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SUBJECT : HISTORY

CLASS XI

Chapter 1 (New)

The Indus valley Civilization

(English Medium)

Chapter 1
The Indus Valley Civilization

1. Introduction
2. Origin, Phases, Spread, and Major Centres
3. Town Planning
4. Technology and Economic Life
5. Social, Religious, and Cultural Life
6. Political System
7. Decline

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The earliest historians of ancient India wrote on the basis only of Sanskrit literature. But before the nineteenth century ended many historians started paying attention to buildings, caves, inscriptions and coins as well. Alexander Cunningham, the first Surveyor General of India, identified many ancient sites, and excavated Sarnath, Taxila, and Sanchi. The written and material evidence (traces from the past) put together enabled the historians to understand ancient Indian history much better.

1.2 The north-western part of the Indian subcontinent in which Punjab is located was the cradle of the earliest civilization in India. The term ‘civilization’, denoting the distinctive way of life of a particular set of human beings in an area, has been defined in diverse ways. Essentially, it includes the existence of writing and urban centres which imply a complex technology (application of knowledge for

practical purposes), economy, and social, religious and cultural life as well as some kind of political authority.

1.3 This civilization is generally called after the river Indus because it initially spread mainly along the valleys or basins (low lying areas) of the Indus river system, including the Jhelam, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Sutlej, and the Saraswati (later covered by the dry bed of the river Ghaggar) rivers. This civilization is also known after one of its two major cities, called Harappa. Situated on the bank of the river Ravi in Pakistan Punjab, Harappa was the first to be discovered and excavated by archaeologists (who study material remains of man's past). Mohenjo-daro in Larkana district in the Sind province of Pakistan was the next and the largest city to be excavated, but it declined before Harappa. Therefore, archaeologists tend to call this civilization 'Harappan' (that is, pertaining to Harappa). Historians often use the term 'culture' interchangeably with 'civilization' for the whole way of life of a people. This chapter uses the terms 'Indus civilization' and 'Harappan culture' interchangeably.

1.4 The Indus valley civilization is a discovery of the twentieth century, a result of archeological excavations, begun by Daya Ram Sahni at Harappa, by R.D. Banerji at Mohenjo-daro in Sind, by M.S. Vats at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, and by N.G. Majumdar at Amri in Sind, under the direction of Sir John Marshal and Sir Mortimer Wheeler who were heading the Archaeological Survey of India before 1947.

Many more sites (places from where archaeological remains have been found) were excavated and more work has been done by archaeologists after Independence both in India and Pakistan. By now, over a thousand sites of **this** civilization have been identified out of which over 600 are in India, over 400 in Pakistan, and a few in Afghanistan.

Daya Ram Sahni

R.D. Banerji

2. ORIGIN, PHASES, SPREAD, AND MAJOR CENTRES

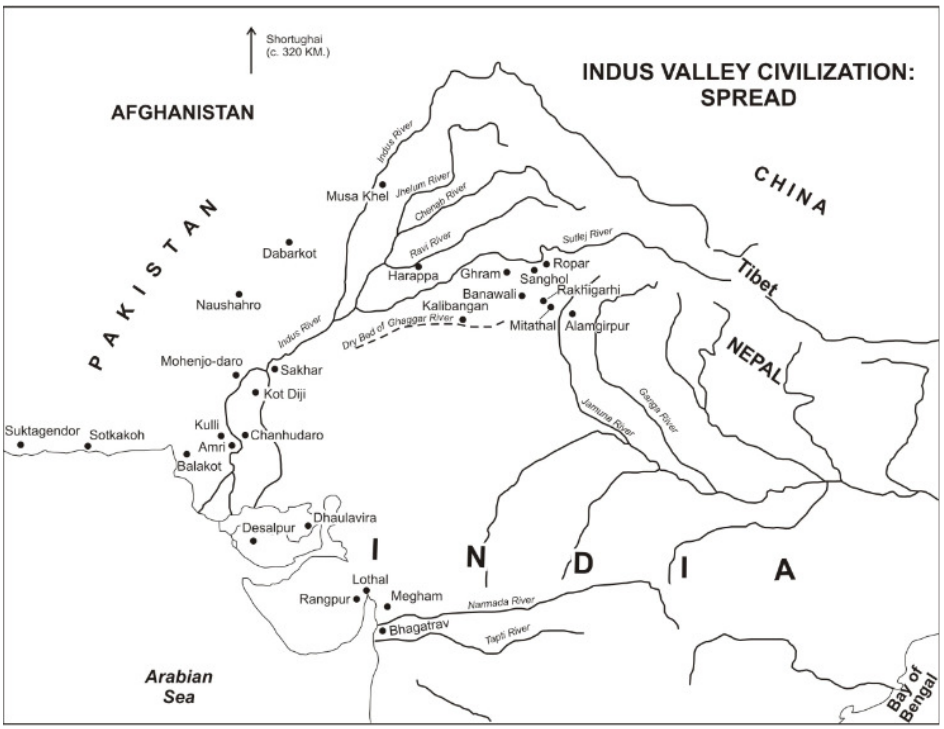
2.1 Human civilization in India as elsewhere in the world had gradually evolved through the stages of hunting and food gathering, domestication of animals, cultivation of crops, formation of rural settlements, and craft production. The tools and implements used at each stage too evolved over time. To the initial and widespread use of different kinds of stone tools were added the implements made of copper, followed, in due course, by those made of bronze (copper mixed with tin, a comparatively scarce metal, constituting about 10 per cent of bronze). It was a much stronger alternative which

facilitated the rise of the earliest civilizations in India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Crete (in the Miditerranean sea) nearly 5000 years ago.

2.2 The time-span too of the Indus valley civilization was quite large. Scholars generally talk of three broad phases in its development and decline – early, mature and late Harappan. In all probability, the earliest settlements in the Indus plains had appeared before 2,600 B.C. All of these, however, were village settlements, or very small towns. It is interesting to note that Amri, Mohenjo-daro, Kot Diji, Harappa, and Kalibangan belonged then to the category of small town agricultural societies. By about 2,300 B.C. cities began to develop. The largest of these was Mohenjo-daro, with Harappa as the second. The third important urban settlement was that of Chanhu-daro in Sindh. This process of urbanization took place in a short phase and lasted till about 1800 B.C. when Mohenjo-daro and some other towns were actually in decline. Harappa declined later. But all the towns and villages did not disappear with the decline and disappearance of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. Just as we talk of pre-Harappan phase, so do we talk also of the post-Harappan phase which lasted for a few centuries till about 1,300 B.C.

2.3 For about 500 years, urban civic life was the leading feature of the life of a large part of north-western India. It should be remembered that urban centres could not have been maintained without agricultural development, because a large urban centre, called ‘city’

invariably implies the existence of a supporting territory which produces enough food to spare. Thus, we could notice an hierarchy of settlements in the Indus civilization: cities, towns, and villages. Cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were differentiated from other settlements by the large size of their population, complexity of social and economic life, diversity of craft production, and existence of some kind of political authority. Towns represented the middle level settlements which shared some of the features of the cities, though on a much smaller scale.



2.4 The sites shown on the map indicate that the spread of the Indus civilization was not confined to the vallies of the Indus river system. Besides the 'Indus sites' like Amri, Chanhu-daro, Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and Ropar, we have, for instance, Kalibangan in northern Rajasthan on the dry bed of the river Ghaggar, Banawali in Hissar district in Haryana, Alamgirpur in the Ganges Doab in Uttar Pradesh, Lothal in the Gulf of Cambay in Gujarat, Bhagatrav below the river Narmada in Gujarat, and Sutkagen-dor near the Makran sea coast in Baluchistan in Pakistan. On the whole, the area covered by the Indus civilization was four times as large as the area covered by the civilization of Mesopotamia. In fact, it was larger than the area of any other ancient civilization. However, much of the population of the Indus civilization was confined to strips along the rivers which were easy to clear for cultivation.

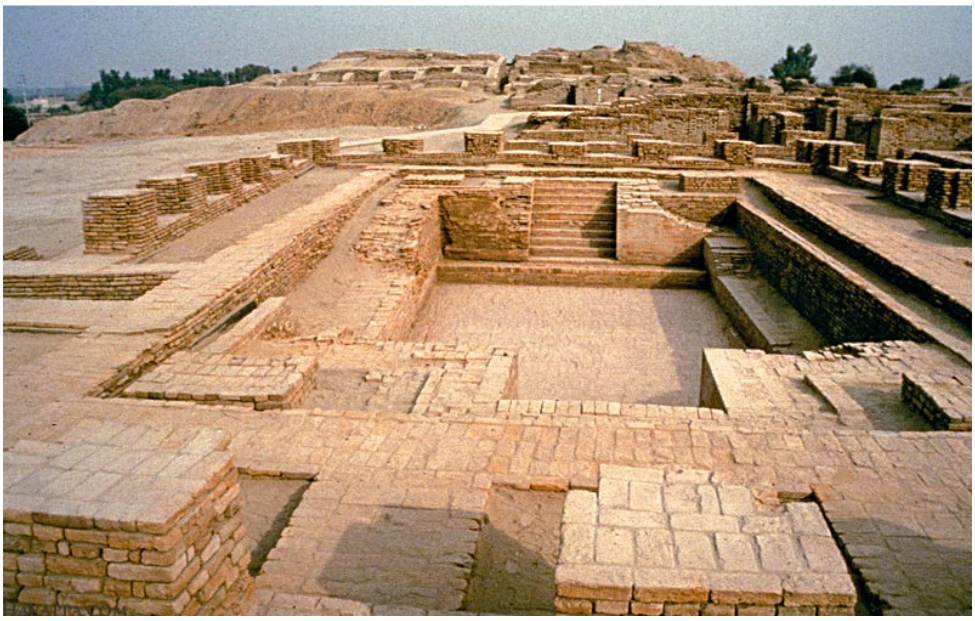
2.5 We should not expect a homogeneous and changeless culture over such a large area and such a large time-span. However, it is possible to talk of some more or less uniform features of the Harrapan culture proper which lasted for about 500 years from 2,300 to 1,800 B.C. We may notice particularly the town planning, and the economic, social, and cultural life of the people. We may also like to know the circumstances of their decline and their contribution to Indian civilization.

3. URBAN PLANNING

3.1 Planned urban settlements shared several features with Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. The two cities had a circumference of four to five kilometers, and were clearly divided into two main parts: the citadel and the town. Some of the smaller cities, like Kalibangan and Sutkagen-dor also had citadels constructed on a high platform or mound. At Harappa, the citadel formed a sort of a parallelogram about 410 metres in length from north to south and about 195 metres in breadth from east to west. The citadel appears to have been used primarily for governmental and religious purposes. It could be used also for the purpose of defence.

Citadel at Mohenjo-daro

3.2 At Mohenjo-daro, the citadel contained a large rectangular tank, now called the Great Bath, measuring 11.88 X 7.01 metres, with a depth of 2.43 metres. At two ends brick steps led to the bottom of the tank, which could be emptied by a drain. The Great Bath was filled with water from a well and used for an elaborate ritual or religious rite which was probably considered vital by the people.



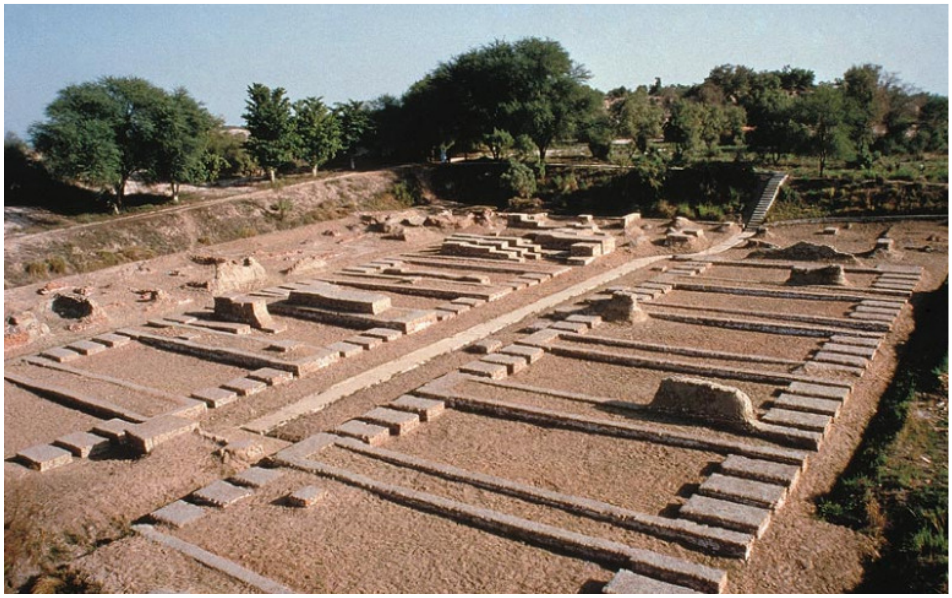
The Great Bath

3.3 The lower town also was walled and it was well planned, with the main streets running north-south and east-west, dividing the city into rectangular blocks, with small lanes connecting these inernally.

3.4 Burnt brick was used for houses on a large scale. However, mud bricks were also used at places as in Kalibangan. The largest houses had even twenty rooms, besides a kitchen, a bath and a well. The average house had upto half a dozen rooms. There were residences

also with only a room or two, which seem to have been occupied by the labouring class. The elaborate system of baths and sewerage indicates a high standard of civic life.

3.5 The largest building in Mohenjo-daro is generally believed to be a granary, measuring 45.71 metres in length and 15.23 metres in width. Harappa had a series of brick platforms on which stood two rows of six granaries. The grain was probably threshed on circular brick platforms to the south of these granaries. The brick platforms found at Kalibangan too appear to have been used for granaries.



The Granary at Harappa

3.6 In addition to the planned streets and houses on a high platform, Lothal probably had a dockyard connected with the Gulf of Cambay by a channel. In other words, despite several common features of urban layout, use of burnt bricks and houses, different settlements could have special features arising from their location and peculiar function.

4. TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMIC LIFE

4.1 The impression of uniformity given by town planning is reinforced by technology of production. There was a standard range of copper and bronze tools in all urban centres, combining functional efficiency with simplicity of design and manufacture. Copper and bronze bowls, cups and dishes, figures of men and animals, and little model carts were made in specialists' workshops in the cities. Seal-cutting was a highly developed art; bead-making was only a little less; remarkable, particularly in the case of long barrel beads of cornelian. Beads made of gold, silver, copper, semi-precious stones, shells, steatite, and faience were excavated at several places. Skill in carpentry is evident from the use of a saw with uneven teeth, which allowed the dust to escape freely from the cut. The most impressive item in the life of the Indus people was cloth, woven locally from the cotton grown in the Indus valley. No other people in the world at this time were growing cotton or making cloth. In technology, the Harappans were peers of

the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians. Technological uniformity over a vast area made this civilization rather unique in the ancient world.

Faience

Unline stone or shell, that are found naturally, faience is a material that is artificially produced. A gum was used to shape sand or powdered quartz into an object. The objects were then glazed, resulting in a shiny, glassy surface. The colours of the glaze were usually blue or sea green.

Faience was used to make beads, bangles, earrings, and tiny vessels

4.2 The weapons of the Indus valley people consisted of short swords, spears, arrow-heads, axes and knives made of copper and bronze. There probably was lesser use of bronze as both copper and tin were difficult to obtain. This civilization is nevertheless regarded as a Bronze Age civilization. The use of iron was unknown in the world at this time. Maces of sandstone were a common weapon of offense and cloy missiles, or sling-pellets, were meant for defence. Apparently, the military elements did not loom very large in the Indus civilization.

4.3 For agricultural production canal irrigation probably was not used by the Indus people. Ploughing was used, but deep ploughing was unknown, because the excavated ploughshare was made of wood. However, dams were constructed for flood irrigation, and harrow was used for sowing. Wheat and barley were the main food crops and formed the mainstay of life, though cultivation of rice was known in

Lothal and Rangpur. Field peas and dates were other items of diet. Sesame end mustard could be used for oil. Sheep, goats, buffaloes, and humped cattle were the important domestic animals. There is evidence of dogs, cats and elephants too. Excavations suggest that even deer, rhinoceros, tigers, and tortoise were known.

4.4 For trade, the first level of exchange was between the urban centres and villages. Then the Harappan towns exchanged goods with the other towns. At yet another level, the people of the Indus civilization had direct or indirect contacts with many parts of the Indian subcontinent and the world. The items of trade consisted of finished goods as well as raw materials. The use of pack animals, particularly asses and camels, bullock carts and boats for transportation was known to them.

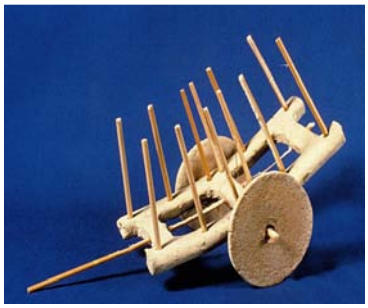
4.5 A well developed system of weights and measures was a significant feature of trade. Cubical weights in graduated sizes made of chert, limestone, steatite, and blackstone have been discovered in all the sites. The smallest weight is of 0.856 grams and the most common weight is of about 13.7 grams, which is in the ratio of 16. In other words, weights were based on 16 or its multiples. Sticks with measure marks indicate that the people had a system of measurement too. Together, the standardized weights and measures regulated the exchange activities internally as well as externally.

4.6 Contacts with the outside world brought raw materials, metals and finished goods for the people of the Indus civilization. From Rajasthan, Mysore and South India, they could get marble, silver and gold, and tin probably from Bihar; from Balochistan they perhaps got copper; from Afghanistan they could get tin and copper, besides gold and silver; and from central Asia they could get jade, turquoise and lapis lazuli. They traded with Mesopotamia probably by both land and sea. It is very likely that sea trade was in the hands of the people of the Indus civilization. The most important items of export were cotton textiles, pearls, ivory and ivory articles. Apes and peacocks were also exported. As mentioned earlier, the carefully planned town of Lothal could have served as a port and also as an entrepot, a sort of 'gate-way'. Some other frontier towns like Ropar, Dabar Kot, and Sutkagen-dor in all probability played an important role in inter-regional economy and trade.

How were goods carried from one place to another?

Look at the illustration of a toy.

What were the modes of transport used by the Harappans?



5. SOCIAL STRUCTURE, RELIGIOUS, AND CULTURAL LIFE

5.1 Several classes of people lived and worked for the maintenance of civic and economic life. The farming communities produced surplus food which supported not only the ruling elite but also the traders and the artisans and craftsmen who lived in urban centres. The sewerage system probably required the services of scavengers. The granaries, it is suggested, were maintained with the help of slaves. Thus, we can glimpse a fairly well differentiated society. The prosperity or poverty of the individuals belonging to different classes is reflected in the varying sizes of houses in the cities and towns of the Indus civilization.

5.2 Excavations throw light on the religion of the people of this civilization which appears to have been dominated by one great god. We do not know his name or his attributes. But he bears a close resemblance to Shiva as Pashupati and Natraj of the much later period in Indian history. The cult of the Indus god was connected with fertility and the lingam. Even more popular perhaps was a female goddess, possessing some of the traits of the Mother Goddess of the later period. From the seals, however, the female goddess is absent and, since these seals are believed to have been used by merchants, it has been suggested that the merchants of the Indus civilization had developed their own secondary cult in which this Mother Goddess had no direct share. The terracotta (baked clay of deep brown colour)

female figurines, which have been found in abundance might have been used in domestic worship. The people appear also to have worshipped trees (especially *pipal*) and tree-spirits. Various animals too appear to have borne a special significance for them.

5.3 As evident from excavated graves, the people of Harappa buried their dead, in north-south direction. Depending upon the social position of the deceased, different kinds of goods were also buried with them.

5.4 Artistic objects of considerable merit were produced by the people of the Indus civilization. A little figurine of a dancing girl from Mohenjo-daro alone is a sufficient proof of this. Stone sculpture, of which several examples have been unearthed, was even more monumental. They represent animal as well as human forms. A fragment of the head and shoulders of a bearded man is regarded as an impressive example of Indus sculpture. A few of the sculptures represent a squatting figure which is presumed to be that of a god. There are sculptures of animals depicting energy and vigour. There is also the figure of a composite animal, suggesting its divine character. One particular piece is regarded as the prototype of the dancing Shiva Natraja.

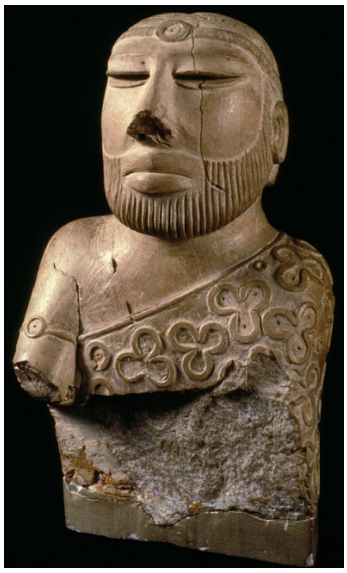
Seals and Sealings

Seals may have been used to stamp bags or packets containing goods that were sent from one place to another. After a bag was closed or tied, a layer of wet clay was applied on the knot, and the seal was pressed on it. The impression of the seal is known as a sealing.

If the sealing was intact, one could be sure that the goods had arrived safely.

The Dancing Girl in Bronze found at Mohenjo-daro

The bearded man from Mohenjo-daro



5.5 The number of terracotta figurines is very numerous. These also are of two categories: animal and human. A large number of these figurines represent females, some of them lying on bed with or without children, indicating the idea of fertility. Among the animals, a considerable number are represented: humped bulls, buffalo (but not cow), dog, sheep, elephant, rhinoceros, pig, monkey, turtle, and some man-headed animals. Terracota carts with solid wheels have also been unearthed. An ekka-like cart in copper has been found from Harappa. Most of the pottery was made with the help of the wheel, though some of it was hand-made. Floral, leaf, bird and animal decorations and other designs are found on much of the Indus pottery. Necklaces of different kinds of beads, along with rings and bracelets have also been discovered.

5.6 The seals, above all, have been regarded as an outstanding contribution of the Indus people to ancient craftsmanship. From Mohenjo-daro alone more than 1,200 seals have been discovered, indicating their popular use. These are little masterpieces with a monumental strength which is out of all proportion to their size. They might have had some religious significance. But they were certainly used to protect packages of goods or filled vases. The seal was believed to impose a sort of taboo. At the same time, the seals reveal a system of ranks and titles prevalent among the Indus people. There are designs on these seals, including a wide range of animals as well as human and semi-human forms. Among the animals represented are an ox-like ‘unicorn’, the short-horned bull, the tiger, an elephant,

an antelpope or goat, a hare, and an eagle. Human figures on the seals are not executed with equal skill. Though some of the designs on the seals may be of secular nature, most of them appear to have a religious import. On the right of a figure there are an elephant and a tiger, while on the left are a rhinoceros and a buffalo; below the figure are two antelopes; and this 'Lord of Beasts' is regarded as Shiva in his Pashupati aspect.

5.7 There is a script on the Indus seals and other objects whose number is around 3700. Though pictographic (consisting of pictorial symbols) in origin, this script came to have an ideographic (a character or figure symbolizing the idea of a thing) or syllabic (signs denoting syllables) character. This script is found also on tablets, pottery and graffiti (a drawing or writing on a wall). The total number of characters comes to be over 400. The script generally appears to start from the right. The number of ideograms (set of symbols expressing a thing) found at any one place is rather small which does not bear resemblance to any known script. No bilingual representation has been recovered. Because of all these features, the Indus script is extremely difficult to decipher. Many attempts were made, and are

being made, but without any success so far. All our knowledge of the Indus people is therefore based on material objects dug up by the archaeologists. It is rightly believed, therefore, that when the Indus script is deciphered, it will add a new dimension to our understanding of this civilization.

6. POLITICAL SYSTEM

6.1 It has been difficult to know the political system of the people. It is tempting to treat Mohenjo-daro and Harappa as the twin capitals of an empire, with cities like Kalibangan and Kot Diji as 'provincial centres of government'. But this would be no more than a guess. Equally conjectural is the suggestion that Harappa in due course replaced Mohenjo-daro as the capital. The elaborate civic arrangements in the cities suggest the presence of a civic authority. However, the Indus people have left no public monuments, and their police arrangements appear to have been inadequate. The existence of a 'priest-king', or a priestly oligarchy, has also been postulated. But, strictly speaking, we do not know for certain. Though we get a strong impression of political and economic unity from the common elements in town planning and architecture, extensive trade, the uniformity of weights and measures, a common script, the uniformity of the seals, and common elements in art and religion, we cannot adequately explain how unity came about and how it was maintained.

7. DECLINE

7.1 The people of the Indus civilization possibly were averse to adopting advanced methods and technology. They perhaps knew of writing on clay tablets in Mesopotamia but they did not adopt it. They also knew of better tools, canal irrigation, and deep ploughing, but they did not learn these. It is suggested that the two categories of people who could have introduced change were the merchants who directed and managed trade and the priests who managed or controlled agricultural production. For the former, change was not profitable and for the latter change was not necessary.

7.2 Many causes have been suggested for the decline and disappearance of this civilization. Change from humid to dry climate as a cause has been more or less finally rejected. It has been convincingly argued that at least for the past 4,000 years there has been no significant climatic change in the Indus basin. There is more acceptable evidence for a general uplift of the land mass which could convert the cities and towns accessible to water traffic into land-locked centres. Another view is that changes in river courses could leave several cities and towns high and dry, and affect agriculture rather adversely. There is evidence of heavy floods too. The activity of the Indus people could reinforce the vagaries of nature:

overgrazing and over-exploitation of the flora could lead to deforestation and desiccation.

7.3 However, mono-causal hypotheses are now being discarded in favour of multi-causal explanations. What is more or less certain is the complexity of the process of decline and disappearance. The disappearance of the Indus civilization was neither sudden nor everywhere. Mohenjo-daro was in decline while Harappa was still a flourishing city. At any rate, after 1800 B.C., the word Meluha, the Mesopotamian term for India, stopped occurring in the Mesopotamian record. However, there appears to have been a shift towards Harappa and a concentration of sites in the Punjab, the Sutlej-Jamuna Divide and the Ganges Doab. Also, there was a movement towards Gujarat and a later intermingling of cultures in central India. There were post-urban habitations at Chanhu-daro and Rangpur, and there was a cultural continuity in Sind, Gujarat and the Punjab after the decline and fall of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. To the declining Indus civilization the Aryans probably gave a blow, but only in the upper basin of the Indus.

7.4 The Indus civilization gradually disappeared from history, but not without leaving some significant traces behind. The Shiva of the later ages is traced to the Indus civilization, and so is the Mother Goddess. Phalic and tree worship was another legacy of the Indus people. These beliefs and practices in the realm of religion emerged

gradually after the arrival of the Aryans in northern India. By then, enough of the blood of the Indus people had mingled with the Aryan blood, and much of the Indus skill had enabled the Aryans to raise a new civilization.

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EXERCISES

I. Short questions of 1 mark each:

1. Name the two Indians who first began the excavations of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro?
2. Identify four settlements of the Indus civilization in Punjab and Haryana?
3. What was the extent of the Indus civilization?
4. What is material evidence?
5. What does the term 'civilization' denote?
6. What was the purpose of the citadel?

7. Identify the various materials used in the making of craft items in the Indus civilization?
8. Name the four weapons found at the Indus sites?
9. Which animals are found on the seals of the Indus civilization?
10. Why is Lothal called a ‘gateway’?
11. Identify the three broad phases of development of the Indus valley civilization?
12. Which countries had contact with the Indus people?
13. What is ‘multi causal explanation’?
14. What is the religious legacy of the Indus civilization?
15. What kind of script was used in the Indus civilization?
16. Harappa is situated close to which river?
17. List the food items used by Indus Valley people?

II. Questions of 3 marks each (35-40 words):

1. What types of settlements were found in the Indus civilization?
2. Comment on the structure of houses in the Indus cities.
3. What were the different crafts items produced by the Indus people?
4. What kind of food was available to the Indus people?
5. Identify the elements that reflect on political and economic unity in the Indus civilization?
6. What was the religion of the Indus valley people?
7. Identify some of the artistic objects found in the Indus sites?
8. What was the significance of the seals found at the Indus sites?

9. Identify the animals known to the Indus people.
10. Identify the items of trade with the outside world.
11. Did the Indus civilization come to a sudden end?

III. Questions of 5 marks each (100-150 words):

1. Write a note on the town planning of the Indus cities?
2. What kind of technology was known to the Indus people?
3. What do you know about agricultural production in the Indus civilization?
4. Comment on the social structure in the Indus cities?
5. Write a note on the seals of the Indus civilization?
6. What can you say about the political system in the Indus civilization?
7. Evaluate the causes responsible for the decline of the Indus civilization.

IV. Map Work:

Mark any five sites of the Indus Valley Civilization on the outline map of India. Describe the features of any one site in some detail.