

SEMESTER-I

HISMAN 1014 HISTORY OF INDIAN CIVILISATION

Unit-II Harappan Culture

1. Extent
2. Town planning
3. Economy
4. Religion

The Extent of the Indus Valley Civilization:

The Indus Civilisation was the most widespread of the three early civilizations of the ancient world, along with Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. It extended along the Indus River from what today is northeast Afghanistan, into Pakistan and northwest India.

The ruins of the Harappan sites in Sutkagen Dor of southwestern Balochistan province in Pakistan, near the Arabian Sea, at Ropar (or Rupar), in eastern Punjab state, at the foot of the Shimla Hills, about 1,000 miles northeast of Sutkagen Dor in northwestern India.

Later exploration confirmed its existence as far south as the Gulf of Khambhat (Cambay), 500 miles southeast of Karachi, and as far east as the Yamuna River basin, 30 miles north of Delhi.

Urbanization:

Indus valley civilization is the earliest urban culture in the world of earliest civilization. It was the result of the years of evolution of the primitive culture developed in the region. The early Harappan period started in c 5500 BCE and become mature Harappan period in c 2800 BCE.

The architecture and **town planning of the Harappan Civilisation** represent one of the most impressive feats of urban planning and construction in ancient history. Their cities were meticulously planned, displaying a level of sophistication that was ahead of its time.

Town Planning of Harappan Civilization

The town planning of Harappan Civilization was based on indigenous and uninfluenced architecture.

Their architectural designs prioritised practical functionality and most structures were large-scale public buildings and spacious houses.

The towns of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro stood out for their remarkable town planning.

The IVC cities were designed on a grid pattern, with streets running in a north-south and east-west direction, forming a well-organized layout. Streets and lanes were cutting across one another almost at right angles, thus dividing the city into several rectangular blocks.

The main street was connected by narrow lanes. House doors opened in these lanes rather than the main streets. It shows the knowledge of measurement of the society of Harappan Civilisation.

The streets and alleyways of IVC cities were planned and constructed with precision. They were wide enough to allow the movement of carts and pedestrians, and some streets had covered drains running alongside them.

The main street was ten metres wide, dividing the town into rectangular and square blocks.

The cities were surrounded by fortified walls made of mud bricks, protecting robbers, cattle raiders and floods.

The city was divided into two parts—An upraised portion known as citadel and the lower part of the city.

Citadel: The citadel was situated in the western part city, an elevated citadel was the foundation for constructing significant structures. This part included granaries, administrative buildings, pillared halls, and courtyards. Cities like Harappa, Mohenjodaro, and Kalibangan featured a citadel built atop a tall mud-brick podium.

Lower part: Below the citadel in each city lay a lower town containing brick houses, which the common people inhabited.

The Harappan people used burnt bricks on a large scale in almost all kinds of constructions, and there was an absence of stone buildings during the Harappan Civilisation culture.

The houses were built of mud bricks, while the drainages were built with burnt bricks. The bricks have uniform size of 1: 2: 4 ratio.

The Great Bath: It is situated within a courtyard. Corridors can be found on all four sides, and stairs can be found on the northern and southern sides. The bricks were water-tightly installed with gypsum mortar. The bath floor was made of burnt bricks. The great bath is related with the ritual bath.

Granaries: The cities had well-planned granaries and storage facilities to store surplus agricultural produce. These structures featured thick walls to protect the stored food from pests and were often located near the citadel or the city centre.

was a brick structure built over 45 meters in north-south and east-west directions. Granaries have been found in the cities of Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Kalibangan

Water management: The Harappans were adept at managing water resources. Many cities had wells, reservoirs, and water tanks that were well-built and strategically placed to ensure a consistent water supply for the residents.

Commercial areas: Commercial areas were present within the cities, where artisans, craftsmen, and merchants conducted their trade. These areas had specialised workshops and shops, indicating a well-organized economic system. Evidence of bread maker shops has been found at Chanhudaro and Lothal.

Dockyard: The dominant sight at Lothal is the massive dockyard, the greatest work of maritime architecture during the IVC. It was discovered on the banks of the Sabarmati River.

The town planning of the Harappan Civilization has had a profound influence on present-day urbanisation.

Society and Political System

Archaeological records provide no immediate answers regarding a centre of authority in Harappan society. The uniformity of Harappan artifacts is evident in pottery, seals, weights, and bricks with standardized sizes and weights, suggesting some form of authority and governance.

There are three major theories concerning to the Harappan governance or system of rule.

The first is that there was a single state encompassing all the communities of the civilization, given the similarity in artifacts, the evidence of planned settlements, the standardized ratio of brick size, and the apparent establishment of settlements near sources of raw material.

The second theory posits that there was no single ruler, but a number of them representing each of the urban centers, including Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, and other communities.

Finally, the Indus Valley Civilisation had no rulers as we understand the concept of a ruler today, with everyone enjoying equal status.

The Indus Valley Civilisation is the earliest known “urban” center and the largest of the four ancient civilizations, which also included Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China. Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were the two great cities of the Indus Valley Civilization, emerging around 2600 BCE along the River Ravi and Indus River in Sindh and Punjab provinces of Present Pakistan.

The discovery and excavation in these two cities 19th and 20th centuries provided important archaeological data regarding the civilization’s technology, art, trade, transportation, writing, and religion.

Technology:

The people of the Indus Valley achieved many notable advances in technology, including great accuracy in their systems and tools for measuring length and mass.

Harappans were among the first to develop a system of uniform weights and measures that conformed to a successive scale. The smallest division, approximately 1.6 mm, was marked on an ivory scale found in Lothal, a prominent Indus Valley city in the modern Indian state of Gujarat. It stands as the smallest division ever recorded on a Bronze Age scale. Another indication of an advanced measurement system is the fact that the bricks used to build Indus cities were uniform in size.

Harappans demonstrated advanced architecture with dockyards, granaries, warehouses, brick platforms, and protective walls. The ancient Indus systems of sewerage and drainage developed and used in cities throughout the region were far more advanced than any found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East, and even more efficient than those in many areas of Pakistan and India today.

They were thought to have been proficient in seal carving, the cutting of patterns into the bottom face of a seal, and used distinctive seals for the identification of the property and to stamp clay on trade goods. Seals have been one of the most commonly discovered artefacts in Indus Valley cities, decorated with animal figures, such as elephants, tigers, and water buffalos.

They also developed new techniques in metallurgy—the science of working with copper, bronze, lead, and tin—and performed intricate handicrafts using products made of the semi-precious gemstone, Carnelian.

Art:

Indus Valley excavation sites have revealed several distinct examples of the culture's art, including sculptures, seals, pottery, gold jewellery, and anatomically detailed figurines in terracotta, bronze, and steatite—more commonly known as Soapstone.

Among the various gold, terracotta, and stone figurines found, a figure of a “Priest-King” displayed a beard and patterned robe. Another figurine in bronze, known as the “Dancing Girl,” is only 11 cm. high and shows a female figure in a pose that suggests the presence of some choreographed dance form enjoyed by members of the civilization. Terracotta works also included cows, bears, monkeys, and dogs. In addition to figurines, the Indus River Valley people are believed to have created necklaces, bangles, and other ornaments.

Script

Harappans are believed to have used Indus Script, a language consisting of symbols. A collection of written texts on clay and stone tablets was unearthed at Harappa, which have been carbon-dated to 3300-3200 BCE, and it contained trident-shaped, plant-like markings. This Indus Script suggests that writing developed independently in the Indus River Valley Civilisation from the script employed in Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt.

As many as 600 distinct Indus symbols have been found on seals, small tablets, ceramic pots, and more than a dozen other materials. Typical Indus inscriptions are no more than four or five characters in length, most of which are very small. The longest on a single surface, which is less than 1 inch square, is 17 signs long. The characters are largely pictorial but include many abstract signs that do not appear to have changed over time.

The inscriptions are thought to have been primarily written from right to left, but it is unclear whether this script constitutes a complete language. Without a “Rosetta Stone” to use as a comparison with other writing systems, the symbols have remained indecipherable to linguists and archaeologists.

Religion

Harappan religion remains a topic of speculation. It has been widely suggested that the Harappans worshipped a mother goddess who symbolised fertility. In contrast to Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations, the Indus Valley Civilisation seems to have lacked any temples or palaces that would give clear evidence of religious rites or specific deities. Some Indus Valley seals show a swastika symbol, which was included in later Indian religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

Many Indus Valley seals also include the forms of animals, with some depicting them being carried in processions, while others showing chimeric creations, leading scholars to speculate about the role of animals in Indus Valley religions. One seal from Mohenjo-Daro shows a half-human, half-buffalo monster attacking a tiger. This may be a reference to the Sumerian myth of a monster created by Aruru, the Sumerian earth and fertility goddess, to fight Gilgamesh, the hero of an ancient Mesopotamian epic poem. This is a further suggestion of international trade in Harappan culture.

Trade And Long Distance Trade:

The civilization’s economy appears to have depended significantly on trade, which was facilitated by major advances in transport technology. The Harappan Civilisation may have been the first to use wheeled transport, in the form of bullock carts that are identical to those seen throughout South Asia today. It also appears they built boats and watercraft—a claim supported by archaeological discoveries of a massive, dredged canal, and what is regarded as a docking facility at the coastal city of Lothal.

Trade focused on importing raw materials to be used in Harappan city workshops, including minerals from Iran and Afghanistan, lead and copper from other parts of India, jade from China, and cedarwood floated down rivers from the Himalayas and Kashmir. Other trade goods included terracotta pots, gold, silver, metals, beads, flints for making tools, seashells, pearls, and coloured gemstones, such as lapis lazuli and turquoise.

There was an extensive maritime trade network operating between the Harappan and Mesopotamian civilizations. Harappan seals and jewellery have been found at archaeological sites in regions of Mesopotamia, which includes most of modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, and parts of Syria. Long-distance sea trade over bodies of water, such as the Arabian Sea, Red Sea and the

Persian Gulf, may have become feasible with the development of plank watercraft that was equipped with a single central mast supporting a sail of woven rushes or cloth.

During 4300-3200 BCE of the Chalcolithic period, also known as the Copper Age, the Indus Valley Civilisation area shows ceramic similarities with southern Turkmenistan and northern Iran. During the Early Harappan period (about 3200-2600 BCE), cultural similarities in pottery, seals, figurines and ornaments, document caravan trade with Central Asia and the Iranian plateau.

The End of Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus Valley Civilization declined around 1800 BCE due to climate change and migration. The Civilisation eventually disappeared along with its two great cities, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Harappa lends its name to the Indus Valley people because it was the civilization's first city to be discovered by modern archaeologists.

Archaeological evidence indicates that trade with Mesopotamia, located largely in modern Iraq, seemed to have ended. The advanced drainage system and baths of the great cities were built over or blocked. Writing began to disappear and the standardised weights and measures used for trade and taxation fell out of use.

Scholars have put forth differing theories to explain the disappearance of the Harappans, including an Aryan Invasion Theory and climate change marked by overwhelming monsoons.

The Aryan Invasion Theory (c. 1800-1500 BC)

The Indus Valley Civilisation may have met its demise due to invasion. According to one theory by British archaeologist Mortimer Wheeler, a nomadic, Indo-European tribe, called the Aryans, suddenly overwhelmed and conquered the Indus River Valley.

Wheeler, who was Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India from 1944 to 1948, posited that many unburied corpses found in the top levels of the Mohenjo-Daro archaeological site were victims of war. The theory suggested that by using horses and more advanced weapons against the peaceful Harappan people, the Aryans may have easily defeated them.

Yet shortly after Wheeler proposed his theory, other scholars dismissed it by explaining that the skeletons were not victims of invasion massacres, but rather the remains of hasty burials. Wheeler himself eventually admitted that the theory could not be proven and the skeletons indicated only a final phase of human occupation, with the decay of the city structures likely a result of it becoming uninhabited.

Later opponents of the invasion theory went so far as to state that adherents to the idea put forth in the 1940s were subtly justifying the British government's policy of intrusion into, and subsequent colonial rule over, India.

Various elements of the Indus Civilisation are found in later cultures, suggesting the Civilisation did not disappear suddenly due to an invasion. Many scholars came to believe in an Indo-Aryan Migration theory stating that the Harappan culture was assimilated during a migration of the Aryan people into northwest India.

The Climate Change Theory (c. 1800-1500 BC)

Other scholars suggest the collapse of Harappan society resulted from climate change. Some experts believe the drying of the Saraswati River, which began around 1900 BCE, was the main cause of climate change, while others conclude that a great flood struck the area.

Any major environmental change, such as deforestation, flooding or droughts due to a river changing course, could have had disastrous effects on Harappan society, such as crop failures, starvation, and disease. Skeletal evidence suggests many people died from malaria, which is most often spread by mosquitoes. This also would have caused a breakdown in the economy and civic order within the urban areas.

Another disastrous change in the Harappan climate might have been eastward-moving monsoons or winds that bring heavy rains. Monsoons can be both helpful and detrimental to a climate, depending on whether they support or destroy vegetation and agriculture. The monsoons that came to the Indus River Valley aided the growth of agricultural surpluses, which supported the development of cities, such as Harappa. The population came to rely on seasonal monsoons rather than irrigation, and as the monsoons shifted eastward, the water supply would have dried up.

By 1800 BCE, the Indus Valley climate grew cooler and drier, and a tectonic event may have diverted the Ghaggar Hakra river system toward the Ganges Plain. The Harappans may have migrated toward the Ganges basin in the east, where they established villages and isolated farms.

These small communities could not produce the same agricultural surpluses to support large cities. With the reduced production of goods, there was a decline in trade with Egypt and Mesopotamia. By around 1700 BCE, most of the Indus Valley Civilisation cities had been abandoned.

Conclusion

As excavations of the sites of the Indus Valley Civilisation continue, more information will no doubt contribute to a better understanding of its history and development. Recognition of the culture's vast accomplishments and high level of technology and sophistication has been increasingly coming to light and gaining greater attention.

Scholar Jeffrey D. Long expresses the general sentiment, writing, “there is much fascination with this Civilization because of its high level of technological advancement”.

Already, the Indus Valley Civilisation is referenced as one of the three greatest of antiquity alongside Egypt and Mesopotamia, and future excavations will almost surely elevate its standing even higher.
