
Political Setup and Society of Harappan

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*Stuart Piggott (1952) described the Harappan Civilization as a theocratic organization, within which chief was himself the ruler. The bearded stone sculpture discovered from Mohenjodaro has been described by scholars as that of a priest king. W. A. Fairservis (1991) and J.M. Kenoyer (1998) assume that it absolutely was not a state society but a chiefdom. J.G. Shaffer (1982) also holds the view that a technologically advanced urban literate culture was achieved without the usually associated social organisation based on hereditary elites, central political government and warfare.*¹

In the opinion of some other scholars the Harappan Civilization fulfills all the standards of statehood. It had a well outlined territory, a large population, an efficient bureaucracy to manage the population, a regular income from agriculture and trade to keep up the apparatus of the state, a stratified social organisation, a standard ideology legitimizing the authority of the ruling class, and a standing army.

The Harappan territory was more extensive than that of the other modern civilizations and its population was quite large. As per Fairservis (1967) the metropolitan centres of Harappa and Mohenjodaro had a population of about 50,000 each. J. Jacobson (1986), additionally described it as a four – tiered settlement hierarchy with massive metropolitan centres, town, large and small villages and even pastoral camps.

The uniformity of standard brick size, weights and measures, city planning, drainage system, material cultures, internal and external trade network etc. all presuppose that the rules and regulations were strictly enforced. Wheeler (1968) also described it as extremely evolved bureaucratic machine, “far behind so vast a uniformity must lie an administrative and economic discipline, however exercised, of a formidable kind.”²

The Harappan society was indeed a complex Society' in the sense in which Gordon Childe first used the term. according to him criteria for considering a society as advanced are (1) cities (2) full – time craft and career specialists (3) taxation (4) monumental architecture (5) social stratification (6) precise and predictive sciences (7) writing (8) developed creative styles (9) long distance trade in luxury items and (10) the state.

Though Redifield and Adams have criticized Childe's scheme it should be admitted that it sets the parameters of a complex society. Judged by Childe's criteria, it will be presently seen, that the Indus Civilization had all the elements. it is universally admitted that Indus cities like Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Lathal and Rehman Dheri were well planned. Even the smaller towns like Kalibangan and Surkotada followed the overall pattern of Indus planning. The second item on Childe's list is full – time craft and presence of career specialists. Bead – making, ivory – carving, shell – working, metallurgy, seal – engraving and pottery – making are a couple of the long list of crafts practiced by the Harappan career specialists. Sailors and scribes could also be included among them. ³

As regards the third item, we have no info from the Indus seals, however the maintenance of public works must have necessitated assortment of taxes in kind for payment of wages that was also made in kind. Monumental design is authenticated to by the massive dockyard, granaries, warehouse, brick platforms and protective walls which were utilitarian in character in contrast to the pyramids of Egypt and also the ziggurat of Sumer.

Other spectacular public buildings that once occupied the huge platforms of Indus cities have now disappeared. social stratification is obvious from the dichotomy of Harappan town planning that gave larger importance to the ruler than to the ruled, however among the ruled the wealthy merchants and the poor craftsmen lived together in the Lower town of Lothal and surrounding cities.

Due attention has not been paid to the contribution of the Indus Civilization to precise and predictive sciences like mathematics, astronomy, engineering and chemistry. The Harappan introduced the decimal division in measuring lengths and mass, studied the stars and invented an instrument to measure whole sections of the horizon, designed a tidal dock after studying tides,

waves and currents, technically advanced the system of sewerage and evolved new techniques in metallurgy.⁴

Religion

A large number of female figurines of terracotta have been discovered. The accepted view is that these are representations of Mother deity. Terracotta figurines of females holding children in their arms or in a state of maternity have been found. A sealing from Harappa represents the world or Mother Goddess, with a plant growing from her womb. Also depicted are a person with a knife in hand, and a lady with raised hands. Commenting on these figurines and drawing parallel with the worship of Mother Goddesses in modern India.⁵



(Mother goddess seal impression from Mohenjodaro)

A male deity, 'the prototype of the historic Siva'. Is pictured on a seal with three faces, sitting on a low throne in the typical posture of a Yogi, with two animals on both sides – an elephant and a tiger on the right and a rhino and a buffalo on the left, and two deer standing beneath the throne. The depiction shows Siva as Mabayogi and as Pasupati (Marshall 1931: 54). There is also another characteristic of the historic Siva in this figure – a pair of horns crowning his head with a central bump that looks like the trisula or trident of the Saivas. Another seal depicts another deity in the same posture of Yoga, with a Naga motion in prayer to him with uplifted hands on either side of him.

From most of the Harappan sites, a large variety of aniconic objects, typically of stone, have been discovered. These have been known as yonis and lingas representing Siva worship. These are classified into three categories: little size lingas; huge size lingas, and yonis, smallsize lingas (1.5 cm to 30 cm) are largely made from limestone and alabaster; however the miniature ones are made from shell, faience, terracotta and paste. The paste ones are even painted to grant a glance of carnelian. These smaller lingas must have been used as amulets to be carried on the person jut as miniature lingas are carried by Saivites even today. ⁶

A large range of ring stones were found at numerous sites that are known as yonis. Their size varies from 1.5 cm to about 1.30 m in diameter. whereas the larger ones are made from stone, the smaller ones are made of shell, faience or paste and painted to grant a glance of carnelian. A number of these ring stones ring stones work very well with lingas of identical material leaving very little doubt that both were once a part of the same.



(Terracotta Sivalinga, Kalibangan)

Despite the overwhelming proof of linga worship in the Harappan Civilization and most of the scholars agreeing to it, a number of raised doubts regarding linga worship and argued that these objects were nothing but gamesmen utilized in chess (Lal 2002, 2005). Marshall rightly pointed out that the modeling and size of some of them totally rules out the idea of their being anything apart from lingas and yonis. However, the discovery of a terracotta linga and yoni produced in one piece from Kalibangan excavations has finally settled the matter. This linga – yoni in one piece is precisely like we see in Siva temples nowadays. ⁷

The practice of tree worship is obvious in some depictions on seals and sealings and paintings on pots. There is also proof of tree worship in two forms. In one case, the tree itself was idolized in its natural form. In the second case, what was adored was not the tree but its dwelling spirit.

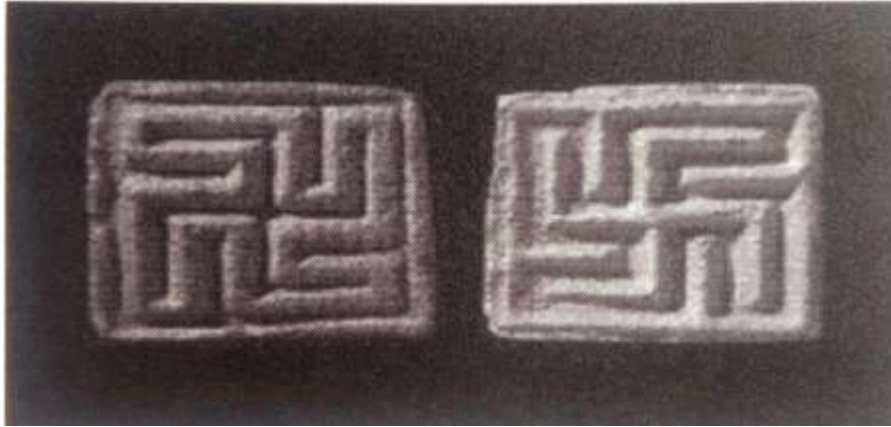


(Pipal leaves depicted on a seal)

A seal found at Mohenjodaro represents a deity standing between two branches of a pipal tree, with long hair, armllets and trisula – horned headgear. The worship of the supernatural being is indicated by a line of seven human figures and by the figure of a half – kneeling suppliant with long hair, behind whom there's a goat, with a person's face. The continuance of this spiritual tradition is found within the sculptures of Bharhut and Sanchi which show the Yaksbis as dryads or tree – goddesses.

The evidences of animal worship are also found in the animals portrayed on seals and sealings, or in terracotta, faience, and stone figurines. Firstly, there are legendary and composite creatures, e.g. human – faced goat or part ram or goat, part bull and part elephant, three – headed chimeras and semi – human semi – bovine creatures. the foremost common depiction on a seal is unicorn, that is probably mythical, although the possibility of the existence of such an animal is not entirely dominated out. Thirdly, there are the traditional animals, like (1) the water buffalo, (2) the gaur or Indian bison, (3) the Indian humped bull or zebu (4) the rhinoceros, (5) the short –

horned humpless bull (6) the tiger, and (7) the indian elephant. In later period, a number of these animals figure as the vehicles of Hindu deities, e.g. the bull of Shiva, the lion of Durga, the buffalo of Yama and the elephant of Indra.⁸



(Swastika depiction on the seals)

A symbol that seems to have gained appreciable popularity within the Harappan cities is the swastika motif. It is known as a logo that represents the order of the universe, which is split into four sectors by the central cross. Left – turning and right – turning swastikas represent the opposing forces of universe, a belief outlined in Hinduism and Buddhism. The illustration of yogistic postures or asamas in the terracotta figures in the Harappan context shows the antiquity of this well – identified Indian tradition.

The great bath of Mohanjodaro suggests the ritual significance of water in its spiritual life, just as the tanks by the aspect of Hindu temples suggest in modern times the necessity of the purification of worshippers by taking a shower in those tanks. the fire – altars, found at several Harappan sites like Kalibangan, Banawali, Rakhigarhi, etc. suggest the observance of domestic rituals of many Hindu households. Almost every expression of the Harappan religious belief echoes later day Hinduism.⁹

Reference:-

[1] ¹ Chakrabarti, Dilip K. Lal, Makkhan.(Eds). History of Ancient India –

II, Protohistoric Foundations. V.I.F. And Aryan Books International, New Delhi 2014, .pp. 321-325.

[2] ² Ibid.

[3] ³ Rao, S.R. dawn and Devolution of the Indus civilization, Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi 1991. Pp. 1-32.

[4] ⁴ Ibid.

[5] ⁵ . Chakrabarti, Dilip K. Lal, Makkhan.(Eds). History of Ancient India – II, Protohistoric Foundations, V.I.F. And Aryan Books International, New Delhi 2014, .pp. 326-330.

[6] ⁶ Ibid.

[7] ⁷ Ibid.

[8] ⁸ Ibid.

[9] ⁹ Ibid.