

## **THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE CITY: A BRIEF OUTLINE FROM THE PRE-HISTORIC PERIOD TO ANCIENT ROME**

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“Houses make a town but citizens make a city”<sup>1</sup>.

-Jean Jacques Rousseau

This paper traces the origin, evolution and development of the city from the pre-historic time to the emergence, development and downfall of the ancient city of Rome. The thrust of the discussion lies not only in mapping out the point of origin of the city, its phases of development, its process of transformation, but also in the evaluation of the roles of various social, political, judicial, cultural, and religious institutions that contributed to the emergence and structuring of the city as the most evolved form of urban settlement. At the same time, it is necessary to mark out remarkable contrasts between the city and the village for such a study will shed some light on the vital differences which will help in understanding of the nature of the city. Here, an outline of the making of cities during different civilizations such as Greek, Roman, Egyptian, etc. will unfold their diachronic development and it, in turn, is likely to help us in understanding the modern cities.

Besides various other sources, the major portion of the discussion in this paper primarily draws on Lewis Mumford's *The City in History: Its Origins, its Transformations and its Prospects* (1961). Apparently, the author's penchant for discovering and rediscovering answers to vital questions concerning the circumstances under which the city was evolved is reinforced with a huge body of interdisciplinary knowledge from history, architecture, etc. The paper tries to bring together a variety of ideas regarding the shaping, structuring, organization, and planning of cities ranging from 'the first city' to ancient Rome. Moreover, the concept of the 'ideal' or the utopian city from the times of Plato and ancient Roman period will constitute a brief segment of the discussion. An attempt will also be made to inquire into some salient features and characteristics that endow a city with its distinct identity.

### **Defining the City**

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *The City in History* by Mumford (113)

It would probably be appropriate to avoid limiting the definition of the city since it is bound to vary according to place, time, culture, society, economy, etc. Some definitions simply deduce, in strict lexical term, the city as “an extensive built-up area where large numbers of people live and work” (*Encarta World English Dictionary*) that should be construed as a mere geographical space with certain physical structures. But there seems to be a universal agreeing point that the city has always certain distinct characteristics and features as compared to the town<sup>2</sup> and the village. On the other hand, the city, as commonly used almost everywhere, “...merely means a relatively dense aggregation of population of considerable size, in which the conditions of life can be described as urban in the contrast to the rural life of the open country” (*The Encyclopedia Americana*,750). Here, an urban community coupled with urban culture seem to serve as a central point as far as the evolution and development of the city is concerned. The rural-urban demarcation occurs in a definitional discussion in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Macropaedia) :“The name city is given to certain urban communities by virtue of some legal or conventional distinction that can vary between regions or nations. It represents a relatively permanent and highly organized centre of population, of greater size or importance than a town or village.” (425) But it is right to argue that the urban community alone cannot make the city happen since various other factors are also at work in its making.

But it seems that on the one hand, the city is widely acknowledged as the creation of a great human endeavour to maximize permanency of settlements with increasing need of multiple-types of comforts, while its nexus with a varieties of institutions attributes to it several roles on the other. But it will not be wide off the mark to consider the perspective of David Harvey who asserts, “Cities appeared to be one of these social creations that tease the limits of autonomy, for, since they are entirely constructed by human action, they both reflect underlying social structures and shape them in unpredictable ways. Moreover, in contrast to rural life, cities create a tangible aura of difference- a way of life that emphasizes hazard, strangeness and free choice: a mental paradigm that seduces as well as abandons”( Zukin, 105). Thus, it may be concluded that cities are a universal phenomenon of civilized society as they are obviously ubiquitous in every country irrespective of its economy, industry or technological advancement.

### **The City in Embryo**

With a formidable sense of awe and apprehensive reverence, the early man required to locate and acquire places to shelter their dead people, though the fear was aroused by the powerful images of daylight fantasy and nightly dream. Such ceremonious concern of the Palaeolithic man for the dead might have strongly necessitated a need for the permanent dwelling: a cavern, a mound marked by a cairn and a collective barrow. Thus, the most primitive urban beginning was taking its shape not with the makeshift settlements of the living people, but with the permanent abode of the buried ones. Mumford rightly avers, “Urban life spans the historic space between the earliest burial ground for dawn man and the final cemetery, the Necropolis, in which one civilization after another has met its end”(15). Obviously, it was customary circumstances that periodically brought the early man back to visit those burial places. This can be associated with the Palaeolithic cave that housed many shrines which embodied sacred properties and powers, and drew men afar to their precincts.

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<sup>2</sup>A populated area smaller than a city and larger than a village (*Encarta World English Dictionary*)

The beginning of the intermediary mesolithic economy can be marked as a point of departure in the course of human settlement because men, families and tribes were indeterminably drawn to their favourable sites having pure springs, solid hummocks of land yet protected by river or swamp, nearby estuaries heavily stocked with fish and shellfish –all these helped to neutralize their vagrant verve. Thus, the temporary settlement was partly responsible for facilitating them not just with better conditions for physical survival, but also for initiation of an irrepressible urge for the sacred things since the nexus between their desire for a more valuable and meaningful life and their appetite for unearthing a string of mysteries- the primal sexual generation, the happenings beyond death, the past and the future- was ineluctably arisen. As a result, a spiritual stimulus and a sense of intercourse with the dead and the sacred led to periodically returning to ceremonial meeting places and in turn, they laid the germ of the first city that virtually became a rendezvous even for the non-residents. Mumford emphasises the point, "...[t]he ceremonial meeting place that serves as the goal for pilgrimage: a site to which family or clan groups are drawn back, at seasonal intervals, because it concentrates, in addition to any natural advantages it may have, certain 'spiritual' or supernatural powers,..." (18). These periodic gatherings unhurriedly aroused in their mind a sense of chiselling imprints on the canvas of natural structures like caves and trees and man-made artefacts as well. Thus, this transient settlements brought out necessities of tools, equipments, domestication, storage, agro-activities, and above all an urgency of the permanent settlement.

As the Neolithic era ushered in, the Neolithic revolution<sup>3</sup> set in motion the commencement of farming and domestication of animals and thus, either the permanent or the temporary settlements led to the process of instituting sedentary societies. This historic age can be considered as a great phase in the evolution of the city since it helped to prepare a concrete ground for the commencement of erecting and shaping the first cities on the earth. This is also claimed with greater certainty in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Micropaedia):

The first cities appeared in Neolithic times when the development of agricultural techniques assured surplus crop yields larger enough to sustain a permanent group of non-agricultural workers. Continuous settlement led to the use of more permanent building materials such as brick and stone. Larger populations led to the need for social control, transportation facilities, and rural hinterlands to sustain the urban population. (333)

Here, such development cannot solely be credited to the agricultural revolution in the Neolithic era, but can also be seen vis-à-vis a special revolution within. Hence, it can be argued that the agriculture revolution might have been preceded by the sexual revolution since the temperamentally nomadic hunting male with their swift feet and ruthless killing instinct were probably mellowed by the comparatively passive female because, Mumford explains, "...[w]omen's needs, women's solitudes, women's intimacy with the processes of growth, women's capacity for tenderness and love, must have played a dominating part" (21). Therefore, these revolutions along with domestication of animals ensured the food security to some extent and in turn, they contributed in settling a village with permanent families and neighbours – harbingers of the emergence of the city.

### **The City in Crystallization**

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<sup>3</sup> The first ever agricultural revolution that witness transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture and settlement. It was a technological development in human history that caused domestication of plants (agriculture) and animals (pastoralism).

Though villages reasonably contributed in dissipation of the central concern of food and reproduction of post-neolithic men, the purpose beyond the survival rose and remained unserved. There was a paradigm shift from the village culture towards an uncertain urban revolution and consequently, peoples- the peasant, the shepherd, the minor, the boatman, the sailor, the fisherman, the woodman - with indigenous practices and professions entered the city and made their contributions to its emergence. Apparently, this phenomenon of intermingling with diverse peoples led to a complexity that proved to be a launching pad for the city to create a superior unity to coalesce the refined groups of peoples - the priest, the merchant, the soldier with the primitive type village groups. Mumford emphasizes the fact of contribution of the village in his other book *The Culture of Cities*, “Every phase of life in the countryside contributes to the existence of cities” (3). Moreover, the heightened demand of food by the non-agricultural occupations probably caused villages to multiply, and new walled towns came into existence out of the old village order.

Such cohabitation of diverse communities in a compressed land practically created a state of dynamic tension and organic interaction that was probably absorbed by the rise of the cities. This union directly contributed in general enlargement and concentration of numbers and experienced a structural differentiation that gave cities forms recognizable in every subsequent phase of urban culture. To a great degree, such incidental hierarchy virtually necessitated a mild urgency of power, both sacred and secular. Mumford here brings out this point, “The city proved not merely a means of expression in concrete terms the magnification of sacred and secular power, but in the manner that went far beyond any conscious intention it also enlarged all the dimensions of life. Beginning as a representation of the cosmos, a means of bringing heaven down to earth, the city became a symbol of the possible” (42). With this implosion, not explosion, of power, an urge for the confident leadership from among the large-size and slow decision-making communities was nourished and it was, directly or indirectly, propelled by the emergence of techniques, politics, and religion. In a society which was confronting numerous social changes, the institution of religion powerfully emerged and well grounded itself in order to accelerate the process of social transformation. Thus, the impact of religion on all aspects of life was inevitable because, Mumford asserts: “...[I]t was religion that took precedence and claimed primacy, probably because unconscious imagery and subjective projections dominated every aspect of reality, allowing nature to become visible only in so far as it could be worked into the tissue of desire and dream.” (44) Hence, this can be well argued that the general magnification of power was significantly substantiated by equally exorbitant images from the unconscious.

As far as the crystallization of the city is concerned, it seems that it might have taken thousands of years in shaping from an overgrown village to a neolithic small town to a full-blown city during its formative stages. This can be traced with the definite historic records of the cities which flourished in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Thus, there was a great change from a decentralized village economy to a highly organized urban economy by the most important agent-the institution of kingship. Mumford argues:

In the urban implosion, the king stands at the centre: he is the polar magnet that draws to the heart of the city and brings under control of the palace and temple all the new forces of civilization. Sometimes the kings founded new cities; sometimes he transformed old country towns that had long been a-building, placing them under the authority of his governors: in either case his rule made a decisive change in their form and contents (47).

The beginning of industrialization and commercialization was often associated with the urban growth that probably took place much later in time and they were virtually caused by the rise of kingship. Thus, a hierarchic power-relation was to come to effect vis-à-vis the process of growth of the city in the wake of the prominent invention of religion, kingship, and technique in urban regions. Mumford outlines prophetically when he writes, “The city, as one finds it in history, is the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community....The city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship: it is the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning” (*The Culture of Cities*, 3). Moreover, religion unquestionably played an essential role in achieving and cementing the institution of kingship by elevating it from the level of a hunting chieftain to a cosmic authority and by widening the sphere of the king’s control.

In this context, this is necessary here to point out that the city made its bold appearance in terms of distinguished practice, culture and values against the backdrop of a sequestered village universe. The earth-oriented peasant’s culture in the village was turned upside down by placing the foundations in the heavens (the institution of God) by the city culture. Consequently, the system of belief was changed to the skywards- the infinite, the omniscient, the omnipresent, because the people in the city wanted to transcend the animal limitations of human existence. These possibilities of transcendence virtually led to a feasible union of the stronghold and the shrine. Apparently, the scared bounds of the shrines were necessarily relocated either into the citadel or near the stronghold that might be transformed in a sacred and inviolable precinct.

Citadel, it is appropriate to describe here, was a walled precinct made of durable materials. It originally had two functions- military and religious. Mumford rightly points out, “Within the precinct he [the architect] usually finds a three huge stone buildings, buildings whose very magnitude sets them aside from the other structures in the city: the palace, the granary, and the temple. The citadel itself has many marks of a sacred enclosure....” (49) Hence, it can be said that citadels contributed in the concretization of cities by serving as military bases and religious centres. As far as archaeological evidences are concerned, Mumford cites different ancient cities-Uruk, Harappa, and Khorsabad- in order to bring the point home. In effect, the citadel also served as the centre of kingly power that often considerably controlled and determined the destiny of cities. Besides, the king was responsible for moulding a new kind of civilization that probably promoted maximum unification and integration of different possible social and vocational differentiations. Kingship also encouraged to solidify the intellectual class of the priest by according it to a significant place in the community and in turn, this institution of “the priesthood measured time, bounded space, predicated seasonal events. Those who had mastered time and space could control great masses of men” (Mumford, 50). At this juncture, it will be relevant to mention that the function and operation of the temple was the legitimatization of the exercise of the king’s power, war between communities, and domination of the king on the community. Therefore, it can be argued that men were not subdued by force but by power in personality provided by the city and its gods and thus the institution of kinship was accomplished.

It was the power of the sacred along with cosmic magnifications that made the ancient city exist and prosper because in the Roman times people were convinced that the city was simulacrum of heaven. For example, the Egyptian city “...Thebes, the centre of the Sun God cult, became in sacred legend the original site of creation itself” (Mumford, 86). Then next great role that the city played was that of a repository that stimulated art to translate human life and



energy to the unattainable transcendence of immortality through ideal forms and images: temples, shrines, palaces, statues, portraits, inscriptions, carved and printed records on walls and columns. Mumford points out, “In the city, the great archetypes of the unconscious, godlike kings, winged bulls, hawk-headed men, lion-like women, hugely magnified, erupted in clay, stone, brass, and gold.” (87) The city was, it may be argued further, often operated by the potent functions of the citadel that not only concretized and cemented religious and political power, but also set the economic life of the city in motion.

With the commencement of trading practices and development of river and surface transportation systems, the economic puissance of the city was boosted and to a large extent regulated by markets and transportations. It can be said that navigation was to a large extent responsible for the first growth of cities in river valleys and “[T]he rise of the city is contemporaneous with improvements in navigation...” (Mumford, 88). The existence of the market as a separate entity led to the settlement of a sizable population of merchants in trading pockets of the city. Thus, the market secured a permanent place in the city and accumulated a concentrated power to influence the economic life of the people. There were two classic forms of the market—the open place or covered bazaar, and the booth or shop-lined street and they may probably have prompted the evolution of market economy in the ancient cities like Ur nearly 2000 B.C. In fact, the marketplaces were developed primarily within the temple precinct. Apparently, Mumford argues, “[T]he market was a monopoly of the god and its priesthood, not a money making corporation, where every form of goods, agricultural and industrial, would be brought for direct taxation before redistribution” (89). Hence, the initiation to effective development of the city was often attributed to the market and its economy that encouraged various productive activities in the settlements in urban areas.

The documentations of the flourishing of cities between 1700 BC to 1500 BC can be found in the descriptions of the first ever historian Herodotus who writes of the city of Babylon in Mesopotamia. The fact of the flourishing of these cities can further be emphasized by quoting from *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Micropedia) which states, “Sizable cities were flourishing from about 3000 BC in Mesopotamia, in the Indus River valley, along the Yellow River, and along the Nile River” (333). The archaeologists are also convinced that Babylon was a representative of city culture and life though they find it difficult to ground their observations with utmost archaeological credence. By defying, conventional criteria, Mumford writes, “Though Herodotus could have seen only remains of this great city [Babylon], he was close enough to it to convey a last exhalation of life, something that the richest archaeological remains hardly any longer contain” (96). Unlike Mesopotamian cities, the Egyptian cities were marked with numerous qualifications, contrasts and particularizations because every city is characterized by its marked individuality. The cities on the Nile valley may have developed around 1400 BC when the Pharaohs who probably introduced the successful religio-political system that proclaimed them as living gods whereas in Mesopotamia, the king was not god. As a result, the development of the city was accorded with investment in permanence of the dead in the forms of monumental structures. Mumford comes with archaeological evidence, “Around the central pyramids of Gizeh we find a veritable urban settlement of corpses with the tombs placed in orderly rows, in streets and cross streets;...” (100). Thus, the central monarchy of dynastic Pharaohs remained unchallenged in the city of the dead since the dead took precedence over the living.

### **The City in Operation**

Illustrations of the evolution and development of the city in prehistoric times make it easier to proceed further in looking into the operational mechanism and nature of the city. By the time the kinship, the monarchy, and the religio-political power were fairly established, the city was no longer only the conglomeration of the physical structures, but also the site of a pulsating market economy, a concentration of power, and polarization of culture. This cultural intermixture effected the city to the extent that it, "...broke down the parsimonious self-sufficiency and dreamy narcissism of village culture. In bringing people from the most distant parts of the valley into the same milieu, the city gave continuity of a meeting place to those who had lived a nomadic life, and it gave the challenge of the 'outside' experiences to those who lived at home." (Mumford, 116) An analogy of the container vis-à-vis the function of the city will elucidate how the latter was primarily acting as storehouse, a conservator and accumulator, but also as a magnet. The intermingling of different communities of a sizable population might have brought forth the concept of division of labour since a community by its nature or ancestral occupational training is bound to excel in a particular field. Mumford, for instance, sharply focuses the caste-based occupational classification of labour. He writes, "The whole system of specialized labour was pushed to the point of caricature in India, where the castes, even minute divisions within the castes, became hereditary..." (125). Thus, the institution of specialized labour fairly contributed in stratification of urban communal and social structures of the city.

The cementing of civilization and labour-division in the city invitingly gave birth to the institution of property propelled by the sudden rise of wealth. The concept of private property found its articulation in "...[t]he treatment of all common property as the private possession of the king for his life and welfare were identified with that of the community. Property was an extension and enlargement of his own personality, as the unique representative of the collective whole" (Mumford, 128). This trait can be found in present history of France when Louis XIV was the king. Thus, two chief driving forces of the city were the class differentiations and the property rights and in turn, they led to the materialization of the city where concrete structures, images, ideas, institutions acquired symbolic meanings by shedding its mere material attributes. Perhaps, this was the culmination point of the prosperity and the height of development of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cities that emerged, developed and hence destroyed in and with the river valley civilization by 1200 BC.

Centuries later, an archetype of the city in the form of polis came into existence around the seventh century BC in Greece. The Greek civilization witnessed the rise of many cities like Athens, Crete and Sparta which blossomed from small urban settlements to mighty seats of powerful empires. But with the introduction of the alphabet and the invention of coined money, a new urban order emerged and thus, "this was marked by a devolution of power from the citadel to the democratic village-based community..." (147). The cosmic insight of a city and the self-consciousness of a village came together in a fuller consciousness in the Greek polis<sup>4</sup>. Unlike Mesopotamia and Egypt cities that flourished as the centres of religious, political and economic power, the Greek city was the embodiment of the self-centredness and isolationism of the village culture since they substantially developed out of the transposition of the village into the polis.

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<sup>4</sup> Lexically, a city-state in ancient Greece, typical of Greek political organization from 800 to 400 BC. The city-state form of government. (*Encarta World English Dictionary*, MacMillan India Limited, 1999). Polis was the miniature of the city in Greek that later became the centre of decentralized political power.

Mumford reinforces this argument, “Pausanias, a late observer of Greek cities, dismissed a city of the Phocians as hardly worthy to be called a city, because it had no government offices, no gymnasium, no theatre, no market, no piped-water supply. For him, it was buildings and utilities that distinguished a city from mere huddle of village houses” (158). Though the Greek polis was the centre of strong despotic power, Greece successfully introduced democracy in its cities like Athens, Olympia, Delphi etc. It is a well acknowledged fact that the urban Greek philosopher Plato explicitly defined a ‘polis’ in a way that has still great relevance to the democratic system of government. On the one hand, the strength of other cities lay in their being big, rich and overarching, the real puissance of the Greek cities was of another order-neither big nor small, neither rich nor poor, on the other.

Perhaps the development of the agora was one of the great contributions of the ancient Greek city. This was an open place- especially a marketplace- where people gathered for their daily activities. Apparently, the absence of a secular place- where people could interchange news and opinions along with, more importantly, interchange of goods- effectuated the growth of the agora. It can be argued that the agora became a dynamic centre of the Greek city since it heavily occasioned its separation from the influence of religious institutions like temples. Hence, as Mumford points out, “This separation of political power from religious power was a turning point in the Hellenic city” (182). This can often be observed that the decentralization and distribution of political power in the polis was fairly transmitted to the people through the agora because it-being a democratic rendezvous- helped in institutionalizing the democratic spirit among them. The impact of the agora can be reflected in the institutions like restaurants, plaza, café house, etc. across the present day world.

The inability to transform direct democracy to the representative form of government functionally brought political failure to the Greek city and in turn, it may have germinated the idea of the utopian city in the mind of great philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, etc. In his *Politics*, Aristotle briefly writes about his ‘ideal’ city where he categorically framed the restriction of a sizable population, advocated rigid social hierarchic stratification based on the classes and divided the city space as per the religious, military and social importance. Mumford quotes : His city, Aristotle observes, was composed of 10,000 citizens divided into three parts- one of artisans, one of husbandmen, and a third of armed defenders of the state. He also divided the land into three part, one sacred, one public, the third private: the first was set apart to maintain the customary worship of the gods, the second was to support the warriors, the third was the property of the husbandmen. (202)

The specifications of the ideal Aristotelian city remained potentially untranslated, though his ideas gradually prompted and impacted the blueprint of urban plans for building ancient Greek cities. Plato asseverated his proposition on the city first in his *The Republic* and later- with slightly altered opinions- in *The Laws*. His detailed description and the framework for an ideal city were reflected. Though Plato may be considered one of the pioneers who contributed in the development of the city, Mumford points out some slanted rationale:

Most of the concrete suggestions in both *The Laws* and *The Republic* are of a negative kind: no poets, no passionate music, no marital attachments, no parental solitudes, no mixing of vocations, no luxury, no foreign intercourse. Restrictive, puritanic, authoritarian: such was his idea. No city could have shrunk into the form that Plato desired without ceasing to be a city. (211)



Perhaps, the authoritative voice of Plato could not be tested on the anvil of both practicality and concrete actions because it apparently suggested the disposition of the totalitarian power. Both his morality and rationality were meant for upper-class use alone. Rest of the population was to be trained and subdued, made harmless and submissive like other domesticated animals. His fixation with the ideal city did not pave any way for a real crystallization because he tried to restore the monopoly of religion, science, and military power that led to the strengthening and securing of the citadel of the polis. But his contribution to the development of the Hellenistic<sup>5</sup> cities should not be overlooked even after centuries later.

Since Aristotle was a naturalist, he emphasized and encouraged the need for variety and plurality in his ideal city by pointing out ambiguities in the opinion of Plato who strongly favoured the social hierarchic stratification based on class and advocated the delimitation of the city-resident population. It can be argued that the Hellenistic cities substantially owed a great deal to both the philosophers in terms of city planning. But their concepts of an ideal city was not fully materialized since they tried to train the minds of the people to accept a certain number of restrictions dictated by collective interest. Mumford underlines this fact when he pinpoints, “They [Plato and Aristotle] had no vision of a wider polis, incorporating the ideal principles of Cos, Delphi, and Olympia and working them into the generous complexities of an open society. Their ideal city was still just a small static container, and the grim direction of the citadel” (219). Thus, new ways were paved for the development of the Hellenistic city that witnessed the rise of the robust middle class who supported its self-contained economy because they gradually grew accustomed to physical comforts and luxuries. Beyond Greece, in Asia Minor and Egypt, “...[t]he foundations of such cities took place around the sixth century” (Mumford, 222). Compared to the Hellenic city, the Hellenistic city was certainly more sanitary and often more prosperous. Later, these cities had been considered as pioneers in introducing the structure and shaping of a ‘megapolis’-an expanded and more urban settlement in size and nature. At this juncture, this would be imperative to discuss the city of Rome that was the centre of the Roman Empire-a mature development of urban civilization with exceptionally well-organized infrastructure.

### **Rome: Built in Centuries**

Regarded as the birthplace of the Roman Empire and of western civilization, Rome was founded in 751 BC as Cicero<sup>6</sup> recorded and it reached its zenith of flowering and fruition as a great city till the fifth century when it was sacked by Alaric I<sup>7</sup>. It was the symbol of visible power since Rome effectively strengthened the Empire by being its capital and dynamic centre of commanding administrative, social, commercial, economic, military, cultural and intellectual affairs. Mumford emphasizes the point how Rome had an effective role in and beyond the great Empire since its existence:

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<sup>5</sup> In strict lexically definitive sense, the term Hellenistic refers to postclassical history and culture from the death of Alexander the Great to the accession of Augustus. It also means the style of the Greek art or architecture of this period. (*American Heritage Dictionary of English Language*, Third edition)

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC-43 BC) was a Roman philosopher, statesman and orator. He was known for championing the republic government during the dictatorship of Julius Caesar.

<sup>7</sup> Alaric I was emerged as the great crusader from the Goth tribe and was famous for the sack of Rome in 410 AD. Before that he also conquered Athens in 395 AD.

The Roman Empire, the product of a single expanding urban power centre, was itself a vast city-building enterprise: it left the imprint of Rome on every part of Europe, northern Africa, and Asia Minor, altering the way of life in old cities and establishing new foundations, ‘colonial’ towns, ‘free’ towns, towns under Roman municipal law, ‘tributary’ towns: each with a different status if not a different form. (239) The lasting and extended effect of Rome apparently made the city important, influential and more enduring because of its sovereignly structured paramouncy vis-à-vis the Roman Empire.

Though Rome was undoubtedly considered the pillar of this almost urban Empire, its diversified and hierarchized “megapolis” society substantially reflected evidences of discriminations hinged on the class-structure. We can argue that even millennia later, the pronounced manifestation of the various forms of such hierarchic discrimination in postmodern cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, New York, London, etc. can easily be noticed. The ancient city of Rome essentially serves as a prototype of the modern metropolitan cities because the conditions of the different types of city-dwellers had yet to witness a sea-change for improved life-style. An apt observation of Mumford brings out the fact thus:

The main population of the city that boasted its world conquests lived in cramped, noisy, airless, foul-smelling, infected quarters, paying extortionate rents to merciless landlords, undergoing daily indignities and terrors that coarsened and brutalized them, and in turn demanded compensatory outlets. These outlets carried the brutalization even further, in a continuous carnival of sadism and death. (257)

These obnoxious, chaotic and unhygienic conditions of the city could be held responsible for the worsened and agonized life of its denizens. It should be, at this juncture, imperative to know how Rome was socially, architecturally, commercially, and politically constituted for it may possibly illustrate the functions and roles of different types of institutions that contributed in making and structuring the city.

In Rome, there were three important architectural institutions- forum, vomitorium, and bath that played vital roles in driving the city life. The forum was an open market-place with a space for assembly and also used for the athletic and gladiatorial contests. It had more functions, as Mumford writes, to perform: As it developed in Rome, it was rather a whole precinct, complex in layout, in which shrines and temples the halls of justice and council houses, and open spaces formed by stately colonnades played a part. Within these open spaces orators could address large crowds; while for inclement weather large halls, basilicas, served in many capacities. (257)

With the passage of time, the forum underwent a great transformation and remained no more only an open space but became a complete enclosure. As succeeding emperors took over the Empire, even many more new forums came into existence and functioned as throbbing venues for shopping, for gossiping, for taking part- as spectators or actors- in public affairs or in private lawsuits. On the other hand, Rome was characterized by some recognizably distinct architectural structures- vomitorium, the bath, colosseum- that distinguished it from other cities. These public places directly and indirectly served as the rendezvous from the various sections of Roman urban society. It seems to be really interesting to analyse how some of these urban structures contributed in the shaping of the city of Rome.

Taking vomitorium first, it was usually a special room adjoining the dining hall in a gigantic meeting place where people from the criss-crossed society of Rome gathered. They used to attend various parties and feasts of varieties of foods and the gluttonous eaters here would

empty out overeaten, rich and exotic dishes through vomiting in the vomitorium. As Mumford avers properly, “The scale of the public vomitorium, necessarily a gigantic one, established the dimensions for the other parts of the building” (261). Thus, a vomitorium was truly significant so as to reflect peculiar practices and character of Rome. But the bath could be considered a rather important urban Roman structure that deeply stirred and impacted urban life driven in public spheres. Initially, this meant a pool of water in a sheltered place where sweaty farmer cleaned themselves. Over the time, it gradually metamorphosed to a fashionable public point, as Mumford reasons: ...[A]s early as the second century B.C. the habit of going to the public baths was established in Rome; and by 33 B.C. Agrippa introduced free public baths in the form that this institution was finally to take: a vast enclosure, holding a great concourse of people, one monumental hall leading to another, with hot baths, tepid baths, cold baths, rooms for massage and rooms for lolling about and partaking of food, with gymnasia and playfields attached, to serve those who sought active exercise, and libraries as well, for the more reflective or more indolent. (262)

The bath was now the privileged place for the ceremonious rituals of the upper classes urban people, though it was started as a farmer’s necessity. This was, perhaps, Rome’s most characteristic contribution to urban hygiene and urban form. This can be argued further that except for some socially hierarchized stratification of classes, there were no aberrations that could seriously obstruct people to have access to these public places that in turn, greatly enriched Rome by shaping it in a distinct manner. The significance and contribution of Rome can be summed up in the following words: The dominance of the city-states was ended by the Roman Empire, which had itself started in the Roman city-state. The growth of Rome as the empire’s administrative and economic centre created vast new problems of urban provision and social control. Roman achievements in the building of aqueducts to ensure water supplies and paved roads to ensure the flow of resources were unsurpassed for centuries. Roman technology spread throughout Europe as Roman conquerors founded dependents settlements (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Micropadia, 333).

It will not be inappropriate to mention here that Rome has really served as the prototype of the later cities in the coming centuries. Hence, the ancient cities like Rome, Athens, Sparta, Egyptian cities, etc. palpably outline and foreshadow the evolution, shaping, foundation, and development of later cities ranging from the medieval to the postmodern state of the art cities. With the introduction of different political systems and economic policies, the city- certainly during different periods of its history-has undergone several positive and negative changes. The glass-walled buildings and metalled roads of a metropolitan city, for example, seem to demonstrate a paradigm shift in the urban habitation and life-style of its dwellers. Mumford goes ironic: “Millions of people grow up in this metropolitan milieu who know no other environment than the city streets: people to whom the magic of life is represented, not by the miracle of birth and death, but by placing a coin in a slot and drawing out a piece of candy or a prize” (*The Culture of Cities*, 253). Most remarkably, the role and relevance of the city in the present context have drastically changed since those cities appeared, it can be argued, to wield strong impact over people and their lives. But now, it would be appropriate to delimit the discussion of the origin and development of the city since both space and time do not allow me to proceed further from this point. The discussion of the cities of medieval, modern and postmodern periods may further bring out more insights in understanding of the current city phenomena like the supermarket economy, the suburb locality, IT parks, migration hubs, slums, ghettos, etc. Thus,

the story does not come to an end here, but it further continues because, “Rapid industrial transformation and population growth have tended to overwhelm traditional urban society. Industrialized cities frequently suffer from lack of adequate housing, sanitation, and recreational space. Migrants from rural areas are not easily absorbed into the existing urban culture and institutions” (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 334). These circumstances and problems of the cities need further studies.

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