SPATIAL NARRATIVES OF TAXILA: A THEMATIC STUDY OF URBANISATION IN ANCIENT PAST

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Abstract;

The landscape of Taxila has a unique spatial fingerprint. As a story and history, it is inscribed on geography and as a geography it has imprints of its long history. The spatial narratives of Taxila helps to recreate the past history and historical geography. It has a spatial chronology and it involves historical chorology. The fragment of history provides an alternative way of reading its geography and thus experiencing the landscape of Taxila.

Spatial narratives are representation of geography and narration of history. But these stories are neither (only) geography nor (only) history. These narratives spell out both myths and realities of geography and history and thus help to recreate the historical geography and spatial history.

Another fact of special significance is that, the spatial narratives are rooted in geography while still rooted in history. Although, the spatial narratives are usually punctuated spatially they are also accentuated temporally (they underline history).

These narratives are descriptions ofplaces or spaces. Besides, these narratives are descriptions of change in a place or space or any other geographical entity. Therefore, it has relevance for geography. However, the terms seem to gain even more importance with history.

From a different perspective, spatial narratives are spatial history or story which unfolds through space. These narratives are depiction of the contours of a place or space and of its spatial configuration that has evolved over time. So, too, these stories ensconce history, in geographical space.

It is an attempt to visualize spatial history of Taxila. This paper examines the temporal sequences and spatial consequences that underlie the cultural or urban landscape of Taxila.

Key Words; Takshashila or Taxila, Spatial Narratives, Spatial History, Historical Geography

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Introduction;

Spatial narratives are representation of geography and narration of history. These narratives are depiction of the contours of a place or space and of its spatial configuration that has evolved over time. So, too, these stories ensconce history, in geographical space.

The spatial narratives are rooted in geography while still rooted in history. Although, the spatial narratives are usually punctuated spatially they are also accentuated temporally (they underline history).

Another fact of special significance is that, these narratives give a sense of the spatiality of objects and also events. Therefore, it has relevance for geography. However, the terms seem to gain even more importance with history.

Takshashila or Takkasila or Taxila has a unique geography and equally unique history. Geographically, it was the frontier (the land near or beyond the boundary) of ancient India (Hindustan). Historically the celebrated city of Taxila was capital of cultures (great centre of learning and a great centre of religion and culture) besides a political capital. (Alexander Cunningham, 1871) It stood at the centre of convergence and confluence; of people, culture, languages and religions. It stood at the centre of conflict and conquest. Thus, it occupies a unique position in the cultural history of India.

The present research is an attempt to present the spatial narratives of Taxila. It explores the spatial history of Taxila. In a thematic study it attempts to explore the chorology and the chronology of its urban land(scape). It presents the spatial history and historical geography of Taxila.

Objective of the Study;

Spatial narratives are description of historical change, in the space. They express geography (historical geography, cultural geography) as a sequential or consequential occurrence of events. Taxila was an ancient capital of culture, capital of civilization and capital of empires. The objective of this study is to;

- Evaluate the spatial narratives of ancient Taxila.
- Narrate the spatial history and historical geography of Taxila.

Objectivity and Authenticity;

The spatial history and cultural geography of Taxila is known from references in Indian, Greek and Roman literary sources and from the accounts of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, Faxian, Xuan Zang and others. Using historical accounts of Greek and Roman historians and travel accounts of Chinese pilgrim and travellers, this paper presents the spatial narratives of Taxila.

Taxila has also been the field of study of historians and archaeologists. Historian Alexander Cunningham and archaeologist John Marshall, the first director of the Archaeological Survey of India, surveyed this region in the early 1900s. The present study will also review some of the available archaeological reports and then reinforce it on the spatial history and historical geography of Taxila.

Methodology;

Each event in a narrative relates sequential or consequential occurrence of events (phenomenon) in the space and time. The spatial narratives help to invent or reinvent the landscape. Spatial narratives consider space as a representation of events (evolutionary or revolutionary). When these narratives are read in the chorological and chronological manner, they reveal the past. It is an attempt to uncover the process of urbanisation in Taxila in the historical past.

A narrative consists of spatial elements (where) temporal elements (when) and semantic elements (who did what). Spatial narratives integrate these three elements and enables search for and analysis of spatial and temporal relationships among narrated space. The present study is both analytical and descriptive.

Spatial narratives help to evaluate the myths and realities and re-evaluate the elements of its spatial expression. The aim of present research is to discover spatiotemporal changes in the urban landscape of Taxila. It is a thematic study. It evaluates / examines / recreates the urban land(scape) of Taxila. The time interval is 6th century BC. To 6th century AD.

Takshashila or Taxila;

The roots of historical land of Taxila goes back to antiquity. The spatial narratives reveal that it is known as Takshashila in Sanskrit literatures, it is Takkasila or Takhashila in Pali scriptures or inscriptions. (Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, 2007, John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012) Taxila is a Greek approximation of Takshashila. (Romila Thapar, 2002, Neelis Jason, 2011) Ta-Cha-Shi-Lo is the Chinese name given to the region in the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims. (Thomas Watters, 1904, John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012)

In its spatial narratives Taxila has a unique identity. It was the frontier (the land near or beyond the boundary) ancient India (Hindustan). Ancient Taxila was land at the pivotal junction of south Asia and Central Asia. It was situated at the terminus or the junction of Uttarapatha (the 'Royal Highway' of Megasthenes). (Neelis Jason, 2011, John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012) In the context of its geography, it was an important city in Gandhara. The Jatakas, mentions it as the capital of the Gandhara. (also, according to Greek sources) (Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, 2007, John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012)

Besides being part of a historical province (Mahajanpada), the ancient city of Taxila was a great centre of religion and culture of the ancient India (Hindustan). It was also a symbol of great centre of knowledge and learning. The ancient script of Kharosthi originated sometime in the fourth or fifth centuries BC. Taxila, seems to have been the place of origin of Kharosthi. (Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, 2007)Its identity expresses originality.
Throughout its history Taxila has stood a confluence of people, culture, languages, religions, thus, it occupies a unique position in the spatial history and cultural geography of India.

Taxila: The Myth and the Reality;

The spatial narrative of Taxila encompasses the long history. According to mythology Taxila is said to be the land of the Taksha (Nag Raj or the serpent king who could change the form at his will to mingle with humans). According to the ancient epic Ramayana, Gandhara was conquered by Bharata, younger brother of raja Rama, (king of Ayodhya) who founded two cities for his sons: Puskalavati (or Puskaravati, Greek Peukelaotis, now Charsadda) for Puskala and Takshashila (Greek Taxila) for Taksha. Prince Taksha was installed here as king. (Ann

Heirmanand Stephan Peter Bumbacher, 2007, Saroj Kumar Rath, 2013) Taxila was also associated with the story of snake sacrifice of King Janamejaya, referred in the great Indian epic Mahabharata. (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra,1923 John Marshall, 2013) It is believed that the Mahabharata have first been recited here.

Taxila was also a renowned centre of Buddhism. It was a hub of Buddhist stupas and monasteries. (even today it is a protected historical and archaeological area) Buddhist literature, 'jataka', was also linked with Taxila. (John Marshall, 2013) We hold from the narratives of the Buddhist traditions that, Taxila was related to the story of the Bodhisattva who voluntarily beheaded himself in sacrifice to a local Brahman, in the city of Bhadrasila. The (nearby) city of Sirkap also has a similar meaning. Faxian also explains the meaning of the name as 'cut off head'. (Thomas Watters, 1904, John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012)

Since its inception, Takshashila or Taxila, have been an important cultural centre. It was a great centre of learning. The ancient city was revered as having one of the first universities of the world. (John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012) Taxila was a metropolitan centre of the past. It flourished during the 5th century BC. to 5th century AD. as part of the great civilization, especially during the period of Ashoka and in the Kushan era. It was an economic and commercial hub on the great trade route of Uttarapatha.

The Characteristics of the Landscape;

The spatial narratives reveal how time unfolds changes and space unfolds interactions. According to historical and archaeological evidences, Takshashila or Taxila is situated across the Indus river. Taxila valley is located in the Punjab province of Pakistan (located at 35°4' N - 72°44' E. north of Islamabad and Rawalpindi). It is identified with the ruins and mounds around modern Taxila in Pakistan. (John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012) (The entire landscape of Taxila is located 30 km east of the Indus) (Neelis Jason, 2011) It was centrally located to the Indus, Swat and Kabul river valleys. The location and the geography of city was also described by Pliny, Megasthenes, Faxian, Xuan Zang. According to the accounts of Pliny, Taxila was 60

miles from Peucolaitis (Pushkalavati) or Hashtnagar (situated in the centre of Peshawar valley). (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra,1923)

Spatial Narratives and Geography of Taxila;

The classical writers are unanimous in their accounts of the size and wealth of Taxila. According to the Greek historian Arrian; it was a great and flourishing city. It was indeed, the greatest (most populous) of all the cities which were situated at the head of the Sind Sagar Doab between the Indus and Hydaspes'(Jhelum). (Alexander Cunningham, 1871, John Marshall, 2013) As Cunningham places its site, the ruins of the ancient city still exist in the vicinity of Shah dheri (Rawalpindi). (Thomas Watters, 1904, John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012)

Geography is considered as one of the important factors, shaping the landscapes of the region. The ancient city of Taxila was located on the slopes of the of the Himalayas. The geography of Taxila is a large mountain valley. Low hills and high mountains enclosed the Valley of Taxila from all sides. In the north and east, it is surrounded by the Hazara and Murree ridges (part of outer Himalayas). It is bounded on the south and west by the spurs of Margala Hills. (Alexander Cunningham, 1871, John Marshall, 2013) Being a mountainous area, it had unique strength of natural defence.

The region was rich with sufficient vital resources. It was endowed with good fertility of soil and constant supply of good water. (John Marshall, 2013) Taxila valley is drained by the Haro river (identified with the Rigvedic Arjikiya) and its tributaries, which rises in the hills. (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra,1923) Pliny calls it 'a famous city, situated on a low but level plain. (Alexander Cunningham, 1871)

Scholarly consensus holds that the beginnings of human occupation in the area can be traced back to the antiquity. In the ancient period Taxila was the centre of political power and therewith economic power. The city of Taxila, known in antiquity as Takshashila, was the capital city of the ancient Gandhara. (John R. McRae, 2012)

Taxila (Takshasila), was the capital of the Gandhara mahajanapada (republic). Chronicles of Faxian and Xuan Zang gives a detailed version of the region. According to Xuan Zang the country had formerly been subject to Kapisi but now it was a dependency of Kashmir. (Thomas Watters, 1904, Surajit Sarkar, 2016) Narrating its geography Xuan Zang said 'it had fertile soil with flowing streams and luxuriant vegetation; the climate was gentile'; The land was irrigated by numbers of springs and watercourse. (Alexander Cunningham, 1871) There was in consequence reasonably numerous populations. The people, who were plucky, were adherents of Buddhism. (Thomas Watters, 1904, Surajit Sarkar, 2016)

Taxila is one of the oldest living cities in the sub-continent. It was known to exist as early as 1000 BC. Strabo declares that Taxila was a large city. As described by Strabo, the kingdom of Taxila formed the eastern part of the old kingdom of Gandhara. It was situated between the Indus and the Jhelum (Hydaspes). The neighbouring areas of the city were very fertile and densely populated. (Alexander Cunningham, 1871, Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra,1923) The Greek historians Herodotus (5th century BC) and Strabo (1st century BC) as well as the Greek geographer Ptolemy (2nd century AD) have described about the region. (Heirman Ann and Bumbacher Stephan P. 2007)

Takshashila was one of the oldest cities of historic India. It was located in the north eastern reaches of the Mauryan Empire. Being situated on 'The Royal Highway' Uttarapatha it was connected to Pataliputra (ancient capital of Magadh). (Neelis Jason, 2011, John R. McRae and Jan Nattier, 2012, John Marshall, 2013)
Although, it had limited accessibility, location of Taxila on the great trade route, connected it with Central and Western Asia and the rest of India. (John Marshall, 2013, Surajit Sarkar, 2016) The high mountain passes connected it with the world outside the hills and mountains.

The ancient highway across the Hindukush connected the city to the outside world. Across the Indus River (through Bactria), it was connected to western Asia. It was also connected and Central Asia through Kashmir. Hence, the Greek, Persian, Scythian and other cultural influences reached Taxila. The location of Taxila at the 'gate way to India' was largely responsible for its development into a political, economic and cultural hub of the Uttarapatha. The city owed its

initial existence as well as its subsequent prosperity and greatness to these trade routes. And, it was due to their diversion or decline, when trade contacts with foreign countries were interrupted, that Taxila sank eventually into insignificance. (John Marshall, 2013)

Taxila has remained an 'inhabited space' since time immemorial. The spatial evolution of Taxila is related to the ancient settlement of Hathial. With all its chronological uncertainties, the settlement morphology of the region reveals that Bhir mound, Sirkap, and Sirsukh were respectively occupied in the years 300 BC, 50 BC and 100 AD. But there was little change in spatial morphology and territoriality of Taxila. The settlement change and settlement expansion had significant effects on regional geography of the region. The spatial archaeology reveals the process of historical change.

The urban Landscape of Takshashila has a vast serial site. The ruins have four fortified sites; Hathial, Bhirh Mound, Sirkap, and Sirsukh. The earliest settlement at Hathial goes back to at least 1000 BC, although there are traces of an even earlier settlement dating back to perhaps 2000 BC. During the ancient past it had three distinct cities. They all were located in the Taxila Valley. The city of Sirsukh at Taxila and Rajar at Charsadda in Gandhara, together with the large number of urban settlements, speak of the prosperity of the region. (Litvinsky, 1996)

Urban Settlements of Taxila in Different Historical Period

Urban Settlements	Characteristics
Hathial Ridge;	Hathial mound at Taxila was the early settlements of Taxila. It appears to have been established in the early 1st millennium BC. (Cameron A. Petriel, 2012) It existed from about 2500 - 500 BC.
Bhir Mound;	It is the oldest townlike settlement of Taxila. It exited during Achaemenid, Mauryan and early Indo-Greek periods, from 425 BC. to mid-second century BC. It is believed that the Bhir mound at Taxila was the city that was visited by Alexander. (Cameron A. Petriel, 2012)
Sirkap;	The Greeks founded a new city in Taxila. (Etienne Lamotte, 1988) It is situated between Hathial and KacchaKot. It was a fortified

urban centre. It was in existence from the last decades of the first century BC. and declined during the second century AD. Sirkap lasted longer until Kanishka.

Sirsukh; It was situated north of Sirkap. the city was established during the Kushana period.

After Neelis Jason, 2011

Taxila is likely to have been an important administrative centre. This may have provided the initial impetus towards urbanization, although its importance grew when it became a point of exchange between north India and places to its west. (Romila Thapar, 2002) Its prosperity in ancient times resulted from its position at the junction of three great trade routes. Taxila flourished from the third century BC to the seventh century AD. (Surajit Sarkar, 2016) The excavation of many urban centres of that period provide evidence of a high standard of living of the people. (Romila Thapar, 2002)

The Spatial and Temporal Evolution of Cities;

Hathial; It is the earliest historic city of Taxila. It was situated on the bank of Tamranala, at the edge of the Mathial hills. It was sustained by the influence of landform / location.

Hathial is believed to be the oldest settlement of this area. The archaeological evidences reveal the 'prior occupation' of the region. The establishment of the Hathial site go back as far as 1000 BC. (The pottery found at the site has been dated to 1000 BC) It was in existence during the 6th century BC. The adjoining settlement of Bhir Mound was only created later, probably around 500 BC. The new settlements had 'neighbourhood legacy'.

Bhir Mound; The morphological history of Bhir represents the ancient city of Taxila. It occupied an elevated plateau, locally known as Bhir mound. The remains of the city exist above the Tamranala. It was the ancient source of water for the city. It was founded before 5th-6th cent BC. Bhir even predates the Gandhara. (Raychaudhuri, Hemchandra, 1923) It was in existence even during the to the 2nd cent BC (during the Achaemenid period and in the Indo/Bactrian

Greek period). It continued to be occupied for about three centuries. It was also associated with the historic event of Alexander the Great into Taxila.

The Bhirh mound, appears to indicate widely diffused and the much more urban character. The excavations have also revealed various religious shrine. The Dharmarajika stupa, situated to the east of Bhir. It is one of the most important Buddhist monuments at Takshashila. It is believed to have been erected by Ashoka.

Sirkap; It was another ancient city of the region. The name of the city is associated with a local legend of Sirkap.

It succeeded Bhir around the second century BC.as the main settlement of the city. The geographical location of the city provided it with natural defences from all sides. It was a fortified city.

The city belongs to pre-Greek era. It is thought to have been established by the Bactrian Greeks in the 2nd cent BC. It continued to be in occupation for the next four hundred years or so. There are evidences of the Scythians (Sakas), Parthians, and early Kushanas occupation also.

Within the fortified settlement of Sirkap, ruins of a few stupas were exposed. These stupas were associated with Buddhism. There were also evidences of Sun Temple, Jain Temple and Stupa. these are seen in coexistence with local deities. (Surajit Sarkar, 2016)

Sirsukh; It was the Kushan city. It was probably established in the 2nd half of the 1st cent AD. The great Kushan ruler Kanishka founded this city. The city was connected to the Margala pass. The Margala pass served as an important route from East to West.

The city of Sirsukh had large number of monasteries and temples. Xuan Zang described the city and the monuments in the neighbourhood, while staying in Sirsukh in 629-30 AD., (Surajit Sarkar, 2016)

Sarai Kala was another city located in the southwest of Taxila. It is a prehistoric mound. The remains of Taxila are situated to the east and north-east of Sarai kala. (Raychaudhuri, 1923) Originally a stronghold of Buddhism, the entire character of this region was based around the unifying element of Buddhism and monastic life. The opulent monasteries had large number of students and monks. During this period Buddhism travelled from Taxila to the far north into China. The religious and cultural nature of Taxila declined after 6th century.

Spatial Temporality (Settlement Change in Taxila)

The spatial narratives have revealed the characteristics of ancient urbanisation.

- These narratives reveal that Taxila was a large settlement in terms of area and population. The ancient urban centre of Taxila had dense population; the urban population had diverse composition and functions (agrarian and non-agrarian). It had closeness to sources of water.

- Either one or several sources - texts, inscriptions, structural remains narrate everything about the city. It is corroborated by foreign accounts.

- It had enough surplus of agrarian produce and raw materials to specialist craftsmen, enabling them to live a settled life. The archaeological evidences have revealed the artefacts reflecting the activities of artisans and craftsman.

- It was capital city since antiquity. It had monumental public buildings and state provision for security. The archaeological evidences have revealed the presence of fortifications. It fulfilled the administrative needs of the urban population and provided security to them.

- Though not all these traits were present in various phases of urbanization but the urban character of the city existed since antiquity.

- The support of heartland from the hinterland boosted the process of urbanization in the region. It had developed regular long-distance or foreign trade; the city had space for traders, merchants and artisans. The city also provided religious and secular services.

- It was engaged in inventions in the field of predictive sciences, such as arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, as also the medicine. It had also developed the sophisticated styles of artistic expression.

Decline of Taxila and Change in the Cultural Landscape;

As mentioned by Xuan Zang in his chronicles dating from the 7th century AD Taxila fell into disrepair and decay. The history of the region (during that period) was characterized by frequent invasions under various empires. Decline of Taxila was largely due to the change in political landscape (political character) of the region. The city of Taxila witnessed the foreign invasions and the consequent economic decline, that led to its decline. Its decline can also be linked to changes in the trade routes (Surajit Sarkar, 2016) and a subsequent decline in the urban functions of the city.

Conclusion;

Spatial narratives consider space as a representation of events (evolutionary or revolutionary). When these narratives are read in the chorological and chronological manner, they reveal the past.

Taxila boasts an exquisite geographical position and deep roots in history. Episodes of change in settlements reveal the persistence of urban civilisation in the region for long.

The city evolved from its creation as a Roman city. Today, virtually nothing from the Roman period exists above ground, though beneath the ground many important archaeological remains survive.

Disregarding the observed changes, the city maintained its own urban character.It was built in the capital during different historical periods.Spatial and historical narratives also argue for sequences and consequences of political and economic change. The city of Taxila witnessed the foreign invasions and the consequent economic decline, that led to the decline of the urban centre.

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