

**VAISĀLĪ: EMERGENCE AND STRUCTURE
OF AN EARLY INDIAN POLITICAL AND
URBAN CENTRE, C. BC 600-AD 400**

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "*Vaiśālī: Emergence And Structure of An Early Indian Political And Urban Centre, C. BC 600 - AD 400*" submitted by **Birendra Nath Prasad** is in partial fulfillment of Master of Philosophy degree from this university. The work presented is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree to this or any other university to the best of our knowledge.

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For My Father

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Urban centres have a very vital role in the cultural landscape of India, and for centuries they have stood as a very powerful factor in influencing its history, but the way in which they have been perceived shows a certain degree of ambiguity. The city by its amenities had always been perceived to be a centre for all that is cherished for day to day "cultured" life yet due to the complexities of life associated with them, they have been perceived as a possible source of anxiety as well.

But the second aspect was never able to overshadow the first. May be it is due to this factor that urban centres had always received an important place in Indian history, and over the years, they are getting an increasing focus in Indian history writing. One may add that the theoretical premises on which cities and towns are being studied, have shown some important changes over the years.

Studies in ancient Indian urbanization have taken many strides since the publication of A. Ghosh's pioneering work, *The City in Early Historic India* (1973). Studies in the second urbanization of the Indian subcontinent have witnessed many theoretical changes, one of the most important of them being

treating the city and the hinterland as mutually dependent entities. The earlier approach of studying the city in isolation from its hinterland is no longer in vogue now, and it had resulted in the gradual widening of the area and scope of study of urban centres of ancient India. Now this has tended to cover the more wide phenomenon of settlement perspective of a given region in which cities are perceived as acting as focal points of the entire region. Another change is visible in treating the functional aspects of urbanism of society. Degree of urbanisation of a society has been recently taken to be the reflective index of evolution of a complex society¹ and this approach necessitates the gradual widening of the scope and methodology of 'urban history'

The second urbanisation of the Indian sub-continent with its epicentre in the mid-Gangetic valley has been subject to a heated debate on the causes behind this phenomenon. No doubt, the Ganga had a paramount influence on shaping the agricultural potential of the north Indian regions, and this has resulted in a renewed search for a degree of homogeneity throughout the Gangetic plains. The general impression of course is that of an overriding cultural uniformity, the same

¹ Erdosy, G., *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, BAR International Series, Oxford, 1988, p. 2.

type of potteries, art objects, coins and such other things characterize the valley from the uppermost part of the Delta. Even when variations are overwhelming in local ceramic traditions, for example between PGW and NBPW, attempts are made to trace a similarity in them.² The Gangā valley is no doubt a geographically diverse region, being subdivided into the upper Ganga valley, the middle Ganga valley and the lower Ganga valley, and these three geographical divisions have witnessed a differential degree of urbanization during the Early Historical period. The epicentre of urbanization was the middle-Gangetic valley, and it was due to certain geographical advantages.

R.S. Sharma has come up with a very interesting book - *State and Varṇa Formation in the Middle-Gangetic Valley: An Ethnoarchaeological View* (1996). Since emergence of early urban centres was closely linked to the process of state formation, it has important bearing on our topic. His views can be briefly summarized as that: the middle reaches of the Gangetic valley offer a fortuitous set of environmental conditions (high soil fertility, but difficulty of tillage - high rainfall, dense primary forest) for the emergence of states: the

² Roy, T.N., *The Ganges Civilization*, Delhi, Ramanand Vidya Bhawan, 1984, p. 249.

extensive settlement here was possible only with the coming of iron tools for clearing trees and ploughing the soil, this wet rice cultivation made possible by iron technology had major implications for agricultural yields; that ensuring surplus made possible the emergence of ruling elites and specialists like craftsmen and merchants.

In a nutshell, according to his analysis, geographical suitability of the mid Ganga valley for the emergence of state formation and urbanization could not have been utilized without the use of iron. But even this iron - surplus - state formation - urbanization model fails to explain why the middle - Gangetic valley witnessed differential degrees of urbanization, for example between Magadha and Videha, roughly the south Bihar and north Bihar. Soil fertility in the latter was certainly not less than the former, and in historical terms, it had an earlier recorded evidence of clearing of the forests in the form of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* legend. But the region could not witness the degree of urbanization which ancient Magadha was experiencing.

This takes us to another dimension of the process of urbanization in ancient India - that there can not be a single

cause of this phenomenon which can be applied for the whole Ganga Valley. Urbanization in a given area evolves with the interplay of different factors, in which a certain factor or a set of factors can be more central than others in shaping the trajectory of urbanism there. Hence even within a region, for example in North Bihar, we can expect a differential degree of urbanization, and this entails a regional focus. The present dissertation is a humble attempt in the same direction. It will try to study *Vaisali* as a focal point, a nodal centre for the entire stretch of land lying between the Gandaka and the Kosi, bounded by the Ganga in the south and the terai in the north. In ancient Indian geography, this stretch of land was referred to as Videha, Mithila and Tirabhukti in different phases. This region according to Upendra Thakur, . comprised of the present districts of Champarana, Muzaffarpura, Darbhanga, Sitamarhi, Madhubani, Saharsa and Begusarai, on the east south and west, this area is bounded by the Kosi, Ganga and the Gandaka respectively. He further adds that this is a well marked natural division with its size varying in different ages³.

³ Thakur, U., *A History of Mithila*, 1988, p. 4.

But does it give any credence to the approaches of taking this whole segment of land as a hinterland of *Vaiśālī*? In my view, it does impart a certain validity to the view that the region should be treated like that. No doubt, this region witnessed the emergence of two powerful states, Videha and Vajji in the 6th century BC with their capitals at Mithila and *Vaiśālī* respectively.

But Videha was a geographical term as well, and it comprised the Vajji territory and territory of the monarchical state of Videha. Thus Ajāṣṭasātru, son of Bimbisāra by a princess of *Vaiśālī* was called “Vaideshiputto”⁴ in literary sources. But political boundaries of the states of Vajji and Videha are not easy to determine, It is generally believed that the Vajjian state comprised of the territories of modern districts of Champarana, Muzaffarpura, Samastipura, Nepalese Terai adjoining Champarana district, and a narrow rectangular strip of bordering the Ganga in the south, and going to the east, “and this eastern boundary cannot be located”⁵ (Emphasis added). The state of Videha joined the Vajji confederacy in the

⁴ *Mahāparinibbanasutta*, SBE XI, p.4-5.

⁵ Y. Mishra, *The Republican States of Ancient Bihar*, In B.P. Sinha ed., *A Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol. I, Part I, Patna, 1974, p.228.

6th century BC⁶, and it was on this ground that Raychaudhury has identified the limits of Vajji with the limits of Videha⁷, and D.K. Chakrabarty assesment of the same in the light of the geographical and archaeological features suggested that this identification was right.⁸ When the state of Videha joined the Vajji Confederacy, *Vaiśālī* ~~stood as~~ stood as the capital of the entire land between the Gandāka and the Kosi.

As a study of Rājagṛha, the first capital of Magadha, will necessarily incorporate the entire land of Magadha as its hinterland, similar will be the case with *Vaiśālī*. In the Gupta period, *Vaiśālī* was the administrative centre for the entire Tirabhukti, and this also gives some credence to our approach. Whether *Vaiśālī* was functioning as the same in the post Vajjian phase up to the consolidation of the Gupta power in North Bihar is a debatable issue, but we cannot rule out this possibility. In this stretch of land, only *Vaiśālī* had a sustained urban presence from the 6th century BC onwards, till the end of the Gupta age. Other important urban centres came up during the *Śunga* phase - Kaṭrāgarh, Balirājgarh, (Madhubani district),

⁶ H.C. Raichaudhury, *Political History of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1954, p.118, Uptendra Thakur, *A History of Mithila*, 1988, p. 106, M.S. Pandey, *Territorial Divisions of Ancient Bihar*, in B.P. Sinha (ed.), *A Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol. 1, Part 1, Patna 1974, p.101-102.

⁷ H.C. Raichaudhury, *Political History of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1954, p.118.

⁸ D.K. Chakrabarty, *The Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plains*, Lower and Middle Ganga, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001, p.208.

Kopāgarh (Darbhanga district), Mangalgarh (Samastipur district), Jaimangalāgarh and Naulāgarh (Begusarai district), but most of them show a 'decline' of urbanism after the second century AD. This aspect also entails a study why only *Vaiśālī* could survive the general 'decline' of urbanism in the Videha/Mithila/Tirabhukti region till the end of the Gupta period or a slightly later.

In short, this work will try to study the emergence and structure of *Vaiśālī* as a nodal centre for the entire Tirabhukti / Videha / Mithilā region, and will take a wider settlement perspective of the region into account. So at times, this study may seem to be verging into a general survey of urbanism of this area, but it is only inevitable.

Past scholarship

If literary data are to be believed, *Vaiśālī* was a fairly well developed city during the period of the Buddha, and the Vajjian state and its institutions were sound enough to command the admiration of the Buddha. *Vaiśālī* emerged as the capital of one important state, the *Vajji Saṅgha*, and this emergence was coeval with the emergence of other cities as the capital of other *mahājanapadas*. Hence, *Vaiśālī* had been studied widely in the

context of Early Historic urbanization as well as independently. Here, a brief review of only those works will be attempted which has been widely used in this work.

Yogendra Mishra's *An Early History of Vaiśālī* (Delhi, 1962) was perhaps the first detailed study of this city as a capital of a state, and he has used a diverse variety of sources in this study. But his treatment of pre-Vajjian *Vaiśālī* is less convincing and is open to many questions. He has at places used the Epic-Purāṇic data concerning this city and the region at their face value: for example, in treating the 'maritime achievements' of the pre-Vajjian *Vaiśālī* princes, he seems to have accepted the epic record at their face value. In the section of discussion on the Vajjian *Vaiśālī*, he has been more convincing and he has painstakingly collected all literary references to the city of *Vaiśālī* and has supplemented it with a collection of data on references to villages and other rural settlements in the Vajjian territory. But he has a scant regard for archaeological data and this renders the work unsatisfactory. Moreover, the work ends with the Magadhan-conquest of *Vaiśālī*, but we see the real efflorescence of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre in the succeeding phase only. Hence this book leaves much to be desired. But it does supply a

valuable insight into the literary image of *Vaiśālī* as gleaned from Buddhist, and Jaina works.

H.N. Jha's *The Licchavis* (1970) is more concerned with the political history of the Licchavis, and pays scant regard, if any, to the status of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre after the fall of the Licchavis in the 4th century B.C. This work is more a book of political history, and does not fit in to our paradigm which is basically interested in tracing the settlement perspective of the region, and study of the place of *Vaiśālī* in that.

D. Kumar's *Archaeology of Vaiśālī* (1986) is refreshing in the sense that it had tried to understand the archaeological personality of *Vaisali* though he had used literary sources as well. He has studied the distribution of archaeological sites as well, in the "Old Muzaffarpura district", (comprising of modern Vaishali, Muzaffarpura and Sitamarhi districts), but sadly he has not used them in relation to the urban network of *Vaiśālī*. Thus he has basically tried to study *Vaiśālī* in isolation from the hinterland. In the treatment of the archaeological material from *Vaiśālī* as well, he appears quite unconvincing at times: for example, his treatment of PGW findings from *Vaiśālī*, (Garh area). He links these PGW findings to the migration of

philosophers from the *Madhyadesa* in search of patronage to the *Vaiśālī* court⁹. No one would argue that pottery does not contain a socio-cultural code in ancient Indian context, but being so categorical about the association of the *Vaisali* PGW with the philosophers from the *Madhyadesha* is something which is very hard to defend. Kumar has studied archaeology of *Vaiśālī* under the headings of prehistory and protohistory, coins seals and sealings pottery etc, out nowhere he has discussed the place of *Vaiśālī* in the settlement perspective of the Videha/Tirabhukti region - and thus his work has remained quite lopsided. It does not take the study of the hinterland in to any consideration.

B.K. Sinha's *Archaeology of North Bihar* (1997), though covering a wider canvas of the entire region of north Bihar, does not leave any other impression than its being a compendium of available study material with least analysis of the same. But one thing which must be taken into account is his painstaking labour in arranging them in a coherent form for a region (North Bihar) which has largely remained a *terra incognita* for archaeologists due to their Magadha-centric approach. This work may induce further researches in north

⁹ P. 85.

Bihar and that will be a great help in unveiling the archaeological heritage of the region.

The study of ancient Indian urban centres has witnessed a fierce academic debate in the last decade, and the debate has largely hanged around micro/macro and settlement hierarchy vs. settlement perspective of a given region in studying the transition to and gradual evolution of urbanism, and this has ushered a qualitative difference in the methodology adopted in the study of the same. A. Ghosh's pioneering *The City in Early Historical India* was no doubt an important work and heralded the beginnings of the study of city as a focus of research, but it had left many issues untouched, such as the relationship of the city with the hinterland, or the processes that lead to this urban phenomenon.

T.N. Roy's *The Ganges Civilization* (1983) though not directly related to the process of beginnings of urbanization, has nevertheless dealt with it quite elaborately and his certain assumptions assume importance in the study of urban phenomenon at *Vaiśālī* as well. His prime concern is tracing and establishing an overriding culture uniformity throughout the Ganga Valley, and if there are any differentiations, for example in differential degree of urbanisation in Magadha and

North Bihar, then he assumes that "it was intimately related to better alluvial morphology and agrarian economy - culturally here as well, the Gāṅga acted as a culture barrier" (p. 257) - he seems to relegate the Magadhana proximity of Chotangapur minerals to the backburner and highlights the importance of relative fertility of Magadha vis-à-vis North Bihar which is very difficult to agree. But at other places, he appears quite convincing - for example in tracing the similarity in material culture of the late PGW and early NBPW. Based on a close study of ceramic types of the PGW and the NBPW, he comes up with the conclusion that PGW was an older contemporary of the NBPW, and despite having different distribution zones, and distinct identities, both have influenced each other¹⁰. A similarity in their texture clearly shows the physical relationship between the two i.e. the PGW and NBPW".¹¹, and he maintains that despite having apparent differentiation, the Ganga valley was gradually getting a "composite culture" which evolved out of interaction between the PGW and NBPW cultures, and this may be called the first phase of the Ganga civilization. His views assume significance in the context of findings of PGW sherds from the Garh area of *Vaiśālī*. *Vaiśālī* is

¹⁰ P. 249.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

the only mid-Gangetic site except Kauśāmbī having shown PGW, (though in a very limited number - only 7), and this has led to many approaches, one of them relating it to the migration of the later Vedic Āryans to this area for which we had^{ve} a literary reference in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* for the same general area - Videha. But Roy's analysis may establish that though such contacts had a singular contribution in the transition to urbanism, they were not confined to this Videha region alone. The Ganga urbanism gradually grew out of this cross-culture interaction in which the PGW was gradually replaced by the NBPW.

The article by Takahiro Tokahasi et.al., "The Ancient City of Śrāvastī: Its Significance On The Urbanisation of North India", published in the *Purātatva* (30) while almost following the same notion of division of the Ganga valley into roughly two regions in which two different system of the production and circulation of fine wares i.e. BRW/BSW and NBPW and PGW interacted and their interaction resulting into the cultural integration of the whole of North India has been discussed. The author opines that to sustain this process, the society came to need one or more regional centres which might act as a knot

connecting both local and inter-regional networks¹² of contacts, and city formation geared up to control and maintain the integration of various regions, and cities acted as focal points in controlling and co-ordinating these contacts. He argues that *Śrāvastī* was situated in a transitional zone between the PGW and NBPW, and was best suited to accelerate this process of interaction and integration. It was also instrumental in connecting and coordinating connections of the Ganga Valley to the southern foothills of the Himalaya, and besides that, it was located on the main *Uttarāpatha*, and this constant cultural interaction with North India and north-west India was one of the most crucial factor to the development of the city of *Śrāvastī*.¹³

Tokahasi's study of *Śrāvastī* imparts a few parallels for *Vaiśālī* as well. It was also taking part in this cultural interaction as suggested by the findings of PGW sherds here. Its importance in maintaining contacts are too well known to be discussed here in detail - suffice it will be to say that location of Aśokan pillars from Salempur (between Lālganj and *Vaiśālī*) to Lauriyā Areraj, Lauriā Nandangarh and Rāmpurvā point towards the importance of the route to Nepala via *Vaiśālī*. Its

¹² *Ibid*, p. 78

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 79.

location on the *Uttarapatha* was also an important factor in sustaining its urban dynamism and might have been one factor behind its sustained urban vitality after the second century AD when other centres of the Videha region - Katragarh and Balrajgarh were showing signs of gradual lessening of urban characteristics.

K.T Sarao' book - *Urban Centres And Urbanization As Reflected In Pali Vinaya And Sutta Pitaka* (1990, reprint 1994) is important due to many reasons. His is perhaps the first systematic attempt to study the second urbanization of the subcontinent by a simultaneous comparative study of literary sources and archaeological data. Thus in the first section of his book, he has collected data about the places mentioned in the *Vinaya* and *Sutta Pitaka*, and in the second section, he has summarized archaeological data for those places, and pointed out the dichotomy between the literary and archaeological pictures. His book serves as an important base book for any study of the Second Urbanization of the sub continent.

In recent years, study of Early Historic urbanisation has witnessed a very heated academic debate viz. settlement hierarchy vs. settlement perspective, of a given region in studying the contours of its urbanization, and this assumes significance in the study of urbanization in Videha-Mithilā region as well. The first approach is

marked in different writings of G. Erdosy, and the second one in the writings of D. K. Chakrabarti.

G Erdosy's *Urbanization In Early Historic India* (1988) is an important attempt to link study of urbanization with settlement hierarchy. Thus according to him, "Study of Urbanization must begin with the study of functional differentiation of sites (which he does on the basis of surface scatters at unexcavated sites) and end with crystallization of hierarchy of population centres crowned with cities."¹⁴

His calculation of population in each phase of site is based upon the measurement of maximum spatial extent of findings of characteristic potsherds of various periods on the surface of a multiperiod site.

Certain fundamental questions have been raised by D. K. Chakarvarty in his criticism of this approach. His view assumes significance in the study of urbanization in our region as well. First of all he opines that in the Indian context most of the ancient villages and urban settlements incorporate directly or indirectly modern habitation in their vicinity. So it is very difficult to be even vaguely confident about the areas of successive occupation at a site on the basis of surface scatters. He again points out that surface scatters of

¹⁴ Erdosy, G., *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, p. 5.

metal slag, pottery kilns and debris of various manufacturing activities do not necessarily indicate in the Indian context that the site did not have agriculture as its major function. So any differentiation of such sites into 'Industrial' and non-Industrial site would be misleading.¹⁵ So according to him a detailed study of agricultural geography of a given area with reference to the location of its ancient settlements may provide some insight in to basic character and functioning of these settlements.

Thus according to his observations, settlement perspective of a given area assumes significance in the study of urbanization in that region. This view has been further developed in his new book - *The Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plains. Lower And Middle Ganga* (2001) in which he has not addressed the issue of urbanization in the selected region directly, but by making an intensive study of inter and intra-regional routes and of settlement perspective of the same, he has to a large extent, prepared the ground for a better understanding of the causes behind the differential degrees of urbanization within a region.

It must be pointed out here that major orientation of the present study will not be tracing the settlement hierarchy in the emergence of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre, but will be on the

¹⁵ D.K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities*, Delhi, OUP, 1995, 264-265.

study of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre in the backdrop of settlement perspective of the Videha region. This is not like passing a value judgment or taking sides in the differing positions of Erdosy or Chakrabarti, but solely due to practical difficulties and personal limitations. For example, how much do we know about the exact extent of occupation outside the Garh area of *Vaiśālī*? When *Vaiśālī* was excavated for the first time in 1958-62, the major aim of the excavator was to establish the cultural sequence of the sites and issue of settlement hierarchy was virtually unknown at that time, hence using that database for the study of settlement hierarchy in the region will be very difficult.

Here what is proposed is the study of emergence and later sustained presence of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre in the backdrop of settlement perspective of the Videha region. This shall be done by using mainly the archaeological data, but literary data shall also be used. Emergence of many urban centres in the mid Gangetic valley was closely related to the process of state formation in the 6th-5th century B.C., and archaeological evidence for that period is very thin. Hence relying on literary sources for that phase becomes a necessity.

Besides a conclusion (Chapter VI), this work shall be divided into four chapters.

1. **Chapter II - The region and the city in Tradition: The Vajjians And their Political centre.** This chapter shall be solely based upon literary sources, and shall trace the emergence of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre, by using literary evidences. It shall not only analyse the literary references to *Vaiśālī* City proper, but also to the country side; and the kind of settlement perspective emerging out of this shall be analysed. As no urban centre emerges in isolation for the country side, and the transition to urbanism in the mid Gangetic Valley is an essential concomitant of the process of state formation, study of the same assumes significance here as well. So the first section of this chapter shall briefly study the process of state formation in the region and the second section shall deal with the study of *Vaiśālī* proper as reflected in the literary sources, and its relationship with the country side, and the settlement pattern emerging out that, and its impact on shaping the urban fortunes of *Vaiśālī*.

Chapter III Distribution of Sites in the Region

Cities do not evolve in isolation but they maintain a very complex relationship with other sites of the region, in which they act as a focal point for a number of settlements. This chapter shall study

the pattern of distribution of sites in the entire Videha region i.e. the region between the Gandaka and the Kosi in North Bihar from the protohistoric phase onwards, and shall study the emergence of *Vaisāli* as a nodal centre in this backdrop. In short this chapter shall be a study of the settlement history of the Vidha region, and emergence and later sustained presence of *Vaisāli* as an important urban centre in this backdrop.

Chapter IV: Archaeology of Urbanism at Vaisali

Vaisāli is the only excavated site of north Bihar for which detailed excavation reports are available. Study of urbanization must involve a regional approach as no urban centre functions in isolation, but a study of the city proper for which detailed excavation reports are available may reflect the main contours of urbanization for that region. Hence this chapter shall study the archaeological picture coming out of the different excavations at *Vaisāli* and shall study phases and features of urbanism at *Vaisāli* and shall compare it with common features of Early Historic Urbanism.

Chapter V: *Vaisāli* In a wider Perspective, Linkage of The City - this chapter shall deal with the linkage of the region under study, and its impact on the urban fate of *Vaisāli*. This chapter shall study alignment of inter regional and intra-regional routes.

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Chapter 2

THE REGION AND THE CITY IN TRADITION; THE VAJJANS AND THEIR POLITICAL CENTRE

Vaiśālī is the only city of North Bihar which is known through profuse references in literary texts and is also an archaeological site. The city was witness to some of the important events in the lives of the two important religious figures - the Buddha and Mahāvīra, and Brahmanical legends associated with it are not scant either. It was perhaps due to this reason that it has received a fair degree of attention in early literary sources.

But certain ambiguity is quite apparent. Brāhmanical sources (Epics and Purāṇas) contain rich references to the pre-Vajjian phases of this region but they are almost silent about the Vajjian phase. Early Pālī canonical and later semi-canonical works on the other hand had eloquent praises for the *Vajjians* and their political centre, *Vaiśālī*. But they are silent about the pre-Vajjian phase. This creates some problem in the study of transition to urbanism in this region, and in tracing its subsequent trajectory. Urbanism is not just a phenomenon, it is a process as well, and is the result of interplay of various factors for a long period of time. No urban centre just descends from the blue, but emergence of impressive urban centres in most of the cases is mainly the

outcome of a complex interaction of various socio-economic factors.

Vaiśālī appears to be a full-fledged urban centre during the period of the Buddha if literary sources are to be believed. It appears as the prosperous capital of the powerful *Vajjians* state with highly developed state institutions, commanding the praise of the Buddha. This highly institutionalized state system presupposes an earlier presence of state apparatus in the region. Early Historical urbanization was closely associated with the process of state formation. This fact necessitates the study of the same in the analysis of transition to urbanism in this region and due to this reason, a brief study of pre-Vajjian phase in the region assumes significance.

The Beginnings of Urbanization: The Process of State formation in the Region

Early Historical urbanization in the Indian subcontinent has been taken to be a "corollary" to the process of state formation¹ and emergence of state has been taken to represent the precondition for the emergence of urbanization.² This seems quite justified in the early historical context; our earliest urban centres

¹ Erdosy, G., *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, 1983, p.-124 .

² Sarao, K.T.S., *Urban Centres and Urbanisation as Reflected in Pali Vinaya and Sutta Pitaka*, 1994, p. 35.

were the capital centre of one *Mahājanapada* or the other. Even transition to urbanism in some regions hitherto untouched by it has been attributed to the expansion of some political power there, for example Mauryan expansion in North Bengal coincided with the emergence of its first urban centre, Pundranagara (Mahāsthāngarh) and it has been taken to represent the fact that Mauryan expansion was a pre-condition for transition to urbanism here.³ Economic functions were no doubt an important aspect of Early Historical urban centres, but they were not the reasons behind their emergence. There is no harm in fully agreeing to Erdosy's view that the earliest cities first rose as administrative centres concerned with more efficient collection, storage, processing and distribution of both material goods and information. To these functions the economic roles of production and distribution were added soon afterwards. They were responsible for the spectacular growth of the cities but not for their origins.⁴ Hence a study of the process of state formation in our region in tracing the gradual transition to urbanism assumes significance.

³ J.F. Salles, quoted in *Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain, Lower and Middle Ganga* by D.K. Chakravarty, 2001, p. 99.

⁴ Erdosy, G., *Early Historic Cities of North India*, SAS, 3, 1987, p. 13.

The Beginnings of State formation in the Region: The *Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa* legend

We are fortunate enough in having a reference in an early text telling us of the migration of a Vedic hero *Videgha Māthava* in our region, Videha. The *Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa* episode beautifully narrates the eastward journey of the Vedic hero *Videgha Māthava* along with his priest *Gautama Rāhugaṇa*, east of the *Sadānīrā*, generally identified with the Gaṇḍaka. According to it -

- (a) the land east of the river *Sadānīrā* was "uncultivated".⁵
- (b) It was highly 'marshy'.⁶
- (c) It had not been sanctified by *Agni-Vaiśvānara*.⁷
- (d) The river even in summer times used to rave along. It was always filled with water. It was so cold because of "having not been burnt over by *Agni Vaiśvānara*".

And not long afterwards we see the emergence of the "kingdom" of Videha with its philosopher "kings" ruling from their capital Mithilāpuri, and their courts adorned with *rsi* from *Madhyadeśa* as well.

⁵ *Sataptha Brahmana*, 1.4.1, 14-16, S.BE., 12, pp. 105-106.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

This description, rather than solving our problem confounds it further. First of all, which part of Videha does it refer to? Historical boundaries of the same region have been fixed as the area lying between the Gandaka and Kosi bounded by the Ganga in the south and Himalayan *terāi in the north*.⁸ From Ramnagara to Hajipur, the Gandaka travels for some 200 kms, in our region (Videha) before finally joining the Ganga. And this eastward crossing could have taken place at any place between Ramnagara and Hajipur. We have no means to know the exact location. The point being stressed here being that southern fringe of the region, as attested by archaeology, certainly does not appear to be uncultivated - Chechar Kutubpur showing traces of agriculture from neolithic phase B.C. 2500 onwards. So at the best the process appears to be that of interaction. Our aim here is not to show whether it was a physical migration of a group of people from the west, or simply the expansion of sacrificial cult in the region, or the introduction of a new language. It can be any one of them. Our aim is simply to show that it did represent an external *stimuli*, and may reflect a cross-cultural interaction, the importance of which is well understood in the process of transition to

⁸ Thakur, U., *A History of Mithila*, 1988, p. 4.

urbanisation.⁹ At this stage one may safely say that state formation in the Videha region has a clear agrarian background.

If Purāṇic records are to be taken at their face value, the institution of kingship will appear to be quite well entrenched in the *Vaiśālī* region, and will place the age of its 'monarchy' to great antiquity.¹⁰ The Epic-Purāṇic records pertaining to our region show little regard for socio-economic condition of the region and are pre-occupied with 'dynastic' history; they need not detain us here. Suffice will it be to say that the Epic-Purāṇic tradition, while recording the genealogical list of the early 'kings' of *Vaiśālī* region neither mention the territory, nor the dynasty with which they were associated - nor any fixed capital of these 'kings' are mentioned. Their attribution to the *Vaiśālī* region is largely the construct of modern historians dealing with the region, though on not so unconvincing grounds.¹¹ All purāṇic sources attribute the foundation of *Vaiśālī* to one Viśāla, 25th in the succession list beginning from Nabhandeshitha,¹² and only with him we have a fixed capital, *Viśālapuri*, a fixed dynasty, and fixed territorial unit, the state of *Vaiśālī*. This may be said to mark the beginning of state system in the region. This event had a lasting impression of

⁹ Erdosy, G., *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, pp. 130.

¹⁰ Mishra, Y., *An Early History of Vaisali*, 1962, Book I.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Vaiśālī. The Garh area of *Vaiśālī* is still called *Rājā Viśāla ka Garh*, and according to Yogendra Mishra, during the Gupta period, some seals of *Vaiśālī* indirectly refer to this event.¹³

What were the processes that led to this event of foundation of a capital and beginning of the phenomenon of a fixed territorial state? Purāṇic records are generally silent about it, but a careful gleaning of Purāṇic sources will unveil some aspects of the process working in the background which ultimately lead to this phenomenon. It will suggest that formation of state system here had a definite agricultural background ensuring mobilization of resources which sustained this process.

The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* narrates a very interesting account about a 'prince' *Nābhāga*, who an account of marrying a *Vaiśya* lady lost his *Kṣatriya* status, was deprived of the 'throne' of his father, and on account of his falling to *Vaiśya* status engaged himself in cattle keeping, agriculture and trade.¹⁴ It was the age when even 'kings' had no hesitation in engaging themselves in some sort of agricultural operations, as suggested by the Janaka legend of neighbouring *Mithilāpuri* in which Janaka rulers used to till the land, at least symbolically. But it was only the dynasty of

¹³ Ibid, p. 65.

¹⁴ Quoted in Mishra, Y., *op.cit.*, p. 23.

this prince Nābhāga which was called a Vaiśya dynasty¹⁵ and this may suggest a greater degree of involvement of the ruling 'kings' in this process - "Nābhāga appears merely to be a symbol of great agricultural and commercial activities which followed, the story regarding Nābhāga's transformation from Khatriya into a Vaisya was probably intended to explain the fact that *Vaiśālī* region became a centre for trade and commerce at an early period.¹⁶ However, in our view the incident may refer more to agriculture than trade. His son Balandhana recovered the kingdom for him, but he insisted on carrying on Vaiśya occupations, and he instead suggested that as his son became king by virtue of his conquest, he would pay 'taxes' to him.¹⁷ This may hint at the mobilization of resources in some form.

So where do we stand vis-à-vis delineating the trajectory of the process of state formation in our region? One thing appears quite plausible. It had a definite agricultural background, and it involved resource mobilization by way of some sort of agrarian taxation (as the incidence of Nābhāga suggests). Much has been said about the maritime achievements of ancient *Vaiśālī* princes¹⁸ but one may just wonder if this was possible. Clearly the first

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 28.

¹⁶ Singh, S.N., *A History of Tirhut*, 1922, p. 22.

¹⁷ Mark. Purana, 114.6 - 116.4, English translation by Paragiter.

¹⁸ Sarkar, S.C., *The Pre-Buddhist Ancient Historical Traditions of the Vaisali Region*, in "Homage to Vaisali", p. 193.

capital Viśālapuri, was a political centre being the capital city of a territorial state, *Vaiśālī*.

In the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa the hero Rāma along with his teacher Viśvāmitra is shown to have visited the region in his way to Mithilāpuri and he found *Viśālapuri* "celestial"¹⁹ and "comparable only to heaven" at that time, Sumati, a descendent of Rāja Viśāla was shown ruling in this region²⁰.

The Vajjian *Vaiśālī*

The real glory of *Vaiśālī* starts when it become the capital city of the Vajji confederacy, with the state of Videha joining the Vajjian confederacy and consequently the centre for political activity shifted from Mithilāpuri to *Vaiśālī*, the new capital city, for the entire area lying between the Gandaka and the Kosi. The importance of *Vaiśālī* derived from another fact, - it was the seat of the one of most powerful clans of the confederacy viz. the Licchavis,. The Vajjian state institutions, and its capital *Vaiśālī* were sound enough to command the respect and admiration of the Buddha.

The Buddha speaks very highly about the political structure of the *Vajjians*. The state was militarily at par with Magadhā once the

¹⁹ Goldman, R.P. 1.44.9

²⁰ Ibid.

ruler of Kośal²¹, Prasenajit was very worried, and the Buddha enquired about the cause of his anxiety, whether it was due to any strife with Bimbisāra²² of Magadha or with the Licchavi of Vaiśālī.²¹ The state was powerful enough to wage a war against Magadha during the reign of Bimbisāra²³, the only ruler of that period who appears to have maintained a permanent standing army - and it presupposes a very sound political economy and a very efficient mobilization of resources. Indeed the Vajjians were powerful enough to harass the Magadha forces across the Gangā, and it was to check their depredations that a fort was erected at Pātaligrāma, the Buddha having a distinct awareness of its future greatness. The Vajjians offered the most bitter resistance to the Magadhan ruler Ajātaśatru for more than a decade, and to break their power, the Magadha ruler had to seek the advice of a person of the standing of the Buddha himself.

The causes enumerated by the Buddha, for the non-decline of the Vajjians, were as following:²³

- (a) their full and frequent public assemblies

²¹ Quoted in "Vaisali ka Prajatantra" by Rahula Sankrityayana", in *Homage to Vaisali*, p. 42.

²² Mishra, Y., op.cit., p. 136.

²³ *Mahaparinibana Sutta*, S.B.E. 11, pp. 3-4.

(b) their mutual concord and acting in accordance with the ancient customs of the *Vajjians* as established in former days

(c) honour and esteem to the Vajjian elders

(d) respect to Vajjian girls and women

(e) support to *cetiya* in the Vajjian country

(f) support to local *arhats* and those coming from a distance

The Buddha at last makes the comment that so long as these conditions continue to exist among the *Vajjians*, they might be expected not to decline but to thrive.

The impression one gets while studying the Buddha assessment of the causes behind the formidable power of the *Vajjians*, is that the Buddha was fairly impressed by the sound political system of the *Vajjians*, as well as their personal qualities of being free from luxury and sloth in another passage.²⁴ Their pomp and splendour are equally referred with a feeling of admiration and respect.

Our point here is not to prove the splendour of the Vajjian state but simply to postulate that such splendour pre-supposes the presence of a huge resource base and an efficient mobilization of resources. The region between the Gaṇḍaka and the Kosi is no

²⁴ *Samyutta Nikaya*, translated C.A.F Rhy Davids, S.S. Thera and F.L. Woodward, *The Book of Kindred Sayings*, London, PTS, 1950-56 (reprint) Part II, pp. 267-68.

doubt very fertile and could have contributed towards the thus mentioned splendour of the *Vajjian* territory and prosperity of their political centre *Vaisālī*. Their coercive power to mobilize the resources was in any way not insignificant—we come across a passage in the *Majjhima Nikāya*²⁵ in which it has been mentioned that these *Sanghas*, Vajji and Malla "can get anyone killed" by ordering "kill him", can get anyone burnt by saying "burn him", or can get anyone exiled from the state by saying "exile him". Magadhan control over its resources is a much discussed phenomenon among the historians for describing the meteoric rise of this state to prominence, but the *Sanghas* in any way do not appear to lag behind in exercising the coercive power of the state in resource mobilization and resource control. The *Vajjians* were the epitomes of this *gaṇa sangha* experiment, and at the same time they were the most diversified *gaṇa sangha* state as far as their structure is concerned. They were composed of as many as 8 clans and they contained the earlier powerful monarchy i.e. the Videha as well. Among the *Gaṇasangha* state, they had the largest resource base in terms of territory, and it is not surprising that their capital, *Vaisali* was the only other urban centre to find a prominent place among the much mentioned *mahānagaras*; *Campā*, *Rājgraha*, *Śrāvastī*, *Sāketa*, *Kāśī* and *Kausāmbī*.

²⁵ Quoted in *Rahula Sanktyayana*, op.cit., p. 43.

So no wonder the city which was so closely associated with the Buddha has been given a place of prominence in the early Piṭaka literature, as well as in later works. It has been described as a *nagara* from where the Licchavi ruled, and it was “opulent, prosperous, populous, crowded with people and provided with abundant food”.²⁶ It was a “highly prosperous river port, and it was encompassed by three walls at a distance of one *gavyuta* from each other, and at three places, the walls and gates with watch towers”.²⁷ The city had many “highways, byways, and crossroads”.²⁸ According to Vinaya Piṭaka, various temples, shrines and monasteries were constructed here for monks who themselves superintended their construction. A poor tailor also tried to build one such home for monks but he was not given due attention by the monks as he was poor.²⁹ It was connected to Rājgraha by a “high road”³⁰. The city had many pre-Buddhist *cetiya*s Bahuputta., Sārandada, Gotmaka, Udena, Bahuputra, Satemba and Cāpāla.³¹ The *Mahāvagga*, one of the oldest books of the Pāli canon, further informs us that at the time of the Buddha, “the city had 7707 storeyed buildings, penacled buildings, 7707

²⁶ Vin. II, SBE 17, pp. 171 translated by T.W. Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg, Oxford, 1882, reprint Delhi, 1974.

²⁷ Jataka No., 149 edited by Fausball, Cowell, E.B., Vol. I, p. 504.

²⁸ *Anguttara Nikaya*, IV, 187. Translated by F.L. Woodward and E.M. Hare: *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, London, PTS, 1885-1900, reprint, 1955-70.

²⁹ *Cullavagga*, VI, pp. 189-90, SBE XX.

³⁰ Vin. II, SBE, 17, p. 299.

³¹ *Anguttara Nikaya* III, p. 109.

lotus ponds”.³² “7707” was a number especially attached to *Vaiśālī* - “there were 7707 *rājā*, 7707 *Uparājas*, 7707 *Senāpati*, and 7707 *Bhāṇḍāgārika* among the *Vajjians*.”³³ In the *Jātakas* and later works the description of the city turns out to be repetitive and verging on hyperbolic. The Tibetan *Dulvapatra* gives the following description - “there were three districts in *Vaiśālī*, in the first district there were 7000 houses with golden towers, in the middle district were 14000 houses with silver towers, and in the last district there were 21000 houses with copper towers - in these districts the upper, the middle, and the lower classes lived according to their position”³⁴. Buddhaghōṣa mentions that as the city could not accommodate the rising population, hence it was enlarged thrice, and come to be called *Vaiśālī* on account of its being very extensive. ³⁵ In the *Lalitavistara*, it has been described as a “rich and prosperous city adorned by courtyards, gates, arches, palaces, towers, lot⁶₁ mansions, gardens and groves overstocked with flowers, rivalling the domains of the immortals of beauty.”³⁶ The city was divided into outer and inner *Vaiśālī* inhabited by 84000 persons in each section and they came to greet the Buddha when he visited the city for the first time after

³² SBE, 17, p. 171.

³³ *Ekapanna Jataka*, edited by Fausball, No. 149, Cowell, E.B., Vol. I, p. 504.

³⁴ Rockhill, “Life of the Buddha”, p. 62.

³⁵ *Paramatthajotika on the Khuddakapatha*, ed. H. Smith, PTS, pp. 158-60.

³⁶ *Lalitvistara*, edited by S. Leffman, pp. 38-39.

enlightenment.³⁷ The Vajjian territory measured 300 *Yojanas* – a platitude, as all the important states of that period in the same that are said to measure 300 *Yojanas* only³⁸ in the same source and no historical conclusion is possible from this description.

Where do these descriptions lead us? It may be noted that Early Pāli canon is content with describing the city as prosperous, abundant with food and people and 7707 lotus ponds, and the likes, the later works tend to verge on hyperbole in describing this city. It may be noted that by 250BC, *Vaiśālī* has developed in to an important secondary Buddhist pilgrimage centre, having depiction of the “monkey legend” as far as *Amarāvati*.³⁹ The city was intimately associated with the Buddha, and in the Buddhist mythology it was serious contender for having the honour of the birthplace of the Bodhisattva. we come across a passage in the *Lalitavistāra* in which gods are holding a discussion to decide which family and city will be most deserving for the birth of the Bodhisattva, and certain gods propose the name of *Vaiśālī* starting that “this city is prosperous and proud, happy and rich with abundant food adorned with buildings of every description. This city resembling the city of gods is indeed fit for the birth of

³⁷ *Mahavastu*, 1, pp. 256-271

³⁸ Quoted in Law, B.C., *Kshatriya Clans in Buddhist India*, p. 25.

³⁹ *Ancient India*, No 20-21, 1964-65, p. 168.

the Boddhisattva.⁴⁰ Indeed it was so liked by the Buddha, that an enlightened soul like him turned nostalgic in his *Mahāparinirvāṇa yātrā* when he departed from *Vaisali*, he turned nostalgic-Ananda; Tathāgata is having the last gaze at *Vaiśālī*.⁴¹ This intimate association of the Buddha with the city was the at the root of hyperbolic description of the city in later works.

There can be no denial of the fact that this city was of considerable urban significance. Even the Magadhan perception of the same was highly impressive, a region of which the capital city *Rājgraha* was a *mahānagara*. Thus, a trader of *Rājgraha* went to *Vaiśālī* and narrated the splendour of the same to Bimbisāra in highly eloquent terms – a rich, prosperous crowded with people and provided with abundant food, having 7707 storeyed building, 7707 pinnacled building” but the most impressive being of course, the famous courtesan, *Āmarapāli*.⁴²

Vaiśālī was also the birth place of Mahāvīra, and due to this fact it has got significant mentions in the Jaina works. According to *Uvāsagadāsāo*, *Vaiśālī* had two suburbs *Kollaga* and *Kundagrāma* and along with these two, *Vaiśālī* had another

⁴⁰ Lalitvistara, edited by S. Leffman, pp. 38-39.

⁴¹ Mahāparinibba Sutta, SBE 11, p. 64.

⁴² Vin. II, 171, SBE, 17.

suburb called *Vāñijyagrāma*.⁴³ In the *Āvaśyka Cūṛṇi*,⁴⁴ Jain source, smith shops of *Vaisali* have been referred to⁴⁴ So it appears that the city was a craft manufacturing centre as well.

Control over Gangetic trade was no doubt an important source of income for the *Vajjian* state, and it was a fundamental cause behind their struggle with the Magadhar. ruler Ajātaśatru. The Gangā had to be crossed between *Rājgraha* and *Śrāvastī* by boats, some of them belonging to the kng of Magadha and others to the Licchavi of *Vaiśālī*⁴⁵ which lay on the road from *Rājgraha* to *Śrāvastī*.⁴⁶ There was a thriving trade between *Vaiśālī* and *Śrāvastī*. The income from the western gate of *Vaiśālī* when collected on the merchandise coming from *Śrāvastī* was one lakh, which was handed over to Mahāli, a prominent *Licchavi*,⁴⁷ though the sum mentioned is conventional. In one of the *Jātakas* we hear of a *Brāhmaṇa* merchant of *Vaiśālī* handing over a fortune of 80 crore to his wife⁴⁸ and it may reflect the prosperity of merchants here. One fact to be noted in this connection was that one of its suburbs was called *Vāñijyagrāma*, and it may reflect the important commercial functions of the city.

⁴³ Translated by Hoernle, Vol. II. p. 4,

⁴⁴ *Avasyka Curni* p.292, Jindasagani, Ruttam, 1928-29.

⁴⁵ *Divyavadana*, pp. 55-56.

⁴⁶ *Vin.* II, p. 159.

⁴⁷ *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names (DPPN)*, edited by Malalasekhara, p. 551.

⁴⁸ *Fausball*, No. 443.

The image of *Vaiśālī* as gleaned from literary sources is that of a highly prosperous capital town of a powerful state, having important craft and commercial functions, an important transit point on a very important trade route, *Uttarāpatha* connecting Rājgraha to Śrāvastī and beyond to Taxila, which by the time of the Buddha was fairly well in use, having some control over the Gangatic trade, mobilizing agrarian resources, in short, a city serving as a focal point of a state having a complex economy. This presupposes a complex settlement hierarchy in the region with *Vaiśālī* acting as a focal point. But what is the real situation as far as settlement hierarchy is concerned, as derived from literary sources?

It may not be impertinent here to mention that literary sources of our period especially the Pāli Piṭaka literature shows a fairly good degree of awareness of different kind of settlements and their hierarchy based upon their functions and origins. Thus *Kuṭis* were most probably dispersed settlements in the forests⁴⁹ followed by *Gāma*, a village having boundaries.⁵⁰ Among the urban centres *nagara* is the most common word used for denoting a city - within it also, a hierarchy was to be found, *nagaraka* used in a derogatory sense to denote a small town like Kapilavastu as compared to 'metropolis'. Six *mahānagaras*, *Campā*, Rājgraha,

⁴⁹ Saraṅ, KTS, op.cit., pp. 36.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 37.

Sāket, *Śrāvastī*, *Kāśi* and *Kauśāmbī*⁵¹ and *Vaiśālī* was significantly , just a *nagara*. Besides the division of cities in ‘*nagara*’ and ‘*mahānagara*’ form, there were other differentiations as well in it, based upon the origin and function of the city. Thus these ‘*nagara*’ were functionally differentiated - *mūlangara*, *śākhānagra*, *Rājdhāninagara* meaning primary city, secondary city, capital city respectively.⁵² The *Pura* was a fortified town⁵³ and most probably, it could have referred to fortified capital cities of early *mahājanapadas*. *Paṭṭana* was a port and even among it, there was functional differentiation. *Vaiśālī* was only a river *Paṭṭana*⁵⁴

This eloquent functional and hierarchical divisions of settlements in the Early Pāli canonical literature is testimony to the fact that by the time these text were composed, a significant portion of the Mid-Gangetic valley, to whom^m these texts are mainly concerned in these references, was witnessing a functional and hierarchical differentiation of settlements, due to, among many other factors, differential degrees of agrarian expansion and urbanization, or in a nutshell differential degree of evolution of complex economy. What is the Vajjian experience then?

⁵¹ *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*, SBE 11, p. 99.

⁵² Sarao, op.cit., pp. 43-44.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 44.

⁵⁴ Fausball ;149

To our surprise references to villages in the Vajjian territory are not numerous, indeed they are quite scanty. In the *mahāparinirvāṇa yātrā*, the Buddha has been shown visiting only six villages⁵⁵ (a) Koṭigāma, (b) Uccācela, (c) Bhāṇḍagāma - this was a Vajjian village between *Vaiśālī* and Hathigāma and near *Vaiśālī* (d) Hatthigāma - It had been described as the village of the *Vajjians*.⁵⁶ The villagers has a special significance as this is the only village in the entire Vajjian territory in which we come across a *gahapati*,⁵⁷ Ugga by name, (d) Jambugāma lying further northwest⁵⁸, (e) Bhognagara. It was a village in the Vajjian country.⁵⁹

Our coming across of only 5 villages and with only one 'gahapali' in a country of extent of 300 Yojanas certainly appears to be inadequate. We may point out that the situation remains unchanged even in later sources such as the *Jātakas*, where references to villages in other neighboring regions are numerous, but by they are marked with a silence on the *Vajjian* villages. Thus according to Buddhaghosa, the country of *Kāśī Kośala* was 300 Yojanas in extent, and had 80,000 villages⁶⁰, the kingdom of

⁵⁵ *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*, SBE 11, p. 30.

⁵⁶ D.P.P.N. II, p. 1318.

⁵⁷ *Anguttara Nikaya*, 1, p. 23.

⁵⁸ *Digha Nikaya* II, p. 123.

⁵⁹ DPPN, II, p. 393.

⁶⁰ Vin. II, p. 163.

Magadha too was 300 *yojanas* in extent and had 80000 villages.⁶¹ A similar account of extent and number of villages of Anga has also been provided.⁶² These figures 300 *yojanas* and 80000 villages are no doubt conventional, but they do show the presence of villages in these territories. But what is surprising that the extent of *Vajjian* territory has also been mentioned as 300 *yojanas* during the life of the Buddha in a later source.⁶³ The number of villages is nowhere stated for the *Vajjian* territory, instead the usual conventional description of 7707 palaces, 7707 tanks etc. are found. This absence is rather baffling.

There can be no denial of the presupposition that presence of an important urban centre like *Vaisālī* suggests the presence of a number of feeding villages in the hinterland. Their existence is indirectly alluded to in the *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*⁶⁴ - some Licchavi youths enquire about the high careers open to them from the Buddha and according to the Buddha, they could aspire to be consecrated to rulership or they could become a *Rāṣṭrika*, a *Peṭṭanika*, or *gāmagāmaṇika* of a village, or the president of an industrial guild - "*pugāmaṇika*". One may point out that the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Paramatthajotika*, PTS, pp. 157-60 (quoted in *Kshatriya Clans in Buddhist India*, by Law, B.C., p. 25.

⁶⁴ English translation *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, vol. III, London, 1952, p. 63. Translated by E.M. Hare and F.L. Woodward.

existence of the office of *gāmagāmanika* and appointment of Licchavi youth for that do support the existence of villages there.

Scanty references to villages (*gāma*) coupled with a conspicuous absence of references to farmers in the Vajjian territory renders our task more hazardous especially when seen in comparison with neighbouring Magadha, across the Ganges, for which we have many more references. It may not be out of place to mention once again that agriculture was given a very high place in the Early Buddhist literature. It has indeed induced some changes in Early Buddhism - for example the practice of rainy season retreat of the monks was instituted when some farmers complained to the Buddha that their newly sown crops were getting damaged by the incessant tours of the monks,⁶⁵ and sometimes the Buddha finds beautiful similes for the *sangha* from agricultural fields. Thus once he is said to have prescribed that 'pattern of the robe for monks of his *sangha* should be designed like the *Khettas* of Magadha which were intersected by a network of canals and ridges and were rectangular and curvilinear which marked the boundaries of arable plots, and resembled the patchwork robe - the *Civara*.⁶⁶ Barring the example of *Ugga gahapti* of Hatthigāma, we do not have a single example of a rich farmer or a *gahapati* in

⁶⁵ *Mahavagga*, p. 144

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 160.

the entire Vajjian territory. This broadly conforms to the trend in other *gaṇasangha* states which are also marked by a general absence of *gahapati*⁶⁷ class, or literary references to farmers in their territory.

However it must be kept in mind that we are referring to the phenomenon of scanty references to the farmers here, and not to the condition of agriculture as such, based upon any inference drawn on the fact that references to the farmers are very scanty in the Vajjian territory. In a nutshell we are more concerned here with the social organisation of agriculture, and its impact on determining the settlement pattern of our region. Agricultural resource base of the *Vajjians* by no means appears to be insignificant. Such a formidable military power as theirs presupposes a very strong resource base, and barring agriculture and some control over trade by the Uttarāpatha leading to Śrāvastī and beyond, and also over the riverine trade on the two very important rivers the Ganga and the Gandaka, they had hardly any other resource base.

So what was the Vajjian organisation of agriculture? Data are indeed very scanty. We have already referred to the *Kulaputtas* of the Licchavis being appointed as '*gāmāgāmaṇika*'. But what were

⁶⁷ Chakravarty, Uma, *Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 1987, p. 87-88.

their functions? And what kind of control the Vajjian republican state was having over agriculture?

Recently Uma Chakravarty has drawn our attention towards the collective ownership of land by the Kshatriya clans in the *gaṇasangha* who did not participate in physically cultivating the land themselves but exercised only managerial functions over it, and got the land cultivated by others - *dāsakarmakāra*⁶⁸ and she co-relates this clan holding of land to the near absence of Gahapati in the *gaṇasangha* polities.⁶⁹

At this stage of research, it is very difficult to reject this view outrightly. Even in later *Jātaka* literature, no 'gahapati' or farmer of the Vajjian region is met with. Though merchants are not absent – the Brāhmaṇa merchant who left a fortune of 80 crore to his wife has already been referred. In the Jaina sources, Smith shops have been described as well, but even these facts do not alter the picture much that references to farmers and gahapatis are very scant for this region. And it may be added that these two (farmers and the gahapatis) were essential constituents of the urban dynamism of 6th century BC.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 91.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 87.

To this, it may be added that all 6 'mahānagaras' of this period – Campā, Rājgraha, Kāśī, Kauśāmbī, Sāketa, and Śrāvastī, were located in non-'gaṇasangha' states. Vaiśālī was just a 'nagara'; it was very closely associated with the Buddha, hence it got a fair degree of references in Buddhist literary sources, but it could not replace the fact that it was considered to be at a lower degree of urbanization during the period of the Buddha.

Why Vaiśālī, or for the matter any other capital of the 'sangha' states, could not attain 'mahānagara' status? This possibility cannot be ruled out that it could have been related to their particular method of land control in some way, and further researches are required to unveil aspects of this vexed issues.

So far, the settlement perspective of this region which emerges out of this discussion is that Vaiśālī was the capital city of an important gaṇasangha state, having craft and other commercial functions as well and surrounded by a number of villages.

Chapter 3

DISTRIBUTION OF SITES IN THE REGION

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the region lying between the Gandaka and the Kosi bounded by the Ganga in the south and extending upto the *terāi* in the North had witnessed the presence of two powerful states – Vajji and Videha, with their capitals at *Vaiśālī* and Mithilāpurī respectively in the 6th century B.C. At some time in the same century the state of Videha joined the Vajji confederacy, and *Vaiśālī* became the centre of political power for this entire region and acted as a focal point of the same. Presence of important urban centres presupposes the existence of a number of rural settlements as no urban centres can exist in isolation. Ancient Indian urban centres functioned as focal points for a number of rural settlements around them and together they formed a functional zone in which the most important urban centres stood at the top of the settlement hierarchy, not only on account of size, but also on account of political and economic importance. In the previous chapter, we have dealt with this aspect of *Vaiśālī*, as gleaned from literary sources. In this chapter we shall do the same on the basis of archaeological evidences.

It must be regretted that a larger portion of the area under study, barring the Southern portion of the same, which includes the modern districts of Vaishali, Samastipur and Begusarai, has largely remained a *terra incognita* for the archaeologists. Annual floods, and intensive agricultural operations are together largely responsible for destruction of mounds of small and medium size and this has aggravated our problem i.e it has forced us to derive our inferences from excavations and explorations of comparatively bigger mounds. Another point worth mentioning is that archaeologists working in this region have largely remained interested in establishing cultural sequences of sites, based on the finding of characteristic pottery, and not so much in measuring the area under occupation in each phase of habitation. It is quite tempting to emulate the model of Makkhan Lal and G. Erdosy in this region as well. But due to this limitation, it appears to be a very difficult task, and will not be tried in this work either. Here the focus will be to study the distribution pattern of sites in different archaeological phases and their impact, if any, on the emergence of *Vaisali* as a nodal point. Based upon the distribution pattern of sites it shall also try to trace the core area of the region under study, and the place of *Vaiśālī* in that. Data gleaned from the annual reports of the A.S.I., and more importantly from

D.K.Chakrabarti' recently published " Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain, Lower And Middle Ganga" (December 2001) which covers the findings of an intensive survey of the lower and the middle Ganga Valley including our region, will be used.

The Geographical Background

The region between the Gandaka and the Kosi is a vast plain with a very slow slope towards the South-East, and forms a part of the Mid-Gangetic valley. The plain is largely divided into two distinct units, geographically – the Mithilā¹ plains and the Kosi plains¹. The two plains are distinguishable geographically, predominantly on account of different riverine depositional character and cropping pattern², but linguistically and culturally these two plains remained quite the same for centuries. The rainfall ranges between 120cms to 130cms annual whereas mean annual rainfall in North Bihar is 122.6cms.

One of the most important aspects of the geography of north Bihar is its drainage system and floods associated with them. Important rivers of North Bihar – the Gandaka, the Burhi Gandaka, the Bāghmati and Adhwārā group of rivers, and the Kosi have provided convenient access to the arterial route of the

¹ Singh, R.L. – *India, A Regional Geography*, Varanasi, 1994, p.247-48.

² Ibid.

Ganga³, but they have been a source of misery due to their annual floods. The Gandaka enters North Bihar in the Champarana district, and before joining the Ganga near Hajipur it provides one of the most important waterways of North Bihar. In the late 19th Century, Hunter had reported that Lalganj, (15 kms south from Basarh) was one of the most important riverine marts on the Gandaka⁴. He has also reported that only the Gandak was navigable for the whole year for large boats⁵. The Burhi Gandaka originating near Someshwara hills in the Champarana distt., and joining the Ganga opposite Munger, passes through Champarana, Muzaffarpura, Samastipura, Begusarai and Khagaria districts, and till late 19th century A.D, as reported by Hunter, provided navigable access upto Sugauli in Champarana district for country boats of 100 *maunds* capacity. Mujaffarpur, Samastipur and Rosera Ghāt were important riverine marts⁶, on this river in the 19th century A.D.

The Baghmati river originates in the Nepala hills, and joins the Kosi in Khagaria districts, and as reported by Hunter, had provided a riverine connection upto Darbhanga and Madhubani by

³ Hunter, W.W. – *A statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. XIII, District Tirhut, 1876, p.19.

⁴ Hunter, W.W. – *A statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. XIII, District Tirhut, 1876, p.132.

⁵ Ibid. p.132.

⁶ Ibid. p.131.

way of Kamalā river⁷. The Kosi is the most notorious for changing its course, generally in westward direction, and during the course of last two hundred years, it had shifted not less than 112 kms, towards west and had laid waste large tracts of agricultural land in Darbhanga and Purnia districts⁸.

Flood patterns had a very great influence in determining the cropping pattern and concentration of population in the entire region, and it has divided the region in important micro zones. In 1876, Hunter divided the district of Tirhoot, comprising of the modern districts of Champarana, Muzaffarpura and Darbhanga into three zones - (i) the south western portion (covering the modern Vaishali district.)-It was least flooded, highest elevated track in the entire region, was least prone to floods, and most fertile.⁹ (ii) The Gandaka - Bāghmati interfluve - a low lying tract subject to inundations, and crops here were principally *kharif* ¹⁰. (iii) Trans Bāghmati region - very low and marshy ¹¹. The Bihar district Gazetteer of Muzaffarpura district (1958), covering the modern district of Vaishali and Muzaffarpura has recorded a similar sequence of floods and fertility¹². It may not be out of place

⁷ Ibid. p.130.

⁸ Roy Chaudhary, P.C. - Bihar District Gazetteer, Purnia and Durbhanga. p.5.

⁹ Hunter, W.W., *op cited*, p.19

¹⁰ Ibid, p.19

¹¹ Ibid. p.19

¹² B.D.G, Mujaffarpura, p.2

to point out that Basār̄h, the ancient *Vaiśālī*, is located in the least flooded and most fertile tract of land according to these classifications. It was located near the Gandaka, and has been described as a prosperous river port in the literary sources¹³ - a function which near by Lālganj was performing in the 19th Century.

Distribution of Sites

Our region is fortunate in having the recorded sequence of archaeological evidence from Neolithic - Chalcolithic period to NBPW period at Chechar - Kutubpur, south of Bidupur on the banks of Ganga, lying 20kms east of Hajipur town on the Hajipur Mahnār road. Habitation continued here in some form upto the Pāla period. Besides, the region also shows a fair degree of distribution of NBPW sites. Recently discovered BRW sites have greatly helped in solving the puzzle of archaeological evolution in the region, and in understanding the vexed issue of emergence of urban centres in the NBPW Phase, and gradual evolution of *Vaiśālī* as a focal point of the entire region.

The Neolithic Phase in the Region

Chechar along with Chirānd may be considered to be type-sites for the Neolithic period in North Bihar. What has made this discovery

¹³ *Ekapanna Jataka*, cd, Fausball, No. 149

more important is that this site has been identified as ancient Swetapur visited by Chinese pilgrim Huen-Tsang in the 7th century A.D.¹⁴ This site shows continuous occupation from the Neolithic – Chalcolithic period to the Gupta period and even later, and may help us in unveiling the gradual process of transition from one phase to another.

Excavations here have shown three continuous phases of occupation¹⁵ - period 1A was the representative phase of the Neolithic period. No metal was reported in this phase, and we get an impression of a developed rural economy, the subsistence base being both agriculture and hunting. Though no complete house plan was available, presence of postholes suggested that people lived in thatch and wattle houses. Pottery was wheel turned and suggested similarity with the same from Chirān¹⁶ Period 1B was marked by relative absence of bone and antler tools of the earlier period but pottery tradition (grey ware, Red ware, BRW) continued. Period 1c represented the Chalcolithic period in which BRW continued, and period II marked the arrival of the NBPW.

What is significant from this discovery is not only the antiquity of settled occupation of this region, but also the very

¹⁴ Mishra, Y – *Swetapura Ki Khoj Aur Uska Itihasa*, p.14.

¹⁵ IAR, 1977-78, p.17.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.17.

location of the site. Chechar like Chirāṅḍ is situated not far from the confluence of two major rivers - the former near the confluence of the Gandaka and the Gangā, and the latter near the confluence of Ghagara and the Gangā. They show a ribbon like formation along the Ganga. Distribution of such sites along the Ganga is not confined to north Bihar alone - Maner on the southern bank of the Ganga shows a similar location. But what is more important is that Chirāṅḍ emerged as full fledged urban centre later, Chechar could not attain this status - a full fledged urban centre could emerge only at Vaiśālī. This question is quite perplexing, and demands some investigation, which shall be attempted in subsequent paragraphs. Here at this stage, it would be enough to say that continuous occupation of this site from Neolithic to the Gupta period and beyond, may show the antiquity of settled life and agriculture in the modern Vaiśālī district and its potential to develop urban centres in later phases, if conducive alignment of different factors leading to the emergence of urbanism is attained.

The K.P. Jaiswal Research Institute is conducting excavations at Rāmchaurā, a site lying between the modern Hajipur town and the Gandaka. - excavations have shown the

antiquity of the site to circa B.C. 1000¹⁷ and further excavation may push the antiquity further backwards. The place is traditionally associated with the first landing of Rama on the Northern bank of Ganga on his way to Mithilapuri.

The BRW bearing sites

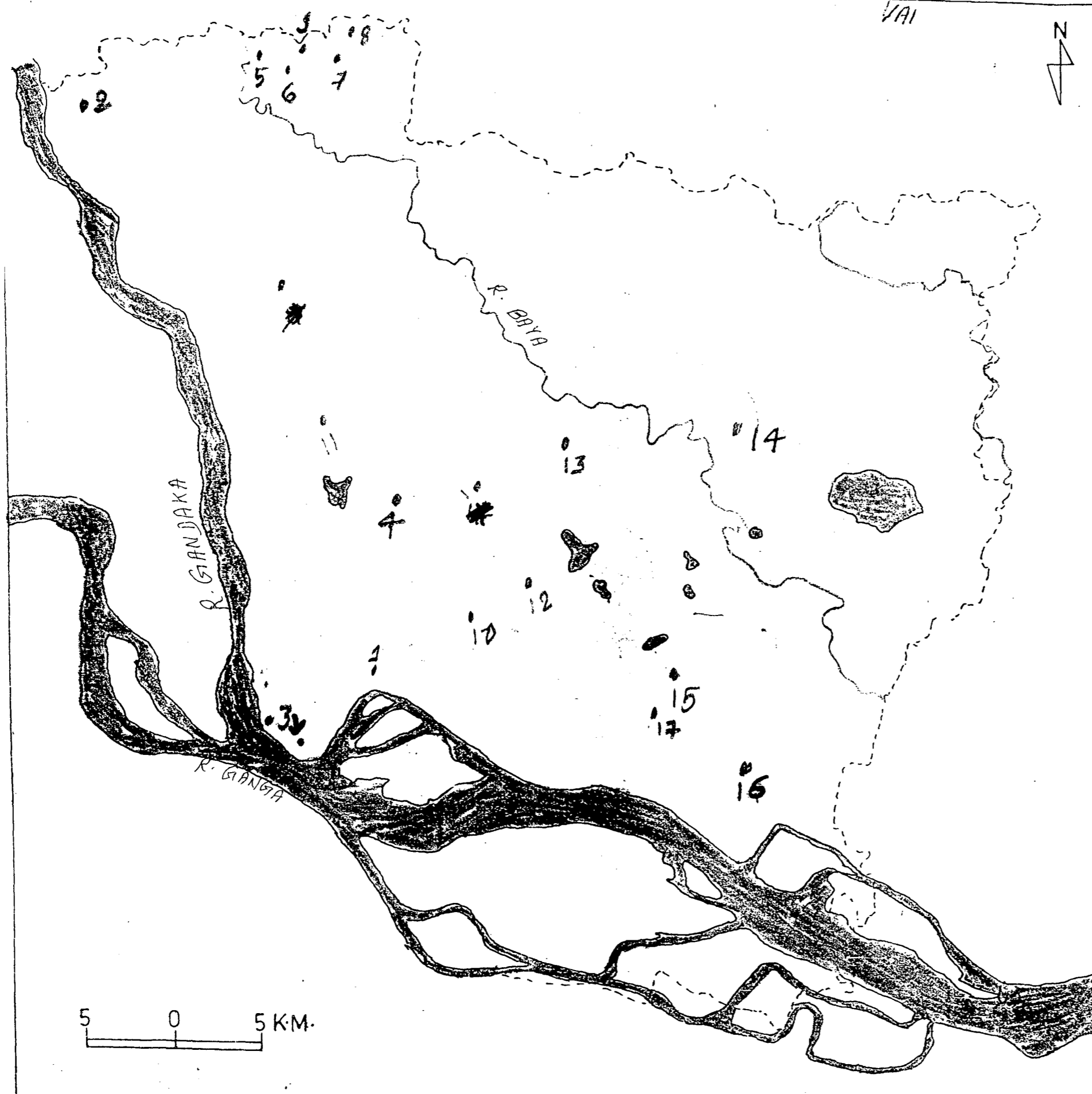
In the known scheme of archaeology, BRW predates the much eventful NBPW, though the presence of the former along with the latter is not unknown either. What is important to note is that they are generally associated with rural settlements having knowledge of settled agriculture and metal.¹⁸

Till a decade age knowledge of BPW findings from the area under study was limited to the same found at Chechar Kutubpur and another finding from the Chakramdasa area of *Vaisali*, 2 miles north-west of Rājā-Visāla-kā-Garh area only. But recent exploration have altered the picture to some extent. The growth of BRW sites may be generally associated with the proliferation of rural agricultural sites, and in a way may suggest the formation of rural hinterland of coming urbanism in the succeeding NBPW phase, if they show continuous habitation in that phase as well. Their concentration in a particular area and general absence in

¹⁷ Personal information from Mr. B.K. Chaudhary, Director, K.P. J.R.I. Patna

¹⁸ Chakrabarti, D.K. – *Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plains, Lower and Middle Ganga*, 2001 p.121.

MAP I- BRW FINDINGS IN VAISHALI DISTRICT.



- 1 CHECHAR
- 2 BASAR-II
- 3 RAMCHAUQA
- 4 RAAGHUASOI ✓
- 5 BRAHMADII ✓
- 6 KHARAUADII ✓
- 7 PAHELDII ✓
- 8 LAJURADII ✓
- 9 CHAMURADII ✓
- 10 FATEHPURADII ✓
- 11 SIMADII ✓
- 12 KAMHAWI DIANADII ✓
- 13 KARHON ✓
- 14 PANPUR BATESHAR ✓
- 15 SHEKHAPUA ✓
- 16 SHERPUA ✓
- 17 FATEHPUR BUZURG ✓
(MATHIA)

another, may solve the puzzle for the development of urban centre in a particular region only.

Distribution of BRW sites

Vaishālī district.

1. Chechar – findings of BRW at a layer below the NBPW has already been noted. One thing may be added that the area between Bidupur and Chechar shows many unidentified mounds,¹⁹ and some of them may show BRW as well.
2. Rām Chaurā – excavation being conducted by K.P.J.R.I, - Patna noted the findings of BRW from this site, in a strata below the NBPW.
3. Raghu Asoi – district *Vaisali*, situated about 5kms South-East of Bhagwānpur Railway station - a mound located here but not excavated so far. Deposits are found away from the main mound, and show a 30 cm thick deposit of BRW below the NBPW period. The occupation level continues up to the Kuśāna period²⁰.

¹⁹ I.A.R. 75-76, p.9

²⁰ I.A.R. 1973-74, p.11

4. Brahamdih – District *Vaisali* in the Belsar Block. A 10 acre mound found, D.K Chakravorty had reported the findings of “micaecious” BRW and “later” pottery from this site.²¹
5. Kharaunādih – 1km away Brahamdih, a large mound of 20 acre area with a maximum height of 3 meters, has been reported by D.K. Chakrabarti with traces of “micaecious” BRW and “later” pottery from this site.²²
6. Paheldih – near Karaunadih, mound 10 acres in area, with a height of about 1 meter. Here he found ‘micaecious’ BRW and “later” pottery.²³
7. Laduriādih – in the same general area – a mound of about 10 acres area containing micaecious BRW and “later” pottery.²⁴
8. Chamauriādih – this place is towards *Vaisali* – mound more or less destroyed but contains micaecious BRW and later pottery.²⁵

Samastipur District

1. Pāndavasthān the site is located 2kms east of Dalsingh Sarai town in Samastipur district, located near a lake. The K.P.J.R.I. has conducted excavations here and results show

²¹ Chakrabarti, D.K. *op. cited*, p. 200

²² *Ibid*, p.200

²³ *Ibid*, p.200

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.201

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.202

here continuous occupation from pre NBPW phase to the Gupta period. Pre NBPW phase is quite interesting. Terracotta objects include beads, bangles, and few unidentified iron objects have also been found.²⁶ There is no proof to show these objects were made locally or imported from somewhere, but discovery of such wide range of objects from BRW site away from the Ganga is significant nonetheless.

Darbhanga District

1. Kopāgarh – This mound, 80 acres in area, is located on the banks of the Balāna river. BRW has been noted here and according to D.K.Chakrabarti, it was micaeous,²⁷ while according to Dr. S.K Jha, who surveyed the site independently, the pottery found here is quite comparable to other Chalcolithic sites of Bihar, Cīrānd and Tārādih.²⁸ In the later phase along with the NBPW, the site developed into a full fledged fortified urban centre.
2. Sahārndih – in the Baheṛā Block a mound having an area of 20 –25 acres have been found, and it contains traces of BRW

²⁶ Personal Information from B.K. Chaudhary

²⁷ Chakrabarti, D.K., *op. cited*, p.199

²⁸ S.K. Jha, "Early Settlements of Mithila" paper presented in a seminar held in Darbhanga March 1998. A copy of the same provided to me by the author.

(micaecious, according to D.K.Chakrabarti)²⁹. NBPW has also been reported from here.³⁰

3. Parsādih and Pārodih – both located in the Keoti block of Darbhanga district, size of mound around 10 acres in each case – and they do not show any evidence of subsequent occupation. Copper slag has been reported from Parsadih³¹.

Madhubani District

1. Andhrāthārhi – a mound found here about 10 acres in area, showing evidences of BRW (micaecious according to D.K.Chakaravarty). the habitation continues here in the subsequent NBPW phase, and remains of Pala period have also been found.³²

Certain important observations can be made regarding the distribution of the BRW sites in our region. One is their concentration in a very limited area as a proportion of the total area under study. So far not single BRW site has been found reported in the Begusarai district, Khagaria district and regions beyond that upto the Kosi. Similarly no BRW site has been reported from the region lying north of the site of Basārhi in the entire stretch of land lying up to Rampurva in the West Champarana district. So if we start from Rāmchaurā near Hajipur

²⁹ Chakarvarty D.K., *op. cited.* p.199

³⁰ Ibid, p.199

³¹ Personal information from S.K. Jha, Directorate of Bihar Archaeology, Patna

³² Chakarvarty D.K., *op. cited.* p.199

where BRW has been reported, Chakāmdāsa area of the ancient site *Vaisali* would appear to be the last outpost area of BRW findings along the Gandaka.

But more important is the issue relating to the typology of BRW found in the region. D.K. Chakrabarti in his survey of North Bihar sites has noted that classic Chalcolithic BRW have been found only in Chechar and Chirand, and *Vaiśālī*, has shown Stratigraphic evidence of BRW pre dating the NBPW, and elsewhere he could find only 'micaeous' variety of BRW, which he, on the basis of personal communication with some noted archeologists working in Bihar,³³ opines that this variety of BRW are found only in the context of NBPW. So he concludes that genuine BRW sites are not found away from the Ganga in North Bihar³⁴. And this has rendered the picture quite hazy. BRW site has been identified by the same author as marking village settlement³⁵. So should we then believe that prior to the NBPW phase (e.g before circa 600 B.C.) barring a very small southern sector (Chirānd, Chechar, Pāndavasthān, *Vaiśālī*, Rāmchaura) of north Bihar, we should not expect village settlements? If this is true, then it is in total contrast to Magadha where BRW

³³ Dr. B.S. Verma

³⁴ Chakarvarty D.K., *op. cited.* p.205

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.120

settlements are located "virtually all over ancient Magadha"³⁶ In the east of our region, a good number of BRW sites in West Bengal has also been reported.³⁷ Then how can this paradox of having least number of pre NBPW, BPW sites in an agriculturally fertile region be solved.

It appears that being too much categorical about the typology of BRW pottery in our region and inferring broad conclusions based upon them will not do justice to these vexed issues. In 1994-95, explorations in the Madhubani and Darbhanga districts brought to light a number of BRW sites, and the explorer has divided them to two groups (a) the first group included those sites in which BRW is followed by one or more than one subsequent cultural assemblage including the NBPW and associated wares. These BRW are found over considerably larger mounds, sometimes of the nature of a full fledged urban centre, such as Kopāgarh (b) the second group of sites is represented by those which had little tradition of settlements behind it, and if ever occupied subsequently it was only in the early medieval period. This group of sites is much smaller in size, is normally below 10 acres area Parsādih and Pārodih in the Keoti block of Darbhanga district represent this category. At both the group majority of BRW

³⁶ Ibid. p.187

³⁷ Ibid. p.119

discovered were coarse and gritty in texture, and on the basis of diverse variety of BRW in its fabric, a long duration of existences has been suggested. The explorer more over found them comparable to the BRW of other well known Chalcolithic sites of Bihar, Chirāṅḍ and Tārāḍih.³⁸

However, it must be pointed out that at present, knowledge of these BRW sites of north Bihar, situated away from the Ganga, is very sketchy, and so is the present state of knowledge of the typology of BRW of the same region. Even if Chakrabarti's assumption that genuine Chalcolithic BRW site in north Bihar are not to be found away from the Ganga, it will not change the situation drastically that modern Vaishali district was a core region in the BRW phase as well, and later emergence of the important urban centre Vaisāli had a sustained background of agriculture in the BRW phase. And till more exploration and excavations reveal the true nature of the 'micaeous' BRW, any such conclusion that it does not antedate the NBPW, will not be safe.

If this inference is accepted then the distribution pattern of BRW sites will appear to be quite revealing. Their most dense concentration is found in Patḍhi chowk area of Vaisāli District,

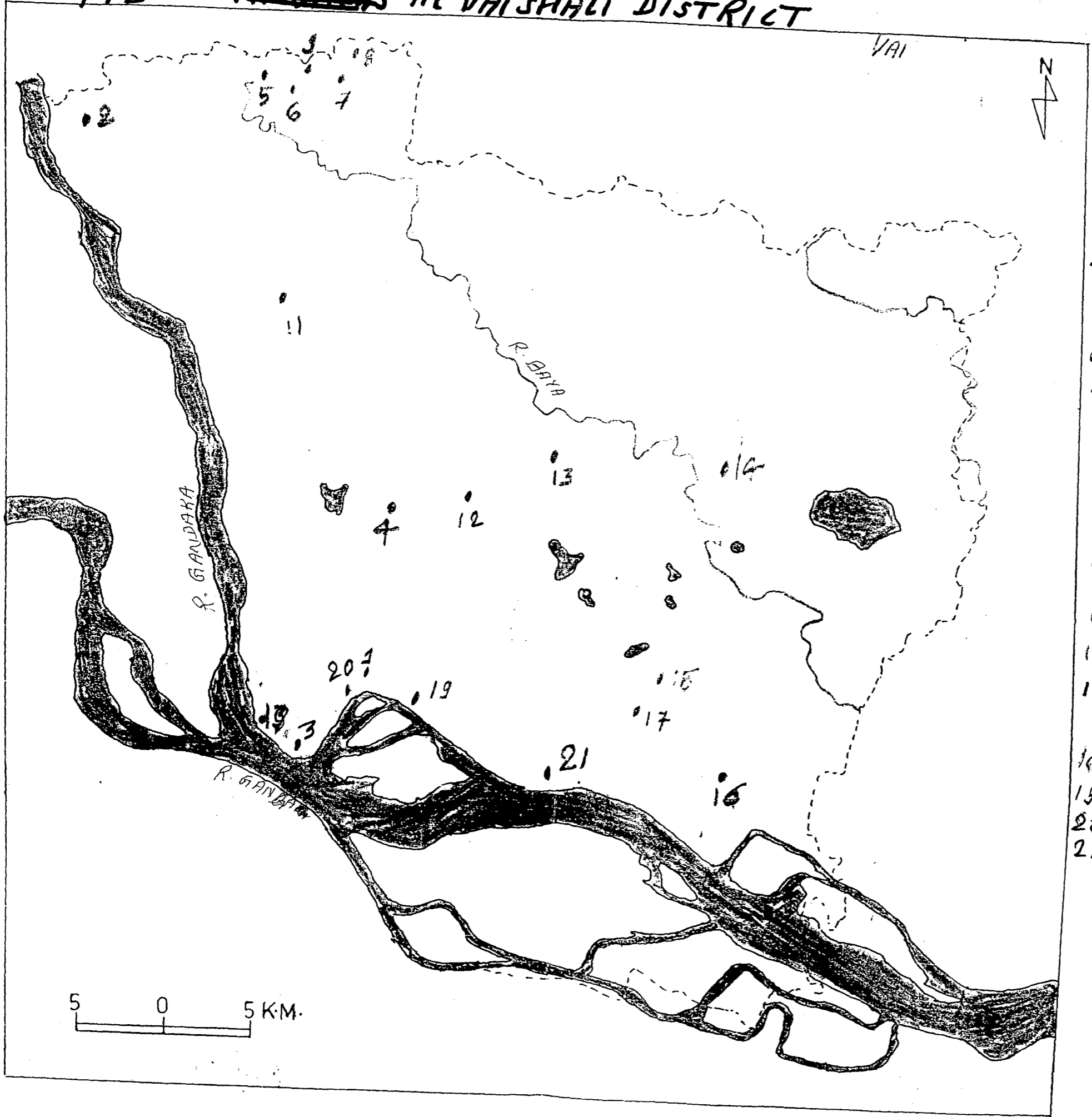
³⁸ S.K. Jha, *op. cited*

around 15kms North - East from Basār̄h. Basār̄h has also shown presence of a layer of BRW below the NBPW layer (in Chakrāmdāsa area). BRW is fairly well distinguished in modern *Vaisali* district – Ram chaurā and Chechar Kutubpur in the south not far from the Ganga, to Patāhi Chauk area and Basār̄h in the North. Besides, a chain of 14 sites, having BRW, associated with BRW, Red Ware, Black Ware, and NBPW, from Nārāinpur Buzurag (north of Basār̄h) and ending at Sherpur has been reported³⁹. These sites are said to be “located on a dried bed, probably of a wide canal cut through the region in ancient times for navigation”.⁴⁰ Most dense concentration of these sites in the modern *Vaisali* district in a way appears to be the harbinger of the later emergence of the most important town of the region – *Vaiśālī*. In Darbhanga district 4 such sites (Kopagrah, Parsūdhī, Pārodih and Sahārandih) have been reported, one each has been reported in Samastipura district (Pāndavsthana), and Madhubani district (Andhrāthārhi). Why there is no evidence of BRW in Mujjafarpur district having Early Historic forlification at Katrāgarh and lying between *Vaisali* and Darbhanga district, both having BRW presence, is difficult to explain at this stage. Similarly, we do not know why we do not find any BRW site north of *Vaiśālī* district along the Gandaka.

³⁹ IAR, 74-75, p. 11

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.11

MAP IV BIPW ~~RESEARCH~~ SITES IN VAISHALI DISTRICT



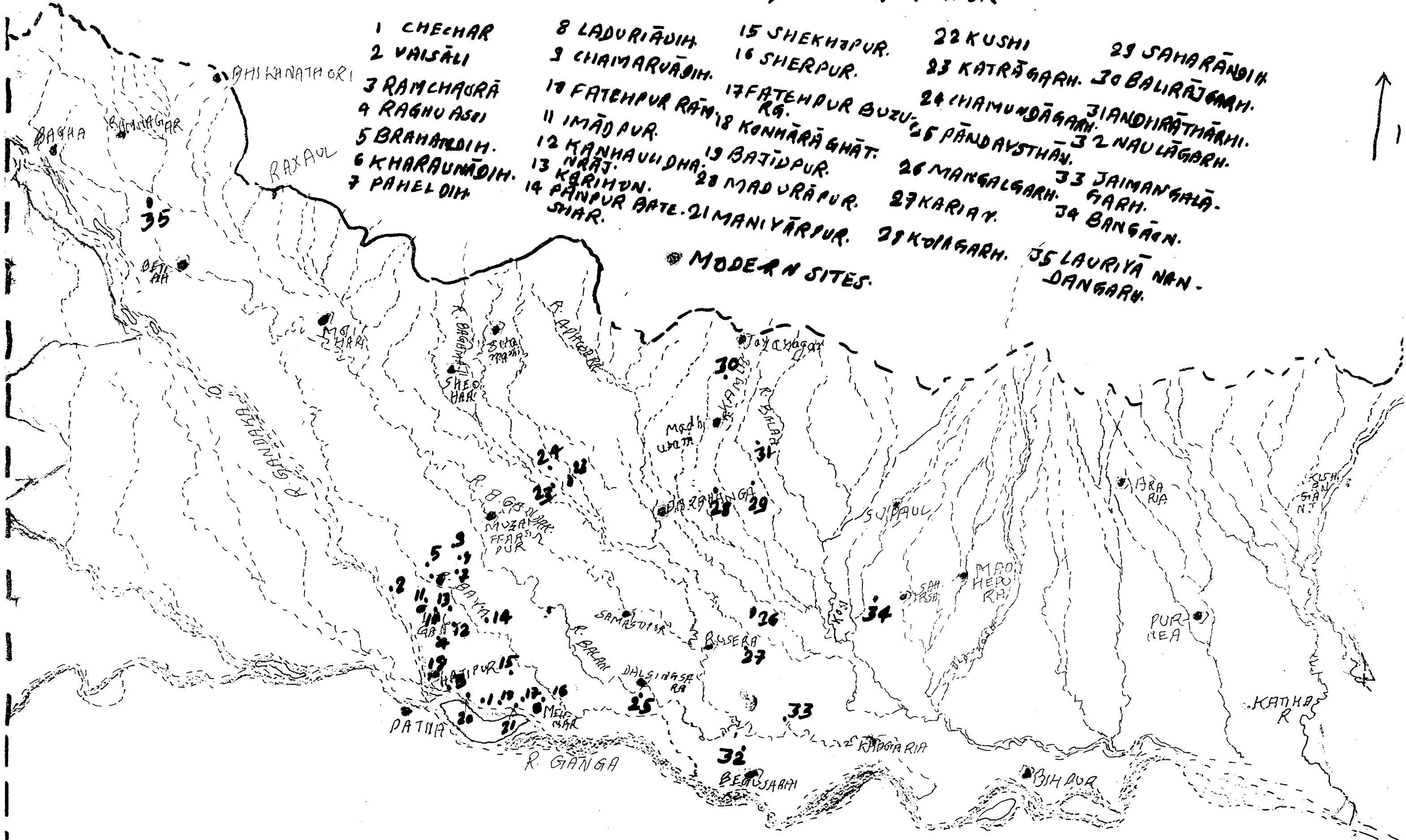
- 1 CHECHAR
- 2 BASARH
- 3 RAMCHAURA
- 4 RAAGHUASOI
- 5 BRAHMADIH
- 6 KHARAUADIH
- 7 PAHELDIH
- 8 LAOURADIH
- 9 CHAMURADIH
- 10 FATEHPURADIH
- 11 SHADPOA
- 12 KANHAULDIANRAJ
- 13 KHAIHAN
- 14 PANPUR BATESHAR
- 15 SHEKHOPHA ✓
- 16 SHERPUR ✓
- 17 FATEHPUR BUKU ✓
RA (MATIHA)
- 18 KONHARAGHAT ✓
- 19 BAJIDPUR
- 20 MADURAPUR
- 21 MANIYARPUR

But one thing appears to be quite apparent. Modern Vaishali district appears to have emerged as a core region even in this period, if distribution pattern of sites is any indication, and in a way harbingers the beginnings of subsequent emergence of *Vaisali* as an important urban centre. This clusterization may be due to the most favourable geographical condition of the district—most fertile and least prone to floods. Continuation of settlement in the subsequent NBPW phase at most of these sites may also be explained on this ground.

The NBPW phase in the region

One very marked concomitant of urbanization in the mid-gangetic valley is the presence of the Northern Black Polished Ware which is generally dated to circa 600 -100 B.C. or a little earlier in the upper phase. But one of the major problems we face is due to its treatment as a homogenous pottery, which it was certainly not, and the fact is being gradually recognized by archaeologists. Most of the exploration reports available for our region are content with recording the cultural sequence of sites only, and this has rendered our task of tracing the archeological evidence for transition to urbanism very difficult.

MAP II - DISTRIBUTION OF NBPW SITES IN VIDENIA/MITHILA REGION.



- 1 CHECHAR
- 2 VAISALI
- 3 RAMCHAURĀ
- 4 RAGHU ASI
- 5 BRAHMANDIH.
- 6 KHARAUANĀDIH.
- 7 PAHEL DIH
- 8 LADURIANĀDIH.
- 9 CHAMARUANĀDIH.
- 10 FATEMPUR RAMĀ
- 11 IMĀD PUR.
- 12 KANHAULI DHA.
- 13 KARIMUN.
- 14 PAHPUR PATI.
- 15 SHEKHAPUR.
- 16 SHERPUR.
- 17 FATEMPUR BUZU.
- 18 KONHARĀ GHĀT.
- 19 BATIDPUR.
- 20 MADURĀPUR.
- 21 MANIYĀR PUR.
- 22 KUSHI
- 23 KATRĀGARH.
- 24 CHAMUNDĀGARH.
- 25 PĀNDAYSTHAN.
- 26 MANGALGARH.
- 27 KARIAT.
- 28 KOIAGARH.
- 29 SAHARĀNDI.
- 30 BALIRĀJGARH.
- 31 ANDIRĀTHĀMI.
- 32 NAULĀGARH.
- 33 JAIMANGALĀ.
- 34 BANGĀN.
- 35 LAURIYĀ NAN-DANGARH.

● MODERN SITES.



Another problem is that while the approximate size of a mound containing NBPW has been specified in recent explorations (Chakrabarti et al – 1996, S.K. Jha, 1995), the area occupied in each phase of habitation e.g BRW or NBPW or later phase, has not been worked out. Most of these mounds show evidence of settlement in post NBPW phase as well, hence tracing settlement hierarchy on the basis of size will be hazardous. But a study of their distribution pattern may prove helpful in tracing the emergence of *Vaiśālī* as a nodal centre in this region.

Distribution pattern of NBPW in this region is quite revealing. We have already noted down the continuation of settlement in the NBPW phase in the general area of Patāhi chowk (on the *Vaiśālī* – Muzaffarpura road, around 15kms North – East from *Vaiśālī*) containing mounds of Brahamdih, Kharaunādih, Paheldih, Ludhuridih, Chamuriādih. In the extreme southern part of the district recent excavations at Rāmchaurā near Hajipur has also testified to the presence of NBPW there, and the general area in Rāmchaurā - Konhārāghāt and Bidupur - Chechar Kutubpur is full of ancient mounds where one can easily pick up NBPW and other related wares.⁴¹ NBPW has been reportedly from Imādpur, 6 kms south east of Bhagawānpur Railway Junction, and it has been

⁴¹ Chakarvarty D.K., *op. cited.* p.201

attributed to the beginning of the Christian era.⁴² A chain of sites starting at Imādpur and reaching Sherpur located near Mahnār Bāzār near the banks of the Ganga and containing BRW, NBPW has already been mentioned.⁴³ Our aim here is not to reproduce a villagewise catalogue of NBPW sites in the modern *Vaisāli* district, but simply to show that such dense concentration of the same is not to be found anywhere else in our region. These sites may be taken to indicate habitation here in this period. It may not be out of place to recall that *Vaiśālī* emerged as an urban centre with its becoming the political centre of the *Vajji Sangha*, at some point of time in the 6th Century B.C. and got first fortification in the *Śunga* period. The distribution pattern of NBPW sites in the Vaishali district shows that it did not evolve in isolation. Why this transition to urbanization in 6th century B.C. occurred at *Vaisali* only shall be dealt with subsequently.

Another important feature in this period was the growth and proliferation of settlements in areas having little archeological tradition of the previous phase along with the urban growth of *Vaiśālī*. Whether these two process were interlinked, and if yes then in which way, is a point worth pondering over. In Muzaffarpura district no BRW site has been reported so far, but in

⁴² IAR, 74-75, p.11

⁴³ IAR, 74-75, p.11

this period from B.C 200 onwards we see the coming into being of not only of such impressive urban centres with fortification as Katrāgarh⁴⁴ but also those sites having no apparent indicator of urban status such as Kushi.⁴⁵ Katrāgarh is quite an interesting site. Here NBPW and other associated wares along with terracotta human and animal figurines in the Mauryan style has been reported from the surface and disturbed pits, and they take the antiquity of the site to the pre-Śunga⁴⁶ period but without any stratified layer of its own, we can not say anything categorical about the Mauryan presence at Katrā. But perhaps more interesting is the fact that this site along with Vaiśālī got its fortification in the Śunga period only. While Vaiśālī thrived as an important urban centre in the subsequent phase this site was largely deserted after the Śunga period, though habitation continued here in a very small segment of the site. It points towards a certain interesting fact i.e. gradual lessening of urban characteristics in northern cities of the region (Katrāgarh, Balirājgarh, to be discussed later) at a time of thriving urbanism at Vaiśālī during the Kushana period.

⁴⁴ IAR 75-76, p.8

⁴⁵ IAR 87-88, p.11

⁴⁶ IAR 75-76, p.8

This proliferation of urban centres in the late phase of the NBPW e.g the Śunga period is marked in other parts of the region as well. In Begusarai district we see the first fortification at Naulāgarh,⁴⁷ situated 20kms north of Begusarai, on the confluence of two small rivelets, Bainti and Balāna which together join the Ganga near Khagaria. Fortification here appears to belong to the Śunga period.⁴⁸ A little north at Jaimangalāgarh, findings of NBPW have been reported in and around the fort area, and here too fortification dates to the Śunga period.⁴⁹

In the Darbhanga district, a huge fortified settlement, 80 acres in area, Kopagarh,⁵⁰ has been discovered recently, and NBPW has been reported here. This site shows continuation of settlement from the BRW phase. In Madhubani district, the site of Balirājgarh, a huge fortified settlement having an area of about one square km is perhaps the most well excavated site of N. Bihar after Basarh. Excavation has revealed two distinct periods-Pd I Late NBPW Phase, fortification dated to the Śunga period.⁵¹ Period II, 100-600 AD contains a little antiquarian remains, and is

⁴⁷ B.K. Sinha, *Archaeology of North Bihar* 1999, p.77

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.77

⁴⁹ B.K. Sinha, *op. cited*, p.68

⁵⁰ Chakarvarty D.K. *op. cited* p. 199

⁵¹ IAR 1962-63, p.8-9.

marked by a discernible absence of any Kushāna layer at this site,⁵² a period of thriving urbanism at *Vaiśālī*.

Similarly in Samastipura district as opposed to only one BRW site (Pāndavasthāna, which shows a continuity of settlements in the NBPW period as well) we have some evidence of proliferation of sites further east. One of them eg Mangalgarh, showing signs of fortification in the Early Historic Period⁵³ Karian near by site has shown evidence from BC 200 onwards and settlement continued here till the “medieval age”.⁵⁴

One of the most important impressions which emerges out of this survey is the riverine location of most of the discovered fortified sites. Thus Kopagarh, Mangalgarh were located on the ranks of the Kareh river, Balirgarh and ^{au} Nēwlagarh along the Balān river, and all these rivers have access to the arterial route of the Ganga, either directly or after confluence with another river we can not rule out this possibility that these sites were acting as river ports and were channelizing the resources of Himalayan and Terai region to the arterial route of the Ganga or vice versa.

Distribution pattern of sites in this phase helps us in identifying the major foci of settlements in the same region.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Personal information from B.K. Choudhary.

⁵⁴ Sinha B.K., *Archaeology of North Bihar*, p.69.

Modern Vaishali district retained its core status in this phase as well. In the east presence of impressive fortified sites of Jaimangalagarh and Naulagarh may represent another foci. In Darbhanga - Madhubani districts Kopagarh with nearby sites of Andhratharhi may appear to present another nucleus.

One may feel very uncomfortable, here by watching the trajectory of urbanization in Videha e.g. the region lying between the Gandaka and the Kosi in North Bihar. The whole region could produce only 2 important urban centre in the Pre-Maurya period - *Vaiśālī* and Mithilāpuri and so far we do not have any archeological correlate of the latter. *Vaiśālī* had a sustained urban presence in the coming centuries. It got 3 successive fortification from circa BC 200 onwards. In the same period, we see the emergence of other important urban centres - Katrāgarh, Balirājgarh Naulāgarh and Jaimangalāgarh. But most of them turned into insignificance at a period of thriving urbanism at *Vaiśālī*. Katrāgarh was largely deserted in the early centuries of the present era, paucity of antiquation remains at Baliarājgarh has forced the excavator to term 500 years (AD 100-600) as one period without any identifiable Kuśāna layer here.

Emergence of *Vaiśālī* as a Nodal Centre

Seen in this backdrop, how can the emergence of *Vaiśālī* as a nodal centre in the 6th century BC be explained when we do not have much archeological evidence for the emergence of other urban centres in the region, and later its sustained growth when other excavated. Early Historic urban centres of his region – Katrāgarh and Balirājgarh turned into relative in significance in the early centuries of the present era? We have already noted down the core nature of the Vaishali district in terms of habitation sites in the NBPW phase and also that this district was geographically most suited – most fertile and least flooded. But these geographical advantage could not have been solely responsibly for the emergence and sustained growth of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre, though it could have contributed a lot in this process.

This leads us back to the heated debate over the nature and origin of second urbanization of the Indian Subcontinent with its epicentre in the Mid-Ganga Valley. No doubt state formation was a pre-condition for the emergence of first urban centres here. *Vaiśālī* and Mithilāpuri emerged as important urban centres in Videha area mainly due to being the capitals of two important states, but while *Vaiśālī* had a sustained growth as a thriving urban centre

despite losing its political independence to Magadha, Mithilāpuri failed to leave any archeological co-relate. It may so reflect a certain fact that importance of *Vaiśālī* was due to economic reasons as well.

It appears that *Vaiśālī* maintained its focal position due to the its advantageous geostrategic location. Early Buddhist literature provides important clue to this phenomenon. It has been mentioned as a prosperous river port in the *Jātakas* and this does not seem improbable; nearby Lālganj town, 15 km South from ruins of Basārḥ along the Gandaka was the second most important riverine port in the late 19th century AD. Confluence of Gangā and Gandaka is 32 km away, from Basārḥ along the Gandaka southwards, and retaining some control over the Gangetic traffic with a base in ancient *Vaiśālī* could not have been very difficult. Indeed the major cause of confrontation between the Vajjians and Ajātaśatru was the question of control over the Gangetic trade. In this respect, position of *Vaiśālī* appears quite comparable to campā which owed its importance primarily to the control over the Gangetic trade it had.

Vaiśālī could have had some control over the Gangetic trade but its control over the Gandaka route would have been more pronounced and this route could have been used in channeling

forest products of the Himalayan foot hills. Importance of and impact of connections of plain sites with the Himalayan foot hills have not been worked out in detail so far, though recent researches have unveiled this phenomenon to some extent. In a study of Śrāvasti,⁵⁵ it has been argued that the city was acting as main conduit for maintaining contacts between the sites of the Ganga Valley and lower Himalayan foothills region and Nepala, and this greatly contributed to the urban prosperity of this city.

If alignment of sites is any indication, we can suggest a similar situation for *Vaiśālī* as well. The land route to Nepala from Pātaliputra followed a route parallel to the Gandaka. D.K. Chakrabarti had rightly argued on the basis of the distribution of potsherds between Rām Chaurā - Kohārāghāt and Checher - Bidupur that Early Historical crossing point on the Ganga was in this area only, and the presence of Mauryan Pillars at Salempur, (between Jalganj and *Vaiśālī*), Lauriyā Arerāj, Lauriyā Nandangarh and Rāmpurvā from where one can easily cross to Nepala via the Bhiknāthori pass in the West Champaranan district, points towards alignment of this route. *Vaiśālī* controlled this route by dint of its strategic location on it. It had the advantage of control over the riverine trade of the Gandaka and the land route to

⁵⁵ Takahiro Tokahasi *et. al* - The Ancient City of Sravasti: Its significance on the urbanization of North India, *Puratattva* 30.

Nepala and it helped in the sustained presence of the focal position of *Vaiśālī*.

Another factor which contributed to this process was the alignment of the land route which connected Rajgraha and Pātaliputra to Śrāvasti and beyond. This route generally referred to as Uttarāpatha was present during the period of the Buddha and *Vaiśālī* was an important transit point. This also contributed to the prosperity of *Vaiśālī*.

There can be no denial of the fact that *Vaiśālī* first emerged as a political centre, and it gained further prominence when it became the capital city of the entire Vajji Sangha. It had one of the most geographically suited hinterland in the immediate vicinity e.g. modern *Vaisali* district. But it did not lose its importance even after losing independence; it further attained growth. And this was mainly due to its location on a very important point of transit.

Chapter 4

ARCHAEOLOGY OF URBANISM AT VAISĀLĪ

Archaeology of Early Historical Urbanism of Indian subcontinent has witnessed a new spurt of interest particularly after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. It has one major advantage compared to the Proto-Historic archaeology i.e. availability of literary data for many important Early Historical urban centres, and this has made possible not only the exact identification of many well known urban centres of this period but has provided an opportunity to juxtapose literary data with the archaeological findings to get a more holistic picture. The images as gleaned from literary and archaeological data rarely seem to converge especially if the place concerned happens to be related to some important religious figure. *Vaiśālī* is an important example in this respect. This city was very intimately associated with the Buddha, hence it received very eloquent praises in many literary works, particularly in the Early Pāli canon and later semi-canonical works, but literary splendour of *Vaiśālī* does not seem to match the archaeological picture.

One major exception is the details provided by Huen-Tsāng who visited this city and adjoining regions during the seventh century A.D., and has left important detail of the city of *Vaiśālī*. Fā-Hsien has

also visited this place but he was more interested in describing the location of important stupas associated with the Buddha in some way, and due to this he has paid least attention to the secular buildings of the city. According to Huen-Tsāng the capital city of *Vaiśālī* in his times was to a great extent in ruins, the old foundation of the same were 60 to 70 *li* in circuit, while the royal precincts (identified with Garh area of *Vaiśālī*) was 4 to 5 *li*. He mentions that both within and without the city, and all around it the sacred vestiges were so numerous that it was impossible to recount them all.¹ Since all modern excavators of *Vaiśālī* have taken the help of data left by Huen-Tsāng, it was considered necessary here as well to quote him to have a better perspective of details of ancient *Vaiśālī*.

This chapter shall be divided into two parts. The first part shall deal with the summary of different excavations conducted at *Vaisali*. The second part shall analyse the position of *Vaiśālī* vis-à-vis characteristic features of Early Historic urbanisation of the subcontinent, it shall also try to trace the nature and trajectory of urbanisation at *Vaiśālī*.

¹ Beal, S., *Buddhist Record of The Western World*, vol. II, p. 66.

Excavations at *Vaiśālī*: A Historiographical Perspective

Archaeological interest in *Vaiśālī* is quite old, though excavations conducted here are largely prefunctory- even today after four excavations by different archaeologists, not a single complete house-plan is available. Another problem is the treatment of the whole N.B.P.W phase as one unified phase in the recent excavations of 1950 and 1958-62, and this has made the task of tracing the transition to urbanism here very difficult, if not impossible.

It was Cunningham who first did survey work and identified Basarh with ancient *Vaiśālī*. The Garh area was measured and examined by this great explorer. At his times the Garh was 1580 ft. long and 750 ft. wide and had towers at all the four corners, none of them now in existence. He had also seen a 220 ft. wide moat around the Garh area. He has described the Aśokan pillar at Kolhuā in great detail, but despite some excavations, he could not reach the root of the pillar below the ground.

T. Bloch's excavations in 1903-4 at the Garh area was more exhaustive than that of Cunningham, though he could not reach below the Gupta Period level of the site in any of his trenches². He could unearth some brick buildings, some of them having rooms of

² ARASI, 1903-4, pp. 90-91.

different dimensions , but none of them exceeding 250 square ft. in area. In some of them he found signs of door as well³, and findings of ringwells suggested their use either as soakage or for drinking purposes⁴. One singular achievement of his excavations was the finding of 720 seals mostly belonging to the Gupta period, the importance of which in tracing the urban dimensions of *Vaiśālī* shall be dealt with later. Other antiquities discovered by Bloch included terracotta figurines, fragments of an iron knife, beads of semiprecious stones, bangles of copper and shell, most of them belonging to the Gupta period. He detected remains of drains in residential buildings⁵.

Spooner carried out excavations in the Garh area only, and unlike Bloch he was able to trace the antiquity of the site to the third century B.C. though he also could not meet any structural remains predating the second century B.C.⁶.

One finding which deserves special mention was the finding of 285 seals on 825 terracotta surfaces, throwing important light on the urban dimensions of *Vaiśālī* upto the Gupta period.

Excavations in 1950 by K.Deva and V.Mishra were mainly directed towards ascertaining the date of fortification of the Garh

³ Ibid, p. 93

⁴ Ibid, p. 93

⁵ Ibid, p. 93

⁶ ARASI, 1914-15, p. 111.

area, and the excavators found the evidence of its dating between a period of c. B.C. 300-150 B.C. excavations at Chakrāmdās area showed the antiquity of the site going back to c. B.C. 500-150, indicated by the presence of N.B.P.W and B.R.W. The excavators found the evidence of occupation here as well as in the Garh area upto around A.D. 500.

It may be pointed out that these excavations were by and large confined to the Garh area, and their main emphasis was on establishing a cultural sequence for the same. But ancient *Vaiśālī* was not confined to this fortified settlement alone. Even if we set aside all literary references of the Pāli canon and later semi canonical works, account of Huen-Tsāng will make us believe that the city of *Vaiśālī* was not confined to the fortified settlement alone, but consisted of other localities as well outside the fortified area and the total extent of the city was 60-70 *lī*⁷ i.e. roughly 10-12 square miles. These excavations had not done justice to this city, and were extremely unhelpful in tracing the Pre-Śunga features of the city.

It was keeping these facts in mind that another excavation was conducted between 1958-62, and trenches were laid out not only in the Garh area but also in some neighbouring villages- Baniyā, Chakrāmdās, Lalpurā and Virpura, and Koluhā with the main aim of

⁷ S.Beals, *op.cit.*, p. 63-66.

throwing light on the pre- Mauryan history of the city. This excavation deserves a detailed discussion.

This excavation has traced the antiquity of *Vaiśālī* predating the N.B.P.W phase, at least at the sites of Chakrāmdās and Virpur, where B.R.W level is found below the N.B.P.W level⁸ and belongs to period I, antedating B.C. 600. Period II, represented by the N.B.P.W phase and covering the period of B.C. 600- B.C. 400 is more widely distributed. Period III covers the phase of B.C. 200- A.D. 200, which is marked with the disappearance of the N.B.P.W and covers the period upto the appearance of the typical Kushanas sprinklers. Period IV (C. A.D. 200-600) covers the Kushana and Gupta period , and period V covers post 600 A.D. period. As will be clear in the subsequent paragraphs, all sites in different periods do not show equal degree of habitation, and this may reflect changing foci of occupation through the ages.

Kharaunā tank area- lying between the Garh area and the village of Chakrāmdās, this tank was identified with the celebrated *abhiśeka Puśkarini* of the Licchavis, where none except the anointed Licchavi raja could bathe. Excavations here revealed as many as six layers, layer six could going back to C. B.C. 600 or a little earlier⁹.

⁸ *Vaisali Excavations 1958-62*, Published by Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Bihar, Patna, 1969, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 10-11

Layer 2-5 represented the N.B.P.W phase. The tank was provided with a walled embankment only during the Śunga period¹⁰, and the uniform size of the bricks suggested that the entire stretch of the wall was built in one operation.

It may be noted that this embankment coincided with the first fortification period of the Garh. In the South- Eastern corner of the tank, terracotta elephants, dogs and some other such objects, stylistically belonging to the Sunga period were recovered. Another noteworthy feature of this period was the findings of the ringwells¹¹ in the last phase of the N.B.P.W phase and according to the excavators they must have been for the use of houses near the tank area before it was constructed. Trenches in the outskirts of the tank area showed the findings of ringwells belonging to period II¹² and other antiquities such as terracotta beads, copper bangles etc. None of the trenches could show evidence of any building, though on the eastern side of the tank, the excavators could find traces of rammed brick concrete, perhaps suggesting a road¹³, leading to the Garh area.

One feature may be noted here- Pre-Śunga levels are not rich in antiquity, and the site got its first embankment only during the Śunga period. If seen in the context of story of the *Ekpanna Jātaka*, the

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 11

¹¹ Ibid, p. 12.

¹² Ibid, p. 12.

¹³ Ibid, p. 13.

tank was considered to be so sacred that none other than an anointed Licchavi *rajā* could bathe in it , and it was very highly protected, covered with iron nets to save it from getting polluted by birds, this paucity of antiquities of the Pre- Śunga period will certainly appear to be odd, and it will show a clear discrepancy between the literary perception and the archaeological picture. The area around it was certainly inhabited as indicated by the findings of ringwells, but absence of any structural building in the general area makes the picture not very encouraging.

The Buddha Stupa- This is a mound 2 ft 10 in. in height and about 50 ft. in diameter, lying on the north of the Kharaunā area, this stupa is supposed to have been built by the Licchavis on the corporeal relics of the Buddha soon after his death in 480 B.C.

Excavations here have shown that the original stupa was mud built, only 26 ft. 6 in. in diameter and had *āyakaṭas* , perhaps the earliest in North India. A relic casket was discovered, lying by itself and not enclosed in any stone, and contained one punch marked copper coin, two glass beads, one piece of gold and one conch. The original stupa dated back to the pre-Mauryan times, perhaps to the fifth century B.C.¹⁴The stupa saw first enlargement during the Mauryan period, second renovation in the first quarter of the third

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 21.

century B.C, another enlargement in the second century B.C. and final buttressing in the first century A.D. in an attempt to save the stupa. ¹⁵

The Garh Area – Fortification is considered one of the most important aspects of Early Historic centres “reflecting their price in the political stock market in the ancient period” ¹⁶. It was the fortified area of *Vaiśālī* which got the attraction of archaeologists like Cunningham, Bloch and Spooner who confined their excavations to the Garh area alone. Excavations in 1958-62 here have unearthed a separate N.B.P.W level, extending the date of habitation at this spot to c. B.C. 600.

An important finding from the Garh area was that of seven sherds of the P.G.W, coming both along with the N.B.P.W strata and in the rampart as well. ¹⁷ Those found in the mud rampart could have come from the surrounding ditch which was dug, and whose soil was used in making the mud rampart. It may be noted that *Vaiśālī* is the only mid- Gangetic valley site showing P.G.W findings, except Kausāmbī. This finding has many implications, not only for *Vaiśālī* but also for the other parts of the mid-Gangetic valley. It shows the evidence of supra-regional contacts of the settlement at the earliest

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 21.

¹⁶ .Sarao, K.T., *Urban Centres And Urbanization As reflected In Pali Vinaya And Sutta Pitakas*, 1995, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Vaisali Excavations*, 1958-62, p.40.

phase of the N.B.P.W period, and it may corroborate the supposition that Early Historic cities emerged as, and functioned as a nodal points in maintaining these contacts.¹⁸

The Garh area has as many as eight occupation layers, layer 7-8 representing period II (N.B.P.W phase), layer 5-6 representing period III(c. B.C. 200 A.D.), layer 3-4 representing period IV, and layer 2 and 1 representing period V¹⁹. Despite continuation of occupation from the N.B.P.W phase the area got defence structures only in the later phase. The first phase of defence dates from the earliest phase of the Sunga period, and was made of baked bricks, 20 ft. in thickness²⁰. In the second phase a massive mud rampart was constructed by digging a moat around the Garh area and using its soil for the construction of the rampart. The rampart is 68 ft. in width at the base, and 21 ft at the top, and dates to the first century B.C.²¹ The settlement got third fortification during the late Kushana or early Gupta period when after the destruction of the mud rampart, a nine feet thick brick wall was built.

In terms of findings of any structural complex, excavation results are not very encouraging. 8 trenches could discover some

¹⁸ For a detail discussion on the implications of PGW findings from *Vaisali* please see Chapter 1, p. 13.

¹⁹ *Vaisali Excavations*, 1958-62, p. 25.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 26.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

rooms of small dimension, none of them exceeding 100 square feet in area²².

In the south eastern corner of the Garh the excavator claims to have found “military barracks”, dating to the period of late phase of period III²³, mainly based upon the finding of “a dozen small rooms fit for the residence of the soldiers stationed there for the safety of the Garh” and also by the findings of iron arrow heads and spearheads. Excavations could not find any evidence of windows and doors in these rooms, though their existence cannot be ruled out.

Some of the trenches excavated in the centre of the Garh revealed a network of structures being divided into three different structural phases.²⁴ The structures of the Sunga and Kusana period are not significant, but they got a little monumentality in the Gupta period. One of the walls in Gupta period was seen going over a length of 57 feet running from north to south, and rooms of varying dimensions were attached to it, but the excavator could not attribute any definite function to this fairly big building.

²² Ibid, p. 27.

²³ Ibid, p. 29.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 27

One of the structures of the Kusāna level was equipped with a well serviceable draining system, made of substantial bricks. Ringwells and soakage jars were reported from the middle phases of period II onwards, and they may be said to represent individual households drainage or sewage system.

One impression is quite visible at the Garh area. Structural remains of the pre-Gupta period are very poor, and we hardly get any structural remains of the pre-Sunga period, despite the fact that the site shows evidences of occupation from the earliest phase of the NBPW, and has shown findings of even PGW. It got first fortification during the Śunga period, and other fortified sites of North Bihar - Balirājgarh, Katrāgarh, Naulāgarh, Jaimangalāgarh, show the sign of fortification in that period only or a little later. In a way, all the literary glory and splendor of *Vaiśālī* of republican period remains confined to literature alone, and does not translate into reality. Even under the Mauryas when a stone pillar was erected at Kolhuā, 2 miles north-west of the Garh area, and a monastic complex was built near the Stupa located here and when *Vaiśālī* functioned as an important nodal point on the Uttarāpatha and on the important route to Nepala, we hardly get any significant structural remains at the Garh area. Incidentally, other

excavated fortified sites of North Bihar - Balirājgarh and Katrājgarh too had very poor Mauryan presence. Biggest development of the Garh area appears to have been in the late Kusāna and early Gupta period, and incidentally, only during this period, we get most explicit evidences of proliferation of trade and commerce as represented by the contents of seals and sealings datable to this period.

Chakrāmdās area: This site lies at a distance of about 1 km west from the Garh area. Here two occupation periods were revealed just below a badly disturbed deposit. The first represented the BRW phase lying below the NBPW,²⁵ and the second one represented by NBPW along with the findings of some ringwells. ²⁶ In the disturbed deposit, Gupta terracotta²⁷ and a fragmentary Pala inscription were found.²⁸ Here also the excavators failed to detect any structural complex in any period.

But the importance of this site should not be underestimated. Besides Virpur, this is the only site in the surrounding of the Garh region which has reported pre-NBPW

²⁵ *ibid*, pp. 27-28.

²⁶ *ibid*, pp. 35-36.

²⁷ *ibid*, pp. 35-36.

²⁸ *ibid*, pp. 36-37.

layer BRW, and here unlike Virpur, habitation continued in some form up to the end of the Gupta period or even beyond.

Baniyā: Excavations here revealed three occupational periods, the earliest being that of the NBPW phase. In the middle phase of Period III were found deep bowls and sprinklers of red wares and terracotta human figurines, a few of which wore typical Kushana turban.²⁹ The upper level of the period exposed a quadrilateral shrine, each side in between 13 feet - 14 feet long and 3'8" wide having a projected opening in the south, dating to the Gupta-period³⁰ but the excavator could not attribute any specific function to it.

Another trench in the same area revealed a single period occupation down to the subsoil water level belonging to the NBPW, and indicating a largely deserted character of the spot since the disappearance of the NBPW.

Antiquities mostly belonged to the NBPW phase and included beads of some precious stones, antimony rods of copper, iron daggers etc. ³¹ Jar soakage and ringwell findings indicated individual home drainage and soakage system.

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 36

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 37.

³¹ *ibid*, p. 6.

Bhimsena Kā Pallā: Excavations here proved that both the earthen mounds, known locally as Bhimsena Kā Pallā, were mud stupa. One of the mounds yielded a few copper utensils along with a few NBPW associated pottery. NBPW was not found but the associated pottery was found both in the core of the stupa and below it, clearly indicating that these stupas belonged to the "Pre-Christian Era,"³² and absence of any later pottery or any other antiquity suggested that the site was largely deserted after the NBPW phase. Here as well, excavations failed to detect any structural complex, monasteries etc.

Similarly, Lālpurā area showed the evidence of a single occupational level of the NBPW, suggesting that the site was deserted before the Christian era³³. One important finding from this spot was a kiln of globular shape, having a diameter of 6 feet; unused potsherds in the same suggested that it was used for baking pottery.³⁴ This is perhaps the only evidence of any craft activity at *Vaisali*.

³² Ibid, p. 38.

³³ Ibid, p. 38.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 38.

Excavations at Virpur area showed a continuous occupation from BRW phase to Gupta period, but here as well no structural remains could be detected.

Kolhuā: Lying 2 miles north-west of the Garh area, this site is famous for the Asokan monolithic pillar, and adjoining monastic complex. The name 'Kolhua' could have been derived from the word 'Kollaga' which had been described as one of the suburbs of the city of *Vaiśālī* during the period of Mahāvira, the Jaina *tirthankara*. Excavations in 1976-78 have brought to light a monastic complex along with a stupa, built during the Mauryan period.³⁵

On the basis of stratigraphical evidence, both the Stupa and the pillar were found to be contemporary. The earliest occupation of the stupa is characterized by the NBPW comparable with the last phase of this were found at the Garh area at Basārh, period I b. The square size bricks of the stupa are similar to the square-sized bricks from period 1b at Garh. Earliest occupation of the site dates to the Mauryan period.

No datable object of the site belonging to the Sunga Kusana period has been found so far. It might have lost its

³⁵ Gupta, P.K., *Puratattva*, 1979-80, pp. 145-147.

importance in the early centuries of the Christian era, but it regained its importance in the post-Gupta period when the main stupa was enlarged and many new votive stupas were added to this complex.

Having discussed the findings from different sites in and around the Garh area of *Vaiśālī* where do we stand in tracing the nature and extent of urbanism at ancient *Vaiśālī*? One impression is quite apparent: the city grew over ages, different settlements (Baniyā, Chakrāmdās, Virpur, Kolhuā, the Garh area) came up in different phases of the life of the city. So it was not the case of foundation of a planned city like Indo-Greek Sirkap and Kuśāna Sirsukh at Taxila, or Sisupālgarh in Orissa. No doubt, certain new settlements came up with the spread of the sway of a new ruling group in the city - for example Kolhuā stupa and adjoining religious complex were most probably founded by Aśoka Maurya, but habitational settlements basically remained the same over the ages. Thus the Garh area, Baniyā and Chakrāmdas area, all showing habitation from the earliest phase of the NBPW, remained in occupation till the end of period IV (c. AD 200 - AD 600). Only the Lālpur area, which may be regarded as a habitational suburb of the city of *Vaiśālī*,

showed the sign of desertation of the site along with the end of the NBPW phase there.

Another important feature is the fairly well distributed nature of pre-NBPW settlements in the environs of ancient *Vaiśālī*. BRW layers have been reported from Chakrāmdās area, and Virpur area, besides the Garh area has also shown some PGW sherds though no separate layer for pre-NBPW BRW or PGW could be found here. All these sites show the evidence of occupation in the subsequent ages.

But perhaps more important is the fact that despite proof of settlement and habitation in the pre-NBPW phase, we hardly get any structure which can be dated to the pre-Mauryan period at different sites of *Vaiśālī*. Pre-Mauryan structural remains are very poor here, only 2 examples being the mud stupa north of the Kharaunā tank area, and the Kharaunā tank itself, but the latter too got its first wall embankment during the Śunga period only. Real proliferation of structures at *Vaiśālī* begins from the Śunga period only. It was during this period that the Garh area got its first fortification, the celebrated *Abhiśeka-Puśkarini* was enlarged and embanked with walls. Incidentally all other fortified sites of North Bihar Katrāgarh, Balirājgarh, Naulāgarh and Jaimangalāgarh show their first fortification

from this period only. This indicates that *Vaiśālī* was not growing in isolation, and its growth was co-eval with the coming up of new urban centres in the Videha region. It is again very interesting to note that other excavated fortified sites of the region - *Katrāgarh* and *Balirājgarh* show very poor signs of habitation as reflected in antiquarian findings after the beginnings of the Christian era - *Katrāgarh* appears to have been largely deserted after this period,³⁶ where paucity of antiquarian findings, particularly of the *Kuśāna* period, forced the excavators to level whole 500 years (AD 100 - AD 600) as one period at *Balirājgarh*.³⁷ But *Vaiśālī* was showing a robust growth during the *Kuśāna* and Gupta periods, indicated not only by the act of second and third fortification, but also by the contents of seals and sealings found in this period. Was it merely due to the fact that *Vaiśālī* was the administrative headquarter of the Tirabhukti province under the Guptas? It may be one factor, but another important factor was its nodal position along the northern branch of the Uttarapatha, and its advantageous position in controlling the riverine trade of the Gandaka and participation in the Gangatic trade.

³⁶ IAR, 1975-76, pp.8.

³⁷ IAR, 1962-63, pp.5.

So far, the structure of the city which emerges out of the archaeological findings is like as following - (a) the Garh area from the Śunga period onwards emerged as and remained as the nucleus of the urban settlements of *Vaiśālī*. It functioned not only as the administrative centre, but an economic centre as well, presumably as a market centre, as indicated by the contents of seals and sealings (to be discussed later) as well, and contained the elite population of the city. Baniyā and Chakrāmdās areas would have been other important residential areas of the city. Kolhuā and Virpura are located away from the main city, and it is doubtful that at any point of time they could have formed parts of the main city.

So far fortification could be found only in the Garh area, though literary sources indicate that the city was surrounded by 3 walls. D.K. Chakrabarti has opined that it is probable that the city of *Vaiśālī* as a whole had an outer ring of walls³⁸, but so far archaeological findings have not revealed any thing like this, and we shall have to wait for future excavations to confirm or deny it. The city was perhaps the only excavated urban centre of North Bihar among Chirānd, Mājhi, Katrāgarh, Balirājgarh which was able to support religious institutions

³⁸ D.K. Chakravarty, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities*, 1995, pp. 252.

from the very beginning of the urban phase, and it also shows its importance.

As far as craft activities are concerned, evidences are very meagre. Channel like furnace, running parallel to each other, filled with burnt reddish sandy earth mixed with charcoal was found during the 1950 excavation³⁹, and the excavators have associated them with bead manufacture.

Features of Early Historic Urbanism and *Vaiśālī*

It is an established fact that none of the Early Historic urban centres of the Ganga valley existed in isolation. They indeed interacted with their hinterlands and with one another in a very complex way. It was perhaps due to this factor that they shared certain common features in their morphology, character and functions. Childe's famous ten point criterion in determining the urban nature of a settlement in the Early Historic north India will not be that useful, as he is largely Euro-centric. Most recently Allchin has propounded a new list for determining the urban character of an Early Historic Settlement for India. According to his formulations, a settlement should hold ten key elements of material culture

³⁹ Deva K., and Mishra, V., *Vaisali Excavations*, 1961, p. 15.

which are generally held to make up or form a city or urban form. They consist of (a) large settlement with (b) a degree of internal planning, and (c) public architecture, (d) at the top of a settlement hierarchy and (e) encircled by defenses. Its inhabitants should have access to (f) a script, (g) craft specialization, (h) long distance trade and (i) a subsistence strategy of raising the carrying capacity of the surrounding area in order to support (j) the increasing population⁴⁰.

It will be interesting to judge *Vaiśālī* on these parameters, though it must be pointed out that absence of some features here should not lead us to deny the urban status to the same as excavations are very fragmentary, and till date, not a single complete houseplan is available here. Another thing which should be pointed out is that there is no reason to assume that all Early Historical cities must have been fortified at the very outset of their urban phase. Śrāvastī was a celebrated *mahānagara* in the Pali canon, but it got first fortification only in the Śunga period, around BC 250⁴¹, and this should not be taken to deny its earlier urban status, and the same holds good for *Vaiśālī* as well.

⁴⁰ F.R.Allchin, (ed.) *Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia, Emergence of Cities and States*, p. 57.

⁴¹ D.K. Chakrabarti, *op.cit.*, p. 249.

As far as the first criterion is concerned (large settlement), it has already been discussed. Settlements on Garh area, Chakrāmdās area, and Baniyā area show continuous occupation from the early NBPW phase onwards, and a continuous habitation between the Garh area and Baniyā area can be assumed.⁴² Considerable long walls, unearthed in the Garh area, dating to the Gupta period may reflect a degree of internal planning. Kharaunā tank, and other embanked tank found in the vicinity of the Garh area may represent public architecture; besides, the Garh area could have contained something like public architecture.⁴³ So far the settlement hierarchy of the region has not been traced, but it may be assumed that *Vaisāli* stood at the top of settlement hierarchy for the entire Videha/ Tirabhukti region, as the second largest site Balirājgarh had a fortified area of 70 hectares with no signs of occupation outside the fortified area, but *Vaisāli* had total 240 hectares of occupation area containing both the fortified

⁴² Indeed, Erdosy, (*Early Historic Cities of North India*, South Asian Studies, 3, 1987, p. 18.) has taken this continuous occupation between the Garh area and the Baniya area, measuring 240 hectares and thus he has calculated that *Vaisali* was the third most populous city of Indian subcontinent in the first century A.D after Patliputra and Mathura. His population estimates are, however, open to many questions. Besides, we have no firm evidence to determine the exact extent of occupation for different sites of *Vaisali*.

⁴³ Recently excavations in the Garh area has revealed "Community Well" like structure there, IAR, 1988-89, p. 9.

area and the unfortified area, if Erdosy's measurements are to be believed.⁴⁴

It got its first fortification during the Sunga period. Archaeological evidence for scripts comes with the seals dating to the Mauryan period, if not earlier. Long distance trade is indicated by the presence of objects of non-local origins - semi-precious beads, gold, silver, copper, and coins.

Seen in an archaeological perspective, hardly any 'urban' characteristic can be attributed to the pre-Mauryan phase at *Vaiśālī*, though literary sources will point towards an altogether different picture. Real urban growth starts in the Mauryan phase, which gets further impetus in the Śunga period, and culminates in the Gupta period as indicated by the contents of seals and sealing dating to this period. The fact these developments began with the foundation of the Vajjian capital at *Vaiśālī*, from 6th century BC onwards, but did not reach a concrete form (in the shape of fortification) till the Sunga period, will suggest that it was mainly due to its becoming a part of vast network of mobilization of resources from a vast area under different empires - Mauryan, Sunga, Kusāna or Gupta, that sustained this process.

⁴⁴ Erdosy, *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, p. 134.

Another feature which should not be overlooked is the locational aspects and distributional pattern of the Buddhist sacred centres, in and around the city, and their relationship with the urban centre of *Vaiśālī*. Perhaps *Vaisali* is the only excavated urban centre of North Bihar showing the presence of these religious centres, and this shows the importance of *Vaiśālī*, as Early Historic sacred centres - Stupas, monasteries etc. are found mainly in and around important urban centres on which they depended for patronage, or on the route connecting important urban centres.

In an interesting article, "Early Buddhism, Trade and Empire", James Heitzman has pointed out the mutual relationship between these three. According to his analysis, growth of empire facilitated the growth of trade and that led to the proliferation of monastic and stupa centres, generally around the important urban centres, or on the routes connecting them.⁴⁵ Early Buddhist centres in turn gave ideological support to these two - trade and empire.

It will not be impertinent to point out here that the Buddha Stupa, containing the corporeal relics of the Buddha,

⁴⁵ J. Heitzman, *Early Buddhism, Trade and Empire*, (1984), in Possene, G.L., and Knenedy, K.A. – *Studies in Archaeology and Paleoanthropology of South Asia*, Delhi, OUP, 1984.

got its first enlargement only under the Mauryas, and its further enlargements were co-eval with the main construction activities phase of the Garh area. Similarly, the Kolhuā complex, 2 miles north-west of the Garh area, was presumably built under Asokan patronage, and other excavated sacred centres in and around *Vaiśālī* - Bhimsena kā Pallā, Marpausaunā all belong to the mid-phase of the NBPW period. All these show that the city had enough resources to support these institutions.

Here, spatial distribution of these religious centres presents some important variation from the same of other parts of India during the Early Historic period. Erdosy has noted three patterns of spatial distribution of sacred centres in and around important Early Historic urban centres.⁴⁶ In the first pattern, large monastic complexes were set up, undoubtedly through royal patronage, as evidenced by inscriptions etc., outside major cities, such as Besnagar, Sānchi, Bēnaras (at Sārnath) Sisupālgarh. It may be noted that Kolhuā complex at *Vaiśālī*, lying 2 miles north west of the Garh area, may represent this pattern at *Vaiśālī*. In the second pattern, sacred centres exist just within the city (such as Kauśambī and

⁴⁶ G. Erdosy, Early Historic Cities of North India, *south Asian Studies*, 3, 1987, p. 10.

Pātaliputra) or just outside them (as in Śrāvastī). A third pattern is formed by numerous religious structures dotting the landscape but without any obvious concentration - as at *Vaiśālī*, Rājgir, Mathurā, Ahicchatra and Tilaurākot. The author points out that widely scattered stupas at *Vaiśālī* must have lined important roads. As has been noted earlier, Huen-Tsang has also observed that there were so many Buddhist sacred centres in and around *Vaiśālī* that it was very difficult for him to count them.⁴⁷ Not much of them have survived to attract the attention of archaeologists' spade.

But the presence of so numerous sacred centres in and around *Vaiśālī* reflects the patronage capacity of the city. Close association of the city with some important events of the life of the Buddha was no doubt an important cause behind these constructions as most of the stupas were erected on the spots associated with the Buddha in some way, but these activities could hardly have been possible without the patronage capacity of the city. These centres indeed formed a part of the urban complex of *Vaisali* in some way.

⁴⁷ S. Beas, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, pp. 66-67.

Seals and Sealings

One of the most interesting discoveries from different sites of *Vaiśālī* is a fairly large number of seals and sealings, made in terracotta clay ^{pieces} pillars, and in this aspect, *Vaiśālī* appears as a unique contrast to most of the other excavated urban centres of the subcontinent. No other site in the subcontinent has reported such a large number of seals of such a diverse variety. In a limited excavation, Bloch could find 720 seals at the Garh area, mostly belonging to the Gupta period⁴⁸, and Spooner has reported as many as 825 seals and sealings during his excavation at the Garh, most of them belonging to the Gupta period.⁴⁹ 1950-62 excavations could not unearth such large number of seals (only 98 of which 86 came from the Garh area alone). Out of these 98 seals and sealings, 5 dated to the Mauryan period, 12 to the Sunga period, 1 to the Kuśāna period and the rest to the Gupta period.⁵⁰

These seals and sealings offer an advantage in studying the gradual trajectory of functions of the city over the ages due to their relatively more certain chronology, which can be safely determined by studying their paleography. Their distribution

⁴⁸ ARASI, 1903-4, p. 101.

⁴⁹ ARASI, 1913-14, pp. 124-125. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁵⁰ *Vaiśālī Excavations*, 1958-62, p. 114.

pattern over the different sites of the city may help in identifying the most important focus of settlement and changes in the same, if any over-different ages. Moreover, their contents may be a great help in analysing the functions of the city.

Site wise distribution pattern of seals and sealings is available only for the 1958-62 excavation. In this excavation, Kharaunā tank and the Buddha stupa area produced 6 seals of the Śunga period, Chakrāmdās, Baniyā and the Lālpurā area together produced 4 Gupta period sealings, Virpura and the Mnapasaunā mound did not produce a single seal, showing the relative lesser significance of the site and the rest (65 Gupta, 1 Kusana, 12 Sunga and 5 Mauryan) were unearthed at the Garh area.⁵¹ If we add Bloch and Spooner's findings to this list, the Garh area will appear to far outnumber all sites of the city and will appear to be the nucleus of the city. This character became most prominent during the Gupta period.

But perhaps a more interesting impression is the gradually changing nature of the city in different periods of its life. One seal of period II, said to be dating to the Mauryan period on paleographic grounds, and recovered from the Garh area, contains the legend "Buddha Lakshitasya"—a place

⁵¹ *Vaisali Excavations, 1958-62*, p. 114.

already seen by the Buddha⁵² and another seal mentions - 'Bhiku'⁵³ whose sanskritized form will be 'Bhikshu' meaning a monk. *Vaiśālī* was closely associated with the Buddha, and it developed as a secondary pilgrimage centre from B.C. 250 onwards. These seals may allude to this aspect of the city.

Another seal discovered by Spooner, paleographically belonging to the Mauryan period, and containing the legend 'Vesāli anusamyaka Takāre'⁵⁴. Spooner takes the word 'anusamyanka' to mean a police guard and *Takāre* to be the name of a place. Hence he suggests that the seal in question is simply of a local sub-station of 'metropolitan police force' of *Vaiśālī*, and this seal would have been affixed to some document sent in from *Takāre* to the headquarters office at *Vaiśālī* where it was found by the excavator.⁵⁵ There is no reason to disagree with his readings. It points towards the fact that *Vaiśālī* was an administrative centre under the Mauryans, but how much area it was controlling, is very difficult to determine. It may be added that during the same period, *Kolhuā* complex was added to this city, and later it developed as a secondary Buddhist pilgrimage centre. But available

⁵² Ibid, Seal No. 3, p. 115.

⁵³ Ibid, Seal No. 6, p. 115.

⁵⁴ ARASI, 1913-14, P. 111.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 113.

sources suggest that under the Mauryas, *Vaiśālī* was mainly functioning as an administrative town. In this period, later seals of Śresthi, Sārthavāha, 'Kulika' and their guilds are quite conspicuous by their absence.

In the second century BC, *Vaiśālī* appears to have retained its administrative centre status, as indicated by the findings of seals of 'Mahāmātya'⁵⁶ but certain important new developments came to the surface. A fragmentary terracotta sealing recovered from the Garh area belonging to this period⁵⁷ deserves special mention. The sealing is unfortunately broken and the first two letters of the first line are unfortunately missing. The probable legend according to the excavators was - "*Rāño Agimita Sā Māmiyeya Kotha Kārasa Vithi*", meaning the seal of the market or shop (owned by) the fort commander or the store owner who was a relative of King Agnimitra through the latter's maternal uncle.⁵⁸ According to excavators, the word *Kothakārasa Vithi* would suggest that there were also many other markets or shops belonging to different individuals or group of individuals and that *Vaiśālī* was an "industrial" city even during the second century BC.⁵⁹ They further opine,

⁵⁶ *Vaisali Excavations*, 1958-62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 116.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 117.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 117.

mainly on the basis of this broken seal, that the Garh (supposed to be the ruins of the fort) was probably not a Garh or fort at any time, but a market place or commercial centre for centuries, at least from 3rd century BC to the Gupta period.⁶⁰

In the opinion of the excavators this claim is further buttressed by the fact that while many sealings of traders, bankers and guilds have been found at the Garh area, no monumental building could be exposed in any of the excavations at the site. It has also been suggested that remains of "military barracks" exposed by excavations may represent the military units kept there for the maintenance of peace and order, and the moat around the Garh has been taken to be a result of digging the earth for the construction of the rampart of the site.⁶¹

But should the status of the fort be denied to the Garh area based on readings of fragmentary seals, and absence of any 'royal structure' unearthed by selective trenching? No doubt seals of guilds of *Śresthi*, *Sārthvāha*, and *Kulika* are numerous in the Gupta period, but seals of administrative

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 118

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 118.

apparatus are not absent either. Again other excavated sites in the region - Balirājgarh and Katrājgarh show similar structure of fortification, but no seals of guilds of merchants have been found there. So should any commercial function be denied to them, and should they be treated as merely administrative centres, when evidence for even that is very meagre at both places?

It is quite obvious that being too categorical about the function and nature of the Garh area based upon inadequate excavations and fragmentary seals will not do justice to the subject. Administrative nature of the Garh area was apparent to Huen-Tsang as well who calls it "royal precincts"⁶². And presence of markets and influential merchants and bankers within the fortified area is not so unusual either.

No doubt the Garh area could have functioned as an important commercial centre, but it never lost its status of an administrative centre. Dhruvadevi - Ghatoktachagupta seals discovered by Bloch are too famous to be mentioned. Gupta period seals and sealings discovered in the Garh area contain specific references *Vaiśālī* being the administrative

⁶² S. Beal, op.cit., p. 66.

headquarter of the Tirabhukti province.⁶³ Thus one of the seal (no. 18) contains the legend '*tirbhukti uparika adhikarnasya*' i.e. seal of the office of *uparika* (provincial governor) of Tirabhukti, and this could have contributed to the sustained presence of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre when other fortified towns of the region, Balirājgarh and Katrāgarh were showing signs of gradual decline. Another interesting seal discovered by Bloch contains the legend - '*raṇa - bhāndāgāra - adhikaranasya*'⁶⁴ viz. seal of the office of military provisions, and it also reflects the important administrative functions of the city.

But more numerous are the seals containing the names of individuals, and those of guild of *Śresthi - Sārthavāha*, and *Kulika*. Out of total 720 seals found by Bloch, one particular legend '*Śresthi-Sārthavāha - Kulika - nigamasya*' occurs for as many as 274 times,⁶⁵ and reflects the thriving position of trade and commerce during this period.

It may be noted that these seals also reflect a fair degree of differentiation within the merchant community. Thus sometimes '*Śresthi*' of *Vaiśālī* appear to have formed their own

⁶³ ARASI, 1903-4, pp. 108-9, Seal No. 18.

⁶⁴ ARASI, 1903-4, p. 108, Seal No. 13.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 101.

guild - '*Śresthinigamasya*'⁶⁶. Even the '*Kulika*' had their own '*Prathama-Kulika*'⁶⁷ and many such *Kulikas* issued their own seals.⁶⁸ These *Sārthavāhas*, (caravan leaders), *Śresthis* (bankers) and *Kulikas* (roughly translated as artisans) had combined guilds - "*Śresthi-Sārthavāha Kulika nigama*" and these guild issued many seals.

The largest number of seals belongs to the category issued by individuals, and it is very difficult to determine which class of citizens they represented. Some of the seals discovered by Spooner provide some clue to this problem. Some of the individuals - Eka, Vyāghrabala, and Bhadrādāsa⁶⁹, are shown to be '*Śresthi*' in seals 270 & 286⁷⁰ and this possibility cannot be ruled out that most of the persons issuing their individual seals could have belonged to the merchant community.

Another very interesting seal discovered by Spooner (No. 93) is almost wholly unparalleled, a unique piece among Indian seals and had no duplicate either at *Vaiśālī* or at any other excavated site of India. It depicts a goddess like figure, accompanied with conch on a large ship. Spooner has

⁶⁶ ARASI, 1913-14, p. 125, 127, 154. Seal Nos. 808, 270A, 282B.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 138, Seal No. 277A.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 138-151, Seal No. 275, 271, 708.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 125-128, Seal Nos. 8A, 14, 70.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 137.

attributed this seal to some temple of some goddess of water.⁷¹ But more probably, it represented the seal of some guild specializing in water borne trade - riverine or maritime.⁷²

Impressions gleaned from the analysis of seals and sealings³ found at *Vaiśālī* are quite interesting. During the Mauryan period, the city largely appears to have functioned as an administrative centre. It retained this status in the coming centuries as well, but its commercial dimensions became more and more clear in the coming centuries, and it reached its zenith during the late Kuśāna and early Gupta period. This is in sync with the periods of main structural activities of the city.

The city has hardly any pre-Mauryan structure, the main phase of structural activity falls in the Śunga-Kuśāna period, and the city got final fortification during the Gupta period. Though no complete structure of this period has been unearthed so far, walls of this period show fairly impressive character.

And another impression which is quite obvious is that the Garh area retained its prime position within the city, at least from the period of its first fortification.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 130.

⁷² Motichandra, *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1977, p.229 has identified this goddess with Lakshmi and this ship with a sea-faring vessel.

Chapter 5

VAISĀLĪ IN A WIDER PERSPECTIVE: LINKAGES OF THE CITY

The second urbanization of the Indian subcontinent with its epicentre in the mid Gangetic valley was marked by many characteristics, one of the most important of them being the evolution of a very complex network of information and exchange. Capitals of the 16 *mahājanapadas* which first emerged as political centres soon evolved as focal points in maintaining these contacts. This complex network of exchange and information was sustained by various factors - political, economic and religious. The 6th century BC is marked by an ever-increasing contracts between these centres, resulting in the opening of the larger parts of the subcontinents, and gradual evolution of established trade routes such as *Uttarāpatha* whose configurations largely remained the same in the coming centuries.

This important aspect of the functions of a city, namely their acting as a focal point for their respective hinterlands in maintaining contacts with other regions, and functioning as purveyors of information and exchange to their hinterland was very important in maintaining their urban vigour even after

losing the political independence. Taxila never outgrew the status of a regional centre and if Allchin's classifications are to be taken in to account, it was a 4th grade city in terms of size, being clubbed with Balirājgarh¹ in the early centuries of the Christian era, but its location on a very important trade route gave it a certain supra-regional presence.

The story of *Vaiśālī* too, was not much different. The Vajjians lost their political independence quite early to Magadha, and after that, *Vaiśālī* was at the best a provincial headquarter for the Videha/Tirabhukti region. Even for that status, barring the Gupta period, we do not have any direct evidence. But it maintained its urban vigour - and it was due to certain locational advantages, which will be dealt with in the subsequent pages.

It must be regretted that while exploring linkage aspect of *Vaiśālī*, we face a genuine scarcity of sources - literary and archaeological. Early Pāli canons, while providing a fairly adequate information about the social customs of the Licchavis, or about their zeal towards the Buddhism etc. are generally silent about the economic conditions of Videha/Vajji regions such as trade, agriculture etc. and this has rendered our task

¹ Allchin, F.R., *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia, The Emergence of Cities and States*, p. 207.

more difficult. Such scant references in the Jatakas and later Buddhist-Sanskrit literature have rendered this task quite difficult, and have necessitated the use of much later sources (such as 19th century records of Hunter² etc.) in tracing the lines of movement within the region.

Linkages of Vaisālī: The Geographical Backdrop

Trajectories of evolutions of linkages of a region are largely determined by its geographical surroundings. Vajji/Videha region was flanked by Kośāla in the west, and Magadha in the south, both having rich archaeological and literary evidences of habitation during the period of the Buddha. But the scenario in the east is quite different - the Kosi-Mahananda interfluvium was largely a *terra incognita* mentioned in only one source by the name of 'Aṅguttarapa. Further east, Paund̄ra-Vārendra region had hardly any pre-historic protohistoric background² and it was only after the incorporation of the region in the Mauryan empire that it came under the pale of regular traffic to and from mid Gangatic valley cities. It was mainly due to these factors that major orientation of Vaisālī largely remained towards the west (Kośāla and beyond) or towards the south (Magadha) and it had readily

² Chakrabarti D.K- *Arch. Geog. of the Ganga Plains, Lower and Middle Ganga*, 2001, p.270. He could find only one fragment of BRW at Bangarh.

acted as a conduit for maintaining contact between the two, after the evolution of the Uttarapatha.

Pre-Uttarāpatha Phase

The earliest reference of migration to this area (Videha) occurs in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* where Agni, after crossing the Pūrvakośala territory, stumbles at the banks of the *Sadānīrā*, and later after crossing it, by burning the forests turns the "uncultivable", "marshy" land "cultivable". In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, configuration appears to be a little different - the hero Rāma on his journey to Mithilāpuri from Kośala, reaches *Vaiśālī* from the southern side of the Gangā, and he crosses it by a boat before reaching *Vaiśālī*.³ It may be noted that this journey from Ayodhya to *Vaiśālī* did not follow the later established route along the Himālayan foot hills from Śrāvastī (not very far from Ayodhya) to *Vaiśālī*.

The Vajjian Vaisali

It was only with the emergence of the *Vaiśālī* as the capital city of the Vajji confederacy that we see the gradual spread of the linkages of the city, which had now started to function as an important nodal point on the Uttarāpatha. Configuration of the same had already been traced in great

³ Goldman, R.P, *The Valmiki Ramayana*, 1.44

detail by Motichandra, based upon literary sources, and by Nayanjot Lahiri by an archaeological perspective, and there is no need to do the same here. Only its relation to *Vaiśālī* and its role in shaping the fate of the same shall be discussed.

It may not be out of place to recall that the Uttarāpatha had two broad configurations. The route coming from Taxila in its northern branch used to pass through Hastinapura, Sāketa, Śrāvastī, Kapilavastu, Pāvā, Kuśinagar before reaching *Vaiśālī* and ultimately reaching Rājgraha or Champā but in the early Pāli canon, configuration of this route in the context of *Vaiśālī* did not seem to go beyond Śrāvastī, though the possibility can not be denied. One Licchavi notable, Mahāli went to Taxila for education, he studied there along with the Kośala prince Prasenajit and after returning to *Vaiśālī* from there, he took up the task of educating 500 Licchavi youths, and education in this way spread far and wide among the Licchavis⁴. Taxila was certainly not unknown, and this contact could have been maintained through the northern branch of the Uttarāpatha. But Śrāvastī was nearer, and we get greater references to traffic of men and material between Śrāvastī and Rājgraha between which *Vaiśālī* was an important point of transit. Śrāvastī was

⁴ Fausboll, *Dhammapada* (old edition)p.211

connected to Rājgraha by a high road⁵, and it run via *Vaiśālī*. The Gangā had to be crossed by boats while traveling to Rājgraha from Śrāvastī⁶. Some of these boats were owned by the rulers of Magadha, and some of them by the Licchavis of *Vaiśālī*.⁷ Volume of trade on this route appears to be considerable and was one of the important source of income for the Vajjian state. Thus income from the toll collected on the western gate of *Vaiśālī*, imposed on the merchandise coming from Śrāvastī was one lakh, and it was handed over to Mahāli, a Licchavi notable.⁸ Though the figures mentioned are traditional, and no historical conclusions can be easily drawn from it, except the fact that *Vaiśālī* had a considerable trade with Śrāvastī and beyond, this route appears to be fairly well in use during the period of the Buddha, and the Pāli canon records the name of even small places along this route. Thus the pupils of Baverj, when they proceeded from Śrāvastī to Rājgraha, they passed through Setavyā, Kapilavastu, Kuśinagara, Pāvā, Bhognagara and *Vaiśālī*.⁹ When the Buddha was staying at the Kutāgārasālā of *Vaiśālī*, some Sakyan ladies came from Kapilavastu by a direct road, and requested their admission to the *Sangha*. The route between Rājgraha and

⁵ Vin. II, SBE17, p. 299.

⁶ *Divyavadana*, p.55-56 ed by Leffman

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ D.P.P.N, ii, p.551

⁹ Sutta Nipata, verses 1011-1015, PTS

Śrāvastī on which Vaiśālī was an important transit point, was very much important in maintaining the urban vigour of Vaiśālī. In the west, the route reached up to Taxila and beyond, and was frequented by monks, merchants and students. Jivaka, the famous physician, after completing his education at Taxila, returned to Rājgraha via Vaiśālī¹⁰ along the northern branch of the Uttarāpatha. Fa-Hain also came to Rājgraha from Gāndhāra by this route, and he has left a vivid account of important cities along this route. About two centuries later, Huen Tsang followed the same route to Vaiśālī.

Motichandra, in his masterly analysis of ancient Indian trade routes, has drawn our attention to a very interesting fact viz. the junction of these branches of the Uttarāpatha, the northern and southern at Vaiśālī.¹¹ According to him, the southern branch of the Uttarāpatha, coming from Taxila followed the Mathurā - Soreyyā - Kāmpilya - Kānyakubja - Prayāga - Banāras route. From Banāras it followed the north bank of the Gangā, reached to Ukkāchela, identified with modern Hājipura or Sonpur, and ended at Vaiśālī where it met the northern branch of the Uttarāpatha, and from there

¹⁰ Quoted in Motichandra - *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India*, 1977p.139

¹¹ *ibid*, p.17

proceeded to Rājagṛha and Cāmpā.¹² Though it is doubtful that the southern branch would have avoided Buxar-Pāṭaliputra direct route, and opted for the Banāras - Balia - Hājipur - Vaiśālī route for reaching Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha after the emergence of Pāṭaliputra as the capital city of one of the most powerful states of India, Magadha. The importance of Vaiśālī was mainly due to its focal position on the northern branch of the Uttarāpatha.

But that does not indicate that the importance of rivers in maintaining the linkages of this city was less important.

In Early Historic urbanization, riverine commerce did not play an insignificant role in the mid-Gangetic valley and control over the arterial route of the Ganga was one of the most important factors behind the Magadhan conquest of Anga, and constant warfare between Magadha and the Vajjians. Cāmpā was the principal port of exit for the entire mid-Ganga valley for the sea-faring merchants, and even archaeological configuration of the city was designed to tap this flourishing trade¹³.

¹² ibid

¹³ Chakrabarti, D.K, op.cit p.

A gleaning from the literary data will make it amply clear that *Vaiśālī* retained its importance due to its location along the Gandaka, and the control it had over the Gaṇḍaka and Ganga trade, at least in the phase till it was not annexed by Magadha. It has been described as a prosperous river port¹⁴. In the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, we get references to Vajjiputtakas going to Sahajāti by boat from *Vaiśālī*¹⁵ Sahajāti has been identified with modern Bhita in the Allahabad district,¹⁶ and it was located on the Yamuna. Though the event mentioned is related to the period of the second Buddhist council, but it may be pointed out that the route referred to may be ancient.

Indeed control over the Gangetic trade was of singular importance to the political economy of the Vajjian state, and was one of the route causes behind their struggle with Magadha. "In one of our sources strife between the Vajjians and Magadha has been described arising out of the dispute over the joint ownership of a riverine port in the Ganga. According to it, there was a river port near the Ganga, extending half *yojana*, half of which belonged to Ajātaśatru, and half to the Vajjians. Near it there was a mountain having mines of gems, or some

¹⁴ Fausball, *Jataka* no.149.

¹⁵ Vin ,ii,pp.299,301

¹⁶ Sarao,K.T.S,op.cit .p. 148.

fragrant material. Ajātaśatru was always late in reaching there, and the Vajjians used to takeaway all the precious gems¹⁷, and this ultimately lead to a fierce battle between the two, over the control of the Gangetic trade.

This connection to the arterial route of the Ganga by rivers remained important in later period as well. All fortified cities of the Videha region of Early Historic period, were located on some important river. Thus Kopāgarh and Mangalgarh were located on the Kareh river, and Balirājgarh and Nāulāgarh were located on the Balān river, and the fortified site of Jaimangalagarh is not very far from the the Burhi Gaṇḍaka. All these sites seem to have had independent access to the arterial route of the Ganga.

It is doubtful that ancient *Vaiśālī* was having any direct maritime connection or not. In the modern period the accounts of Hunter prove that nearby Lālganj had direct riverine access to Calcutta in the 19th century.¹⁸ But in the absence of any direct evidence for *Vaiśālī*, it is very difficult to postulate this situation for earlier periods.

¹⁷ *Sumangalavilasini*, P.T.S,ii,p516

¹⁸ Hunter, W.W-A *statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol.xiii,p151

In one very interesting seals recovered from the Garh area of Basārh by the excavation of Spooner in 1913-14, datable to the Gupta period, we come across a very interesting depiction of a boat or a ship.¹⁹ It shows the figure of a goddess standing on the ship, but the figure is so complicated that it is very difficult to describe it. At first, the oval in the lower part of the seal appears a horn like object, perhaps representing the bottom of the ship. The side of the middle of the ship is higher than the bow and stern, and perhaps two parallel lines indicate the presence of the deck. The bow is on the right and on the same side is represented an oar going obliquely to the water. Towards the stern appears a bigger banner post from which banners are hanging. In between these banners stands the Goddess standing on, what appears to be a lion. On her right appears a conchshell. This figure has been identified with Sri Lakshmi by Motichandra,²⁰ and the boat with a sea faring vessel. In fact, maritime connections of river-port towns tof north Bihar of this period (Chirānd and Vaiśālī) is a poorly understand phenomenon, despite the fact that it could have a fundamental impact on their urban fate. This maritime connection does not seem to be impossible either – in the case of Chirand, one seal belonging to the Gupta period, depicts a boatman rowing a boat, and the legend on it reads –

¹⁹ ARASI, 1913-14, p137.

²⁰ Motichandra, op.cit p.229

“*Samudrasya*” i.e. “of the sea”.²¹ This may point towards the maritime connections of the city. No such conclusive evidence has so far come to light for the maritime connection of Vaisali, but this possibility can not be ruled out.

R.C. Majumdar has drawn our attention towards a city on the Arakan coast in Burma, named Vethāli, which he thinks, was the local pronunciation of *Vaiśālī*.²² It is impossible to say if original *Vaiśālī* had any relationship to it. Chronicles of the Chandra dynasty of Burma recorded the marriage of one of their rulers to the princess of *Vaiśālī* in India²³, in the 11th century A.D and this raises doubts about the credibility of the event, as it is well known that by that time, there was no “kingdom of *Vaiśālī*” from where the Burmese king could marry a princess. It may be pointed out that many cities in the south-east Asia were christened with the name of important Indian cities, such as Campā etc, and *Vaiśālī* was no exception, and it should not be taken to construe any direct maritime linkage of *Vaiśālī*. It is likely that voyagers from *Vaiśālī* could have gone to first Campā by riverine route, and from there reaching Tāmralipti and beyond had never been a difficult task. Gandāka could have acted as a convenient link in maintaining linkages

²¹ Prasad, Kameshwara, Transition from Rural to Urban Settlement: A Case Study of Chirand, in Thakur V.K., ed. *Towns in Pre-Modern India*, Patna, 1994, p.73.

²² “*Vaisali And Greater India*” in “Homage To *Vaisali*” p.189-191

²³ *ibid*

with Nepala, though we do not have any direct literary evidence, to support it.

Linkages: An Archaeological Perspective

While dealing with the linkages of North Bihar in general, a certain discrepancy is quite visible - barring *Vaiśālī* and Mithilāpuri, literary co-relates of any other city is not available, and archaeologically Mithilāpuri has not been traced so far. Even in the case of *Vaiśali*, literary data contain almost no information on *Vaiśali* of post Vajjian era, but structural remains at *Vaisali* generally do not antedate the Mauryans. Seen in this backdrop, archaeological and literary data sometimes appear to produce quite conflicting impressions. Literary data are almost silent about linkages with Nepala either during the Vajjian phase or after that, but most dense concentration of Asokan pillars north of *Vaiśālī* up to Rāmpurvā in the Champarana district appear to present quite a contradictory picture. In this section, an attempt will be made to trace the line of movement, inter-regional as well as intra-regional, based upon the alignment and distribution pattern of sites.

Much of the first aspect shall be based upon the findings of D.K. Chakravorty's recent survey work in the mid-Gangetic valley, though my orientation will be to trace their impact on *Vaiśālī*. Since location of most of the cities has already been noted in an earlier chapter, the focus here will be on the analysis of the same vis-à-vis tracing the lines of movement.

First of all, the location of Aśokan pillars between Pāṭaliputra and Rāmpūrva. As many as 5 pillars have been noted along this sector - Salempur (between Lālganj and Basarh), Kolhuā (near Basarh), Lauriya Arerāj, Lauriya Nandangarh and Rāmpūrvā. From Rāmpūrvā, one can easily cross to Nepala via the Bhikhnāthodi pass in the west Champārana district, and in the same general area there is a huge fortified undated site of Chankigarh.²⁴

Concentration of pillars in the area north of Basarh is rather intriguing, especially due to the presence of 2 Mauryan pillars at Rāmpūrvā. The area around Rāmnagar doon from where it is not very far, was said to be "the most unhealthy place to live"²⁵ Situations in the Early Historical period could not have been better. However, small reserve of gold and silver in the same Rāmnagar doon area has been noted and also the

²⁴ Chakrabarti.D.K,op.cit.p.206

²⁵ Hunter, W.W.op.cit p252.

presence of the finest quality of the *sala* timber.²⁶ It may be due to these factors that *terai* and Nepala connections were so important in the Mauryan scheme of things.

D.K. Chakrabarti has identified two ancient ferry points²⁷ on the Gangā north of Pātaliputra, Rāmchaura-Konharāghāt²⁸ sector and near Chechar-Kutubpur sector. Road to *Vaiśālī* along the Gandaka, runs straight from Rāmchaurā - Konhārāghāt section, and here a Mauryan pillar has been discovered at Salempur between Lālganj and Basārḥ. This Pātaliputra - Ramchaura - Salempur - *Vaiśālī* - Lauriya Arerāj - Lauriyā Nandangarh - Rāmpurvā - Nepala route was very important and *Vaiśālī* functioned as an important nodal point in it. Concentration of sites around Patāhi Chowk area has already been noted down in the second chapter and it could have played some role in maintaining *Vaiśālī*'s contacts with other fortified 'northern' towns - Katrāgarh, Kopāgarh and Balrājgarh, and the route could have extended up to Nepala from this side as well.²⁹

The role of *Vaiśālī* in maintaining connections towards the east- Anguttarapa, Mahāsthāngarh appears to be less

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.228

²⁷ Chakrabarti .D.K, op.cit.p279

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ *ibid*, p.280

prominent. From Pātaliputra, the Ganga could have been crossed opposite Chechar Kutubpur from where sites of Nāulāgarh and Jaimangalāgarh lay roughly to the north east. Further east in the Purnia district, a Maurya column at Sikligarh has been reported along with a fortified settlement on the same site, and Sikligarh lay roughly straight west to the Early Historic cities of Bangarh and Mahāsthāgarh of North Bengal. This Pātliputra - Chechar Kutubpur - Nāulāgarh - Sikligarh - Mahāsthāgarh alignment of route had no great role for *Vaiśālī*. One possibility may be that the northern branch of the uttarāpatha coming via *Vaiśālī* could have joined this route at some point south of *Vaiśālī*, but it in no way lessened the dependence of *Vaiśālī* on the Uttarāpatha's northern branch, or on the route to Nepala.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Vaiśāli is the only city of North Bihar which has many literary references and is an archaeological site as well. This facilitates certain degree of comparative study of literary perceptions and archaeological reflections of this city. But in this process certain discrepancy is quite discernible between these two classes of sources. Despite numerous literary references of the glory of Vajjian *Vaiśāli*, there is hardly any Pre-Mauryan structural presence there. And when we start to get archaeological evidences, literary references to this city gradually diminish. This cleavage between literary and archaeological data makes a coherent study of urbanisation in this region very difficult. Nevertheless an attempt was made in this work, and it must be admitted that it has its own limitations.

In the first chapter, a study of transition to urbanism and literary reflections of *Vaiśāli* as an important urban centre was attempted. The study began with an analysis of causes leading to the emergence of state system and subsequently to urbanization in this region, and the impression emerging out of that there was a definite agrarian background of state system in the region.

Vaiśālī emerged as the capital city of powerful Vajjian state and due to its close association with the Buddha, it has received a great degree of praise in the early Pali Canon, and later semi-canonical works. But despite this praise, one important fact cannot be denied that it was just a “*nagara*” compared to other ‘6 *mahānagaras*’ *Rājāgrha*, *Campā*, *Kāśī*, *Kauśmbī*, *Śrāvastī* and *Sāketa*. This is further confounded by the fact that while literary references to other social groups-farmers, merchants etc, are many in these states having these *mahānagaras*, the same is not visible for the Vajjian *Vaiśālī*. Were these two phenomena eg. absence of *mahānagra* status of *Vaiśālī* and scant literary references to farmers *gahapatis*, and *setṭhi* related in some way? Only this much can be said that future research may unveil some aspects of this perplexed problem. Scanty references to farmers and rural settlements in the literary sources render a study of settlement perspective of the region difficult. Only a tentative hypothesis can be made that these rural settlements would have tended to cluster in the vicinity of the capital city, and a relative thin presence in other areas.

The second chapter has underlined this fact that modern *Vaiśālī* district has emerged as a core region of the area even

during the protohistoric phase, if the number of sites is any indication.

Clustering of sites in a particular area may be safely taken to be an important precondition for the emergence of urban centre there and modern ~~Vaishali~~ ^{Vaishali} district was showing this trait. This was mainly due to certain advantageous geographical factors-the district is most fertile and least flooded. In this backdrop *Vaiśālī* first emerged as a political centre, and later retained its importance ever after losing its political independence, and it was mainly due to its location on an important trade route and access to riverine trades of the Ganga and the Gaṇḍaka that it retained its importance as an important urban centre.

The third chapter has shown the nature of discrepancy between the literary references and archaeological picture. There is hardly any pre-Mauryan structural presence at *Vaiśālī*. *Vaiśālī* got first fortification during the Sunga period only and in the same period, certain other sites of the region were fortified including Balirājgarh and Kaṭaragarh, but only *Vaiśālī* could survive as an important urban centre in the Kuṣāna and Gupta period. This may also have been due to the fact that *Vaiśālī* was the administrative headquarter of Tirabhukti province in North Bihar, but this was not the only reason. Perhaps more important were the commercial

functions of the city. If seals and sealings found at *Vaisali* reveal anything, it was that the city was an important commercial centre under the Guptas, and this function cannot be ruled out for earlier phases as well. A second century seal referring to the presence of a market centre at the Garh area of *Vaiśālī* has already been mentioned, but seals and sealings referring to the guild of *Sreṣṭhi*, *Sārthavāha* and *Kulika* are most numerous for the Gupta period. Though no complete structural remains have been found so far at any site of *Vaiśālī*, but fragmentary findings do show fairly impressive nature of buildings in the Kuṣāna Gupta period and these two phenomena could have been interrelated.

Commercial functions of this city are manifest in the famous “river goddess seal” of Spooner as well. This could have been the seal of some guild having riverine or maritime trade connections. This shows a continuity of this function from the earliest urban phase of *Vaiśālī*-even the Vajjian *Vaiśālī*, as has been noted, has been described as a prosperous river port. In terms of structural findings results are not very encouraging and this may be due to inadequate excavations. Selective trenching has not done justice to this important city.

Chapter Four has underscored the impression quite visibly that though the city and the region was having commercial or

other relations with diverse regions, it was mainly its location as an important nodal point on the *Uttar^āpatha* northern branch that was greatly responsible for the sustained urban vigour of the city up to the Gupta period. This becomes amply clear when picture of *Vaiśālī* is juxtaposed with the other excavated sites of the region, Balirājgarh and Kaṭrāgarh. These two sites located away from the main trunk routes could not sustain this vigour in the Kuṣhāṇa and Gupta period.

In the end, it can be said that emergence of *Vaiśālī* as an important urban centre was preceded by its emergence as a political centre. It lost its independence quite early, but even in that phase, it maintained its urban vigour, mainly due to its location on a very important trade route.

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