Indus Valley Civilization

Indus Valley Civilization was the first major civilization in south Asia, which spread across a vast area of land in present day India and Pakistan (around 12 lakh sq.km). The time period of mature Indus Valley Civilization is estimated between BC. 2700- BC.1900 i.e. for 800 years. But early Indus Valley Civilization had existed even before BC.2700.

Features of Indus Valley Civilization

- BC. 2700- BC.1900 i.e. for 800 years.
- On the valleys of river Indus.
- Also known as Harappan Civilization.
- Beginning of city life.
- Harappan Sites discovered by – Dayaram Sahni (1921) – Montgomori district, Punjab, Pakistan.
- Mohenjo-Daro discovered by – R. D. Banerji – Larkana district, Sind, Pakistan.
- City was divided into Citadel (west) and Lower Town(east).
- Red pottery painted with designs in black.
- Stone weights, seals, special beads, copper tools, long stone blades etc.
- Copper, bronze, silver, gold present.
- Artificially produced – Faience.
- Specialists for handicrafts.
- Import of raw materials.
- Plough was used.
- Bodies were buried in wooden coffins, but during the later stages 'H symmetry culture' evolved where bodies were buried in painted burial urns.
- Sugar cane not cultivated, horse, iron not used.

Indus Valley Sites and Specialties

Harappa

- Seals out of stones
- Citadel outside on banks of river Ravi

Mohenjodaro

- Great Bath, Great Granary, Dancing Girl, Man with Beard, Cotton, Assembly hall
- Term means " Mount of the dead"
- On the bank of river Indus
- Believed to have been destructed by flood or invasion (Destruction was not gradual).

Chanhudaro

- Bank of Indus River. – discovered by Gopal Majumdar and Mackey (1931)
- Pre-harappan culture – Jhangar Culture and Jhukar Culture
- Only cite without citadel.

Kalibangan

- At Rajastan on the banks of river Ghaggar, discovered by A.Ghosh (1953)
- Fire Altars
- Bones of camel
- Evidence of furrows
- Horse remains (even though Indus valley people didn't use horses).
- Known as third capital of Indus Empire.

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Lothal

- At Gujarat near Bhogava river, discovered by S.R. Rao (1957)
- Fire Altars
- Beside the tributary of Sabarmati
- Store house
- Dockyard and earliest port
- double burial
- Rice husk
- House had front entrance (exception).

Ropar

- Punjab, on the banks of river Sutlej. Discovered by Y.D Sharma (1955)
- Dog buried with humans.

Banawali

- Haryana
- On banks of lost river Saraswathi
- Barley Cultivation.

Dholavira

- Biggest site in India, until the discovery of Rakhigarhi.
- Located in Khadir Beyt, Rann of Kutch, Gujarat. Discovered by J.P Joshi/Rabindra Singh (1990)
- 3 parts + large open area for ceremonies
- Large letters of the Harappan script (sign boards).

Religion of Indus Valley People

- Pashupathi Mahadev (Proto Siva)
- Mother goddess
- Nature/ Animal worship
- Unicorn, Dove, Peepal Tree, Fire
- Amulets
- Idol worship was practiced (not a feature of Aryans)
- Did not construct temples.
- Similarity to Hindu religious practices. (Hinduism in its present form originated later)
- No Caste system.

Indus Valley Society and Culture

- Systematic method of weights and measures (16 and its multiples).
- Pictographic Script, Boustrophedon script – Deciphering efforts by I. Mahadevan
- Equal status to men and women
- Economic Inequality, not an egalitarian society
- Textiles – Spinning and weaving
- 3 types – burial, cremation and post cremation were there, though burial was common.
- Majority of people Proto-australoids and Mediterraneans (Dravidians), though Mongoloids, Nordics etc were present in the city culture.

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Artifacts for Posterity

The most numerous of the surviving artifacts are a series of steatite (soapstone) seals, of which the best known are those of the Humped Brahmani Bull and Pashupati. Apart from this, there are some carved figurines - the bronze Dancing Girl and the statues of a priest and a male torso, again in steatite.

Reasons for Decline of Indus Valley Civilization

Though there are various theories, the exact reason is still unknown. As per a recent study by IIT Kharagpur and Archaeological Survey of India, a weaker monsoon might have been the cause of decline of Indus Valley Civilization.
Environmental changes, coupled with loss of power of rulers (central administration) of Indus valley to sustain the city life might be the cause (Fariservis Theory). There might be resource shortage to sustain the population, and then people moved towards south India.
Another theory by Dr Gwen Robbins Schug states that inter-personal violence, infectious diseases and climate change had played a major role in the demise of the Indus Valley Civilization.

Origin of Aryans

The Aryans came to India in several waves. The earliest wave is represented by the Rig Vedic people who appeared in the subcontinent in about 1500 BC. They came into conflict with the indigenous inhabitants called the Dravidians mentioned as Dasa or Dasyus in Rig Veda. The Rig Veda mentions the defeat of Sambara by Divodasa, who belonged to the Bharata clan. Possibly the Dasyus in the Rig Veda represent the original inhabitants of the country, and an Aryan chief who overpowered them was called Trasadvasyu. The Aryan chief was soft towards the Dasas, but strongly hostile to the Dasyus. The term Dasyuhatya, slaughter of the Dasyus, is repeatedly mentioned in the Rig Veda.

Some of the chief tribes of the period were Yadu, Turvasu, Druhyu, Anu Puru, Kuru, Panchala, Bharata and Tritsu. Among the inter-tribal conflicts the most important was the 'Battle of the Ten Kings.'

Important points to remember:

- The group of Indo-Europeans who moved to Persia and India are known to Aryans
- The Aryans are the original inhabitants of Central Asia.
- They arrived in India around 1500 BC, though there is an ongoing debate.
- The region where the Aryans settled in India was called Sapta Sindhu (also referred to as the Brahmavarta)

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- The Aryans established themselves in India by defeating the natives whom they called Dasas or Dasyus
- The period when the Aryans first settled in India, is known as Early Vedic Period (1500 BC to 1000 BC)
- The Aryans spread to Indo-Gangetic plains in the later Vedic Period and this region came to be known as Aryavarta (1000 BC to 600 BC)
- The Aryans were the first people in India to know the use of iron and brought horses along with them.

Stratification in Vedic Society

Although the Rig Veda deals with devotional work of religious nature, yet it gives a vivid picture of the early Vedic civilization. The Vedic Civilization is best understood from the social life, political organisation, economic life and religious beliefs. The Kula or family was the basic unit of Rig-Vedic society. The Kula was headed by a Kulapa, who was usually the eldest member. Society was essentially patriarchal and birth of son was desired repeatedly. Status of women was equal to men in the early Rig-Vedic society. Both polygamy and polyandry were in vogue.

The Evolution of Varna System

Social strata used to exist in the Harappan civilization also. Similarly, there was a threefold division of society {priests, rulers and producers} in the Iranian society also. However, what happened in Indian sub-continent was unique and extraordinary. In the evolution of Kingship in the later Vedic era, the priests (Brahmans) and rulers (Khsatriyas) consolidated their respective position in the society. The producers split into two groups. The free peasants and traders formed the group Vaishya while the slaves, laborers, artisans degraded to fourth group Shudra. This was based on occupation initially but later got rigid on the basis of birth. Despite of a small population, the people got compartmentalized into these four groups as per Varnashrama Dharma.

Marriage and women

Despite of the patriarchal character of the family, the position of women was much better in the Rig Vedic period than in later times. They could attend assemblies and offer sacrifices along with their husbands. Five women have been mentioned as composers of hymns out of which Ghosha, Lopamudra and Apala are famous. Girls were normally married off after puberty (between the age of 16 and 17). Unmarried girls grew up in the home of their parents. Some unmarried woman like Visvavara and Apala offered sacrifices on their own. There are also evidences of widow remarriage in the Rig-Veda.

Education

In the early Rig-Vedic era, entire instruction was given orally. Art of writing does not seem to have developed yet. In the well-known Gayatri mantra there is a prayer to Savitri for the stimulation of the intellect. There were women teachers. Many of them possessed the highest spiritual knowledge. Maitreyi and Gargi were gifted scholars. Rishis who composed hymns founded their own schools separately to teach their pupils and every person

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among the vis was entitled to learn Vedic mantras. In the later-Vedic phase, with the development of Varnashrama, education began with an investiture ceremony (upanayan). Since Upanayan was confined to three upper Varnas, the sudras were not entitled to education. Sometimes girls were also encouraged. When teacher was satisfied with the student, last sermon called snatakopadesa (kind of convocation) was delivered.

Institution of Gotra

Gotra or cowpen was a mechanism for widening social ties a new relationship was established between hitherto unrelated people. It is possible that animals were herded in common and such a place was known as gotra and from this it acquired the character of an exogamous institution.

Amusements and entertainments

Music, both vocal and instrumental, was well known. Vedic Aryans played on the Vina and flute Vana to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Few claim that Dhrupad of Indian classical music originated in Vedic Era. Dancing was common. The chariot race was a favourite sport and source of entertainment. Chariot race was a symbolic source of political authority of the king. The fascination of gambling and the ruin caused by its addiction find mention in the Rig-Veda.

House holding

The Griha sutra prescribes a code of conduct, which gives a fairly good idea of the manners and etiquette of the later-Vedic age. A guest (atithi) was welcomed at all times and special guests, like the guru, the king, and the father-in-law, etc. were given special treatment. Respect for the elders self-restraint, moral purity, abstinence of all kinds and faithfulness were some of the virtues. Cleanliness was a passion. Daily bath, washing of the feet and hands every now and then, and purifying the atmosphere with Vedic mantras were a part of ritual when ritualism acquired special significance in the later-Vedic age. It became one of the many sources of the development of hierarchy and the supremacy for the Brahmanas.

Eating Habits

The main cereal produced by the early Rig-Vedic people was Yava or barley. Wheat (Godhuma) appears in later Vedic texts only. Yava was also a generic term for various kinds of cereals. ilk, Milk products and cattle meat belonged to their food habits. Alcoholic / Non-alcoholic drinks were known and common. Soma and Sura are two popular liquors. Sura may be a kind of beer or wine.

Dress code

Two pieces of cloth were normally worn- the upper garment was called uttariya and the lower one was known as antariya. The dress for the male and the female did not differ much.

Health and hygiene

Everyone aspired for and everyone was blessed to live for a hundred years. Epilepsy was common and it affected the children as well. Superstitions and magical charms were employed to cure the diseases. Miraculous cures are ascribed to the twin-gods, the Ashvins, who are the great healers of diseases and experts in the surgical art. They were divine physicians who restored eyesight and cured the blind, sick and maimed.

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