A STUDY OF ANCIENT TOWNS OF GUJARAT

SYNOPSIS

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INTRODUCTION

When unknown visitor ‘HANUMAN’ tried to enter Lanka at midnight, he was not allowed to do so by a fort-guard. Hunuman asked the fort-guard who was she? Answered. “I am Lankini, the fort-guard of this town” (Ramayana). This indicates a great civic sense described in the Epic.

Town planning is a great civic art. We find beautiful description of town in ancient literature. In Vedas, Epics, Buddhist and Jain literature, and Puranas, the description of ancient towns and their synonyms are found in detail. Town planning subject is mirror of civilization. In the scriptures on Vastusastra, we find descriptions of towns in exaggerated manner.

A brief perusal of the history of origin and development of settlements and township in ancient India revealed some very interesting facts. The earliest neolithic rural settlements were surprisingly well planned. Subsequently this small scale experiment of neolithic village planning (c.7000 BC) was evolved and spread further eastward. The larger chalcolithic settlement which developed in the two great river basins viz. Sindhu (Indus) and Saraswati and its tributaries provided fertile land, water ways and suitable environment for the development of urban centres. The scholars called it first urbanisation, However the majority of the Harappan urban centres displayed very common pattern of town planning showing citadel, lower town, grid iron road pattern and extremely effective drainage system. Perhaps this was contribution of the Harappans in the field of town planning.

The decline of Indus civilization and shifting of settlements from western India to the Ganga-Yamuna river basin and their tributaries and also
towards Deccan (south) are described as post-Harappan and post-urban phase. However, in this phase characters and components seems to have became scanty.

The discovery of iron and emergence of several historic towns in the period of Sodasah mahajanapada onwards has been described as the period of second urbanisation. A brief survey of these Early Historic settlements, towns and cities which grew in different geographical setup is presented here. It may be noted here that this period also witnessed Vedic texts, Epics, Buddhist and Jain texts, Kautilya’s Arthashastra, Brhatshamhita etc. referring to various types ancient of townscape. The traditional knowledge pertaining to the science of town-planning from the above-listed varities scriptures was subsequently collected, edited elaborated and finally codified in the texts on Vastusastra prevailing in different parts of the country.

Evidently the region of Gujarat has yielded evidence of first urbanisation (Harappan and post-Harappan) and second Urbanisation (Mauryan to Kshatrap period) in different geographical and environmental set-up. The growth of various types of ancient and medieval townscape were studied and compared with the pura-nivesa Vidhana referred in the scriptures such as Aparajitaprccha, Samaranganasutradhara, Visvakarma Vastusastra and Rajavallabha by Mandana.

A detailed comprehensive study of some selected ancient and medieval towns of Gujarat indicated the emergence of various types of townscape due to different type of topography and various other politico-economic reasons. Irrespective of different types of town planning it displayed some common medieval components such as Forts, Pratolis, Chabutaras etc. Perhaps the crescent shape of town planning (Karmuka) with radiating road-pattern became more popular due to the growth of the population from medieval period onwards.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A brief survey of the emergence of ancient settlements and towns in different regions of India in general and Gujarat in particular is presented as a back ground for this study. The settlements and ancient townscape referred in ancient and medieval scriptures on Vastusastra has been given for comparitive study.
The study of some selected ancient towns of Gujarat is mainly based on historio-archaeological data. The survey maps of these towns were procured from different authentic local institutions. The aforesaid survey was followed by intense and extensive explorations of various sectors of each of the eight towns. Here it may be noted that in absence of any such survey maps of hilly towns namely Bhutambilika (Ghumali Western Saurashtra) and Pavakdurga (Pavagadh-Champaner, Central Gujarat) were explored and sketched. Further its architectural details and other components of its townscape were documented and put on the maps. These significant survey-maps are extensively used for the study of its Parvatiyanagaras.

Further, intensive field work of each sectors of the towns was conducted. During the exploration, forts, defence architecture, aquatic monuments, temples, ring wells, pratolis, chabutaras etc. were noted and plotted. Interestingly these methods revealed some of the features of townscape more distinct. To this added the study of topography, toponomy, Pauranic archaeology and Salvage archaeology. The Pauranic Archaeology describes various areas, place names, pilgrimage routes, stories regarding maritime activities, temples migration of the people etc. Such varities of relevant data gleaned from various ancient townscape of Gujarat. Mention may be made of KaumariKa Khanda (of Skanda Purana) refers to the area of Karnavati (Ahmedabad), Tapimahatmya (a part of Tapi purana) refers to ancient Suryapura-Surat area while Saraswati Purana gives a vivid description of Anhilpur Patan and its environs.

The data so-collected through multi-disciplines by the researcher was scrutinised, analysed, critically studied and presented. The study of these ancient townscape indicates growth of various forms of ancient town amidst different topography, road pattern and politico-economic nucleus. These various forms of townscape are compared with the traditional scriptures on Vastusastra which were prevalent in the region of Gujarat.

The present study is undertaken with a view to present comprehensive analysis and interpretation of some selected ancient towns of Gujarat. The work is divided in following chapters.

Chapter-1 Introduction

This is the introductory chapter that deals with historio-archaeological study of some ancient towns of India.
Chapter-2 Origin and Growth of Town in Guajrat.
It mentions the study of origin and development of towns during Protohistoric, Early Historic and Medieval period in the region of Gujarat. With the background, detailed study of different townscape in the Guajrat is given namely Bharukachcha, Stambhatirtha, Vadapadraka, Anhilapur-Patan, Karnavati, Suryapur, Bhutambilika and Pavakdurga.

Chapter-3. Ancient Settlements in Literatures.
It describes ancient settlements and towns referred to in the traditional scriptures on Vastusastra.

Chapter-4. Bharukaccha
It deals with the beginning and various stages in the development of Dandaka type of townscape of Bharukaccha.

Chapter-5. Stambhatirtha
It represents the Sarvatobhadra type town planning based on topography, toponomy and Pauranic Archaeology.

Chapter-6. Vadapadraka
It also shows the Sarvatobhadra type of town planning based on historical basis, material cultural and salvage archaeological observations.

Chapter-7. Anhilpur-Patan
It represents a study of this town. It has Swastika type of townscape which is identified on the basis of medieval Jain literary works, excavation, exploration records and medieval map of Gujarat.

Chapter-8. Karnavati
This chapter deals with the Karmuka type of townscape where radiating pattern of growth around royal enclosure. This is followed by the medieval town planning tradition of Anhilpur Patan.

Chapter-9. Suryapur
It represents bow-shape townscape developed on a meander of Tapi river where the radiating road-pattern lead towards Nanavat-area which was nucleus of this mercantile port-town.
Chapter-10. Bhutambilika
It describes ‘Divya’ type of hilly townscape in Western Saurashtra which was a seat of throne Sandhava and Jethavas for several centuries.

Chapter-11. Pavakdurga
It also deals with Divya type of hilly townscape spread at Pavagadh (Champaner, Dist.: Panchmahals) during the regime of the Chauhan dynasty.

Chapter-12 Conclusion
The conclusion has shown the growth of various type of townscape based on topography, politico-economic nucleus, sea-routes and land-routes. These various type of townscape are referred to in the traditional texts on Vastusastra such as Dandaka, Sarvatobhadra, Swastika Karmukha and types of Parvatiya nagar. Some of the medieval towns have represented some common components such as fortifications, pratolis, chabutaras, ringwells, havada, chat-slabs etc.