

DECLINE, MIGRATION AND HARAPPAN CONTINUITY: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract:

Perhaps the fiercest debate on the Indus civilization is over the reasons for the end of the India's earliest cities. Did they dramatically collapsed or was there steady urban decline? Was the decline a result of invasions by the Aryans or did rivers, earthquakes, or climatic shifts contribute to the disintegration? Was the end marked by a cultural fracture or regional migrations from the core areas to the areas which offered better subsistence possibilities? The recent studies do not accept the Aryan invasion theory or the inundation theory or the tectonic upliftment concept as it is not warranted by any scientific or rationale evidences. It seems likely that the decline of the Harappan civilization was mainly due to ecological imbalances. The delicate ecological balances of semi-arid areas (Harappa and Mohenjodaro) was being disturbed because the human and cattle populations in these areas was fast depleting the scanty forest, food and fuel resources. Thus the growing populations of men and animals confronted by scanty resources wore out the landscape. This depletion of the subsistence base caused strain on the entire economy. Moreover the drift of the monsoon to the west necessitated the Harappan people to migrate to the areas of Gujarat, Haryana which provided better survival possibilities. The depletions of the populations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro coincided with the increase in populations of the Gujarat and the eastern areas. The Harappan learnt the technique of rice cultivations from the people of Gujarat and in turn they gave the art of ceramics tradition to the Gujaratis.

KEYWORDS: Decline, Ecological imbalances, Harappa, migrate, mohenjodaro and Gujarat.

In recent years most of the historians agree that the end of the Harappan civilization was marked by a cultural fracture or climatic shifts which might have led the Indus people to migrate from the core areas to the areas which offered better subsistence possibilities.

Cities like Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Kalibangan saw a gradual decline in urban planning and construction of the houses. Made of old dilapidated bricks shoddy houses encroached upon the roads and streets in the later phases of Mohenjodaro. Later on some of the settlements like Mohenjodaro, Harappa etc. were abandoned. However, in most other sites

people continued to live. Some important features associated with the Harappan civilization, writing, uniform weights, pottery and architectural style disappeared. These evidences have been interpreted by scholars as indicative of the decline of the Harappan civilization. Earlier the scholars believed in a dramatic collapse of the Indus civilization. As such they were looking for some calamity of catastrophic proportions which wiped out the urban communities. In the past search for the causes of the decline of the Harappan civilization has moved in two directions – (1) that some natural calamity led to the collapse of the civilization (2) that it was some barbarian invasion that destroyed it.

Among the causes spelled out for the decline of the Indus civilization scholars like R. L. Raikes & others have used the evidence of flooding from Mohenjodaro. Mohenjodaro habitations show at least three instances of deep flooding. There are evidences of deposits of silty clay and layers of collapsed building material mixed with clay which indicate the flooding of the city. Raikes carried the argument further and tried to prove that the collapse of the Indus civilization was because of the prolonged flooding of the cities located on the river Indus. They have shown that geomorphologically the Indus area is a disturbed seismic zone. Earth quakes might have raised the flood plains of the lower Indus river that led to prolonged submergence of cities like Mohenjodaro. It is pointed out that the finds at sites like Sutkagendor in the Makran coast indicate that they were sea ports. However, at recent, they are located away from the sea coast. It is believed that the upliftment of the coastal areas caused destruction of the Indus cities and disruption of commercial life based on river and coastal communication. However, it has been pointed out by some other scholars that the evidences in Mohenjodaro do not support the idea of prolonged submergence. Floods did occur periodically but they were not related to tectonic uplift. In any case Harappa has not yielded any evidence of flooding and this theory cannot explain the decline of sites located outside the Indus system.

Lambrick has offered his own explanation for the decline. He believes that changes in the course of the river Indus could be the cause of the destruction of Mohenjodaro . The Indus is an unstable river system which keeps shifting its bed. Apparently, the river Indus shifted about thirty miles away from Mohenjodaro. The people of the city and the surrounding food production villages

deserted the area because they were starved of water. This kind of thing happened many times in the history of Mohenjodaro. The silt observed in the cities is actually the product of wind action blowing in lots of sand and silt. This, combined with disintegrating mud, mud brick and baked brick structures, produced what has been mistaken for silt produced by floods.

D.P. Agarwal and Sood have introduced a new theory for the decline of the Harappan civilization. They believe that the Harappan civilization decline because of the increasing aridity in this area and the drying up the river Ghaggar-Hakra. Basing their conclusions on the studies conducted in the U.S.A., Australia and Rajasthan they have shown that there was an increase in the arid conditions by the middle of the second millennium B.C. In semi- arid regions like those of the Haryana, even a minor reduction in moisture and water availability could spell disaster. It would affect agricultural production which in turn would put the city economies under stress.

Scholars like Fairservis tried to explain the decay of the Harappan civilization in terms of the problems of ecology. He computed the population of the Harappan cities and worked out the food requirements of the townsmen. He also computed that the villagers in these areas consume about 80% of their produce leaving about 20% for the market. If similar patterns of agriculture existed in the past, a city like Mohenjodaro, having a population of about 35 thousand, would require very large number of villages producing food. According to Fairservis's calculation the delicate ecological balance of these semi- arid areas was being disturbed because the human and cattle population in these areas was fast depleting the scanty forests, food and fuel resources. The combined needs of the Harappan townsmen, peasants and pastoralists exceeded the limited production capacities of these areas. Thus, a growing population of men and animals confronted by scanty resources wore out the landscape.

With the forests and grass cover gradually disappearing, there were floods and droughts. This depletion of the subsistence base caused strain on the entire economy of the civilization. There seems to have been gradual movement away to areas which offered better subsistence possibilities. That is why the Harappan communities moved towards Gujarat and the eastern areas, away from the Indus. Scholars like Mallick and Possehl working on the Indus civilization no longer look for the causes of its decline . That is because they believe that it is a wrong

question. Archaeologically all that seems to have happened was that some of the sites were abandoned and the tradition of literacy, seals and sealings were lost. It simply meant the end of the urban phase. Very many smaller sites continued to exist. The archaeological finds show a stylistic continuity from the Harappan phase . In fact in the areas Of Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat etc. vibrant agricultural communities emerged in larger numbers in the succeeding period . Thus , from a regional perspective the period succeeding the urban phase can be treated as one of flourishing agricultural communities. That is why scholars now talk about cultural change, regional migrations and modifications of integrated systems of settlements and subsistence.

In Sind, in Harappan towns like Amri and Chanhudaro etc., people started using a slightly different kind of pottery called the Jhukar pottery and new artifacts like cloth fastening pins of copper and button seals without inscriptions. They used brick- houses but gave up the planned layout. The end of Harappan cities here meant that people were using fewer items for trade and exchange.

In the areas east of Indus in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan several sites having distinct pottery traditions have been found. The sites of Mitathal, Bara, Roper and Siswal are well known. In most of the sites people continued to live in the same areas in the post urban phase. These places had distinctive pottery traditions in the early Indus period. In the urban phase these ceramic tradition continued along with the Harappan pottery. At the end of the urban phase these regional traditions re-emerged with fresh vigour. Brick houses have been reported from sites like Bara and Mitathal. In many of these sites Ochre coloured Pottery has been found which is linked with the Harappan tradition of the past and at the same time anticipates the early Indian pottery traditions.

In Kutch and Saurashtra the end of the urban phase is clearly documented in places like Rangapur and Somnath. Even during the urban phase they had a local ceramic tradition coexisting with the Harappan pottery. This tradition continued in later phases also. Some sites like Rangapur became more prosperous in the subsequent phase. They were using potteries called the Lustrous Red ware. However, people stopped using Indus weights, scripts and tools imported from the

distance areas. There was a significant increase in the number of settlements all over Gujarat as suggested by Nayanjot Lahiri and Dilip Chakravarti.

The end of the cities did not mean the end of Harappan tradition. It might mean the end of the centralized decision making in policy and economy . The folk cultures that survived would have definitely retained the religious tradition. Possibly, the priestly groups of the Indus civilization merged into the Aryan Communities. The folk communities would have also retained the traditions of craftsmanship. Once again when the literate urban tradition emerged in early India, it absorbed elements of folk culture. That is why the Pasupati, mother goddess and phallic worship cults seems to have come down to us from the Indian tradition. Similarly the evidence of fire worship in Kalibanga is interesting because it was the most important ingredient of the vedic rituals.

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