

# Indus Valley Civilization

## [UPSC Notes]

### What was the Indus Valley Civilization?

Indus civilization, also called Indus valley civilization or Harappan civilization is the earliest known urban culture of the Indian subcontinent. The Indus Valley was home to the largest of the four ancient urban civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China. It flourished in the basins of the Indus River, which flows through the length of Pakistan, along with a system of perennial, mostly monsoon-fed, rivers that once coursed in the vicinity of the seasonal Ghaggar-Hakra river in northwest India and eastern Pakistan.

### Phases of Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus Valley Civilization is divided into three phases, namely:

- **Early Harappan Phase (3300 to 2600 BCE):** It is related to the Hakra Phase, identified in the Ghaggar-Hakra River Valley, with the earliest examples of the Indus script. This phase is characterized by a centralized authority, urban quality of life, established trade networks and cultivation of crops.
- **Mature Harappan Phase (2600 to 1900 BCE):** It is characterized by Kot Diji. The early Harappan communities were turned into large urban centres, like Harappa, Ganeriwala, and Mohenjo-Daro in modern-day Pakistan and Dholavira, Kalibangan, Rakhigarhi, Rupar, and Lothal in modern-day India.
- **Late Harappan Phase (1900 to 1300 BCE):** It signifies the gradual decline of the Indus Valley Civilization. Though, archaeological data indicates the persistence of the Late Harappan culture till 1000-900 BC.

### Discovery of Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus civilization is also known as the Harappan Civilization, after its first site was excavated, in what was then the Punjab province of British India and is now in Pakistan.

The discovery of Harappa and soon after Mohenjodaro was the culmination of work beginning in 1861 with the founding of the Archaeological Survey of India during the British Raj. Nevertheless, there were earlier and later cultures in the same area often called Early Harappan and Late Harappan. There are five major urban sites, the most important being: Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Dholavira, Ganeriwala, and Rakhigarhi.

### Architecture and Town Planning of Indus Valley Civilization

Architecture and town planning was the most striking feature of the Indus valley civilization. The town planning of the Indus Valley Civilization proves that the IVC people lived a highly civilized

and developed life. Indus people were the first to build planned cities with a scientific drainage system. For architecture, it can be said that the Indus cities were built on a uniform plan and the town planning was amazing in nature. Life in the Indus cities gives the impression of a democratic bourgeois economy like that of ancient Crete.

## Streets

The streets were 13 to 34 feet wide and were well lined, straight and cut each other at right angles. The streets and roads divided the city into rectangular blocks. The presence of dustbins proves the presence of good municipal administration. Archaeologists have also discovered the lamp posts at intervals, which suggests the existence of street lights.

## Drainage System

The cities of the Indus valley civilization were provided with an excellent closed drainage system. Brick-laid channels flowed through every street. Each house had its own drainage and soak pit which was connected to the public drainage. They were covered and had manholes at intervals for cleaning and clearing purposes. Indus people had a perfect underground drainage system. Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, and the recently partially-excavated Rakhigarhi demonstrate the world's first known urban sanitation systems.

## Granaries

They constituted an important part of the Harappan cities. The largest building in Mohenjodaro was the granary which was 45.71 meters long and 15.23 meters wide. In Harappa, there are a series of brick platforms which formed the base for two rows of 6 granaries each. These granaries safely stored the grains, which were probably collected as revenue or storehouses to be used in emergencies.

In the Southern part of Kalibangan brick platforms have also been found.

## Architecture and Buildings

The houses and other buildings were built by the side of roads by the people of the Indus Valley Civilization. The houses were terraced houses made up of burnt bricks. Standardized burnt bricks of ratio 1:2:4 were found in all the sites. No stones were used.

Every house had two or more rooms. There were also more than one-storied houses. The houses were designed around an inner courtyard and contained pillared halls, bathrooms, paved floors, kitchen, well etc. There was an excellent system of water supply which is verified by public wells by the side of the streets. Every big house had its own well. The workmen's quarters are also found. The quality of urban planning suggests efficient municipal governments that placed a high priority on hygiene or religious ritual.

Harappans demonstrated advanced architecture with dockyards, granaries, warehouses, brick platforms, and protective walls. They also built a dockyard at Lothal.

## The Great Bath

The most striking feature in Mohenjodaro is the Great Bath, which is a large quadrangle structure. In the centre, there is a huge swimming pool with the remains of galleries and rooms

on all four sides. The Great bath had 8 ft thick outer walls. The water was discharged by a huge drain with a corbelled roof more than 6 ft in depth. There were arrangements for a hot water bath in some rooms. Most scholars agree that this tank would have been used for special religious functions where water was used to purify and renew the well-being of the bathers.

## Characteristic features of Harappan cities:

There was great uniformity in Harappan town planning. Town planning was based on a grid pattern or chessboard pattern. Streets and lanes intersect at right angles, creating a number of rectangular blocks in the city. The entire city was divided into two major areas; The Citadel and Lower Town.

- The Citadel was a fortified area with vital public buildings, including granaries and dwellings for the ruling class. The lower town was larger and lay east of the Citadel.
- The lower town was intended for the common public, while the Citadel and the lower town were separated by an area of ground.

## Agricultural Pattern of Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus people were the earliest people to produce cotton. The Harappan villages were situated mostly near the flood plains and produced sufficient foodgrains, such as wheat, barley, rai, peas, sesame, lentil, chickpea and mustard. Millets were found at sites in Gujarat. Animals were also reared on a large scale. Representations on seals and terracotta sculptures indicate that the bull was known, and archaeologists extrapolate shows oxen were also used for ploughing.

They also developed some new tools known as plough which was used to dig earth for planting the seeds and turning the soil. Traces of canals have been found at the Harappan site of Shortughai in Afghanistan.

## Economy during Indus Valley Civilization

Indus Valley Civilization was a prosperous civilization. Indus Valley Civilization's economy was largely based on agriculture and animal husbandry, supplemented by the exploitation of natural and wild resources. The importance of trade in the life of the Indus people is witnessed by the presence of numerous seals, uniform script and regulated weights and measures in a wide area. The Harappans carried on a considerable trade in stone, metal, shell, etc. Metal money was not used and trade was carried by a barter system.

### Agricultural economy

The main crops produced were Wheat, Barley, Rice, Dates, Mustard, and Cotton. The use of wooden ploughshare, well irrigation, dams, and irrigation canals shows the advancement of Harappans in agriculture technology. The Indus people set up a trading colony in northern Afghanistan which facilitated trade with Central Asia.

They also carried commerce with those in the land of the Tigris and the Euphrates.

## Manufacturing

A large number of terracotta articles show that it was used by common people. Harappans were the first to use silver in the world and the people did not use an iron but used Copper, bronze, silver, and gold. Owing to this, the Harappan people were good at metallurgy and producing alloys. The Indus Valley people were an expert in bead-making jewellery.

## Pottery

The Harappans used Red and Black pottery (redware painted with black designs) and also knew the use of Potter's wheel with ease. It shows the expertise of Harappans in pottery making e.g. Glazed pottery, incised pottery, perforated pottery, etc. Harappans produced their own characteristic pottery, which was glossy and shining.

## Trade

Harappans had trade with Mesopotamia (Sumeria), Central Asia, Persia, Afghanistan, Oman (Oman), and Dilmun (Bahrain). Trade was through the barter system. Trade shows the advanced trade relation of Harappan civilization with other parts of India as well as also with other contemporary civilizations. Export items included Teak (obtained from Gujrat), Amazonite (Hirapuri, GJ), Slate (Kangra), Lead (Kashmir and South India), and Copper (from Baluchistan), whereas the import items include Jade (from Central Asia), Turquoise (from Khorasan), Lapis Lazuli, Gold, Silver, Tin (from Afghanistan), Gold was also obtained from Iran and Kolar mines in Karnataka and Steatite (Iran).

## Weights and Measures

The weights followed a binary system of 1, 2, 8, 16, 32 to 64, 160, 320, 640, 1600, 3200, and so on. Weights were made of chert, limestone, and steatite and were generally cubical. The standardization and accuracy of weights and measures throughout the IVC were remarkable.

## Seals

Harappan seals are the greatest artistic creation and were used to mark ownership of property and in trade. They were made up of Steatite (soft stone) and were half an inch to 2.5 inches. The seals were generally square and rectangular with carved animals and inscriptions. The humpless bull is the most used animal in seals.

## Religion during Indus Valley Civilization

In Harappa, numerous terracotta figurines of women have been found. The Harappans, therefore, looked upon the earth as a fertility goddess and worshipped her in the same manner as the Egyptians worshipped the Nile goddess Isis.

The male deity is represented on a seal with three-horned heads, represented in the sitting posture of a yogi. This god is surrounded by an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros, and a buffalo below his throne. At his feet appear two deer. The depicted god is identified as Pashupati Mahadeva. The people of the Indus region also worshipped trees and animals.

The most important of them is the one-horned unicorn which may be identified with the rhinoceros and the next important was the humped bull.

The absence of any palace or temple despite structures like granaries and public baths led historians to believe that the Indus Valley society was an egalitarian one.

## Important Sites and Findings of Indus Valley Civilization

In the 1920s, the Archaeological Department of India carried out excavations in the Indus valley wherein the ruins of the two old cities, Mohenjodaro and Harappa were unearthed. In 1924, John Marshall, the then Director-General of the ASI, announced the discovery of the Indus valley to the world.

Over 1400 Indus Valley Civilization sites have been discovered, of which 925 sites are in India and 475 sites in Pakistan, while some sites in Afghanistan are believed to be trading colonies.

Site	Excavated By	Location	Important Findings
Harappa	Daya Ram Sahni in 1921	Situated on the bank of river Ravi in Montgomery district of Punjab (Pakistan).	Granaries, bullock carts and sandstone statues of Human anatomy
Mohenjodaro a.k.a. Mound of Dead	R.D Banerjee in 1922	Situated on the Bank of river Indus in Larkana district of Punjab (Pakistan).	Seal of Pasupathi Mahadeva, Bronze dancing girl, Great bath, Granary, Steatite statue of beard man and a piece of woven cotton.
Sutkagendor	Stein in 1929	In southwestern Balochistan province, Pakistan on Dast river	Trade point between Harappa and Babylon
Chanhudaro	N.G Majumdar in 1931	Sindh on the Indus river	Bead makers shop and footprint of a dog chasing a cat.
Amri	N.G Majumdar in 1935	On the bank of Indus river	Antelope evidence

Kalibangan	Ghose in 1953	Rajasthan on the bank of Ghaggar river	Wooden plough, Fire altar and Camel's bones.
Lothal	R.Rao in 1953	Gujarat on Bhogva river near Gulf of Cambay	Dockyard, First manmade port, Rice husk, Fire altars and Chess playing.
Surkotada	J.P Joshi in 1964	Gujarat	Bead and Bones of horses.
Banawali	R.S Bisht in 1974	Hisar district of Haryana	Evidence of both pre-Harappan and Harappan culture Beads and Barley.
Dholavira	R.S Bisht in 1985	Gujarat in Rann of Kachchh	Water harnessing system and Water reservoir.

## Difference between Harappan and Mesopotamian Civilizations

The difference between Harappan and Mesopotamian Civilizations are listed below:

Features	Harappan	Mesopotamian/Egyptian
Decline of Civilization	Declined after 1900 BCE	Both civilizations continued to exist even after 1900 BCE.
Extent of Civilization	Spread was 20 times that of Mesopotamian and Egyptian Civilization	Less area as compared to IVC.
Script	Invented their own typical pictographic script	Mesopotamia has a cuneiform script and the Egyptian script is known as hieroglyphics. Both scripts have been deciphered.
Writing Material	The majority of the Script has been found on the seals	The majority of the Mesopotamian script has been found on the clay tablets while Egyptians wrote on papyrus sheets made of reeds.
Weapons	No clear evidence of war or weapons	Clear evidence of wars and expeditions in the other two civilizations.
Religion	No temples or religious structures have been found	Had elaborate religious practices, magic spells, and dominance of priests.
Urban Planning	Planned towns with a grid-like pattern	Towns show haphazard growth.
Building Material	Burnt Bricks	Egyptians used Dried Bricks, whereas Mesopotamians used Baked Bricks.

## Decline of Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus Valley Civilization declined around 1800 BCE. The reasons behind the demise of Civilization are still debated.

Many scholars believe that the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilization was caused by climate change. Some experts believe the drying of the Saraswati River, which began around 1900 BCE, was the main cause of climate change, while others conclude that a great flood struck the area. Many scholars argue that changes in river patterns caused the large civilization to break up into smaller communities called late Harappan cultures. Another disastrous change in the Harappan climate might have been eastward-moving monsoons or winds that bring heavy rains.

