

## GIST OF N.C.E.R.T THE HARAPPAN CULTURE: BRONZE AGE CIVILIZATION

THE INDUS or the Harappan culture is older than the chalcolithic cultures which have been treated earlier, but it is far more developed than these cultures. It arose in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. It is called Harappan because this civilization was discovered first in 1921 at the modern site of Harappa situated in the province of West Punjab in Pakistan. It extended from Jammu in the north to the Naramada estuary in the south, and from the Makran coast of Baluchistan in the west to Meerut in the north-east. The area formed a triangle and accounted for about 1,299,600 square kilometers.

Nearly 1500 Harappan sites are known so far in the subcontinent. Of these, the two most important cities were Harappa in Punjab and Mohenjo-daro (literally the mound of the dead) in Sindh, both forming parts of Pakistan. Situated at a distance of 483 kilometres they were linked together by the Indus. A third city lay at Chandu daro about 130 km south of Mohenjo-daro in Sindh, and a fourth at Lothal in Gujarat at the head of the Gulf of Cambay. A fifth city lay at Kalibangan, which means black bangles, in northern Rajasthan. A sixth called Banawali is situated in Hissar district in Haryana. It saw two cultural phases, pre-Harappan and Harappan, similar to that of Kalibangan. The Harappan culture is noticeable in its mature and flourishing stage at all these six places. It is also found in its mature phase in the coastal cities of Sutkagendor and Surkotada, each one of which is marked by a citadel. The later Harappan phase is found in Rangpur and Rojdi in the Kathiawar peninsula in Gujarat. In addition to these, Dholavira lying in the Kutch area of Gujarat shows Harappan fortification and all the three phases of the Harappan culture. These phases also appear in Rakhigarhi which is situated on the Ghaggar in Haryana and is much bigger than Dholavira.

### Town Planning and Structures

The Harappan culture was distinguished by its system of town planning. Harappa and Mohenjo-daro each had its own citadel in each city lay a

lower town containing brick houses, which were inhabited by the common people. The remarkable thing about the arrangement of the houses in the cities is that they followed the grid system. According to it, roads cut across one another almost at right angles, and the city was divided into so many blocks. This is true of almost all Indus settlements.

The most important public place of Mohenjo-daro seems to be the Great Bath, comprising the tank which is situated in the citadel mound. It is an example of beautiful brickwork. It measures 11.88 × 7.01 metres and 2.43 metres deep. Flights of steps at either end lead to the surface. There are side rooms for changing clothes. The floor of the Bath was made of burnt bricks. It is suggested that the Great Bath served ritual bathing, which has been so vital to any religious ceremony in India.

In Mohenjo-daro the largest building is a granary, which is 45.71 metres long and 15.23 metres wide. But in the citadel of Harappa we find as many as six granaries. We come across a series of brick platforms which formed the basis for two rows of six granaries. Each granary measured 15.23 × 6.03 metres and lay within a few metres of the river bank. The combined floor space of the twelve units would be about 838 square metres. Approximately it had the same area as the Great Granary at Mohenjo-daro. Harappa also shows two-roomed barracks, which possibly accommodated labourers.

At Kalibangan also we notice in the southern part brick platforms, which may have been used for granaries. Thus, it would appear that granaries constituted an important part of the Harappan cities.

The use of burnt bricks in the Harappan cities is remarkable, because in the contemporary buildings of Egypt mainly dried bricks were used. We find the use of baked bricks in contemporary Mesopotamia, but they were used to a much larger extent in the Harappan cities.

The drainage system of Mohenjo-daro was very impressive. In almost all cities every big or small

house had its own courtyard and bathroom. In Kalibangan many houses had their wells. Water flowed from the house to the streets which had drains. Sometimes these drains were covered with bricks and sometimes with stone slabs. The street drains were equipped with manholes. Perhaps no other Bronze Age civilization gave so much attention to health and cleanliness as the Harappan did.

#### Agriculture

The Indus people produced wheat, barley, rai, peas, etc. They produced two types of wheat and barley. A good quantity of barley has been discovered at Banawali. In addition to this they produced sesamum and mustard. As 1800 B.C., the people of Lothal used rice whose remains have been found. Foodgrains were stored in huge granaries in both Mohenjo-daro and Harappa and possibly in Kalibangan. Probably, cereals were received as taxes from peasants and stored in granaries for the payment of wages as well as for use during emergencies. This can be said on the analogy of Mesopotamian cities where wages were paid in barley. The Indus people were the earliest people to produce cotton. Because cotton was first produced in this area the Greeks called it *sisindon*, which is derived from Sindh.

#### Domestication of Animals

Although the Harappans practised agriculture, animals were kept on a large scale. Oxen, buffaloes, goats, sheep and pigs were domesticated. The humped bulls were favoured by the Harappans. From the very beginning dogs were regarded as pets. Cats were also domesticated, and signs of the feet of both dogs and cats have been noticed. They also kept asses and camels, which were obviously used as beasts of burden. Evidence of the horse comes from a superficial level of Mohenjo-daro and from a doubtful terracotta figurine from Lothal. The remains of the horse are reported from Sutkotada, situated in west Gujarat, and belong to around B.C. but it is doubtful. In any case the Harappan culture was not horse-centred. Neither the bones of horse nor its representations appear in early and mature Harappan culture. Elephants were well known to the Harappans, who were also acquainted with the rhinoceros.

#### Technology and Crafts

The Harappan culture belongs to the Bronze Age. The people of Harappa used many tools and implements of stone, but they were well acquainted

with the manufacture and use of bronze. Ordinarily bronze was made by the smiths by mixing tin with copper mines of Rajasthan, although it could also be brought from Baluchistan. Tin was possibly brought with difficulty from Afghanistan. The bronze tools and weapons recovered from the Harappan sites; contain a smaller percentage of tin. However, the kit of bronze goods left by the Harappans is considerable, which suggests that the bronzesmiths constituted an important group of artisans in the Harappan society. They produced not only images and utensils but also various tools and weapons such as axes, saws, knives and spears. Several other important crafts flourished in the Harappan towns. A piece of woven cotton has been recovered from Mohenjo-daro, and textile impressions found on several objects. Spindle whorls were used for spinning. Weavers wove cloth of wool and cotton. Huge brick structures suggest that brick-laying was an important craft. They also attest the existence of a class of masons. The Harappans also practised boat-making. The goldsmiths made jewellery of silver, gold and precious stones; the first two may have been obtained from Afghanistan and the last from south India. The Harappans were also experts in bead-making. The potter's wheel was in full use, and the Harappans produced their own characteristic pottery, which was made glossy and shining.

#### Trade

Trade was important in the life of the Indus people. The Harappans carried on considerable trade in stone, metal, shell, etc, within the Indus culture zone. However, their cities did not possess the necessary raw material for the commodities they produced. They did not use metal money. Most probably they carried on all exchanges through barter. In return for finished goods and possibly foodgrains, they procured metals from the neighbouring area by boats and bullock-carts. They practised navigation of the coast of the Arabian Sea. They knew the use of wheel, and carts with solid wheels were in use in Harappa.

The Harappan had commercial links with one area of Rajasthan, and also with Afghanistan and Iran. They had set up a trading colony in northern Afghanistan which evidently facilitated trade with Central Asia. Their cities also carried commerce with those in the land of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Many Harappan seals have been discovered in Mesopotamia, and it seems that the Harappans imitated some cosmetics used by the urban people of Mesopotamia.

The Mesopotamia records from about 2350 B.C. onwards refer to trade relations with Meluha, which was the ancient name given to the Indus region. The Mesopotamian texts speak of two intermediate trading stations called Dilmun and Makan, which lay between Mesopotamia and Meluha. Dilmun can probably be identified with Bahrain on the Persian Gulf.

### Political Organization

We have no clear idea about the political organization of the Harappans. But if we take into account the cultural homogeneity of the Indus civilization it can be said that this cultural homogeneity would not have been possible to achieve without a central authority.

If the Harappan cultural zone is considered identical with the political zone, the subcontinent did not witness such a large political unit until the rise of the Maurya empire; the remarkable stability of this unit is demonstrated by its continuity for nearly 600 years.

### Religions Practices

In Harappa numerous terracotta figurines of women have been found. Probably the image represents the goddess of earth. The Harappans, looked upon the earth as a fertility goddess and worshipped her.

### The Male Deity in the Indus Valley

The male deity is represented on a seal. This god has three horned heads. He is represented in the sitting posture of a yogi, placing one foot on the other. This god is surrounded by an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros, and has a buffalo below his throne. At his feet appear two deer. The depicted god is identified as Pushupati Mahadeva.

### The Harappan Script

The Harappan invented the art of writing like the people of ancient Mesopotamia. Although the earliest specimen of Harappan script was noticed in 1853 and the complete script discovered by 1923, it has not been deciphered so far.

There are nearly 4,000 specimens of Harappan writing on stone seals and other objects. Unlike the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, the Harappans did not write long inscriptions. Most inscriptions were recorded on seals, and contain only a few words. Altogether we have about 250 to 400 pictographs, and in the form of a picture each letter stands for some sound, idea or object. The Harappan script is not alphabetical but mainly pictographic.

### Weights and Measures

Numerous articles used for weights have been found. They show that in weighing mostly 16 or its multiples were used; for instance, 16, 64, 160, 320 and 640. Interestingly the tradition of 16 has continued in India till modern times and till recently 16 annas made one rupee. The Harappans also knew the art of measurement. We have come across sticks inscribed with measure marks; one of these is made of bronze.

### Harappan Pottery

The Harappans were great experts in the use of the potter's wheel. We come across numerous pots painted in various designs. Harappan pots were generally decorated with the designs of trees and circles. The images of men also appear on some pottery fragments.

**Seals:** The greatest artistic creations of the Harappan culture are the seals. About 2000 seals have been found, and of these a great majority carry short inscriptions with pictures of the one-horned bull, the buffalo, the tiger, the rhinoceros, the goat and the elephant.

**Images:** The Harappan artisans made beautiful images of metal. A woman dancer made of bronze is the best specimen. Except for a necklace she is naked. We get a few pieces of Harappan stone sculptures. One steatite statue wears an ornamented robe over the left shoulder under the right arm, and its short locks at the back of the head are kept tidy by a woven fillet.

### Origin, Maturity and End

The mature Harappan culture, broadly speaking, existed between 2550 B.C. and 1900 B.C. Throughout the period of its existence it seems to have retained the same kind of tools, weapons and houses. The whole style of life appears to be uniform. We notice the same town-planning, the same seals, the same terracotta works, and the same long chert blades. But the view stressing changelessness cannot be pushed too far. We do notice changelessness cannot be pushed too far. We do notice changes in the pottery of Mohenjodaro over a period of time. By the nineteenth century B.C., the two important cities of the Harappan culture, Harappa and Mohenjodaro, disappeared but the Harappan culture at other sites faded out gradually and continued in its degenerate phase in the outlying fringes in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh.

While the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia continued to exist even after 1900 B.C., the urban Harappan culture disappeared at about that time. Various causes have been suggested. It is held that the amount of rainfall in the Indus region slightly increased around 3000 B.C. and then decreased in the earlier part of the second millennium B.C. This may have adversely affected agriculture and stockbreeding. Some ascribe the decline to the decreasing fertility on account of the increasing salinity of the soil caused by the expansion of the neighbouring desert. Others attribute it to a sudden subsidence or uplift of the land which caused floods. Earthquakes caused changes in the course of the Indus which led to the inundation of the hinterland of Mohenjo-daro. And still others point out that the Harappan culture was destroyed by the Aryans, but there is very little evidence for this.

The consequences of the disintegration of the largest Bronze Age cultural entity are still to be clarified. We do not know whether the urban eclipse led to the migration of merchants and craftsmen, and the dissemination of the elements of Harappan technology and way of life in the countryside. Something is known about the post-urban situation in Sindh, Punjab and Haryana. We find agricultural settlements inside the Indus region, but their connection with the preceding culture is not clear. We need clear and adequate information.

#### ADVENT OF THE ARYANS AND THE AGE OF THE RIG VEDA

##### Original Home and Identity

It is difficult to say that all the earliest Aryans belonged to one race, but their culture was more or less of the same type. They were distinguished by their common language. They spoke the Indo-European languages, which are current in changed forms all over Europe, Iran and the greater part of the Indian subcontinent. Originally the Aryans seem to have lived somewhere in the steppes stretching from southern Russia to Central Asia. Their earliest life seems to have been mainly pastoral, agriculture being a secondary occupation. Although the Aryans used several animals, the horse played the most significant role in their life. Its swiftness enabled them and some allied people to make successful incursions on West Asia from about 2000 B.C. onwards.

On their way to India the Aryans first appeared in Central Asia and Iran, where the Indo-Iranians

lived for a long time. We know about the Aryans in India from the Rig Veda. The term Arya occurs 36 times in this text, and generally indicates a cultural community. The Rig Veda is the earliest text of the Indo-European languages. It is a collection of prayers offered to Agni, Indra, Mitra, Varun and other gods by various families of poets or sages. It consists of ten mandalas or books, of which Books II to VII form its earliest portions. Books I and X seem to have been the latest additions. The Rig Veda has many things in common with the Avesta, which is the holiest text in the Iranian language. The two texts use the same names for several gods and even for social classes. But the earliest specimen of the Indo-European language is found in an inscription of about 2200 B.C. from Iraq. Later such specimens occur in Hittite inscriptions in Anatolia (Turkey) from the nineteenth to the seventeenth centuries B.C. Aryan names appear in Kassite inscriptions of about 1600 B.C. from Iraq and in Mitanni inscriptions of the fourteenth century B.C. from the Aryans appeared in India. The earliest Aryans lived in the geographical area covered by eastern Afghanistan, North-West Frontier Province, Punjab and fringes of western Uttar Pradesh. Some rivers of Afghanistan such as the river Kubha, and the river Indus and its five branches, are mentioned in the Rig Veda. The Sindhu, identical with the Indus, is the river par excellence of the Aryans, and it is repeatedly mentioned. Another river, the Saraswati, is called naditama or the best of the rivers in the Rig Veda. The whole region in which the Aryans first settled in Indian subcontinent is called the Land of the Seven Rivers.

##### Tribal Conflicts

We hear of many defeats inflicted by Indra on the enemies of the Aryans. In the Rig Veda Indra is called Purandara which means that he was the breaker of forts. The Aryans succeeded everywhere because they possessed chariots driven by horses, and introduced them for the first time into West Asia and India. The Aryan soldiers were probably equipped also with coats of mail (vaiman) and better arms.

According to tradition, the Aryans were divided into five tribes panchajana but there might have been other tribes also. The Bharatas and the Tritsu were the ruling Aryan clans, and they were supported by priest Vasistha. The country Bharatavarsha was eventually named after the tribe Bharata, which appears first in the Rig Veda. The Bharata

ruling clan was opposed by a host of ten chiefs, five of whom were heads of Aryan tribes and the remaining five of non-Aryan people. The battle that was fought between the Bharatas on the one hand, and the host of ten chiefs on the other is known as the Battle of Ten Kings. This battle was fought on the river Parushni, identical with the river Ravi and it gave victory to Sudas and established the supremacy of the Bharatas. Of the defeated tribes, the most Important was that of the Purus. Subsequently the Bharatas joined hands with the Purus and formed a new ruling tribe called the Kurus. The Kurus combined with the Panchalas, and they together established their rule in the upper Gangetic basin where they played an important part in later Vedic times.

### Material Life

The Rig Vedic people possessed better knowledge of agriculture. Ploughshare is mentioned in the earliest part of the Rig Veda though some consider it an interpolation. Possibly this ploughshare was made of wood. They were acquainted with sowing, harvesting and threshing, and knew about the different seasons.

In spite of all this there are so many references to the cow and the bull in the Rig Veda that the Rig Vedic Aryans can be called predominantly a pastoral people. Most of their wars were fought for the sake of cows. The terms for war in the Rig Veda is gavishthi or search for cows. The cow seems to have been the most important form, of wealth.

The Rig Veda, mentions such artisans as the carpenter, the chariot-maker, the weaver, the leather worker, the potter, etc. This indicates that they practised all these crafts. The term ayas used for copper or bronze show that metal-working was known. But we have no clear evidence of the existence of regular trade. The Aryans or the Vedic people were acquainted more with land routes because the word samudra mentioned in the Rig Veda mainly denotes a collection of water. We may, therefore, this of a pre-iron phase of the PGW which coincided with the Rig Vedic phase.

### Tribal Polity

The administrative machinery of the Aryans in the Rig period worked with the tribal chief in the centre, because of his successful leadership in war. He was called rajan. It seems that in the Rig Vedic period the king's post had become hereditary. We have traces of election of the king by the tribal

assembly called the samiti. The king was called the protector of his tribe.

Several tribal or the clan-based assemblies such as the sabha, samiti, vidatha, gana are mentioned in the Rig Veda. They exercised deliberative, military and religious functions. Even women attended the sabha and vidatha in Rig Vedic times. But the two most important assemblies were the sabha and the samiti. These two were so important that the chiefs or the kings showed eagerness to win their-support.

In the day-to-day administration, the king was assisted by a few functionaries. The most important functionary seems to have been the purohita. The two priests who played a major part in the time of Rig Veda are Vasishtha and Vishvamitra. Vishvamitra composed the gayatri mantra to widen the Aryan world. The next important functionary seems to be the senani, who used spears, axes, swords, etc. We do not come across any officer concerned with the collection of taxes. Probably the chiefs received from the people voluntary offerings called bnali. Presents and spoils of war were perhaps distributed in some Vedic assemblies. The Rig Veda does not mention any officer for administering justice. Spies were employed to keep an eye on such unsocial activities.

The officer who enjoyed authority over a large land or pasture ground is called Vrajapati. He led heads of the families called kulapas, or the heads of the fighting hordes called gramanis, to battle. In the beginning, the gramani was just the head of a small tribal fighting unit. But when the unit settled, the gramani became the head of the village, and in course of time he became identical with the Vrajapati.

The king did not maintain any regular or standing army, but in times of war he mustered a militia whose military functions were performed by different tribal groups called vrata, gana, grama, sardlia. By and large it was a tribal system of government in which the military element was strong.

### Tribe and Family

Kinship was the basis of social structure, and a man was identified by the clan to which he belonged. People gave their primary loyalty to the tribe, which was called jana. The term jana occurs at about 275 places in the Rig Veda, and the term janapada or territory is not used even once. The

people were attached to the tribe, since the territory or the kingdom, was not yet established.

Another important term which stands for the tribe in the Rig Veda is vis; it is mentioned 170 times in that text. Probably the vis was divided into grama or smaller tribal units meant for fighting. When the gramas clashed with one another it caused samgrama or was. The most numerous varna of varishya arose out of the vis or the mass of the tribal people.

The term for family (kula) is mentioned rarely in the Rig Veda. It comprised not only mother, father, sons, slaves, etc., but many more people also. It seems that family in early Vedic phase was indicated by the term griha, which frequently occurs in this text. In the earliest Indo-European languages one word is used for nephew, grandson, cousin, etc. It seems that several generations of the family lived under the same roof. Because it was a patriarchal society, the birth of a son was desired again and again, and especially people prayed to the gods for brave sons to fight the wars. In the Rig Veda no desire is expressed for daughters, though the desire for children and cattle is a recurrent theme in the hymns.

Women could attend assemblies. They could offer sacrifices along with their husbands. We have an instance of five women who composed hymns although the later texts mention 20 such women.

We also notice the practice of levirate and widow remarriage in the Rig Veda. There are no examples of child-marriage, and the marriageable age in the Rig Veda seems to have been 16 to 17

### Social Divisions

The Rig Veda mentions arya varna and dasa varna. The tribal chiefs and the priests acquired a larger share of the booty, and they naturally grew at the cost of their kinsmen, which created social inequalities in the tribe. Gradually the tribal society was divided into three groups - warriors, priests and the people - on the same pattern as in Iran. The fourth division called the sudras appeared towards the end of the Rig Vedic period, because it is mentioned for the first time in the tenth Book of the Rig Veda, which is the latest addition.

In the age of the Rig Veda differentiation based on occupations had started. But this division was not very sharp. We hear of a family in which a member says: "I am a poet, my father is a physician, and

my mother is a grinder. Earning livelihood through different means we live together..." We hear of gifts of cattle, chariots, horses, slaves, etc. Unequal distribution of the spoils of war created social inequalities, and this helped the rise of princes and priests at the cost of the common tribal people. But since economy was mainly pastoral and not food-producing, the scope for collecting regular tributes from the people was very limited. We do not find gifts of land and even those of cereals are rare. We find domestic slaves but not the wage-earners. Tribal elements in society were stronger and social divisions based on collection of taxes or accumulation of landed property were absent. The society was still tribal and largely egalitarian.

### Rig Vedic Gods

The most important divinity in the Rig Veda is Indra, who is called Purandara or breaker of forts. Indra played the role of a warlord, leading the Aryan soldiers to victory against the demons. Two hundred and fifty hymns are devoted to him. He is considered to be the rain god and thought to be responsible for causing rainfall. The second position is held by Agni (fire god) to whom 200 hymns are devoted. Fire played a significant part in the life of primitive people because of its use in burning forests, cooking, etc. The cult of fire occupied a central place not only in India but also in Iran. In Vedic times Agni acted as a king of intermediary between the gods on the one hand, and the people on the other. The third important position is occupied by Varuna who personified water. Varuna was supposed to uphold the natural order, and whatever happened in the world was thought to be the reflection of his desires. Soma was considered to be the god of plants, and intoxicating drink is named after him. The maruts personify the storm. Thus we have a large number of gods, who represent the different forces of nature in one form or another, but are also assigned human activities.

We also find some female divinities such as Aditi, and Ushas who represented the appearance of the dawn. But they were not prominent in the time of the Rig Veda; in the set-up of the period the male gods were far more important than the female.

The dominant mode of worshipping the gods was through the recitation of prayers and offering of sacrifices. Prayers played an important part in Rig Vedic times. Both collective and individual prayers were made.

Originally every tribe or clan was the votary of a special god. It seems that prayers were offered to gods in chorus by the members of a whole tribe. This also happened in the case of sacrifices. Agni and Indra were invited to partake of sacrifices made by the whole tribe (jana). Offerings of vegetables, barley, etc. were made to gods. But in Rig Vedic times the process was not accompanied by any ritual or sacrificial formulae. They asked mainly for praja (children), pashu (cattle), food, wealth, health, etc.