

ABSTRACT

Settlements which are significant features in the geographical landscape, form an important aspect in the study of Historical geography. Most of them, especially the larger ones such as towns, have their beginnings in the distant past and have evolved through time bringing about distinctive patterns of spatial interaction from one historical period to another.

In early times the northern dry zone lowlands of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was the centre of a unique Sinhalese culture which influenced the whole island. In this region economic, social and political factors brought about a distinctive pattern of spatial interaction (the movement of people, goods and ideas) and the location of nodes or "central places" to and from which this interaction took place.

From the sources, mainly the chronicles and epigraphy, it can be noted that during the Late Anuradhapura period when the region was at the height of its prosperity, some of the larger villages, the towns and the capital city of Anuradhapura were central places, and performed

various services such as administration, religion, health and trade, for the surrounding settlements.

To explain the location of these central places W. Christaller's Central Place Theory has been applied in this study. According to this theory, in an ideal landscape space is envisaged as being organized into nested hierarchies each with its own centre. The central places too are therefore hierarchial; and in order to explain the size, number and distribution of central places within a region Christaller formulated three principles, namely the marketing, traffic and administration principles.

In the northern dry zone lowlands at this early period, the sources indicate that Anuradhapura was the highest order central place, followed by the towns (second order), the large villages (third order) and the gāmas (lowest order). From Anuradhapura five main highways linked the towns and mainly along those were situated the lesser central places. It is evident therefore that the traffic principle governed the location of central places. However, this principle did not apply to all levels of the hierarchy - the marketing principle appears to have operated in the middle levels while the administration principle operated at the lowest level.

The central places, while performing services for their hinterlands had a definite place in the over-all hierarchial pattern and were finally dependent on Anuradhapura for all high order services. There was much movement, aided by the road network, which linked the whole region into a complete spatial system.