

Ch. 3 Shifting Agrarian Centers in India

- 1) How well established were Harappan contacts (e.g. exports or imports) with the world outside India? Give examples.

Harappan contacts outside of India were extremely well established. Records in Mesopotamia tell of a people called the Meluha who historians believe to be the Harappans who carried on extensive seaborne trade and had colonies of merchants in many Mesopotamian cities. Harappa seals have been found in Ur in Mesopotamia and there is evidence of Harappan trade as far as Egypt and Central Asia. The Harappans created fortified border settlements that seem to be trading posts, extending their influence to the borders of modern-day Iran and as far North as Amu Darya. They maintained governmental control over trade in the Indus cities, as there is basically no evidence of foreign goods within this area. These Indus cities were important for the long-distance trade of copper in exchange for gold, silver, semiprecious stones, shells, and timber.

- 2) What happened to the Harappan civilization?

It is widely believed that the decline of Harappan civilization was due to ecological collapse. Within 200 years, there goes from evidence to a drop of population in large cities to those cities being all but abandoned, their inhabitants moving to smaller outlying towns, many returning to farming or herding. The land around the area had been used to its limits and was no longer able to support large cities. The salt levels in the Indus had increased, possibly as a result of diverting too much water for irrigation and use in the cities. Flooding or weather may have played a role, as well as earthquakes, diverting the flow of rivers.

- 3) Who were the Indo-Europeans?

Indo-Europeans spread items and ideas throughout Eurasia and India. In the beginnings of their travels, they collected, refined, and spread many Bronze Age technologies. They introduced the domestication of wild horses as well as bridles and weapons to use while on horseback. It is believed they were also key in moving the technology of the chariot all the way from eastern Europe to China. The Hittites, an Indo-European culture, brought iron making techniques out of Anatolia bringing them all the way to the Yellow River basin. They spoke what is believed to be the parent language of Latin, German, Greek, Slavic languages, Celtic languages, and Sanskrit.

- 4) What are the Vedas? What do they tell us about Aryan Indian society?

The Vedas are the oldest recorded poetry in any Indo-European language. They are the religious hymns passed down orally from generation to generation by Aryan Priests and their successors. They show an idealized vision of Indo-Aryan society. This society is led by hard fighting, lusty warrior chieftains and priests and composed of

herders, cultivators, artisans, and servants. The Vedas show that material wealth and skill in battle were the most valued attributes within Aryan culture. A large portion of the Rig-Veda celebrates the exploits of the god Indra, who was an embodiment of the Aryan heroic ideal. Indra valiantly battles the serpent demon Vritra and releases the rivers the demon had bottled up.

5) What is the Indian caste system?

The Indian caste system stemmed from the structure of the varnas. They described four types of people within society, priests, warriors, commoners, and servants. Priests were described as tranquil, pure, intelligent, and pious. Warriors were described as heroic, skilled, charitable, and characterized by a refusal to retreat in battle. Commoners were those who did activities that contributed to the subsistence of society such as farming, herding, and commerce. Finally, the Servants were those who did any action that was essentially servitude. These archetypes began to be the way in which people of India described themselves and others, and these labels were passed down from generation to generation, creating a social system based on jati (basically translating to “born into”). From there, the caste system imposed itself upon society. Eventually there were many castes and subcastes, at one point reaching a number exceeding 3,000.