

# Indian civilization

Government



INDIAN CIVILIZATION Also called Indus Valley Civilization; the earliest in South Asia Contemporary with Bronze Age civilizations in pre-dynastic Egypt, Mesopotamia Compared to the other Bronze Age civilizations, Indus Valley Civilization was unspectacular Early civilizations of the Indian sub-continent were centred on two major river valleys: The Indus River and its tributaries, especially the Saraswati River Valley (2600-1500BCE) – associated with Dravidians.

Called Harappan Culture The Ganges River Valley (1500-500BCE) – associated with the Aryans. Called the Vedic Age. Along the Indus & Saraswati, there were two major centres of this civilization: Mohenjodaro and Harappa hence Harappan Culture Other cities of this civilization include Kalibagan, Chanhudaro & Doraji in Gujerat Origins and Development

This civilization appears as fully developed & distinctive culture; little is known about the cultures that came before it or the factors that led to its development Recent research indicates that antecedents of this civilization can be found at Mehrgarh on the western edge of the Indus plains Evidence that domestication of plants & animals, pottery production and village life began here Around 3200 – 2600 BCE, several pre-urban cultures existed in Indus Plains and the western hill valleys that show aspects of the Harappan culture HARAPPAN CULTURE: CHARACTERISTICS

Built on irrigation-based agriculture. Irrigation based on dikes and drains. Barley and wheat the most important crops; grains stored in granaries in Harappa and Mohenjodaro (as a form of tax? ) Domesticated animals cattle, water buffalo, goats, pigs, donkeys Trade was very important; extensive

trade connections with areas around the Arabian Sea & up the Persian Gulf to Mesopotamia Fortified cities; well-planned with straight streets intersecting at right angles; a system of underground drains and sewers Buildings made of baked bricks.

At Mohenjodaro, multi-roomed houses have been recorded Thickness of walls and remains of staircases point to the existence of upper floors Skilled artisans including bead makers, metal workers, cotton weavers and potters Potters made painted pots decorated with nimal figures, water jars, cooking & drinking vessels & storage vessels Metal workers produced copper and bronze vessels, silver and gold ornaments Other artisans produced the square and rectangular seals from steatite & other soft rocks Seals had an animal carved in negative relief and a line of script that could be read when the seal was stamped on wet tablet Seals were used to authenticate messages. The script on the seals revealed the name, lineage, social identity or the public office held by seal-owner Seals could also have been worn as talismans or amulets

They are the only examples of writing from this period 400 pictographs/characters have been identified so far, but the script is not fully deciphered RELIGION Little is known about the early religions of the Indus River Valley in these early times However, many elements of India's religious heritage today are evident from some seals from Harappa and Mohenjodaro. A seal from Mohenjodaro has a human-like figure with three heads wearing a headdress and sitting in the Yoga position. He is surrounded by animals: elephants, rhinos, water buffalo, deer etc.

Thought to be a Prototype of the popular Hindu god, Shiva (the Lord of Beasts) Seal impressions and clay figurines from Harappa depict a female deity with conspicuous sexual organs = thought to represent the goddess of fertility

**FALL & DECLINE** Harappan Culture declined and fell around 1500 BCE; Harappa, Mohenjodaro and other cities were abandoned and their populations dispersed into smaller settlements There was a reversal of achievements: writing was forgotten and much of northern India returned to village life

**REASONS FOR DECLINE/FALL**

1. Possible flooding along the Indus, affecting the densely populated areas and cities
2. Shifts in patterns of long distance trade with Mesopotamia and other regions
3. Changes in subsistence farming; rice cultivation was introduced along the Ganges Basin and had taken root by 1500BCE; millet was introduced in Gujerat. So new environments were opened for farming where conditions were unsuitable for wheat and barley
- 4.

Major geological disturbances near the source of Saraswati river, causing it to dry up, catastrophically disrupting agriculture downstream.

5. Invasion by the Aryans (Arya = noble) who came from the northern steppes of Europe

**REASONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE ARYANS**

A highly developed spoken language that tended to displace other tongues that it encountered

Better military organization: horse-drawn war chariots and weapons made from iron which was superior to bronze

**GANGES RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS**

Aryans became sedentary landowners along the Ganges; others became traders on the river

Crafts became more specialized & increased in

complexity; produced iron ploughs, luxury items for trade Urban centres re-emerged with substantial populations of artisans, traders, resident landowners, priests, warriors Major metropolises along the Ganges include Patna, Benares (which is still a holy city for Hindus even today) SOCIAL ORGANIZATION Early Indian societies were matriarchal (i. e. headed by women) and matrilineal (inheritance was through the female side of the family).

This changed with the coming of the Aryans who were patriarchal Before the Aryans, husbands lived with the wife's family; the wife's family paid dowry. After Aryans, wife's were required to move to the husband's family, bring substantial dowries and accept husband's authority The caste system was introduced at this time. Basis for caste division was social and economic rather than racial Originally there were four castes: 1. Sudras = cultivators of land, manual labourers, domestic servants 2. Vaisyas = landowners, artisans, herdsman, merchants . Kshatriyas = the warrior nobility 4. Brahmins = priests, scholars The caste system became a dominant factor in shaping Indian society Economic specialization & division of labour played a role in the evolution of the caste e. g. Brahmins engage freely in other occupation, avoiding those considered to be polluting The hierarchy embodied in the caste system also applies to the cosmic order; the ranking order of the caste (from pure to impure) corresponded to the ascending order of the divinities as well

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION Not much is known about the political organization in India before the coming of the Aryans However, we know that Harappans had adopted the city as a means of organizing & controlling their

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civilization Up to five major Harappan cities are known: Harappa after which the civilization is named; Mohenjodaro, Kalibagan, Chanhudaro & Doraji Aryans were loosely organized into families, clans and tribes.

Tribes were headed by chiefs/kings called Rajas, most of whom were elected or chosen by rotation from the leading families Rajas shared political power with councils of elders & assemblies of adult males There were two forms of states in India: Republics and Kingdoms In the Republics, rajas continued to rule in conjunction with powerful councils and the assemblies while in the Kingdoms, the power of the rajas grew at the expense of the councils & the assemblies.

Most often, power became hereditary Monarchies developed administrative systems headed by chief priests and military leaders Close alliance between kings & priests; Brahmans were involved in the consecration of new kings; the kings supported the emerging Hindu priesthoods RELIGION Again, little is known about early religion in Harappan India. However, we know that religion in early India was a form of polytheism People of Harappan culture worshipped a goddess whose clay figurines have been recovered in Harappa & Mohenjodaro Aryans introduced new gods including:

Indra = the god of war Agni = The spirit of the sacrificial fire Varuna = the lord of the big sky Aryans sacrificed to these divinities by slaughtering dozens, even hundreds of animals & sometimes humans too Sacrifices were accompanied by hymns, prayers & rituals. The hymns were passed on through generations to become core of the Hindu scriptures, the vedas

HINDUISM

Hinduism emerged from the merging of the gods of the Aryans and those of the conquered Dravidians. Early Hindus saw some of their gods in the shape of animals (anthropomorphic divinities) such as snakes, the sacred cow etc. However, Hinduism did evolve to engage in philosophical search for the deepest spiritual principle of the universe. The most important gods of the Hindu faith are: Brahma = the creator god; also called the Absolute Being or the World/Universal Soul. Vishnu = the preserver of the universe.

Shiva = the dancing divinity with four arms and the destroyer of all things; also the Lord of Beasts. The concept of Brahma later subsumed all the three gods (Brahma, Vishnu & Shiva). Brahma personified the concept of a deity that could be worshipped; Brahman (as the title for the priestly class) is a derivative of the same word. Brahman can also be described as the universal principle that underlies all that exists, the spiritual essence permeating the entire cosmos & the one hidden in all things; hence reincarnation. THE VEDAS

Today, Hinduism is based on the vedas, the sacred books of the Hindu religion. Vedas are believed to have been divinely inspired. There are four vedas: 1. Yajurveda: a manual of sacrifice for the officiating priest. 2. Atharvaveda: a catalogue of charms & spells supposed to be effective in curing illnesses, arousing passion in the object of one's desire or in destroying one's enemies. 3. Rig Veda (means "verses of wisdom" or "knowledge"): a compilation of more than 1000 poems composed between 1500-900 BCE, addressed to various Aryan gods.

For example one of the poems is dedicated to Indra who is described as the god of thunder who pierced the bellies of the mountains to release waters.

(possibly referring to annual floods caused by the melting of snow in the Himalayas). Another poem appeals for protection of goddess Night whose radiance was believed to drive away darkness. Another poem is by a gambler lamenting an unlucky throw of the dice which has caused his wife to repel him and his mother-in-law to hate him. 4.

Upanishads (meaning “sitting down near”): These are philosophical treatises in prose and verse. They are cast in the form of dialogues between teacher and student. They examine the nature of reality and the problem of man’s place in the universe. They reveal a genius for conceptual reasoning still admired today. •Upanishads teach that evil is the fruit of ignorance; that the pursuit of wisdom is pursuit of the highest possible good and that attainment of wisdom bestows both power and virtue •Main Teachings:

The Absolute Being/World Soul is the only supreme reality. Material world is an illusion (or maya); it is not permanent. •That individual souls go through a cycle of rebirth; the soul seeks to reach nirvana (spiritual liberation) •That the soul can escape the cycle of rebirth by union with the Absolute Being. The individual soul (atman) is actually a fragment of Brahman, the Universal Soul. OTHER ASPECTS OF HINDUISM

The concept of brotherhood of all living things embodied in the concepts of reincarnation and transmigration of souls, karma and ahimsa. The Hindu faith holds that each human soul is reborn/reincarnated in the body of some other creature – human, animal, plant or even supernatural being over & over again. The precise form one takes on reincarnation depends on karma or the



actions one takes in the present life Good and pious life – you may be reborn as a Brahman or other high caste; a life of self-indulgence & sin – you may live your next life as a worm, dog or something else Members of lowly castes were encouraged to diligently do their duties to be born to higher status Dharma (faithful performance of one's assigned role) and Karma (merits and demerits earned as a result of action) cemented loyalty to the prescriptions of caste.

Thus doctrine of transmigration of souls reinforced the caste system Ahimsa refers to the doctrine of nonviolence; first emerged among the Jains before adoption by others in Indian society Meditation – Hindus believe that one might escape endless rounds of lives filled in with human suffering through meditation (i. e. the mystical concentration of all psychic forces) The goal of Yogi meditation is the submergence of one's ego in the supreme unity of Brahman. This is achieved through spiritual enlightenment: that all differences are illusions (or maya) & that all that really exists is the totality of Brahman, the Absolute Being BUDDHISM Has origins in religious reforms in Indian society in the 6th century BCE.

These reforms produced the spiritual teachers or gurus The gurus were later described as the naked philosophers (or the gymnosophists) because they walked naked in the rain and the sun to discipline the flesh Also fasted for long periods of time & engaged in exhausting exercises that developed into the sacred discipline of yoga Two leading gurus were Mahavira (540-476 BCE) & Prince Siddhartha or Gautama (563-483 BCE) Mahavira founded Jainism & Gautama founded Buddhism Gautama was given the title of Buddha (the Enlightened One) by his followers; was born in the Himalayas, <https://assignbuster.com/indian-civilization/>

present day Nepal GAUTAMA'S TEACHINGS He denied the existence of a soul; taught that only matter existed (in opposition to teaching of Upanishads) Because matter was always in a state of flux, he recognized no Absolute Being or any fixed universal principle other than constant change Even gods were subject to laws of growth & decay; the universe is forever becoming He retained the concept of karma; he believed that the root of suffering is desire (i. e. he pursuit of unattainable goals because the objects sought are fleeting & unreal) In this sense, he agreed with orthodox Hinduism that worldly things are an illusion or maya To reach Nivarna, one should recognize & reject worldly desires as blind follies; cultivate unselfishness, compassion & honesty; reject injury to others such as murder, theft & adultery; choose a life that does not bring harm to other living things

500 years after Buddhism was founded, it split into two major divisions: Hinayana School ( the Lesser Vehicle) and Mahayana School (the Greater Vehicle) HINAYANA SCHOOL So called because it emphasized individual salvation; claimed that a diligent person could attain nivarna in three lifetimes Bodhisattva - successive incarnations of the Buddha Denied existence of a soul; does not recognize the founder of Buddhism as a god. However, prayers, gifts of flowers & incense may be offered to his image Found in Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia & Laos

MAHAYANA SCHOOL

Mahayana sets as its goal the redemption of the entire human race; worships Buddha as a god The concept of Bodhisattva - represents the Buddha-elect, an individual who has won enlightenment but chooses to remain in the world for the liberation of others; agreeing to suffer as ransom for all human beings

Everyone is potentially a Bodhisattva & may become a Buddha. It embodied as cardinal virtues love, piety, joy & serenity Mahayana Buddhism found in China, Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal & Japan, but it disappeared in India in later centuries JAINISM Founded by Mahavira; it is contemporary with & in many respects parallel to Buddhism. Mahavira broke radically with traditional religions, rejected both their deities and their scriptures Doctrines of Jainism

To Mahavira, the material universe is real, but it is filled with an infinite number of souls lodged in living creatures & inanimate things Rejected the concept of an overriding World Soul & taught that individual souls are held in bondage by matter; this bondage is perpetuated through successive births by operation of karma Because every action produces karma and karma adds weight to the chains of bondage, the only route to escape is to avoid action altogether; thus nivarna represents a place of absolute passivity Mahavira prescribed a regime of extreme asceticism, ideally culminating in death through self-starvation. Despite its atheistic tendencies, Jainism did resemble a true religion with prayers, holy scriptures and gods. Today, there are about 2 million Jains in southern and western India Prominent in Jain faith is the doctrine of ahimsa or non-injury to living things; it imposes taboos against slaughter of not only of animals but even insects. Ahimsa contributed ethical support to the ideal of pacifism Since Jainism ruled out the practice of agriculture, Jains turned to trade & money-lending, becoming some of the wealthiest in Indian society ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE VEDIC AGE

Medicine: dissection, delicate surgeries; thorough knowledge of human anatomy; study of embryology Knowledge of astronomy: the first to suggest that the earth revolves on its axis & that the earth rotates around the  
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sunMathematics: were the first to extract square & cube roots; used the decimal system; invented the principle of zero, eventually adopted by the rest of the world; Arabic numbers in use today originated in India; advances in algebra Literature: Two epic poems: Mahabharata & Ramayana Mahabharata – the longest poem in the world with over 10, 000 verses. About the struggle between two powerful Indian clans, but gods were involved also Ramayana – a romantic story of Prince Rama who rescues his lovely wife Sita fromRavana, the demon king of Ceylon Arthasastra a political commentary