

Medieval Archaeology of Indian Subcontinent

Yogesh Yadav

Research Scholar,

Department of Archaeology,

Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute ,

Pune, Maharashtra, India



ABSTRACT

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This article encompasses and provides an overall general understanding of the concept of "Medieval Archaeology" in India and its constructive periodization. The whole nature of this manuscript has been formulated based on prevailing archaeological evidence and information.

Keywords : Medieval, Medieval Archaeology, Periodization, Settlement

The South-Asian historical discourse has been compartmentalized with reference of time broadly into three considerable epochs precisely Ancient, Medieval and Modern. The sweeping generalization that the Middle Ages are the "Dark Ages" of urbanism in the world. This reverberate colossal episodes encountered and entangled so far by the humanity. The present research is quite substantive and encompasses various facets of widely divergent medieval historical and archaeological heterodoxy. The issue of terminology begins the 'Medieval' in south Asia has been vexed by issue of chronological, uncertainty, obscurantism, communal distortion and heavy model of building (Ali: 2014). This medieval culturalization process itself proposed a pluralistic prospect and also given a favourable juncture for explicit involvement with distinguish approaches into this period. The cultural mosaic that emerged in this period is being fabricated with its deep embodiment in various elements such as literature,

art, architecture, coins, inscriptions etc. to effectively enriching our investigation to extrapolate medieval Indian diasporas with its evident wholeness, thus, it is necessity to scrutinize and access ideas embedded within various dimensions of the past. For instance, the study of medieval structural edifices has remained as a significant threshold which immensely contributed in illustration of the medieval era by creating numerous pragmatic commentaries related to the subjectivity and objectivity of the discourse. from James Mill, the reorientations of Indians depended upon the creation of binaries in which the Muslim rulers always featured as foreign invaders and cruel despotic monarchs whose influence on the Hindu was extremely destructive. As Lane-Poole citing, as he writes that the medieval period "begins when the immemorial systems, rule, and customs of Ancient India were invaded, subdued, and modified by a succession of foreign conquerors who imposed a

new rule and introduced an exotic creed, strange languages and a foreign art. These conquerors were Muslims, and with the arrival of the Turks under Mahmud, the iconoclast, at the beginning of the eleventh century, India entered upon her Middle Age” (Lane-Poole:1903). Captain H.H Cole in 1880 led to separation of surveys for conservation from the surveys of archaeological research he classified the monuments in ‘Buddhist’, ‘Hindu’ ‘Jain’ or ‘Muhammedan’ (Cole:1880). In 1871- 72 Cunningham classified architectural division based on religious and racial grouping (*Ratanabali Chatterjee :2000*). Cunningham divided what he called the Muslim style into (1) Ghori Pathan with overlapping arches (1181-1289 AD) (2) Khilji Pathan with horseshoe arches (1289-1321AD); (3) Tughlaq Pathan with sloping walls; (4) Bengali Pathan (1200-1500 AD); Jaunpur Pathan (1400-1500 AD); Early Mughal (1556-1628 AD). And Late Mughal (1628-1750 AD). (Cunningham Report: 1848.) As pointed out by Tapati Guha Thakurta in her work *‘Archaeology as Evidence’* “As each building found its slot in an intricate grid of dynastic and religious Classification the first architectural documentation of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain or Muhammadan (denominations which remained fundamental to the subject) rested centrally on the experts acumen of identifying the pure and primary structure beneath all subsequent accretions, alterations or decay” (*Tapati Guha Thakurta:1997*). such classification of historicity is associated with occidental view. As the double agenda of Archaeology in colonial India was to pointedly dissociate itself from negative knowledge and selective transforming these, to mobilize them in its own cause (*Tapati Guha Thakurta:1997*). The ramification of ‘Medieval’, which has been divided into two periods as ‘Pre-Mughal’ and ‘Mughal’(Pandey:1970), thereafter the Pre-Mughal era which has contemplated to be ‘Sultanate’, The

title "Sultanate" delineates the political and cultural distinctiveness of Muslim sultans in India from the last decade of the twelfth century till the establishment of Mughal hegemony in 1526 AD. From 12th century through the 16th century , a period that has been conveniently albeit somewhat erroneously suggested as a monolithic period of ‘Sultanate’ till the Mughals.(Sohoni:2018) Indeed, it is implied promptly with plausible reference pertained to the dynasties of Turkish and Afghan descent; they had rooted their dominance extensively over the northern portion of Indian subcontinent during this period, majorly the power play was directed from a centralized seat located at Delhi, or else from handful of provincial territories in which sultans established independent kingship during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, while circumscribing the pre-Mughal period as a whole, with rapidity of cursory flow of knowledgeable factors are evident to describe aspects of the artistic and architectural fragments of the era – the reconstruction of such internal and external identity would never be possible in absence of intended reference to the political and cultural hegemony of the Indian sultans. In such cases, use of the term inappropriately assigns sectarian or political attributes to neutral categories such as artistic styles or architectural structure (Sloan: 2001). the scheme of periodization followed in the Indian History Congress, Ancient India came to a close in the first decade of 13th century, when Muslim rule was established in Northern India with Delhi as its capital (*See Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 13th session (Nagpur 1950) and 14th session (Jaipur 1951)*).

Archaeological research on the earlier periods each constitutes significant bodies of research in that own right and it is not the intention to offer a review of

the substantial amount of literature pertaining to those bodies of scholarship here archaeological research in the later medieval period in north India has been due and remains largely limited to the work of Jajmau (IAR 1973-74) Golconda (IAR974-75) Hampi (IAR 1975-76) Champaner, R.N Mehta (1979), Fatehpur Sikri, (R.C Gaour:2000) Daulatabad, (M.S Mate:1983) Fatehpur Sikri (Sayyad Ali Nadeem Rizavi:2013) for recent research on Vijayanagar (Sinapoli and Morrison: 1995).

The term 'Early medieval' (7th to 13th) has emerged in Scholarship to define a particular phase of Social and cultural development that mark it as being broadly recognizable from earlier ancient period the came before(Chattopadhyay: 1994). The tendency to view the development of peripheral polities in South Asia as a sign of the weakness of the centralized body politic is characteristic of the feudalism model that has been applied to early medieval South Asia (Jha:2000;Nandi:2000; Sharma:1995,Sharma:2001).

Brajadulal Chattopadhyay argues that the period from the 3rd/4th centuries to the 6th century AD, was marked by regional state formation and this process intensified in the early medieval period of Indian history from about the 6th/7th to the 12th/13th centuries AD. Emergence of regional polities is taken as indicative of expansion of state society to hitherto peripheral areas, leading to integration rather than disintegration of the state. Inscriptions shows that in this period people intensified agriculture by expanding irrigation to new areas, leading to the growth of agrarian societies and the rise of regional polities and cultures in different parts of India. The presence of feudalism in a South Asian context has been deserted by several scholars (Mukhia:1995). A few detailed case studies of specific regional states have led to alternate characterizations of states in medieval South Asia.

For the Chola state, with its core in the Kaveri river valley of Tamil Nadu, Stein (1969; 1980; 1995) postulated a segmentary political system, where authority was fully exercised only at the core, fading away into ritual sovereignty in the intermediate and peripheral areas. This distinction between ritual suzerainty and political sovereignty is an interesting one for the Early Medieval period, where the role of religious institutions in state formation is coming under increasing scrutiny (Chattopadhyay 1995: 207- 213; Kulke 1995: 42-43). Scholars Like Mohammad Habib and K. A Nizami (Habib:1967 Nizami:1974) pointed out the period of Seventh to the thirteenth century of Indian History were bereft of '*Aryavarta Consciousness*' and yet such periods saw the rise of regional languages, literature, art and temple architecture.

Historiographical background it is clear that the medieval period does not tend to be studied archaeologically and that wider archaeological to be has done. One a general level problem that the few excavated settlements represent the settlement history of the period all sites are towns and urban sites no rural sites dating to the have been excavated in entire subcontinent, this makes the existing settlement data highly biased towards the urban sphere, problem is the researcher not investigate the site is found Early/ Medieval Phase. 105 approximately excavated settlements with early medieval remain that have been recorded in the whole India (Haweaks: 2014). The issue of greater pertinence for archaeological practice is that all of these periodization's emerge primarily from the study of texts. And thus, it is problematic when these periodization's are assumed for or expected to reflect in the archaeological record (*Kalra Kanika:2016*).

As far as excavated sites are concerned excavation have tended with one or two notable exceptions to be aimed either at fixing the occupation encountered on the way down to the earliest foundations of the site recent exception to this trend include excavations at the costal sites of 'Chaul' (Gogte 2003; Gogte et al 2006) 'Sanjan' (Gupta et al 2004) all are of which carried out specifically in order to investigate known early medieval sites. This has recently been demonstrated by Kenet (2013) who has shown that large and substantial areas of the sites at Bhonkardan, Nevasa and Besnagar (all of which are supposed to have been abandoned during Early Medieval period) were never excavated (Hawkes:2014). According to Bhonkardan report, "there were a few moments of revival in the medieval period, but these were no match to its ancient" (Excavation at Bhonkardan: 1973). According to K. Paddayaa "In order that the archaeological materials are fully exploited it seems necessary to invoke in medieval studies some of the major tenets the 'New Archaeology' which have already been put to good use in prehistoric and proto historic studies (Paddayaa:1990). John Moreland suggests practicing contextual archaeology. He argues that "just as the people in the historical past did not rely totally on written sources in the construction of self and society, so we in the present do not have to privilege the written word in our attempts to access meaningful worlds they constructed – a fully contextual archaeology allows us to do this" (*John F. Moreland, Archaeology and Text. Duckworth Debates in Archaeology Series (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), 39- 41*).

The first archaeologist who proposed specific methods to study the material remains and settlements of 'medieval' India was Ramanlal Nagarji Mehta. Mehta, a Sanskritist, joined the M.S.

University of Baroda for training in archaeology under the guidance of H.D. Sankalia and B. Subbarao in 1950. And like most archaeologists at the time, he started out investigating the prehistoric and early historic archaeological remains at sites in Gujarat (*Kalra, Kanika:2016*). He formulated his approach to the subject, which is most clearly delineated in a monograph titled "Medieval Archaeology", wherein he recognized the fundamental difficulty in assigning definite boundaries to the period of his interest and advocated a multiple-source approach for the study of historical sites.

Archaeology of Medieval India plays an imperative role to understand its contemporary society. 'Medieval Archaeology' as Mate said "is directed to the study of human activity of the last one thousand years through material in their natural setting in the living and dead habitations and other places"(Mehta:1979). Mate argues, the archaeology of medieval India must go beyond the study of 'artistic remains' and access "the ordinary man and his lifestyle" (*Madhukar S. Mate, "Daulatabad: Road to Islamic Archaeology in India," World Archaeology 14, no. 3 (1983): 335*). Mate raised some issues pertinent to the archaeology of medieval India or, more specifically, to what he called "Islamic Archaeology in India". Medieval period in India is developed with various trends and features that are reflected in the domain of planning settlements and the architectural characteristics that emerged suiting to the environment and the local tastes and aspirations of the people (Margbandhu:2014). According to Mate the term 'Islamic' for Medieval period as a blanket designation rather inappropriate this was relished by hence the term 'Medieval' was adopted (Mate:2005). as well Mate suggested "This very abundance of written records perhaps led scholar to

treat purely archaeological studies as redundant. the realization that archaeology provided a tool useful not only for verification of these records but also for discovering new facts dawned only slowly. It can hardly be claimed that the full potential of archaeological studies for the Islamic period has been appreciated even today (Mate:1983 pp.336) as Supriya Varma and Jaya Menon discussed the ceramics from the site of Indor Khera (in Western Uttar Pradesh, Northern India) within the context of the dispute surrounding the site of Babari Masjid—Ram Janmabhoomi. They highlighted the issues with investigating identity through material remains, especially in the context of medieval India, and how such research feeds into the current politics of knowledge and the writing of history in India (*Supriya Varma and Jaya Menon:2008*). A more systematic step was taken in 1873 when the Government of India assigned to the local governments the duty of preserving all monuments of historical and architectural importance. It was in this context that the ‘Medieval’ sites gained especial status (Cunningham’s report 1884).

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