

CHAPTER-3

SINDHU-SARASVATI CIVILIZATION



After studying this chapter you learn :

- About ancient civilizations of India.
- To analyse urbanization, special features of the cities, town planning, life style and the decline of towns.
- About the development of vedic period, life style during vedic period and post vedic period.

Sindhu-Sarasvati

Who is not aware of the Vedas? That, Rig-Veda is the world's oldest literature, is a matter of pride for Indians. Vedas encompass not just matters of bhakti, spirituality but several subjects that narrate the history of our nation. After studying the details and description of rivers, seas, mountains, the Earth, flora and fauna, lifestyle of people of those times, Scholars have penned the history of ancient India.

Of these numerous details, Sarasvati River is an important one. Sarasvati used to be a gigantic river. It contracted over the years due to natural causes and finally disappeared at around 2000 B.C.E. Based on this, historians have proved that the timeline of Rig-Veda is older than 3000 B.C.E. at the least. That is, 5,000 years before the current era!

Hundreds of antiquity sites, townships are discovered in the basin region of Sarasvati. Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro are some of the first ones to have been discovered. Experts found the traces of civilization for the first time in these ancient towns – all the reason why Harappa civilization is a more common term used to identify ancient Indian civilization. However, it is most apt to call it Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization instead. The region where rivers Sindhu, Vitasta (Jhelum), Asikni (Chenab), Parushni (Ravi), Vipasha (Beas), Shutudri (Sutlej) and Sarasvati flowed, itself is the homeland of this ancient civilization. Apart from these, the plains created by rivers Ganga and Yamuna, Gujarat, Baluchistan, and other regions are also key for studying ancient India.

Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization period has been termed as post-Vedic period by the experts. By the turn of this period, all four Vedas had been formulated. The cultural aspects that can be seen in Atharva-Veda largely resemble the aspects found in Harappa and other towns.

Discovery of ancient towns

The story of discovery of ancient bases of Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization is fascinating.

Around 1921, technicians at Punjab's Sindhu valley discovered some Harappan sites when they were laying rails. They appeared as mounds made of best quality of earthen bricks. They used these bricks as sleepers for rails. They found several more such buildings in the due course of time after which the archaeologists took up ground research. The archaeologists were convinced that those buildings were part of a town. There were similarities in the sites discovered after this with the ones discovered earlier – all around an existing town called Harappa. Hence, they were collectively termed as Harappa civilization. Even before this major discovery, in 1917, a major site was discovered in Kalibangan.

Town Planning

Two or more divisions can be seen in Harappan towns. The western parts are smaller, but elevated. Archaeologists call it fort. The eastern parts are generally wide and low-lying. They are called villages. Every division had a wall of burnt clay bricks constructed around it. The bricks were laid in an inter-locking fashion which had ensured that such walls were stronger. The usage of burnt clay bricks indicates the advancement of the civilization.

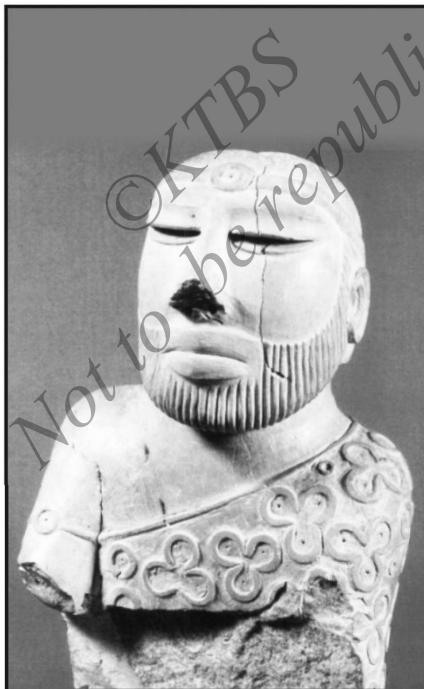
A ground-level tank can be seen constructed in another town Mohenjo-Daro. The experts have identified it as an open bath. Built with bricks, precautions have been taken to ensure the structure was leak-proof. Stairs are located at two sides of the tank which has rooms built all around. Perhaps, the water to this tank was supplied from a nearby well, and the water was drained out after usage. Prominent people of the town would be bathing in this bath, it is presumed.



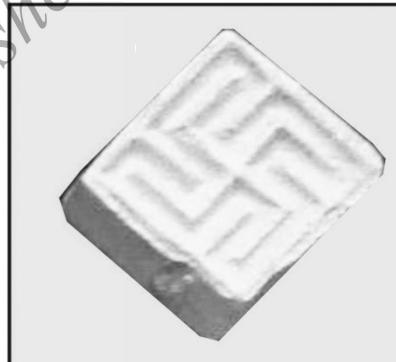
Public bath at Mohenjo-Daro



Bronze Dancing Doll



Torso of a man



Swastik Sun Seal



Sindhu Script

Fire places are found in the towns of Kalibangan and Lothal. Well-arranged grainaries can be seen in Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and Lothal.

The low-lying space – the village – was the habitat part of the town. They were planned and built quite systematically – well planned

houses, roads and drains can be seen there. The houses were built with bricks and walls were strong; generally, the houses were of one or two storeys. The inner core space had rooms surrounding. The doors faced the street; None of the windows were street-facing, though. The houses had baths, some with wells for water supply. Water availability was abundant. Every household having its own bath was a big thing back then. Such information shows that the Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization population led a prosperous life.

Towns had internal drainage system, the drains of which were built with bricks and covered with stone slabs. The drains of houses were connected to the external drains. Domestic grey and black waters were led into the external drains through these connecting drains. Cover slabs had holes to enable regular maintenance. It is understood that separate officers were appointed for maintenance. The drainage system alone shows how superior the systematic thought process of the then town-planners, grievance-less execution and maintenance, and interest towards civil responsibilities were.



**Mother Goddess
Teracota Idol**

Such well-equipped town construction is not seen in Egypt, Mesopotamia and other civilizations. Even in terms of physical expanse, the Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization was more advanced and bigger than the contemporary ones.

Cultural details

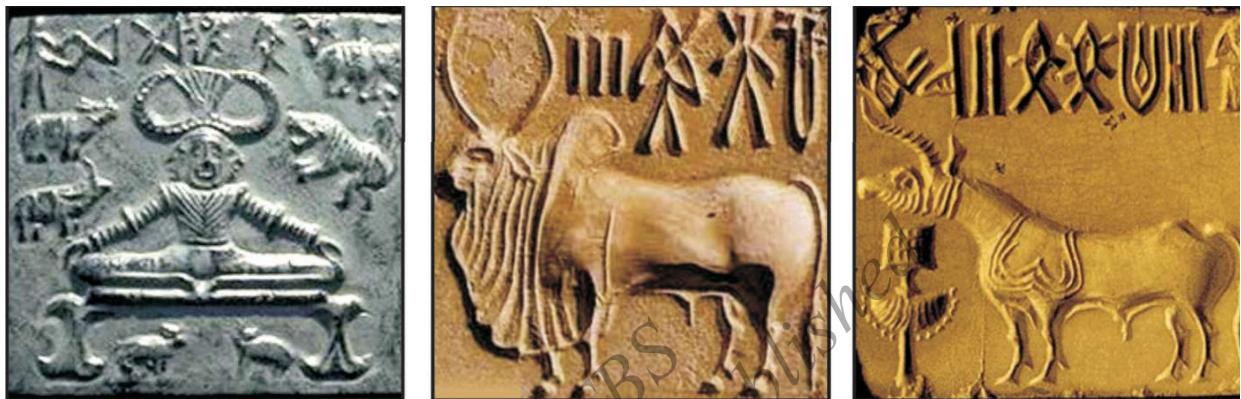
Apart from the buildings, the artefacts found are mostly metal and precious stones. Beads and seals are found in large quantities.



**Shivling found at
Kalibangan**

Harappan beads had demand even in the distant Mesopotamia. The technique of drilling a diametrical hole through a bead was well practised by Harappans. Pots with various designs are also found. Bangles made of metals and shell material

are found in abundance along with female figurines adorning them in different patterns. Women wearing such bangles made of shell is believed to be sacred and practised even today across the sects. It is possible that there were smaller towns/ settlements built only for bangle-making. The township system shows a clear hierarchical arrangement – precious metals, stones and jewellery must have been worn by the administrative section while the commoners wore beads. Women used to wear vermillion on their foreheads, a practice which is alive even to this day.



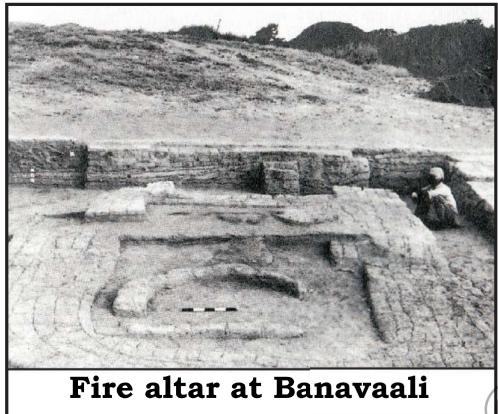
Seals of Pashupathi, Bull and Unicorn

The seals show still undeciphered script. They could engrave scripts on the seals even back then. Vrushabha (bull) is one of the most important figures found on seals of those times with the leaf of the sacred fig (peepul or ashvattha) tree being another prominent figure on the seals. Several idols with different yoga and namaskara postures are also seen. Vrushabha, Shiva's vehicle, also stands as a figure of dharma; the leaf of a fig tree, also known as yajnya-vrukha; yoga, one of the vaidika aspects – all these facts point at the continuation of vaidika tradition since the Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization times.

Weavers used to work with cotton, sometimes even silk. There were artists who worked on stones, ivory and such materials. Woollen blankets, wooden furniture, articles that enhanced the beauty of the buildings were in vogue. Bronze has been one of the important alloys found in ancient civilizations. The copper needed to create the alloy was available in Baluchistan, Rajasthan, etc. People had mastered the art of bronze making after centuries of effort. Such technology helped them create several items from hard tools to mirrors. The

metrology and measurements followed during this civilization match the descriptions in Kautilya's Arthashastra – which were in use till a few centuries back in our country.

A temple dedicated to Agni (sacred fire) worship is found in Banavali, Haryana. Platforms of worship are seen in Lothal, Kalibangan and other sites. Dholavira town was planned on measurements that were proportionate to the 'mahavedi-s' used in vaidika yaga-s. The same ratio is later seen in texts starting from vaidika band of Shatapatha Brahmana, Shulbasutra-s, etc. to the later encyclopaedia of Brihatsamhita – only goes on to show the normality in our traditions.



Fire altar at Banavaali

Literature, music, dance, painting, sculpture and other art forms were well established. Female figurines in dancing posture, drum and string instrument sculptures, several varieties of masks obtained during the exploration excavations confirm their deep interest in art. The famous dancing female figurine obtained in Mohenjo-Daro is

seen as the original form of Indian woman with its posture and the bangles that it wears. Toy carts, tops, whistles, etc. were in vogue, as toys for kids.

Farming and trading

Sindhu-Sarasvati population were dependant on farming and trading. Wheat, barley and pulses were their primary crops. The bullock cart modelled and used back then is still in use in almost the same way. Hunting and fishing were also vastly practised. Cotton farming was done to manufacture textiles. Since several of the towns of the era were situated on the banks of rivers, it is obvious that they were experts in irrigation which helped in their farming. They were involved in rearing of cattle including bull, cow, buffalo and sheep, goat and poultry. Oxen were used to plough the fields. Commerce and trading were equally important to them. Urban centres used to trade with country side and foreign nations –Baluchistan, Sourashtra and Deccan regions were prominent among them. Several seals found in

Mesopotamia indicates the close ties that existed between the Sindhu-Sarasvati and Mesopotamian civilizations.

A huge construction is found in Lothal, Gujarat which is most probably a ship dockyard. Lothal was their primary centre of sea trade. Dholavira had best of practices of rain water management. A one-third of the town was reserved for this, experts opine.

It goes on to show how advanced the Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization was.

The decline

Historians have ascribed several reasons for the decline of urban centres. Some claim, the drying up of rivers, drastic change in their course could be the reason; some others feel loss of forests could be reasons, because of long-term flooding of the region, which could also have forced the population from sites along Sindhu and in Western Punjab to migrate Eastwards and towards the South. However, the civilization continued until much later in Lothal, Gujarat which finally got infused into our culture.

All in all, the Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization is a great sign of Indian pride.

From nomadic life towards village settlement

After the nomadic life stabilized, hutments and houses were built traces of which can still be seen. Pit houses are found in Burzahom, Kashmir. Those people used to build bore holes in ground and live underground to save themselves from harsh cold and wild animals. The underground bunker used to have steps for access. Clay pots are found inside and outside such bunkers. These were used for cooking either inside or outside the bunker based on the weather.

Mehrgarh is situated on the way to Iran, near the fertile plains of Bolan pass. People here cultivated barley and wheat and raised sheep and goats. Mehrgarh is the first of the villages found from this era. The people here used to live in well built houses, some of which had four or more rooms. Apart from fossils of animals, many graves are also found. It appears that animals were also buried along with humans.

Vedic society

Vedic times had brahmana and kshatriya varnas based on several characteristics and lifestyles. Those were mainly into learning and teaching were brahmanas while the ones who were responsible for the protection and nurturing of society were kshatriyas. The common people were called ‘vishah’. Vaishyas were those who were into trade and commerce; shudras were those who were into physical work at every level. There were sabha and samiti in administrative system to provide guidance. Sabha had several people representatives while samiti had specifically a few experts. The priest, army general and village head and others used to assist in administration. The priest used to be the king’s guru and guide. Army generals used to be involved much into administration and defence affairs. Village heads used to look after the well-being of people in villages which were the basic blocks of administration.

Those were the times when there were tribes by name Bharata, Puru, Anu, Druhyu, Turvasha and Yadu. They used to fight over protection of cattle – the key wealth of those times. These fights were helped by usage of horses. Well cultured, respected people were addressed as Arya. The word arya indicates no tribe but all of Indians. A group of selfish traders called pani used to accumulate wealth unethically and used to fight to protect it too.

Arya-Dravida Division

In the later half of nineteenth century, the British resorted to divide and rule Indians on the basis of caste and religion. Arya-Dravida division was created for the sake of it. Christian Missionaries first proposed and propagated that the word Dravida was indicative of a tribe. The later historians kept amplifying the idea. However, there are no evidences to claim that Arya and Dravida were specific tribes. The theory of Aryans having come to India from outside has been proved false. The architect of Indian Constitution, Dr. B R Ambedkar also has strongly condemned the Aryan migration theory.

EXERCISES

I Answer the below questions in one sentence.

1. How old is Rig-Veda as on today?
2. Which are the sapt-Sindhu rivers?
3. In which year, was Kalibangan region discovered?
4. Which year were the ancient civilization traces found in Harappa?
5. What are the symbols/ pictures found on the seals of Sindhu civilization?
6. Which town was the primary centre for sea trade?
7. List out the tribes of Vedic period.
8. Which site had the system of rain water harvesting?
9. Who has said that Aryan migration theory is wrong?
10. The dimensions of towns of Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization match the mentions of which literary work?

II Answer the below questions in three-four sentences.

11. How were the traces of Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization found?
12. What are the materials/ items found during the archaeological excavation of Sindhu-Sarasvati sites?
13. Explain the construct of baths of this civilization.
14. Which alloys were in use in this civilization? What are their traces?
15. Who created the myth of Arya-Dravida?

III Answer the below questions in seven-eight sentences.

16. How was the township construction done in Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization?
17. Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization seals show the continuity of vaidika tradition. Explain how.
18. How was the social system during the vedic age?
19. How were the farming and trading practices in vedic age?

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