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# RECONSTRUCTION OF CERTAIN CULTURE PATTERNS OF PREHISTORIC PAKISTAN

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Archaeology contributes to man's understanding of the factors that cause civilizations to come into being, to flourish. This paper, based on the archaeological evidence found in the Indus sites, particularly in the graves and cemeteries, attempts to reconstruct certain cultural patterns of ancient Pakistan. This reconstruction falls into four main categories:

1. Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Commerce (Economy)
2. Magic and Religion
3. Political Structure
4. Social Stratification

## 1. *Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Commerce (Economy)*

Cities the size of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa in Pakistan need to have large-scale agricultural systems in order to supply the necessary food for their populations. Evidence from various food grains together with other goods found in several Indus graves allows us to infer that the Indus people cultivated a variety of crops. In addition to barley, the Indus people had wheat which they used to grind on flat or saddle-shaped slabs of stone. Charred peas and melon seeds in the graves would indicate that these two crops were also present in pre-historic times. These people must have grown cotton, too, for cotton-made fabrics were discovered in the graves. On the pottery that has been found in the graves are certain engraved tree forms which resemble the various flora of Modern Punjab.

Sufficient use of metal can be noticed in the manufactured tools and in vessels found in the graves. Some of these metals such as tin and silver, which appear only sporadically in the area, might have been trade goods from neighbouring countries like Afganistan and Persia where they were abundant. This is

particularly true of tin which is totally absent in Baluchistan and very rare in northwest Pakistan. Gold and silver found in the graves most likely had been imported from Afghanistan and Persia, or from further south, i.e., Rajputana. In this connection, we can quote Wheeler (1953:59),

Other materials used for ornamental purposes by the Harappans include lapis lazuli, turquoise, jade, and amazonite. Lapis lazuli is not common, two beads and a "gamesman" of this material are recorded from Mohenjodaro, three beads and a fragment of inlay from Chanudaro. It has been suggested that, as the stone was far more abundantly used in Mesopotamia, the Indus examples may be important from the west.

Trade appears to have taken place between the people of Nāl at Baluchistan and the people of the Iranian Plateau, between the inhabitants of Mohenjodaro and the people of Harappa, between Mesopotamia and Egypt (Islam 1964:39), and between the Indus people and those of South Gujrat and also others further south. Most of the archaeological evidence supports the view that trade was reciprocal, but some have maintained that the movement first started in the north and slowly moved southward (Sankalia 1962:48).

## 2. *Magic and Religion*

The trappings of a religion are by no means all material, and so, of course, do not all leave archaeological evidence. Even the language, if found and studied, cannot carry all the meaning of the religion, but only the symbols. Many of the words associated with religious observances are highly symbolic and leave little trace of the actual meaning they had in the minds of their users. When we speak of symbols and their meaning, we ought to bear in mind that the distinction is not always clear in the minds of the users, and it is to this confusion that Frazer (1941), in *The Golden Bough*, has attributed the development of sympathetic magic. Traces of this confusion can be found in the red stain on the bones of the corpses; the origin of the stain has been traced to red ochre. Probably relatives sprinkled the deceased with this powder which suggested blood and the color of the living in the

belief, or at least in the hope, that life could be restored. The amulets found in the Indus sites also suggest that the inhabitants must have had a highly developed practice of magic.

Spurred on by their religious beliefs and ideologies, men perform all sorts of acts, the nature of which we can hardly guess. Often these acts have no counterpart in the practices of the lower animals, and their particular manifestations satisfy no universal or direct biological necessity. Such human peculiarities as burial of the deceased were observed among the Neanderthal men (Childe 1954:15). Our problem, then, is complicated by the fact that the needs that ceremonial observances satisfy, and the pleasures that are derived from them, are defined for the individual not by his nature, but by the customs of his society. Nonetheless, a general idea of a people's religious attitude can usually be gleaned, or at least ought to be derivable, from their burial practices since the practices are usually developed from religious beliefs. Grave goods, and careful preparation of the dead for burial suggest a belief in the probability of a life after death, and if the corpses also show signs of differential elaboration of burial, we can infer not only a multi-level society on this side of the grave but also the anticipation of a similar society or the continuation of this society after death. To judge from the elaborate burials evidenced by graves from the time of megaliths (Sankalia 1962) in South India, there must have been a keen interest in questions about immortality and a strong belief in a future life. This is illustrated by :

1. Frequent attempts to protect the body of the deceased (Islam 1964:29).
2. Fractional burials, since they are always associated with various grave goods.
3. The ceremony of cremation, which, as demonstrated by the practices of present day Hindus, can be interpreted to mean that the dead had, through fire, been purged of their sins and corruption to prepare them for an after life.

Burial of relatives near their ancestral home, underneath the dwelling place or in the front yard, however, suggests that personal identity was thought to be preserved after death, and

that familiar affiliations could be expected to continue in the future life.

When we encounter ceremonially-arranged burials, we may feel quite justified in inferring that there were strict and possibly quite complicated rituals governing burial. The deductive power of the evidence is increased by the fact that among the primitive tribes of the Chittagong Hill region of East Pakistan, practices similar to those attributed to the people responsible for the ancient fractional burials are still to be found today.

Judging from some of the burials which emphasize the sexual and generative character of women, we are justified in inferring the existence of fertility rites aiming to facilitate not only human reproduction, but also a good crop and the subsequent acquisition of other desired goods. Additional evidence of these rites comes from figurines which have been found depicting the Mother Goddess, who can be regarded as the guardian of the local population, as in later times, i.e., the Vedic period, presiding over childbirth and taking human interest in the needs of her votaries. Her small breasts, as compared with those of the more matronly figures, may indicate that she was regarded as a virgin by the ancient population of the area. But it is uncertain whether this was so or whether she was one of a trinity involving a husband and son, as today many Hindu villages of East Pakistan believe. If she was the wife of Siva (Mohadeva) she was both virgin and wife, even as Siva is both ascetic and lord of reproductive nature, and as such, is related to the concept of the Virgin Mother in later systems. The association of the Mother Goddess with other deities was a common feature in other countries.

Interesting conjectures on the nature of the relationship between these figurines, which have been found in Egypt, Syria, Iran, and all around the Mediterranean, (I include here the Indus Valley), and the fertility rites, were made by Childe (1954:64).

The earth from whose bosom the grain sprouts has been imagined as a woman who may be influenced, like a woman, by entreaties (prayers) and bribes (sacrifices), as well as 'controlled' by initiative rites and incantations.

Similar figurines have been held to be divine symbols within the period of known history in Mesopotamia, and even today, fertility symbols are treated as objects of worship amongst the Hindus of Pakistan. Phalli similar to those found in prehistoric Pakistani sites are still worshipped today by Hindu virgins preparing for marriage, presumably with the same effects.

It is possible that the growing anthropomorphism of these people as exemplified by the creation of Siva and Mother Goddess, was characterized by an increasing feeling of the superiority of the gods and their detachment from mortals. The gods' existence apart from the people illustrates the division attributed to the universe in the philosophy of these people. The only way in which these segregated elements could be unified was by some mark of favor which man might win from the gods by sacrificial atonement. On the whole, the wrath of the gods and the evil powers permeating the universe were to be feared. Man as such had very little status, and he lacked even the right to assert his individuality in personal dignity. He had no self-confidence, but rather submitted himself to those unknown, yet indomitable forces. He never thought of himself as free; he was merely a wisp to be blown by any capricious power that might beset him. His separation from any guiding force made him a slave to the unknowable, yet overpowering, gods.

### 3. *Political Structure*

The armed citadels of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa speak more vociferously of domestic authority than of the awareness of the danger of external aggression, since with the exception of chert blades we did not find any weapons of war in the burials (Islam 1964:43a, Chart No. 3). Other metal implements that have been traced from the burials could have been used for ordinary household purposes as well as by craftsmen, hunters, and soldiers. All the so-called weapons discovered are thin, flat, leaf-shaped blades which could buckle on impact, indicating that Indus people were essentially peaceful. This suggestion also corresponds to what Wheeler (1953:52) and Linton (1958:-187) suggested earlier. The striking lack of weapons makes all the Indus sites conspicuously different from other sites of south-west Asia.

The Indus Valley culture eventually was swept away and the people were massacred by invaders who destroyed the fortresses and walled settlements.<sup>1</sup> This inference we can draw from the heaped up, uncared for, skeletal remains. Apparently the tribal and semi-settled life of the newcomers, based on cattle keeping (Allchin 1963), was incompatible with the sedentary and urban life of the people of the indigenous culture. The Indus people were rich and possessed valuables, which probably excited the greed of the invaders; it was primarily cattle which offered the greatest temptation to the invaders. The struggle between these two groups was attended by much bloodshed (Islam 1964:23ff).

The invaders, who in the early stage of their expansion coveted cattle for their subsistence, naturally did not understand the value of urban settlements and organized agriculture. The destruction of the pre-Aryan urban settlements seems to have been complete. It is this which accounts for the disappearance of urban life during a later period. While the spoils of war, especially cattle, must have added to the power of the warriors and priests, raising them above the *vis'* (commoners), it was slowly realized that the peasants of the older culture could provide labor power with which the newcomers could carry on agriculture.

It is reasonable to hold that the Harappan urban settlements could not have flourished without the surplus in agricultural products provided by the peasants from the adjacent countryside. We do not know in what relation the ordinary people stood to the ruling classes, though there is no doubt that there were important people in the society. The pattern of the Indus political system has been likened to that of Sumer—a priest king governing a servile population through a rigid bureaucracy (Islam 1964:29 and also MacKay 1948:XII-XIII).

For lack of data, it is difficult to get a precise idea of the effects of the Aryan impact on Harappan society and vice versa. The spoils of war must have added to the wealth and social status of the tribal leaders, since we know that they could afford to

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<sup>1</sup> When I was discussing this point with my colleagues, some of them said that many present-day archaeologists may not agree with this statement which was first conjectured by Stein (1929), and later advocated by Marshall (1931), MacKay (1948), Wheeler (1953), and Linton (1958). On the basis of the literature available, however, it has not been possible for me to pursue this point further.

patronize the priests by making gifts of cattle, and in some cases of female slaves (Rg. Veda II. 27. 12; Wheeler 1953:94).

#### 4. *Social Stratification*

From later history we know that the Aryans (new invaders) were basically tribal in character, but we do not know if they possessed slaves at the time of their first coming in Pakistan. The Vedic Pakistanis were probably primarily pastoral; at least this holds true of the Aryans known from the early parts of Rg. Veda. Anthropological investigations show that some pastoral tribes also kept slaves, although slavery was relatively more developed among agricultural tribes (Landtman 1938:230). But there is no doubt that the urban population of Harappan society had differences of wealth amounting to class divisions. This is well reflected in their different burial patterns (Islam 1964:29). It has also been suggested by Childe (1952:175), and Wheeler (1953:94) that, between the Harappans and Mesopotamians, slaves formed one of the articles of trade.

Despite the paucity of information, reasonable hypotheses may be made about the social adjustment between the Aryans, the survivors of the Harappan society and other peoples. I am inclined to believe that the pre-Aryans, though they did not have a very rigidly stratified social structure, definitely had a ruling class composed, perhaps, of a priest-god type ruler and his associates; a cultivator class that was responsible for food production; and a technician class that can be credited with the making of citadels, buildings, baths, road and metal implements (Islam 1964:17, 18, 39 & Chart III).

In the first flush of Aryan expansion the destruction of the settlements and population might have been so complete that very few people in northwestern Pakistan remained to be absorbed into the new society (Islam 1964:23). This may not, however, have been the case in the succeeding stages of their expansion. While the majority of the survivors and especially the comparatively backward people might be reduced to helotage, the natural tendency would be for the vis' of the Aryan society to mix with the lower orders and for the Aryan priests and warriors to mix with the higher classes of the earliest societies. The early literature throws hardly any light on the



process of assimilation between the Aryan vis' and those survivors of the earlier societies. We can assume that most of them were reduced to what came to be known as the fourth Varna in Aryan society. Thus, possibly, the priests of the ancient Harappans together with the Aryan priests formed the Brahman group; warriors of both Harappans and Aryans formed the Khastrya group; all tradesmen became the Vaishya; and the most neglected group of both became the Sudras.

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