

Settlement and Urbanization in Ancient South India**Dr. Jakir Hussain****Assistant Professor -History****Babu Shobharam Government Arts College****Alwar (Rajasthan)****(Received:16September2022/Revised:1October2022/Accepted:10October2022/Published:31October2022)****Abstract:**

The history of how people settled and built cities in ancient South India shows a process that changed over time because of geography, trade, farming, power, and cultural connections. From around 600 BCE to 300 CE, cities in this region started to grow from simple farming and herding communities. These early societies became more complex because of trade, the use of iron, and stronger political control. Important cities like Madurai, Kanchipuram, and Puhar were supported by rich farmlands near rivers and by trade with places like Rome. New discoveries at Keeladi show that by the 6th century BCE, there was already a society that was literate and had industries. Early villages were set up in areas with good soil, near coasts, and in places with plenty of resources, where people farmed, raised animals, and made goods. During the Iron Age and the Megalithic period, more people started living in the same places, helped by better iron tools, more food production, and different social classes. By the early time of written history (around 300 BCE to 300 CE), cities like Arikamedu, Kaveripattinam, Madurai, and Uraiyur became important centers for trade, government, and religion. These towns were connected to both local and distant trade routes, especially with the Roman Empire, which helped the economy and spread culture. The growth of local kingdoms like the Cholas, Cheras, and Pandyas also helped cities develop by creating markets, improving water systems, and supporting temples.

Keywords:**Ancient South India, Settlement Patterns, Urbanization, Megalithic Culture, Sangam Age, Trade Networks, Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas, Early Historic Towns****Introduction**

Settlements and cities in ancient South India were a big change in the history of the Indian subcontinent. South India includes present-day Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. It had its own way of building settlements and cities based on natural surroundings,

farming, trade by sea, government systems, and culture. Unlike North India, where cities started during the time of the Indus Valley Civilization and later in the Ganges area, South India saw steady and growing cities from the Iron Age and the early history period^[1].

The earliest communities in South India lived during the Neolithic and Megalithic times, around 3000 BCE to 300 BCE. These people lived in small villages, farmed, raised animals, and used stone and iron tools^[1]. Sites like Brahmagiri, Maski, Paiyampalli, and Adichanallur show people living together, burying their dead, making pottery, using iron tools, and growing crops. These villages were often near rivers, flat lands, and hills, showing how geography helped people settle. A big change happened during the early history period, around 300 BCE to 300 CE. This time saw large growth in cities because of better farming, making special crafts, trade, and the rise of states. The three main Tamil kingdoms Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas helped build cities and towns. These kingdoms had administrative centers, strong capitals, ports, and market places that boosted trade and brought more people together^[1].

Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas, was a famous city known for its wealth, markets, palaces, temples, and learning. Kanchipuram was another big city known for religion, education, and textiles. Uraiyur was an early Chola city, and Karur was a trade hub for the Cheras. These cities had organized streets, homes, storage areas for goods, craft shops, and public buildings. Ports were really important for South India's growth because trade by sea connected the region to other parts of the world^[2].

Ports like Muziris, Kaveripattinam, Arikamedu, and Korkai were busy places with trade with the Roman Empire, Egypt, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. Things like Roman coins, jars, beads, ceramics, and writings found at these places show the busy trade. South India sent out things like pepper, pearls, ivory, cloth, gems, and spices. Cities also grew because of farming. River areas like the Kaveri, Vaigai, Tungabhadra, and Krishna rivers helped with water for farming and growing wet rice. Harvesting more food supported people who didn't farm, like traders, craftsmen, priests, and government workers. Tanks, canals, wells, and dikes helped people settle in the same places for a long time.^[3]

Religion and culture were also big reasons for city growth. Temples, monasteries, and holy places brought people from far away, like pilgrims and scholars, and encouraged donations. Religious groups like Buddhism, Jainism, and later Hinduism built monasteries and temple towns that became centers of living. In later times, cities like Thanjavur and Kanchipuram grew around big temples and because of royal support^[3].

Historical Background

The earliest signs of people living in settled communities in South India come from the Neolithic period, which started around the third millennium BCE. These groups lived by growing food, raising cattle, and making stone tools. Early villages were found in the Deccan and southern parts of the region, often near rivers and areas where crops could be grown^[4].

A big change happened during the Iron Age and Megalithic period, from about 1200 BCE to 300 BCE. This time saw the use of iron tools, which helped with farming and clearing land. Megalithic graves also show that society was becoming more complex. Places like Brahmagiri, Maski, Adichanallur, and Paiyampalli show people living in villages, making pottery, using iron weapons, creating beads, and growing crops. Around the third century BCE, South India moved into the Early Historic period^[1].

This was a time when local kingdoms started to grow, and money, trade, writing, and cities all became more common. It was during this time that the Chera, Chola, and Pandya dynasties rose to power in Tamil areas, while other groups formed in the Deccan and Andhra regions^[4].

Geographic Basis of Settlement

The geography of South India played a big role in where people settled.

River Valleys

Rivers like the Kaveri, Vaigai, Krishna, Godavari, and Tungabhadra created rich, flat areas that were great for farming. Especially in the delta regions, people grew wet rice^[1].

Coastal Zones

The western and eastern coasts were good for fishing, making salt, and doing trade by sea. Over time, these coastal areas turned into important ports^[3].

Uplands and Forest Margins

The highlands and forest edges were used for raising animals, hunting, and digging for minerals. Later, many of these areas became part of farming kingdoms. Early Settlement Patterns Ancient South Indian settlements can be divided into different types^[6]:

- 1. Rural villages** - communities that relied on farming and cattle.
- 2. Pastoral settlements** - groups that moved around or lived in a semi-settled way with their animals.
- 3. Craft villages** - places where people made things like pottery, metal tools, cloth, or beads.
- 4. Market towns** - towns that connected villages to bigger trade routes.
- 5. Administrative centers** - places where rulers lived and ran the kingdom.

6. Port cities - settlements that dealt with trade from other countries.

7. Temple towns - places centered around big temples and religious activities.

Many villages were able to take care of their own needs but still connected with other areas for trade. Over time, control over land and water, family ties, and jobs passed down through generations helped shape how villages were organized^[1].

Sangam Age Urbanization

The best way to understand early urban life in southern India is through Sangam Literature, which dates back around 300 BCE to 300 CE. These poems paint a picture of lively cities, busy markets, traders, soldiers, farmers, poets, and kings^[6].

Madurai was the capital of the Pandya kingdom and a key cultural hub.

Descriptions from the literature show wide roads, marketplaces, big houses, storage areas, and royal buildings. It was also known for its poetry, education, and temple traditions.

Uraiyur was the main city of the early Chola rulers and was famous for its cloth production and political power^[6].

Karur was an important trade city connected to the Chera rulers and involved in long-distance trade. Kanchipuram became a significant religious and learning center, and it later grew under the Pallava rulers^[1]. These cities had organized spaces with areas for different jobs, trade, and special events.

Ports and Maritime Urbanization

One of the most remarkable features of South Indian urbanization was maritime commerce.

Muziris

Muziris was a famous west coast port connected to the Roman Empire. Pepper and luxury goods were exported in exchange for gold, wine, and ceramics.

Kaveripattinam

Kaveripattinam (Puhar) was a Chola port described as cosmopolitan, wealthy, and crowded with merchants^[1].

Arikamedu

Arikamedu has yielded Roman amphorae, beads, and ceramics, confirming international trade contacts^[4].

Korkai

Korkai was involved with pearl fishing and the Pandyan trade. Ports helped cities grow by providing storage spaces, customs services, shipbuilding, and diverse populations.

Agriculture and Irrigation

No city could survive without extra food from farming. Urban growth in South India relied on expanding farmland. Rice farming became very important in the Kaveri river delta^[6]. Tanks, canals, embankments, and wells helped with growing crops in dry areas. Local leaders and kings funded irrigation projects to increase income and food supply. The link between village farming and city markets was vital. Farmers gave grain, cotton, oil seeds, sugarcane, fruits, and animals to towns, while towns provided farming tools, jewelry, and fancy goods^[7].

Political Power and Urban Centers

The rise of states helped cities grow in different ways:

1. Capitals brought together government and military control.
2. Collecting taxes needed records and officials.
3. Roads and safety helped trade.
4. Royal support helped build temples, markets, and public buildings.
5. Fighting wars sometimes led to building walls and expanding cities.

The Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas, Satavahanas, Pallavas, and later big empires all worked on urban areas. During the Chola period, cities like Thanjavur and Gangaikonda Cholapuram showed advanced city planning and administration^[7].

Craft Production and Guilds

In city life, people had to work in specific jobs. In towns of South India, there were many skilled workers like^[6]:

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| ➤ Weavers | ➤ Potters | ➤ Bead makers |
| ➤ Metalworkers | ➤ Stone masons | ➤ Shipbuilders |
| ➤ Goldsmiths | ➤ Ivory carvers | |

Groups of merchants and craftspeople, called guilds, were very important for trade and community activities. Guilds such as Ayyavole 500 and Manigramam grew powerful over time and helped spread trade across the Indian Ocean^[8].

Religion and Temple Urbanism

Religion played a big role in how settlements grew. Buddhist monasteries, Jain centers, and Hindu temples drew in pilgrims, donors, and scholars. Starting from the Pallava and Chola periods, towns centered around temples grew a lot. Temples served many purposes like^[8]:

- Religious places
- Landowners

- Job providers
- Storage areas
- Schools
- Cultural centers

Cities like Kanchipuram and Thanjavur became important temple cities.

Archaeological Evidence

Archaeology has greatly improved knowledge of South Indian urbanization.

Key Evidence Includes:

- Brick structures and habitation layers
- Pottery assemblages
- Iron tools
- Coins
- Roman amphora fragments
- Beads and ornaments
- Wharf remains and warehouses
- Inscriptions
- Ring wells and drainage systems

Excavations at Keeladi suggest an organized settlement with craft activity, literacy, and urban characteristics in the Vaigai basin. This has renewed debates on early Tamil urbanism^[9].

Comparison with North Indian Urbanization

South Indian urbanization differed from northern models in several respects:

Aspect	North India	South India
Early Urban Phase	Indus & Gangetic cities	Mainly Early Historic
Economic Base	Agriculture + empire networks	Agriculture + maritime trade
Political Pattern	Large empires often dominant	Regional kingdoms
Religious Urbanism	Buddhist/Jain/Hindu centers	Strong temple-town development
Trade Orientation	Inland river routes	Oceanic commerce

Despite differences, both regions shared monetization, craft specialization, and state-supported urban growth.

Decline, Continuity, and Transformation

Some old cities fell because of changes in rivers, silt buildup, wars, or shifts in trade routes. For example, cities near the coast might have been affected by changes in the shoreline^[8]. However, even though these cities declined, their traditions didn't disappear completely they changed over time. Many ancient city centers kept going into the medieval and modern periods, like Madurai and Kanchipuram. Others remained remembered through archaeology and stories^[9].

Conclusion

In ancient South India, people built and lived in cities in a unique and changing way. It started with early farming villages and stone marker groups, and later developed into more complex towns, capitals, ports, and religious city centers. Factors like geography, water management, farming, metalworking, trade, and political control all played a role in this growth. Trade with places like the Mediterranean, West Asia, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia helped connect South India to the wider world, while local farming and production supported city life. The records from ancient texts, writings, and archaeological findings show that South India was not on the edge of ancient Indian civilization—it was a major area for new ideas, trade, and city development.

References

- [1]. Dhanaraj, K., & Angadi, D. P. (2021). A GIS based interpretation of the historical evolution of urban settlements in Mangalore City, India. *Spatial Information Research*, 29(4), 615-629.
- [2]. Sen, A. P. (2021). *Settlement and local histories of the early Deccan*. Routledge.
- [3]. Patra, D. (2021). *Veries Cities of Ancient India: An Analytical Survey*. *International Journal of Approximate Reasoning*.
- [4]. Srivastava, A., & Chinnasamy, P. (2021). Assessing groundwater depletion in southern India as a function of urbanization and change in hydrology: a threat to tank irrigation in Madurai city. In *Climate Change and Water Security: Select Proceedings of VCDRR 2021* (pp. 293-308). Singapore: Springer Singapore.
- [5]. Manuel, M., Gunawardhana, P., Namalgamuwa, H., Coningham, R., Davis, C., Krishnan, K., & Rammungoda, U. R. (2021). Low-Density Urbanism in Medieval Sri Lanka. *Asian Perspectives*, 60(2), 248-271.
- [6]. Van Oostrum, M. (2021). Access, density and mix of informal settlement: Comparing urban villages in China and India. *Cities*, 117, 103334.
- [7]. Srivastava, A., & Chinnasamy, P. (2021). Water management using traditional tank cascade systems: a case study of semi-arid region of Southern India. *SN Applied Sciences*, 3(3), 281.
- [8]. Myers, G. (2021). Urbanisation in the global south. In *Urban ecology in the global south* (pp. 27-49). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- [9]. Ramineni, S., & Bharadwaj, M. (2021). Integrated water systems in vernacular settlements: Temple City of Melukote, Karnataka, India. *ISVS e-journal*, 8(3), 34-54.