

## THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION OR CULTURE [INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION]

### Origin, Extent and Chronology of Harappan Civilization

As the excavations by D.R. Salini in 1920-21, first discovered the relics of the civilization at Harappa in the Montgomery district of the Punjab, it is known as the 'Harappan Civilization'. The next important site of this civilization is Mohenjodaro in Larkana district in Sindh which is discovered with the excavations by R.D. Banerjee. Since at that time the remains of the civilization were found only in the Indus Valley, it came to be known also as the 'Indus Civilization'. The 1400 settlements discovered so far are located over a very wide geographical area of 12, 50,000 sq. k.m. extending upto Sutkagendor in Baluchistan in the west; Alamgirpur in Meerut in the east; Daimabad (Ahmadnagar District, Maharashtra) in south; and Mauda (Akhnor District, Jammu and Kashmir) in the north. Among these 1400 sites of Harappan Civilization, 925 settlements are in India and 475 in Pakistan. Harappa (+150 hectares) and Mohenjodaro (+250 hectares) are now in Pakistan. Some other sites of Harappan civilization are Amri, Channudaro in Sindh, Rangapur and Lothal in Gujarat; Rapur in West Punjab and Kalibangan, Surkotada, Dholavira etc.; The settlements of Harappan civilization are mostly located on river banks *i.e.*, 40 settlements on the Indus and its tributaries and as many as 1100 settlements on the vast plain between the Indus and the Ganga comprising mainly the Saraswati river system which is dry today and about 250 settlements beyond the Saraswati river system in Gujarat and Maharashtra. These settlements have been classified as small villages (which are upto 10 hectares) large towns or small cities (10 to 50 hectares) and large cities (above 50 hectares). Each of these sites was surrounded by vast agricultural lands, rivers and forest that were inhabited by scattered farming and pastoral communities and bands of hunters, food-gatherers. In recent times, since many more Harappan sites have been discovered,

and new methods of dating have been adopted, the Harappan civilization is now firmly placed between 2,300 B.C. and 750 B.C. though previously it was placed between 3,200 B.C. to 2,750 B.C.

The origin of Harappan civilization is a matter of controversy. According to some archaeologists, it had been brought to the Indus Valley by the Sumarians, who lived in the valley of two rivers, Euphrates and Tigris (now in Iraq). But, recent excavations in Sindh, Punjab and Baluchistan showed that the Harappan civilization originated in India. However, they had lot of commercial and cultural contacts with Mesopotamia.

### Town Planning and Urban Living of Harappan People Citadels and Entrances of Cities

The Indus Civilization is famous for its urban life. The cities like Mohenjodaro and Harappa are known for remarkable town planning. The overall layout of the cities is distinguished by the orientation of streets and buildings, according to the cardinal directions east-west, and north-south and fortification all around. The roads, were straight and wide and some of these streets were as wide as 30 feet. Each city comprised a series of walled sectors or mounds or citadels oriented in different directions. Mohenjodaro and Harappa have a high rectangular mound of citadel on the west and extensive mound in the north, south and the east. Thus, each city was divided into citadel areas, where the essential institutions of civic and religious life were located, and the residential area where the urban population lived. There were large gateways at various entry points of the city. These gateways are seen even in the inner fortification areas. Sign boards with inscriptions are found close to the main gateways. Mounted above the gateway, the sign board would have been visible from a long distance.

### Drainage in Towns and Cities

Well laid-out streets and side lanes equipped with drains are the most outstanding features of the Harappan civilisation. Even smaller towns and villages had impressive drainage systems. This indicates that people had a great civic sense of sanitation and care for health and hygiene. Small drains made of burnt bricks were connected with bathing platforms and latrines of private houses joined the medium-sized drains in the side streets. These drains ran into larger sewers in the main streets which were covered with bricks or dressed stone blocks. At regular intervals, along the

main sewage drains, there were rectangular sump pits for collecting waste and these were regularly cleared.

### Material used in Buildings

The houses were situated along the roads. The most common building materials were mud-bricks and kiln-fired-bricks, wood and reeds. Where stone was available, dressed stone replaced bricks. The average size of brick used for houses was  $7\frac{1}{2} \times 15 \times 30$  cm.; for the construction of

fortification walls the size of the brick was 10x20x40 cm. The doors and windows were made of wood and mats. The floors of houses were generally hard-packed earth that was often plastered. Bathing areas and drains were made with baked bricks or stone. Roof fragments were probably made of wooden beams covered with reeds and packed clay.

### Types of Buildings

Considerable variation is seen in the size of dwellings, which range from single roomed tenements to houses with courtyards having up to dozen rooms of varying sizes. Doorways and windows rarely opened out into the main street but faced side lanes. The view into the houses was blocked by a wall or a room around the front door. Many houses were at least two storied and some may have been three storied. Hearths were commonly found in the rooms. Almost all the houses had a bathroom and a well.

### Public Buildings

#### The Great Bath

Some large and distinct structures have been found on citadels for the use of public. At Mohenjodaro, the Great Bath was excavated. This finely built brick structure measures 12 m by 7m and is nearly 3 m deep from the surrounding pavement. There are steps on all sides of the pool. The floor of the bath was constructed on sawn bricks set on edge in gynusum mortar, with a layer of bitumen sandwiched between the inner and outer brick layers. Water was evidently supplied by large well in an adjacent room, and an outlet from one corner of the bath led to a high corbelled drain disgoring on the west side of the mound. It is surrounded by verandas with rooms and galleries. The Great Bath was perhaps used for some ritual purpose.

### Granaries

Another important structure of Mohenjodaro is the

granary. It measures 50 m east-west and 27 m north-south. Somewhat similar structures have been found at Harappa, Kalibangan and Lothal. These were used for storing grains. Impression of a large wooden mortar was found placed in the centre of one of the circular brick platforms. Such wooden mortars are used in many parts of the world to remove the husk from the grain.

### Political Organisation

It is difficult to be sure of the kind of political setup that prevailed at the time of the Harappan civilization. Though archaeologists have recovered about 2500 Harappan inscriptions engraved on seals, they have not been able to decipher the script. We can only speculate the mechanism of government. The town planning indicates that the Harappan people had developed some type of municipal administration which was under an overall state organisation. An Indus empire is often talked about, implying that the entire area was administered from one capital, with a few regional administrative centres or provincial capitals. However, it is also possible that there were several independent states or kingdoms each with cities like Mohenjodaro, Harappa etc. as their capitals. The merchant class seems to have dominated the government. The cities were maintained from the surplus produce of the country, judging by the elaborately constructed granaries found in both the cities. Another source of income was the profit from a flourishing trade both internal and external.

### Social Life of the Harappan (Indus) People

#### Social Stratification

The Harappan society seems to have been divided into three sections, viz., an elite class associated with the citadel; a well-to-do middle class; and a relatively weaker section, occupying the lower towns which were generally fortified. Some of the craftsmen and labourers resided outside the fortified area. We cannot say whether these divisions were based purely on economic factors or had a socio-religion basis. At Kalibangan, it appears that the priests resided in the upper part of the citadel and performed rituals on fire altars in the lower part of it.

The Indus society, class-ridden as it was, included administrators, officials, priests, traders, merchants, craftsmen, landlords, peasants, herdsmen and labourers. The social position and gradation is reflected in the houses and

disposition of the dead bodies in the graves. The rich and the influential people lived in big and palatial buildings, others in smaller houses, while labourers etc. lived in barrack-like residences. The peasantry and labourers must have formed the largest number in the society. The people of Harappan civilization seem to have possessed a high civic sense.

### Living Style of Harappans

Besides wheat, barely and rice, milk, vegetables and fruits were included in the diet of the Harappan people. In addition, animal food, such as beef, mutton, pork, river-water fish and dried fish from the sea, were also eaten. Grind stones were used for grinding spices and cereals.

The ladies were scantily dressed. They wore short skirts that reached upto the knee; and it was held by a girdle—a string of beads. The men used a robe with or without embroidery. It was worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm. A man, on a seal from Harappa, wears a dhoti. No footwear has survived, nor is it shown in any of the figures. Cotton was used.

Women took special care of their hair. Some females had a plait tied with a bow at the end. The men had several styles of hair dressing. Hair was parted in the middle and tied with a band. Sometimes, the hair was gathered up in a bun or coiled in a ring on the top of the head. The crawling child depicted in a clay figure which was found at Mohenjodaro had curly hair. Beards of men were trimmed and upper lips were shaven. Completely shaven faces with a small beard in the chin are also noticed. Very long beards were not preferred. Mirrors of bronze were very common.

With the traditional oriental fondness for ornaments, men and women, both rich and poor decorated themselves with them. Women wore a fan-shaped head-dress. Small combs of gold, silver, copper were worn on the side of the head. The forehead was decorated with a band or a headband. Ear-rings were made of coils of gold, silver or copper or porcelain. It was doubtful any nose ornaments were used. There was a variety of necklaces with a number of rows of beads of various shapes and materials artistically arranged, using spacers and terminals. Finger-rings were worn in large numbers, and bangles and bracelets of gold, silver, copper, bronze shell and glazed earthenware were commonly used. A bracelet with six strings of globular beads is an excellent specimen of workmanship. Girdles were worn round the waist. Anklets were worn. Various stones such as carnelian,

steatite, agate, chalcedony jasper etc. were used for the manufacture of beads. Men also wore fillets, necklaces, finger-rings, and armlets.

It appears that the ladies at Mohenjodaro knew of the use of collyrium, face-paint and other cosmetics. Small shell-fish shells containing a red cosmetic for colouring the cheeks, lumps of green earth, white face-joint and black beautifying-substance show that the ladies in ancient Indus attended to beauty and toilet culture. Toilet jars were made of ivory, metal, earthenware and stone. Small decorated or glazed earthenware or porcelain vessels having four compartments were used for keeping expensive perfumes or cosmetics. There were small toilet tables specially designed for women. Other articles on the dressing round table included round-shaped bronze mirrors, and ivory combs of different shapes. Some combs were probably worn in the hair. Bronze razors of various types served for the toilet of the male.

A large number of toys and objects used in games have been unearthed from all the important sites. Dice were used in gambling. Chess playing men made of stones have been found.

Dance and music might have been familiar to the Harappan people. A bronze statue of 'Dancing Girl' and a drum hangs from the neck of a figure in pottery indicates the same.

### Economic Life of Harappan (Indus) People

#### Agriculture

Agriculture was the main occupation of the Harappan people. We have evidence to indicate that wheat and barely were the main food crops. Rice is only found from Lothal, where rice husks imprinted in clay and pottery have been discovered. Other items that were grown were sesamum, mustard, dates peas and beans. Six varieties of millets including ragi, kodon, sanwa, and jowar were cultivated. Cotton was also grown and this is known due to the evidence of fragments of cotton cloth found at Mohenjodaro and other sites.

Agriculture was generally practised along the river banks most of which were flooded during the summer and monsoons. Irrigation channels have not been found. They might have used wooden ploughs similiar to modern ones. Harvesting of crops would have been done with copper sickles

as well as stone blades hafted in wood.

### Pastoral

The agrarian economy of Harappan people was largely supplemented by pastoral economy. They domesticated a large number of animals like sheep, goat, bull, buffalo, deer, elephant, camel, pig, dog and cat. They knew the animals such as the tiger, the rhinoceros, the crocodile and the lion. It is doubtful whether they knew the horse. The figures of these animals are depicted on a large number of terracotas. Several types of birds as well as fishes were also hunted for food.

### Crafts

The Harappan people developed many techniques of metal making. The Harappan civilization is referred to as a bronze age civilization, mostly unalloyed copper was used for manufacturing artifacts. The supply of copper was in plenty. Bronze was manufactured by mixing copper with tin. A large variety of copper tools have been discovered. They include flat-axes, chisels, arrowhead, spearheads, knives, saws, razors and fish-hooks. The people also made copper and bronze vessels. They made small plates and weights of lead and gold and silver jewellery of considerable sophistication.

Steatite was used for making a variety of objects like seals, beads, bracelets, buttons, vessels etc. and its use in making faience (a form of glass) is particularly noteworthy.

Seal-cutting and bead-making were common occupations. The material used to make beads were gold, silver, faience, steatite, shells and semi-precious stones. The long carnelian beads stand out as one of the technical skills of the Harappans.

Textile impression on several objects have been found reflecting the weaver's craft. The most common yarns used were wool and cotton.

Brick laying and making of burnt bricks were significant crafts. Stone was used for sculptures. The crafts of terracota and pottery flourished on a large scale. The potters made big jars for storage of food grains and other things. The crafts flourished as there were a number of professional classes like potters, carpenters, masons, jewellers, ivory workers goldsmiths, weavers, blacksmiths and dyers.

### Arts

A large variety of objects such as seals, stone statues terracotta etc. are examples of art activities. The most outstanding pieces of art are a yogi and a dancing girl.

Harappan people produced a large number of terracotta figures which are handmade. The figures include humans, animals, birds, monkeys, dogs, sheep and cattle. As for the evidence of paintings, we have it only on pottery. There were no wall paintings.

The Harappan script has 400 to 500 signs or pictograms as they were found on seals but, it is not an alphabetic form of writing. The language of Harappans is at present still unknown. Some scholars opine that Harappan inscriptions present a logo-syllabic writing system.

### Trade and Commerce

In the beginning, trade must have been internal and later external trade also developed. Agricultural produce, industrial raw material, like copper ores, stone, semi-precious shells etc. were traded. Besides the raw material, finished products of metals, precious and semi-precious stones, ornaments of gold and silver were also traded to various areas. They imported gold from South India. Silver came from Afghanistan, copper from Baluchistan, precious stones came from western India. For the goods they imported, they exchanged finished good or food grains. The Harappans had commercial links with Iran and Mesopotamia. There was a thriving trade between these regions. Harappan seals have been found in Mesopotamia. Many objects of Mesopotamia and Egypt have been found in Harappa. The evidence of Mesopotamian documents establish that the Harappans had trading relationship with that land.

### Weights and Measures

The Harappan weights and measures were cubical and spherical in shape and were made of chert, jasper and agate. The weights proceed in a series, first doubling upto 64 (i.e. 1,2,4,8...) then going to 160, and from then on in decimal multiples of sixteen. Sixteen chhatank made a ser, and 16 annas made one rupee. The measures of length was based upon a foot and a cubit.

### Transport and Travel

For the overland transport, bullock-carts and pack animals like bull, camel, ass etc. were used. Travel and transport were carried on through ships and boats along the rivers. The representations of ships on the seals shows that the Harappans had maritime contacts in western civilization of the time.

## Religion

The Harappan religion was mainly of an indigenous growth and "the lineal progenitor of Hinduism".

There were no temples in the areas excavated. The predominant feature of the religion is the worship of Mother-Goddess. Nude female figurines in terracotta were worshipped. A number of these figures have been found all over the lower city. The people worshipped a male God also. He had three faces, with a crown of horns. He was depicted as sitting in the position of a Yogi. He is surrounded by four wild animals. This is, according to scholars, the image of Pasupathi or Siva. Many symbols of Phallus (Linga) and of the Female Organ (Yoni) made of stone were discovered in Harappa. The worship of trees and animals was also followed. Some seals with Swasthika and wheel made some scholars believe that there was worship of Sun god. Worship of the servants also seems to have been in use. A large number of fire-altars have been found from sites at Kalibangan, Lothal and Banawali which seems to have been used as sacrificial altars. A large number of terracotta figures depict the individuals in various yogic postures (asanas) indicating thereby that the Harappans practised yoga. Scattered burials, as well as discreet cemeteries, have been found at many major cities. The dead were usually cremated. Partial burial was also in practice. Earthen pots containing food grains etc. were placed in the grave and, in some cases, the body was buried with ornaments.

## Decline of the Harappan Civilization

The decline of the Harappan civilization may be due to environmental degradation. Floods, drought and famine might have become recurring features which finally led to its decline. Wheeler opined that it was destroyed by the 'barbarian' Aryans who came to India in about 1500 B.C. But there is no archaeological or biological evidence for this. The Harappan civilization was spread over a large area, and the causes of its decline in all the regions cannot be one and the same. While in the Saraswati region, it declined mainly due to shifting of river channels, along the Indus, it declined largely due to recurring floods. However, the Harappan civilization did not disappear suddenly. Archaeological evidence shows that the decline was gradual and slow which is witnessed over a period of six hundred years from 1900 B.C.-1300 B.C. The Harappan civilization was the most outstanding Chalcolithic culture.

**Other Chalcolithic Cultures in India**

The end of the Neolithic period (New Stone Age) saw very different kinds of developments in different areas, known as Chalcolithic culture. 'Chalco' means metal and 'lithic' means stone. The Harppan culture is the oldest and the most developed Chalcolithic culture of India. Some of these cultures were contemporary with the Harappan culture and others were decidedly later than Harappan. Some important Chalcolithic cultures are : Ahar Culture (2800-1500 B.C.), Kayatha Culture (2450-1700 B.C.) Malwa Culture (1900-1400 B.C.) Savalda Culture (2300-2000 B.C.), Jorwe Culture (1500-900 B.C.), Prabhas Culture (2000-1400 B.C.); Rangpur Culture (1700-1400 B.C.) etc.

These cultures shared certain common features. They are all characterised by painted ceramic, usually black-on-red, a specialised blade and flake industry of the silicious material like chalcedony and chert, and copper and bronze tools. Their economy was based on subsistence agriculture, hunting and fishing.

The distinguishing feature of these Chalcolithic cultures is their distinct painted pottery. Stone, mud bricks, and mud were used for the construction of houses and other structures. They built rectangular and circular houses of mud wattle-and-daub. These houses and huts had roofs of straw supported on bamboo and wooden rafters. People raised cattle as well as cultivated crops in rotation. Wheat and barley were grown. There is evidence to show that the Chalcolithic communities traded and exchanged materials with others. Wheeled bullock carts, drawings of which have been found on pots, were used for long distance trade besides the river transport.

The Chalcolithic farmers had made considerable progress in ceramic as well as metal technology. The copper objects such as celts, harpoons, antennae, swords, rings and anthropomorph have been found in about 40 hoards. These hoards have been dated between 2000 and 1800 B.C.