



Research Paper

Town Planning, Mega Relics and the Social Order: A Case Study of Indus

MITA SARKAR DAS
INDIRA GANDHI CENTRE, VISVA-BHARATI
RESEARCH ASSOCIATE (ANTHROPOLOGY)

ABSTRACT: Indus valley civilization is known to the world primarily through its architectural relics. These huge constructions point not only to the cognizance of the citizens but also to their social formations. This paper is an attempt to find out how these mega constructions point towards the stratified society and the layout of those strata for the formation of a much developed society than the previous time and era.

Keywords: Indus, relics, stratified, polity, chiefdom, city-state.

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The people living in the proto historic Indus valley and surroundings can only be defined on the basis of the archaeological remains that they left behind. The Harappan culture was distinguished by its system of excellent and elaborate type of Town planning and off-course the mega relics scattered at the different urban centers.

IMPORTANT CENTRES: Harappa was the first site to be excavated. From the year 1920 onwards Dayaram Sahani, M. S. Vat, Mortimer Wheeler carried out excavations at Harappa. As this was the first city excavated, Indus civilization often termed as the Harappa civilization. Harappa is located at the bank of river Rabi in Western Punjab. The ruins of the city covers a circuit of about 3 miles

Mohenjodaro: This city is located at the Larkana district of Sind, on the bank of the river Indus. It is the largest city of the civilization. Most of the data of Indus civilization regarding town planning etc are gathered from this site. Excavations began in this site in the year 1922.

Kalibangan: The settlement of Kalibangan is located in Rajasthan, along the dried up bed of the river Ghaggar. This area had the largest concentration of Harappan Settlements.

Lothal: This site is located in the coastal flats of the Gulf of Cambay. This place seems to be an out post for sea trade.

Excavations at the different sites of the Indus civilization showed that the people lived at the particular places for a long time and went on building and rebuilding houses at the same location. As a result of these actions, the height of the debris at the different structures varies from 75 to 80 feet. The Harappan subsistence was totally dependent on the agricultural production.

TOWN PLANNING: Archaeologists like Mortimer Wheeler and Stuart Piggot believed that Harappan towns had a remarkable unity of conception. This was suggested by the division of each town into two parts. In one part was a raised citadel where the rulers were staying, in the other part of the town lived the ruled and the poor. The settlements of Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan, show certain uniformities in their planning. These cities were divided into a citadel on the western side and a lower town on the eastern side of the settlement. The citadel was built on a high podium of mud bricks. The citadel seems to have contained large structures which might have functioned as administrative or ritual centers. The lower city contained residential areas. In Mohenjodaro and Harappa the citadel was surrounded by 'a brick wall. At Kalibangan both the citadel and the lower city were surrounded by a wall. Streets ran from north to south in the lower city and cut at right angles.

The remarkable thing about the arrangement of the houses in the cities is that they followed the grid system. According to it, roads cut across one another almost at right angles, and the city was divided into so many blocks. This is true of almost all Indus settlements regardless of its size.

Big buildings distinguished both Harappa and Mohenjodaro. The latter was extremely rich in structures. Their monuments symbolized the ability of the ruling class to mobilize labour and collect taxes; the huge brick constructions also impressed the common people with the prestige and influence of their rulers. In Harappa and Mohenjodaro baked bricks were used for buildings. In Kalibangan mud bricks were used. In settlements like Kot diji and Amri there was no fortifications of the city. The site of Lothal in Gujrat also shows a very different layout. It was a rectangular settlement surrounded by a brick wall. It did not have any internal division into citadel and lower city. Along the eastern side of the town was found a brick basin which later identified as the dockyard by the excavators. The site of the Surkotada in kutch was divided into two equal halves and the building materials were basically mud bricks and lumps of mud.

Harappans were accustomed with baked and un baked bricks of standard size. This shows that it was not the individual house owners who make their own bricks but brick making was organized on a large scale. Similarly, cities like Mohenjodaro showed the excellent arrangements for sanitation. The waste water should pass through the chutes connected with public drains aligned to the margin of the streets. This again indicates the presence of a civic administration. Perhaps it would take decisions for the sanitary requirements of the all the towns men.

MEGA STRUCTURES: In Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan, the citadel areas contained monumental rather mega structures. All these structures perhaps have had special functions. This is clear from the fact that they stood on the high mud brick platform. Among these structures is the famous GREAT BATH of Mohenjodaro.

PUBLIC BATH: The most important public building of Mohenjodaro is its public bath. This huge structure has been claimed as the oldest public tank of the world. The floor of the Great Bath was built of Burnt bricks. Water was drawn from a large well in an adjacent room, and an outlet from the corner of the bath led to a drain. Flights of steps were there on the both sides of this huge structure. These steps used to lead the persons to the base of the Great Bath. The structure of this Great Bath suggests that at a time perhaps a large number of people used to take dip in this structure may be for ritual purposes or any such occasions of this nature.

GRANARY: Both at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, a Granary of massive construction of solid masonry, divided into blocks with attached platforms for loading and unloading has come to light. A timber super structure was provided above the blocks which were arranged in a manner to ensure proper airing. Very big granaries have also been reported from Egypt and Mesopotamia, but they are not comparable to that of Harappa and Mohenjodaro in specialisation and of Design and in monumental dignity. The granary at Harappa is the largest building in the city.

WAREHOUSE OR GRANARY: At the acropolis area of Lothal there is a dockyard as well as a construction which has been described by the archaeologist as the warehouse or possibly a granary. It stands on a twelve feet high mud brick platform measuring 165x145 feet and consists of twelve cubical blocks.

DOCKYARD: A trapezoidal brick structure with an overall measurement 710x124 ft with inlet and outlet channels identified as a dockyard at Lothal was the most important public building. Its extant height is 14 ft but it might have been originally much higher. It must have been used for berthing ships and handling cargo. Stratigraphically, this enclosure was connected with the old river bed of Sabarmati. The recent discovery of the five anchor stones suggest that it was meant for the dock purpose. There are other signs also which suggest that this structure used for berthing purpose, like the absolute verticality of the walls of the embankment without any provisions for reaching the water level, the extreme salinity of the silt. Some archaeologist have argued that it was a tank of drinking water or a tank of irrigation.

COLLEGIATE BUILDING: Near the stupa the great structure with extra thick outer walls has been identified as the collegiate building, which probably housed some high officials. The list of high officials may include high ranked priests or the high ranked administrators.

PUBLIC ASSEMBLY: Pillared hall, 80 feet square divided into long corridors, interspersed with low benches and having even seats may probably serve as the public assembly.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: It is known to everybody that Harappan civilization can be categorized mainly into three phases. They are Early Harappan phase, Harappan phase and Late Harappa phase, but Indus

urbanism is defined on the basis of large central cities, which may have held between 40,000 to 80,000 people surrounded by an irregular network of smaller towns, villages, hamlets and camps of pastoral sheds. Each of the cities of Indus Civilization are having at least one mega structures which take a huge area and serve to many people at a time. All these magnificent structures are unique in its construction and supplementary to each other. That means if it is assumed that a group of people are living in that place at a particular phase of Harappan civilization, then each of those structures are beneficiary to a group of souls by serving a particular purpose. The earliest large scale urban society in south Asia emerged during the Harappan phase of the of the Indus tradition-1900BC. Shaffer in 1992 defined it as the chiefdom society. Now chiefs and chiefdoms are more or less the contemporary political formations. It means the political organization characterized by social hierarchies and consolidation of political power into fulltime specialists who control production and distribution of resources. The prestige of the chiefs family is high but not always. The chief has always a bigger control over the productions. In general chiefdom is seen where intense agriculture was possible. No doubt Indus economy was strongly dependent on agricultural economy. The town planning of each of the city and the presence of the megalithic construction strongly recommends for a divisions amongst the population though not very sharp. Therefore chiefdom was quite a possible deduction. On the other hand there are other group of social scientists who argued for preliminary state level political organization represented by the Harappan phase of the Indus valley civilization. The Harappan phase represents the first state level political organization, but no single settlement dominated the region and there is no indication that there was emergence of hereditary monarchies or highly centralized territorial states. (J. Kenoyer, 1998). There is a conspicuous absence of central temples palaces and elaborate elite burials that are characteristic of other early urban societies. In Mesopotamia, Egypt and China John Kenoyer suggested that due to large geographic area and the many different sizes settlements associated with Indus civilization it is more appropriate to consider the larger settlements as the state level society, with some of the smaller regional centers as the representing chiefdoms. The large cities such Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, or Lothal were perhaps the independent city states with direct political control over the local settlements and lands. Several competing classes of elites would have been present in these urban centers; merchants, and other individuals who controlled resources like land, live stocks and others. The elites and their supporting communities probably maintained different level of control over their respective regions. {Kenoyer, 1998}

Presence of hierarchical stratification conspicuously evidenced in its structural manifestation and also in the layout of the. Based on the comparison with early historic polities, Harappan cities were the place of the competing elites. Archaeologist and social scientist often made it more prominent through pointing out to the evidences like ritual objects, ornaments etc. On the other hand it is observed that though there were differentiation on the structure of the houses or the alignments but their close proximity in a particular zone saying that the hierarchical stratification was not so rigid. The centre of power would have been within each of the walled mounds at Mohenjo Daro. Probably there were competition between these communities which contributed to the economic development and rapid buildup of a city as a whole.

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