

## 6<sup>th</sup> – In the Earliest Cities I



As you seen earlier in 8000<sub>BCE</sub>, many people had settled in small villages, and were practicing agriculture and domesticating animals. People no longer had to spend the whole day hunting and gathering food. With better methods of agriculture, surplus (extra, more than required) food was produced. So people could now devote more time to other activities like leisure and thinking. Writing was invented, art flourished trade grew, and various inventions and discoveries changed almost every aspect of human existence. Gradually, villages grew into towns, and towns into cities; and the first great civilizations of the world were born.

### What is civilization?

Civilization is said to occur when a society is in an advanced state of social development. Such a society would have

- an advanced system of agriculture,
- people living in towns and cities,
- complex legal, political and religious institutions,
- division of labour, with rules, warriors, priests, farmers, carpenters, potters and so on, and
- Literacy or the knowledge of writing.

Whenever and wherever these conditions were fulfilled, civilization arose. The earliest civilizations of the world came up around 5000<sub>BCE</sub> in river valleys. There were four major river valley civilizations- Mesopotamian civilization came up between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the Egyptian civilization in the Nile valley, the Chinese civilization and the Indus Valley civilization on the bank of the river Indus. these parts of the ancient world witnessed the first urban revolution.

**The story of Harappa:** A hundred and fifty years ago, when railway lines were being laid down for the first time in the Punjab, engineers stumbled upon the site of Harappa in present-day Pakistan. To them, it seemed like a mound that was a rich source of readymade, high quality bricks. So they carried off thousand of bricks from the walls of the old buildings of the city to build railway lines. Many buildings were completely destroyed. Then, about eighty years ago, archaeologists found the site, and realized that this was one of the oldest cities in the subcontinent. As this was the first city to be discovered, all other sites from found were similar buildings (and other things) were found were described as Harappa. These cities developed about 4700 years ago.

### What was special about these cities?

**Urbanization and cities:** A city is a large and densely populated area. Cities are also known as urban area. When more and more people start moving from villages to towns and cities, the process is called urbanization. Urbanization is one of the key features of civilization. In cities, people have occupations other than farming. There are traders, jewellery makers, writers, thinkers, and artists. Cities usually have well-developed public facilities like roads, a drainage system, public halls, and granaries.

Many of these cities were divided into two or more parts. Usually, the part to the west was smaller but higher. Archaeologists describe this as the citadel. Generally, the part to the east was larger but lower. This is called the lower town. Very often walls of baked brick were built around each part. The bricks were so well made that they have lasted for thousands of years. The bricks were laid in an



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interlocking pattern and that made the walls strong. In some cities, special buildings were constructed on the citadel. For example, in Mohenjo-Daro, a very special tank, which archaeologists call the great bath, was built in this area, this was lined with bricks, coated with plaster, and made water-tight with a layer of natural tar. There were steps leading down to it from two sides, while there were rooms on all sides, water was probably brought in from a well and drained out after use. Perhaps important people took a dip in this tank on special occasions.

**The Indus valley civilization:** The Chalcolithic age was followed by the Bronze Age. In the Bronze Age people started using bronze- an alloy or mixture of copper and tin. About 4700 years ago, the largest Bronze Age civilization in the world emerged in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. Since this culture was born in the valley of the Indus River, it came to be known as the Indus valley civilization. The Harappan culture (as the Indus civilization was also known) was the largest of the ancient civilizations. It was spread over 650,000<sub>sq</sub> km, which is more than twice the area of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations. More than 1400 Indus civilization sites have been discovered to date, and more continue to be discovered. Of these the more important ones include Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Mehrgarh (all three in Pakistan), Dholavira and Lothal in Gujarat, Rakhigarhi and Banawali in Haryana, Ropar in Punjab, Kalibangan in Rajasthan, and Alamgirpur in Uttar Pradesh.

**House, drains and streets:** Generally, houses were either one or two storey's high, with rooms built around a courtyard. Most houses had a separate bathing area, and some had wells to supply water. Many of these cities had covered drains. These were laid out in straight lines. Each drain had a gentle slope so that water could flow through it. Very often, drains in houses were connected to those on the streets and smaller drains led into bigger ones. As the drains were covered, inspection holes were provided at intervals to clean them. All three- houses, drains and streets- were probably planned and built at the same time.

### **Life in the city: Town planning**

The most striking feature of the Indus civilization was the well-planned nature of its cities. Most of our knowledge of the Indus cities is based on excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Like most of the Indus towns, Mohenjodaro was a grid-planned city, i.e., all the streets cut each other at right angles. It was divided into two parts. One part was at a higher level. It was built on a massive platform constructed of baked brick. Archaeologists call this area the citadel or acropolis. It might have been the administrative centre of the city where all the large public buildings were located. The lower part of the city consisted of the houses of the common people. Harappan city was a very busy place. There were people who planned the construction of special buildings in the city. These were probably the rulers. It is likely that the rulers sent people to distant lands to get metal, precious stones, and other things that they wanted. Besides, there were men and women, crafts persons, making all kinds of things - either in their own homes, or in special workshops.

**New craft in the city:** Copper and bronze were used to make tools, weapons, ornaments and vessels, gold and silver were used to make ornaments and vessels. The Harappans also made seals out of stone. These are generally rectangular and usually have an animal carved on them. The Harappans also made pots with



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beautiful black designs. Many of the things that were produced were probably the work of specialists a specialist is a person who is trained to do only one kind of work, for example, cutting stone, or polishing beads, or carving seals.

**The great bath:** Within the citadel at Mohenjodaro, archaeologists found a structure that they called the Great Bath. This was a rectangular tank made of fired bricks closely fitted together. This tank was made waterproof by a 3cm thick layer of bitumen (tar). Flights of steps from opposite sides led to the bottom of the tank. There were several rooms along the other two sides of the tank. In one of the rooms there was a large well, from which water was supplied to the tank. Used or dirty water was drained out through an outlet to a brick drain.

