

# HARAPPA TOWN-PLANNING

Dr S.SRIKANTA SASTRI

Among the great civilizations of the ancient world, India may be said to possess the only surviving Heritage from the remote past as a living force even today. The history of India was supposed by earlier historians to begin only with the alleged Aryan invasion in the middle of the second millennium B.C. But the almost accidental discovery of the Harappa civilization, definitely assignable to the fourth millennium B.C., if not earlier, compelled the historians to acknowledge that India took its rank as one of the oldest civilised countries in the world.

## PROTO-INDIC CULTURE

Recent explorations and excavations have revealed the wide diffusion of this Proto-Indic culture. From Ruar and the foothills of the Himalayas to Lothal and the Narmada Valley in the south, from Assam in the east to the borders of Persia in the west, a single homogenous culture prevailed for at least two thousand years continuously. From the supposed affinity with the Sumerian civilization, it was at first styled as Indo-Sumerian. Others called it "The Indus Valley Culture", the "Indo-Mediterranean Culture", etc., but now it is called Proto-Indic or Harappa Culture.

The two most important sites almost fully excavated are at Harappa in the Punjab and Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh at a distance of about 350 miles from each other. The Indus river and its tributaries and its fluctuations brought about the destruction of the cities. But the sites were reoccupied and new cities were constructed on identical plans.

Harappa is chronologically earlier and lasted longer than the southern city of Mohenjo-Daro. In spite of the long duration there is absolute uniformity of culture. The earlier stages of this culture may be traced in some of the outlying sites like Rana Ghundai, Amri and Nal, but the chronology is disputed. Similarly, the end of Harappa culture is undefined. Probably in 2000 B.C. the Harappa Culture was displaced in some places by Jhukar Culture and still later by Jhangar culture. The absolute and almost monotonous uniformity of Harappa culture compels us to postulate at least a millennium of development before 3000 B.C. Further, the Harappa civilization did not vanish without leaving a trace,

for a good deal in the spiritual and religious heritage of Hinduism today can be traced to Harappa civilization.

### TANTRIK AND AGAMIC PHASE

The civilization of Harappa was the product of various racial factors. A cosmopolitan population composed of Proto-Austroloid, Alpine, Nordic, Mediterranean and Mongoloid elements has been proved from the evidence of the skeletal remains. Some scholars have tried to assert that the predominating element was the so-called Mediterranean race having affinities with Sumerians. To the same category belongs the theory of the Dravidian element being primarily responsible for the culture. A single grave with a form of burial similar to Sumerian and a type of government with a priest-king residing in a central citadel are supposed to prove conclusively that Harappa Culture was of Sumerian origin. A sober evaluation of the archaeological evidence, however, shows that the Sumerian and Dravidian theories have hardly a sound basis. The almost universal custom of cremation of the dead, the use of the horse and the long sword, the fire-cult, which are supposed to indicate, Aryan culture, had existed long before the beginnings of Harappa Culture and it was really the age of the Tantrik and Agamic phase of Atharvan culture of 3000 B.C.

### ADHERENCE TO SILPA SASTRA

The town plan of both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro shows that regular Silpa Sastras were followed. The uniformity cannot be explained by assuming a single cultural and political authority only. We are compelled to assume "a long established usage, a code of commerce and industry, a hereditary system of property and land-tenure, guild and caste organisations and municipal government." The towns are orientated to the true north, showing a knowledge of astronomy, climatic conditions and hygiene. The city was regularly divided into wards by streets 13 to 30 feet wide. Even the narrow lanes were 3 1/2 to 7 feet wide with well cemented covered-drains. The system of drainage was elaborate and not equalled anywhere until modern times. The pottery drain-pipes led off the water from the houses into cess-pits which were periodically cleaned. A big drain formed of corbelled arches finally led the water of the whole city into the river near-by.

## GREAT BATHS

In both cities there were great baths near the citadels, used probably religious ceremonies also. The Great Bath had galleries and dressing-rooms on three sides. The total area was 180 feet by 108 feet and the outer walls were eight feet thick. In the middle, the bath was 39 feet by 23 feet, with a depth of eight feet. On the four sides were steps and platforms and the water was supplied by a corbelled drain 6 1/2 feet high. Adjoining this bath were rooms for taking steam-baths or Hammams. There was also a shallow bathing place for children. The floor and the sides of the bath were made water-tight by coating with bitumen.

## MARKET PLACES ETC.

At the junctions of important roads there were market places, with permanent stalls in long rows. A gigantic building at Harappa supposed to be a public granary. It was in two blocks facing each other, with a 23 feet wide aisle in between. Each block had six halls and five corridors. Again, each hall was sub-divided into four narrow divisions to provide air. This building had a second storey, with halls 52 feet by 17 feet. Near this, there were 12 circular platforms in double rows. In the middle of each circular platform was a wooden post and excavations revealed not only grain, but bits of animal bones. Therefore, the hitherto accepted opinion that the building represents a central granary and that the circular platforms were used to pound grain, with the help of slave-labour, seems to be far-fetched. It is more likely that the building was a sacred edifice for the performance of Vedic sacrifices. The platforms with the central wooden posts were Vedic altars with the sacrificial pillars or Yupas in the centre. Such circular Vedic altars conform to the dimensions given for "Ratha Shakra Chiti" in the *Sulba Sutras*.

## PRIVATE HOUSES

The private houses were substantial structures of burnt brick. Harappa was a modern town in "Lancashire" bricks. The average size of the Harappa bricks corresponds exactly to the dimensions prescribed by the *Kasyapa Silpa Sastra*. Wedge-shaped bricks were used for wells, which were usually in an opening in the outer wall of the house and provided with wooden pulleys, so that the neighbours may draw water from the street without entering the house. The outer walls presented a blank front to the street without any window and

with only the main entrance giving access to the street. The walls were covered with mortar or mud mixed with bits of straw and the floors were paved with brick. The houses had a central open courtyard surrounded by rooms and stairs leading to the upper storey. Even the upper rooms were furnished with baths, the water being led off by means of clay-pipes affixed to the walls. Some of the larger houses had even, twenty-five rooms with walls five feet thick.

### HIGH DEGREE OF COMFORT

The people of Harappa enjoyed a high degree of comfort and luxury. The ground floor was used for domestic purposes and the upper rooms as bed-rooms. There were balconies of timber around the courtyard and the roof was also terraced and provided with wind-catchers and ventilators. In the hot season many preferred to sleep on the roof. The houses were furnished luxuriously with chairs, tables, cots, stools and almirahs. The chassis of wood, beds, chairs and stools were finely carved. The kitchen had long brick channels for large-scale cooking. Between the kitchen and the dining-room was a service-hatch. The rooms were lighted at night with candles in pottery candle-sticks.

Some special buildings were probably used as assembly-halls. One such building was eighty square feet in area, with pillared halls, divided into corridors with low seats near-the walls. There was a central seat at right angles in the corridor, probably meant for the president of the Assembly. There is no definite evidence of a public temple for communal worship, but each house had a small room set apart for the household deities.

For the defence of the city, there was a fortified "palace" in the centre and on the outskirts of the city traces of fortifications and guard-houses have been discovered. The city, police also had police-stations in every ward of the city and regular night patrols were conducted. The former assumption of the archaeologists that the Harappa people were a peaceful folk, with only defensive weapons, is no longer true. It is also not true that the Government was theocratic. There is no evidence of any priest-king ruling the people as the representative of a city God, in Sumer, because of the simple fact of the absence of any huge temple, either at Harappa or Mohenjo-Daro. The Sumerian and Egyptian analogies are not correct and cannot be applied to Indian religious conditions.

## ORNAMENTS

The economic prosperity of the Harappa People is evident from the wealth of ornaments and art works. Gold and silver, probably imported from Mysore and Afghanistan respectively, were abundant. Electrum - a mixture of silver and gold -, Lead, copper, nickel, tin and bronze were used for weapons and utensils. Several kinds of stone, like alabaster, steatite, green stone from the Nilgiris, lapis, turquoise and jade, were used for beads, weights, bangles, etc.

## THE DRESS

The dress material consisted of wool and cotton and there is no evidence of sheepskin being used, as in Sumer. The men wore the typical Indian dress, the *dhoti*, either closely clinging to the body or above the knee. The shawl covered the upper part of the body, in the orthodox fashion called Upavita – passing over the left shoulder and under the right arm. The women had a scanty skirt, above the knee in front and longer behind, tied with an ornamented girdle. The upper part was bare, but covered with a profusion of necklaces. Sometimes a cloak was worn over the shoulders. Both men and women were fond of ornaments and of many varieties of hair-dressing.

## ARTS AND CRAFTS

The beads were specially held sacred and Chanhu Daro was perhaps a great centre of bead manufacture. The beads are so small and so finely-perforated that only a hair can pass through the holes. The art of the potter, the gold-smith and the lapidary and sculpture had attained an excellence unparalleled elsewhere in the ancient world.

The seals, with their beautiful representations of animals and stylised letters, are creditable achievements. The statues and figurines anticipated by millenniums the classical sculptures of the Greeks. Dancing and music are attested by sculptures and the seals. A dancing God, like Natraja, and a bronze figure of an aboriginal dancing girl have been found and musical instruments, like the *vina*, the *mridanga* and bronze cymbals, are represented on the seals. Even the children had mechanical toys, rattlers, whistles, marbles, etc., the elders had many kinds of outdoor and indoor game like dice, chess, wrestling, cock-fighting. The Harappa culture was not an isolated episode a passing phase of Indian history. It had inherited and developed the great Vedic culture and transmitted to posterity

in an unbroken continuity all the spiritual and metaphysical elements which are living forces even today in India.

[www.srikanta-sastri.org](http://www.srikanta-sastri.org)