

Religious Aspects of Indus Valley Civilization-An Analysis

¹Dr. ABHISHEK AGRAWAL, ²Prachi Bhatpahari

¹Assistant Professor, ²B.A. 6th Semester

^{1,2}Department of Arts & Humanities Kalinga University, Kotni, Naya Raipur (C.G.)

¹abhishek.agrawal@kalingauniversity.ac.in

²prachi555bhatpahari@gmail.com

Abstract

The discoveries at Harappa in the Montgomery District of the Punjab were made by Rai Bahadur Dayaram Sahni and at Mohenjo-Daro, about 400 miles. Further down in the larkana district of Sindh by R.D. banerji and K.N. Dixhit of the Indian Archaeological Department. The ruins of Harappa were for the first time observed by Burns and Masson, but they were professionally examined for the first time by Cunningham in 1873. Excavation work was done at Mohenjo-Daro by Sir John Marshall and his collegiums from 1921 to 1927. It was later or continued by J.H. Mackey from 1927 to 1931. Work was also done on this site by G.F. Dales in 1963.

The religious ideologies of the Indus people is one of the most complex and least understood aspect of this civilization in the absence of any decipherable written text. Therefore the main tools in building these ideologies had always been the excavated archaeological material. But recent studies in this aspect and the use of creative imagination has helped us in bridging the gaps or re-establishing a connection to a certain extent; for it would be unjust only to accept the archaeological evidences as concrete for deducing the religious beliefs of people that no longer exist.

Over the years since the discovery of Indus civilization, many scholars have written about the religion of the Indus People but unfortunately very briefly and whatever conclusions they drew have also been revised on a large scale in the light of recent research.

Religious believes of Indus Valley Civilization-An Analysis

Introduction

The epoch making archeological excavations, made by Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni at Harappa, in district Montgomery of the Punjab and R D banerji at Mohanjodaro in district Larkana of Sindh, in 1921-22, shattered this fallacious belief, however. They revealed that a full-fledged indigenous civilization flourished in India about 5000 years ago. Both of these find spots now from a part of Pakistan.

The credit for the discovery of this pre-Aryan culture goes to the archeologists of the British India Government. It was Lord Canning, who made the appointments of General Alexander Cunningham as the first Archeological Surveyor of India in 1862. In 1875, Cunningham, in the course of his exploration at Harappa, came across a fire-burnt clay seal with an unfamiliar inscription. His finding remained a mystery until, in 1921-22, Sahni and Banerji unearthed the ruins of two big cities of the Bronze Age at Harappa and Mohanjodaro respectively. Thereafter, the excavations were carried out systematically at these sites under the personal supervision of Sir John Marshall, the Director General of the Archeological Department, with amazing results. He played a very important role in this enterprise, and fully established the antiquity of the Indian civilization before his retirement in 1931. According to Sir John Marshall, it attained maturity between 3250-2750 BC. This discovery pushed back, by one stroke, the antiquity of Indian history and culture to the fourth millennium B.C.

The spatial extension of the Indus civilization is very vast, covering an area of over 2 million square kilometres radiating from the valley of the Indus. The 1400 plus settlement sites discovered so far are distributed over a very wide geographical area extending in the west is upto Sutkagendor in Baluchistan; Alamgirpur in Meerut District (Uttar Pradesh) in the east; Daimabad (Ahmadnagar District, Maharashtra) in south; and Manda (Akhnoor District, Jammu and Kashmir) in the north, covering an area of almost 1600 km. east – west and 1400 km. north-south. The estimates of area vary according to the point of view of different scholars; Kenoyer (1991) estimated it about 680,000 sq. km., Possehl (1991) estimated it one million sq km, while Agrawal (2009) gave an area of about 1.5 million square kilometres (at its peak). It spread over the present

day western parts of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan covering about one-third of the present landmass of the region.

A site count published in 1984 showed about 138 classic Indus civilization sites in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan. The largest site – Rakhigarhi in Hissar district – is said to be as large as Harappa. The classic Harappan site count in Gujarat in 1984 was 101; 30 in Kutch; 12 in mainland Gujarat, and 59 in Saurashtra. Lothal, Surkotada, Padri, Rangpur and Rojdi are among the major excavated sites of this region. S. R. Rao (1991) divides the Harappan area into six regions, such as –

- Punjab (type site: Harappa)
- Rajasthan, Haryana (type site: Kalibangan and Banwali)
- Bahawalpur (type site: Ganweriwala)
- Sindh (type site: Mohenjo-Daro)
- Baluchistan (type site: Kulli, the Harappa phase)
- Gujarat (type site: Dholavira)

MAJOR HARAPPAN CITIES:-

Some of the major Harappan cities are –

- Harrapa** -25Km west-south-west of Montgomery, the district headquarter of the Pakistan Punjab),
- Mohenjo-Daro**-located on the right bank of the Indus in Larkana district of Sindh in Pakistan),
- Chanhu-Daro**-located 20km east of the Indus and 130Km to the south of Mohenjo-daro in Nawabshah district of Sind in Pakistan),
- Balakot**- in the Las Bela district of Balochistan in Pakistan),
- Kalibangan**- located along the left bank of the dried-up bed of the river Ghaggar (ancient Sarasavati) in Ganganagar district of Rajasthan),

- vi) **Banawali**- located on the bank of ancient Saraswati River in Fatehabad district of Haryana, at about 120Km north-east of Kalibangan and 220Km north-west of Delhi),
- vii) **Rakhigarhi**- located on the right bank of the dry course of the Drisadavati in the Hissar district of Haryana),
- x) **Dholavira**- in district Kachachh in Gujarat),
- xi) **Lothal**- four miles away from Bhurkhi that lies between Rann of combay the Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat),
- xii) **Diamabad** is a deserted village on the left bank of the Pravara River, a tributary of the Godavari River, Maharashtra state),
- xiii) **Alamagirpur**-an easternmost post of the Indus Valley civilization located in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh),
- xiv) **Sutkagendor**- located on the extreme eastern edge of the wide Dasht Valley in the Makran on the Iran-Pakistan border),

One of the significant features of town planning is the grid or rectangular system – both characters can be seen in the layout of citadel and lower town. High rampart wall on broad foundation of mud-work, city gates, and a moat, etc characterizes the citadel. At regular intervals of the city wall are provided with bastions. Arrangement of parallelogram plan is seen at the citadel at Harappa.

Let us now briefly discuss what different scholars have said about the religious beliefs of the Indus Valley Civilization. According to Irfan Habib the Indus civilization as a monotonously uniform and utilitarian civilization, which at first sight cannot be admired for its art, as it lacks large sculpture pieces or any kind of monumental art that could be linked to the state. This means that the artisans might be working for individuals rather than state. This point clearly distinguishes the Indus art from the art work of Mesopotamia and Egypt where huge religious monumental

structures and sculptures were made to endorse the state religion. This point also backs that the Indus state might not be endorsing,

Religious Belief of Indus Valley Civilization

An idea of the religion of the Harappa people can be formed by a study of the seals, sealing's, inscribed copper tables, stone statuettes and terracotta figurines. Evidence of Harappan religion can be reconstructed through the seals, the figurines and the stone images discovered in the excavations.

Mother Goddess-

This view of Sir John Marshall in that the foremost among the Indus Pantheon was the Mother Goddess. A large number of terracotta female figures recovered from various sites are considered to be reorientations of the Mother Goddess. Similar figures have been found from the historic sites of the Kulli culture in south Baluchistan and Zhob valley in the north. According the archologists the range of the cult of the Mother Goddess at one time extended without break from the Indus to the Nile. To quote Sir John Marshall "But in no country, the worship of the Divine Mother is so deep rooted and universal as in India where she become a prototype of the Cosmic Energy (Prakriti). And the counterpart of the Cosmic Soul (Purusha). Here worship which originated in a matriarchal society in course of time formed the basis of later Saktism."

Critic's points out that the idea of Mother Goddess of earth Goddess was well known to the Vedic Aryans. To begin with, it appears in the form of Prithvi, but later on it is called Aditi, Prakriti, Durga, gauri, kali etc. It is true that principal gods of the Vedic Aryans were males and the female played a subordinate part, but the same was the case with the Harappan people whose principal goes were mostly males and goddess played a secondary role. The Pipal God which was possibly the prototype of the Vedic Prajapati, was the supreme deity of the Indian pantheon and his seven attendant messengers were also male deities of composite form. Like their Sumerian counterparts, they were human in the upper part and avian in the lower part. The buffalo-headed god was a strange compound of heterogeneous elements. His horned-head was that of a buffalo, arms were centipedes, thoraxes tigrine and the part below waits is a combination of two looped

cobras. Other deity's repressed on the Indus seals were almost all males. The tree-spirit figuring on a number of seals in the act of hypnotizing the tiger-demon was masculine in appearance. The same was the case with the indwelling spirit of the Acacia which has tried to throttle with his centipede-arms the two tiger-headed demons who were ready to carry away the tree of life. A number of seal amulets showed bellmen and the semi-bovine super-human beings which were invariably endowed with masculine traits. Under these circumstances it is not proper to maintain that female elements was dominated in the Indus religion.

It is also pointed out that the Mother-Goddess is not to be found in the glyphic art of the Indus Valley. All that we possess are the terracotta figures putting on elaborate head-dresses, neck ornaments and a skirt secured by a girdle round the waist. Their head-dress is usually a fan-shaped or arched framework of some light material. Ordinarily, the figurines of the Indus valley Civilisation are in a standing pose and their arms hang parallel to the body. However, some of them wearing the arched head dresses are seen relishing their arms to the level of the head and touching their fore-heads with both hands as though in a saluting pose. Dr. Mackey hinted at the similarity between the fan-shaped head dress of these figurines and the crest of the so-called Pasupati from Shiva found at Mohenjo-Daro. According to Dr. C.L. Fabri, "The head dresses of the Indus figures were borrowed from Create." However, according to Dr. K. N. Sastri "The female figures might have represented some minor gods which held a subordinate position under the Pipal god which was the supreme deity of the Indus age." It is to be noted that only the figurines wearing arched head-dresses appear in the saluting pose.

This points to some connection between the head-dress and the saluting pose. It is suggested that the saluting figure is worshipping the divine symbol which she is carrying on her head. According to Dr. K.N. Sastri "It follows that the head-dress and the saluting pose of the female figurines indicate that the models represented a minor deity and not the Mother Goddess.

That the cult of Mother Goddess was prevalent among them is presumed from the discovery of a large number of miniature terracotta statues of a 'standing semi-nude female figure', wearing a long bronze statue of a dancing girl, as referred to above, may also have been the

representation of a female divinity. The striking uniformity in the size and shape of some lots of female figurines make us believe that these objects, like many others, were made in moulds. Some of them were found covered with smoke, which shows that they might have been formally worshipped as household deities by the burning of incense and oil lamps before them.

According to Sir John Marshall and Dr. Mackey, the Pipal Deity, the votary and the seven messengers were all males. The main deity is nude but the seven messengers are said to be dressed up in tunics. They were fabulous creatures and were shown as male deity. The cult the Mother Goddess did not dominate the Indus Valley Religion. The male gods loomed large on the horizon of that age. The Pipal God was the supreme deity and a large number of subordinate male deities ruled over the destinies of the poor mortals inhabiting the Indus

Tree-Worship-

The seal and painted pottery of the Indus Valley show the figures of the Pipal and Acacia Trees. They were regarded as celestial plants and were supposed to be inhabited by divine spirits. The Pipal Tree was the abode of the supreme deity of the Indus Valley. On account of the extreme sanctity attaching to that plant, its symbolic representation formed the crest of the horned head-dress of the deities of lower grades. The pipal was the tree of creation and knowledge and was believed to impart highest knowledge to those who denuded its branches on their heads. This privilege was enjoyed by the gods alone. The tree of life figures with great frequency on the seals of the Indus valley. Around this magic plant, most of the adventures and mighty exploits of the gods and national heroes of the Indus Valley were grouped. The sami tree is usually identified with Jand or Jandi. The Jand Tree is still believed to be the abode of a deity and many religious ceremonies are performed under it.

There was a struggle between the gods and demons for the possession of the tree for donning its branches as crests of pig-tails on their heads. Certain demons were always trying to steal away the tree or its branches. The tree was heavily guarded by a spirit. In addition to the guardian spirit, there were also other sentinels to protect the tree. The important of them was a composite animal whose face was human but the body comprised the features of various animals.

He was to possess the intelligence of man, the dash and virility of a ram, the brutality and aggressiveness of a tiger and deadly bite of a cobra. Such a composite animal was considered to be the most fitting guardian of the tree of life. There were also other single bodied but three-headed animals in the form of sentinels. In one case, the heads were those of unicorn, bison and an indeterminate quadruped with long hooked horns curving forward.

On a sealing at Mohanjodaro, a bull protected by a cobra is engaged in fighting a human adversary and is preventing him from coming near the sacred tree. Another sealing shows an Acacia Tree being protected by a bull which is engaged in fighting a male. Another sealing shows an Acacia Tree being protected by a bull which is engaged in fighting a male. Another composite guardian is seen watching a huge monster or a tiger whom he evidently killed in a combat. In another case a votary is seen presenting an object to an Acacia Tree. A cobra or a Naga Deity is also seen guardian the tree. In another seal, an Acacia Tree is seen being guardian by the buffalo-headed goat.

A study of the seals shows that although the tiger demon was always trying to steal away the tree or its branches, it failed to do so. However, on one occasion, he was able to steal two branches of the tree of life, but his success was short-lived and soon the demon was killed by the guardian. Many seals show the torture of the tiger demon.

Dr. Mackey excavated from Chanhudaro a seal which shows the tree of life and three pictograms. Lower down is a tiger with his tongue speaking out and almost touching the mouth of the tree spirit which is sitting in half-kneeling pose. According to Dr. Mackay, the tiger is licking the face of the man, perhaps in anticipation of the feast and the man is asking for mercy. This explanation is not accepted by other scholars.

Various seals and seal impressions from the Indus site show the Acacia alone, with or without any inscription. However, a few of them show the Acacia Tree enclosed by a railing. Another sealing show that it was surrounded by a platform.

Tree worship is very old in India its persistence in historic times clearly shows that the ancient tradition relating to this cult was later on incorporated by the Hindus in their religious system in a highly modified form.

Shiva-

This male consort of the Mother Goddess corresponds to shiva who is also known as pasupati. On the seals is found a male god, horned and three –faced, in Yogic pose, his legs bent and surrounding by four animals. , the elephant, the tiger the rhinoceros and buffalo, by a couple of deer, indicating that the god is the lord of the animals. On the basis of that evidence, sir John Marshall came to the conclusion that “Saivism was the oldest religion in Indian deity was “the prototype of the historic Siva.”

There were no public temples which may be due to fact that such structures may still be concealed beneath the Stupa at Mohenjo-Daro. Another temple has been “bodily re moved by the brick robbers at Harappa.” Most of the sacred images were found in the corners of the rooms which indicate that religion was.. Merely a private concern and not dictated by the state. However, Dr. Mortimer Wheeler and Dr. Piggott feel that the people were ruled by priest kings who held public festivals and the community of priests controlled by political destiny also. In the absence of public temples, it is proper to arrive at such conclusion.

Dr. Mackey noticed an interesting seal amulet depicting a different religious subject. A horned goddess is shown in the midst of a Pipal Tree. , before which another horned deity is kneeling and doing obeisance. The goddess and the worshipper wear long plaits of hair, have their arms adorned with many bangles. Both have a floral and leafy spray spring from the head between the horns. Behind the worshipper a goat with a human face looks on. A row of female spirits facing the opposite way occupies the whole of the lower part of the seal amulet, each figure wearing a spring on the head, a pig -tail behind, but no horns. According to Dr. Mackay, “the mystical seven in number recall the Smallpox Goddess Sitala and her six sisters, primitive cult regarded as indigenous.

Most of the seals are clearly are amulets. They bear inscriptions which are probably charms or spells. This shows that the people were afraid of demons. There was also the practice of Yoga. The worship of sacred “incense –burners” was also prevalent.

According to Wheeler , the importance ., not necessarily the deification of water in the life of Indus Valley people is stressed by Great Bath at Mohenjo-Daro and by the almost extravagant provision for bathing and drainage throughout the city. Purification by bath or ceremonial ablutions must have been a part and parcel of the religion of the people.

Conclusion

An idea of the religion of the Harappa people can be formed by a study of the seals, sealing’s, inscribed copper tables, stone statuettes and terracotta figurines. According to Sir John Marshall and Dr. Mackey, the Pipal Deity, the votary and the seven messengers were all males. The main deity is nude but the seven messengers are said to be dressed up in tunics. They were fabulous creatures and were shown as male deity.

This view of Sir John Marshall in that the foremost among the Indus Pantheon was the Mother Goddess. A large number of terracotta female figures recovered from various sites are considered to be representations of the Mother Goddess. Similar figures have been found from the historic sites of the Kulli culture in south Baluchistan and Zhob valley in the north. According the archaeologist the range of the cult of the Mother Goddess at one time extended without break from the Indus to the Nile. To quote Sir John Marshall “But in no country, the worship of the Divine Mother is so deep rooted and universal as in India where she become a prototype of the Cosmic Energy (Prakriti). And the counterpart of the Cosmic Soul (Purusha). Here worship which originated in a matriarchal society in course of time formed the basis of later Saktism.”

The seal and painted pottery of the Indus Valley show the figures of the Pipal and Acacia Trees. They were regarded as celestial plants and were supposed to be inhabited by divine spirits. The Pipal Tree was the abode of the supreme deity of the Indus Valley. On account of the extreme sanctity attaching to that plant, its symbolic representation formed the crest of the horned head-

dressings of the deities of lower grades. The pipal was the tree of creation and knowledge and was believed to impart highest knowledge to those who denned its branches on their heads. This privilege was enjoyed by the gods alone. The tree of life figures with great frequency on the seals of the Indus valley. Around this magic plant, most of the adventures and mighty exploits of the gods and national heroes of the Indus Valley were grouped. The sami tree is usually identified with Jand or Jandi. The Jand Tree is still believed to be the abode of a deity and many religious ceremonies are performed under it.

This male consort of the Mother Goddess corresponds to shiva who is also known as pasupati. On the seals is found a male god, horned and three –faced, in Yogic pose, his legs bent and surrounding by four animals. , the elephant, the tiger the rhinoceros and buffalo, by a couple of deer, indicating that the god is the lord of the animals. On the basis of that evidence, sir John Marshall came to the conclusion that “Saivism was the oldest religion in Indian deity was “the prototype of the historic Siva.”

There were no public temples which may be due to fact that such structures may still be concealed beneath the Stupa at Mohenjo-Daro. Another temple has been “bodily re moved by the brick robbers at Harappa.” Most of the sacred images were found in the corners of the rooms which indicate that religion was.. Merely a private concern and not dictated by the state. However, Dr. Mortimer Wheeler and Dr. Piggott feel that the people were ruled by priest kings who held public festivals and the community of priests controlled by political destiny also. In the absence of public temples, it is proper to arrive at such conclusion.

To quote Wheeler, “The Indus religion was a mélange of much that we already know of third millennium Asiatic religious observance, augmented by specific anticipation of the later Hinduism.” More than that, we find ample evidence of the phallus worship among them. The discovery of many conical and cylindrical stones. , which symbolized fertility, is closely connected with the modern cult of Siva, called the Lingams or Lingas, they symbolized the divine power of reproduction. The archaeologist have found some terracotta seals with the figures of a three-faced male god, with a peculiar protruding two long horns, and seated cross –legged. He has a nude body with the exception of a girdle round his lower parts and a few armlets and necklaces to adorn his

body. On one seal, four wild animals – an Elephant, tiger, rhinoceros and a buffalo, surround him while the outline figures of two deer are shown beneath his couch or stool. This horned god has much in common with the Lord siva or the Pashupati of modern Hinduism. And his worship was not only iconic but also phallic.

The archaeologist have discovered a few pottery shreds from the Harappan Site at Chandigarh, which contain a pictorial word, similar to a trident or trisul, inscribe on the. The people of Indus Valley help all animals and plant life as sacred and accorded a status of religious veneration to some of them. The humped bull, which appears most extensively on the seals and many other figurines, also seems to have enjoyed some sort of religious sanctity, and it is comparable to the modern NANDI bull, the main vahan or ride of LORD siva (SHIVA).

Another unique animal that figures on quite a few seals and statues is a unicorn, with a single straight horn, projecting from its forehead, and resembling a humpless bull, which must have been an object of worship by the Indus Valley people. Similarly, they regarded the Pipal tree as a sacred plant, worthy of veneration, as it is in Hinduism today. It bespeaks highly of the rather scientific attitude of these people, as Pipal happens to be one of the rare plants, which emits Oxygen-the saviour of all animal life, even at night. There is no shadow of doubt that the modern Hinduism was born by a antique blend of the Indus valley.

References

1. Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark. 1998. Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization. Karachi & Islamabad: Oxford University Press & American Institute of Pakistan Studies.
2. Kenoyer, J. M. 1991. The Indus Valley Tradition of Pakistan and Western India. *Journal of World Prehistory*, 5 (4):.
3. Mainkar, V. B. 1984. Metrology in the Indus Civilization, in *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*, eds. B. B. Lal & S. P. Gupta. New Delhi: Books and Books.
4. Marshall, John. 1931. The Buildings, in *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, ed. J. Marshall. London: Arthur Probsthain.
5. Mughal, M. R. 1970. The Early Harappan Period in the Greater Indus Valley and Northern Baluchistan, Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
6. Mughal, M. R. 1984. The post Harappan phase in Bahawalpur District, Pakistan. In Lai, B. B., and Gupta, S. P. (eds.), *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*, Books and Books, New Delhi.
7. Mughal, M. R. 1990. Further evidence of the Early Harappan Culture in the Greater Indus Valley: 1971-90. *South Asian Studies* 6:.
8. Piggot, Stuart 1961. *Harappa Culture of the Indus Valley- Prehistoric India*, Baltimore, Pelican Books, 1961.
9. Possehl, G. L. 1977. The end of a state and continuity of a tradition. In Fox, R. G. (ed.), *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, Duke University Program in South Asian Studies, Durham, Vol. 4.
10. Possehl, G. L. 1990. Revolution in the Urban Revolution: Emergence of Indus Urbanization. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19:.
11. Possehl, G. L. 1999. *Indus Age: The Beginning*. New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Company.
12. Possehl, G. L. 2002. *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications,

13. Rao, S.R. 1991. Dawn and Devolution of the Indus Civilization.
14. Roy, T. N. 1986. A Study of Northern Black Polished Ware Culture: An Iron Age Culture of India, New Delhi: Ramanand Vidya Bhawan.
15. Shaffer, J. G. 1981. The Protohistoric Period in the eastern Punjab: A preliminary assessment. In Dani, A. H. (ed.), Indus Civilization: New Perspectives, Qaid-i Azam University, Islamabad.
16. Shendge, M.J. 1997. The Language of the Harappans: From Akkadian to Sanskrit. Abhinav Publications.
17. Stacul, G. (1989). Continuity and change in the Swat Valley (18th-15th Centuries B.C.). In Kenoyer, J. M. (ed.), Old Problems and New Perspectives in the Archaeology of South Asia, Wisconsin Archaeological Reports, Madison, Vol. 2.
18. Vahia, M. N. and N. Yadav. 2011. Reconstructing the History of Harappan Civilization. Social Evolution & History, 10 (2):.
19. Whitteridge, G. (1986), Charles Masson of Afghanistan: Explorer, archeologist, numismatist and intelligent (e) agent. War minister: Aris & Philips.