

Abstract

The main objective of this research is Archaeology of Kelani river basin to create a sequence of the human behavioral pattern in the area, from the prehistoric period to the end of the Kotte period of Sri Lanka by using archaeological data and historical sources. This archaeological study, based on a river basin can be defined as a landmark in the study of establishment of settlements in the Wet Zone of Sri Lanka, an area which has not taken ample attention in the subject area of archaeology. The study focused on the differences in establishing of settlements in the Wet Zone and the Dry Zone of the island, and managed to create a model pertaining to the establishment of settlements in the Wet Zone. Analyzing of field data on the spread of settlements, economy, architectural constructions, road network etc. which depict human activities was taken into consideration in creating the said model. It can be argued that the geographical setting of the Kelani river basin such as altitude, soil composition, rainfall, drainage pattern and vegetation were active factors which effected the spread of settlements. In accordance with the general characteristics of a Tropical region, the hydrological behavioral pattern of the upper, middle and lower Basins of the Kelani river depicted notable differences. After mapping the data obtained from the field extending from the mountain Sri Pada to the mouth of the Kelani river and the historical data, it was identified that there was a clear difference in the pattern of the spread of settlements in the upper, middle and lower basins. Thus, when compared to the upper and lower basins, a wide and well-established human settlement pattern can be seen in the middle basin throughout from the prehistoric period to the Kotte period. This was achieved through tackling the geographical factors such as elevation, topography, land form and climate. Thus, there is evidence to say that this middle valley of the Kelani river which has the widest horizontal spread at the catchment area situated between 100-1500 feet from sea level, was the central region of the Kelani river basin which had permanent settlements. The environmental conditions in the middle basin which were suitable for the spread of agricultural, was the basic factor which made it the central settlement region. Even during the prehistoric period the middle valley had environmental resources for hunting and gathering and this availability was the base for the spread of settlements. However, the sacred site which thousands of worshippers gather annually called Sri Pada or the sacred foot print believed to be that of the Buddha situated on the peak of the Samanala mountain which is in the mountainous area of over 7000 feet from the sea level and Kelaniya, situated in the lower basin which is subjected to constant flooding are live cities which acted as sacred cities from the historical period. Due to these cities being established as worship center of settlements regardless of the environmental difficulties in the upper and lower basins, it can be argued that there were settlements or human interference in those basins although a wide spread of settlements was not evident. Although the accumulation or decentralization of settlements occurred due to political and economic background, there are factors to prove that the settlement activities

continued consistently in the Kelani river basin right throughout the period under consideration. Although certain limitations in the spread of settlements in the valley were evident when compared to the Dry Zone, this study revealed that the valley was never a region which lacked human habitation. Due to the central and local political role of cities such as Kotte, Sitavaka and Dedigama, establishment of sacred and commercial cities and the use of Colombo port during the late medieval period the Kelani river basin - being a river basin in the Wet Zone - depicted notable variations in establishment of settlements.

Key words: settlement pattern, model of settlements, human behavior pattern, sacred cities, administration center.