
Historical Context and Linguistic Affiliation

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Abstract

The IVC has been tentatively identified with the toponym Meluhtha known from Sumerian records. It has been compared in particular with the civilizations of Elam (also in the context of the Elamo-Dravidian hypothesis) and with Minoan Crete (because of isolated cultural parallels such as the ubiquitous goddess worship and depictions of bull-leaping). The mature (Harappan) phase of the IVC is contemporary to the Early to Middle Bronze Age in the Ancient Near East, in particular the Old Elamite period, Early Dynastic to Ur III Mesopotamia, Prepalatial Minoan Crete and Old Kingdom to First Intermediate Period Egypt.



After the discovery of the IVC in the 1920s, it was immediately associated with the indigenous Dasyu, inimical to the Rigvedic tribes in numerous hymns of the Rigveda. Mortimer Wheeler interpreted the presence of many unburied corpses found in the top levels of Mohenjo-daro as the victims of a warlike conquest, and famously stated that “India stands accused” of the destruction of the IVC. The association of the IVC with the city-dwelling Dasyus remains alluring because the assumed timeframe of the first Indo-Aryan migration into India corresponds neatly with the period of decline of the IVC seen in the archaeological record. The discovery of the advanced, urban IVC however changed the 19th century view of early Indo-Aryan migration as an “invasion” of an advanced culture at the expense of a “primitive” aboriginal population to a gradual acculturation of nomadic “barbarians” on an advanced urban civilization, comparable to the Germanic migrations after the Fall of Rome, or the Kassite invasion of Babylonia. This move away from simplistic “invasionist”

scenarios parallels similar developments in thinking about language transfer and population movement in general, such as in the case of the migration of the Greeks into Greece (between 2100 and 1800 BCE), or the Indo-Europeanization of Western Europe (between 2200 and 1300 BCE).

It was often suggested that the bearers of the IVC corresponded to proto-Dravidians linguistically, the breakup of proto-Dravidian corresponding to the breakup of the Late Harappan Culture.⁶⁶ Today, the Dravidian language family is concentrated mostly in southern India and northern Sri Lanka, but pockets of it still remain throughout the rest of India and Pakistan (the Brahui language), which lends credence to the theory. Finnish Indologist Asko Parpola concludes that the uniformity of the Indus inscriptions precludes any possibility of widely different languages being used, and that an early form of Dravidian language must have been the language of the Indus people. However, the proto-Dravidian origin theory is far from established, and the Harappan language remains an unknown quantity, and there are a number of hypotheses: Proto-Dravidian, Proto-Munda (or Para-Munda) and a “lost phylum” (perhaps related or ancestral to the Nihali Language) have been proposed as candidates.

The civilization is sometimes referred to as the Indus Ghaggar-Hakra civilization the Indus-Sarasvati civilization by Hindutva groups, which is based on theories of Indigenous Aryans and the Out of India migration of Indo-European. A possible natural reason for the IVC's decline is connected with climate change that is also signaled for the neighboring areas of the Middle East: The Indus valley climate grew significantly

cooler and drier from about 1800 BCE, linked to a general weakening of the monsoon at that time. Alternatively, a crucial factor may have been the disappearance of substantial portions of the Ghaggar Hakra river system. A tectonic event may have diverted the system's sources toward the Ganges Plain, though there is complete uncertainty about the date of this event, as most settlements inside Ghaggar-Hakra river beds have not yet been dated. The actual reason for decline might be any combination of these factors. New geological research is now being conducted by a group led by Peter Clift, from the University of Aberdeen, to investigate how the courses of rivers have changed in this region since 8000 years ago, to test whether climate or river reorganizations are responsible for the decline of the Harappan. A 2004 paper indicated that the isotopes of the Ghaggar-Hakra system do not come from the Himalayan glaciers, and were rain-fed instead, contradicting a Harappan time mightily "Sarasvati river."

In the aftermath of the Indus Civilizations collapse, regional cultures emerged, to varying degrees showing the influence of the Indus Civilization. In the formerly great city of Harappa, burials have been found that correspond to a regional culture called the Cemetery H culture. At the same time, the Ochre Coloured Pottery culture expanded from Rajasthan into the Gangetic Plain. The Cemetery H culture has the earliest evidence for cremation, a practice dominant in Hinduism till today.

While discussing in the context of Indus society, we may have to limit ourselves with 'visual arts'. We cannot

possibly trace the performing arts, as the sources are limited. The art and craft objects of the Indus artists today survive as visual records to enrich our understanding of the lifestyle of those people. The objects such as ornaments, toys, seals, pots, terracotta ritual objects, beads, etc fall under the pure utilitarian category whereas the images made of terracotta, bronze, stone or the artistry expressed on pottery in delineating the lines and colours or engravings on the seals could be categorised as objects of art. There is some archaeological evidence in the form of a few shell objects used in tuning stringed musical instrument at Lothal. The dancing girl of Mohenjo-daro clearly indicates that dance was one of the performing arts of Indus period. A harp depicted on a seal also hint at music as performing art, while the mask is the indication of theatrical arts.

We are not sure that the signatories of the artifacts of that period had created all these objects keeping in mind the distinction between arts and crafts. But it cannot be denied that the 20th century scholarship has clearly demarcated the categories of art and crafts in the context of the art objects as 'fine arts' and utilitarian objects as 'applied arts'. This kind of differentiation has caused more damage than benefit. The craftsmanship had lost its sense of design and grace during the last century. Today we are again minimising the distinction between arts and crafts, which has bridged the temporal; gap between times of Indus and contemporary visualisation.

Often we try to reason out in vain as how such a glorious phase of human development has disappeared.

The Indus (Harappa) Civilization dominated the Indian subcontinent for more than 1300 years from 3000 to 1700 BC. Even now it is a living civilization in the sense that the elements of the civilization such as religion, philosophy, the art of writing and the science of yoga have greatly influenced the thought process and lifestyle of the people of India and the neighbouring countries in South Asia. But certain misconceptions about the end of the Indus Civilization and its contribution to world thought, culture and material progress still prevail. In presenting the latest archaeological and linguistic evidence from recent excavations of Harappan sites the views expressed in the book *Dawn and Devolution of Indus Civilization* removes these misconceptions. It highlights the survival of the Indus Civilization in a less sophisticated form for a few more centuries outside the Indus Valley making substantial contribution to later civilizations. The author puts forth convincing evidence to prove that the decline of Indus Valley cities was not due to the invasion of "barbaric Aryans unsympathetic to civilization" but due to natural calamities such as floods, desiccation and tectonic activity.

A strong Aryan substratum was already present in the Indus Civilization during its early days, and continued to the last, leaving its indelible impression on the fabric of Indian culture. Tired of natural disasters the Harappans migrated to the Sarasvati (Ghaggar), Drishadvati (Chautang), Yamuna and Ganga valleys in the East and to Gujarat and Narmada valleys in the South. There they lived in small villages selling their skill to the local population and transformed the political and cultural scene into what can be identified as the Vedic

culture. It may be noted here that the term 'Aryan' implies here Aryan language and culture and not any ethnic group.

The Indus people were neither conservative nor lived in isolation as stated by some archaeologists and historians. The Harappans had built up a vast network of land and overseas trade with Mesopotamia, Iran and the Arabian countries which resulted in cultural interaction and exchange of ideas as attested to by the evolution of the Semitic script bearing close resemblance to Late Indus cursive alphabetic script. The science of yoga which the world values greatly today is one of the Harappan legacies, the other being Indus metrology. Some missing links about town planning leading to second urbanization in the mid-second millennium BC are brought to light in recent studies.

'Clay culture' is the one that India actively preserves and recreates through millennia from Indus Civilization. Even in an obscure rural setting an artist takes to delight in creating clay objects of daily use and ceremonial need. Artifacts and handicrafts have thus found such a place in the socio-cultural life of India that even the advent of the modern technological era could not amputate its root. The artisans do not work at souvenirs and curios. Rather, the rich heritage of their articles, their fine workmanship, ritualistic backdrop, and high aesthetic qualities contribute much to the in-built cultural pattern of society (Debasish Bandyopadhyay, p. 202). Rural society in India of Sourashtrian, Maharashtra, Rajasthani or Punjab region of today and Indus Civilization then take pleasure in producing toys and dolls made of clay, bamboo or metal for their children' to play. If we observe them closely they bear

striking resemblance to the doll-making and toy-making art of Indus Civilization. This art event today fill the lives of little ones and as specimens they have taken a place of pride in the museums all over the country. One of the best examples that is remarkably known for the popularity of terracotta cart is when the dramatist Sudraka titled his play mricchakatika meaning the terracotta cart.

The oldest remains of Indian crafts that one can see and touch, belongs to the excavated areas. The figurines of remote antiquities cannot be precisely dated. These are identified as the symbol Of fertility expressing vital energy. More sophisticated forms have come and gone. These simple, hand-modelled, pinched to the required size, still hold world attention because of their unique charm and distinctive style. The earthen pots are in vogue in rituals even today in all tribal, folk and eclectic cultures symbolizing the merger of the mortal entity into panchabhutas, the primordial elements-air, water, fire, sky, ether. The kalash, kumbha or ghata originating from the ritualistic pots are the auspicious symbols of Hindu ceremonies of both rural and urban nature (op. cit, Terracottas of the Far south).

Numerous fertility symbols and ritual objects attest to the desire for children but our most direct evidence is from tiny terracotta figurines of infants or young children. These figurines, common at most of the Indus sites, may have been votive offerings to pray for children or o protect from illness. Childbirth, particularly the male baby, must have been considered as very significant as seen even today in the northern parts of India. It is a common sight in the pilgrimage

centres to see the custom of votive offerings in the form of figurines of animals or parts of human body in silver foil or images in miniature of cow, snake or weapons. The miniature figurines of Indus sites may be considered as the rudimentary form of votive offerings of today but the nature of offerings may be different from what we see today. Many female votive figurines of Indus sites carry a suckling infant on the left hip, a characteristic pose among village women throughout Pakistan and India today. When held with the right arm free, a woman can continue her household work while nursing her child. No female figurines have been found showing an infant carried in a sling at the back or side, a position that is common among some communities in the sub-continent (Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, p. 132) .

One of the striking features of a major city is the presence of different types of people with varied professions.; By observing the material culture, extension of trade and the warehouses and dockyard of Indus cities we may frame an opinion that the art and craft activities were not just confined to functional level. They were beyond doubt a part of commercial venture and because of their tangible form they were in demand in all Provincial sites. In a way the uniformity in beliefs, care for animals and children, designing the objects like jewellery and beads were possible because of the exchange of art objects between different provinces.

There is no doubt that the Indus population was cosmopolitan and the religious practices were heterogeneous. It is also true that the art of the Indus Civilization was varied catering to the needs and tastes of different categories of the

cosmopolitan population, which is reflected even in present-day art of India.

The eternal question is that how an advanced civilization of the nature of Indus Valley attained a phase of devolution? Whether the dissolution occurred at the same time in all the cities of Indus Valley. From the time of discovery of the first sites Harappa and Mohenjo-daro the various scholars involved with the findings and study are trying to come out with different interpretations. The early ones were far from convincing but of late the studies made steady progress in connecting the life of people to historical times, by observing certain technology that still hold good in the areas where the Indus cities were situated once. The present approach of extension of Indus Civilization to historical times and connecting to Vedic times have convincing answers to the above question, which are in a veil.

References

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