Gurukul International Multidisciplinary Research Journal (GIMRJ)*with* International Impact Factor 8.712
Peer Reviewed Journal
https://doi.org/10.69758/GIMRJ/2609I01VXIVP0002

e-ISSN No. 2394-8426
Monthly Issue
SEPT-2026
Issue– IX, Volume–XIV

Mathura and Pehowa: Prominent Centres of Trade and Religion (Ancient and Early Medieval Period)

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Abstract
The economy and religion influence each other. Ancient trade centres had not only economic backdrops but also some religious dimensions also, whether it was a coincidence or due to some other causes. This paper is an attempt to trace the religious-economic components that were responsible for shaping the two prominent towns of ancient India and to comprehend the different aspects of that time. Two main significant dimensions, economy and religion, have been discussed here related to the two most important trade and religious centre Mathura in Uttar Pradesh and Pehowa in Haryana, which was in Punjab in ancient time. This is an endeavour to cast shadow on the interconnection between Mathura and Pehowa and how they had gradually become trade and religious centre. Historical methods, secondary sources like ancient accounts, travelogues, inscriptional records, books will be used for the study. There are many fascinating narrations about these two prominent centres, some of them have been marked out here with an attempt to trace the historical background of these two places.

Keywords: Economy, Mathura, Pehowa, Religion, Trade.

Introduction
The economy has always been one of the most important aspects of any civilization. This aspect influences other dimensions, which also play a significant role in the development of any settlement. Economy and religion, the two important aspects, are interconnected with each other. If we cast our eyes at the ancient important cities, it can be noticed that some of them were playing a chief role in the economy and gradually became the famous religious site also and vice versa. There are so many hidden reasons behind it, and those ancient, famous religious and trade centres are still playing a significant role in the fields of economy and religion. This study discusses the important trade and religious centres of ancient India, Mathura and Pehowa, which are in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, respectively. These two centres situated in the two different states played a prominent role in the ancient and early medieval periods. The paper aims to explore how Mathura and Pehowa developed as important centres of both trade and religion in ancient and early medieval India and to show how economic and religious factors were closely connected in shaping these towns.

R.S. Sharma, in his paper 'Trends in the Economic History of Mathura (300BC - 300AD),' has discussed the archaeological evidence that has been found in Mathura during excavations, especially different types of pottery (Sharma, n.d.). Further, he discussed the environment and climate of this place and how the Yamuna played a significant role in the region. R.S. Sharma has discussed various topics in this paper, including the different types of commodities exported from Mathura, irrigation facilities, land grants,

inscriptions that record information about merchants, and the various textiles produced in the region. He has written about Mathura art, which was a prominent attribute of Mathura in ancient India; different types of coins and changing styles of building making have also been described. He addresses the city's religious aspect in this paper, despite the limited focus on Mathura's trading activity.

Dinesh Chandra Varshney has described Mathura in his paper *'Some aspects of economic life in Mathura (First and Second century AD)* throws light on various names of Mathura and how it became popular and populated in the Kushana period' (Varshney 1991). He further discusses the connections of Mathura through various trade routes, the characteristics of Mathura's sculptures, textiles, metalwork, the different commodities exported from the region, and the design of dresses depicted in the sculptures outlined in this paper. The religious background has not been marked out in this study. However, there are numerous other sources related to the religious life of Mathura.

Sanjay Kumar, in his paper *'Towns in Haryana from 600 AD to 1000 AD,'* describes the background of Haryana, the context during the post-Harsha to Turkish invasion, political powers that were fighting with each other for acquiring this place, different inscriptions that have been found from Pehowa through which we get information about the presence of a centre of horse dealers here and the famous horse fair of that time, architectural remains, material culture of this place, terracotta figurines that have been found here during excavation, stone sculptures, amount of rainfall in this region, and how rain affected the development of towns, all of which have been expressed in this paper (Kumar 2008). But the role of Pehowa in trade and commerce is missing.

Samiran Sharma and Veeresh, in their papers *'Tracing the Socio-economic, Cultural, and Architectural Historiography of Haryana (600 AD to 1200 AD)'* and *'Economic Dimension of Marketing and Trade Centre in Ancient India,'* respectively, have discussed the socio-economic and cultural backdrops that became the reason for shaping present-day Haryana, from ancient and Vedic ages to later periods. The journey of this town, coins that have been found here, and the impact of different political kingdoms of Haryana have been conferred here, lacking content about the economic and religious importance of Pehowa (Veeresh 2022). The main objective is to attempt to discuss the religio-economic aspects of Mathura and Pehowa and try to find out the interrelation between these two major towns from the ancient period until the medieval age.

Antiquity of Mathura

Mathura, a centre of economy, polity, religion, and administration, has always been a significant place in North Indian history, situated at the bank of river *Yamuna*. There are so many fascinating tales about this city. The most prominent narration of Rāmāyana's Uttarkand (Sarga 68-70) mentions that this city links to Rāma's younger brother *Shatrughan,* who came here and killed the demon *Lavana,* who was the son of *Madhu*. To celebrate his victory over the demon, Shatrughan founded the city after clearing the nearby forests of that area; hence, Mathura became the name of this area. This name is a variant of Madhura from Madhu (Srinivasan 1989). Hence, the journey of this city started as a royal capital and later as a commercial centre. Satrughna had two sons, one of whom was Sursena, and his descendants ruled at Mathura, thus making the Surasenas members of the Suryavamsa, or Ikshvaku lineage; therefore, they were quite different from the Yadavas, who belonged to the Chandravansha, or Aila lineage (Ibid.). It is one of the most important ancient settlements of the region popularly known as Brij Kshetra; this term could be available in ancient literature but became prominent in the medieval period (Gupta 2014). The whole district of Mathura is a part of the Yamuna plains. The Garuna-Purana (II.28.3) mentions Mathura along with six other most holy cities of India (Ibid.). Ancient Indian texts have discussed this holy city, and many narrations praising this pious town can be found in various classical texts, not only in Hinduism

but also in Jaina and Buddhist literature. Surasena is included in the list of sixteen janapadas whose capital was Mathura. Evidence from Pali texts and archaeology suggests that Mathura was a considerable settlement in Mauryan times; coins, inscriptions, and archaeology suggest the real identity of this place as an urban centre during the first century AD (Sharma, n.d.). This city is known by different names in early Indian sources like *Madhurā, Madhara, Madhuravan, Madhupuri,* and *Methorā* (Sharma 1983).

Recognition as a Trade Centre

Mathura was linked through land routes with Northwestern India, the Deccan, the Doāb areas, and areas further east. The trade routes connecting Mathura with other parts of the country had developed systematically under the influence of trade and commerce, conquest, ethnic migrations, cultural interactions, and its linkage with inter-regional trade routes (Varshney 1991). Mathura was connected to Central Asia through the Shaka and Yueh-chi migrations to India, and it served as the principal junction of Uttarāpath for travellers coming from Takshilā, Pushkalāvati, Pusrushpura, Kapishā, and Bactria to the Tarim Basin, where they joined both branches of the Silk Route (Ibid.). The important economic factor about Mathura was the close relationship between the Kushana Empire and the Roman Empire. Its prominence had reached its zenith under the imperial Kushanas when it served as one of their principal capitals and the chief stronghold for the expansion and control of their territorial possessions in mainland India (Srinivasan 1989). Many items like Chinese silk, ivory, precious stones, spices, and cotton textiles were carried on the routes controlled by the Kushanas. The silk trade travelled along the Central Asian route, which was then diverted to the eastern part of the Roman Empire through Bharuch and Uttarāpatha, passing Mathura, before the goods continued to the western coast via Vidisha and Ujjain. Mathura was situated at the centre of the four crossroads, and merchants played a significant role in the economic life of the city (Varshney 1991). Yamuna acted as a navigational channel to this trade city about which we discover detailed accounts in the *Brahad Kalpasutra*, the Jain religious text (Bangroo, n.d.).

Religious Centre

Mathura has always been a religious centre since ancient times. Notably, it gained widespread recognition during the Dwāpar Yuga, as recounted in the tales of that era and the Mahābhārata, Purānas, and other texts. This land is the birthplace of Krishna, so people have an emotional attachment to this city. *Charlotte Vaudeville* has described that probably during the 16th century Mathura emerged as a centre of Krishna worship; she presents the fact that the books like Harivamsa Purana and Bhagavata Purana locate Krishna outside Mathura, that is, in Vraja, which is the adjoining pasture lands (Kaul 2015). She also says that before the Gupta period, the sources that linked Krishna with Mathura were very few; instead, a greater amount of Jaina and Buddhist sculptures have been found here from the ancient period (ibid.). In Megasthenes's *Indica*, there is a mention of the worship of *Herakles* (a Greek god widely accepted as referring to Krishna) by the people of Soursenoi, and the two major cities were *Methorā* and *Kleisborā* (Ibid.). Mathura holds a prominent position in the Jaina religion. Many excavations proved it as a Jain religious centre. Jainism couldn't receive the royal patronage of the kings, but it flourished side by side with Buddhism and Hinduism and was aided by rich merchants and traders. Mathura is a revered place for Jains because it is the birthplace of the 23rd tirthankara, Neminath. Lord Mahāvira is also said to have visited this place (Bangroo, n.d.). The Jaina religion did not receive royal patronage but flourished with Buddhism and Hinduism with the help provided by merchants and traders (Ibid.).

Lord Buddha also visited here. In *Lalit Vistār*, a Buddhist text, Buddha has referred to this place as dusty and rustic and one where yakshas roam freely. Buddhism got patronage by Kushāna kings till the 7th century; hence, gradually Mathura became a prominent centre of Buddhist learning (Ibid.). The Garuna Purana has given a name to this city as *moksha dāyini* (Ibid.). However, there is a debate about the

relationship between Krishna and Mathura. Whether Mathura remembers him as cowherd Krishna or Krishna the kshatriya, most of the texts have accounts of his life according to which Krishna spent more of his youth in Vraja and most of his adulthood in Dwārka, so there is a relative paucity of iconic representation of Krishna in and around Mathura; hence, Krishna had relations with Mathura but merely did not live there (Srinivasan 1989).

Cognizance of Pehowā

The prominent urban and trade centre, as well as religious centre Pehowa, is situated in the Haryānā state, which has been the seat of many famous saints in ancient India. The earliest reference to Haryānā occurs in a Chāhmāna inscription describing Arnorāja as carrying arms as Haritanaka, which is Haryānā (Veeresh 2022). Geographically, Haryana is surrounded by the Shivālik hills in the north, the Arāvali hills in the south, the Yamuna River in the east, and the Thār Desert in the west. It has been the centre of many ancient settlements throughout history. However, this place was not very famous until the war of Mahābhārata, which made it famous everywhere. Haryānā was popularly known as *Hariyānā* and termed '*The Gateway of North India'* and witnessed many decisive wars and invasions from Huns, Turks, and Afghans (Ibid.). After the death of Harsha, there was chaos in northern India; it is believed that Harsha's relative Bhandi took control over Thāneshwar. From the period of Harsha to the Turkish invasion, three prominent dynasties-the Pratihāras, Chāhmānas, and Tomaras-controlled this region, and each had to face the wrath of the Turkish invasion (Ibid.). For a long time Haryanā remained as a part of the kingdom of Kannauj. Nāgabhatta II became the prominent ruler of this area, which was a part of Punjāb; many inscriptions give evidence about the rule of this ruler over this area. In Haryānā one of the most important trade and religious centres was Pehowa, whose ancient name was *Prithudakā;* people believe that *King Prithu* was the founder of this town (Tila, n.d.).

Foci of trade

An inscription of Pratihāra king Mihirbhoj has been found from Pehowā, which gives important facts of the economic and political history of this region. Through this inscription, we learn that this town was a significant and famous marketplace for horse dealers. The Arab traveller *Sulaiman* also discussed the powerful cavalry of King Mihirbhoj's army (Kumar 2008). The inscription found in Pehowā provides valuable insights into the nature of urbanization in the region. This inscription clarifies the fact that Pehowā was a trading centre and nodal point in the network of horse trading; organizational and occupational details of the people are also evident from the names of merchants mentioned in it (Chattopadhyaya 1974). The names of customers as well as traders do not appear to be local, so it is believed that long-distance merchants visited here (Ibid.). The inscription of Pehowa's Garibnath temple points out Pehowā to be an important trade centre during the 9th century (Veeresh 2022). Pehowā has also been briefly discussed by B.D. Chattopadhyaya in his book *'Making of Early Medieval Period.'* According to him, the Pehowā record says that during the 9th century, the people of northwest India acted as intermediary dealers in horse trade, and Prithudakā acted as a focal point in the northwestern horse dealers (Chattopadhyaya 1994). This place cannot be considered a fully developed urban centre but it can be labelled as *a nigama,* a kind of market centre that holds an intermediary position between a village and a developed township (Ibid.). In other records Pehowā is mentioned as *an adhisthān,* which was assumed as an urban centre during the Gupta and post-Gupta Period (Ibid).

Legacy as a religious centre

Pehowā has been a religious centre since ancient times. It is situated on the left bank of the river Sarasvati. It is an ancient place of great sanctity, where prayer and pind dān for ancestors is believed to grant 'moksha,' or redemption from the cycle of death and birth (Kusum 2018). The temples dedicated to Lord

Shiva and his son Kārtikeya also contribute to the fame of this place. The unique quality of these Sivā temples here is that they have no Sivā Linga; instead of this, here a panch mukhi idol of Lord Sivā is present (Ibid.). It is an important Hindu pilgrimage centre, the Prithudakehswar temple is situated here. Two inscriptions related to the Gurjara-Pratihāra have been found here; one records the erection of three Vishnu temples, while the other, from King Bhojdeva, details the collection of voluntary taxes from each trader for the maintenance of these temples (Tila, n.d.). Scientific clearance of site Vishwāmitra ka Tila yielded beautiful stone sculptures depicting Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata scenes, which are the first discoveries of this kind in Haryānā (Ibid.).

The Strategic Roles of Mathura and Pehowā along Uttarāpath

In ancient India, the important trade route of northern India was the Uttarāpath (northern route). This route was not an easy path only for the traders and travellers but also for invaders who easily entered via this route into the interiors of India. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, in his book '*Making of Early Medieval India,'* has discussed that during the 11th century, Prithudakā (Pehowā) was apparently considered the point where Uttarāpatha began. Mathura was at the principal junction of Uttrāpatha for those coming from northwest India. Virendra Bangroo, in his paper *"Mathura-a treasure trove of antiquity,"* says that Mathura is situated at the junction of Uttarāpath and Dakshināpath; caravans used to break the journey and camp here.

Since ancient times, Uttarāpatha has been renowned for its fine breed of horses and horse dealers. Trade in horses has been attracting the attention of the economic historians for some time; the importance of horses, both war horses and ordinary horses, in the political and socioeconomic arena of life can hardly be denied (Ghosh 2001). Indian accounts are full of examples about the horses and their import to India; they were bought here via Uttarāpath from Taxilā to Vārānasi. Additionally, the horses were transported to Tāmralipti, and from there, they were sent to Southeast Asian countries (Ibid.). In Pehowā (Prithudakā), a very famous horse fair was organized, which was similar to the horse fair of Taxilā, where traders and merchants of different countries came and bought and sold the horses during the early medieval period (India 1888). When someone entered India via the northwestern route, the prominent centre of trade, Taxilā, came in the way. After this, the market that played an important role was Pehowā, which was an urban, religious, and trade centre. Through this one can move further to the next important stop, Mathura, the major trade centre situated at the junction of both the northern and southern routes. From here, one route continued to Tāmralipti via Vārānasi, while another southern route first reached Ujjain in Central India, then proceeded to Pratisthān in Mahārāstra before connecting to the seaports. Prithudakā was believed to be situated at the beginning of the northern region (Rai 1964).

Conclusion

These two most important centres from northwest to north India, Pehowa and Mathura played an important role in ancient period to Harsha period's trade and commerce also interlinked with each other. However, it is believed that in later period, mostly after the post Gupta period most of the cities lost their prominence and deserted for a long time. Archaeological evidences suggest that during post Gupta period, most of the ancient urban centres were in declining phase and reoccupied after a long gap. This concept is related to belief that India was facing dark phase after the Harsha period till the 12th century A.D. Mathura and Pehowa were among those urban centres which had lost their economic prominence, status of trade and urban centre in some ratio after the post Gupta period according to historians but they maintained their religious sanctity. In present times, both of these cities are still renowned for their religious importance. This study has tried to cover religious and economic factors of Mathura and Pehowa and their rich historical backdrop from ancient time to pre medieval period. This study highlights how, in

ancient India, economic and religious factors were closely linked and often developed together, shaping the growth and legacy of these important towns.

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