

INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (PART-4) B.A.HISTORY(HONS) PAPER-1

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DECLINE OF INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

- ▶ The Harappan Civilization lasted for about one thousand years. Archaeological evidence shows that many of the major cities of the Harappan Civilization, like Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, and Dholavira faced abandonment and decline during the late 3rd and early 2nd millennium B.C. Many of the distinctive features of the Harappan Civilization like writing, standardized seals and weights, some standardized aspects of town planning and other traits of material culture also disappeared. The decline of this civilization which was the largest in Bronze Age civilization has been an enigma even today. Earlier it appeared to be a sudden and

DECLINE OF INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

- ▶ total decline and abandonment. This was due to focus on the studies of cities, town planning, large structures and goods of splendor. However, mounting new evidence since the sixties compels that the decline was not as sudden and dramatic as earlier assumed.

Some scholars have even argued for continuity and survival of the Harappan tradition in certain areas. We see abandonment or sparse occupation of certain areas like Sindh in the west and increase in settlements in other areas, particularly towards the east northwestern India including the westernmost Yamuna -Ganges rivers region, and Gujrat in the southwest. Often, reoccupation of former cities is also noted. During this transitional phase we notice a shift from urban centres towards increasing settlements of villages, or de urbanization.

DECLINE OF INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

- ▶ But many distinctive features of the Harappan Civilization, like Indus script, seals, architectural style, etc. disappeared forever. The abandonment of major Indus cities has been roughly dated to about 1700 B.C. References to Meluhha in the Mesopotamian literature does not occur after 1900 B.C. After the Harappan Civilization, the major culture observed is Painted Grey Ware (PGW) culture which is found after a long gap.
- ▶ The downfall of the Harappan Civilization has been one of the most puzzling issues in Indian archaeology. A number of explanations have been put forward ranging from environmental causes like droughts, floods, changing river courses and sea levels, tectonic shifts due to Aryan invasions and disruptions in trade and social instabilities.

CAUSES OF DECLINE

- ▶ The explanations for decline are reviewed below in the light of recent understanding emerging from new explorations and excavations.

CAUSES OF DECLINE

- ▶ The Harappan Civilization came to an end around 1800 B.C. while the Rigveda is believed to be written around 1000 B.C. even though the exact chronology of the Rig-Veda Aryans has not yet been established.
- ▶ **(1) Foreign Invasion:-** Wheeler was the first to propound a theory for the decline of the prosperous Harappan Civilization. He believed that the Harappan Civilization was destroyed by Aryan invasions. However, this theory has been criticized on a number of grounds.

CAUSES OF DECLINE

- ▶ (2) *Environmental Changes:-* Often hydrological calamities like floods, droughts, changing river courses and sea-levels have been cited as responsible factors for the collapse of civilizations. Even for Harappan Civilization, this has been considered as an important factor leading to its final demise.
- ❖ *Floods:-* Mohenjo-Daro, Kalibangan, Dholavira and Channhudaro witnessed flood. This led to the decline of Indus Valley Civilization (Raikes and Dales theory)

CAUSES OF DECLINE

- ❖ ***Shift in river course of Indus:-*** This theory has been propounded by Mackay and Lambrick. Changes in the course of Ghaggar-Hakra (often identified with the lost Saraswati –Drishadvati rivers of the epic) led to the decline.
- ❖ ***Tectonic shift :-***Koval et al. (2010) have emphasized the effects of earth quake on Harappan Settlements. Earthquake can accelerate decline by causing changes in drainage patterns due alteration in elevation levels, this affecting water supply , disrupting trade routes, necessitating rebuilding or force migration.
- ❖ ***Increased Aridity And draught:-*** Indus Valley Civilization declined due to increasing aridity, on the basis of pollen sequences from three salt lakes (Sambhar, Lunkaransar and

CAUSES OF DECLINE

Didwana) of Rajasthan-between 3000 to 1800 B.C. (Singh, Bryson, Swain)

- ▶ A recent study conducted by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)Kharagpur reveals that the decline of Harappan city Dholavira was caused by drying up of river like Saraswati river and Meghalayan drought.
- ▶ These researchers have for the first time connected the decline of Harappan city Dholavira to the disappearance of a Himalayan snow-fed river which once flowed in the Rann of Kutch. They have been able to connect the dots between the growth and decline of the Dholavira, located in the Rann with this river which resembles the Himalayan river Saraswati. The study has just been published online in prestigious Wiley Journal of Quaternary Science, according to information shared by the institute.

CAUSES OF DECLINE

- ❖ *Ecological Imbalance:-* Fairservis suggested that the growing demand of increasing human and cattle population led to depletion of forest, food and fuel resources. Over-cultivation and over-grazing disturbed the symbiotic ecological balance of the region. Over manipulation of natural resources and such large scale alterations to the landscape resulting from human activity perhaps caused floods and salinity further aggravated the problem.
- ❖ This is reflected in the gradual deterioration in town planning and living standards. Depletion of resources for subsistence caused a shift eastwards towards more viable regions.

CAUSES OF DECLINE

- ▶ **(3) *Disruption Of Trade***:- The growth of trade and the expansion of Indus settlements onto the Ganges river plain and Gujarat in western India led to the overextension of the Indus political and economic system. But sometime during the end of the 3rd millennium B.C. there is considerable
- ▶ evidence for the disruption of trade between the Harappans and other civilizations. Textual references to Meluha (Indus region) decrease at the end of the 3rd millennium B.C. in trade records of Mesopotamia indicating that long distance trade network had started deteriorating. On the other hand references to Alashiya (Cyprus) and its copper start occurring.

CAUSES OF DECLINE

► (4) *Social Instabilities:*

Possehl opines that the collapse of the Indus Civilization was primarily a matter of ideology. This was induced by over extended socio-political networks and the rise of a new social order. There was "a definite transformation of Harappan life, with important changes in the socio-cultural system" (Possehl, 1997). In the aftermath of the Harappan Civilization we find continuity and survivals of the earlier tradition in the form of a large number of Regional/Local Post-Urban/Late Harappan cultures in the Harappan culture area and its margins.

CONTINUITY

- ▶ The urban character of the Mature Harappan with its large, multifunctional cities, system of writing, weights and measures, long-distance trade, and contacts with the Gulf, Africa, Mesopotamia, and Central Asia was no longer found. But rural villages or peasant societies with local arts and crafts continued to thrive, particularly towards the east of the Indus system. Average site size declines, but there was no net change in the total settled area. This indicates a redistribution of the population from cities to villages or increase in number of small communities owing to shifts in trade economy and environmental parameters.

CONTINUITY

- ▶ Therefore, Possehl, Kenoyer and many others shy away from talk of 'collapse' or 'eclipse' of the civilization and instead talk in terms of 'continuity' and 'survivals'. These cultures have their own characteristic artifacts and varying chronological distribution.

CONCLUSION

- ▶ "Collapse means the end of an integrated and complex social, economic and political system, carrying with it a decline in social stratification, erosion of economic specialization, the eclipse of regulatory institutions and the flow of information, the city life that embodies the sophistication of the civilization and ultimately the magnificent monuments and art production" (Shereen Ratnagar 2000). Though some cultural elements relating to rural technologies or peasant knowledge that was passed down generations did indeed survive, but the Harappan civilization in the form of " a political economy with its institutions of dominance, its economic networks, its interrelationships and dependencies, and intellectual norms - in other words, a state system and the cultural circumstances in which it had flowered" (Shereen Ratnagar 2000) did indeed come to an end..

CONCLUSION

- ▶ There seems to have been no single cause of the decline and abandonment of cities, and reorganization and transformation of the Indus Civilization but that it is 'a complex, multifaceted process of change' (Possehl 1997). Allchin and Allchin argued for the interconnection of causes in regional and interregional terms. It may be said that both internal and external factors together contributed to the decline and collapse of the Bronze Age civilization in the Indus valley and its surroundings.

CONCLUSION

- ▶ In contrast, background conditions or enabling factors could be the shamanistic nature of the religion, the absence of institutionalized temples, tensions in the little communities, an undeveloped division of labour group movements and migration along the western margins of the Harappan world, and the possible extension of regional cults." For a better understanding we need a firmer chronology and better understanding of the regional cultures and environment. Ratnagar (2000) succinctly sums the causes for the transformation at the end of the Mature Harappan, "Triggers or immediate causes could have been raids, migrations in the west, or internal dissensions that affected the centres of control and residential stability.

CONCLUSION

- ▶ The process of transformation was perhaps slow and gradual that began two to three centuries before the actual decline as evidenced from the abandonment of the Great Bath and Granary at Mohenjo-Daro. By 1300 to 1000 B.C. a new social order characterized by a distinctive ideology and language began to emerge in the northern Indus Valley and the Ganges river region to the east though some aspects of Indus urbanism and the important craft technologies survived. A second urban revolution was brought through the emergence of new technology of iron metallurgy and glass production.

CONCLUSION

within the villages, absence of village self-sufficiency in a Bronze Age political economy, as also the inroads by metal, faience and brick industries into the vegetation cover of the surrounding . Ultimate and deep-rooted causes would mainly be the stresses and contradictions of a system which could sustain only in its geographical expansion, and in which the polity, trade and craft production, all centred on the elite. And elite dominance depended on a paradoxical combination of coercion and the forging of personal ties (this being too early a form of state to have developed a full-fledged bureaucracy).

CONCLUSION

- ▶ Perhaps the structural strains became too great to override when they were juxtaposed with other independent variable, coincidental occurrences in adjoining regions: the expanding pastoralist mobility in the Eurasian steppe, the emergence of Elam as a dominant power and its possible appropriation of tin supplies after 2000 B.C. which in turn could have been connected with group movements and migration along the western margins of the Harappan world, and the possible extension of regional cults." For a better understanding we need a firmer chronology and better understanding of the regional cultures and environment.

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Ruins of Mohenjo-Daro city

LATE PHASE OF INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION



Suggested video lectures available on YouTube in Hindi:

- (1) "हड़प्पा सभ्यता : उत्पत्ति"
➤ <https://youtu.be/APUjJr8z3o8>
- (2) "हड़प्पा सभ्यता : बसावट पद्धति"
▶ <https://youtu.be/Z0QX0dYwdw0>
- (3) "हड़प्पा सभ्यता: बसावट पद्धति (भाग 2)"
▶ <https://youtu.be/vNvU5R0pesA>
- (4) "हड़प्पा सभ्यता की सार्वजनिक अर्थव्यवस्था"
▶ <https://youtu.be/CXafHMysWAw>
- (5) "हड़प्पा सभ्यता: धर्म"
▶ <https://youtu.be/e8rDOFoafAI>
- (6) "हड़प्पा सभ्यता : पतन"
▶ <https://youtu.be/zt50l8aEJU4>
- (7) "हड़प्पा सभ्यता : पतन (भाग 2)"
▶ <https://youtu.be/CR8P-apNkjU>

(concluded)