

of evolution of regional cultures is exclusively rooted in the complexities of their respective spatial context, then why is it that such a process, almost in every region, starts during the same period, i.e. the 5th-6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.? Has it anything to do with the social restructuring that the upper and middle valleys of Ganga underwent during this period? Moreover, how to rationalize for those elements of regional cultures, too intelligibly articulated to be ignored, that were obviously disseminated from the mid-Ganga valley? The construction of an “alternate mode” of analysis, therefore, cannot afford to disengage itself from the dominant historical process of the times. It is with these concerns at the centre stage that the present paper seeks to explore the twin issues of the differential pattern of urban growth in north India during the Gupta period and the factors responsible for the emergence of cultural nuclei (the contemporary urban pattern being one of its manifestations) in the erstwhile peripheral regions. An archaeological survey of northern India of the times brings to the fore a significant chronological dimension of the habitational pattern of the early Indian urban centres. Despite suggestion to the contrary fitted into any universally applicable and chronologically standardized format. The dominant stand in the current debate on the question of urban decay in early India, however, ignores this variant chronological schema of decline obviously to buttress the hypothesis of the emergence of the homogenetic and chronologically uniform feudal formation of the Gupta/post-Gupta period. This dichotomy between urban tradition and feudal formation has been accorded such an absolute relevance in Indian historiography that complete negation of urban form becomes a logical deduction in the context of the feudal mode of production. Is the antagonism between feudalism and towns, so intense? Does one negate the other so comprehensively? Or does it distinctly underline a pattern of urban decline that was both qualitative and quantitative in nature? What is then the specific form of the opposition between the two? Marx, in his apparently Eurocentric definition of the specificity of the feudal town, does lay bare the dynamics of the relationship: “The history of the classical antiquity is the history of the cities, but of cities founded on landed property and agriculture: Asiatic history is a kind of undifferentiated unity of town and countryside (the largest cities must be regarded here as royal camps as works of artifice created above the economic construction proper); the Middle Ages (Germanic period) begin with the land as the seat of history, whose further development then moves forward in the opposition between town and countryside; the modern age is the urbanization of the country, not the realization of the city as in antiquity”. This opposition need not be construed as a complete negation of towns in the feudal complex. The complexity of an inherent antagonism between feudalism and towns as well as the latter’s separation from the countryside finds an echo in the writings of Weber, Braudel and Sjoberg who delimit the town as an institutional expression of power. Taking the cue from Weber, Philip Abrams situates the town in a larger social context called the complex of domination, which is marked by a struggle to constitute and elaborate power. Such a concept of domination and power associated with the medieval European towns had a crucial bearing on the explanations related to the formation of the cultural and economic base for the origins of capitalism. The projection of these “non-feudal islands in the feudal seas” as the prime mover towards capitalism underlines this position. The more recent writings on this topic, however, do not talk in terms of an absolute antagonism between feudalism and towns; rather they underscore the changing functional nature of these settlements. Now the process of urbanization is sought to be situated within the feudal system and the medieval towns are seen as development integral