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.

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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.

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.

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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.'

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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)
- 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.

Apscnotes

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.

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