UNIT 3 : EARLY INDIAN CIVILIZATIONS

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the city life and town planning of the Harappan Civilization,
- explain the socio-economic and religious life of the people of Harappa,
- discuss the causes for the decay of the Harappan Civilization,
- elaborate the key features like society, economy, polity and religion of the Vedic Civilization,
- distinguish between the Vedic and Later Vedic Civilization.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Do you have any idea how did civilization emerge in ancient times? It is now a common knowledge that the early men were savages and they led a nomadic life moving from one place to the other from time to time. As the time rolled on, these early people took to agriculture and began to live a settled life. Thus, there grew society where people started orderly lifestyles. The gradual progress in various fields of life gave birth to civilizations. Most of the earliest civilizations of the world were river valley civilizations i.e. these civilizations grew on the river valleys. It was due to the fact that rivers provided the primitive men with water for drinking and for irrigation purposes and mud for building their huts. Rivers also served as a means of communication. Now, let us recollect the names of a few ancient civilizations of the world such as Egyptian Civilization, Babylonian Civilization, Mesopotamian Civilization, etc. It is interesting to note that Harappan Civilization which is the earliest civilization of India is also a contemporary civilization of these ancient civilizations of the world. Thus our country significantly contributed to the most ancient phase of human history. Harappan Civilization was followed by the Vedic Civilization of the Aryans and after much addition and deletion it continues to exist till date. This unit deals with different characteristics of both Harappan and Vedic Civilization in brief.

3.3 HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

We have discussed earlier that Harappan Civilization was the oldest civilization of our country. However, prior to the archeological discoveries in Harappa and Mohenjodaro it was believed that Indian civilization was started by the Vedic Aryans. In 1922-23, three archaeologists namely **Rakhaldas Bannerjee, Daya Ram Sahni** and **Sir John Marshall** discovered through excavations, the ruins of an ancient civilization in the cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Harappa is situated in the Motegomery district of Punjab and Mohenjodaro in the Larkana district of Sindh-both now in Pakistan. Most of the excavated cities are located on the bank of the river Indus. So it is also known as the Indus Valley Civilization. Some scholars named it as Harappan Civilization.



Harappan Civilization- Indus Valley Civilization was first discovered in Harappa. So this civilization is also known as Harappa Civilization.

We have no written sources about the Indus Valley Civilization. The scholars failed to identify the pictorial language written on the Indus seals found in different sites. As a result our knowledge on the Harappan people and their lifestyle is largely vague and general. Our knowledge regarding this civilization is primarily based on the careful examination of different items found during the excavation in Harappa, Mohenjodaro and many other sites. However these lifeless objects tell us a lot about the people who were the founder of such a high-class civilization.

Figure - 3.1



Mohenjodaro, Larkana District, Sindh, Pakistan

Source : Google image

3.3.1 The City

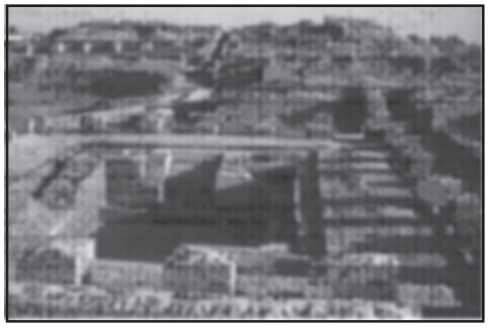
The interesting remains of the cities of Indus Valley indicate that this was an urban civilization. In other words this civilization flourished around cities. The ruins show remarkable town planning and excellent drainage system. Let us now explore a few amazing features of these outstanding cities.

The dwelling houses were many in number and varied in size. These were made of well burnt bricks. Almost every house had a well, drain and bathroom. The streets of the cities were strait. Provision for street lights was also an important feature of the Indus city life. All such amenities of Harappan cities definitely remind us of any present day town with modern town planning.

The biggest architectural structure found among the ruins was the great bath of Mohenjodaro. It was actually a public bath with

180 feet length and 108 feet in breadth. The main bathing pool was 39 feet by 23 feet with 8 feet depth. Galleries and rooms surrounded the bathing pool in all sides. You will be amazed to hear that like a modern swimming pool there was provision to fill and empty the water of the bathing pool.

Figure - 3.2



Great bath of Mahenjadaro

Source : Google image

3.3.2 The Society and the People

After the discussion on flourishing Indus cities, let us now have some idea on the people who lived in these remarkably well planned cities.

The excavations of Indus Valley show that there were probably four classes of people in the society **i.e. the learned class, the warriors, the traders and artisans and the working class.** The learned class included the priests, the astrologers, the physicians etc. The ruins of ancient forts and palaces indicate the existence of a ruling or warrior class whose primary duty was to protect the land and people. The merchants and various artisans such as goldsmith, weaver, carpenter, mason etc. formed the third section of society. The lowest class was constituted by the manual labourers, daily wage earners, domestic servants etc.

The people of Indus Valley took vegetarian and non- vegetarian food. Their diet list included wheat, barley, rice, milk, mutton, pork, beef etc. besides many a number of fruits.

Cotton as well as woolen clothes were used by the people. Discovery of spindles points to the existence of weavers. Both men and women wore ornaments. These ornaments were made of different materials like gold, silver, bronze ivory etc. The Harappan Gallery of the National Museum, New Delhi has a large collection of ornaments and various cosmetic items of the period.

In addition to the clothes and ornaments, a number of other household articles like furniture, utensils, toys etc. have been found in different sites of Indus Valley. Most of the kitchen utensils were made of earth and stones. You can see the vase and pots used by the people of Harappa in the picture shown below. All objects were beautifully polished and decorated.

Figure - 3.3



Vase and Pots of Harappa

Source : Google image

Play and amusement was probably a significant part of the life of the Harappan people. Gambling was a favorite pastime. Hunting was also very popular among those people. Children played with clay toys.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the fallowing questions:

Q 1: what is the another name of Harappan civilization?

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Q 2: In which Harappan city the great bath was discovered?

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Q 3: Fill up the gap:

(a) There were ..... classes of people in the Harappan society.

(b) Discovery of ..... indicates the existence of weavers.

3.3.3 Economy

The growth of the cities and their large population testify the sound economic condition of the people of the Indus Valley. Various factors such as agriculture, trade and commerce, communication etc. largely contributed to such economic growth.

Agriculture was one of the most important occupations of the Harappan people. River Indus and its tributaries made the valley fertile for agriculture and thereby contributed greatly for the large productions. The chief agricultural products were wheat, barley, rice, cotton, various kinds of vegetables. The Harappan people domesticated animals mainly for the purpose of food. They tamed cow, sheep, pig, camel, bullock, buffalo, ass, elephants etc.

Trade and commerce was a vital part of the economic life of the Harappan Civilization. There are evidences to prove that the Indus people traded not only with the other parts of India but also with many parts of western and northern Asia, Egypt, Babylon, etc. Some objects of Harappan origin have been found in Sumeria, This certainly confirms the trade relation of Indus Valley with that civilization. Clothes were the main items of export of Indus Valley and in return gold, silver, copper and precious stones were imported from contemporary outer world.

Figure - 3.4



Harappan seal

Source : Google image

A developed and safe communication was the first condition for a sound commerce. The Harappan people performed their foreign trades through the river and sea routes. The figures of boats and ship on Harappan seals confirm this view. Lothal and Mohenjodaro were probably two important ports of Indus Valley. Inter city trade was conducted through local rivers.

3.3.4 Religion

The archaeological remains of Harappa and Mohenjodaro indicate a lot about the religious life of these people. Interestingly no temples have been discovered in the excavated sites. Still the discovery of a large number of seals and terracotta figurines points to the fact that the Indus People were idol worshippers. People probably believed in a female energy as the source of creation. This female energy was worshipped as the mother goddess, the nature goddess or the divine mother. Lots of figures of this goddess found throughout Indus valley indicate that the mother goddess worship was a significant part of Indus religion. Besides the mother goddess, a male god was also worshipped. In a Mohenjodaro seal we find this god sitting in a yoga posture with three faces, horned head dress and surrounded by animals. For all these features this god has been identified by the scholars as the proto type of Siva. The identification of this male deity with Siva is further strengthened by the discovery of a number of stone objects which exactly look like a Siva Linga. Further, the worship of trees, water and fire has also been prevalent among the Harappan people. The discovery of a few seals bearing *swastika* symbol indicates the worship of Sun god.



ACTIVITY - 3.1

Make a comparative list of household items used by the people of Harappa with those of your own household.

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3.3.5 Date and Extent of the Harappan Civilization

It is difficult to fix a proper date for Harappan civilization. On the basis of the careful examination of available materials scholars

have decided that the Indus Valley Civilization ranged between 3200 B.C. and 1700 B.C.

The Harappan Civilization was extended in a huge geographical area. It spread from Sutkanjodaro in Baluchistan in the west to Alamgirpur in Uttar Pradesh in the east and from Manda in Jammu in the north to Daimabad in the Godavari valley in the south. As a whole, it covered an area of 22,50,000 sq. kilometers. It is the largest cultural zone in the contemporary history of world civilization.

3.3.6 Decay of the Harappan Civilization

Rise and fall of a civilization is a natural phenomenon. The amazing civilization once started by the Harappans is also no exception to it. There are many theories among the scholars regarding the causes of decay of the Indus Civilization. The most valid and valued theories in this regard are as follows - rapid change of environment, natural calamities like flood and earthquake, foreign attack, etc. However, most of the scholars opine foreign invasion (probably the inroads of the Aryans) as the most fatal factor for the destruction of the Harappan Civilization.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Fill up the gap:

a) Two important ports of Indus Valley were …..…… and ……..…..

b) The Harappan Civilization covered an area of .....…… sq. kilometers.

Q 5: Write True / False :

a) Swastika is the symbol of sun god. (True/False)

b) Tsunami was a major cause of decay of the Harappan Civilization. (True/False)



Swastika- Swastika is the symbol of sun.

3.4 VEDIC CIVILIZATION

In the foregoing section we have got an idea of a flourishing civilization i.e. the Harappan civilization. The present section will deal with another civilization which is completely different from the former from many aspects. This civilization emerged in India after the Indus Valley Civilization. The people who evolved this new civilization were known as the Aryans. They came to India from some parts of Central Asia through the North West frontier. You should not think that their migration to India was completed with a single batch. Rather it was a continuous process for hundreds of years. You surely have heard about the Vedas. Vedas were the main scriptures of the Aryans. The Aryan Civilization is also known as the Vedic Civilization.

LET US KNOW



There are four Vedas namely: -

- Rig Veda
- Yajur Veda
- Sama Veda
- Atharva Veda.

The Rig Veda is the oldest one. It is also the earliest literature of India.

The whole Vedic age may be described under two different time zones – the Rig Vedic age/or early vedic age and the Later Vedic age. The Rig Vedic age ranged from 1500 B.C. to 1000 B.C. and the Later Vedic age ranged from 1000 B.C. to 700 B.C. In this section we will discuss various aspects of Vedic civilization during these two ages.

3.4.1 Society

The foundation of the Vedic society was the family. At that time families were patriarchal. During the Rig Vedic age head of the families were called *grihapati* or *kulapati.*

Women enjoyed a respectable position in early Vedic society. Although the society was patriarchal, the girl children were also not neglected. The door of education was open for the daughters as well as the sons. Thus we come to know about some female scholars like Ghosa, Apala, Viswavara, etc. Girls were usually married in a mature age, though child marriage was not unknown altogether. Remarriage of widows was permissible in the society. Thus, we may observe that the Rig Vedic women held a high position in the society as well as in the household.



Patriarchal Family-
It is a family where the eldest male member is considered as the head of the family.

Cotton, wool and deer skin were used for the purpose of making clothes. Occasionally clothes were embroidered with gold. The Rig Vedic ladies were fond of gold ornaments of different types. Both men and women wore turban.

Barley, rice, wheat and vegetables of different seasons were the chief food of the people. Moreover, milk and its various products were also taken by them. The list of non-vegetarian items includes fish, bird, goat, bull etc. The Vedic Aryans took two kinds of intoxicating drinks called *soma* and *sura.*

The people of Vedic age were fond of amusements. Chariot racing, war dancing and hunting were the most fascinating outdoor games. Joyous moments were celebrated with music and dancing. Gambling was probably the most exciting indoor game of the period.

The Vedic society was divided into four classes viz. *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Sudra*. However, in the early Vedic period (i.e. in the Rig Vedic period) there was no water tight division of society. Although there was vague existence of four classes, no strict caste system existed at that time. During this period, inter marriage and inter dinning was a common feature and there was no bar in this respect. The orthodox divisions of society, the conception of untouchability etc, were only the development of later period.

3.4.2 Polity

The family was the lowest political unit of the Vedic age. Many

families combined together to form a *grama* or village. The union of several gramas formed the higher unit called *vis*. The vis was probably a larger administrative unit. The head of the *grama* was called the *gramani* and that of a *vis* was called the *vispati*.

LET US KNOW



The Rig Vedic state was a tribal state. The first Veda informs us about a number of Aryan tribes like Yadu, Anu, Puru, Bharata, etc. These tribes were often at war with one another for the possession of land or cow.

Kingship was the usual form of government of the period. The Vedic king enjoyed special power and dignity. He was denoted the title '*Rajan*'. Proficiency in warfare was the most essential qualification for the kings to possess the royal throne. He had the responsibility of protecting the life and property of his subjects. In return, he collected tribute called *Bali* generally in kinds from his subjects. The king was helped in his administration by the *purohita* (priest), the *senani* (general), the *gramani* (village head man), and the *spasa* (spies). Further, there were two popular bodies called the *sabha* and the *samiti* to help the king. The sabha probably was the selected body of the chiefs of different tribes and the samiti was possibly the assembly of the common people.

3.4.3 Economy

The Vedic civilization was evidently a rural civilization. Agriculture was the principal occupation of the Aryans. They ploughed the fields with the help of the oxen. They knew the art of irrigation. Wheat and barley was the chief agricultural products but oil-seeds and cotton were also cultivated.

Cattle-breeding was another important means of leaving. Cows were regarded as sacred animal. It was called *go-dhana* or

wealth of cow. In addition to cows, the other domesticated animals were the bull, the horse, the dog, the sheep; the goat etc. Horses were used for transportation. Besides agriculture and cattle rearing there are many other occupations for the Aryan folk. The Rig Veda refers to professions like weavers, carpenters, potters etc.

The Rig Vedic people perhaps carried on inland trade. Merchants used both land and water routes for distant places. Barter system was prevalent during that period. There is controversy whether the Aryans had overseas trade or not.

Barter System- Exchange of goods or services for other goods or services.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Choose the correct answer:

(a) The Rig Vedic family was a matriarchal / patriarchal family.

(b) Hunting / Gambling was the most exciting indoor game of the Rig Vedic period.

Q 7: Fill up the gap:

The king collected tribute called …….. from his subjects.

Q 8: Write True/False :

(a) The Rig Vedic Aryans knew the art of irrigation. (True/False)

(b) The Vedic civilization was an urban civilization. (True/False)

3.4.4 Religion

The Rig Vedic religion was simple. The early Aryans worshiped every aspects of nature. Thus there were a number of gods and goddesses in Aryan religion. The Aryans divided their deities into three classes viz.-Earthly gods like *Prithvi, Soma, Agni,* etc. Atmospheric gods like *Indra, Rudra, Vayu* etc. and Heavenly gods like *Dyau, Surya, Baruna* etc. Sacrifices or *yajnas* occupied a prominent place in the Vedic rituals. The Aryans believed that the sacrifices and other offerings pleased the gods and in return, they

blessed the performer with desired object. Everyone, without the distinction of rich and poor, could perform sacrifices according to his capability.



ACTIVITY - 3.2

Make a list of the Gods and the Goddesses of the Vedic Religion according to their classes.

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3.4.5 Later Vedic Civilization

We have already discussed that there were clear distinctions between the Rig Vedic and Later Vedic Civilization. The Aryans of Later Vedic age lead a more settled life. During that period they expanded from the North West India towards the East. Small tribal territories of Rig Vedic period were gradually replaced by large kingdoms. With the enlargement of kingdoms, the power of the king also increased significantly. The Later Vedic kings styled themselves as the *samrat* or *ekarat* meaning sole suzerain. There was also increase in the numbers of official for managing the state affairs.

Society as a whole witnessed far reaching changes in the Later Vedic period. The caste system was started to be rigid probably from this age. There was a significant growth in the power and prestige of the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas in the society. They enjoyed special privileges which were denied to the other castes. The concept of untouchability was developing in the society. Striking changes may be seen in the status of women in the Later Vedic society. The women lost their respectable social position enjoyed in the Rig Vedic period. Their domestic freedom and equality were also gradually vanished. Birth of girl child was detested. Dowry system became popular. As a

whole, women were looked as an inferior class.

Both domestic and foreign trades were carried out by the Later Vedic Aryans. By this time they attained the art of navigation. In the absence of a regular coinage, a gold piece called *nishka* was used as the unit of value. Agriculture continued to be an important occupation. Reference of many other occupations like merchants, money lenders etc. may be found in the Later Vedas.

Significant changes took place in the spiritual life of the Aryans of Later Vedic age. The Rig Vedic gods like *Indra, Baruna, Surya,* etc. had lost their previous glory and were replaced by new gods like *Rudra, Vishnu, Prajapati,* etc. In the Later Vedic religion, *yajnas* or sacrifices played an important role. The Rig Vedic yajnas were simple. But in the later age *yajnas* became more complicated, ceremonial and expensive. Further, the *Brahmans* rapidly came forward as mediator between the heavenly gods and earthly mortals. Thus religion gradually went beyond the reach of the common men and dissatisfied many in the society. As a reaction to the elaborate rituals and the highhandedness of the priestly class, there developed a philosophical trend in the Later Vedic religion. The inquisitive mind of the philosophers enquired various aspects of the creation, life and death. Thus there emerged the philosophical doctrines like transmigration of soul, *karma* (action) and *moksha* (emancipation/ liberation).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Fill up the gap :

a) The Aryans divided their deities into ……..…… classes.

b) In the Later Vedic age the Aryans expanded from the ……..... towards the ….....……...

c) Birth of girl child was ……..……. in the Later Vedic society.

d) In the absence of a regular coinage, a gold piece called …… was used as the unit of value.



3.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learned about

- the city life and town planning of the Harappan civilization and realized different other aspects of the socio-economic and religious life of the people of Harappa.
- the key features of the Vedic Aryans like society, economy, polity and religion. The Later Vedic Civilization is too shortly discussed.



3.6 FURTHER READING

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4) Sharma, L.P. (1981). *Ancient History of India (pre-historic Age to 1200 A.D.).* New Delhi, Vikas Publication House Pvt. Ltd.
5) Tripathi, Ramashankar (1999). *History of Ancient India.* Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.



3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to the question no.1. Indus

Answer to the question no.2. Mahenjadaro

Answer to the question no.3. a) Four

b) Spindles

Answer to the question no.4. a) Lothal and Mohenjodaro

b) 22,50,000

Answer to the question no.5. a) True

b). False

Answer to the question no.6. a) Patriarchal

b) Gambling

Answer to the question no.7. Bali

Answer to the question no.8. a) True

b) False

Answer to the question no.9. a) Three

b) West, East

c) Detested

d) Nishka



3.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q.1: Name the oldest civilization of India.

Q.2: What was the main occupation of the people of Harappan civilization?

Q.3: What were the three divisions of the Aryan deities?

Q.4: Who was 'Rajan' during the Vedic period?

Q.5: Who was 'Kulapati'?

B) Short Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q.1: Write a short note on the society and people of the Harappan civilization.

Q.2: How Later Vedic Civilization is different from the Rig Vedic Civilazation?

Q.3: ' The Vedic civilization was evidently a rural civilization'- Discuss briefly.

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in between 150-300 words)

Q.1: Discuss about the Harappan Civilization.

Q.2: Discuss about the Vedic Civilization.

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