

HARAPPA ARCHITECTURE – HUB OF ART AND CULTURE

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Abstract

India is a multicultural subcontinent resulting from a history of migrations of diverse peoples and establishment of new communities. The newcomers, often arriving as invaders, carrying their cultural baggage with them, were gradually absorbed into Indian culture. Art generally means sculpture and painting and often includes architecture, but human artefacts may embrace a wider category of material remains that includes the decorative and minor arts such as jewellery, pottery, metal, wooden utensils and even toys. The artefacts of the earliest inhabitants of India, the Stone Age societies, go back many millennia: rock paintings of central India used different pigments to depict humans and animals, Neolithic pottery was ornamented with natural and geometric patterns, while terracotta figurines suggest the universal cult of the Great Mother. Around 2500 BCE, the urban culture of Harappa sprang up in the North – West of India along the Indus River, continuing down to the West coast. They constitute an area of 8,40,000 square miles, which is must vaster than that of any contemporary civilization elsewhere. Hailed as the land of urban culture, Indus Valley has captured the imagination of historians and common people alike. But amazingly, the inception of the Indus Valley Civilization is devoid of any kind of battles. The Indus Valley people rather made deals, not war and created a stable, peaceful and prosperous culture. It was known for its spectacular city planning. Archaeological investigations in the Indian sub-continent during the last two decades have contributed significantly to an overall understanding of various cultures. Of these, the Harappan studies have attracted the attention of various scholars. Harappans, an ancient people who lived in the Indus Valley were advanced for their time, especially in architecture.

Keywords: *Indus Valley Civilization, Harappan art, urban culture, human artefacts, terracotta figurines*

Introduction

Indus Valley Civilization was a Bronze Age civilization (3300 – 1300 BCE) mainly in the north-western regions of South Asia. It flourished in the basins of the Indus River, which flows through the length of Pakistan. At its peak, the Indus Civilization may have had a population of over five million people. Historically part of Ancient India, it is one of the world's earliest urban civilizations along with Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt. Inhabitants of the ancient Indus river valley developed new techniques in handicraft (carnelian products, seal carving) and metallurgy (copper, bronze, lead and tin). The Indus cities are noted for their urban planning, baked brick houses, elaborate drainage systems, water supply and clusters of large non-residential buildings.

The Indus Valley Civilization is also known as the Harappan Civilization, after Harappa, the first of its sites to be excavated in 1920s, in what was then the Punjab province of British India, and now is Pakistan. The discovery of Harappa, and soon afterwards, Mohenjo-Daro, was the culmination of work beginning in 1861 with the founding of the Archaeological Survey of India in British Raj. There were earlier and later cultures, often Early Harappan and Late Harappan in the same area of Harappan Civilization.

Basic Issues in Harappan Archaeology

The identification of the Harappa Civilization in the early 20th century was considered to be the most significant archaeological discovery in the Indian subcontinent, not because it was one the earliest civilizations of the world, but because it stretched back the antiquity of settled life in the Indian Subcontinent by two thousand years. The discovery of the Harappan Civilization brought to light that it was contemporary to Mesopotamian and Egyptian Civilizations. This Civilization was unique compared to the two contemporary civilizations on account of its extent and town planning. Extent-wise it was much bigger in size than the Mesopotamian and Egyptian Civilizations.

Its town planning included a citadel and lower town, both fortified and with a checkerboard type of planned settlement which were unique and unparalleled in the contemporary world. Intensive and extensive works have brought to light over two thousand

sites till date. In true sense, this was the only civilization in its contemporary world, which was international in nature.

Sir John Marshall identified the Harappan Civilization on 20th September 1924, and since then numerous scholars and institutions, both from India and outside, have been engaged in unravelling the history of this most important phase of Indian culture. No other culture in the subcontinent has received as much attention as the Harappans.

Terminology

The culture when identified at the site of Harappa, in the jurisdiction of the modern large village of Harappa in the Punjab province (now in Pakistan) in 1924, was termed as the Harappa Civilization. It was named after the type – site where the culture was identified. However, with the passage of time and the discovery of more and more sites covering a vast geographical locale from time to time the nomenclature for the culture underwent constant change. Different scholars identified this culture by different names and today the Harappan Civilization has three different terminologies viz., Indus Civilization, Indus Valley Civilization and more recently Indus – Saraswati Civilization.

Origins of Harappan Civilization and the Roles of Regional Cultures

Many excavations undertaken over a long period of time in the sub-continent, the one is carried out at Mehrgarh between 1974 to 1985 is real sense epoch making. It provided solid evidence for the steady and gradual emergence of Harappan elements. The evidence from Mehrgarh laid to rest the earlier controversial theory of the Western world being responsible for the emergence of Harappan Civilization.

Three different phases of Harappan culture – Early, Mature and Late, demonstrate the cultural process from origin through development to decline. A number of Early Harappan cultures flourished in various regions of the Harappan Empire and the Mature Harappan is supposed to be the result of internal development within these Early Harappan cultures. The Mature Harappan phase is the most prosperous one and shows the development of the Civilization into an urbanized society.

Chief Characteristics

The chief characteristics of the Harappan Civilization are planned cities comprising a citadel for the aristocracy and a lower town for the common people, with roads and streets

running at right angles; the city enclosed by a fortification with impressive gateways; public buildings like the Great Bath at Mohenjo-Daro, dockyard at Lothal and granaries at several cities; elaborate drainage system comprising public and private drains; houses provided with paved baths; strict enforcement of municipal laws ensuring maintenance of cleanliness and absence of encroachment on public areas; use of both kiln and sun-baked bricks in construction sturdy wheel made pottery, profusely decorated by painted naturalistic and geometric motifs, measures of metal and ivory; a uniform script depicted on steatite and other seals and tablets, often accompanied by carved animal and human figures; fine jewellery made of gold, silver, copper, ivory, shell, semi-precious stones, steatite, faience and terracotta.

Record of Archaeologists

The first visit to Harappa was made in 1826 CE by James Lewis, who was a British army deserter who roamed in Punjab and North West areas in search of antiquarian remains. Later in 1831 CE, an emissary from King William IV, namely Alexander Burnes, recorded the extensive remains at Harappa while travelling from Multan to Lahore to deliver gifts of horses from the King of England to Ranjit Singh. However, their records were noticed by Alexander Cunningham, who visited the site in 1853 CE and 1856 CE, resulting in a small excavation in 1872 CE. During his excavations Cunningham found pottery, chert blades and seal. Actual excavations were started in 1920-22 by Daya Ram Sahni under John Marshall at Mohenjo-Daro and by R.D. Banerjee at Harappa. John Marshall dig to work on the sites in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in 1923-24 CE where the Indus Civilization is finally considered to have been identified.

Town Planning at Harappa

Harappa is located near the Ravi River, which is a tributary of the upper Indus region. The remnants of the highly developed city have been excavated through the years and it is believed that Harappa town planning dated five thousand years back. The Harappan culture was distinguished by its system of town planning. The patterns of settlements were based on the behaviour of rivers which is based around the flood plain ecology, regional trade over rivers, favourable climate for daily life, access to trade routes and natural resources. Easy access to water table near rivers and arable land due to alluvial soil encourages human habitation. Cities like Harappa, which lie on the periphery of the Indus Valley Civilization, served as gateway cities into the main region. Both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro had a citadel

or acropolis, and this occupied by members of the ruling class. Below the citadel in each city lay a lower town with brick houses that were inhabited by the common people.

The remarkable thing about the arrangement of the houses in the cities is that they followed a grid system, with roads cutting across one another virtually at right angles. People followed a system of centralised administration. The most important public space of Mohenjo-Daro seems to have been the Great Bath, comprising the tank which is situated in the citadel mound and is a fine example of beautiful brickwork. The most remarkable and largest building at Harappa is the Great Granary. The use of burnt bricks in the Harappan cities is remarkable. Drainage system consisting of horizontal and vertical drains, street drains, and soak pits of Harappa is almost unique.

The buildings thus far unearthed in the Indus Valley fall into three main classes viz., 1) dwelling houses, 2) larger buildings and 3) public baths. The careful town planning, adequate water supply and efficient drainage system presuppose an advanced state of civic authority. Perhaps no other Bronze Age Civilization paid so much attention to health and cleanliness as did the Harappan. The Harappan town planning is still a matter of surprise and wonder for the contemporary world. This actually establishes the fact that the people were really technologically advanced and very knowledgeable in the laying out of the construction of the city as a whole. Harappan Town Planning has become a landmark for the contemporary civilization when technological advancements have been made which is helping to achieve great heights.

Technology and Crafts

The rise of towns in the Indus zone was based on agricultural surplus, making of bronze tools, various other crafts and widespread trade and commerce. This is known as the first urbanization in India and the Harappan urban culture belongs to the Bronze Age. The people of Harappa used many tools and implements of stone, but they were very well acquainted with the manufacture and use of bronze. Several other important crafts flourished in Harappan towns. Textile impressions have been found on several objects, spindle whorls were used for spinning and weavers wove cloth of wool and cotton. Harappans also practised boat – making, seal – making and terracotta manufacturing, they were expert in bead making. They produced gleaming pottery. Specimens of art are to be sought only in figurines, seals, amulets and other small objects. All figurines are well baked and some of them are painted in red. The majority

of human figures are female; animal figures are found in large numbers in pottery. The engraved seals of the animals like humped bull, buffalo and bison are master pieces of art.

Science and Astronomy

The Harappan people knew the measuring tools of length, mass and time. They were the first in the world in developing a system of uniform weights and measures. Their measurements were extremely precise.

Indus Script

Indus Script also known as Harappan Script is a corpus of symbols produced by the Indus Valley Civilization between 3500 and 1900 BC. It occurs in the form of stamp seals, few terracotta tablets, pottery and graffiti. On seals, the script is associated with masterly carved miniature animal figures. The script was written from right to left. In cases where there are two or more lines it is boustrophedonic. Most of the Inscriptions are extremely short. The first publication of a seal with Harappan symbols dates to 1875, in a drawing by Alexander Cunningham. Since then, over 4,000 inscribed objects have been discovered. In early 1970s, Iravatham Mahadevan published a corpus and concordance of Indus Inscriptions listing 3,700 seals and 417 distinct signs in specific patterns.

Religious Architecture

The first point of importance is the cult of Mother Goddess. A number of figurines of terracotta, faience, etc., portray a standing female figure. These figures are rightly taken to represent the Mother or Nature Goddess. Among the male gods, the most remarkable is a three-faced deity wearing a horned head-dress, seated cross-legged on a throne surrounded by elephant, tiger, deer, rhinoceros and buffalo appearing under the seat. This representation has at least three concepts which are usually associated with Siva viz., that he is (i) Trimukha (three-faced), (ii) Pasupati (lord of animals) and (iii) Yogisvara or Mahayogi. Animal worship or zoolatry formed part of the religious beliefs of the people is indicated by the representations of animals on seals and sealings, or in terracotta, faience and stone figurines. The worship of tree, fire and water also seems to have been in vogue. The existence of tree worship is evidenced by the representations on several seals and sealings. Some Indus Valley seals show Swastikas which are found in other religions worldwide.

Recent excavations have added new dimensions in the field of Harappan religion and religious architecture. The excavation has given evidence of a) individual fire worship having a separate room in the house in which a pit housing a vertical terracotta stump with ash is placed, b) high altars in the citadel mound with a series of fire altars with brick-lined pits having ash and animal bones. Besides this a sacrificial brick lined pit having animal bones has been discovered.

Burial Architecture

The excavated sites at Harappa, Lothal, Kalibangan, Dholavira have given sufficient evidence of different types of burials in the Harappan Civilization. Three forms of burial have been found at Mohenjo-Daro viz., complete burials, fractional burials and post-cremation burials. Complete burial means the burial of the whole body, ceremonially performed in various forms. Fractional burial represents a collection of some bones after the exposure of the body to wild beasts and birds. Post-cremation burials have been inferred from large wide mouthed urns containing a number of smaller vessels, bones of animals and of birds, variety of small objects such as beads, bangles, figurines, etc., sometimes mixed with charcoal ashes.

Probably, the location of the cemetery depended on the wind direction so that polluted air of the symmetry could be avoided. It has been found that following types of pits were dug to bury the dead: 1) extended burials in rectangular or oblong pits with pots and pans, 2) extended burial with mud brick lining in the grave, 3) extended burial in a coffin of rose wood with a lid of deodar wood, etc.

Conclusion

Harappa holds the distinction of being considered the first identified site of Indus Valley Civilization and hence is still a major site in terms of excavations. An efficient and technologically advanced urban culture is clearly evident in the Indus Valley civilization. Advanced Harappan art indicates that the people of the ancient Indus Valley had fine artistic sensibilities. The quality of municipal town planning is an outstanding feature of the Harappan civilization. The Indus Valley was a developed urban culture akin to the civilizations of Mesopotamia. Two major cities house about 40,000 people who enjoyed quite a high standard of living with sophisticated water systems, drainage systems, wells, etc. some cities of the Indus Valley culture have yet to be excavated. The data still being discovered from there is helping us to piece together its history bit by bit. No doubt much more work to be done to preserve the

heritage from these most important sites due to heavy encroachment. Undoubtedly, Indus Civilization has made several permanent contributions to the progress of humankind.

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