

ASPECTS OF INDUS CULTURE

Harappan had a conservative outlook and their culture remained almost unchanged for centuries. They always followed the same construction pattern of their cities devastated in floods. Harappans are known for their stability, regularity and conservatism, it could not be ascertained who wielded authority—whether an aristocratic, priestly or commercial minority. However, little bit of regional variation within the Indus Valley Civilization can be traced because of its vast geographical expanse for instance, baked bricks were commonly used for construction at Mohenjodaro and at Harappa because stone is rare there, while limestone was more commonly used at Dholavira.

Agricultural

The Indus people supported themselves by irrigation-based agriculture. They grew rice, wheat and barley, and they may have cultivated dates and cotton as well. They were among the first people in the world who were known to have kept chicken; they also had dogs, buffaloes and humped cattle. They may have also had domesticated pigs, horses, camels and possibly elephants. Mehrgarh is the earliest known farming settlement in south Asia (established circa 7000 BC), the first of several villages to appear among the hills of Baluchistan along the western edge of the Indus plain. Stone sickles found at Mehrgarh provide definite evidence of wheat cultivation. The people cultivated wheat and barley and raised sheep, goats and cattle, all traditions that paved the way to civilization. Soon after, they began making painted pottery, ornaments and terracotta figurines representing both humans and animals. The early agricultural

society that developed wheat cultivation in South Asia had not yet discovered metal tools. Instead, these early farmers used sickles made of small stone blades, inserted diagonally into wooden sticks for harvesting cereals. These composite tools were reusable as the original blades could be replaced with new ones when the old ones were broken. Sickles used for reaping wheat still have traces of silica from ancient wheat stems on their blades, which produce a sheen that is, visible to the naked eye. Stone arrowheads were also used and some of the arrowheads were decorated; with artwork. Asphalt or bitumen was used to help secure these stone tools (blades and arrowheads) to the wooden components of composite tools and weapons.

Political

There was a central government. Weapons of war like axes, spears, daggers, bows and arrows were made of stone. Leadership is said to have been vested with merchants and traders.

Socio-Economic

The Indus Valley Civilization people sowed seeds in the flood plains in November, when the flood water receded and reaped their harvest of wheat and barley in April before the advent of the next flood, rice, barley, milk, dates, fish, eggs and animal flesh formed their staple food. Cotton was first produced by the Indus Valley people. Spun and woven cotton and wool dresses were also used by them. Agriculture, hunting, fishing and rearing of animal/birds was their main source of livelihood.

Social

The people had a highly developed artistic sense, which is reflected in their pottery and paintings on vases. Their pottery was generally wheel-made and was painted red and black. Some of it was also inscribed, polychromed and glazed. More than 2,000 inscribed seals with pictorial scripts have been discovered: these were used as amulets, exchange medium for family symbols. The society, in general, was literate, artistic and was fairly egalitarian in spite of the practice of slave labour.

People made tools and weapons using copper and bronze but not iron. Cotton was woven and dyed for clothing; Wheat, rice and a variety of vegetables and fruits were cultivated. A number of animals, including the humped bull were domesticated.

Religious

They worshipped the Mother Goddess, Pashupatinath, stones, trees and animals. There seems to have been some veneration of horns and pipal leaves throughout Baluchistan and the Indus valley, even centuries before the establishment of the Indus Valley Civilization. At that early stage, the motif of a human head with horns decorated with flowers or pipal leaves appeared for the first time, probably representing the beginning of an ideology involving a priestly figure or a deity. The stone sculpture of the Priest King from the Indus Valley Civilization may have originally had a horned head dress affixed to the back of its head. The people of the Indus Valley Civilization apparently regarded buffalo horns and pipal trees as sacred. Depictions of men wearing horned head dresses decorated with pipal leaves of some seals and tablets may have represented religious as well as secular leaders. Perhaps,

these men wore the unique ornaments made of gold and semi-precious stones found at Indus sites. Of these ornaments, carnelian beads with bleached (etched) white designs treated with alkaline solution were an Indus speciality, exported as far as the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia.

Town Planning

Archaeologists have long commented on the uniformity and standardization of the material remains of the Indus Valley Civilization, Except in the outposts along the Makran coast and in its most remote colonies, Indus cities were built of baked-brick blocks with standard proportions of length to width to thickness of 4:2:1. Great buildings, double-storied dwellings and a drainage system were in existence. There were planned cities and roads. Mortar and baked bricks were used for the construction of dwellings. The major cities contained a few large buildings, including a citadel, a large bath—perhaps for personal and communal ablution—differentiated living quarters, flat-roofed brick houses and forti- like administrative or religious centres enclosing meeting halls and granaries. Ritual bathing may have been carried out at the Great Bath as part of rituals for such concerns as a plentiful harvest and peace in society. Crops may have been brought for storage in the granary and later distributed to craftsmen such as potters, jewellers and merchants who resided in the city. Mohenjodaro, one of the largest cities of the Indus Valley Civilization, covers an area of approximately 12 km. Mohenjodaro and some other Indus cities consist of two sectors, a western Citadel and an eastern Lower City. Size and layout are typical criteria for differentiating cities from villages.

The 'Lower Town' was divided into a number of blocks by a grid of straight streets running north-south and east-west, and each block was further divided by small lanes. Some houses had rooms with wells, bathing rooms (paved with baked bricks) and even toilets. Waste water was drained out of the houses through drain chutes built into the side walls that fed into a system of drains built alongside the lanes and streets.

Animals in Daily Life

Cattle, water buffalo, sheep, dogs, elephants, rhinoceroses, monkeys, birds and many other animals are represented in the figurines of the Indus Valley Civilization. Some of the animals depicted in figurines are familiar to us today, but others are no longer common or may have been mythical creatures, caricatures or representations of humorous characters in stories, significance of these animals and the affection of people towards some of them are clear, despite their relative simple features.

Pottery

Pottery forms and designs were also remarkably similar throughout the vast area encompassed by the Indus Valley Civilization. Few large works of art or pieces of statuary have been discovered from Mohenjodaro and Harappa.

Tools and Ornamental Objects

Copper and bronze implements included farming implements and tools, fish hooks, weapons, ornaments and vessels. These metal implements may have served as status symbols. They were manufactured in two ways: (i) by casting (pouring molten metal into moulds) and

(ii) by heating and hammering the metal into shape. Spears, knives and other objects of copper and bronze have been found, but most are of rather poor quality. Ornaments of silver, gold, ivory, copper and precious stones were used. They carried on considerable amount of trade in stones, metals, shell, etc. within their cultural zone. They were goods traders and might have carried on all exchanges through barter. They knew the use of wheels and solid wooden wheels were fixed on bullock carts and boats, used as means of road and river transportation.

Sculptures and Carvings

The most developed craft appears to have been the carving and drilling of square stamp seals that depict various domestic animals such as humped bulls, rhinoceroses and elephants. These seals numbering in the thousands are the major source of the pictographic Indus script. Attempts to decipher these symbols have so far been unsuccessful largely because no major inscriptions have been discovered. This lack of evidence has forced some scholars to conclude that the characters do not represent writing in the same sense as Sumerian cuneiform or Egyptian hieroglyphics; instead, they may symbolise elaborate heraldic devices or standards that served to identify families and their properties from others.

Three seals from Mohenjodaro show a seated horned deity surrounded by wild animals, an image that may foreshadow the portrayal of the Hindu God Shiva in his aspect of Pashupati, the Lord of Beasts. The apparent cult of the bull and the emphasis on washing and ablutions, suggested by these material remains, raise the

fascinating if unanswerable question of the influence of this early pre-Aryan civilization on Hindu practices in ancient India. A round seal, found at the Harappan mound of Rangpur, has perforations that run through its sides to make a ring. It measures 35 mm diameter, is approximately 4 mm thick, and bears engraved motifs on both sides. It was probably worn around the neck. It is believed that the people of Rangpur had trade relations with Egypt between 2000 and 1500 BC and such seals came from Egypt. The illustration on the seal, of the figure of a unicorn, shows delicate intaglio carving. When stamped in wet clay, the seal creates a raised image of itself in the clay. The limestone torso of a god is believed to represent a friendly god. The rhythmic repetition of the curving lines of the torso shows a love for linear rhythm, Indus sculptors also stressed on harmonised forms, as shown in the way the torso is unified by its softly swelling curves. The sculptor has carefully rounded these curves, particularly the abdomen. This emphasis on harmonised forms appeared later as a dominant characteristic of the Indian sculpture. The well-known bronze statuette of a girl may represent a dancer who has paused between movements. The dynamic quality of this sleek figure is partly because of the rhythmic, angular thrust of her arms, legs and torso. The sculptor has also indicated movement by contrasting the linear rhythms of the torso and legs against the triangular right arm and the forward left leg. A similar linearity and dynamism is characterised much later in the Indian sculpture.

Terracotta Objects

Triangular terracotta cakes were common at most Indus sites. Earlier, some

scholars proposed that they were used as toilet paper. However, as many of them have been found inside kilns and hearths, it is more likely that they were used for retaining heat during pottery firing and/or cooking. A few triangular cakes are incised with human figures, which have led some scholars to interpret them as objects used in fire rituals. Terracotta cakes were either triangular or round/oval and sometimes had a finger impression in the centre. The model of a terracotta plough, in almost perfect condition, was recovered from the site of Banawali. It is S-shaped with a sharp edge near the point and a hole at the end of the central component to fasten it to a yoke. The shape of the plough is exactly like those used even now in South Asian villages. The terracotta model of a house and some other terracotta objects with carved designs have provided rare examples of architectural features such as windows or doorways, and perhaps even the general structure of houses of the Indus Valley Civilization. Thresholds and window frames were probably made of wood and then set into baked brick walls. Windows may have been covered with cloth curtains or carved screens. The house depicted in the model may have originally had two storeys because part of an upper threshold is preserved.

Transport Vehicles

Bullock or ox carts with a curved frame probably had wooden components for attaching wheels and for protecting and containing the load. People may have even used these carts to peddle pottery or other goods. The coloured patterns on some of the wheels may indicate that the wheels were made from joined wooden planks, like some carts still found in parts of

Pakistan. Other designs painted on wheels may have represented spokes. Terracotta models of yokes that would have been used to hitch animals to these carts (or to ploughs) have also been found at Nausharo. Most figurines were hand-made, but in a few cases where intricate detail was desired, moulds were used.

Trade

Trade supplied the Indus valley people with essential foods and with basic raw materials such as timber, raw cotton dyes, metal and glass. Archaeologists have also found a large quantity of well-made pottery, replicas of bullock carts, status showing the human face, bronze objects (including a beautiful female statuette) and glass. These findings prove that the people of Harappa practised industrial crafts such as ceramics, sculpture, metalwork glass making. There is a strong similarity between the Indus Valley Civilization and the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia in the Middle East. Scholars believe that sea trade may have existed between north-western India and the Persian Gulf.

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