AD EDUXIAN JOURNAL
A Quarterly Multidisciplinary Blind Peer Reviewed & Refereed Online International Journal
Google Scholar Indexing PIF: 1.048(I2OR) & 3.125 (IIFS)
Vol (3), Issue (1), January-March 2026 *ISSN: 3048-7951*

Continuity and Legacy of the Indus Valley Civilization in Indian Culture

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DOI: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24318309
Review: 01/01/2026 **Acceptance: 04/01/2026** **Publication:25/03/2026**

Abstract:
The Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), also known as the Harappan Civilization, represents one of the earliest and most sophisticated urban cultures in human history, flourishing approximately between 2600 BCE and 1900 BCE in the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent. This research paper examines the origin, geographical extent, urban planning, socio-economic structure, religious practices, technological achievements, and eventual decline of the civilization. Based on archaeological findings and modern scholarly interpretations, the study highlights the remarkable advancement of Harappan society, particularly in its systematic city planning, drainage systems, standardized weights and measures, and extensive trade networks extending to Mesopotamia and Central Asia. The research also evaluates competing theories regarding the decline of the civilization, including environmental changes such as river shifts, climate variability, and internal socio-economic transformations. The study concludes that the Indus Valley Civilization was not only highly organized but also uniquely distinct in its relatively egalitarian structure and absence of monumental royal architecture. Its legacy continues to influence cultural and historical developments in South Asia. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of early urbanism and the complexity of ancient societies.

Keywords: Indus Valley Civilization, Harappan Civilization, Ancient Indian Culture, Urban Planning, Socio-Economic Structure, Archaeological Heritage, Cultural Continuity.

Introduction:

The Indus Valley Civilization is among the earliest known urban civilizations of the ancient world, alongside Mesopotamia and Egypt. First discovered in the 1920s through excavations at Harappa (Punjab, Pakistan) and Mohenjo-daro (Sindh, Pakistan), the civilization revealed an unexpectedly advanced level of urban development. Spread across a vast geographical region covering modern-day Pakistan, northwest India, and parts of Afghanistan, the Indus Valley Civilization represents a major milestone in human history. The importance of studying the Indus Valley Civilization lies in its contribution to understanding early human settlements, state formation, trade systems, and cultural evolution. Unlike other contemporary civilizations, the Indus Valley Civilization presents unique characteristics such as highly organized city planning without clear evidence of monarchy or large-scale warfare. This research paper aims to explore key aspects of the civilization, including its origin, urban planning, economic organization, social structure, religion, and decline. It also seeks to evaluate the broader significance of the civilization in shaping later historical developments in the Indian subcontinent.

Literature Review:

The study of the Indus Valley Civilization has evolved significantly since its discovery in the early twentieth century. Sir John Marshall, one of the earliest archaeologists associated with its excavation, emphasized the sophistication of urban planning and architecture. His work laid the foundation for understanding the civilization

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as highly advanced and organized. Mortimer Wheeler later contributed significantly by proposing the Aryan invasion theory, suggesting that external forces may have led to the civilization's decline.

However, this theory has been widely criticized and largely abandoned due to lack of substantial evidence. Modern scholars such as Gregory Possehl, Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, and Shereen Ratnagar have shifted focus toward environmental and internal explanations. These include river shifts, particularly the drying of the Ghaggar-Hakra river system, climate change leading to reduced agricultural productivity, and gradual economic decline. Recent interdisciplinary approaches combining archaeology, geology, and climate science have strengthened the argument that environmental factors played a crucial role in the transformation of the civilization. However, the undeciphered script of the Indus Valley remains a major limitation, restricting a complete understanding of its political and cultural systems.

Methodology:

This research paper is based on qualitative analysis of secondary data derived from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, excavation reports, and historical interpretations by established scholars. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach to examine different dimensions of the Indus Valley Civilization. Comparative analysis is also used to understand similarities and differences between the Indus Valley Civilization and other contemporary civilizations such as Mesopotamia and Egypt. The methodology emphasizes critical evaluation of sources to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Results:

1. **Origin and Geographical Extent:** The Indus Valley Civilization emerged around 2600 BCE during the Bronze Age and continued until approximately 1900 BCE. It covered a vast area of over one million square kilometers, making it one of the largest ancient civilizations. Major sites include Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Dholavira, Lothal, Kalibangan, and Rakhigarhi. The civilization was primarily centered on the Indus River and its tributaries, as well as the now dry Ghaggar-Hakra river system. Its strategic location facilitated agricultural productivity and trade connections.

2. **Urban Planning and Architecture:** One of the most remarkable features of the Indus Valley Civilization was its advanced urban planning. Cities were laid out in grid patterns with streets intersecting at right angles. Houses were constructed using standardized baked bricks, indicating uniformity and regulation. The drainage system was highly sophisticated, with covered drains running along the streets and connected to individual houses. Public structures such as the Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro suggest organized civic life and possibly ritual practices.

3. **Economy and Trade:** The economy of the Indus Valley Civilization was primarily agrarian, supported by crops such as wheat, barley, peas, and cotton. Evidence suggests the use of irrigation techniques and plowing. Trade played a vital role, both internally and externally. Archaeological findings, including seals and artifacts, indicate trade relations with Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia. Standardized weights and measures highlight a regulated economic system.

4. **Craftsmanship and Technology:** The Harappans were skilled craftsmen, producing pottery, beads, jewelry, and tools using materials such as copper, bronze, gold, and semi-precious stones. The discovery of dockyards at Lothal indicates maritime trade capabilities. Technological advancements included metallurgy, bead-making techniques, and the use of standardized tools. The precision in craftsmanship reflects a high degree of specialization and Expertise.

5. **Social Structure:** The social structure of the Indus Valley Civilization appears to have been relatively balanced compared to other ancient societies. There is no clear evidence of kings or ruling elites, as seen in Egypt or Mesopotamia. However, variations in house sizes and burial practices suggest some degree of social differentiation. The absence of grand palaces or temples indicates a unique socio-political organization.

6. **Religion and Beliefs:** Religious practices in the Indus Valley Civilization are inferred from archaeological evidence such as seals, figurines, and symbols. The presence of mother goddess figurines suggests fertility worship, while the Pashupati seal is often associated with proto-Shiva worship. Sacred animals such as bulls and unicorn-like figures appear frequently in seals. The Great Bath may have been used for ritual purification, indicating the importance of water in religious practices.

7. **Script and Language:** The Indus script remains undeciphered despite numerous attempts by scholars. It consists of short inscriptions found on seals, pottery, and tablets. The lack of a bilingual inscription, like the Rosetta stone, has hindered decipherment. Understanding the script is crucial for gaining deeper insights into the administrative and cultural aspects of the civilization.

Discussion:

The findings highlight the Indus Valley Civilization as one of the most advanced urban cultures of the ancient world. Its systematic urban planning, efficient drainage systems, and standardized economic practices reflect a highly organized society. Unlike Egypt and Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley Civilization lacks clear evidence of centralized political authority or monumental religious structures. This suggests a decentralized or community-based system of governance. The civilization's decline remains a subject of debate. Environmental factors, particularly river shifts and climate change, are widely accepted as major causes. The gradual drying of water sources would have severely impacted agriculture and settlement patterns. Additionally, internal factors such as economic decline, resource depletion, and possible social changes may have contributed to the transformation of urban centers into smaller rural settlements. The earlier theory of Aryan invasion is now largely rejected due to insufficient archaeological evidence. Instead, the decline is seen as a complex and gradual process rather than a sudden collapse.

Conclusion:

The Indus Valley Civilization stands as a remarkable example of early human achievement in urban planning, economic organization, and cultural development. Its cities demonstrate a level of sophistication that was unmatched in many contemporary societies. Despite the mystery surrounding its script and political structure, the civilization provides valuable insights into early forms of social organization and technological advancement. Its

emphasis on planning, hygiene, and trade reflects a forward-thinking society. The decline of the civilization, likely due to environmental and internal factors, marks an important transition in the history of the Indian subcontinent. However, its cultural legacy continued to influence subsequent civilizations. Future research should focus on deciphering the script and conducting further excavations to uncover new evidence. Interdisciplinary approaches combining archaeology, environmental science, and technology may provide deeper insights into this fascinating civilization.

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