

# Indus Valley and Vedic Civilizations

## 1) How is the bronze civilization in India known?

Ans: The Indus Valley Civilization was a Bronze Age civilization (Early Bronze Age-

c. 3300-1300 BCE and Late Bronze Age- c. 2600-1900 BCE) located in the western region of South Asia and spread over what are now Pakistan, northwest India and eastern Afghanistan. Flourishing around the Indus river basin the civilization primarily centered along the Indus and the Punjab region extending into the Ghaggar-Hakra River valley and the Ganges-Yamuna Doab.

## 2) How were the Indus towns planned?

Ans: A sophisticated and technologically advanced urban culture is evident in the Indus Valley civilization. The quality of municipal town planning suggests knowledge of urban planning and efficient municipal governments which placed a high priority on hygiene. The streets of major cities such as Mohenjo-Daro or Harappa were laid out in a perfect grid pattern, comparable to that of present day New York. The houses were protected from noise, odors, and thieves.

As seen in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro this urban plan included the world's first urban sanitation systems. Within the city, individual homes or groups of homes obtained water from wells. From a room that appears to have been set aside for bathing, waste water was directed to covered drains, which lined the major streets. Houses opened only to inner courtyards and smaller lanes.

The ancient Indus systems of sewage and drainage that were developed and used in cities throughout the Indus Empire were far more advanced than any found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East and even more efficient than those in some areas of modern Pakistan and India today. The

advanced architecture of the Harappa's is shown by their impressive dockyards, granaries, warehouses, brick platforms, and protective walls.

The cities were divided in Citadel and Lower Town according to the social classes of the town people.

**Citadel:** Citadel was built of mud and mud bricks. It was raised on platform 7-14 meters high. It included public buildings, Great Bath, granary, assembly hall, priest residence. The people of the Citadel were socially a bit high than the people of Lower Town. Each home had its own private drinking well and its own private bathroom. The massive citadels of Indus cities that protected the Harappans from floods and attackers were larger than most Mesopotamian ziggurats.

**Lower Town:** Lower Town was well planned and walled. The people of the lower town were socially a bit low then the people of Citadel. More than one family used to share one bathroom and well.

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. Clay pipes led from the bathrooms to sewers located under the streets. These sewers drained into nearly rivers and streams.

### 3) What were the export and import items in the Indus?

**Ans:** The Indus civilization's economy appears to have depended significantly on trade, which was facilitated by major advances in transport technology. These advances may have included boats. The people of Indus Valley Civilization began trading by boat along the Indus down into the Arabian Sea, into the Persian Gulf and up the Tigris and Euphrates into Mesopotamia. Most of these boats were probably small, flat-bottomed craft, perhaps driven by sail, similar to those one can see on the Indus River today.

Farmers brought food into the cities. Traders brought the materials workers needed. Trade goods included terracotta pots, beads, gold and silver,

coloured gem stones such as turquoise and lapis lazuli, metals, flints (for making stone tools), seashells and pearls.

Crafts of the Indus valley included pottery making, dyeing, metal working in bronze, and bead making. Bead materials included:

- jade from the Himalayas,
- lapis lazuli from Afghanistan,
- turquoise from Persia,
- amethyst from Mewar in India,
- and steatite, which was found locally.

Small sculptures in stone, terra cotta, and bronze appear to represent priestly or governmental officials, dancing girls, and perhaps mother goddesses. Since there are no surviving texts to explain identities, these can only be guesses.

Dice and small sculptures of bullock carts were probably used as toys and games. The first known use of cotton as a fiber for weaving textiles occurred in the Indus Valley.

They were the earliest known people to grow cotton. They spun the cotton, wove it into cloth and dyed it bright colors. They produced cotton cloth hundreds of years before anyone else.

#### 4) Was there any industry in the Indus civilization?

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### 5) What kind of seals did the Indus people use?

Ans: The first publication of a seal with Harappan symbols dates to 1875, in a drawing by [Alexander Cunningham](#). The seals were one of the most important finds. These were basically tiny seals made of soapstone. An animal and a line of writing were carved on each seal. Most of the seals had a small hole in them and could be worn as necklaces or bracelets. The seals may have stated the names, titles or trades of a person, family or business. Experts believe the seals were used to stamp the wet clay that sealed package of goods.

Some significant seals are:

- **Bull seal, Harappa:** The majestic zebu bull, with its heavy dewlap and wide curving horns is perhaps the most impressive motif found on the Indus seals. Generally carved on large seals with relatively short inscriptions, the zebu motif is found almost exclusively at the largest cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa.

The rarity of zebu seals is curious because the humped bull is a recurring theme in many of the ritual and decorative arts of the Indus region, appearing on painted pottery and as figurines long before the rise of cities and continuing on into later historical times. The zebu bull may symbolize the leader of the herd, whose strength and virility protects the herd and ensures the procreation of the species or it stands for a sacrificial animal. When carved in stone, the zebu bull probably represents the most powerful clan or top officials of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa.

- **Unicorn Seal, Mohenjo-daro:** Large square unicorn seal with perforated boss on the back (26). The unicorn is the most common motif on Indus seals and appears to represent a mythical animal that Greek and Roman sources trace back to the Indian subcontinent.

A relatively long inscription of eight symbols runs along the top of the seal. The elongated body and slender arching neck is typical of unicorn figurines, as are the tail with bushy end and the bovine hooves. This figure has a triple incised line depicting a pipal leaf shaped blanket or halter, while most unicorn figures have only a double incised line. The arching horn is depicted as if spiraling or ribbed, and the jowl is incised with multiple folds.

A collar or additional folds encircle the throat. In front of the unicorn is a ritual offering stand with droplets of water or sacred liquid along the bottom of the bowl. The top portion of the stand depicts a square grid or sieve, that actually may have been a circular cylinder.

- **Seal, Mohenjo-Daro:** Square seal depicting a nude male deity with three faces, seated in yogic position on a throne, wearing bangles on both arms and an elaborate headdress. Five symbols of the Indus

script appear on either side of the headdress which is made of two outward projecting buffalo style curved horns, with two upward projecting points. A single branch with three pipal leaves rises from the middle of the headdress.

Seven bangles are depicted on the left arm and six on the right, with the hands resting on the knees. The heels are pressed together under the groin and the feet project beyond the edge of the throne. The feet of the throne are carved with the hoof of a bovine as is seen on the bull and unicorn seals. The seal may not have been fired, but the stone is very hard. A grooved and perforated boss is present on the back of the seal.

#### 6) Did the Indus people have a script?

Ans: The **Indus script** (also known as the **Harappan script**) is an amount of symbols produced by the Indus Valley Civilization during the Kot Diji and Mature Harappan periods between 3500 and 1900 BC. Most inscriptions are extremely short. It is not clear if these symbols represent a script used to record a language, and the subject of whether the Indus symbols were a writing system is troublesome. In spite of many attempts,<sup>[4]</sup> it remains unreadable, and no original language has been identified. There is no known multilingual inscription, and the script does not show any significant changes over time.

#### 7) Why did the Indus Civilization came to an end?

Ans: No one knows for certain how Indus civilization came to an end. One reason may have been that the Indus used up their natural resources. For example, the farmers may have tried to raise more and more crops on the same plots. This would have robbed the soil of nutrients needed to make it fertile enough to produce well. With-out good harvests, there would not have been enough food to feed everyone, especially if the Indus population was increasing. Another reason may have been that the Indus cut down too many trees to fuel their ovens. Without tree cover, floods would have swept away the soil and forced people to leave their cities and farming villages. It is known that parts of Mohenjodaro had to be rebuilt several



times because of floods. At first, the city was rebuilt carefully. As time went on, however, new buildings were not made as well, and older ones were patched up. Then, too, they may have gotten tired of rebuilding and decided to move somewhere else. A third reason may have been that the Indus River valley was invaded and all the people were killed. Unburied skeletons of groups of men, women, and children have been found in the streets of Mohenjo-daro's ruins. Every skeleton showed some kind of injury. All that is certain is that Indus civilization began to change about 2000 B.C. Not only were homes no longer built as well, but pottery was no longer made as carefully. By 1500 B.C., a group of people called Aryans had taken over the Indus River valley.

### 8)What is Vedic civilization?

Ans: Veda means "Knowledge". There are 4 versions of Veda. Rigveda was the earliest one. It was created by the Indo-Aryans ("respected ones"). They were nomadic people from central Asia, who Spoke Sanskrit. They were a part of Indo- European language group.

Around 1500 BCE, a group of nomadic peoples calling themselves Aryans ("respected ones") wandered out of their homelands in the steppes of inner Eurasia. But in contrast to Egypt, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia, these pastoral nomads did not immediately establish large territorial states. Crossing the northern highlands of central Asia through the Hindu Kush, they were a sight to behold. They went down into the fertile Indus River basin with large flocks of cattle and horses, singing chants called Rig Veda as they sacrificed some of their livestock to their gods. Known collectively as the Veda ("knowledge"), these hymns served as the most sacred texts for the newcomers, who have been known ever since as the Vedic people. They also arrived with an extraordinary language, Sanskrit (perhaps prophetically labeled "perfectly made"). It was one of the earliest known Indo-European languages and a source for virtually all of the European languages, including Greek, Latin, English, French, and German. Like other nomads from the northern steppe, they brought domesticated animals— especially horses, which pulled their chariots and established their military superiority. Not only were the Vedic people superb horse charioteers, but they were also masters of copper and bronze metallurgy and wheel making. Their expertise

in these areas allowed them to produce the very chariots that transported them into their new lands. Like other Indo-European-speaking groups, the Vedic peoples were deeply religious. They worshipped a host of natural and supernatural deities, the most powerful of which were the sky god and the gods that represented horses. They were confident that their chief god, Indra (the deity of war), was on their side. The Vedic people also brought elaborate rituals of worship, which set them apart from the native populations.

### 9) Who were the Indo-Aryans?

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### 10) What is the origin of the Vedic caste system?

Ans: According to one long-held theory about the origins of South Asia's caste system, Aryans from central Asia invaded South Asia and introduced the caste system as a means of controlling the local populations. The caste system was based on the Vedic religion which was given a rigid and permanent shape. The Aryans first developed the class system but later the class division transferred into caste division. The caste system included strict rules about every part of daily life. Each person's job was determined by his or her caste. Members of one caste could not marry, eat with or work with members of another caste. The four Varnas (implying colour) developed out of very early Aryan class divisions. According to an ancient text known as the Rigveda, the division of vedic caste system was based on Brahma's divine manifestation of four groups.

Brahma: Brahma is the four-headed, four-handed deity worshipped as the creator of the universe. The four groups are:

- **The Brahmanas:** They were Priests, scholars and teachers. They were cast from the Brahma's mouth. They were to study and teach, sacrifice, give and receive gifts.
- **The Kshatriya:** They were rulers and warriors. They were cast from the Brahma's arms. They were to protect the people.
- **The Vaishya:** They were merchants and traders. They were cast from the Brahma's thighs. They were to breed cattle, pursue trade and lend money.
- **The Sudra:** They were workers and peasants from his feet. They were to serve the other three classes.
- **Untouchables:** Beyond the four classes, came the "untouchables" or "outcastes". They were expected to do dirty jobs, like: cleaning up

gutters, bathrooms, clean and skin dead animals, handle corpses etc. They were not supposed to have contacts with any of the 4 castes. If a Brahmin priest touches an untouchable or even passes his or her shadow then the priest must go through a ritual in which the pollution is washed away. In order to avoid any kind of touch with them they were forced to use wooden clappers to warn of their approach. It is believed that a person is born as an untouchable because of bad karma he or she earned in previous life.

The rules of caste were strictly followed because back then people believed in rebirth of the soul into a new body. They believed that each person would be reborn again and again until that person reached spiritual perfection. They thought that a person's caste was a reward or punishment for the way he or she lived in a past life. Those who led a good dutiful life might be reborn into a higher caste. Those who lived a bad life might be reborn into a lower caste or even into the body of an animal.

### 11) Where does the superiority of Brahmins lie in the Vedic caste system?

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- The Vaishya
- The Sudra

Among these 4 castes the Brahmanas were at the top. The Brahmanas were Priest, scholars and teachers. They were cast from the Brahma's mouth. They were to study and teach, sacrifice, give and receive gifts. The Brahmin class is essentially defined by its believed to be priority, by knowledge of the Veda, and by the domination this class holds on the operation of sacrifice. These traits justify the social position of the class others: they are major because they are former, and they claim to stand outside of the power relations that govern social life for others because of their superior knowledge and sole possession of the ultimate "weapons," sacrificial techniques.

