

Pre-Harappan sites*, their achievements, common characteristics, interlinkings and reasons for their demise.

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Introduction:

The vast alluvial plains of the Indus Saraswati river system was the cradle of the human civilisation which nurtured one of the most ancient and perhaps one of the most advanced human settlements a few millenia ago. The temporal extent of the Indus Valley Civilisation has been speculated to be from 5500BC to 1300BC and the entire period has been split up into the following *phases and eras*²-

Regionalisation Era

5500-3300 Mehrgarh II-VI (Pottery Neolithic)
3300-2600 Early Harappan (Early Bronze Age)

Integration Era

3300-2800 Harappan 1 (Ravi Phase)
2800-2600 Harappan 2 (Kot Diji Phase, Nausharo I, Mehrgarh VII)
2600-1900 Mature Harappan (Middle Bronze Age)
2600-2450 Harappan 3A (Nausharo II)

Localisation Era

2450-2200 Harappan 3B
2200-1900 Harappan 3C
1900-1300 Late Harappan (Cemetery H, Late Bronze Age)
1900-1700 Harappan 4
1700-1300 Harappan 5

NG Mazumdar in 1929 noticed at Amri the Harappan culture was clearly stratified over an essentially different ceramic culture. He was thus the first to identify an earlier phase of chalcolithic civilisation than that represented by Harappa and Mohenjodaro³. In 1946 Sir Mortimer Wheeler conducted fresh excavation at Harappa which led to the discovery of the pre-Harappan substratum.

Emergence of the earliest settlers:

The earliest signatures of human settlement in south - Asia has been traced back to the hills of the present Baluchistan. The Indus Valley civilisation was thus predated by these farming cultures. One of the best known sites of this culture is Mehrgarh(6000BC) which has been elaborated upon later. It has been speculated that these people grew wheat and domesticated a variety of animals, including cattle. Pottery was in use by around 5500 BCE. These well integrated cultural system

* This discussion has not been restricted to Indian Sites alone.

1 The Ghaggar-Hakra river has been identified as the mythical Saraswati river, but it is disputed- Ching, Francis D. K.; Jarzombek, Mark;Prakash, Vikramaditya (2006). A Global History of Architecture. Hoboken, N.J.: J. Wiley & Sons, pp. 28-32. ISBN 0471268925.

2 Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark (1991). "The Indus Valley tradition of Pakistan and Western India".

3 Malati J. Shendge, The Language of the Harappans: From Akkadians to Sanskrit ,ISBN 8170173256

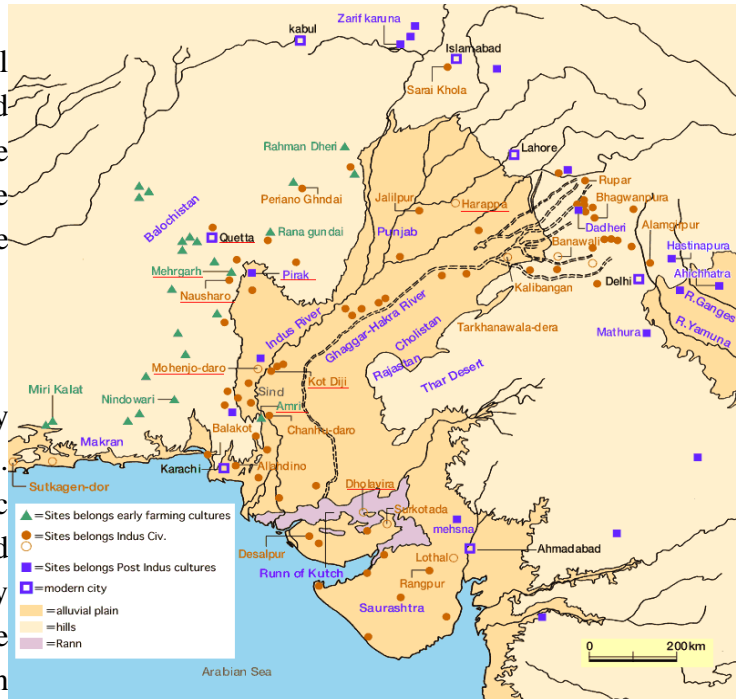
flourishing all along the sub-mountainous regions, skirted by the Kirthar and Suleiman mountains and the basins of the Indus, Ravi, Chenab, Sutlej and the Saraswati. It is this system that eventually gave rise to the Indus-Saraswati Civilisation in the vast alluvial plains of those rivers through a long process of cultural, social and economic interactions between themselves.

The sites of the early Neolithic Cultures:

Of the many early neolithic cultural sites, the ones at Kile Gul-Mohammad and Mehrgarh are especially worthwhile to mention since, the major stages of the pre-Harappan civilisation can be quite well comprehended from them.

Kile-Gul Mohammad:

Kile-Gul Mohammad near present day Quetta, was excavated in the 1950s. Evidences of a pre-pottery neolithic culture with remnants of huts, wild and domesticated animals but no pottery were found at the site. Unfortunately the site initially didn't get much attention from scholars because the imprecise



radiocarbon dating gave it's date to be 4000BC and it was assumed by the scholars that Neolithism didn't develop locally in the region but came from northern Iran where it flourished in the seventh millenium BC. The later discovery of the site at Mehrgarh and its corrected radiocarbon date falling within eighth to seventh millenium BC renewed the interests of archaeologists towards these sites. It was becoming clear to archaeologists that agricultural practices and domestication of animals- the characteristics features of neolithism, developed in the sites of Baluchistan, quite independently of their development in the sites around Zagros hills of northern Iran. Painted pottery and geometric motifs were unearthed from the Kile-Gul Mohammad level II and III. Similar such motifs were also excavated from Mehrgarh, Damb Sadat, Togau- another Neolithic/Chalcolithic site at Baluchistan, and Mundigal-in southern Afghanistan. The presence of such similar Neolithic pottery in all the sites speak of the cultural and economic interactions among the sites.

Mehrgarh:

The settlers of Mehrgarh were the late stone age nomadic people of Baluchistan, and were using microliths for tools. The geographical locations of the sites of Mehrgarh and Kile-Gul Mohammad had a profound influence in the interactions between the sites. Kile-Gul Mohammad is located at 1500m MSL whereas Mehrgarh is loacated at only 150m MSL. The favourable climate in the tropical regions of Kachhi Plains, where Mehrgarh was located led to extensive growth of vegetation, whereas the condition in the surrounding highlands was the opposite. This morphological and climatic complementarity played a vital role in the seasonal movement of the

population from the highland to the lowland, especially when it is cold and dry during the winter season. This social phenomenon played a very important role in integrating large tracts of land, including those ecologically different, into a system which works wonders because it brings various peoples, of different technological attainments, face to face and allows them to interact and learn from each others' experiences. ⁴

Archaeologists have divided the entire period of occupation at the site into several periods. Mehrgarh Period I (7000 BC - 5500 BC), was Neolithic and aceramic (i.e., without the use of pottery). The earliest farming in the area was developed by semi-nomadic people using plants such as wheat and barley and animals such as sheep, goats and cattle. The settlement was established with simple mud buildings with four internal subdivisions. Numerous burials have been found, many with elaborate goods such as baskets, stone and bone tools, beads, bangles, pendants and occasionally animal sacrifices, with more goods left with burials of males. Ornaments of sea shell, limestone, turquoise, lapis lazuli, sandstone and polished copper have been found, along with simple figurines of women and animals. Sea shells from far sea shore and lapis lazuli found far in Badakshan, Afghanistan shows good contact with those areas. A single ground stone axe was discovered in a burial, and several more were obtained from the surface. These ground stone axes are the earliest to come from a stratified context in the South Asia. Quite surprisingly, evidences⁵ of a type of proto-dentistry were found in Mehrgarh. This is the earliest known example of drilling in teeth of live human.

Mehrgarh Period II (5500 BC - 4800 BC) and Mehrgarh Period III (4800 BC - 3500 BC) were ceramic Neolithic, pottery was now in use and later chalcolithic. Much evidence of manufacturing activity has been found and more advanced techniques were used. Glazed beads were produced and terracotta figurines became more detailed. Figurines of females were decorated with paint and had diverse hairstyles and ornaments. Two flexed burials were found in period II with a covering of red ochre on the body. The amount of burial goods decreased over time, becoming limited to ornaments and with more goods left with burials of females. The first button seals were produced from terracotta and bone and had geometric designs. Technologies included stone and copper drills, updraft kilns, large pit kilns and copper melting crucibles. There is further evidence of long-distance trade in period II. An important indication of this is the discovery of several beads of lapis lazuli originally from Badakshan. Several mud-brick structures, were discovered which were speculated to be storage pits/granaries.

The existence of burial sites of Period I and early part of Period II, alongwith the presence of burial-goods like jewellery and semi precious stones like lapis-lazuli and turquoise, or sea shells and animal bone, indicate that the people used to practise ceremonious disposal of the dead. This indicates the concept of ownership rights over the objects that the deceased had used during his/her lifetime. However during the latter part of Period II and Period III, the grave goods were almost non-existent. In the latter levels of Period III, copper awls, hooks and blades were found which testified the technological innovations of the neolithic people. These innovations were a big step forward achieving efficiency in everyday life, hence accelerating their pace of development.

Though Mehrgarh and Kile Gul-Mohammad are the best known sites of pre-Harappan culture, there

⁴ The Dawn of Indian Civilisation, Vol 1, Part 1p.285 , G.C.Pandey

⁵ *Nature* **440**, 755-756 (6 April 2006)

are several sites scattered around the Baluchistan province, some of which were once thought to be of the mature Harappan phase, but later on were classified as sites of pre-Harappan culture.

Kot Diji:

The ancient site at Kot Diji was the forerunner of the Indus Civilization. The people of this site lived about 3000 BC. The remains consist of two parts; the citadel area on high ground, and outer area. Located about 22 kilometres south of Khairpur in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. The Pre Harappa site at Kot Diji consists of two clearly defined areas. Citadel on high ground for the elites separated by a defensive wall with bastions at regular intervals. This area measures about 500 ft x 350 ft. Outer area, or the city proper consisted of houses of mud bricks on stone foundations. Pottery found from this site have design with horizontal and wavy lines, or loops and simple triangular patterns. Other stuff found are pots, pans, storage jars, toy carts, balls, bangles, beads, terracotta figurines of mother goddess and animals, bronze arrowheads. Well fashioned stone implements were also discovered. The interesting find at Kot Diji is a toy cart, which shows that potter's wheel lead to wheels for bullock carts. There are evidence of burning of this fortified town, which were also observed at Amri and Kalibangan. Burning of these cities is still unexplained.

Nausharo:

Nausharo is located around six km from the site of Mehrgarh. At the upper levels of this site we find the remains of the mature phase of the Indus-Saraswati Civilisation. However the lower most levels hints towards the settlement of people of the pre-Harappan civilisation. The strata of this site bears resemblances to that of Kot Diji.

Amri:

Amri is the site of a Pre-Harappa fortified town which flourished from 3600 to 3300 BC. The site is located south of Mohenjo Daro on Hyderabad-Dadu Road about 110 kilometres north of Hyderabad in Sindh province of Pakistan. Situated near foothills of Kirthar Range of mountains, this was an important earlier urban center in Lower Sindh. Amri is close to Balochistan where development of earlier farming communities from 6000BC to 4000BC ultimately led to urbanization. On timeline, Amri is dated after Rehman Dheri. The ancient mounds of 8 hectares on the west bank of Indus River have been extensively excavated. The pottery discovered here had its own characteristics and known as Amri Ware. Like other Pre Harappa towns, no writings were found at this site. There is evidence of widespread fire at the town around 2500BC.

Evidences of interlinkings among the sites:

Around 4000BC pottery in the different sites of Baluchistan showed remarkable homogeneity in their nature and design barring a few regional peculiarities. So much so the distinction between 'Kile Gul-Mohammad' and 'Togau' styles of painting has now no justification. Kalat, Quetta, Zhob and Loralai potteries are also one with those found at Mehrgarh even though the sites which have yielded them are located in the highland. ⁶ Contemporary to that townships also developed along

6 The Dawn of Indian Civilisation, Vol 1, Part 1, p.285 G.C.Pandey

the banks of Indus and its tributaries. The developed form of Kile Gul-Mohammad/Togau painted pottery, which is also found at Mehrgarh was found at the lowest levels of these settlements, a fact which clearly shows that the highlanders came down to the lowlands and established the first settlements in the river valleys around 4000BC ⁷

During the early part of the fourth millennium extensive trade relationships were established, whereby the geographically isolated sites like the highlands of Baluchistan, the plains of Gujarat, and also the basins of the Indus and the Saraswati river system got integrated forming a vast network. It became the 'Formative Period' of the Developed Urban Phase of the Indus-Saraswati Civilisation of the third millennium since the roots of this civilisation are found firmly established in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic village cultures which had moved from the foothills of Baluchistan into the plains at Amri, Jalilpur, Harappa, and at several Hakra Culture sites in the Bahawalpur region of Pakistan. ⁸ The final levels of Mehrgarh gradually gets merged with the Kot Diji-Sothi culture complex forming the early Indus-Saraswati Civilisation.

Decay of the pre-Harappan farming culture:

The demise of the pre-Harappan farming culture from the sites of Baluchistan is generally attributed to adverse climatic factors. Apparently, Mehrgarh was not found suitable for the establishment of a township during the Mature Phase of the Civilisation, may be due to hydrological reasons, such as the occurrence of sudden floods and concomitant erosion of land. Hence it was abandoned around 2800-2700BC ⁹ By 2600 BC., some pre-Harappan settlements grew into cities containing thousands of people who were not primarily engaged in agriculture. Subsequently, a unified culture emerged throughout the area, bringing into conformity settlements that were separated by as much as 1,000 km and muting regional differences. So sudden was this culture's emergence that early scholars thought that it must have resulted from external conquest or human migration. Yet archaeologists have demonstrated that this culture did, in fact, arise from its pre-Harappan predecessor. However there is no evidence that the bearers of the Harappan Culture were responsible for the destruction of the pre-Harappan sites. The opportunity for the establishment of a richer and more complex urban setup was provided when natural calamities razed down the previous settlements.

Conclusion:

The pre-Harappan culture was succeeded by the Indus-Saraswati Civilisation. The Indus-Saraswati Civilisation was a unique product of a slowly growing and changing civilisational process that was occurring from the eighth millennium through the third millennium in north-western India, including the Indus and the Saraswati basins, in which the West Asian, Turanian and Central Asian cultures had some role to play but generally in the field of economic interaction and not so much in social, cultural, religious and ideational fields. ¹⁰ The Indus civilization grew out of this culture's technological base, as well as its geographic expansion into the alluvial plains of what are now the provinces of Sindh and Punjab in contemporary Pakistan and Northern India.

⁷ The Dawn of Indian Civilisation, Vol 1, Part 1, p.285 G.C.Pandey

⁸ The Dawn of Indian Civilisation, Vol 1, Part 1, p.285 G.C.Pandey

⁹ The Dawn of Indian Civilisation, Vol 1, Part 1, p.285 G.C.Pandey

¹⁰ The Dawn of Indian Civilisation, Vol 1, Part 1, G.C.Pandey