

Overview of Indus Valley Civilization

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Abstract – The Indus Valley Civilization was a cultural and political entity, flourished in the northern region of the Indian subcontinent between c.7000 - c.600 BCE. Its modern name derives from its location in the valley of the Indus River, but commonly referred to as the Indus-Sarasvati Civilization (after the Sarasvati River mentioned in Vedic sources which flowed adjacent to the Indus) and the Harappan Civilization (after the ancient city of Harappa in the region, the first one found in the modern era).

Key Words – Civilization, River, Period, Reason, Evolution, Phases

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Indus Civilization came into being as the result of a long cultural evolution in the Indo-Iranian borderlands. It consists of different developmental phases.

- first stage of development at about 7000-4300 BCE
- Stage two at about 4300-3200 BCE, is Chalcolithic.
- Stage three is the Early Harappan period about 3200-2600 BCE.

A relatively short but still poorly known transition phase, between 2700-2500 BCE, turned the Early Harappan culture into the Mature Indus Civilization. Around 2000-1900 BCE the Indus Civilization came to an end in the Indus Valley, although it lingered some centuries longer in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Multiple reasons are assumed to have caused this down.

2. DAILY LIFE IN INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

Homes: Houses were one or two stories high made of baked brick, with flat roofs, and were just about identical. Each was built around a courtyard, with windows overlooking the courtyard. The outside walls had no windows.

Entertainment: A beautiful small bronze statue of a dancer was found, which tells us that they enjoyed

dance and had great skill working with metals. In the ancient city of Mohenjo-Daro, scientists have found the remains of a large central pool, with steps leading down at both ends.

Food: Dinner might have been warm tasty wheat bread served with barley or rice. It would appear they were very good farmers. They grew barley, peas, melons, wheat, and dates. Farms raised cotton and kept herds of sheep, pigs, zebus (a kind of cow), and water buffalo.

Dress: From the sculptured figures it can be seen that the dress of men and women consisted of two pieces of cloth-one resembling a dhoti, covering the lower part, and the other worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm. Men had long hair designed differently. Women wore a fan shaped head dress covering their hair. The discovery of a large number of spindles showed that they knew weaving and spinning. Similarly it was concluded, by the discovery of needles and buttons, that the people of this age knew the art of stitching. Many spindles were discovered at the Harappan sites. This proves the use of cotton for weaving social cloths. Probably wool was also used. The garments might have been sewn.

Both men and women used two pieces of cloth. The men folk wore some lower garment like dhoti and upper garment like shawl. The upper garment wrapped the left shoulder. Female attire was the same as that of men. Arts and crafts and trade formed one of the main occupations of the people. The potter, the mason, the metal worker had high demand. The cotton and woolen dresses show the

existence of cotton and woolen industries. Goldsmiths and silversmiths made ornaments.

2.1 House-Hold Articles and Furniture's

Most of the house-hold articles were made of pottery or of metals like copper and bronze. The art of pottery attained a wonderful excellence at Mohenjo-Daro. This is proved by painted and glazed wares. Most of the kitchen utensils including jars, vessels, dishes etc. were made of earth and stone.

Domestic implements like axe, knife, needles, saws etc. were made of bronze or copper. Copper supply was limited as it had to be imported from outside. So copper had to be discretely used for making necessary implements and weapons like axe, lance, and dagger. There is lack of defensive weapons like sword. Chairs and tools were used for decorating rooms and for sitting comfortably.

2.1.1 Funerary custom

- The Indus people had three funeral custom viz.,
- Complete burial of the dead body.
- Burial of the bones of the dead body after wild beasts ate of it.
- Burial of ashes and bones after burning the dead body.
- Social Class and Social Structure of Indus Valley Civilization

The humped bull, buffalo, ship etc. and the granary indicate the existence of a prosperous agricultural community. Some scholars believe that there was a prosperous and powerful ruling class in the Indus cities who imposed their domination on the rest. All men of the cities and the nearby areas did not enjoy social and economic equality. Those who lived in the upper portion of the cities near the forts formed a ruling class. The social and economic life of the people of Indus Valley Civilization (Harappan Civilization) was systematic and organized.

2.1.2 Indus valley civilization: religion of the people religious developments of Indus civilization

It was widely suggested that the Harappa people worshipped a Mother goddess symbolizing fertility. A few Indus valley seals displayed swastika sign which were there in many religions, especially in Indian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The earliest evidence for elements of Hinduism is before and during the early Harappan period. Phallic symbols close to the Hindu Shiva lingam was located in the Harappan ruins.

The Indus civilization had a polytheistic religion. The Indus people worshipped natural forces such as trees, animals, water, and mother goddess. These are also important in the Hindu religion. They believed that water had a purifying power. The numerous seals and figurines discovered in the excavations carried out at various sites connected with the Harappan culture point out to the religious beliefs of the Indus Valley people. The Indus Valley people had a primitive religious system. The main goddess was a mother goddess representing fertility, they also worshiped animals. On a seal there are a figure sitting in a yoga-like position and is thought to be an early representation of a Hindu god. Some Indus valley seals show swastikas, swastikas were used in the Hindu Religion. Swastikas were sacred symbol for good luck. The Hindu religion was probably based off of the Indus Valley.

Many Indus valley seals show animals. One scroll shows a horned figure surrounded by animals; the figure was called Pashupati, which meant lord of cattle. Pashupati is similar to the Hindu Gods, Shiva and Rudra. Religion in Indus Valley civilization is a subject matter which has not been available in any ancient texts or documents but rather in the inscriptions, seals, images and other materials. These have been excavated by various archaeologists at the site. The Harappan religion was polytheistic. Scholars are unable to draw a conclusion regarding the religion of Indus people. However, some historians are of the opinion that Harappan people were Hindus. No temple, however, has yet been discovered at the excavated site. Evidence for presence of Hinduism is believed to have been present during the Harappan period. Phallic symbols, similar to that of the Hindu Shiva Lingam, have been found in Harappa. Various figures of the Mother Goddess, made out of clay have been found. It was considered as a symbol of fertility and was venerated by the people. A figure of a male god in a seated posture was also found. It was carved on a small stone seal.

Worship of Mother Goddess: A large number of excavated terracotta figurines are those of a semi-nude figures which is identified with some female energy or Shakti or Mother Goddess, who is the source of all creation. She is wearing numerous ornaments a fan-shaped head dress. It is concluded from the smoke stained figures that the people offered burnt incense before her.

Worship of Pashupati or Lord Shiva: The Pashupati seal in which the three faced male god is shown seated in a yogic posture, surrounded by a rhino and a buffalo on the right, and an elephant and a tiger on the left, make the historians conclude that the people of those days worshipped Lord Shiva who is the Lord of the Beast (Pashupati) and the male principle of creation. Discovery of a large number of conical or

cylindrical stones show that the people worshipped lingam, the symbol of Lord Shiva.

Worship of Trees: The worship of trees was widespread. The Pipal tree was considered most sacred. One of the seals shows a god standing between the branches of a people tree and the god was being worshipped by a devotee on his knees. The discovery of a large number of seals with papal trees engraved on them suggests that this tree was considered sacred, same as some nowadays Hindu do.

Other Objects of Worship: People also worshipped animals such as the bull, buffalo and tiger. The worship of mythical animals is evident from the existence of a human figure with a bull's horns, hoofs and a tail. Besides animals, these people also worshipped the Sun, the Fire and the Water.

Faith in Magic, Charms and Sacrifices: The discovery of amulets suggests that the Indus valley people had belief in magic and charms. Some seals have figures of men and animals in act of sacrificing. This shows that sacrifices played some part in their religion.

Belief in Life after Death: The people of Indus Valley disposed of their dead either by burial or by cremation. They buried their dead together with household pottery, ornaments and other articles of daily use. Even when they cremated the dead, they preserved the ashes of the bodies in clay urns. Both these practices show that people believed in life after death.

The existence of public baths suggests that people believed in ritual bathing. The religious beliefs such as the worship of Shiva, animals and trees, show that the religious beliefs of the Indus Valley people were the foundation on which the modern day Hinduism grew up.

2.1.3 Basic issues in Indus valley civilization

The identification of the Harappan Civilization in the early twentieth century was considered to be the most significant archaeological discovery in the Indian Subcontinent as it pushed the beginning of settled life by 2000 years. Contemporary to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian Civilizations it was unique in its town planning. Spread over major parts of the western and north-western subcontinent, its influence is seen to the Tajikistan border in the north and the Gulf region in the west with over two thousand sites found till date. The past eight decades of research have brought to light many important details of the culture including the cultural process involving its origin, maturity and decline but certain aspects such as the terminology, climatic influence, regional variations, script etc. are still very flimsy.

- The culture when identified at the site of Harappa, in the jurisdiction of the modern large village of Harappa in the Punjab province (now in Pakistan) in 1924, was termed as the Harappan Civilization. It was named after the type-site where the culture was first identified. Different scholars identified this culture by different names and today the Harappan Civilization has three different terminologies- the Indus Civilization, the Indus Valley Civilization and more recently the Indus-Saraswati civilization.
- Three different phases of the Harappan culture - Early, Mature and Late demonstrate the cultural process from origin through development to decline. The Mature Harappan phase is the most prosperous one and shows the development of the Civilization into an urbanized society. The evidence from various excavated sites now leads us to believe that this phase has emerged out of the Early Harappan phase. As is evident the process of transformation from Early to Mature Harappan appears to have happened simultaneously over the major Harappan region including Baluchistan, Sindh, Indus-Saraswati basin and Gujarat.
- The earlier belief that the Harappan Civilization (Mature Harappan phase) was a homogenous entity has turned out to be a myth. Within the Harappan region itself we find manifestation of the regional variation and three such regional variations.
- Over two thousand sites of the Harappan culture have been discovered so far, of which only half a dozen are cities and slightly more than a dozen can be identified as towns. Rest of the settlements fall in different categories like small or big villages, processing centres, ports, and temporary camps for exploitation of local natural resources.
- Very little data is available at present on the climate that existed throughout the Harappan period (3500-1500 BC) and the region.

3. CONCLUSION:

The decline of the Harappan Civilization was as dramatic and enigmatic as was its emergence. Of the many reasons, the climate appears to be the major villain in the decline of this great civilization. The reconstruction of the Holocene climatic sequence in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the Thar Desert area of Rajasthan demonstrated lowering of annual rainfall around 2000 BC that

may have caused major decline of the most flourishing first civilization of the Subcontinent.

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