DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS-HISTORY

SEMESTER -I

ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY UPTO 650 A.D.: SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

SOFT CORE-103

BLOCK-1

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FOREWORD

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavors.

ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY UPTO 650 A.D.: SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

BLOCK-1

BLOCK-2

BLOCK-1 ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY UPTO 650 A.D.: SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

Introduction To Block

UNIT I

ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

(Definitions—Generalization, Causality, Objectivity, Ideology; Vedic Danastutis; The Epics; The Purans; Prasastis; Charitas; Kalhana and the Rajtarangini; Different Traditions of Historical Writing; Various Dating Systems)

UNIT II

HUNTING-GATHERING, EARLY FARMING SOCIETY, PASTORALISM

(Palaeolithic Societies—Archaeological Evidence**,** Rock Art**;** Hunting-Gathering Societies --Social Structure**;** Mesolithic-Neolithic Continuity**;** Early Food Producing Societies—Neolithic Culture; Early Food-Producing Societies--Farming and Herding**;** Chalcolithic Societies

UNIT III

HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION: DISTRIBUTION, EXTENT, AGRICULTURE, ECONOMY, TRADE, CRAFTS PRODUCTION TO URBANISATION

(Features of Food Production; Need for Cultivation; Earliest Farming Congregations in the Subcontinent; Early Harappan Phase; Rise of Cities; Harappan Culture; Financial System)

UNIT IV

HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION: SOCIETY, RELIGION, SEALS AND FUNERAL PRACTICES

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UNIT V

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, ETHNICITY AND DECLINE OF HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

(Science and Technology**;** Ethnicity**;** Downfall of Harappans**;** Notions of Sudden Decline**;** Notion of Gradual Downfall**;** The Continuity**;** Dissemination of Harappan Tradition**;** Legacy of Harappa Civilization)

UNIT VI

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(Sources of Information-Literary**,** Archaeology**;** Aryan Invasion—A Myth**;** Financial System**;** Social Life**;** Political Organization**;** Faiths and Beliefs**;** Growth of Varna**;** Kinship and Patriarchal Associations)

UNIT VII

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE

(Sources of Information-Literary, Archaeology; Ramifications of Iron Technology; Character of the Economy-Decline of Pastoralism, Modifications in the Functions of Rituals, Significance of Land, Political and Social Life; Traditions and Beliefs-Priesthood, Emerging Gods, Folklore)

UNIT-1 ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

STRUCTURE

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we have tried to deal with various tools and techniques necessary for writing. Our position is that they are very important part of historical work. Although there are many pros and cons attached to these terms but no writing is possible without using these general concepts. They also keep changing as the work progresses. However, at every stage, the historians have to use these concepts which provide the basis for understanding their facts and source material but major chunk of this

Unit will also throw light on various Historiographical trends in Early India.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It might seem rather trite to say that history is a study of the past, but, for understanding ancient traditions of historiography, it is perhaps useful to remember that definitions of History have been changing over time. Today, our understanding of the scope of history has expanded considerably. We no longer understand history to be simply a chronicle of kings. Instead, historians are interested in, explore, and attempt to reconstruct histories of the environment, of gender relations, of social categories and classes that were regarded as marginal, subordinate or even insignificant, of processes, and of regions that were considered peripheral. Many of these concerns find little or no place in ancient works that we identify as Historical. What then was the focus of these works?

As we will see, many of these works were composed by literate men, generally (though not always) Brahmans, for consumption by the ruling elite. They were designed to proclaim and legitimize claims to power by new aspirants (who might otherwise have been dismissed as upstarts or interlopers). They were also deployed to consolidate claims of more established rulers. Thus the concerns of both authors and patrons seem rather narrow. Vast sections of the population, including common women and men, find little or no place within such narratives.

It may seem easy, and even fashionable to dismiss these works on account of their limitations. Yet, it is worth remembering that their significance has been debated for nearly two centuries, and that a critical appreciation of the traditions within which these texts were located can enrich our understanding of the past.

Initially, these texts were opened up for scrutiny using modern techniques of analysis in the colonial context. Works that purported to be itihasas (literally ‘so it was’) and puranas (‘old’) were compared with histories produced in ancient Greece and Rome, and were found wanting. They were found to be especially deficient in terms of spatial and chronological precision, which was regarded as the minimum

requirement of a historical work. And this was then used to argue, implicitly and often explicitly, that, as they lacked a sense of history, early Indians and by extension their descendants were intellectually inferior to their western counterparts. Clearly, history and notions of the past were inextricably enmeshed in notions of power.

As may be expected, attempts to suggest that Indians were somehow incapable of writing histories led to a reaction, where virtually any and every textual tradition which had some semblance of chronological underpinnings, was valorised as embodying historical "fact." These responses have in turn been critically examined and questioned. It is useful to keep these perspectives and contexts in mind as we examine specific examples of early texts and traditions that have historiographical significance.

1.2 DEFINITIONS

1.2.1 Generalisation

A generalisation is regarded as linkage of disparate or unrelated facts, in time or space, with eachother. It is their grouping and rational classification. Basically, a generalisation is aconnection or relationship between facts; it is an 'inference' or, as Marc Bloch puts it,'an explanatory relationship between phenomena.' It is the result of the effort to providean explanation and causation, motivation and effect/impact.More widely, generalisations are the means through which historians understand theirmaterials and try to provide their understanding of facts to others. Analysis andinterpretation of events is invariably done through generalisations.Generalisation is involved as soon as we perform the two most elementary tasks i.e. classify'facts' or 'data' or 'phenomena' and compare and contrast them, or seek out similaritiesand dissimilarities among them and make any inference from them.

Thus we make a generalisation when we put our facts into a chronological series.For example, when we mention the caste or religion of a leader we are making ageneralisation. By connecting the caste and the leader or writer we are suggesting that his or her caste was an

important part of his or her personality and, hence his or herpolitical or literary work. Or even the mention of his or her age/gender. More comprehensively,a generalisation occurs when we try to understand facts or make connection betweendata, objects, events, records of the past through concepts and convey them to othersthrough concepts.Generalisations may be simple or complex, of low level or of high level.

A Low-level generalisation is made when we label a fact or event, orclassify or periodize it. For example, labelling certain facts as economic, or certainpersons as belonging to a caste, region or religion or profession, or saying that certainevents occurred in a particular year or decade or century.A middle level generalisation is made when a historian tries to findinterconnections among the different elements of the subject under study; for example,when we are studying a segment of the social reality of a time, space or subject boundcharacter. In this case – for example peasant movement in Punjab from 1929-1937 –the historian may at the most try to see the backward and forward linkages or connectionsbut confining himself strictly to his subject matter. Themes such as class consciousness,interest groups, capitalism, colonialism, nationalism and feudalism cannot be tested in aresearch work except through middle level generalisations, such as relating to workersin Jamshedpur in the 1920s, growth of industrial capitalism in India in the 1930s and labourlegislation in India in the 1930s.

Wide generalisations or systematising or schematising generalisations

These are made when historians reach out to the largest possible, significant connections orthreads that tie a society together. These historians try to study all the economic,political, social, cultural and ecological linkages of a society in an entire era. The historiantries to draw a nation-wide or society-wide or even world-wide picture of these linkageseven when he is dealing with a narrow theme. Quite often, even when a historian isstudying a narrow theme, wide generalisations lie at the back of his mind. For example,quite often when a European scholar studied a specific social or religious aspect of anAsian or African society, a wider Orientalist understanding of Asia or Africa lay at theback of his mind. Similarly, when a British scholar studies the economic history of

an Asian country for a specific period; a widerunderstanding of colonialism lies at the back of his mind.The widest form of wide generalisations is the study of a social system (e.g. capitalism),or stage of society (e.g. feudalism or colonialism) or above all the transition from onesystem to another (feudalism to capitalism or colonialism to post-colonialism). Some ofthe historians and sociologists who have undertaken such wide generalisations are Karl Marx, Max Weber, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Eric Hobsbawm, ImmanuelWallerstein, D.D.Kosambi, R.S.Sharma, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib.

1.2.2 Causality

Even though the event is taken to be unique and particular, historians nevertheless endeavourto explain its occurrence. The analysis of an event as a particular does not weakeneither the effectiveness of the offered explanation or its claim to represent the reality.Like other social scientists, historians offer a complete explanation of the phenomenonunder consideration and they do this by valuing what caused that event to happen.Search for causes is thus central to historical analysis. Until the 18th centuryphilosophers and historians believed that the cause must be an antecedentevent - one that occurred prior to the event that is being explained and that the antecedentevent must be regularly associated with the effect. However, following upon the workof John S. Mill, the cause is no longer identified as an event that occurs before. Ratherit is conceived as a condition or a set of conditions that are always present when theevent *Z* occurs, and always absent when *Z* does not occur.

The cause is a condition that is both necessary and sufficient for bringing about the given event *Z***.** It is said to be necessary because its absence implies the absence of the effect *Z* and it is sufficient because its presence yields the given output *Z*.If a study shows that individuals with Vitamin A deficiency suffered from night blindnessand in all those individuals where Vitamin A was present in sufficient measure, night blindnessdid not occur, then it can be concluded that deficiency ofVitamin A is the cause of night blindness. We can designate Vitamin A

as the causebecause its absence meant night-blindness and its presence meant the absence of night-blindness.

Three points need to be emphasised here. First, the relationship of necessity issignificantly different from that of sufficiency. Second, the cause is considered to be acondition that is both necessary and sufficient and third that constant conjunction is not anadequate indicator of a causal relationship. If in a given instance cardiac arrest leads tothe death of a person, we may assume that heart failure was a condition that was sufficientfor the death of a person. However to assert that cardiacarrest was a necessary condition for the death of the individual we need to show thatthe absence of cardiac arrest would have meant absence of the effect i.e. death. If deathcould have occurred due to some other condition for e.g., liver failure orhaemorrhage, then cardiac arrest may have been a sufficient condition but it cannot beassumed as a necessary condition for the occurrence of the event i.e. death of person. Since the person could have died due to the presence of other ailments, theabsence of cardiac arrest would not have prevented the effect. Hence, it cannot be a pre-condition that is necessary for the event under consideration. What is being suggestedhere is that the connection of necessity is different from that of sufficiency andin philosophies of science the cause has been perceived as being both anecessary and a sufficient condition.

If the cause is a necessary and sufficient pre-condition, it means that it is regularly associatedwith the given effect i.e. it always exists when the effect *Z* occurs and alwaysabsent when the event *Z* is non-existent. Constant conjunction is thus an importantobservable quality of causation. Further, the causal condition is almost alwaysa precursor to the effect. However, this does not signify that a condition that is regularlyobserved before the event *Z*takes place is the result of the latter. Constant conjunctionand spatial contiguity are sine-quo-non of a cause-effect linkage but the cause cannot beidentified on this basis alone. On a record, songs appear in a specific sequence. However,the song that comes first is not the cause of the one that comes later. Likewise, lightning maybe regularly observed before we hear a thunder but this does not mean that it is thecause of the latter phenomena. It is possible that both lightning and thunder are the perceivable effects ofan altogether different cause. What needs to be underscored here is that regularassociation is not by

itself sufficient for proving that the condition that is observed firstis the cause of that which comes later.

1.2.3 Objectivity

Objectivity has been the founding principle of the historiographical tradition in the West.Since the days of Herodotus, the historians believed in the separation of thesubject and the object, in the distinction between the knower and known and in thepossibility to recover the past. Peter Novick, a critic of the principle of objectivity, hasclearly defined it in the following words: 'The principal elements of the ideal of [objectivity] are well known and can bebriefly recapitulated. The assumptions on which it rests include a commitment tothe reality of the past and to the truth as correspondence to that reality, a sharpseparation between knower and known, between fact and value, and above all,between history and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independentof interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accountsfor the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, notperspective. Whatever patterns exist in history is "found", not "made". Thoughsuccessive generations of historians might, as their perspectives shifted, attributedifferent significance to the events in the past, the meaning of those events wasunchanging.'(Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the AmericanHistorical Profession,* Cambridge: CUP, 1988, pp. 1-2)

For this purpose, however, the historian has to be unprejudiced and non partisan.He/she should be able to suspend his/her personal orientations and rely only on the truth ofthe evidences. Thomas Haskell, a historian, has questioned this conflation of objectivity and neutrality.In his article 'Objectivity is not Neutrality', he has argued that objectivity and neutralityare two separate things, even though in most of 19th century historiography theywere equated with each other. He cites the cases of historians, particularly,Eugene Genovese, the American historian on slavery, whose history is objective, thoughnot neutral.

We, therefore, now have two somewhat differing perceptions of objectivity; so far its relation with neutrality is concerned. However, in other areas such as objectivity'sposition as the prominent principle of the

historical profession, its distance from indoctrinationand from sophistry, its reliance on evidence and rationality and its requirement for aminimum level of separation are common to all its definitions.

1.2.4 Ideology

Probably, the word 'ideology' was first used in France by logical philosophers toindicate what was then understood as the philosophy of the human mind. In Englishdictionary, ideology conveyed the meaning of the science of ideas. The analytical emphasison empirical social ideas had an important role in the promotion of the Enlightenmentphilosophies which largely bestowed to the making of the French Revolution of 1789.This revolution faced numerous difficulties in achieving popular sovereignty. By the endof the following decade, there occurred the coup d'etat of Napoleon Bonaparte, who disregarded the Enlightenment philosophers for disseminating metaphysicsand a critical failure to adapt their socio-political ideas. Napoleon's attack imparted to ideology a sense ofhaving unreal, impractical and even fanatical tendencies.

He blamed the ideologues, for they illusion the people by elevating them to asovereignty where the same people were incapable of application. He rebuked theprinciples of enlightenment as ideology. An element of empiricalism becomes a featureof ideology. It is neither rationalisation in the sense of direct action to better something nor in the sense of finding suitable theoretical paradigm to explain some rationalobservations. The ideologues support for popular sovereignty must have been basedon their ideas about the people and their capacity. Napoleon's critique implies that theideologues considered people more as what they would wish them to be and less to what those people were in actual reality. This is a kind of scientism influencing thehabit of mind prone to promote ideologies.In an important sense, Napoleon's emphasis on 'knowledge of the human heart andthe lessons of history' also had an ideological distinction opposed to the position ofthe Enlightenment thinkers. This is a case of conflict between democratic and undemocratic sanctions about the nature of political power. Not that Napoleon's pleasfor singular man authority could justify itself on any historical criterion ofuniversal excellence. He had to be a creature of pure and simple pragmatism.

Insome circumstances, realism may serve as the way out of an immediate problem.But even realism cannot rid itself of a rather dull ideological dictum enjoiningthat 'nothing succeeds like success'. As we have already noted, every ideology growseither in support or in opposition to an existing social order, its economy, politics, andculture. The different patterns of cognitive and moral beliefs embedded in differentideologies can then have a vital influence on the historical processes of action, reactionand change.

Let us highlight the two different cases in which the term ideology has been used in theevolution of human thought about history and society. It may mean a set of beliefbelonging to any particular society. Such beliefs are likely to differ from one class toanother, reflecting separate class interests and divide, which can be inimical or propitiatory This is how an ideology comes to have the label of being 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian' etc. An ideology of a class cannot have the tendency of vindicatingthe particular interests thereof. The usual manner of such legitimization consists in projectingthat the promotion of particular interests, under consideration, in line to the generalgood of the entire society.

The other usage of the term ideology is negative. It means a delusion born of falseusage and speculation, the sense in which Napoleon sharply criticised the ideologiesof popular sovereignty. The critique implied a kind of difference between knowledgebased on rational experience and ideology. In their early writings, criticising Hegelian idealism, Marx and Engels applied the term ideology in thissense. They had the same critical approach while exposing the drawbacks of LudwigFeuerbach's materialism. Marx's critiques of the Hegelian philosophies of the *State*(1843) and *Right* (1843-44) and his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844)made no substantive mention of ideology. The emphasis was on the transposition of Hegel.For example, the true relationship of *thought* to *being* is that *being* is subject and *thought*the predicate (Hegel). The Hegelian inversions led to countless uncertainties and mercurial conclusions. To citea few of them, Hegel's apotheosis of an authoritarian absolute and despotic state did not fit in with his advocated course of history as the progress towards consciousness of freedom. FurtherHegel's idea of God creating man means an inversion of the same kind. LudwigFeuerbach, himself a radical Hegelian, rightly

argued in his book *The Essence ofChristianity (1814)* that God is a creation of man in his own image, invoking thehuman ideals of wisdom, will and love endowed with countless power.

In connectionwith this theme, Marx analysed the nature of religion, tracing its origin in the rebuttaland anguish of the real world: 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heartof a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.'*(Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction).*In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), Marx no longer travelledonly in the world of philosophy. His criticism then expands to the economic connectionsin a capitalist society. This was Marx's first analysis of estranged labour andits severe refutation in the domain of private capitalist world.

We have noted that the use of the word ideology is extremely rare inMarx's later texts. Of the two senses of ideology, the strictly negative one hadalso been taken in conjunction with false consciousness in some writings of Engels.Even in its negative uses, ideology referred to manipulations with a view to veiling somerefutation in reality. While capitalism abounds in contradictions and brings severedistress to the exploited, the bourgeois ideology, in Marx's words, presents the systemas the 'very Eden of the innate rights of man; there alone rule, Freedom, Equality,Property and Bentham'. And so, the similarity of ideology and false consciousnessmay be an illusion without appropriate specificity of the contraries which are beingconcealed.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What is generalization?

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2) Elucidate Objectivity.

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1.3 VEDIC DANASTUTIS

If we understand histories as recording events that were regarded as significant by those who chronicled them, some of the earliest examples of these come from the Rigveda (c. 2nd millennium BCE). These include verses that were identified as danastutis (literally 'in praise of gifts'). These were composed by the recipients, who were priests, and usually mention the name of the donor. Here is a typical example. These verses are from the second hymn of the eighth mandala or book of the Rigveda, "Skilled is Yadu's son in giving precious wealth, he who is rich in herds of cattle. May he, Asanga's son, Svanadratha, obtain all joy and happiness? Asanga, the son of Playoga, has surpassed others, by giving ten thousand. I have got ten bright coloured oxen".

As we can see from this example, the recipient acknowledges the gifts he receives and prays for the well-being of the donor. Such acknowledgments or proclamations were a part of major rituals such as the Asvamedha as well. As part of the ritual, the sacrificial horse was let loose to wander for a year. During that period, a Brahman priest was expected to sing about the generosity of the patron every morning, while a Kshatriya was to sing about his war-like exploits every evening. It is likely that many of the stories that were later compiled in the epics and the Puranas developed out of such narrative practices.

It is perhaps worth reflecting on what would get recorded and why. Only what was regarded as positive or desirable from the point of view of the Brahman or the Kshatriya would find a place in such eulogies. Other activities, or failures, would tend to be glossed over or even obliterated from memory. We may also note that recalling the generosity and prowess of the patron was not meant to be a simple, objective recounting, but was in fact meant to ensure that the patron would continue to live up to expectations. As such, these histories were related to a context of patronage.

1.4 THE EPICS

Traditionally, the Mahabharata is recognised as an itihasa while the Ramayana is regarded as a mahakavya (great poem). Each of these texts has a long and complicated history. The kernel of the stories contained in the epics may date back to the early centuries of the 1st millennium BCE, but the texts were finally written down much later (c. 4th-5th centuries CE). As such, the texts have undergone alterations and additions over several centuries. The Kurus and Pancalas in general are mentioned in later Vedic literature (c. first half of the 1st millennium BCE). While both these lineages were important in the Mahabharata, references to specific personages mentioned in the epic are relatively sparse in the Vedic corpus. References to the locale of the Ramayana, Kosala and Videha, are even fewer, and, once again, the principal characters of the epic hardly figure in later Vedic literature. Archaeological excavations and explorations indicate that sites such as Hastinapura and Indraprastha (associated with the Mahabharata) and Ayodhya (associated with the Ramayana) were small, pre-urban settlements during this period.

The literal historicity of the events depicted in the epics is unlikely to be established. Nevertheless, the texts can and have been analysed in terms of the genre that they represent. Significantly, both epics contain genealogies. The Mahabharata contains the genealogies of the lunar (chandravamsa) lineage, while the Ramayana contains the genealogy of the solar (suryavamsa) lineage. Several ruling families in the early medieval period (c. 7th century CE) traced descent from these lineages. While the genealogies may not be literally true, they are important for what they suggest about socio-political processes.

1.5 THE PURANS

By the middle of the 1st millennium CE, another category of literature, the Puranas, was written down. Like the epics, the antecedents of the Puranas can be traced back for several centuries. And as in the case of the Mahabharata, a social group known as the sutas evidently played an important role in the composition, compilation and transmission of at least some of the narratives that were included in the Puranas. The sutas are often regarded as bards. They were important in early states, so much

so that they are listed amongst the "jewels" or principal supporters of the raja in the later Vedic texts. They were expected to act as messengers of the king, accompany him in battle, and maintain as well as narrate stories about his exploits. However, sutas are also mentioned as low status people in the Dharmasastras such as the Manusmriti. This would suggest that at least some people in society, perhaps the Brahmans, were contesting the claims of the sutas to be both close to the king and transmitters of royal lore. And when the epics and Puranas were finally written down, the authors were recognised as Brahmans rather than as sutas.

We find two or three types of genealogies in the Puranas. The first includes lineages of sages. Such lineages, which perhaps served as markers of legitimate transmission of knowledge, are found in some of the Upanishads and Dharmasastras as well. The other genealogies are those of rulers. These in turn are divided into two categories, those that pre-date the onset of the Kaliyuga and those of rulers who are post Kaliyuga. The first category, delineating the original solar and lunar lineages, includes the heroes of the epics. In fact, the war that constitutes the central event of the Mahabharata is recognised as marking the turning point (for the worse) in human history, and the beginning of an age of decline, i.e. the Kaliyuga. The genealogy of the second category of rulers, clearly lesser mortals, is marked by an interesting feature. All these genealogies, which in some cases run till about the 5th century CE, are constructed in the future tense. For instance, a verse about the Gupta rulers, who ruled in north India from c. 4th century CE, runs as follows:

Kings born of the Gupta family will enjoy all these territories: viz. Prayaga (Allahabad) on the Ganga, Saketa (eastern Uttar Pradesh) and Magadha. Why were these genealogies compiled, and why did they take such a curious form? There are no easy answers. It is likely that the final compilation was undertaken during the time of the Gupta rulers, as (with few exceptions) later rulers are generally not mentioned. Was the future tense adopted so as to suggest that these rulers were destined to rule, and was this then a possible strategy for legitimating? It is likely that this would have also created an illusion of stability and permanence that may have been valuable in a fluid political situation. What is interesting is that many (though not all) of the rulers mentioned in the Puranic

genealogies are known from other sources such as inscriptions and coins as well. At the same time, not all rulers who are known from other sources find place in these genealogies. Clearly, traditions of recording the names of rulers as well as the duration of their reigns were widely prevalent, and were more or less systematised within the Puranic tradition.

It has been suggested that genealogies become particularly important during certain historical moments, when attempts are made to either contest or consolidate power. Invoking genealogies at such moments may become a means of asserting status, which may be especially important when these claims are somewhat tenuous. Claims to continuity, implicit in invoking lineage identities, are also particularly significant when there are major resources that are accumulated and handed down from one generation to the next. These resources could include land, and in the ultimate analysis, kingdoms.

What is also important is to focus on the principles of inclusion and exclusion that underlie genealogies. We can examine whether kinship is traced bilaterally (i.e. through both parents) or is patrilineal or (in some rare instances) matrilineal. We can also examine the positions assigned to elder and younger brothers in these texts. Thus the genealogies often provide information about the kind of kinship networks that were valorised.

What is evident then is that such genealogies need not be literally true. Nevertheless, insofar as they appeal to selected events and ancestors in the past, they allow us to speculate on the circumstances in which such strategies of drawing on or even constructing a mythical past may have been important.

1.6 PRASASTIS

Much of the literature we have been considering so far was written in relatively simple Sanskrit verse. Although access to Sanskrit learning was limited, the Puranas and the epics contain provisions that suggest that these could and probably were read out to all categories of people, including women and sudras, who were otherwise denied access to

Sanskrit texts. In other words, there were certain kinds of 'histories' that were meant to be accessible to all sections of society. These were not only meant to provide an understanding about the past, but were also probably visualised as a means of disseminating information about social norms. In a sense, these agendas were complementary.

There were at the same time, other categories of texts that were probably meant for circulation amongst a more restricted, elite audience. These were associated with the royal court, and were usually written in ornate Sanskrit, with prolific use of similes, metaphors, and other strategies to render the text weighty. Examples of these texts are found in prasastis or eulogistic inscriptions as well as in charitas. While some of the earliest examples of prasastis are in Prakrit, the best-known examples are in Sanskrit. Such inscriptions become particularly common from c. 4th century CE. These were often independent inscriptions, but could also be part of votive inscriptions, commemorating the generosity of the royal donor. Perhaps amongst the best-known of such prasastis is Samudragupta's Prayaga prasasti, also known as the Allahabad Pillar Inscription (it is inscribed on an Asokan pillar). It was composed by Harisena, who evidently was a skilled poet, apart from holding several offices.

The inscription describes how the ruler was chosen by his father, his numerous exploits, and the strategies whereby he won the allegiance of rulers of distant lands, his heroic qualities and his boundless scholarship. In short, the ruler is idealized as an all-rounder, someone who excelled in just about everything. It is likely that some of the descriptions of the ruler's exploits are true.

Nonetheless, the element of poetic exaggeration is also more than apparent. To cite just one example: the ruler's body was described as having become even more handsome as it was adorned with the wounds caused by axes, arrows, spikes, spears, darts, swords, clubs, javelins and other weapons. Such elaborate descriptions, couched in ornate Sanskrit, were probably meant to impress the ruling elite. While the inscription was literally visible, its contents would probably have been accessible only to a relatively limited audience.

Another famous prasasti is that of Pulakesin II, the Chalukya ruler of the 7th century CE. The poet who composed this particular prasasti,

Ravikirti, compared his skills to those of Kalidasa and Bharavi. Once again, we have a description of Pulakesin's accession to the throne, and his military exploits, which included pushing back the contemporary ruler of north India, Harsa, when he attempted to cross the Vindhyas. Ravikirti's composition is part of a votive inscription that also records how the poet donated a house for a Jaina teacher.

1.7 CHARITAS

Another genre of text associated primarily with the courts was the charita. These were meant to be accounts of the lives and achievements of 'great men.' Most of the surviving examples of charitas are in Sanskrit, and, like the prasastis, the style of these compositions is extremely ornate. Given the length of these texts, it seems likely that these were composed entirely for elite consumption. Somewhat paradoxically, one of the earliest charitas that survive is the Buddhacharita, composed by Asvaghosa (c.1st century CE). Although purporting to be the life of a world renouncer, the author dwells at length on the luxuries of courtly life, including elaborate descriptions of women. It is possible that this was meant to serve as a representation of life at the Kusana court.

Perhaps the best-known of the charita genre is the Harsacharita, composed by Banabhatta. This is an account of the early years of Harsa's reign. Bana's composition contains some of the most complex prose sentences in Sanskrit literature, carefully crafted so as to lend an aura of exclusiveness to the ruler who was eulogized. The description of Harsa's feet, cited below, is just one example of this style, "His feet were very red as if with wrath at insubordinate kings, and they shed a bright ruby light on the crowded crests of the prostrate monarchs, and caused a sunset of all the fierce luminaries of war and poured streams of honey from the flowers of the crest garlands of the local kings, and were never even for a moment unattended, as by the heads of slain enemies, by swarms of bees which fluttered bewildered by the sweet odour of the chaplets on the heads of all the feudal chiefs".

The writers of charitas adopted other strategies as well. We find that Sandhyakaranandin, a poet who eulogized the Pala ruler Rama Pala of eastern India (c. 11-12th centuries CE), composed the Ramacharita in such a way that each verse could be interpreted as referring either to the life of the epic hero or to that of his patron. It is likely that both prasastis and charitas were especially valuable in situations where rulers were somewhat insecure. In the case of all the four rulers we have mentioned, it is evident that their claims to the throne did not rest on primogeniture. In Samudragupta's case Harisena states that he was chosen by his father, ignoring the claims of rivals. Pulakesin was the nephew of his predecessor. Harsha succeeded to the throne on the sudden death of his elder brother, and claimed the kingdom of his deceased brother-in-law as well. Rama Pala, too, had no direct claim to the throne. It is possible that these elaborate texts were to some extent visualized as strategies for exalting rulers who might otherwise have been vulnerable.

1.8 KALHANA AND THERAJTARANGINI

It is often said that the only truly historical work produced in ancient India was the Rajatarangini, or the river of kings, authored by Kalhana, (12th century CE). The Rajatarangini is, at one level, a history of Kashmir since its inception (the account begins with the creation of the land from primeval waters). It consists of eight books or tarangas, and is composed in verse.

The first three tarangas deal with the history of the region till the 7^{th} century CE, tarangas 4 to 6 carry the story forward till the 11th century, while the last two tarangas (which are also the longest) deal with the 12th century. What is interesting is to see how the tone of the narrative changes: in the first section, the author, who was a Brahman, the son of a minister, and a learned Sanskrit scholar, paints a picture of what, from his point of view, was an ideal world, one in which sons succeeded fathers, and in which the brahmanical norms of varna and gender hierarchies were strictly followed. However, in the next two sections, he documents in detail how these norms were violated. Amongst the "horrors" according to Kalhana is the phenomenon of women rulers. As

is obvious, not all present-day readers will share Kalhana's perspective, even as they might derive information from his writing.

What makes Kalhana's work unique is that he mentions at the outset the sources he consulted. These included sasanas or royal proclamations pertaining to religious endowments, prasastis or eulogies, and the sastras: By the inspection of ordinances of former kings relating to religious foundations and grants, laudatory inscriptions, as well as written records, all wearisome error has been set at rest.

He also attempts to distinguish between the plausible and the fantastic, and offers explanations for changes in fortune. These are, more often than not, in terms of invoking fate, whose ways, according to the author, were mysterious. Kalhana is scathing in his critique of earlier writers, whose works, according to him, were full of errors and lacked style. Unfortunately, none of the works of his predecessors have survived, so we have no means of assessing his claims. He himself set a precedent that was emulated by later writers, who continued his narrative down to the times of the sultans of Kashmir.

Kalhana regarded himself as a poet. Ideally, according to him, a poet was supposed to be endowed with divine insight, (divyadrsti), and was almost as powerful as Prajapati, the god recognised as the creator within the brahmanical tradition. He also envisaged his work as a didactic text, meant especially for the education of kings. There is an emphasis on trying to offer impartial judgments, and to cultivate a sense of detachment.

As a poet, moreover, Kalhana functioned within the Sanskritic tradition according to which every composition was expected to have a dominant rasa (emotion, mood or sentiment). The rasa he valorised was the santa rasa (tranquillity), although there are sections where the heroic tone dominates. There are also sections where the horrors of war and the destruction it leaves in its trail are graphically highlighted. Interestingly, although Kalhana was clearly close to the court, he was not the court poet.

1.9 DIFFERENT TRADITIONS OF HISTORICAL WRITING

While most traditions of historical writing were related to kings, other traditionsdeveloped around religious institutions. These included the Buddhist, Jaina, andbrahmanical institutions. Of these, the early Buddhist tradition is perhaps the best-knownat present.Buddhist traditions record the convening of three (according to some versions four)Buddhist councils, where early Buddhist doctrines and teachings were recorded.

Gradually, as the monastic order was consolidated, more systematic records werekept, and a system of chronology, marking years in terms of the mahaparinirvana orthe death of the Buddha, was evolved. Maintaining such records probably becamemore important as monasteries became rich institutions, receiving endowments of villages,lands, and other goods, as well as cash, from benefactors including kings. Such chronicleswere best preserved in Sri Lanka, where there was a close bonding between the stateand the monasteries. This relationship was documented in texts such as the Dipavamsaand the Mahavamsa.

1.10 VARIOUS DATING SYSTEMS

Chronologies are crucial to history, and it is in this context that it is worth examining thevarieties of dating systems that were used in early India. One of the earliest systems tobe documented, and one that remained popular for several centuries, was the use ofregnal years. This was a system whereby kings took the first year when they beganruling as a starting point, counting years of their rule in terms of this beginning. This was used by the Maurya emperor Asoka, for instance. He used dates derived from thetime of his abhiseka (sprinkling with sacred water). We learn from his thirteenth majorrock edict that he attacked Kalinga eight years after he had been installed as king.

In other instances, dynastic eras were developed. Perhaps the best-known example ofthis is provided by the era of the Guptas. This was projected as beginning from c. 320CE, the date assigned to the first important

Gupta ruler, Chandragupta I. Interestingly,the use of the era began with retrospective effect, from the time of Chandragupta II,about 80 years after the date from which it was supposed to begin. Clearly, it was onlyafter they had consolidated their power that the Gupta rulers thought it fit to begin anera, pushing back the antiquity of their claims to power as far back as possible.

Other eras that have endured for about two millennia are the Vikrama era (c. 58 BCE)and the Saka era (c. 78 CE). Both of these eras were probably of royal origin, butthere is little or no consensus regarding who the kings in question were. The Vikramaera is particularly problematic from this point of view, as several kings in early Indiaadopted the title of vikramaditya (literally the sun of valour), and we have no means ofdetermining which one amongst these initiated the era which is still in use. The Saka eramay mark the beginning of the reign of Kaniska, arguably the most illustrious of theKushana rulers. However, it is worth remembering that the Kushanas and Sakas weredifferent groups of Central Asian peoples. What is possible is that the term Saka wasused as a generic term for foreigners, and an era that may have been begun by the Kushanas came to be known by this name.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Write notes on the following:

a) Vedic *Danastutis*

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b) *Charitas*

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c) *Prasastis*

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1.11 LET US SUM UP

The discipline of history, as other social sciences, constantly seeks new definitions which giverise to various phenomena. The search for these is crucial to historical analysis. These definitions provide both thenecessary and sufficient ground for the occurrence of certain events. However, unlike inthe natural sciences, the search for definitions in history cannot be conducted in a controlledatmosphere as in a laboratory. Instead, the social scientists look for similar and differentconditions for the occurrence of events.

It is evident then that a sense of history, if by this we mean an awareness of the past,was well-developed in early India. There were several systems of reckoning datesthat were in existence, and that were commonly used, as is evident from finds ofinscriptions bearing dates. These have been found throughout the subcontinent.Inscriptions and in textual traditions tell us about how elites thought about the past andattempted to both use and manipulate it through specific strategies of recording. Theseinclude recording the names and deeds of generous patrons, as for instance in the Vedicdanastutis. Genealogies, too, could be constructed to meet political exigencies, andcould be extended in innovative ways. Besides, distinctive genres were developed toproclaim the status of rulers, most evident in the prasastis and the charitas. Yet, thereseem to have been other traditions as well. Kalhana's Rajatarangini, though for andabout kings, is very different in its tone and tenor.It is when we search for histories of non-elite groups that we run into problems. Thesewere clearly of marginal interest to the literate few, who compiled the textual traditionswe have examined. So we are left with the sense of historiographical traditions thatwere rich, but restricted.

1.12 KEYWORDS

Orientalist:A person from the West who studies the language, culture, history, or customs of countries in Asia.

Mahakavya:great poem.

Empiricism:the theory that all knowledge is based on experience derived from the senses.

Sutas: Bards.

Abhisheka: Sprinkling with sacred water

Upanishad: Series of Hindu sacred treatises written in Sanskrit *c*. 800–200 BC, expounding the Vedas in predominantly mystical and monistic terms.

Dharmsashtra: Collection of ancient Sanskrit texts which give the codes of conduct and moral principles of Hindus.

Purans:A class of sacred Sanskrit writings on Hindu mythology and folklore of varying date and origin, the most ancient of which dates from the 4th century A.D.

1.13 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1) Discuss the tradition of Puranic genealogies.

2) Who was Kalhana? Discuss his historical work.

3) Write a note on the dating systems used by various dynasties in early India.

1.14 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) A generalisation is regarded as linkage of disparate or unrelated facts, in time or space, with eachother. It is their grouping and rational classification. Basically, a generalisation is aconnection or relationship between facts. It is the result of the effort to providean explanation and causation, motivation and effect/impact.More widely, generalisations are the means through which historians understand theirmaterials and try to provide their understanding of facts to others.

2)The assumptions on which Objectivity rests include a commitment tothe reality of the past and to the truth as correspondence to that reality, a sharpseparation between knower and known, between fact and value, and above all,between history and fiction.

Check Your Progress 2

1)a) If we understand histories as recording events that were regarded as significant by those who chronicled them, some of the earliest examples of these come from the Rigveda, which include verses that were identified as danastutis (literally 'in praise of gifts'). These were composed by the recipients, who were priests, and usually mention the name of the donor.

b) Thesewere meant to be accounts of the lives and achievements of 'great men.' Most ofthe surviving examples of charitas are in Sanskrit, and, like the prasastis, the styleof these compositions is extremely ornate. Given the length of these texts, it seems likely that these were composed entirely for elite consumption.

c) There were categories of texts that were probably meant forcirculation amongst a more restricted, elite audience. These were associated with theroyal court, and were usually written in ornate Sanskrit, with prolific use of similes,metaphors, and other strategies to render the text weighty. Examples of these texts arefound in prasastis or eulogistic inscriptions

UNIT-2 HUNTING-GATHERING, EARLY FARMING SOCIETY, PASTORALISM

STRUCTURE

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we will study the Archaeological Evidence for Palaeolithic Societies including Rock Art; Social Structure of Hunting-Gathering Societies; Mesolithic –Neolithic Continuum and the Process of Domestication; Archaeological Evidence for Early Food Producing—Neolithic Culture; Social Structure of Early Food-Producing (Farming and Herding) Societies and ; Chalcolithic Cultures.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will be contrasting two kinds of societies, hunting-gathering and food producing (agriculture and pastoralist). These signify two different stages of social development, with hunting-gathering representing the band level and food producing, the tribal level.

Archaeologically, the material culture of early human history (categorised as the Palaeolithic /Old Stone Age, Mesolithic /Middle Stone Age and Neolithic /New Stone Age) in the subcontinent can help us understand band and tribal levels of social organisation. Thus, in this Unit, we will describe the archaeological evidence for the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic societies. This evidence would provide information on subsistence strategies, residential units, kinds of technologies, and so forth. Social structures of prehistoric societies, on the other hand, have to be inferred with the aid of anthropological theory and ethnographic accounts.

Human history comprises a mere fraction of geological history. The geological period during which most human evolution took place is termed the Pleistocene that extended from roughly 2 million years ago to about 10,000 BP. Over this vast time span, man has largely been a hunter-gatherer. It is only in the last 10,000 years, from the onset of the Holocene, that several significant developments in human societies have taken place. On the other hand, language development, of crucial importance to human societies would have taken place in the Pleistocene. Dates for the origins of language development cannot be ascertained with any certainty so far. However, some scholars assume that the evidence of visual art forms (paintings, sculpture) from c. 35,000 BP establishes the presence of language in the Upper Palaeolithic.

The Holocene witnesses a far more varied picture in contrast to the Pleistocene. Unlike the Palaeolithic where the margins between the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic are distinct in chronology and lithic technology, in the Holocene there may be a contemporaneity of Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age societies. Thus at the same time there could be groups at various stages of social development (bands, tribes, early states) coexisting together. In the Pleistocene, a more limited range of subsistence strategies (involving hunting, foraging and fishing) contrasted with the far more varied strategies (cultivation, herding, hunting gathering, fishing and combinations of these) of the food producing societies in the Holocene.

In this Unit, we will also be referring to Chalcolithic societies. The Bronze Age, a term used by V. Gordon Childe, should be seen not merely as a technological stage, but as one marked by a particular social

form, that takes shape within an urban context and has features of a state society, while the term chalcolithic would refer to food producing societies at the tribal level of social organization. While stone was used far more than metal for the major cutting tools in the chalcolithic, the Bronze Age is noted for a far more regular use of copper/bronze tools. Given that there are limitations to the forms possible in stone, the chalcolithic indicates a more basic toolkit (where chalcolithic metal objects largely imitated stone tool types), unlike the Bronze Age where a greater diversity in shapes and sizes of metal tools come into use.

2.2 PALAEOLITHIC SOCIETIES-- ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

In the Indian subcontinent, the earliest evidence for humans goes back to about 1.9 million years ago from Rawalpindi in Pakistan. This period from roughly 2 million years ago till about c.10,000 years ago is known archaeologically as the Palaeolithic. The word Palaeolithic means Old Stone Age (where 'palaeo' means old and 'lithic' comes from lithos, the Greek word for stone). Within the Palaeolithic, sub-phases are differentiated into Lower, Middle and Upper on the basis of types of stone tools and the techniques for making them as well as relative dates based on stratigraphy.

The Lower Palaeolithic is roughly dated from 1.9 million years ago, the Middle Palaeolithic from about 80,000 years BP to 40,000 years BP and the Upper Palaeolithic from 40,000 till 10,000 years BP. The Lower Palaeolithic is generally identified by the presence of two types of tools: the chopper-chopping tools and the handaxes. The former, particularly in a non- Indian context, are considered to be earlier to the handaxe tradition. Middle Palaeolithic tools are identified by flake industries and the preferred tools were scrapers. A blade and burin tradition marks the Upper Palaeolithic. Largely the Lower Palaeolithic industry concentrates on quartzite as the raw material; from the Middle Palaeolithic, more fine-grained stones, such as jasper and varieties of chert were preferred. The tool making technology in the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic is relatively simple, with flakes struck off parent nodules. In the Lower

Palaeolithic, tools of the chopper-chopping variety were flaked on working edges; while handaxes were also known as bifaces or tools flaked from both sides.

The real change in tool making technology occurs, perhaps from the Middle Palaeolithic but more obviously in the Upper Palaeolithic, when nodules were carefully prepared, so as to remove a number of blades from a single pebble of stone. The raw materials used were fine-grained stones that would result in sharp-edged tools. The technology also implied some amount of mass production and a more efficient way of making tools. Tools were also richer from the Upper Palaeolithic, capable of being used for varied purposes. It is also from this period that bone was used for making tools. A gradual reduction in tool size is a feature of the Palaeolithic with the largest tools in the earliest sub-phase, the Lower Palaeolithic. This is noted at sites in Central India like Adamgarh Hill in Hoshangabad District or Bhimbetka where occupations of Lower and Middle Palaeolithic humans were marked by tools increasingly smaller in size.

Palaeolithic stone tools are found in several contexts: habitation sites in rock shelters or in the open; factory sites near sources of raw material where tools were made; habitation sites cum factory sites; or scatters of tools. Sometimes, one may find Palaeolithic tools in sections along the banks of rivers. These may not indicate actual living areas of Palaeolithic man but may represent tools moved by river action. We are likely to get better evidence from say, rock shelters where early man may have lived for periods of time, than from the relatively more open areas.

Geographically in the Indian subcontinent, certain areas would have been preferred for habitation by early humans like areas with stone outcrops that would have provided raw materials for tools, areas with water, and so forth. Thick vegetated areas, such as in Kerala or the northeast would have been avoided. Thus, we find Palaeolithic sites largely on the foothills of the Himalayas, along the margins of the Ganges plain bordering on the hills of central India, margins of the Thar Desert and much of central and peninsular India.

2.2.1 Rock Art

Another body of evidence from the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic is the art found in the form of rock engravings, rock bruising and as paintings on walls of caves and rock shelters. Geographically, these are obviously limited to areas where rock formations are available such as the extensive sandstone formations of central India, where shelters with paintings are commonly found. Apart from central India, Ladakh in North India is an area where rock engravings are still being discovered and South India where carvings and bruising have already been recorded. There are also examples of portable art such as the decorated ostrich eggshells found from Rajasthan that have been radiocarbon dated to c. 40,000 years BP. The Patne eggshells have been dated to 25,000 years BP. The most evocative and extensively studied are the rock paintings. The major ascribed reason for the art itself has been magical. Early paintings largely centre on scenes of hunting and gathering. The depiction of the hunt has been seen in terms of ensuring the efficacy of the actual hunt that in 'killing' the animal through a depiction would ensure the same in practice.

Dating examples of prehistoric art is not easy, and one has a very large time range for the paintings, from about c. 40,000 BP to 1000 AD. While it is difficult to obtain exact dates, one may be better able to obtain relative dates. The fact that paintings are often superimposed one upon the other would enable us to figure out which painted layer was earlier than the others, but the dates for each layer or the relative time elapsing between each layer would be less easy to ascertain. Cave shelters that have occupation deposits can be excavated and the paintings can be correlated to the deposits. One example illustrates this: at Bhimbetka, a famous cave shelter complex in Madhya Pradesh, paintings in a shelter were adjudged to be Upper Palaeolithic in date as they were depicted in green pigment. The correlation was made on the basis of pieces of green pigment found in occupation layers within the shelter that contained Upper Palaeolithic tools. On that basis, V.S. Wakankar also considered the use of green pigment as indicative of the earliest prehistoric paintings. However, this last point has been disputed as early paintings have also been found in red colour.

2.3 HUNTING-GATHERING SOCIETIES-- SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Let us take the example of the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic site of Budha Pushkar around a lake in the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. Artefacts are found in clusters that perhaps represent small living and multi-activity sites suggesting that groups may have camped here periodically. This archaeological picture beyond a point would not help us to understand ancient society. Information on social structures can be inferred with help from anthropological or ethnographic data from living hunting-gathering societies.

According to Elman Service and Marshall D Sahlins hunting-gathering societies are essentially at the band level of social organisation. The term band is used to signify very small groups (20-50 persons) with a flexible membership. Thus the family is the essential unit of production with foraging activities performed by the nuclear family within the band's range. Most activities (like collecting, fishing, foraging) are performed at the family level, while hunting of large game could have involved a group of males from several families and/or from a different band. The membership of such groups may have changed from hunt to hunt.

Hunting-gathering societies are solely dependent on wild plants and animals. Wild plant foods gathered mainly by women may have been a more substantial component of the diet than the meat from the hunt. In fact, scholars feel that such communities should be more appropriately termed "gatherer-hunters". Whatever was collected/ hunted would have been according to need and consumed immediately – there was no likelihood of storage or surplus. Camps would have had to frequently shift in response to the availability of both plant and animal resources. The frequent mobility of bands also ensured that population remained low; in fact, families deliberately limited their numbers.

Band level societies are essentially egalitarian, with only two kinds of social units comprising of families and bands of related families. There is no formal, permanent or hereditary leadership – either elders may have

had influence over moral issues or a particularly skilled hunter may have assumed a leadership role during a hunt. Though there is no clear territoriality, there is some kind of tacit understanding over resource use or the areas where these were available. Conflicts over use of resources may often have been resolved by the moving away of one group.

Ritually, there may have been totemistic beliefs. A totem could be a plant or animal or inanimate object that was protected and revered. The relations between a group and a totem could be such that the group took its identity from the totem. We have also seen in the previous section that visible evidence of beliefs may survive in the form of paintings, engravings and bruising.

2.4 MESOLITHIC-NEOLITHIC CONTINUITY

Around 10,000 years BP, the Pleistocene gave way to the Holocene. This shift was marked by climatic changes to a warmer climate much like the present, with an increase in rainfall and humidity resulting in dependability on water sources such as lakes and rivers. Vegetation too changed with an expansion of forests and grasslands into previously arid areas. Human adaptation to the changed environmental circumstances is marked by the Mesolithic. Essentially the Mesolithic is a stage transitional between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic, falling between hunting gathering and food producing societies. Thus, the Mesolithic, in comparison to the Palaeolithic, probably witnessed the experimenting with a larger range of subsistence strategies. On one end of the continuum would have been reliance on hunting gathering and fishing, involving a mobile existence and on the other end, a relatively more settled pattern around a home base.

What we know of a Mesolithic stage in India is not so much one that is clearly transitional between Palaeolithic and Neolithic, but one that is chronologically more diffused, sites in some cases contemporary to Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures. Very few sites have been dated; for instance, Chopani Mando in the Belan Valley (c. 6000 BC) and Bagor in Rajasthan (c. 5000-2800 BC). On the other hand, we have indications of

an advanced Mesolithic, where sites may have been permanent or semi-permanent, consisting of groups of small huts, with earthen floors, hearths and walls of wattle and daub (reeds plastered with mud). Tools include grinding stones, hammer stones, querns and microliths. Animal bones were of both wild and domesticated species. That would explain the finds of microliths, and heavy stone implements as also the existence of hearths and huts. Querns and grinding stones may have been used for processing edible wild plants that could have been gathered or even cultivated.

From the Near East (the region comprising present day Syria, Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Turkey to Iraq-Iran, referred to as the 'Fertile Crescent'), the evidence for the transition to a Neolithic way of life is clearer. Between 10,000 and 8,000 years BP, human societies tended to cluster around water bodies on a reasonably permanent basis. There is a shift from the hunting of big game to small animals preferring grassy areas (deer, sheep, goat) and to aquatic resources, as well as to a more limited range of edible plants (in this case wheat and barley). It is these plants and animals (wheat-barley, sheep-goat) that would shortly be domesticated.

By domestication we mean the process by which humans create a new form of plant or animal. Domestication is likely to have taken place in those areas where wild forms, of plants and animals, were already present. The selection of certain plants and animals, those with preferred attributes, would have necessitated a long process of domestication. Those attributes would be: in the case of plants those already relied upon by hunting-gathering societies; "generalist" species that could grow in disturbed conditions; those that are adapted to growing together rather than in dispersed forms; also those that would be able to tolerate moisture and temperature conditions of storage.

Certain features would have been looked for – their seed retention capacity and the structure of the plant itself. Of plants that grow in the wild, only those that escape human gathering have the chance of getting dispersed on the ground and sprouting. When humans began to store seed stock for the next growing season, it was these seeds that formed the genetic stock of subsequent harvests. And early farmers would have preferred plants that kept (retained) their seeds till they were harvested,

and also those that had their seeds bunched together rather than dispersed all along the stalk of the plant. Obviously in the latter case, much more effort in harvesting would have been required and many seeds would get missed altogether. Thus, the process of domestication of plants was precisely the gradual process of selecting for actual advantages, a process that continues even today. Thus, hardier plants would have been noticed and their seeds preferred over more delicate varieties, those that grew quickly, those that had higher yields, and those that appeared disease-resistant.

Similarly, the domestication of animals was also a long process beginning with following herds of animals, to gradually attracting them to human company, to the preliminary corralling or penning of animals and their protection from other wild animals. Again, the process would work better with certain more docile, friendly animals.

Specialised feeding habits prevent easy domestication of animals – hence goats and pigs are ideal species. Social species are preferable and those that are predisposed to follow a dominant animal are more likely to accept a human substitute. This submissive behaviour is an important requirement for animal domestication. No wonder then, that goat and sheep were the first species to be domesticated in the Near East: both are relatively placid and slow-moving foragers; neither is territorial; and both form highly social groups with a single dominant leader. Also, such species maintain small home ranges and are thus amenable to human control. The ultimate end of domestication would be where a plant or animal would be unable to survive by itself and needs human initiative even for its propagation.

It is this step taken towards domestication that had far-reaching implications, which V. Gordon Childe described as the 'Neolithic Revolution'. In the Near East, the transition took over c. 2000 years, hence indicating that the change was not sudden but was more in terms of its impact. The process of domestication ushered in a change in ecological relations, with human societies now being much more in control of their food supply. Now plants and animals could be taken from their original habitat and nurtured elsewhere, thus expanding the possible areas of habitation. With the reliance on a limited range of annual crops, there is now a greater need to store grains for the year as well as for seed.

The growing of cereal crops meant their protection and careful tending over a long growing season. This would have required some amount of sedentarisation. At the same time, Neolithic strategies would have also involved the herding of animals (sheep, goat, cattle). Herding involves varying scales of mobility in some cases where for part of the year, animals may have to be pastured at some distance from the home base. It is likely that combinations of cultivation and herding may have been practised, rather than a dependence on either one alone. Moreover, hunting and fishing as also gathering would have had their place in subsistence strategies.

Archaeologically, settled societies do indicate some growth of population. One of the reasons could be sedentarisation where there would be no need to limit the size of the family. In fact, children may be quite useful in protecting growing plants and the herding of animals in and near the settlement. We now clearly see nucleation of population in the form of the 'village'. A Neolithic village would be comprised of a cluster of houses with hearths and storage facilities, particularly for grains. In the context of animal food, storage 'on the hoof' was resorted to, that is, protecting animals and butchering them as and when required. Crafts form a part of the Neolithic way of life. Pottery would now be required for storage purposes as also for the cooking of the hard cereal grains. Weaving of flax and cotton were probably practised.

Other than villages, there could also have been settlements occupied on a relatively temporary basis - such as seasonal settlements, pastoral camps, camps for processing raw materials and so forth. The Neolithic villages would not have been isolated entities. There would have been contact across villages and between mobile and sedentary groups for varying reasons (social ties, buffering mechanisms and barter, perhaps even ritual links).

2.5 EARLY FOOD PRODUCING SOCIETIES—NEOLITHIC CULTURE

Let us try and see what these Neolithic settlements were like. An important site for the Neolithic is Mehrgarh in Baluchistan in Pakistan.

The location of this site in the fertile Kacchi lain, known as the 'bread basket' of Baluchistan, is particularly significant. The site is located on the bank of the Bolan River and lies at the foot of the Bolan Pass, perhaps an important route linking the northern and western valleys with the Indus Plains.

With a very long history of occupation, Mehrgarh is recorded by archaeologists as having eight cultural levels, of which the first two, Period I and II were Neolithic. Period I is a ceramic (without pottery) while pottery appears in Period II at the site. The earliest settlement may go back to c. 7000 BC. From the beginning of occupation, mud bricks were used for constructing the groups of 2-4 small rectangular rooms that may have been houses. These were associated with fireplaces. There is evidence for the crafts of bone and stone tool making. A new feature seen here is the setting of multiple blades in bitumen on a bone or wood handle, to be used as sickles for the cutting of plants.

Burials in Period I indicate early beliefs regarding the disposal of the dead. Items deposited with the dead were ornaments, made of materials of which some came from distant areas, such as marine shell. Other materials deposited in graves were bitumen-lined baskets and food, including whole young goats.

In Period II, structures with numerous compartments were constructed. Some of these were of two rows of cells separated by a central corridor or passage. These kinds of structures may have been used as storehouses or granaries. Mehrgarh is a valuable site for the Neolithic because of the evidence for domestication. Plant remains are found in the form of impressions, particularly in brick, and as burnt specimens. Largely these were of wheat and barley. Over half the animals represented in the aceramic Neolithic were wild, with the largest number being gazelle, along with other deer species, nilgai, onager, wild pig and so forth. Of domesticated species, goats are the largest in number followed by sheep and cattle. By the end of Period I, gazelle appear to have almost disappeared with other wild species found in small amounts, while sheep-goat is over half of the domesticated species.

The evidence of domesticated species may represent the importance of herding in the Neolithic economy. As mentioned earlier, there may have been pastoral campsites at varying distances from the home base.

However, the archaeological detection of such campsites will not be as easy as that of a sedentary village, for the simple reason that herders on the move will carry little with them. Also, since occupations are for short durations, there will be little build-up of occupation deposits. Moreover, intensive explorations, necessary to detect such sites, have not been possible for various reasons.

Another geographical area where Neolithic sites have been found is Kashmir, where an important site, Burzahom was excavated. At Burzahom, early Neolithic (dated around 3000 BC) dwellings were in the form of pits of varying depths. Holes around the pits may have been used for erecting poles and some sort of roofing made of birches, of which burnt pieces have been found. Cooking may have been done both inside and outside the pits as seen by the evidence for hearths. The suggestion is that the pits were mainly used as dwellings in the cold weather. Apart from Neolithic ground stone axes, bone tools were also used. Crude handmade pottery was also found.

In the later Neolithic (which continued until 1700 BC) at Burzahom, the pit dwellings were given up and structures of mud or mud bricks were made. Handmade pottery and Neolithic tools continued. Apart from this, a few objects may indicate contact with outsiders. A few copper arrowheads, a wheel-made red ware pot with 950 beads of stones like agate and carnelian, and certain painted pottery may suggest contact with mature Harappan settlements in the Greater Indus Valley to the south. Other interesting details from the later Neolithic are animal burials (of wild dogs) found along with those of humans. The use of red ochre in the burials and in other parts of the settlement has also been noted.

A cluster of Neolithic villages (dated between 4000 and 2500 BC) showing links with the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic have been reported in the Vindhya region, particularly the Ganges Plains and the Belan and Son Valleys. Hand-made pottery of various types is found as well as the ground stone axes typical of the Neolithic. The small squarish flat ground stone axes and cord-impressed pottery are hints that this region was the western extension of an Eastern Neolithic culture of Eastern Central India, Assam and South East Asia. The significance of this area may lie in its being the locus of an early domestication of rice in

the subcontinent. The penning of cattle appears to be a new feature in these sites.

A dependence on cattle-keeping may also have been a feature of the South Indian Neolithic. Sites in this region are the distinctive ash mounds (literally mounds of ash suggesting large-scale ancient burning of heaps of cow-dung), as well as ash mounds associated with habitations or habitations alone. The ash mounds or stockaded cattle pens were the earliest Neolithic sites in the south, dating between c. 2900 and 2400 BC. Examples of such sites were Utnur, Kupgal, Kodekal and Pallavoy, all in modern Karnataka. These stockades were in two consecutive rings of palm trees, the inner one for possibly enclosing animals and the outer for the herders. Those ash mounds occurring alone (without permanent habitation sites) may have been pastoral campsites. Their location in the midst of forests may add to such an interpretation. The habitation sites generally date from 2000 BC.

Just like at Mehrgarh, subsistence strategies would have involved animal herding as well as grain (probably ragi) collection or cultivation. By c. 2000 BC, ragi is archaeologically detected and this may have been the main cereal consumed, as this region is well suited environmentally to the cultivation of millet.

In the South Indian Neolithic, materially, one finds the same evidence as in other parts of the subcontinent – stone artefacts like querns, hammer stones and sling balls, as well as blades of fine-grained stones. Pottery is found throughout the Neolithic period. One of the reasons for the location of sites in this region may be the proximity to the gold resources of Karnataka and the possibility that some small-scale early gold mining may go back to this period. The contemporaneity of the South Indian Neolithic with the Early and Mature Harappan cultures may be a reason for the extraction of gold.

2.6 EARLY FOOD PRODUCING SOCIETIES--FARMING AND HERDING

A Neolithic society is a tribal society. By tribe is meant a particular stage in social organisation as well as a particular type of society. It is not

necessary that band societies (hunting-gathering) would evolve into tribal societies. A tribal society, in contrast to bands, comprise larger numbers (100 onwards) of people held together by kinship relations, lineages, common ancestors and joint ownership of and equal access to resources, by descent groups. A tribe is composed of a number of clans, which in turn comprises of different lineages/descent groups. The smallest social unit is the extended family, not the nuclear family. It enables the pooling of labour required to take care of diversified activities typical of Neolithic societies and to offset risks.

Socially, the tribal level of society is characterised by the importance given to kinship relations. Essentially egalitarian, there is little social stratification. Kinship relations not only govern most aspects of society, but also function as integrative mechanisms. Exchanges, for example, between close kin would act as safety nets against situations of stress and scarcity of food. Marriages between descent groups, bringing about alliances, act as forces of cohesion. At the tribal level, different forms (matrilateral, patrilateral, bilateral) of cross-cousin marriage (with frequent reversals of wife-givers and wife-takers) prevent the hierarchy of lineages.

Another integrative force at the tribal level would have been pan-tribal associations, some of which cut across kinship ties. These would have included individuals bound together by common features, such as age and proficiency in ritual or warfare or healing. The fourth integrative force is that of inter-tribal warfare, where one tribe perforce unites against another. Inter-tribal warfare is chronic in tribal societies, and is never conclusive. Warfare in the form of raids or ambushes, aims at the capture of booty and the prevention of encroachment into favoured areas. These integrative forces were necessary in the absence of political institutions binding the tribe together. Tribal leadership depends on personal charisma or qualities of individuals and is not permanent. There is no real power attached to this office; the role of a Big Man is as an advisor. Kinship relations also prevent the misuse of the position of a big Man. Ancestor worship as forming part of religious beliefs assumes importance in the tribal level of society. Such beliefs involve the worship of immediate (at the family level) and more remote (at the level of the clan) ancestors. Ancestors are considered responsible for the well being

of the members of society. Misfortunes require the placating of ancestors at family and clan levels by sacrifices and ritual exchanges.

Certain individuals within the tribe have skills perhaps not available to all--to communicate with the supernatural world, through a state of trance, to cure, to divine. Such skills may or may not be hereditary. These individuals, described in anthropology as shamans, occupy an important position in society.

2.7 CHALCOLITIC SOCIETIES

Following the Harappan period, we find the Greater Indus Valley occupied by several regions chalcolithic cultures, such as the Cemetery H and Jhukar cultures. In outlying areas, to the East and South (the Punjab and Kathiawad), we find material elements reappearing that had been there prior to the Harappan and continued contemporaneously with it. These cultures are largely distinguished on the basis of ceramics while other artefacts indicate the use of local raw materials and a limited range of types. The diversity of crafts visible in the Harappan is no longer present. Materially, there are a few new elements appearing: seals or amulets as Jhukar (differing from the Harappan in shape, material and possibly function), paintings on Cemetery H pottery, terracotta headrests at Jhukar, and so forth.

These cultures comprise small rural settlements with houses of mud. Outside the Indus Valley and Gujarat, there are other chalcolithic cultures occurring in various parts of the subcontinent. These are partly contemporary with the Harappan culture at the earliest and continue into later periods. These include the Banas/Ahar culture in eastern Rajasthan, an area known for copper deposits (with a major site, Ahar, giving evidence for copper smelting). Further to the east, in Malwa, we come across other chalcolithic cultures termed as the Malwa Culture, followed by the Jorwe Culture. However, Jorwe culture predominantly occurs in the northern part of the Deccan Plateau. Again, pottery is a feature differentiating cultures form each other. Most of these chalcolithic cultures appear to have had tribal social structures with the capacity to develop into chiefdoms. One clear case of the latter can be given of

Inamgaon, a Jorwe Culture site that may have developed into the seat of a chiefship.

A chiefdom level of organization refers to tribes with one or more status groups: chiefs (sometimes with a graded hierarchy) and commoners. Often, chiefly positions are hereditary. To quote M.D. Sahlins, "power resides in the (chiefly) office, in an organized acquiescence to chiefly privileges and organized means of upholding them. Included is a specific control over the goods and services of the underlying population. The people owe in advance their labour and their products. And with these funds of power, the chief indulges in grandiose gestures of generosity ranging from personal aid to massive support of collective ceremonial or economic enterprise". What could have been ways to archaeologically detect the presence of chiefships? These could be through the analysis of mortuary remains, settlement size hierarchies, structural remains and some organization of production. In the context of mortuary remains, one would look for the size of funerary monuments, the presence of wealth objects within graves as well as children's burial of valuables, themselves rare in chalcolithic contexts, would mean their being taken out of circulation. Also, infants being buried with such objects would indicate an ascriptive, rather than achieved status.

Settlement size hierarchies would rest on the understanding that certain settlements at the top of the hierarchy would be those where differently graded chiefs would reside. (The hierarchy of chiefs essentially depends on proximity to the common ancestor, with the senior-most descendent at the top of the hierarchy). At the bottom of the hierarchy may be numerous small settlements clustering around the seats of chiefships. The latter would be relatively larger in size because they would attract followers and loyal kinsmen. Structural remains within seats of chiefships may indicate differing social statuses. For example, a chief's house would tend to be larger in size than the others due to the need to entertain visitors. There would also be storage facilities attached to the house of chiefs, attesting to the significant redistributive role of chiefs. The chief is seen as a ritual leader, and is therefore offered tribute by their kinsmen and followers, which is termed as "first fruits". Much of this tribute goes back to the community through gift-giving or as aid in times of stress or for community works and inherently shows the non-

appropriative role of chiefs. Essentially, this aspect of chiefships is necessary because of close kin relations.

Organization of production, clearly witnessed through ethnographic accounts, in the case of crafts is through sponsorship of certain skilled individuals for the manufacture of prestige goods. These individuals may be supported by part of the tribute collected by the chief. These skilled individuals may be supported by part of the tribute collected by the chief. These skilled individuals are not specialists in that they only work at crafts, but more in the context of skill. Prestige goods would often be displayed on ceremonial occasions to show the prestige of the chiefs and at times may also be given as gifts to other elites. There is another category of objects that function as primitive valuables. The main difference between prestige goods and primitive valuables would be that the latter can be used in more generalized exchanges, such as payment for death compensation, or war or alliances, or payment for the labour of craftsmen, or marriage payments and could be used to obtain a variety of subsistence goods. In contrast, prestige goods cannot be exchanged for subsistence goods but may move in their own separate sphere of exchange.

We will now take up the particular case of Inamgaon. M.K. Dhavalikar considered the site as representative of a chiefship centre on the basis of the analysis of burials and structural remains. Situated on the Ghod river in the Bhima Valley of Maharashtra, this site of about 5 ha was occupied from 1600-1700 BC. Its earliest occupation was the Malwa phase (1600-1400 BC) followed by the Early Jorwe 91400-1000 BC) and finally the Late Jorwe phase (1000-700 BC).

As far as structural remains are concerned, a large multi-roomed (5 rooms) house contrasted with the other single-roomed houses in the Early Jorwe period. This large structure was in the central part of the settlement and next to it was identified a granary with pit silos and round mud platforms. Two large firepits were found in the granary. In the courtyard of this house was also found a fourlegged clay jar, enclosing a skeleton of an adult male sitting cross-legged with feet intact. This latter feature has been contrasted with other burials at Inamgaon, where bodies were buried without feet. A four-legged jar found in a slightly earlier level is considered to represent a symbolic burial as it contains no human

skeleton. There was only an animal bone and the jar was covered with a knobbed lid. Close to this large structure has been found another burial comprising of two clay jars fitting into one another. Enclosed within the jars was the skeleton of a two-year old girl child with a necklace of alternating jasper and copper beads. The latter may provide an instance of ascribed or inherited status. A possible irrigation channel (118 m long, 3.50m deep and 4 m wide) with an embankment of stone rubble (2-4 m wide, 240 m long) was apparently constructed in the Early Jorwe period.

This evidence may indicate a community project involving some amount of labour mobilisation by the chief. In the Late Jorwe phase, mostly round huts were uncovered while a four-roomed rectangular structure was found in the eastern margin of the settlement. This structure enclosed a double burial (one man, one woman), with intact feet, under the floor of one of the rooms. Dhavalikar proposed that the chiefship passed into a different family in this late phase due to the shift in location.

At a more general level, it may be pointed out that chiefships are inherently unstable polities. Rather than expanding and developing into a more elaborate structure, there is a greater tendency for chiefships to fission. The role of kinship as an enabling and a limiting factor to the power of chiefs essentially differentiates that social formation from a state. Thus, for a state society to develop, a new set of social institutions (overriding kin relations) needs to be set in place.

Check Your Progress

1) Name the tools found in all the stages of Palaeolithic.

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2) Rock Art found at Bhimbetka has its own significance. Elaborate.

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3) Describe the term ‘domestication’ in the context of Mesolithic Age.

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4) Highlight the importance of Mehargarh.

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5) Write a short note on Burzhom.

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6) How Chalcolithic Cultures differ from Bronze Age?

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2.8 LET US SUM UP

The Pre-historic societies of hunter-gatherers are studied on the basis of archaeological remains with the help of anthropological theories. The Palaeolithic and Mesolithic ages represent the hunting-gathering stage of social evolution. The Palaeolithic Culture has three phases in terms of the nature of stone tools and changes in climate. The handaxes, cleavers, choppers and chopping tools are predominantly Early Palaeolithic artefacts. The Middle Palaeolithic tools are mainly flakes. The Upper Palaeolithic Culture is characterized by burins and scrapers. The Mesolithic Age started around 8000 B.C. and the age is associated with changes in climatic conditions. There was further technological development reflected in the production of microliths and small stone tools. The Mesolithic tools are mainly the blade, core, point, triangle and lunate.

Faunal remains give us considerable idea about the subsistence pattern of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic people. During the Palaeolithic age people were primarily in the hunting and gathering stage. People seem to have hunted large and middle size mammals such as elephant, ox, nilgai, deer, wild bear and a variety of birds. At the same time they also exploited the plant foods like fruits, seeds etc. The hunting-gathering pattern continued during the Mesolithic age. However, some animals like wild goat, fox etc. appeared during this time. From the Palaeolithic age to Mesolithic Age, there seems to have been a shift from big animal hunting to small animal hunting and fishing. The pre historic paintings give us the glimpse of social, economic and political life of the people.

While the Chalcolithic cultures are distinguished by small rural settlements with houses of mud and have been found side by side the Bronze age.

2.9 KEYWORDS

Stratigraphy: The concept of stratigraphy rests on a basic principle of the deposition of consequent layers, where the uppermost layers would be the most recent while the lowermost would be the oldest. Continuity of human occupation at a place would imply that over time building, destruction/decay, levelling, rebuilding of structures and the discard and/or loss of objects would eventually result in a mound like formation.

Hunting-gathering Economy: Refers to that stage of economy which was dependent on hunting and gathering of foods.

Hunters-gatherers: Refers to that stage of human development when human beings procured their foods through hunting and collecting from nature.

Proto-Neolithic: The stage before the beginning of the Neolithic period.

Sedentary life: Refers to that stage of human development when human beings started settled life.

Terracing: Method of cultivating crops by which hilly lands are divided into steps.

Assemblage: A group of objects of different types found in close association with each other. Where, the assemblage is frequently

repeated, and covers reasonably full range of human activity it is described as a Culture.

Epigraphy : It is the study of inscriptions.

Flora : The plant life of an area.

Fauna : It stands for animal life.

Geology : The subject that deals with the composition, structure, and history of the earth.

Mammal : The animal that feed their young with milk from the breast.

Numismatics : It is the study of coins.

Pleistocene : The geological period corresponding with the last of Great Ice Age. The onset of the Pleistocene is marked by an increasingly cold climate.

Pollen Analysis: This technique is used in establishing relative chronology. It is the analysis of the pollens of flowers.

Primate: Age of the highest order of mammals (including human beings, apes, monkeys and lemur)

Radiocarbon: One of the best known chronometric dating techniques which can be used for dating of most organic material up to 70,000 years old. Plants and other living organs consume carbon from the atmosphere during this life time. This carbon also includes carbon 14 which is a radioactive element. After the death of plants and the living organs the accumulated carbon-14 starts decaying and by measuring its present concentration we can determine the age of the organisms which became extinct a long time ago.

Transverse: Cross-wise, in a direction at right angles to the length of the body.

Terrace: A platform of land created by the river. It is formed beside the river.

2.10 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1) Rice is one of the cereals for which wild species still exist in the subcontinent. Find out where wild varieties of rice are found. Do these areas correlate with the evidence for rice domestication in the

subcontinent? How does our knowledge of the Neolithic Revolution help us to understand this picture?

2) Is there a Stone Age site in your vicinity? Or visit the nearest Museum to look at the finds for the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic or Neolithic. If you cannot do either, then study the report for Bagor. What kind of understanding of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic or Neolithic societies can be obtained from such finds?

2.11 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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2.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress

1) The Lower Palaeolithic is generally identified by the presence of two types of tools: the chopper-chopping tools and the handaxes. The former, particularly in a non- Indian context, are considered to be earlier to the handaxe tradition. Middle Palaeolithic tools are identified by flake industries and the preferred tools were scrapers. A blade and burin tradition marks the Upper Palaeolithic.

2) At Bhimbetka, a famous cave shelter complex in Madhya Pradesh, paintings in a shelter were adjudged to be Upper Palaeolithic in date as they were depicted in green pigment. The correlation was made on the basis of pieces of green pigment found in occupation layers within the shelter that contained Upper Palaeolithic tools. On that basis, V.S.

Wakankar also considered the use of green pigment as indicative of the earliest prehistoric paintings. However, this last point has been disputed as early paintings have also been found in red colour.

3) See section 2.4.

4) Mehrgarh is recorded by archaeologists as having eight cultural levels, of which the first two, Period I and II were Neolithic. Period I is a ceramic (without pottery) while pottery appears in Period II at the site. The earliest settlement may go back to c. 7000 BC. From the beginning of occupation, mud bricks were used for constructing the groups of 2-4 small rectangular rooms that may have been houses. These were associated with fireplaces. There is evidence for the crafts of bone and stone tool making. A new feature seen here is the setting of multiple blades in bitumen on a bone or wood handle, to be used as sickles for the cutting of plants.

5) At Burzahom (Kashmir), early Neolithic (dated around 3000 BC) dwellings were in the form of pits of varying depths. Holes around the pits may have been used for erecting poles and some sort of roofing made of birches, of which burnt pieces have been found. Cooking may have been done both inside and outside the pits as seen by the evidence for hearths. The suggestion is that the pits were mainly used as dwellings in the cold weather.

6)Bronze age is marked by a particular social form, that takes shape within an urban context and has features of a state society, while the term chalcolithic would refer to food producing societies at the tribal level of social organization. While stone was used far more than metal for the major cutting tools in the chalcolithic, the Bronze Age is noted for a far more regular use of copper/bronze tools. Given that there are limitations to the forms possible in stone, the chalcolithic indicates a more basic toolkit (where chalcolithic metal objects largely imitated stone tool types), unlike the Bronze Age where a greater diversity in shapes and sizes of metal tools come into use.

UNIT-3 HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION: DISTRIBUTION, EXTENT, AGRICULTURE, ECONOMY, TRADE, CRAFTS PRODUCTION TO URBANISATION

STRUCTURE

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we will study the distribution, extent, agriculture, economy, trade, arts and crafts of the Harappan civilization and analyze how they contribute to the growth of this culture and facilitate the rise of first urbanization in India.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The transition from foraging to farming is one of the turning points in human history. The seasonally mobile life of hunter-gatherers, who obtained their food from wild plants and animals, was replaced by the settled life of farmers, who cultivated crops and raised domesticated livestock. This shift from nomadic to sedentary life led to the growth of population and village settlement, the development of crafts such as pottery and metallurgy, and eventually to centralised city states and urbanization.

Our knowledge about the beginning of food production is derived from excavation reports. At the time of the beginning of food production our ancestors did not know reading and writing. So, we have to draw conclusions on the basis of archaeological remains found in ancient sites. The earliest evidence for the beginning of food production comes from the western 'Fertile Crescent' (largely covering modern Iraq), principally from the 'core area' of the southern Levant and the middle Euphrates Valley. Here, remains of domesticated cereals (barley, einkorn wheat and emmer wheat), pulses (lentil, pea and chickpea) and flax have been recovered. These sites have been radiocarbon-dated between approximately 10,000 and 8500 BC. By this period domesticated goats and sheep also appear.

In this Unit, we will see what people did in the past in an urban milieu. We are specificallyinterested in discerning what it is that economically distinguishes an urban centre from anon-urban one. Multiplicity of occupations seems to be the key factor demarcatingurban from non-urban situations. This emanates primarily from a dense population thatcannot all be accommodated within agriculture. The need for new products and servicesnecessitated specialisation of production which became a distinct part of the urbanscene.

We will, however, start with the base, or the subsistence sphere, which comprisesagriculture and allied occupations. This is, contrary to general perception, an integralpart of ancient urban centres where agriculturists were a significant proportion of thepopulation. For Bronze Age urban centres, especially the Harappan where the data isprimarily archaeological, we may find the evidence for agriculture not only from botanicalremains such as burnt seeds but also from certain artefacts.

3.2 FEATURESOF FOOD PRODUCTION

When archaeologists talk about the beginning of food production they refer to four associated features. Cooking and storing wheat and barley presents a new kind of problem. While meat can be roasted directly on fire, cereals will be lost in ash if they are not cooked in a utensil. Thus utensils which could withstand the high temperature of oven were required for cooking wheat and barley. Metal was unknown. Earthen potsbaked in fire were the earliest utensils for cooking food. Wheat and barley were ground for making bread. Querns and pestles were used for grinding wheat and barley. Regular grinding created a smooth polished surface on the stone tools. Thus, the beginning of food production is associated with the use of polished stone tools. The beginning of food production coincided with the domestication of goats and sheep too. Although cultivation began earlier, in the Indian subcontinent most of the early agricultural communities used small quantities of copper tools. That is why they are referred to as chalcolithic communities meaning thereby that they used stone tools along with a few copper tools.

3.3 NEED FOR CULTIVATION?

One of the great questions of prehistory is why, about 12,000 years ago, some peopleadopted an agricultural way of life. The most convincing explanation is that theenvironmental changes that followed the last ice age between *c* 9000 and *c* 8000 BC,caused hunter-gatherers in Iraq, Palestine and Turkey, to shift to foods derived fromgrasses and legumes (beans) that were the progenitors of the cereal and pulse crops.Regular harvesting and sowing of these plants led to selection of the domesticated forms,which proved more productive. The beginning of food production coincided with an equally revolutionary change–livestock raising. The domestication of animals represented a radically new way of life. In the hunting gathering society animals werekilled and consumed immediately. Now animals were reared to act as walking lardersthat could be used in times of scarcity. Food production and animal domestication representeda changed outlook for food quest. It represented a planning not for a day but for a season –for the long term. When food production and animal domestication combined as a modeof life it amounted to a revolution. This new agricultural economy expanded at the expenseof the old foraging way of life.

3.4 EARLIEST FARMING CONGREGATIONS IN THE SUBCONTINENT

The causes of the origin of agriculture in India are not clear to us. Mehrgarh near theBolan Pass in Baluchistan is the earliest agricultural settlement in the Indian sub continent. Beginning around 7000 BC as a camping site, this settlement saw a gradual shift fromdependence on wild game to domesticated food crops and animals. However, we haveno evidence for gradual, local transitions to agriculture. Instead, the domesticated cerealsand pulses appear suddenly. That is why scholars believe that the knowledge of agriculturespread to India from neighbouring Iran where it had been imported from Iraq. Plantsand animals domesticated by the villagers in Mehrgarh are less at home in monsoonIndia with its summer rainfall than in the uplands of western Asia and Afghanistan with itswet winters. The knowledge of agriculture

could spread to other areas through the actualmigration of people, through trade and inter community marriages. From the north westernIndia the idea of cultivation gradually spread to other parts of the subcontinent. Manycommunities took up agriculture and many did not. It depended on the needs andperceptions of the group. If some areas had abundant wild resources, foragers wouldnot take up agriculture even if they knew about it.

The hunting gathering communities experimented with various kinds of locally availableedible grasses. Some of these grasses became the staple diet of the succeeding agriculturalcommunities. In the Indus region the primary cereal was wheat/ barley. They also domesticated sheep, goat, cattle and buffalo. The Ganga valley subsistence pattern was centred on the cultivation of rice. Their domestic animals were the same. The farmers supplemented their food by fish, game, wild plants and honey. The modern day food habits of the people in the Ganga and the Indus plains reflect the decisions made by our ancestors in the prehistoric past.

The cities of Harappa emerged in the Indus region. Later on the Ganga valley witnessedthe emergence of cities in the sixth century BC. We shall follow the developments in theIndus region because it is connected with the first urbanization in the Indian past.

3.4.1 Mehrgarh: First Evidence of Agriculture

The earliest evidence for agriculture in the Indian subcontinent comes not from the fertileriver valleys of Indus or the Ganga. Rather it comes from the dry, windswept hilly regionsof Baluchistan. The site of Mehrgarh is located in the Kacchi plains on the bank of TheBolan River. The river water forms an inland delta in this area. The Bolan valley has beenone of the important routes linking the Indus plains with the mountainous terrain ofBaluchistan. Pastoral nomads, traders and invaders have used this route from prehistoric times. Even now, pastoral nomadic communities come down from the hills and use thepastures of this area in the winter season. No wonder the settlement of Mehrgarh beganits history as a camping site around 7000 BC. Probably the community of pastoralistshad learnt about farming from other mobile communities in the Afghanistan – Baluchistanarea.

The food of the people at Mehrgarh consisted primarily of wild game supplementedby small quantities of domesticated cereals and animals. Over a period of a thousandyears the inhabitants shifted from a reliance on wild animals to barley, wheat, sheep,goats and cattle.The earliest inhabitants did not use pottery or copper tools. An irregular scatter of mud brick houses separated by refuse dumps made up the first village. However, even the earliest inhabitants were using azure blue lapis lazuli, blue-green turquoise and white marine shells. These objects had been obtained from distant places. Marine shells could be obtained from the Makran coast only. Lapis lazuli is found either in the steep mountainous region of Badakshan or the dry desert of Chagai. Similarly, Turquoise came from Kyzyl Kum beyond the river Oxus. It shows that even the earliest agriculturists were connected with networks of exchange extending from the Arabian Sea to Central Asia.

By about 5500 BC the settlement was transformed. People built mud brick houses having cubicles that could have been used for the storage of grains. They built retaining walls on terraces. They began to set roofs on rectangular section rafters. The first coarse pottery also appeared in this period. The already existing list of precious stones was augmented by the white and black steatite, red-orange carnelian and banded agate.

3.4.2 Spread of the Agricultural Communities

By the fifth millennium BC many agricultural villages, large and small, had been foundedin Baluchistan. Villages like Kile Gul Mohammed and Kalat in the Quetta valley andMundigak near Kandahar in Afghanistan came into existence. Settlements like SaraiKhola near Taxila and Sheri Khan Tarakai south of Bannu also date to this period. Bythe fourth millennium BC the settlement of Balakot came into existence. Located on theMakran coast (near Karachi), this settlement might have been the source of sea shellsfound in contemporary agricultural settlements.

Around 4000 BC Mehrgarh had grown into a settlement of about 50 hectares. Apartfrom the continuance of the earlier tradition of building houses and granaries this periodsaw some developments. People in Mehrgarh began using copper on a significant scale.To this period also date the finds of a large number of female terracotta figurines. Thereare

evidences for mass production of pottery with the introduction of the potter's wheel.The painted decoration on this pottery has been regarded as the hallmark of the potteryof the agricultural communities of Baluchistan. It seems that agricultural communitieswere colonizing new areas.

3.4.3 Agricultural Expansion to the Indus Plains

It was in the second half of the fourth millennium BC that the agricultural system developedin the piedmont zone was successfully transplanted into the plains of the Indus riversystem. The site of Amri shows typical borrowings from Baluchistan. About forty siteshave been reported on the plains of the now dry bed of the Hakra River.

The colonization of the Indus plains by the agriculturists was a major step in thedevelopment of agricultural communities. The flood plains would have been more denselyforested with swamps and wild animals posing challenges to human communities. Oncethese areas were colonized the food yields would dramatically improve. Also waterwayswere the most efficient modes of transport in the ancient world. So settlements along theriver bank became efficient nodes of communication radiating and receiving influenceson a more organized scale than had been possible earlier. Thus the shift to river valleyswas an important stage in the expansion of agriculture.

3.4.4 Effects of Agriculture

The origin of agriculture is related to the birth of village. Hunter-gatherers moved their homesaccording to the seasonal migration of animals and availability of fruits and roots. Unlikehunting gathering, agriculture requires that the farmer stay in one place for a long period.He has to sow seeds, he has to water the plants and he has to protect the saplings frombirds and animals. Only after four to six months are the plants ready for harvesting. Thismeans that unlike hunting-gathering, agriculture encourages settling down in one place.That is why the large scale emergence of villages dates to the coming of agriculture.

Coming of agriculture is also related to the emergence of long term patterns ofcooperation. Hunting-gathering groups need cooperation for

organizing hunt. Once thehunt is over and game has been shared the group ceases to exist. The basic unit of socialorganization of most hunting and gathering groups is the band, a small- scale nomadicgroup of fifteen to fifty people related by kinship. Rather than living in uniformly sizedgroups throughout the year, band societies tend to spend part of the year dispersed intosmall foraging units and another part of the year aggregated into much larger units. Thispattern of dispersal and aggregation is related to the seasonal availability of food andgame in different areas. Kinship ties are loose and people of one group easily move toanother group. On the other hand agriculturists need cooperation from sowing toharvesting. Unlike a typical hunting expedition which might last a day or a week,agriculturists have to cooperate in the production process lasting at least four months.

While agriculturists are waiting for the crops to grow, they survive on the food producedby farmers in the previous season. So, there is a need for cooperation among foodproducing groups across the year. No wonder agricultural societies are characterized bylarge kinship networks which are the institutional frame for long term cooperation amongthe farmers.

Settled agricultural populations tend to expand both numerically and territorially.Population growth is higher among sedentary communities. Crops provided farmerswith more dependable supplies of grain based weaning foods such as gruel and porridge,as well as milk, once the goats and sheep began to be milked. The average intervalbetween births would have been reduced, leading to increase in population. Alsoagricultural activities like harvesting and sowing can be done by children too, whereashunting requires full grown adults. The possibility of early induction into the productionprocess creates desire for more children.

The coming of agriculture meant that crops could be sown in areas where they did notgrow naturally. Thus, there was an artificial extension of the production niche. Whilehunter-gatherers depended on nature to provide them food, agriculturists actively creatednew landscapes of cultivated crops. Thus, cultivators colonized many new areasuninhabited in the earlier period. They removed unwanted vegetation to plant foodproducing crops. This led to cutting down of forests. The domesticated plants requiredgreater tending and care compared to the wild varieties. They needed water more regularly.

So, the beginning of food production coincided with the development of irrigation.Agriculture also led to an increase in the carrying capacity of land. Various calculationssuggest that a hunter-gather would need roughly four square kilometres of land to feedhimself in a year's time. A very small chunk of land could support large number ofagriculturists.

3.5 EARLY HARAPPAN PHASE

The period beginning around 3200 BC saw some significant changes in the Indus region.The cumulative impact of the expansion of agriculture is visible in this period. Cultivatorsliving in the same village for hundreds of years developed a better understanding of land,soil and cropping pattern of the area. Areas having similar weather and soil would producesimilar crops. These villagers were in touch with each other through trade and intermarriage.

There are evidences for regular interaction among the village communities. Shared potterytraditions in large areas have also been reported. That is why some scholars call it theperiod of the emergence of regional traditions.The village communities in southern Baluchistan and the Quetta valley show the use ofsimilar kinds of painted pottery having naturalistic decorations showing humped bull andPipal leaf motifs. Mundigak in Afghanistan, Damb Sadaat in the Quetta valley and RanaGhundai shows the use of similar types of terracotta figurines. Settlements like Anjira,Togau, Nindowari and Balakot have been reported from central and southern Baluchistan.They had trade links with towns in the Persian Gulf. In the Baluchistan area the numberof settlements increased fourfold.

3.5.1 Indus Area

Dramatic changes were taking place in the settlements of the Indus plains. Over a periodof time the Indus area emerged as the focal point of future developments. We shallreview some of these developments.

Developments in the Piedmont Zone

In the piedmont region Mehrgarh continued to show impressive developments in theearly third millennium BC. The settlement of

Rahman Dheri near the Gomal pass showsevidence of planned oblong settlement and presence of many kinds of semi-preciousstones. In the Bannu area the settlement of Tarkai Qila too has yielded evidence of alarge variety of grains. The finds of wheat, barley, lentil, peas, sesamum, linseed togetherwith the bones of domesticated sheep, goat and cattle, indicate that the food productionbase of the Harappas had emerged by this period. In a settlement nearby called Lewanthe inhabitants seem to have specialized in the production of stone tools.

3.5.2 Lower Indus Area

In the lower Indus plain Amri emerged with a distinct tradition. People built houses ofstone and brick. They painted motifs like the humped Indian bull on their pots -a traditionwhich continued into the mature Harappan phase too. These people shared somecharacteristics with the roughly contemporary settlements like Dholavira and Surkotdain Gujarat. Opposite Mohenjodaro on the left bank of the Indus was located the settlementof Kot Diji. The most interesting find in this settlement is the wheel thrown pottery havingdecorations of plain bands of dark brownish paint. This kind of pottery has been reported from such far flung settlements as Kalibangan in north Rajasthan, Mehrgarh in Baluchistan, and along the entire stretch of the river Indus where pre-Harappan villages have been found.This sharing of the pottery tradition is related to greater communication among the agriculture communities.

3.5.3 Increase of Agriculture and Use of Metal

In the period 3300 -2600 BC the subsistence base of an agricultural society had takenshape. This base drives the economic life of people of this area even in the modemtimes. Wheat, barley, linseed, peas, lentil, sesamum, dates and grapes were beingcultivated. Sheep, goat, humped cattle and buffalo were the domesticated animals. It isin Kalibangan (Rajasthan) that we come across the dramatic evidence of a ploughedfield. The cross furrows suggest that two kinds of crops were grown in the field. Thisproof of intensive cultivation was the reason why the Ghaggar-Hakra basin was themost densely populated area in this period.

The Kalibangan evidence and contemporary Sothi-Siswal (in northern Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana) culture indicate the use of copper on an appreciablescale. Settlements like Mehrgarh and Rehman Dheri attest to a modest use of copper-bronze. It was used for making bangles, awls and chisels. Unlike the subsequent urbanphase the technique of their production was quite primitive. Metal objects were producedby cold hammering and open mould casting. Gold and silver were rarely used.

3.5.4 Planning in Sites

The most dramatic developments were visible in the sphere of planning of settlements.There are evidences for the building of fortification in settlements like Kalibangan, RahmanDheri, Kot Diji and Banawali. Fortification serves two purposes. Citadels are meant to exclude outsiders and the underprivileged. They indicate that communities inside thecitadel had something to protect. Thus citadels are clues to socio-political hierarchy. Ithelps the powerful to control activities inside the fortification. It also helps them keep aneye on the outsiders. If traders bring goods from places faraway they can collect theirshare for allowing them access to potential buyers inside the fortification. At Kalibanganthere is evidence for standardized norm of brick production and brick laying.

The finds of toy carts indicates that bullock carts were part of the existing technology oftransport. Seals were in use in sites like Mehrgarh and Rahman Dheri. Seals are used forsealing merchandise in interpersonal trade. However, many early people of West Asiaare known to have used seals for securing doors of houses. So, we are not very sureabout the use of these seals.

By the beginning of the third millennium BC the Indus region had made significant stridesin the field of agriculture (cultivation of many crops), transportation (boats and bullockcarts), metallurgy (use of metals on a modest scale), and town planning.

3.6 RISE OF CITIES

The coming of the city represents a major transformation in the history of humankind.While the agricultural revolution changed the relationship between humans and nature,the urban revolution transformed the relationship among humans. We shall tentativelyidentify some of the processes involved in this transformation. In the subsequent sectionswe shall describe the economic structures that emerged in the wake of this greattransformation.

3.6.1 Shifting and Increase in Population

The urban phase is known as the 'Mature Harappan' among the archaeologists. Thearchaeological evidence suggests that emergence of the city was accompanied byconsiderable population shift as well as population increase. This is clear from the studyof the settlement pattern in the Ghaggar-Hakra basin. Very few purely agriculturalsettlements of the pre-urban period survived into the urban phase. On the Hakra plainsout of thirty seven sites only three continued to be inhabited in the urban phase. Theemergence of city also coincided with an increase in the number of settlements. Apartfrom the three sites which survived from the early Harappan period, eighty new mature Harappan settlements came into existence in this period. If we were to put together theoccupied area of the early Barappan settlements in the Ghaggar-Hakra basin it will addup to 210 hectares. In the mature Harappan phase on the other hand the total occupiedarea was 450 hectares. This indicates a population increase.

3.6.2 Warlike Situations

The coming of city also saw an increase in the number of violent conflicts amongcommunities. In settlements located as far apart as Nausharo and Kot Diji we haveevidence of the burning down of settlements towards the end of the early Harappanperiod. Buildings of the new urban phase lie right on top of the layer of ash. Kalibanganalso shows evidence of burning. Not all the fires would have been caused by accident.Some ofthem are likely to have been the results of conflicts. This impression is buttressedby the fact that in settlements like Kalibangan the burning of the old settlement is followedby the building of a township where the mature Harappan pattern of town planning

andfortification is in evidence. Those who destroyed the town followed different principlesof planning.

3.6.3 Expansion in the Area of Sites

The size of some of the settlements of the Harappan civilization dwarfs the settlements ofthe pre-urban phase. While the largest settlements of the pre-urban phase would rangebetween twenty to fifty hectares, an urban settlement like Mohenjodaro covered an areaof 150 hectares. It is a fact that cultivators prefer to live near their fields. Ifthe population of a village grows, a correspondingly larger area would be required forcultivation. The fields of some families would be located at a greater distance necessitatingtime consuming journeying to and from the field. In such a situation cultivators bud offfrom their villages and set up a village close to the field. Therefore, if a settlement is large,its size needs to be explained by factors other than food production.

Check Your Progress 1

1)Highlight the importance of Mehrgarh.

_____

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_____

2) What factors accompanied the rise of cities during the Harappan civilization?

_____

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3.7 HARAPPAN CULTURE

When we refer to a settlement as a part of the Harappan civilization we are suggestingthat it shares certain features with larger settlements like Harappa and Mohenjodaro.These shared features range from a thick red pottery and large bricks having the sizeratio of 4:2:1, to a range of weights and measures. It also includes use of a script, seals,steatite disc

beads, long barrel shaped carnelian beads, bronze razors with two curvedblades and barbed fish hooks. There are also other common features.

3.7.1 Position of Sites

Location of the Harappan settlements gives us clues about the Harappan economy.Although most of the Harappan settlements are located in the fertile plains of the Indussystem, a large number of them are located in settlements skirting arid deserts (Sutkagendoron the Makran coast bordering Iran) and steppe terrain (Shortughai in Badakshan).These places were settled with the diverse needs of the Harappan elite in mind. Forexample Shortughai was settled with the intention of extracting lapis lazuli and panninggold from a river nearby. The settlement of Balakot on the Makran coast and Nageswarin Gujarat were centres for making bangles out of Shankh shells. These bangles havebeen found in most of the Harappan settlements and they were in demand in Mesopotamiatoo. Sutkagendor was meant to be a port for ships going to the Persian Gulf. Thelocation of Harappan settlements indicates that they were performing a variety of functions.

While most of the sites would be agricultural and pastoralist villages, there were otherkinds of settlements meant for extracting semi-precious stones, factory sites at Rohri inSind for making stone tools and coastal settlements for trading and extracting sea shells.There seems to have been regional and local specialization in crafts. This specializationrequired coordination by a power structure.

It has been shown by some scholars that the coming of the Harappan urbanism signifieda distinct shift in trade routes. Communications down the Bolan route to Kandaharceased. Pre Harappan settlements like Mehrgarh, Mundigak and Shahr-I-Sokhta werein contact with each other. In the urban phase the Harappans do not show any contactwith these settlements. The Harappan elite obtained its supply of precious objects likelapis lazuli by founding its own settlements in places like Shortughai.

3.7.2 Grading of Sites

Harappan settlements ranged in size from 150 hectares to less than a hectare. The majorityof sites were around six hectares or less. Each geographical region had its ownhierarchyof settlements. For example in the Cholistan area in the Ghaggar-Hakra basin the site ofGanweriwala is the same size as Harappa (150 hectares) while 8 site are 10 to 50 hectares, 20 sites are 5 to 10 hectares and 44 are between 1 to 5 hectares. Probably themidsized settlements acted as nodes in the local economy. They supplied metals andprecious stones needed in the villages. These middle level settlements in turn weredependent on the larger settlements for rare precious metals obtained from distant places.It is believed that Mohenjodaro had a population of 35000. Villages do not house suchlarge populations. If such a large number of people lived in one place it has to be explainedby additional functions like administration, religious activities, trade and crafts production.The elite of the city appropriated and exploited the resources of areas near and far.

These activities offset the disadvantages of congregating it a small space. In fact hierarchyin site size indicated domination and control of the smaller sites by the larger sites. This issubstantiated by the finds of rare luxury items like gold, silver, turquoise and lapis lazuli inlarger settlements like Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Also the evidence for the presenceof a large number of craftsmen in these settlements indicates that they had clustered in asmall area. These non-food producers depended on the agricultural produce of thevillagers of the surrounding areas. The presence of granaries in cities like Harappa,Mohenjodaro and Lothal indicate that grains were procured from villages and stored inthe city. Cities are units of settlement which dominate villages with their economic, politicalor religious power.

Finds at Harappan settlements indicate that it was a society controlled by small elite.This is proved by the presence of large exclusive buildings, expensive imported itemswhich were the preserve of a few and the well regulated planning of many of thesettlements. These divisions between rich and poor, rulers and (he ruled are possible instate societies only. This was a state which was actively involved in the economy. Theuniformity in brick size, pottery and bronze tools can be attributed to

the mobilization ofskilled craftsmen across the entire area of the Harappan civilization. Besides it was thepolitical unification achieved by the Harappan elite that made it possible for smallcommunities in Nageshwar to produce shell bangles for faraway centres likeMohenjodaro.

Similarly, stone weights manufactured at Chanhudaro were in use inMohenjodaro. Evidences at Lothal suggest that goods brought from distant areas werestored possibly for shipment. All this shows that these urban centres had been assimilatedin a larger trans-regional economic system. That state was actively involved in the economyis proved by the uniform system of weights, seals and writing. Precious objects availableat great distance needed rich and powerful elite to mobilize personnel to procure them.The Harappan state seems to have intervened in managing the distribution andprocurement of such objects from distant areas.

3.7.3 Farming and Pastoralism in the Harappan Culture

Villages in the Harappan civilization show the same diversity as the urban settlements.This is because they are located in divergent ecological zones. The technologies used inagricultural production seem to have been already in place in the early Harappan period.

As mentioned earlier, the use of plough would have increased agricultural production.They also made wells and practiced lift irrigation. In Shortughai has been reported thefind of a canal. Possibly such canals were built in other settlements too. Probably, thereal innovation of the Harappans was the use of a variety of food crops. They grewwheat, barley, grams, lentil, linseed and mustard as winter crop and Bajra, Ragi, Jowar,sesamum and cotton as summer crop. Among the domesticated animals oxen drewplough and carts while cows provided milk. While sheep provided wool and meat,goats were used for their meat.

Pastoral nomadism must have been an important ingredient of the economy. They tendedherds of sheep, goat and cattle. The manure provided by these animals is critical toagricultural productivity even in modem times. In many cases in Harappan world wheredroughts and

blight could wipe out agricultural production, pastoral nomadism was auseful form of adaptation. However, we have limited information about these communities.Harappans also consumed fish and wild game whose bones have been reported fromsome of the settlements.

3.7.4 Planning in Towns

Planned streets and drains with planned housing complexes in places like Mohenjodaro,Harappa and many other settlements reveal an important fact. These towns did notgrow organically from the pre-existing villages. Pre conceived housing pattern indicatesthat these cities were planned and built first and residents moved in later. This indicatesthat the economy had moved beyond the realm of individual households. Decisions about the location and building of a household were not taken by the head of the family but by a superior authority ruling over the city. There were some innovations in building tradition.

Large pillared halls, clerestory courtyards and thick walled two storied structures were innovations of the mature Harrapan period. At Dholavira in Gujarat we find innovations in the extensive use of stone as a building material.The cities and buildings of Harappa indicate that there were people who lived in largehouses. Some of them bathed in exclusive swimming pools (the Great Bath). There wereothers who lived in small barracks. One can say with certainty that those who lived inlarger houses belonged to the richer groups whereas those living in the barracks mighthave been part of a servile class of labourers. In other words the Harappan urbanismshows the emergence of a class society hierarchically divided between rich and poorand dominant and dominated.

3.8 FINANCIAL SYSTEM

3.8.1 Economyfor Livelihood

Farming, animal husbandry, fruit gathering, fishing and hunting comprise the sphere ofactivities that provide the basic means of survival, which is food. We are, in the Harappanperiod, dealing with farming regimes that utilized fields year-round. Inother words, both winter and summer crops were grown in the Harappan period, thedirect evidence for

which we have in the form of burnt seeds. The major cereal cropswere wheat and barley, both winter season crops. Others grown in the same seasonwere peas and chickpeas, mustard and sesame. A fibre crop such as flax was also awinter crop. Certain other crops were grown in the summer such as cotton. For cotton,a non-food crop, the evidence is in the form of small fibre pieces found on artefacts ofsilver and metal at Mohenjodaro, suggesting the objects were wrapped in the fibre. Inareas such as Gujarat, summer crops included millets. The evidence for rice, a summercrop, is yet unclear as what has been found so far may be uncultivated forms. Fruits would also have been eaten and may have been grown or nurtured such as pomegranates,dates and grapes. Gathering of wild fruits such as jujube or ber is also evident fromburnt specimens found at sites.

That animals were kept by the Harappans is known from a variety of sources. For one,we have the bones of several domesticated species, such as cattle, buffalo, sheep/goatand pig. Several terracotta figurines of animals have been found from Harappan sites.These are of the bull, ram and dog. The bull is also a popular motif on Harappan steatiteseals. Cattle were used for transportation and for ploughing. For the former we haveseveral terracotta carts, cart frames and wheels and for the latter, terracotta models ofploughs that have been found from Shortughai, Banawali and from sites in the Cholistanregion of Pakistan.

Cattle, sheep/goat and pig would also have been part of Harappandiet, as seen from the cut marks on the bones.Harappan sites have also given evidence, in the form of bones, for wild animal species,such as deer, boar, and so forth that again must have been part of human diet. Thesespecies would have been obtained through hunting practiced either by the Harappansthemselves on occasional expeditions or by other communities who traded meat forother produce, such as grains, with the Harappans. Harappan knowledge of wild animalstranscended those species used for food. Harappan seals provide evidence of wildanimals such as elephant, rhinoceros and tiger that would not have been part of theirdiet.

Living near water bodies and rivers also meant the possibility of fishing. Excavationshave revealed the bones of several varieties of Indus fish at Mohenjodaro. Sea fishwere also consumed as is known from a site like

Balakot. Marine fish, in fact, weretransported as a food source inland to settlements, such as Harappa. Evidence forfishing has also been recovered in the form of tools such as copper fish hooks.

The implications of all the above is that Harappan agriculture provided a well-roundedrange of crops with varied cereals, oil and fibre crops. Combined with animal protein,it showed that the Harappan diet was a varied one. Agriculture was also intensive inthat the same fields were used for growing more than a single annual crop. The evidencefor both winter and summer crops meant the Harappans practiced double cropping.Though plough shares have not been recovered yet, terracotta toy models of ploughsindicate their use. Evidence of a ploughed field, with two different kinds of furrows, atKalibangan has shown that multiple cropping (the growing of two ormore crops in the same field) was also practiced. Among the numerous stone bladesthat have been found, some may have been used as sickle elements for harvestingcereals.

Irrigation was also a necessary requirement in farming. Were the annual floods of theIndus River used to grow crops? Sites which are in the floodplain, however, would havebeen in danger of not only losing their crops but also their houses. The evidence ofperiodic flooding at Mohenjodaro indicates the danger of the Indus for nearbysettlements. Canals or channels from rivers would have been more useful for irrigationand the technology was known as can be seen from drainage channels in cities, butthere is no evidence for their use for irrigation in the Indus plains. The only evidence ofcanals has been recovered from the site of Shortughai in Afghanistan. It is possible thatthe archaeological evidence for channels from rivers may have been submerged underyears of silt deposition. However, another plausible method of irrigation may have beenthrough wells. The technology of building wells for drinking water was known to theHarappans and it is quite possible that lift irrigation through wells may have been usedto water crops.

3.8.2 Non Agricultural Occupations

Let us put the following bits of evidence together:

- Harappan agriculture was intensive.

The area available for fields around a city was limited due to constraints on travellingtoo far between the home and the field.

Thus, not every household would have had its own fields.

Numerous individuals/households would have had to move to other occupations.

Hence, while farming would have been one of the occupations in a Harappan city, it was actually known for varied occupations, requiring other kinds of skills. The demandtoo for different kinds of work, such as construction, maintenance, ritual, and so forth,would have meant that these were performed by individuals specialised in them. Insome cases, these skills were the accumulation of several generations of expertise suchas potting, in some new skills were developed such as of constructing drainage channelsor the carving of steatite seals.

One of the distinctive features of urbanism rests in thediversity of occupations, a situation that we can clearly see in the Harappan cities.Non-agricultural occupations that provided the means of livelihood for several individualswere unusual in another sense in Bronze Age cities that functioned without coinage.This meant that individuals who provided various services for other individuals,households and communities had to be compensated for their labour in ways withoutmoney. For example, brick makers who made the millions of fired bricks for buildinghouses at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, the masons who built the monumental architectureof the cities, those who cleaned the streets and drains had to be provided with theirsubsistence. Bronze Age cities are known for this large scale use of labour for variedpurposes.

3.8.3 Arts and Crafts

One of the important features of urbanism is believed to be craft specialization. It isbelieved that in the pre urban societies every member of the group performed agriculturalor hunting gathering activities. In the spare time individuals pursued their hobbies. Theymade beautiful stone tools or wove basket. Sometimes these crafts persons barteredtheir produce with other people in the village. In exceptional circumstances they couldstop producing food altogether. Normally these were activities

in addition to foodproduction. The coming of city coincided with the emergence of a group of crafts personswho met a part of their needs by buying and selling things in the market. They weregenerally patronized by the rich and powerful of their society. These powerful peopleneeded craft products like precious stones and jewellery to enhance their status. These powerful people would procure precious stones from distant places which in turn wouldbe worked by the crafts persons. As a result many of the crafts persons stopped producingfood for themselves. Since crafts persons do not grow their own food, specializationmeans' that specialists exchange their wares with others for obtaining raw material andfood.

There are evidences for the presence of craft specialization in many Harappan cities.For example shell was frequently used as a material for making bangles, cups etc. Shellwas obtained from the sea. It was procured from the sea andcut into various shapes. This can be inferred from the heapsof waste shell pieces with half finished ones at settlements like Nageswar and Balakot.

Considering the small size ofthese settlements and the large output of shell objects, it is obvious that these objects werenot for the immediate consumption of the community. This fact is further buttressed bythe fact that shell objects have been reported from Harappan settlements as far apart asHarappa and Shortughai. One can say that the producers of shell objects were craft specialists participating in an exchange network extending from Gujarat to Badakhshan in Afghanistan. Shankh shells have been reported from Mesopotamian settlements too.

This means that these crafts persons were participating in long distance trade beyond theboundaries of the Harappan civilization.Harappan settlements have yielded evidencefor various other kinds of craft activities.The widespread use of long chert bladesproduced in Rohri hills in Sind again is thepointer to a trans-regional economy whichis producing objects of everyday utility incentralised locations. Chert blades producedin the Rohri hills have been found insettlements as far apart as Balakot andShortughai. Copper- bronze tools have been reported from a large number ofHarappan settlements. At Chandudaro havebeen reported evidences for themanufacture of stone weights, seals, shellbangles, steatite and carnelian beads.

We can conclude that urban crafts personswere producing for exchange. It presupposes a demand for such goods. Insettlements like Mohenjodaro have beenreported workshops for making beads of carnelian and lapis lazuli. This means that an elite had emerged which funnelled rawmaterials from distant Central Asia and peninsular India to urban workshops. The rangeof products seems to suggest that the craft persons were producing goods for the commonpeople as well as the rich. Even very small Harappan settlements like Allahdino have yielded high status objects like lapis lazuli or seals and sealings. This suggests a very high degree of integration of the local economies in the inter-regional economy.

The coming of Harappan urbanism showed an increase in the scale and skills of craft production. The earlier method of cold hammering or open mould casting for metals was replaced by two-piece moulds and or lost wax casting. In the pre urban phase settlements like Mehragarh have yielded evidence for the use of copper. They used it for making bangles, awls and chisels.However, it was a rarecommodity. In the urban phasecopper bronze artefacts havebeen reported from most of thesettlements. In addition to theitems of the pre urban phasethese include fish-hooks, axes,dagger, swords, mirrors, largevessels and adzes. Gold andsilver too have been reportedfrom many settlements. Silver vases, bangles and seals have beenreported from Harappa andMohenjodaro. Gold beads, hairornaments, gold wire and pendantshave been reported from many sites.

The new developments in metallurgyhelped the Harappans shape betterstone tools, beads and ornaments.Long barrel shaped carnelian beadswith holes drilled in them wereperhaps possible with bronze drillsonly. Shankh shells were cut with bronze saws to makebangles, ladles and cups.Ivory, lapis lazuli andnumerous other stoneswere used for makingbeads, seals, bangles,combs and numerousother luxury objects.

3.8.4 Domestic and Foreign Trade

The pre-historic settlement of Mehrgarh showed evidence for procuring preciousstones from lands faraway. The emergence of Harappan

urbanism witnessed aregulation and reorganization of the trade routes. For example a Harappansettlement was consciously planted in Shortughai in the vicinity of lapis lazuliproducing area of northern Afghanistan. Similarly, settlements like Sutkagendorin the dry inhospitable Makran sea coast seems to have been founded to provideanchorage to ships sailing from the Harappan ports dotting the coastal areas of(Gujarat and Sind). Even the location of Harappa can be better understood asa place where trade routes from the upper Indus plains, the North West Frontierhighlands and Rajasthan converged. So, the merchants and rulers of Harappacould control the supplies of precious stones like lapis lazuli or jade comingthrough the North West Frontier route. Similarly, the logs of Deodar woodused as ceilings beams of many houses in Harappa could float down the RaviRiver from the upper reaches of the Himalayas.

Harappans had trade linkages with the contemporary Mesopotamian cities.Scholars believe that the Mesopotamians knew the Harappan civilization bythe name of Meluha. Mesopotamian kings proudly proclaim that ships fromMeluhha brought ivory, gold, carnelian and lapis lazuli to their cities. Such references are supported by the finding of seals bearing Harappan script inMesopotamia. Harappan shankh shells and carnelian beads have been found inroyal graves of Mesopotamia. In the Harappan port city of Lothal in Gujaratthe discovery of a dockyard is an important indicator of the long distance tradeof the Harappans. Seals found in the Harappan settlements were definitely usedfor trade because many sealings have been discovered which were used overpacked merchandise at Lothal. At Lothal, we found seals of PersianGulf origin too.

The coming of city implied some radical changes. City was the setting for craftspecialization because the urban elite generated the demand for these items.These elite also procured raw material needed by the crafts persons. Cities alsocreated economies linking diverse areas spread over millions of squarekilometres. Cites displayed the glories of urban art and architecture. They werealso the scene of exploitation of masses - a vertical division of society betweenrich and poor. The concentration of the productive forces meant that the goodsand services previously

enjoyed by all in relatively egalitarian communities could be greatly multiplied but not shared by all.

Check Your Progress 2

1)What are the features of Harappan civilization?

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2) Throw light on long distance trade of Harappans.

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3.9 LET US SUM UP

The transition of foraging cultures to sedentary life occurred initially in one partof the Indian subcontinent as early as the seventh millennium BC and in thesubcontinent in general by the third-second millennium BC. The beginning offood production coincided with domestication of animals and the beginning ofthe use of pottery. The earliest farming group in Indian subcontinent was that inMehrgarh. By the fifth millennium BC there emerged many agricultural villagesin the Baluchistan region. By 3300 BC one sees the emergence of regionaltraditions. There occurred dramatic changes in the agricultural techniques. Forthe first time we find evidences of ploughed fields; settlements with fortifications;and the emergence of rudimentary form of cities. Mature Harappan period wastruly an urban phase. Harappan settlements were characterized by a hierarchy ofsite size as well as habitations. There were people who lived in large houseswhile others were housed in barracks. Urbanization brought noticeablespecialization in craft production and long distance trade. This urbanism endedaround 1800 BC. Scholars are not sure about the causes of the decline of theHarappan civilization.

If we take multiplicity of occupations of a non-agricultural kind as a key criterion of urbanism, then several of the Harappan settlements like Mohenjodaro and Harappa would qualify as urban centres. That does not seem to be the sole criterion. Certain other settlements, like Chanhudaro and Lothal, while primarily devoted to craft, are also urban but in a different category from the larger centres. Thus, producing for outside consumers would also seem to be a characteristic of urbanism.

3.10 KEYWORDS

Ice Age: Ice Ages refer to periods when large partsof the globe were covered with ice sheets(glaciers). During the last 2 million years, over 20 glacial advances and retreats haveoccurred. The Pleistocene periodcorresponds with the last Great Ice age.

Levant: The term refers to an area roughly boundby the Mediterranean Sea in the west andthe Zagros Mountains in the east. The areastretched from Suez to the Taurus Mountains, including present day Israel. Lebanon, West Jordan, Sinai in Egypt and parts of Syria. It became thecentre of many important events,particularly the Crusades.

Lost Wax Casting: It is a method of producing metalsculptures. At first a mould is created froman original sculpture, wax is poured intothe mould. The wax impression is encasedinside and out with refined clay. Once theclay sets, the wax impression is fired in akiln; the wax melts out of the clay mould,and is "lost." The void created by the meltedwax in the clay mould is then filled with moltenbrass (or any other desired metal) which isidentical to the wax impression it replaced.The clay mould surrounding and inside thesculpture is delicately removed, revealing the cast sculpture gris (green-gray) or bronzelustre. This labour intensive method of lostwax casting has been widely practiced by theHarappans aid the Egyptians to produceunique sculptures.

Piedmont Zone The piedmont zone, built up by thecoalescence of alluvial fan deposits. Owingto high permeability, this zone hardlyretains any water and hence forms a highrecharge zone with relatively deeper groundwater level. Typical landforms in thiszone include gravel deposits (bhabar) andplains (tarai).

3.11 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1) What do you understand by subsistence economy? Explain in the context of theHarappan civilisation.

2) In Harappan cities agriculture constituted a significant form of production.Comment.

3) Discuss the pattern of non-agricultural production in a Harappan city.

4) How did the Harappans organise craft production?

3.12 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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J. Kenoyer, Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization, Oxford UniversityPress, Delhi, 1998.

3.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) The earliest evidence for agriculture in the Indian subcontinent comes not from the fertileriver valleys of Indus or the Ganga. Rather it comes from the dry, windswept hilly regionsof Baluchistan. No wonder, Mehrgarh is regarded as the first farming village of Indian sub-continent.

2) Population Increase and Shift; Warlike Conditions;Increase in the Size of Settlements. (See section 3.6)

Check Your Progress 2

1) See section 3.7.

2)Harappans had trade linkages with the contemporary Mesopotamian cities.Scholars believe that the Mesopotamians knew the Harappan civilization bythe name of Meluha. Mesopotamian kings proudly proclaim that ships fromMeluhha brought ivory, gold, carnelian and lapis lazuli to their cities. Harappan shankh shells and carnelian beads have been found inroyal graves of Mesopotamia. In the Harappan port city of Lothal in Gujaratthe discovery of a dockyard is an important indicator of the long distance tradeof the Harappans.

UNIT-4 HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION: SOCIETY, RELIGION, SEALS AND FUNERAL PRACTICES

STRUCTURE

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand the different aspects of societyand religious practices of the Harappan people. Particularly you will be able to:know about their dresses and food habits, discuss the controversy about their script and language, list their main occupations, understand the nature of the ruling classes, recall their

religious practices and prominent Gods and know about their funeral practices. Also a case study of the city ‘Mohenjodaro’ is given so as to acclimatize you with the level of urbanization in the Harappan civilization.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier Units of this Block you studied some significant features of HarappanCivilization. In this Unit we will discuss the society and religion of the Harappans.One might ask what the Harappans looked like. Did they wear clothes of the samekind as we do? What did they read and write? What kinds of jobs did the townsfolkdo? What language did they speak? What food did they eat? Did they have cups oftea with chips of potato? Did they play games and did they fight? Who ruled overthem? What were their temples and gods like? Were they like us?

These are some very simple questions which the scholars find difficult to answer. This is because of the nature of sources available for knowing about that period. The Mainsources available are in the form of archaeological findings excavated from differentsites.Answers to many of the questions related to the realm of ideas and feelings are difficult to provide with our present knowledge about this civilization. Even aninnocuous question like whether a Harappan was feeling a sense of pleasure whilemaking a carmelian bead cannot be answered. In this Unit we will try to derive someanswers from silent objects lying abandoned for thousands of years.

4.2 SOCIAL LIFE

The archaeological finds from Harappan sites helps us in reconstructing the society of the period. We get an idea about their dress styles and food habits. We also get information about the trade and crafts and various social groups. Let us first examinethe external appearance and dresses of the Harappans.

4.2.1 Style of Dresses

What did the Harappans look like? The only way of finding out an answer for thiswould be examining the terracotta figurines and stone sculptures surviving from thatperiod. Another way of knowing would be examining the skeletal remains found insome of the Harappan settlements.

The study of the skeletal types shows that the Harappans looked like the present daynorth Indians. Their faces, complexion and height were more or less similar to thepresent day people living in those areas. But the similarities end here. They did notwear the shirts and trousers or Salwar-Kameej like the modern men and women. Wecan have some idea about their dresses and fashions by a study of contemporarysculptures and terracotta figurines. Men are mostly shown wearing a dress whichwould be wrapped round the lower half of the body with one end worn over the leftshoulder and under the right arm-like the modern saree. The other dress was a kiltand a shirt worn by both men and women. The men arranged their hair in variousways sometimes making buns and using headbands. The men used much more ornaments than the modern Indians. They would be wearing ring, bracelets andornaments round their neck and hands. Growing beard was fashionable but theywould shave their moustaches. Women seem to have used ornaments on their waist.Women wore a large number of necklaces. Bangles too were in fashion and of coursethere was no end to the number of ways in which hair was arranged. Men and womenalike had long hair. We know that they used cotton clothes also that in one sculpturethe cloth was shown as having trefoil pattern and red colours. However, for all hisfashionableness if we saw a man from Harappa walk down the road, to our eyes he willprobably resemble a mendicant more than anyone else.

4.2.2 Foods

What did they eat? Again, we know very little, the Harappans of Sind and Punjabate wheat and barley as their staple food. Those who stayed in towns of Rajasthanhad to be content with barley only. The Harappans of Gujarat in places like Rangpurand Surkotada preferred rice and millet. Let us see where they got their supply ofprotein and fat from.

They got their supply of fat and oil from sesame seeds, mustard and possibly ghee.We do not know whether they were familiar with sugarcane to supply them sugar.They might have used honey to sweeten their food. Seeds of jujube and dates bundin the Harappan sites indicate their preference for these fruits. It is likely that theyalso ate bananas, pomegranates, melons, lemons, figs and of course mangoes. They seem to have consumed a whole range of wild nuts and fruits but it is difficult toidentify them. They were eating peas too. Apart from this the Harappans seem tohave relished non-vegetarian food. Bones of deer, bears, sheep and goats have beenfrequently found in the Harappan settlements. Fish, milk and curd too would beknown to them.

4.2.3 Medium of Communication

What language did they speak and what did they read and write is again not veryclear to us. We have discovered the written script of the Harappans. As pointed outearlier, we have not deciphered it as yet. Some scholars believe that the languagewritten there is ancestral to the Dravidian group of languages like Tamil. Some otherwriters would like to think that it was ancestral to an Aryan language like Sanskrit.

However, no one has proved his case beyond doubt. However, one noticeable thingabout their script is that it did not change all through the life of the HarappanCivilization. All the other ancient scripts have showed distinct changes over a periodof time. This indicates that the Harappan script was not in common use. Perhaps avery small section of privileged scribes had a monopoly over the written word. Aboutwhat they learnt and how they learnt-we have no answers. Whether they had somekind of school for teaching as was the case in contemporary Mesopotamia is notknown to us.

4.2.4 Seals

The categorization or difference of size of seals most probably reflects official,commercial, economic, political or religious status of respective owners in the urbanizedsociety. Owning and using seals must have been a privilege for traders or merchantswho were approved by certain public authorities.

The fact that the unicorn seals alone constitute 70.1% of entire seals, and alsothat their majority is concentrated at Mohenjodaro and Harappa, is the most distinctfeature of the Harappan seals. At the same time, unicorn seals are the only Harappanseal which is found from almost all the sites on the list where at least one seal isfound, not confined only to the major urban sites but also found from minor urbansites and small settlements. In other words, wherever the site, perhaps priority of tradetransactions were in the hands of owners of the unicorn seals.

On the other hand, Mohenjodaro and Harappa are the only sites where almostall the other motifs (and variations thereof), as well as all the size variations, are seen.There may have been division of labour among seal bearers and certain trading goodswere handled by owners of certain seals only who all shared their role and responsibilityof trade activities of the Indus society as a whole.Chanhudaro is a unique exception among the small Harappan sites. Unlike othersmall sites, various kinds of motifs such as unicorn, bison, goat, tiger, multi-headedanimal, plant in a vessel etc. are found from this site. However, no geometric seals arefound. It is emphasized that the importance of Chanhudaro is also testified by presenceof the large A-4 category of unicorn seal.

Concerning number of finds of seals and regions where either large or smallurban sites are located, Sind and Punjab are definitely core regions, followed bynorthern Rajasthan and Haryana. The number of seals found from Gujarat is far less incomparison. As far as the number of seals found in the region is concerned, Gujaratcan be described as a region of less activity. But many sealings with impressions ofHarappan seals have been discovered from Lothal.

It is clear from the above analysis that the Harappan type seals were made,though not so rigidly regulated, on certain size categorization of respective motifs.The majority of seals fall between around 17–35 mm and each group has at least twocategories-large and small-which clearly indicate that there was a hierarchy amongthem. Even the geometric seals have large and small categories though their sizedistribution is unique. Larger seals are usually less in number, possibly owned bypeople in important authority positions.Diversity of the motifs and their hierarchy obviously reflect the need of efficientcontrol of trade within complex urban society and economy. This is in contrast with thePre/Early

Harappan phase where categorization or hierarchy of their geometric seals isunclear.

Each motif must have been a symbol of a respective group of merchantssharing same roots, clan or totem who cooperated and jointly dealt with trade activities. In the majority of cases, the samemotif is shared among all the owners who belong to the same group. Only differenceamong them was 'words' depicted above the motif. These 'words' must have acted as'signatures' in order to differentiate respective owners of seals bearing the same motifs.

The largest seals exceeding 45 mm are confined to the unicorn and zebu sealsfound from two large urban sites of Mohenjodaro and Harappa (with one exceptionfrom Chanhudaro). This suggests that their owners were high ranking merchants, notonly among the unicorn and zebu seal owners but among the entire group of Harappanseal owners. The extremely fine and delicate workmanship of engraving of these sealsalso support this view. A. Parpola has also suggested that common 'words' depictedabove the unicorn motif of very large variety may reflect such hierarchy.

The largest categories of each motif are found in Mohenjodaro in most of thecases, except motifs of horned deity-A in narrative scene (Bhirrana), tiger (Lothal),buffalo (Harappa), goat and geometric-swastika (Harappa and Lothal), which indicatethe magnitude of this site. This suggests that the owners of the largest seals usuallystayed at either Mohenjodaro or Harappa and the owners of smaller seals were posted atboth the largest as well as smaller sites in various regions of the Indus territory. Thus,the importance of the seals directly reflects the importance or hierarchy of sites as well.

However, in some cases (motifs with horned deity-A, B, C, gharial, animalswith plant, animals in group and those classified as other motifs), respective motifoccurs only once or very rarely. The majority of the horned deity-A, B and C motifsare restricted to the major city sites of large to middle size, namely, Mohenjodaro,Harappa, Kalibangan, Banawali, Bhirrana and etc. All these seals belong to group Din the present analysis, though size hierarchy does not exactly apply to them. Many ofthem are found from Mohenjodaro and some examples from other urban centers such asHarappa, Kalibangan and Dholavira, but not

from small sites. The owners of these sealsalso stayed at these cities and controlled trade transactions.

Such motifs had certain specific meaning different from those seals found inabundance like the unicorn seals. In case of the unicorn seals for example, the motifitself strongly indicates the group to which the owner belongs, but in case of rare motifslike that of horned deity-A, B, C or gharial, the motifs indicate the individual ownersthemselves. In other words, the owners who could use these seals could have beenengaged in specific positions in major cities.

For example, such functions are indicated from the very fine and delicateworkmanship of the seals from Mohenjodaro with horned deity-A, B and C appearingin the motifs. However, the horned deity-A seal from Dholavira is so roughly made thatit could almost be called fake. Such distortion is not as bad in case of unicorn or othermotifs. This may reflect reality or difficulty of integrating the civilization which hasexpanded into vast geographical regions.The individuality of the seals has some similarity with the Mesopotamiancylinder seals where the motif on each seal is different, though some divine figures oranimals do appear repeatedly. Furthermore, the hoards of sealings that are common inMesopotamian are not found in case of the Indus sites. This may reflect a difference ofattitudes towards preserving records of trade activity in the two civilizations.

The most distinct feature of many of the Harappan seals from Haryana region isdirection of head of animal which is engraved facing right (thus faces left on impressedimage). As stated earlier, in this region, seals having a right-facing animal constitute75% or 24 out of 32 seals in which the direction of the head of main motif is clear (i.e.left or right). Among them, goat seals (concentrate in D-1 and D-2 categories) are themost prominent. Seals having a right-facing goat constitute 65% or 13 out of 20 sealswhich direction of head of main motif is clear (i.e. left or right). The shape of the bosson the reverse side also differs from other regions, which is small, slim and square orcylindrical. This suggests that the owners of goat seals had adifferent origin from other seal owners.

4.3 GOVERNING ELITE

At the top of the pyramid of the Harappan society was three invisible categories ofpeople--administrators, traders and priests. Their presence can bepresumed on the basis of an understanding of the problems of organisation. The riseof Civilization is associated with the emergence of a centralized decision-makingsystem called the State. In the Harappan civilization we can perceive the presence ofa decision-making authority for running the municipal system:The construction and maintenance of elaborate drainage system and streets wouldrequire a municipal authority in the cities.

Similarly, the granaries indicate the presence of an authority which would collectfood grains from the surrounding hinterland and redistribute it among the citizens.As pointed out earlier, the tools, weapons, bricks etc. show a remarkableuniformity of design. Some of the tools and weapons seem to have beenmass-produced in one place and then distributed to various cities and settlements. The organisation of production and distribution of these objects over an area covering thousands of kilometres would give tremendous power to those who decidedhow much to produce and where to send the products. If these people were to stopthe supply of goods to a particular town, that town would be starved of tools andimplements.

The sheer range and volume of products consumed by the residents of the larger citiesindicate that some kind of a ruling class resided in them. Many of the objectswere rarities brought from faraway lands. The possession of such precious stonesor metals would give immense prestige to owners vis-a-vis the rest of thepopulation.Similarly, the larger size of the cities did not simply indicate that a larger numberof people lived there but also the fact that they contained many monumentalstructures like temples, palaces etc. The people who lived in these structuresexercised political or economic or religious authority. No wonder, the seals whichare considered marks of authority of traders, priests or administrators are foundin largest numbers in Mohenjodaro where the largest number of monumentalstructures has also been found.

However, we are not suggesting that Mohenjodaro functioned as the Capital of the Harappan Civilization. It is possible that the Harappan Civilization consisted of two or even five independent political units. All we are suggesting is that the city had emerged as the Centre of politico-economic power. We do not know who the rulers of the Harappans were. They may have been kings, priests or traders. However, we know that in many pre-modern societies the economic, religious and administrative spheres are not clearly demarcated. This means that the same person could be the head priest, king and the wealthiest merchant. But all these evidences indicate the presence of a ruling authority. What was the form of this authority is not yet clear to us.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What were the staple foods of the Harappan people?

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2) Write a short note on Harappan seals.

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4.4 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Who did the Harappans worship? This is one question about which there has beenconsiderable discussion among scholars. The mute survivors of the Harappan past donot tell us anything. So, we have to fit in our logic and our fancies to understandtheir religious beliefs. One major problem is that without written information it isdifficult to differentiate their sacred and secular activities. Thus, it seems that any orevery find from Harappa might have a sacred content. However, we shall try tounderstand the religious beliefs of the Harappans with the help of modern parallels.

4.4.1 Venue of Worship

A number of large buildings in the citadel and the lower town at Mohenjodaro arebelieved to have been temples of Gods. This view is supported by the fact that mostof the large stone sculptures were found in these buildings.In the lower city at Mohenjodaro a large building has been discovered. This buildinghas a monumental entrance and a double stairway leading to a raised platform onwhich was found a stone sculpture sixteen and a halfinches high. It is a seated man with hands onknees. It has a bearded face with a fillet passing over a receding forehead and hangingdown in two strands at the back. Another stone statue was discovered in the samebuilding. This is why scholars have identified this building with a temple.

In Mohenjodaro several structures are reported from the citadel mound which seemsto have had some ritual significance. Among them 'The Great Bath' is the mostfamous. Such elaborate bathing arrangements were made in very sacred ritual spotsin the subsequent historical phases in India. So, it is likely that 'Great Bath' was notsimply a swimming pool but that it had a great ritual significance.

Near the Great Bath was found another large structure (230 x 78 feet) which hasbeen identified as the residence of some high priest or college of priests. Similarly,an oblongassembly hall has also been reported from the citadel area. To the west ofthis structure was found a complex of rooms in one of which was discovered a seatedmale statue. This too has been identified as a part of some religious structure. Theseritual structures provide us with a glimpse of the religious practices of the people inMohenjodaro. We can presume that someof the ritual performances took place inthe large temple like structure.

4.4.2 Tools of Worship

The evidence for the objects of worship comes from the study of Harappan seals andterracotta figurines. Amongst the evidences that come from the seals, the mostfamous is a deity who has been identified as proto-Siva. On a series of seals a deity wearing a buffalo-horned head-dress is shown sitting in a yogic posture. The deity issurrounded by animals like goats, elephants, tiger and antelope. Marshall identifiedhim

with God Pashupati Lord of Beasts). In several instances he has a sprouting plant emerging between his horns. In another case a deity with horns and flowing hair isstanding nude between the branches of a Pipal tree. A worshipper is kneeling in frontof it. Behind the worshipper is a man-faced goat and below are seven other humanfigures. They have long pigtails and tall head-dresses. In one seal are shown snakesaccompanying the yogic figure. Each of the features associated with the horned deityare attributes of Siva of later Indian history. Moreover in some Harappan settlementsthe phallic emblem of Siva (Lingam) has been found. All these evidences have ledscholars to believe that Siva was the most important male God of the Harappans.Perhaps the temples were dedicated to the same God.

Terracotta Figurines

The Harappan settlements have yielded a very large number of terracottafigurines. Among them are the representations of females adorned with a widegirdle, loin cloth and necklaces. They wear a fan-shaped head dress. Sometimesthey are shown with an infant. The general notion of fertility is indicated by manyrepresentations of pregnancy. These evidences indicate the prevalence of cults offertility and mother goddess worship.

Sacred Tree

The Harappans also seem to have worshipped tree spirits. Several seals depictthe Pipal tree. In many cases a figure is shown looking through the branches.Scholars believe that this represents the tree-spirit. In many cases worshippersare shown standing in front of the tree. In many other cases a tiger or some otheranimal is shown in front of the tree. In one case seven human figures is shownstanding in front of it, with a horned-figure standing in it. As discussed earlierthe horned figure probably is Siva. The Pipal tree has been worshipped in Indiafor ages and in many cases the Pipal tree and Siva are worshipped together. Theseven figures have sometimes been identified with the seven great sages or sevenmothers of the Indian mythology.

Mythological Heroes

Some other human figures which seem to have a religious significance are thosefound on seals and amulets. Human figures with horns on the head and long tailsare frequently shown on the seals. Sometimes, they

have hoofs of cattle and hindlegs. Some other seals remind us of Mesopotamian mythology.For example, a man grappling with a pair of tigers immediately brings to mind abrave warrior called Gilgamesh who is said to have killed two tigers.

Worship of Animals

A large number of animals also seem to have been worshipped. Again, ourinformation comes from their representation on seals and sealings and interracotta. A seal has been reported from Chanhudaro depicting a bull-bison witherect penis, fecundating a supine human figure. A plant is sprouting from thehead of the human figure. This obviously is indicative of some fertility cult. The Brahmani bull with its heavy dewlap is frequently represented on the seals. 1t ispossible that the present day reverence for bulls and cows had its beginnings inthe Harappan Civilization.

Mythological Animals

Many composite animals are depicted in the seals. There are animalrepresentations of creatures with the foreparts of humans and the hind-quartersof tigers. Similarly, composite creatures combining various portions of rams, bullsand elephants are a frequent occurrence. They obviously represented objects ofworship. The conception of composite creatures like 'Narasimha' was very mucha part of the mythology of the later Indian tradition. One important animalfrequentlyrepresented on the Harappan seals is the unicorn. This is a horse-likebeast with a horn issuing from the middle of its head. In front of the animal occursa curious object which is not shown in association with any other animal. Itconsists of a bowl on a central post carrying a cage like object. We do not knowits function-it has been taken for a sacred manger or an incense holder. In another seal impression, a 'unicorn' is shown being carried in a processionbetween two other objects, one of which was similar to the one discussed above.Obviously the 'unicorn' was a mythical animal, since there is no such real beast.It is likely to have been a cult object.

The Harappans at Kalibangan and Lothal seem to have followed different religiouspractices. At Kalibangan in the citadel were found a series of raised brick platformscrowned with 'fire altars' i.e. a series of brick-lined pits containing ash and animalbones. This area also had a well and bathing places. This complex seems to haverepresented some kind of

ritual centre where animal sacrifice, ritual ablution andsome sort of fire rituals were performed. Many houses in the lower town alsocontained a room having 'fire altars'. Several other 'fire' altars are also reported. AtLothal too, fire altars have been found. These evidences are very important because:

a) they show that the Harappans staying in different geographical areas followeddifferent religious practices, and

b) the fire ritual was central to the Vedic religion.

The Vedic Aryans are believed to have been a different set of people. The evidencefrom Kalibangan might indicate that the Aryans adopted the religious practices ofthe Harrapan people, when they came and settled down in these areas.

4.4.3 Funeral Practises

Disposal of the dead has been an important religious activity of the human groups.This is because the attitude towards the dead is linked up with the human beliefsregarding this life and life after death. The Harappan civilization has not yielded anymonuments for the dead, which could equal the pyramids of Egypt or the Royalcemetery of the Mesopotamian city of Ur, in its grandeur. However, we have certainevidences about the burial practices of the Harappans.

In Harappa many graves have been discovered. Dead bodies were generally placed in a north-south orientation. Bodies were laid on their back. A large number ofearthen pots were placed in the grave. In some cases the dead were buried withornaments like shell bangles, necklace, and an ear ring. In some cases copper mirrors, mother of pearl shells, antimony sticks etc. were kept in the grave. A number ofgraves were constructed with bricks. A coffin burial has been found at Harappa. AtKalibangan some other kinds of burial practices were encountered. Small circular pitscontaining large urns and accompanied by pottery have been found. But they did nothave any skeletal remains. Some other burial pits with collected bones have also beenfound. From Lothal some examples of pairs of skeletons with a male and a femalein each case buried together.

These practices show that the disposal ofthe dead among the Harappans was differentfrom the one followed subsequently. In the historical phases the predominant systemseems to have been cremation. At the same time the careful placement of bodiesprovided with ornaments and toiletries is indicative of some belief in life after death.What that belief was is unknown to us.

A study of the various kinds of objects found in excavations shows that differentregions of the Harappan civilization followed different kinds of religious practices.Fire worship was prevalent in Kalibangan and Lothal but unknown in Harappa andMohenjodaro. Ritual bathing evidenced at Mohenjodaro might have been absent inHarappa. The burial practices show wide variation ranging from extended inhumationto double burials and pot burials. Finds in Kalibangan also show that different kindsof burial practices were being followed in the same settlement. This kind of diversityof religious beliefs and practices even in the same settlement reflects the complex nature of the urban centres. Unlike tribal societies where every member the tribefollows similar kinds of religious practices, the urban centres are characterised by thepresence of people following different kinds of religious practices. This apparentlymeans that urban centres were formed by the political and economic integration ofvaried social groups. Also, an urban centre means the presence of traders fromdifferent regions with their own religious practices. These groups retained their socialmores and religious customs but lost their political and economic independence.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Do we get any evidence of fire altars from Harappan finds?

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2)What significant points emerge from the study of burial practices of Harappan

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_____

_____

4.5 CASE STUDY OF MOHENJODARO

Wheeler was, however, not the first to visit or excavate Mohenjodaro. SuperintendentArchaeologist D.R. Bhandarkar in 1911-12, was the first to visit the site which hemistakenly understood to be of recent construction due to the bricks found there. R.D.Banerji was the first to recognize the antiquity of Mohenjodaro in 1919-20, when hefound a flint scraper at the site. He also correctly identified the date of the stupa as ofthe early centuries CE. The magnitude of Banerji's discovery was, however, only realizedwhen the finds of Mohenjodaro were found to be similar to those found by D.R. Sahnifrom the site of Harappa far away to the north-east in the Punjab. In 1924, John Marshall,the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India could announce to the worldthe discovery of the remains of an extensive new civilisation, a discovery that wouldconsiderably take back the antiquity of the subcontinent.

John Marshall was the first professional archaeologist to head the Archaeological Surveyof India, having excavated before in Crete and Turkey. Due to his personal interest inand commitment to the excavations at Taxila being undertaken at the same time, hedeputed the American, E.J.H. Mackay, who had excavated at Mesopotamian sites likeKish and Jemdet Nasr, to work at Mohenjodaro from 1926-1931. The first threevolumes recording the excavations at Mohenjodaro were brought out by John Marshallin 1931 and another two volumes on the further excavations by Mackay in 1938.

This section will be dealing with a case study of a Harappan city considered by manyscholars as typical of the Harappan culture. This has been considered so for severalreasons: one, because most of the distinctive features of Harappan urban centres havebeen found at this site; two, archaeologically this site is remarkably well preserved; andthird, because this site has been examined both through exploration and excavationnumerous times since the 1920s so that the cumulative information from this site is on anunprecedented level. Even though the archaeological culture is named after the site ofHarappa since the first evidence came from that site, Mohenjodaro still remains theprominent

Harappan site due to the comprehensive evidence recovered from there.The purpose in this section will be to explore as to why Mohenjodaro has been consideredas a prime example of a Harappan urban centre.

4.5.1 Shape

The ancient settlement was divided into two portions, one a smaller but more elevated one, called the Citadel, and the other, a larger but lower one, called the Lower Town. This two-fold division became known as a classic Harappan pattern, but is actually best represented at Mohenjodaro. The early excavations under the general supervision of John Marshall were undertaken in several parts of the ancient settlement. The excavated areas came to be known after the names of the archaeologists responsible for the excavations in those particular sections. Thus, for example, SD wasnamed after A.D. Siddiqui, DK was named after Kashinath Narayan Dikshit, VS afterMadho Sarup Vats, HR after Harold Hargreaves and the Moneer Area after Q.M.Moneer.

Mohenjodaro is located in Sind on the right bank of the river Indus. The river was in theancient past near enough to periodically damage the settlement due to the annual floods.Because of this, the ancient inhabitants had raised their settlement artificially makinghuge platforms of mud-brick, on which the structures were laid out. The platforms areclearly known from the western smaller mound, known as the Citadel as it was elevatedabove the plain. Some of the area of the Lower Town (the larger mound on the east)was also raised on similar platforms.

Photographs and plans of structures from the early excavations show a settlement thatwas densely built up, where houses stood close against each other with many sharingwalls between them. This was because often a new house was built up against anotherusing some of the former's walls for part of their own structure. Sometimes, it becomesdifficult to figure out where one house ends and another begins. Seeing whether doorsopen onto what looks like an addition to the house can help. Sometimes the thicknessof walls demarcates one house from another. The streets and lanes divided the Lower

Town into what were labelled as ‘Blocks’ by the excavators within which separatehouses were delineated. Criss-crossing narrow lanes separated these Blocks from eachother. Since the level of architectural preservation is good at Mohenjodaro, the photographsof these lanes and streetsshow what it would have been like to live inthe ancient city. The main streets would have allowed vehicles to pass each other easilywhile the narrow lanes were obviously only for pedestrian traffic.Even though the street pattern is often called one of ‘grid-plan’ for Mohenjodaro, inactuality many of the lanes twisted through the settlement allowing access betweendifferent parts. This can be seen by the names given to certain lanes,such as ‘Crooked Lane’.

One of the main public amenities for an urban settlement comprises the drainage systemof the Harappans, which can still be seen so distinctly at Mohenjodaro. Streets andlanes show long stretches of public drains, sometimes curving around a corner and are generally covered with bricks. These exceptionally well constructed drains are a ubiquitous reminder of the urban character of the settlement.

The household waste was channelled into these public drains through chutes, whichcould be a hole in the wall or a specially constructed sloping one of terracotta.The common perception is that drinking water supply was a domestic concern withhouseholds constructing their own wells, often within their houses. While this is correctin the sense that the city’s inhabitants would not have needed to go to the river for theirwater, there is in reality more information regarding the dispersal of wells within the city.

4.5.2 Design of Buildings

The buildings at Mohenjodaro can be divided into two broad categories: the publicarchitecture and the domestic houses. Public architecture comprises those buildingsthat do not appear to have been living spaces due to their size and the internal arrangementof their rooms. While much of the architecture on the Citadel mound appears to havebeen of a specialised public nature, not all large public buildings werefound only here. In some parts of the Lower Town, too, large buildings have beenidentified. However, it is striking that most of the large buildings,

whether on the Citadelor Lower Town, are not easily identifiable as to their function.

Excavations on the Citadel were conducted in two broad areas, which were labelled asSD Area for the northern group and L Area for the southern group of buildings. Thebest example of public architecture on the Citadel mound in the northern group ofbuildings is the Great Bath, a well-built structure measuring 51.6 × 31.9 m and surroundedby colonnaded verandas on all sides. The tank itself would have hada capacity of 160 cubic meters. On two sides (northern and eastern), the galleries gaveonto several other rooms. Within one of the rooms on the eastern side was a doublewalledwell. There was probably an upper storey as seen by a staircase in the north-easterncorner of the building. The sunken part of the Bath itself was accessed through two setsof staircases on the opposing shorter ends. The floor of the Bath was paved with wellfittedbricks laid with gypsum mortar, making it waterproof. The Bath building wassurrounded on all sides by lanes and broader streets and the large drain for the wateron the western side exited into one of these lanes. This drain, constructed using thecorbelling technique, was such that a human could walk through it.

To the north of the Bath and across a lane was a building with two rows of eightbathrooms, all with staircases connecting to a now no-longer standing upper storey.Near these paved bathrooms was an oval-shaped well that was placed within the buildingbut which could be accessed from the outside too. In the excavation report, these wereunderstood to be ablution areas for a select group of individuals thought of as priests.

According to Ernest Mackay who excavated here, the priests lived in the rooms aboveand came down ‘at stated hours to perform the prescribed washings. Possibly theywere monks or ascetics who occupied this building, and they kept themselves apartfrom the world. It has however been thought that this building was occupied later thanthe Great Bath.

Among the southern group of buildings on the Citadel, in L Area, was a large pillaredhall, measuring 26.4 × 21.2 m. This was a covered hall, with the roof supported by 20rectangular piers. It seems each row had 5 piers. Gypsum and mud-mortar was used toerect these piers. Each row of piers was resting on a footing or foundation wall thatprojected on either side of the piers.

4.5.3 Dwellings

The urban nature of Mohenjodaro comes out clearly in the varied plans of houses thatare a feature in the Lower Town. A curious block of what appear to be rooms that have been labelled as houses by John Marshall are similar in size toeach other. These similar sized buildings in a double row were thought of as shops or asquarters for retainers for the large adjacent building. These buildingsconsisted of a large room sometimes with one or two smaller rooms at the rear. Someof these buildings had small paved bathing floors within them. At the southern end thereis a well that was probably commonly shared between them. This was found inside oneof the buildings in the extreme southwest corner in a paved room on which severalbroken terracotta goblets were found. The well was evidently used by the double rowof buildings and probably from the street as well. Between the double rows of buildingswas a long narrow corridor but the buildings were evidently entered from the othersides, which looked onto Lane 7 and Street 3. However, the entrances to the easternrow of buildings is not very clear but must have been from the public space providedbetween these buildings and House XXX directly to the east.

However, Marshall, in hisexcavation report of Mohenjodaro, made a point of describing and illustrating in threedimensionalfashions, two large houses in the Lower Town. House VIII, in HR Area, Section A, Block 3, opened onto a lane thatled off from a main thoroughfare, called as First Street. There was only one entrancethat led into a small room which in turn led to several other rooms. The open courtyardwas paved with brick and had a covered drain in it. Next to the entrance was a smallpaved room with a well in it, connected by an aperture with the bathroom next to itwhich was also paved. There are several rooms around the courtyard, the function ofwhich are not immediately known but are proposed by the excavator. The small roomson the east were suggested to have been ‘for menials’, though they could well also havebeen store-rooms. An open-fronted room on the northern side of the courtyard wasthought to have been a kitchen.

A completely separate room on the west accessed bothfrom the entrance and from the courtyard through a zigzag passage was hypothesizedto be ‘a guest-chamber’. This room had a low ceiling with rafters of deodar and sissoowood, burnt portions of which still remain. The living and sleeping rooms were thought to be on the first floor reached by a staircase in the northern part of the house. Anotherstaircase in the southern part allowed direct access from the upper area to the bathroombelow. The upper area had at least one large room and passage on a solid base whichcan be seen as the projection to the north while the other rooms were probably built onthe plan of the ground floor, around the courtyard. The roomed area of the housewould have had a flat roof.

The other house, House XIII in VS Area was more elaborate andhad four “fair-sized” courts, ten smaller rooms, three staircases, a “porter’s lodge” anda well-chamber in its ground plan. It fronted onto the main thoroughfare of Mohenjodaro,First Street, and unusually had three entrances, the central one which had the porter’slodge. The left side of the house is slightly different in that the court and the longpassageway leading to the well-room are paved with brick. There was a door in thewell-room which was later blocked up. The small rooms on this side of the house werethought to have been for menials. This characterisation of the rooms appears arbitraryas similar small rooms on the other side of the house were called guest-chambers.

Certain portions at the back of both houses descried and illustrated by the excavator,had solid sub-structures, which may have acted as a plinth on which rooms wereconstructed. This may have been to deal with flood situations when one would havehad to move for safety to an upper floor.Thus, in Mohenjodaro at least, house construction methods donot vary and are not useful for suggesting status differences.

4.5.4 Arts and Crafts

Craft production at Mohenjodaro is an aspect of its urban character. Production in anurban centre requires specialisation and we are also interested in the archaeologicalform that specialisation takes. Were specialised crafts located in a separate sector ofthe ancient city? Were

different processes undertaken in separate areas? What was therelation between craft activities and political power?

The archaeological evidence for craft production comprises unfinished (or semi-finished)objects, pieces of raw material, tools, and waste. Where these are found may inform usas to the location of craft production, though there may be human activities and post depositional disturbances that may have impacted on the nature of the site which in turnmay complicate our interpretations.

Excavations were conducted at different parts of the site (SD and L in the Citadel, inthe Lower Town, DK-G in the north, DK-A, B and C towards the eastern and centralportion, VS and HR towards the south as well as the Moneer area in the east), providinga representative picture, but it is also clear that only a small proportion of the entire sitehas been plumbed. Outlying areas have not been excavated, thus leaving out potentialareas of craft activity, many of which usually take place on the peripheries of settlements.

However, the excavation data was vastly amplified by an intensive surface explorationthat was conducted by an Italian team. With information provided by the surface survey,we now know that the entire eastern and south-eastern portions of Mohenjodaro werecraft areas.If craft production is one among other urban occupations, the question then arises as towhether there is evidence for all crafts and what is the discernible pattern for those thatwere practised. At Mohenjodaro, going by craft indicators, stone bead making, stoneblade making, weight production, seal cutting, pottery production, steatite and metalworking were practised as well as rarer crafts like stoneware bangle production.

Craft working is largely dispersedand more or less confined to the Lower Town. Within the Lower Town, too, there areareas that seem to show more evidence for craft than others. Though there is evidenceof kilns from the HR area, there are not too many other craft indicators. The DK-Gsector in the north definitely seems to have been a significant craft working area, and soalso the areas east and south of the Moneer site in the eastern part of Mohenjodaro.Sometimes, we find that the same structure revealed the working of different crafts.

There are several examples in the DK-G Area: from Block 1, House VI in Rooms 52 and 64 were found evidence for metal and faience working; from Block 7, House III,Rooms 44 and 52, shell and metal working respectively; from Block 7, House I, Rooms15 and 19, beads and shell working respectively; from Block 9, House VIII, Rooms15 and 16, seal making and metal working respectively; from Block 4, Rooms 12 and15, shell and metal; and Block 18, Rooms 17 and 7, beads and shell working. Threeseparate indicators for metal working were found from Block 12A, House I, Room 15and two indicators for bead making from Block 6A, Rooms 38 and 41.

Though the Moneer South East area gave, in the surface survey, evidencefor the manufacture of chert micro-drills, this area did not show evidence for drilling ofbeads. It is, in fact, the DK-G sector where it seems beads were drilled, going by thenumber of unbored specimens as well as rejects, or beads broken during drilling.Unpolished beads too were found here. The Moneer South East area gives evidencefor the preliminary chipping and flaking of stone to make not only beads, but also drillsand weights. Perhaps roughly flaked beads were sent to the DK-G area for polishingand drilling. Thus, there is at Mohenjodaro, some evidence for localization of craftprocesses. This can be seen with shell working too where a small low mound northeastof Moneer Area revealed the preliminary stage of perforation and chipping of the topportion of T. pyrum (or sankh) shell.That chert micro-drill manufacture, preliminary flaking of beads and production of weightstook place at the same locus in the Moneer South East area is understandable. Similarflaking technologies were utilized in all three cases. It also indicates a tendency forcraftsmen to concentrate on the working of a material even if the end products weredifferent.

Thus, for most of the crafts that we are considering, we may have to accept thatMohenjodaro was primarily a consuming settlement. In fact, Mohenjodaro does notgive evidence for the production of certain artefact-types, like steatite micro-beads,which were probably made at Chanhudaro (and perhaps also Lothal). Similarly evidencefor the production of long barrel-cylinder carnelian beads has only been attested fromChanhudaro. This may be one more indicator that finding these

beads in the assemblageof Mohenjodaro meant that they must have been brought into the settlement.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed the religious and social aspects related to the life pattern of Harrapans.The main dress of Harappans was a big unsewn cloth like modern day saree and was wrapped on the body. The kit and shirt were other dresses worn by men & womenalike. Men and women both were fond of ornaments. Their food included a largevariety of items depending on the inhabited areas. The main items included rice,barley, millet and wheat. A number of fruits, vegetables and non-vegetarian itemswere also used.The Harappan script is still a mystery for the archaeologists and linguists. It has notbeen deciphered yet.

Fortification of their settlements and weapons found indicate that they were oftenengaged in fights.Pottery, bead making and number of crafts were practised by Harrapans, This indicates the presence of artisans and urban labour force. The society seems to have been divided into classes. There are indications of presence of some kind of a political structure. Administrators, priests and traders alongwith large number of workmen seem to constitute the society in towns.The categorization or difference of size of seals most probably reflects official,commercial, economic, political or religious status of respective owners in the urbanizedsociety

Some large structures indicate the prevalence of some collective worship or ritual.A number of gods, goddesses and objects seem to have been worshipped. Theprominent were mother goddess, Siva and a number of trees and animals. Somecomposite mythical beasts also seem to have some place in religious practices.The most prevalent system for disposing the dead seems burial rather than cremation.A number of ornaments and other objects are also found in the burial pits. All thesegive us, if not a total but a nearer view of the Harappan society.The urban character of Mohenjodaro thus rests on several features and is incontestable.

On the basis of size, planned layout, provision of civic amenities such as drains, roadsand wells, differentiation not only between public and

residential structures but alsobetween different residential structures, the variety and quantity of the artefactualassemblage, the presence of luxury goods and exotic raw materials, and the evidencefor occupational differentiation all lead us to suggest that Mohenjodaro was a significanturban centre. Not every Harappan city was a mirror image of Mohenjodaro, as in fact,the large urban centres all show interesting differences. The distinctiveness ofMohenjodaro lies in the features mentioned above as well as its central geographicallocation within the entire Harappan domain.

4.7 KEY WORDS

Fertility Cult:A system of worship in which the reproductive aspects of nature andmankind are emphasised. The worship is expected to ensure the production ofabundant crops or children.

Fire Altars: Brick-lined pits found in Kalibangan. They contained ash and animalbones. In many societies fire is worshipped. In the Vedic society similar kinds of pitswere dug for lighting fire and worshipping it.

Royal Cemetery of Ur:A cemetery discovered in the Mesopotamian city of Urbelonging to the third millennium B.C. This cemetery contained the graves of manykings.

Script : System or style of writing.

Unicorn :A mythical animal having a body of a horse and one straight horn.

4.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1) Throw a light on the society of Harappan civilization.

2) Which of the Harappan religious structures indicate .the prevalence of some collective worship or rituals?

2) Write a note on the city ‘Mohenjodaro’.

4.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Wheat and barley as their staple food. The Harappans of Gujarat in places like Rangpur and Surkotdha preferred rice and millet.They got their supply of fat and oil from sesame seeds, mustard and possibly ghee. They might have used honey to sweeten their food. Seeds of jujube and dates bund in the Harappan sites indicate their preference for these fruits. It is likely that they also ate bananas, pomegranates, melons, lemons, figs and of course mangoes.

2)Unicorn seals are the only Harappanseal which is found from almost all the sites on the list where at least one seal isfound, not confined only to the major urban sites but also found from minor urbansites and small settlements.On the other hand, Mohenjodaro and Harappa are the only sites where almostall the other motifs (and variations thereof), as well as all the size variations, are seen. (See section 4.2.4)

Check Your progress 2

1) At Kalibangan in the citadel were found a series of raised brick platformscrowned with 'fire altars' i.e. a series of brick-lined pits containing ash and animalbones. This complex seems to haverepresented some kind of ritual centre where animal sacrifice, ritual ablution

andsome sort of fire rituals were performed. Many houses in the lower town alsocontained a room having 'fire altars'. Several other 'fire' altars are also reported. AtLothal too, fire altars have been found.

2)A study of the various kinds of objects found in excavations shows that differentregions of the Harappan civilization followed different kinds of religious practices.Fire worship was prevalent in Kalibangan and Lothal but unknown in Harappa andMohenjodaro. Ritual bathing evidenced at Mohenjodaro might have been absent inHarappa. The burial practices show wide variation ranging from extended inhumationto double burials and pot burials. Finds in Kalibangan also show that different kindsof burial practices were being followed in the same settlement.

UNIT-5 SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, ETHNICITY AND DECLINE OF HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

STRUCTURE

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will get to know about the developments in the field of technology during the Harappan Civilization; various theories

related with the ethnicity of Harappan people; the problems faced by scholars to understand the decline of HarappanCivilization; about the theories put forward for the decline of Harappan Civilization and; why over the years scholars have stopped looking for the causes of decline of Harappa and instead looking for the evidence of survival and continuitiesof the Harappan Civilization.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units we have discussed the various aspects of origin and growth of Harappan Civilization. However, the disappearance of the various aspects of its maturity i.e. writing, town planning, etc. in the subsequent phase of ancient India is rather mysterious. In this unit we will examine the various arguments put forward to solve this mystery. Now we will deal with how the transition from the primitive society to an agriculture-based civilisationled to the birth of science, describe how the growth of cities, trade between cities and the corresponding socioeconomic needs gave rise to various areas of scientific activity.

5.2 SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The great cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, now in Pakistan, were discovered in the1920s. They were the first evidence of a fairly advanced civilisation in the Indus Valley.Subsequent excavations at other sites such as Kalibangan, Ropar and Lothal have shown thatthis civilisation spread as far as the present Haryana to the east and as far as Gujarat to the south. The ancient cities in the Indus Valley show town planning of a truly amazing nature. Someof the city houses are multi-storeyed and palatial. They are built of well baked burnt bricksand supplied with such amenities as excellent bathrooms and lavatories. These obviously belonged to the rich. The town layout was in rectangular blocks of about 200 yards x 400yards with wide main streets and good minor lanes. The straight streets met at perfect right angles to each other.

There was a superb drainage system for carrying out rain water, and cesspools for clearing the sewage. There were enormous well constructed

granaries. The small tenement housesin rectangular blocks obviously accommodated workers or slaves. Public baths were an important feature of the Indus Valley cities. Many rooms and multi-storeyed buildings were found around an open courtyard, which contained a rectangular tank of about 23 ft x 30 ft and 8 ft deep. The bricks were well laid in the tank wall, with waterproof intermediate layer of pitch. A finely built drain allowed water to be emptied for cleaning the tank, while filling was done by drawing water from a nearby well. The high quality of construction and layout found in the Indus Valley implies that the peopleof these cities were good technologists. They had mastered the techniques of constructionusing a profound knowledge of space utilisation and geometry. Historians conjecture thatthe making of bricks with perfect geometrical precision, fitting them together in differentshapes and sizes, and maintaining straightness and angles, in roads as well as in bigbuildings, required considerable knowledge of geometry.

It is interesting to find detailed description of the geometrical theorems and axioms in a textcalled Sulvasutra which dates around 600-300 B.C. These sutras were used for makingintricate devotional fire altars in Vedic times. Fire altars have also been found in some citiesof Indus Valley Civilisation like Kalibangan. This leads the historians to conjecture thatSulva geometry is the product of the earlier age of Indus Valley Civilisation, transmittedthrough tradition to a later age.

We are all familiar with the famous Pythagoras theorem which says that "the square on the hypotenuse of a right angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides". Its discovery is generally attributed to the Greek thinker Pythagoras (582-500 B.C.). The Sulvasutra also contains an alternate version of this theorem which says that "the diagonal of a rectangle produces areas, which its length and breadth produce separately". Apart from this, Sulvasutra deals with construction of geometrical figures, combination and transformation of areas, measurements of areas and volumes, squaring the circles and vice versa, making of similar figures with different areas, and a variety of other related problems. The value of square root of 2 is given in Sulvasutra

All this leads us to surmise that the inhabitants of Indus Valley may have possessedconsiderable knowledge of geometry.Bronze tools, containers, seals, ornaments, toys etc. found in the excavations at Mohenjodaro.Harappa and the other sites indicate that the Indus Valley Civilisation had attained ahigh level of scientific and technical know-how. We also have evidence oftrade with Mesopotamia in the artefacts found in archaeological surveys. Richness ofslit deposited by the Indus on its banks made it possible to cultivate without deepploughing. Hence, the available evidence does not reveal bronze ploughs but only toolsto bury the seeds very near the surface of the soil.

A peculiar feature of the Indus Valley Civilisation was that bronze was used only for makingtools, such as sturdy knives, chisels and saws, but almost never for instruments of violence.The spears used were thin without a riband totally ineffective in combat. There were nobronze arrowheads either. The early Indus Valley culture was particularly non-violent.All these inferences about the Indus Valley Civilisation arise from the physical evidence,such as tools, artefacts like pottery and textiles, architecture and the total plan of the citiesincluding water works and sewage disposal, gathered from these sites. We could haveknown a lot more about those times, if only we were able to decipher the writings on theseals found at these sites. So far, we haven't been able to make out what the varioussymbols and writings carved on stone seals indicate. Possibly, in future new facts may emergewhich could shed more light on the Indus Valley culture.

To sum up, we have seen above how the changes in the methods of production led to the riseof villages and cities. The growth of cities created further demands which led to greatscientific and technical advances. In turn, these advances improved the methods ofproduction. Much of the equipment that evolved at that time has not changed appreciably inthe 5000 years that have gone by. Most of us still use the same kind of tables and chairs;live in rooms with walls and ceilings of stone, brick and plaster, eat from the same kind ofdishes and wear clothes made of the same kind of cloth such as cotton, wool or silk. Eventhe staple cereals that we eat were more or less known at that time. However, the gloriousera which gave us so many things, came to an end, by about 1500 B.C.

5.3 ETHNICITY

We have already seen earlier that nucleation of population embodies the physicalcharacter of a city. Implicit in this is the necessity of evoking relationships betweenpeople not related by kinship. The deciphering of kinship relations or ethnicity fromarchaeological contexts has proved to be difficult. Jim Shaffer and Lichtenstein attemptedto decipher ethnic groups in Early Harappan and Mature Harappan society. They adaptedRoland Barth's idea of an ethnic group that differentiated itself from others on the basisof certain features. Shaffer and Lichtenstein used material cultural traits todelineate such boundaries in the archaeological context, particularly through distinctiveceramic styles. This 'pots-as-people' approach has meant that for them the MatureHarappan symbolised the fusion of previously separate ethnic groups as of Bagor,Hakra and Kot Diji.

There may well have been different communities living within Harappan cities. However,the contention that, archaeologically, ethnic groups can be differentiated on the solebasis of ceramic types is highly dubious. A good example of the archaeological difficultieswith ethnicity is the Old Assyrian trade with Anatolia. Apart from the archives of inscribedterracotta tablets at Kanesh, there is no other archaeological evidence of the existenceof traders living at Kanesh; here, they appear to have lived in houses similar to localtypes and seem to have used local pottery. The above discussions have shown thatthere were social differences in Mature Harappan society. Lineage groupings wouldhave continued in an urban context but the nucleation of population would have neutralisedtheir earlier pre-eminence. As Shereen Ratnagar points out 'lineages may survive aslocalised communities, or functionally specialised groups, or as land-holding entities.'

In both Egypt and Mesopotamia community or kin labour was used for constructingthe large monumental buildings such as pyramids and temples or palaces respectively.Written records attest to a ration system, which was developed to support such labour.We have no idea whether a similar system prevailed in the Harappan cities, as we haveno such

commensurate written documentation. But are there other ways in which wecould look for such kin groups in Harappan society? Does the layout of Harappanhouses suggest the presence of such kin groups? Do the blocks of housing separatedfrom each other by lanes and streets, which are discernible in the plan of Mohenjodarohousing, suggest occupation by kin groups? Does a house such as House XXIII inBlock 5 of HR Area with its five staircases leading to an upper storey suggest fiverelated families living in close proximity?

Certain ideas remain contentious such as whether Harappan society was organised onthe lines of the later caste society. Caste divisions arise from particular circumstances ofbirth as well as practices of livelihood that carry across generations. Archaeology cantell us little about birth. But longevity of occupations can be tested through archaeology. Kenoyer has written that "potters would have been hereditary specialistsliving in the same location as their ancestors; pottery making would have been organisedas a cottage industry involving men and women potters, with children as assistants." Ifwe are dealing, in the Harappan period, with a situation of families and/or householdspracticing the same craft over several generations, as Kenoyer suggests, then we should be finding over time (and through several layers) evidence for the same craft. However,there is one concrete example that suggests otherwise.

This comes from the MoneerArea in the eastern part of the site of Mohenjodaro. In the excavations, steatite wastewas found within the deposits that filled up the original structures, thus representing themost ancient craft practiced in this area. This craft was then followed by a large stonewarebangles-producing compound, which took over a large part of this area after the earlierinhabitants abandoned it. In turn, this was abandoned and followed by large depositionsof stone waste resulting from several work areas in the vicinity, as well as some amountof shell waste. The pottery firing kilns represent the last craft practiced in this area asthey can still be seen on the surface. This finding of evidence forseveral crafts in the same area belies the notion of longevity of one craft in one locationand hence of crafters living over several generations within the same location.

It is often noted that homogeneous groups produce a strong and clear message that isspatially discernible, unlike in heterogeneous

communities where such messages are‘cancelled’ out due to their conflicting nature. Thus, in heterogeneous societies, weshould be expecting a range of stylistic influences. Thus, it is interesting that even thoughwe know there were considerable social differences in Harappan society, there is alsoa strong unifying thread running through it. This can be seen materially through severalcategories of artefacts such as a sturdy red pottery with distinctive black designs, steatiteseals with motifs and a possible script, chert weights of a uniform shape, particularshapes and designs of beads (such as etched carnelian, the long barrel-cylinder carnelianand the micro steatite ones), certain types of bronze tools, a uniform ratio for themanufacture of bricks and so on. It is the presence of many of these items that haveallowed for the identification of a site as Harappan. It is also these artefacts that havebeen seen as evidence for the unifying of a large region and as possible infrastructuralelements provided by an early state.

That brings us to the socio-political organisation of the Harappans. There are conflictinginterpretations of this. One theory, propounded by Walter Fairservis, is that the Harappanpolitical organisation was in the form of chiefdoms, rather than a state. This was modifiedby J.M. Kenoyer (1997) who drew a parallel with the early historic republics in theIndian subcontinent, as well as with the organisation of city-states in Mesopotamiacontemporary to the Harappan civilisation. He suggested that each major Harappancity (such as Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Dholavira, Ganweriwala and so forth) representedthe centre of separate Harappan city-states. Kenoyer suggested that thewalled mounds at Mohenjodaro and Harappa were inhabited by competing politicaland socio-economic classes. Hierarchy in Harappan society, to his mind, were evidencedthrough certain large buildings at both sites, and “ritual” objects, ornaments, weightsand seals that were perhaps used by certain sections of society.

The third theory is byShereen Ratnagar, who suggested that the Harappan region was perhaps undera single political entity, probably centred at Mohenjodaro. For this, she has put forwardas arguments: 1) the uniformity of certain typical artefacts all over the Harappan region,such as uniform brick size and shape, pottery, chert blades, steatite seals, chert weights,and copper/bronze tools; 2) the evidence of

planning in Harappan settlements; 3)sustained urbanism; and 4) stone statuary and monumental architecture on a large scaleat Mohenjodaro. At the same time, she points out that it was probably an inchoate statewhere tribal elements still lingered, making the state and the civilisation eventually unstable.

Check Your Progress 1

1)Highlight the growth of technology during Harappan times.

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2) What is Shaffer and Lichtenstein's "pots-as-people" approach? To what extent isit useful in identifying Harappans and other contemporary social groups?

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5.4 DOWNFALL OF HARAPPANS

Cities like Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan experienced gradual decline in urban planning and construction. Houses made of old dilapidated bricks and shoddy construction encroached upon the roads and streets of the towns. Flimsy partitions sub-divided the courtyards of the houses. The Cities were fast turning into slums. A detailed study of the architectures of Mohenjodaro shows that many entry points tothe 'Great Bath' were blocked. Sometimes later the 'Great Bath' and the 'Granary'fell into total disuse. At the same time the late levels (i.e. later habitations) atMohenjodaro showed a distinct reduction in the number of sculptures, figurines,beads, bangles and inlay works. Towards the end, the city of Mohenjodaro shrank toa small settlement of three hectares from the original eighty-five hectares.Before its abandonment Harappa seems to have witnessed the arrival of a group ofpeople about whom we know through their burial practices. They were using a pottery which

was different from those of the Harappans. Their culture is known as the'Cemetery H' culture. Processes of decline were in evidence also in places likeKalibangan and Chanhudaro. We find that buildings associated with power andideologies were decaying and goods related to displays of prestige and splendour wasbecoming increasingly scarce. Later on, cities like Harappa and Mohenjodaro wereabandoned altogether.

A study of the settlement pattern of the Harappan and Late Harappan sites in the Bahawalpur area also indicates a trend of decay. Along the banks of the Hakra River the number of settlements came down to 50 in the Late Harappan period (174 in the Mature Harappan period). What seems likely is that in the last two-three hundred years of their life, the settlements in the core region of the Harappan civilization were declining. The population seems to have either perished or moved away to other areas. Whereas the number of sites in the triangle of Harappa, Bahawalpur and Mohenjodaro declined, the number of settlements in the outlying areas of Gujarat, East Punjab, Haryana and upper Doab increased. This indicates a phenomenal increase in the number of people in these areas. This sudden increase in the population of those regions can be explained by the emigration of people from the core regions of Harappa.

In the outlying regions of the Harappan civilization, i.e. the areas of Gujarat,Rajasthan and Punjab, people continue to live. But life had changed for them. Someof the important features associated with the Harappan civilization-writing, uniformweights, Harappan pottery and architectural style had disappeared.The abandonment of the cities of the Indus is roughly dated to about 1800 B.C. Thisdate is supported by the fact that the Mesopotamian literature stops referring to Meluha by the end of 1900 B.C. However, even now the chronology of the end of Harrappan cities remains tentative. We do not as yet know whether the majorsettlements were abandoned at one and the same or at different periods. What iscertain, however, is the fact the abandonment of the major cities and thede-urbanisation of other settlements indicates the decline of the Harappancivilization.

5.5 NOTIONS OF SUDDEN DECLINE

Scholars have given different answers to the question as to why did the civilizationend? Some scholars, believing in a dramatic collapse of the civilization, have lookedfor evidences of a calamity of catastrophic proportions, which wiped out the urbancommunities. Some of the more plausible theories for the decline of the Harappancivilization are:

a) that it was destroyed by massive floods

b) that the decline took place because of the shift in the course of rivers and the gradual drying up of the Ghaggar-Hakra river system

c) that barbarian invaders destroyed the cities

d) that the growing demands of the centres disturbed the ecology of the region andthe area could not support them anymore.

Let us discuss these explanations on their merits.

5.5.1 Inundations and Tremors

Among the causes spelled out for the decline of the Harappan civilization scholarshave used the evidence of .flooding in Mohenjodaro. It appears from the records ofthe principal excavators that in Mohenjodaro various periods of occupation wereseparated by evidences of deep flooding. This can be inferred from the fact that thehouses and streets of Mohenjodaro were covered with silty clay and collapsed buildingmaterial many times in its long history. This silty clay seems to have been left by theflood waters which had submerged the streets and houses. The people ofMohenjodaro again built up houses and streets on top of the debris of the previousbuildings, after the floods had receded. This kind of catastrophic flooding andrebuilding on top of the debris seems to have happened at least thrice.

Borings in the occupation deposit indicated successive phases of occupation levels spanning a vertical distances of 70 feet which is equivalent to the height of a seven storied building. Many occupation deposits were divided by silt deposits. Thick silt deposits have been noticed at points as high as 80 feet above the present day ground level. Thus, many scholars believe that the evidences are indicative of abnormal floods in Mohenjodaro. These floods led to the temporary

desertion and reoccupation of the city throughout its history. That these floods were catastrophic is shown by silt deposits 80 feet above the present ground level, meaning that the flood waters rose to such height in this area. The Harappans at Mohenjodaro tired themselves out, trying to out top the recurring floods. A stage came when the impoverished Harappans could not take it anymore and they simply abandoned the settlement.

Raikes's Ideology

The theory of catastrophic flooding has been carried further by a famous hydrologistR.L. Raikes. He argued that such flooding which could drown buildings 30 feet above the ground level of the settlement and could not be the result of normal flooding in the river Indus. He believes that the Harappan civilization declined because of catastrophic flooding causing prolonged submergence of the cities located on the bank of the river Indus. He has shown that geomorphologically speaking, the Indus area isa disturbed seismic zone. Earthquakes might have raised the level of the flood plainsof the lower Indus River. This uplift of the plain along an axis, roughly at right anglesto that of the river Indus, blocked the passage of the river water to the sea. This ledto the ponding of the waters of the river Indus. A lake was formed in the area wherecities of the Indus had once flourished. And thus, the rising water levels of the riverswallowed cities like Mohenjodaro.

It has been pointed out that sites like Sutkagedor and Sutkakoh on the Makran Coastand Balakot near Karachi were seaports of the Harappans. However, at present, they are located far away from the sea-coast. This has happened because of the upliftment of the land on the sea coast possibly caused by violent tectonic uplifts. Some scholarsbelieve that these tectonic uplifts took place somewhere in the second millenniumB.C. These violent earthquakes, damming rivers and burning the towns destroyedthe Harappan civilization. This led to the disruption of the commercial life based onriver and coastal communication.

Denunciation

This grand theory of the catastrophic fall of the Harappan civilization is not accepted by many scholars. H.T. Lambrick points out that the idea that a river would be dammed in such a manner even by tectonic uplifts is incorrect due to two reasons:

i) Even if an earthquake artificially raised a bund downstream, the large volumeof water from the Indus would easily breach it. In recent times in Sind, a swellof ground raised by the earthquake of 1819 was breached by the first flood itfaced from one of the smaller streams of the Indus called Nara.

ii) Silt deposition would parallel the rising surface of water in the hypothetical lake.It wouldtake place along the bottom of the former course of the river. Thus, thesilt of Mohenjodaro might not be the deposition of a flood. Another criticism ofthis theory is that it fails to explain the decline of the settlements outside the Indussystem.

5.5.2 Indus River Shifting

Lambrick has offered his own explanation for the decline. He believes that changesin 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, theriver Indus shifted about thirty miles away from Mohenjodaro. The people of the cityand the surrounding food production villages deserted the area because they werestarved of water. This kind of thing happened many times in the history ofMohenjodaro. The silt observed in the city is actually the product of wind actionblowing in lots of sand and silt. This, combined with disintegrating mud, mud brickand baked brick structures, produced what has been mistaken for silt produced byfloods.

This theory too cannot explain the decline of the Harappan civilization in totality. Atbest, it can explain the desertion of Mohenjodaro. And if the people of Mohenjodaro were familiar with these kinds of shifts in the river course why could not theythemselves shift to some new settlement and establish another city like Mohenjodaro? Obviously, it appears that some other factors were at work.

5.5.3 Dryness

D.P. Agarwal and Sood have introduced a new theory for the decline of the Harappancivilization. They believe that the Harappan civilization declined because of the increasing aridity in this area and the drying up of the river Ghaggar-Hakra. Basingtheir conclusions on the studies

conducted in the U.S.A., Australia and Rajasthanthey have shown that there was an increase in the arid conditions by the middle ofthe second millennium B.C. In semi-arid regions like those of the Harappa, even aminor reduction in moisture and water availability could spell disaster. It would affectagricultural production which in turn would put the city economies under stress.

They have discussed the problem of the unstable river systems in western Rajasthan.As stated earlier the Ghaggar-Hakra area represented one of the core regions of the Harappan civilization. The Ghaggar was a mighty stream flowing through Punjab,Rajasthan and the inn of Kutch before debouching into the sea.Rivers Sutlej and Yamuna used to be the tributaries of this river. Because of sometectonic disturbances, the Sutlej stream was captured by the Indus River and theYamuna shifted east to join the Ganges. This kind of change in the river regime, whichleft the Ghaggar waterless, would have catastrophic implication for the towns locatedin this area. Apparently, the ecological disturbances brought by the increased aridityand the shift in the drainage pattern led to the decline of the Harappan civilization.Interesting though this theory too has some problems. The theory about the onsetof arid conditions has not been fully worked out and one needs more information.Similarly, the drying up of the Ghaggar has not been dated properly as yet.

5.5.4 Aryan Invasions

Wheeler believed that the Harappan civilization was destroyed by the Aryaninvaders. It has been pointed out that in the late phases of occupation at Mohenjodarothere are evidences of a massacre. Human skeletons have been found lying on thestreets. The Rig Veda, time and again refers to the fortresses of the Dasas and Dasyus. The Vedic God Indra is called 'Purandara' meaning 'the destroyer of forts'. The geographical area of the habitation of the Rig Vedic Aryans included Punjab andthe Ghaggar-Hakra region. Since there are no remains of other cultural groups havingforts in this area in this historical phase, Wheeler believed that it was the Harappancities that were being described in the Rig Veda. In fact, the Rig Veda mentions aplace called Hariyupiya. This place was located on the bank of the river Ravi.

TheAryans fought a battle here. The name of the place sounds very similar to that ofHarappa.

These evidences led Wheeler to conclude that it was the Aryan invaderswho destroyed the cities of Harappa.Attractive though this theory is, it is not acceptable to a host of scholars. They pointout that the provisional date for the decline of the Harappan civilization is believedto be 1800 B.C. The Aryans on the other hand are believed to have arrived here notearlier than a period around 1500 B.C. At the present state of knowledge it is difficultto revise either of the dates and so, the Harappans and the Aryans are unlikely tohave met each other. Also, neither Mohenjodaro nor Harappa yields any otherevidence of a military assault. The evidence of the human bodies lying exposed inthe streets is important. This, however, could have been caused by raids of banditsfrom the surrounding hilly tracts. In any case, the big cities were already in a stateof decay. This cannot be explained by the invasion hypothesis.

5.6 NOTION OF GRADUAL DOWNFALL

Scholars like Fairservis tried to explain the decay of the Harappan civilization in termsof the problems of ecology. He computed the population of the Harappan cities andworked out the food requirements of the townsmen. He also computed that thevillagers 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 humanand cattle population in these areas was fast depleting the scanty forests, food andfuel resources. The combined needs of the Harappan townsmen, peasants andpastoralists exceeded the limited production capacities of these areas. Thus, a growingpopulation of men and animals confronted by scanty resources wore out thelandscape.With the forests and grass cover gradually disappearing, there were more floods anddroughts. This

depletion of the subsistence base caused strain on the entire economyof the civilization. There seems to have been a gradual movement away to areas whichoffered better subsistence possibilities. That is why the Harappan communities movedtowards Gujarat and the eastern areas, away from the Indus.

Of all the theories discussed sofar Fairservis's theory seems to be the most plausibleone. Probably the gradual deterioration in the town planning and the living standardswas a reflection of the depleting subsistence base of the Harappans. This process ofdecline was completed by the raids and attacks of the surrounding communities.

However, the theory of environmental disaster also has some problems.The enduring fertility of soils of the Indian sub-continent over the subsequentmillennia disproves the hypothesis of soil exhaustion in this area.Also, the computation of the needs of the Harappan population is based on scantyinformation and a lot more information would be needed to make a calculation ofthe subsistence needs of the Harappans.

Thus, any theory based on such scanty information will remain a hypothesis, unlesssubstantiated by more evidence in its favour.The emergence of the Harappan civilization involved a delicate balance of relationsbetween cities, towns and villages, rulers, peasants and nomads. It also means a fragilebut important relationship with the communities of the neighbouring areas who werein possession of minerals crucial for trade. Similarly, it meant maintenance of contactwith the contemporary civilizations and cultures. Apart from this, we have to takeinto account the ecological factor of relationship with nature. Any breakdown in these chains of relationships could lead to the decline of the cities.

5.7 THE CONTINUITY

Scholars working on the Indus civilization no longer look for the causes of its decline.This is because of the fact that the scholars who studied the Harappan civilizationright upto the 1960s believed that the collapse of the civilization was sudden. Thesescholars concentrated their work on the studies of cities, town planning and large structures. Such problems as the relationship of the Harappan cities with thecontemporary villages

and the continuity of various elements of the Harappancivilization were ignored. Thus, the debate about the causes of the decline of theHarappan civilization became more and more abstract. It was towards the end of thesixties that scholars like Malik and Possehl focused their attention on various aspectsof continuity of the Harappan tradition. These studies have yielded more excitingresult than the debate about the causes for the decline of the Harappan civilization.It is true that Harappa and Mohenjodaro were abandoned and the urban phase cameto an end. However, if we take a perspective covering the entire geographical spreadof the Harappan civilization, quite a few things seem to continue in the old style.

Archaeologically speaking some change is observable- some of the settlementswere abandoned but most other settlements remained in occupation. However, thetradition of uniform writing, seals, weights and pottery was lost. The objects showingintensive interaction among the far flung settlements were lost. In other words theactivities associated with city-centred economies were given up. Thus the changes-thatcame about simply indicated the end of the urban phase. Small villages and townscontinued to exist and the archaeological finds from these sites show many elementsof the Harappan tradition.

In most of the sites in Sind it is difficult to observe any change in the pottery tradition.In fact in the areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana, vibrant agriculturalcommunities emerged in large numbers in the succeeding period. Thus, from aregional perspective, the period succeeding the urban phase can be treated as one offlourishing agricultural villages which outnumber those of the urban phase. That iswhy scholars now discuss issues like cultural change, regional migrations andmodification in the system of settlement and subsistence. After all, no one talks aboutthe end of the ancient Indian Civilization in early medieval India, when most of thecities of theGangetic Valley declined. Let us see what kinds of archaeological remainssurvive after end of the urban phase.

5.7.1 Sind

In Sind, i.e. at the Harappan towns Amri and Chanhudaro, Jhukar, etc., people continued to live as of old. They were still staying in brick houses but they gave up the planned lay out. They were using a slightly different pottery called the Jhukar pottery. It was a buff-ware with red slip with paintings in black. Recent studies suggested that this pottery evolved from the 'Mature Harappan' pottery and as suchneed not be considered something new. In Jhukar certain distinctive metal objects have been found which might be indicative of trade links with Iran, or what is more likely the influx of a migrant population having Iranian or Central Asian influences.A shaft-hole, axes and copper pins with looped or decorated heads have parallels inIranian settlements. Circular stamp seals of stone or faience and a bronze cosmetic jarare also indicative of contacts with the cultures to the west of the Indus.

5.7.2 Indo-Iranian Borderlands

The areas to the west of the Indus-Baluchistan and the Indo-Iranian border landsalso show the presence of people using copper stamp seals and copper shaft hole axes.Sites like Shahi Tump, Mundigak, Naushahro and Pirak indicate movements ofpeople and contacts with Iran. Unfortunately the dating of these settlements is stillnot clearly worked out.

5.7.3 Western India

In the areas of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan several settlements have beenreported where people continued to live in the same old way after the decline of thecities. However, the Harappan influences on the pottery tradition gradually declined and the local pottery traditions which were always present along with the Harappan pottery gradually replaced the Harappan pottery altogether, Thus, the decline of urbanism was reflected in the reassertion of regional traditions in these areas. The sites of Mitathal, Bara, Ropar and Siswal are well known. Brick houses have been reported from Bara and Siswal. In many of these sites Ochre Coloured Pottery hasbeen found. This pottery underlay many early historical sites in ancient India. As such these village cultures of Punjab,

Haryana and Rajasthan are linked with the Harappan tradition of the past and anticipate the early Indian tradition. In all about late in the upper Gangetic valley also many agricultural settlements wereestablished. They show remote late Harappan influences. This area became theheartland of the subsequent phase of Indian civilization.

5.7.4 Gujarat

In Kutch and Saurashtra the end of the urban phase is clearly documented in placeslike Rangapur and Somnath. Even during the urban phase they had a local ceramictradition co-existing with the Harappan pottery. This tradition continued in later phases. Some sites like Rangapur seem to have become more prosperous in the succeeding period. They were using potteries called the Lustrous Red Ware. However, the people stopped using the Indus weights, script and tools imported from distant areas. Now they were using stone tools made of locally available stones. In the 'Mature Harappan' phase there were 13 settlements in Gujarat. In the subsequent 'Late Harappan' phase dated to about 2100 B.C, the number of settlement went upto 200 or more. This increase in the number of settlements indicating anincrease in population cannot be explained by biological factors. In pre-modernsocieties the population could not increase so much in a space of a few generations that 13 settlements would multiply into more than 200 or more settlements. Thus,there is a distinct possibility that people inhabiting these new settlements came from other areas. Late Harappan settlements have also been reported from Maharashtrawhere their culture merged into those of the emerging agricultural communities.

5.8 DISSEMINATION OF HARAPPAN TRADITION

The end of the cities did not mean the end of the Harappan tradition. It is evidentfrom our discussion that archaeologically speaking the Harappancommunities mergedinto the surrounding agricultural groups. However, the centralised decision-makingin the polity and economy had ended. The Harappan communities which continuedafter the urban phase

would have definitely retained their older traditions. It is likelythat the Harappan peasants would retain their forms of worship. The priests of theHarappan urban centres were part of a highly organised literate tradition. Even ifliteracy ended they are likely to have preserved their religious practices. Thedominant community of the subsequent early historic period called itself The Aryans. These people do not seem to have possessed a literate tradition. Possibly, the priestly groups of the Harappans merged into the ruling groups of the Aryans. As such the Harappan religious tradition would be transmitted to the historical India. The folk communities also retained the traditions of craftsmanship as is evident from the pottery and tool making traditions. Once again when literate urban culture emerged in early India it absorbed elements of the folk cultures. This would providea more effective channel of transmission of the Harappan tradition.

5.9 LEGACY OF HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

The cults of Pashupati Siva and of the mother goddess and phallic worship seem tohave come down to us from the Harappan tradition. Similarly, the cult of sacredplaces, rivers or trees and sacred animals show a distinct continuity in the subsequenthistoric civilization of India. The evidence of fire worship and sacrifice in Kalibanganand Lothal is significant. These were the most significant elements of the Vedicreligion. Could the Aryans have learnt these practices from the Harappan priesthood?

This hypothesis would require more evidence but it is not unlikely.Many aspects of domestic life like the house plans, disposition of water supply andattention to bathing survived in the settlements of the subsequent periods. The traditional weight and currency system of India, based on a ratio of sixteen as theunit, was already present in the Harrapan civilization. It might well have been derivedfrom them. The techniques of making potter's wheel in modern India is similar tothose used by the Harappans. Bullock carts and boats used in modern India were already present in the Harappan cities. As such we can say that many elements

ofthe Harappan civilization survived in the subsequent historical tradition.

Check Your Progress 2

1)State the reasons for the decline of Harappan Civilization.

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2)What is Raikes's Hypothesis?

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3) How the decline of Harappan civilization is marked by continuity.

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5.10 LET US SUM UP

The origins of science can be found in the attempts of the early human beings to meettheir basic needs of food, shelter and clothing, which led to the development of primitivetools and techniques.Language arose basically from their need to communicate better. Several rituals andmagic rites also came into being in the primitive society.Increasing population and certain climatic changes forced the primitive human beings tolook for other methods of production.

Agriculture enabled them to control and manipulate nature to satisfy their needs. Citiescame into being. The needs of growing cities led to a spurt in scientific and technicalactivity adding to their fund of knowledge. The new techniques, in turn, led to bettermeans of production.The unequal distribution of the produce resulted in the rise of a dominant group of priests-kings—'the thinkers' who isolated themselves from farmers and urban craftsmen, 'thedoers'. In the attempt of the priest-kings to

consolidate their power, the gulf between thetwo increased, leading to stagnation in society and in science. Barbarian invasionsfurther weakened the city states.

For archaeology, one of the most elusive aspects to deal with is society and ethnicity. This is becauseit can be sometimes difficult to figure out what certain kinds of material culture mayhave meant in archaeological terms, without explanations that can come from writtenmaterial of the time. This is one of the reasons that most textbooks on the Harappancivilisation rarely emphasises social aspects. But as we have seen in this Unit, it is possibleto study certain pieces of information and that even if we may end up with multiple waysof interpreting them it is still a useful exercise.

We have seen that scholars have offered various reasons of the sudden decline ofHarappa. But all these theories had to be given up because of lack of adequateevidence. Gradually scholars have given up looking for causes of decline of Harappa.Now the focus is on understanding the late phases of Harappa. This is looked into toexpose the continuities of Harappa which might have survived in the flourishingagricultural communities of the time. And no doubt there have been certaincharacteristics of Harappa which transcended down to the historic phase.

5.11 KEY WORDS

Ecology: Study of plants or animals or peoples and institutions in relationship to theenvironment.

Tectonic Uplift: Relating to the process which elevates large areas of earth's surface.

Aryans: A group of people who spoke the Indo-European languages like Sanskrit, Latin,Greek etc.

Dasa and Dasyu : Peoples mentioned in the Rig Veda. The Aryans were in conflictwith their chiefs.

Ochre Coloured Pottery:A pottery found in the upper Gangetic plains. It has beenfound at the levels that underlie early Indian historical pottery.

Late Levels: An excavated archaeological site is divided into layers or settlementlevels according to their ages. Accordingly the late or the youngest settlement levelwill be somewhere near the top of the site and the oldest will be at the bottom most

Catastrophic: Disastrous.

Occupation deposits: At each level of the excavated site there will be evidence inform of pottery etc. to show that the site was occupied. These deposits are calledoccupational deposits.

Silt: Material deposit from a flowing river on the banks.

Arid: Dry.

5.12 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1) 'No theory of sudden decline seems to suffice the cause for the decline of Harappan civilization'. Elucidate.

2) What is the legacy of Harappan civilization?

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5.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) The ancient cities in the Indus Valley show town planning of a truly amazing nature. Some of the city houses are multi-storeyed and palatial. They are built of well baked burnt bricks. The town layout was in rectangular blocks of about 200 yards x 400yards with wide main streets and good minor lanes. The straight streets met at perfect right angles to each other. There was a superb drainage system for carrying out rain water, and cesspools for clearing the sewage. There were enormous granaries and baths.

2)Shaffer and Lichtenstein used material cultural traits todelineate such boundaries in the archaeological context, particularly through distinctiveceramic styles. This 'pots-as-people' approach has meant that for them the MatureHarappan symbolised the fusion of previously separate ethnic groups as of Bagor,Hakra and Kot Diji.

Check Your Progress 2

1) a) that it was destroyed by massive floods, b) that the decline took place because of the shift in the course of rivers and the gradual drying up of the Ghgggar-Hakra river system, c) that barbarian invaders destroyed the cities, d) that the growing demands of the centres disturbed the ecology of the region and the area could not support them anymore.

2)He has shown that geomorphologically speaking, the Indus area isa disturbed seismic zone. Earthquakes might have raised the level of the flood plainsof the lower Indus River. This uplift of the plain along an axis, roughly at right anglesto that of the river Indus, blocked the passage of the river water to the sea. This ledto the ponding of the waters of the river Indus. A lake was formed in the area wherecities of the Indus had once flourished. And thus, the rising water levels of the riverswallowed cities like Mohenjodaro.

3) Thus the changes-thatcame about simply indicated the end of the urban phase of the civilization. Small villages and townscontinued to exist and the archaeological finds from these sites show many elementsof the Harappan tradition.In most of the sites in Sind it is difficult to observe any change in the pottery tradition.In fact in the areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana, vibrant agriculturalcommunities emerged in large numbers in the succeeding period.

UNIT-6 THE EARLY VEDIC SOCIETY

STRUCTURE

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to learn about the various sources through which we can attempt to know about the Early Vedic period, examine the theory of a large scale migration by the Indo-Aryan through the sources, know about the nature of economy, society, polity and religion of the Early Vedic people and grasp the process of reconstruction through which we have arrived at a conceptionof the Vedic society.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Previously, you have seen that in different regions of India communities of different stages of cultural development were present during 2000-

1000 B.C. Their cultures were essentially agro-pastoral and our understanding of these cultures is based entirely on archaeological remains because with the exception of Harappa culture none of these have left behind any written records. In this Unit, however, we shall be focusing on the evidence provided by a voluminous body of religious textswhich are considered be the earliest literary records of India. We shall also try to supplement this evidence with, wherever relevant, archaeological evidence.

The Rig Vedais considered to be earliest collection of hymns available, and so, we shall start by examining the Rig Vedafor an understanding of the Early Vedic period and then go on to other Vedas and allied texts which are placed later. This exercise is necessary for two reasons. First, the Vedas are thought to have been composed by the Aryans and it was long believed that the Aryans played a major role in civilizing the Indian subcontinent. The contents of the Rig Veda, if they are analysed carefully, do not give the impression of a very advanced material culture. On the other hand, many of the material traits, which are characteristic of Indian civilization, are already present in the non-Vedic archaeological cultures in different parts of India. Second, when the contents of the Rig Vedaare compared with the contents of Later Vedas and allied texts, it becomes clear that significant changes took place in the Vedic society itself. This means that there was no fixedcultural pattern which can be called Vedic culture or Aryanculture.

The core geographical area to which the evidence of the Rig Vedawould relate was Sapta-Sindhuor the land of seven rivers. This would correspond to the whole of Punjab and its neighbouring region Haryana, but Rig Vedicgeography also included the Gomal plains, southern Afghanistan and southern Jammu and Kashmir and Indo-Aryan migration from West Asia into the Indian subcontinent. These migrants who are regarded as the authors of the 'Vedas' are called the Vedic people.

According to this historical interpretation the Aryans came to India in several stages or waves. The Aryans are considered to represent a linguistic group speaking Indo-European languages. They are distinguished by traditional historians and archaeologists from the non-Aryan Harappans of the preceding period. However, in making certain

observations on Early Vedic society it may be fruitful to see if literary texts and archaeological evidence can supplement each other. If both types of sources are of the same region and of the same period, then they together can give us more detailed ideas on economic, social, political and religious life.

As you can see, the span of time related to Vedic literature is vast. Archaeologically,it includes the time frame covered by post-Harappan cultures, including those withGrey Ware, the Painted Grey Ware culture sites of the Ganga-Yamuna doab, and theNorthern Black Polished Ware associated with the early urban centres in the Gangavalley and elsewhere in the sub-continent. The archaeological evidence is extremelyrich and diverse; however, most of it comes from explorations rather than excavations,and even where there have been excavations, these are, with a few exceptions, smallvertical trenches designed to co-relate chronologies rather than horizontal excavationsthat allow us to trace out the contours of the settlement. So while broad co-relationsbetween textual and archaeological evidence have been attempted, detailed, meaningfulcomparisons are often difficult, given the specific character of the texts, and thenature of the archaeological record as available at present.With these limitations in mind, we will explore these two themes in this unit:-

- Varna;
- Kinship structures

6.2 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

We have two types of sources to study the Early Vedic Society--Literary and Archaeological Sources. Let us first examine the literary sources for this period.

6.2.1 Literary

Among the literary sources we may first refer to the four Vedas: Rig Veda,Samveda Yajurveda, and Atharva Veda. Out of these the Rig Veda is the earliest text. The word 'Veda' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Vid' which means 'to know'.The "Vedas" are essentially a compilation of

prayers and hymns, offered by different familiesof poets and sagas to various Gods. These four Vedas are also 'Samhitas', in the sense that they represent the oral tradition of the time. Since the hymns were meant to be recited, learnt and transmitted orally, they were not written when they were first composed. Due to this reason none of the Samhitas can be dated with absolute certainty. Infact, each Samhita represents a collection through a period over a few centuries. Relative dating in terms of the context of these four Samhitas has led scholars to believe that the period represented in the Rig Veda can be placed between,1500 B.C to 1000 B.C.

The Rig Veda Samhita comprises 10 books or "Mandalas" of which booK II to VII are considered to be the earliest and belong specifically to the Early Vedic phase. Books I, VIII, IX and X are considered to be later additions to the Samhita. Scholars found similarities in the language used in the Rig Veda and the Avesta, the oldest Iranian texts, older to the Rig Veda. Based on these linguistic similarities and taking into account the chronological precedence of the Avesta over the Rig Veda, these scholars suggested that:

i) The people represented in both these books belonged to a common linguistic group, and they migrated from West Asia and Iran to the Indian subcontinent. These people were called the 'Aryans'.

ii) The Aryans had a common original home, from where different groups migrated to Europe and the East.

However, the debate regarding the original home of the Aryans is no longer valid, since the concept of a common racial identity for the Aryans has now been proved false. But a common linguistic identity is still believed by the historians and on this basis some of them still insist upon the theory of the Aryan migration.

6.2.2 Archaeology

Excavations conducted in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Northern Rajasthan, along the Indus and Ghaggar rivers over the last 40 years, have unearthed many post-Harappan Chalcolithic settlements from these regions. These have been dated from 1700 B.C. to 600 B.C. You have read about these in previous Units. You have seen that these Chalcolithic cultures are also

called late Harappan, OCP (Ochre Coloured Pottery), BRW (Black & Red Ware) and PGW (Painted Grey Ware) cultures.

However, we must remember that pottery types do not reflect the entire culture of the people. Different pottery types do not necessarily mean that people who used these pots also differed. Pottery analysis only helps in defining a specific trait of the cultural assemblage, nothing more. Some scholars have made attempts to examine whether the evidence provided by some of these cultures of north-western and northern India can be compared with what we know from a study of the Vedic texts.

6.3 ARYAN INVASION—A MYTH

Was the Aryan invasion a myth or a reality? Let us see to what extent archaeological evidence help us in answering this question.

Archaeologists have attempted to relate the various post-Harappan cultures with the Aryans. The Painted Grey Ware Pottery which has been dated between 900 B.C. to approximately 500 B.C. has been repeatedly connected with Aryan craftsmanship. Their argument is based on inferences which historians make from their analysis of the literary texts. Hence, archaeologists, following linguistic similarities found between the Rig Vedaand the Avesta, tried to find similarities in pottery forms, paintings on ceramics and forms of copper objects etc. between post-Harappan and the West Asian/Iranian Chalcolithic assemblages. Such similarities were magnified to support the view that the Aryans were a group of people who migrated from West Asia to the Indian subcontinent. Thus literary and archaeological sources were made to support one another in order to validate the notion of migration.

Linguistic similarities between the RigVeda and the Avesta are not disputed. But such similarities do not really suggest large scale migration of people into the Indian subcontinent. Secondly, the similarities which have been found between Chalcolithic artefacts of India and those of Western Asia are only occasional. They also do not suggest large-scalemigration of people. The concept of an "Aryan", as stated before, cannot be equated with any particular type of pottery. It also does not

have any ethnic or racial significance. The 'Aryan' is, therefore, at best a vague concept, related to linguistic similarities between people.

In this context you should take into account the following points suggested by archaeological excavations at various sites:

i) Earlier scholars believed that the Indo-Aryans caused the downfall of the Harappan civilization by destroying the Harappan towns and cities. They quoted Rig Vedic hymns which invoke Indra to destroy the dwellers of the forts. But archaeological evidence has shown that the decline of the Harappan civilization was not caused by any large scale destruction brought about by an alien invading group.

ii) Attempts to identify the makers of Painted Grey Ware with the Aryans also do not receive strong support from archaeological evidence. If the PGW cultures related to the Aryans, then keeping the theory of invasion in mind, we should have found this pottery type in the areas of Bahawalpur and Punjab i.e. along the route taken by the so-called Aryan migrants. However, we find these pottery types confined to a particular geographical region comprising Haryana, Upper Ganga basin and eastern Rajasthan.

iii) It was earlier thought that there exists a time gap and hence, a cultural discontinuity between the late Harappan and the post-Harappan Chalcolithic period.

However, recent excavations at Bhagwanpura, Dadheri (Haryana), and Manda (Jammu) have shown that the Late Harappan and Painted Grey Wares could be found together without any breaks. Hence "invasion" cannot be proved on the basis of the excavated sites. What disappeared after 1750 B.C. were the town and cities of the Harappan civilization and such artefacts as the seals, weights, measures etc. i.e. articles connected with trade and urbanism. The rural structure of the earlier period continued into the second and the first millennium B.C. The variation found in the archaeological remains of the post-Harappan period in pottery, metal implements and other objects may also represent "regional" variations in Indian Chalcolithic cultures.

Archaeological evidence relating to the period between second millennium B.C. and first millennium B.C. has thus helped us modify existing views regarding the Vedic 'Aryans' in several ways. First, there is no substantial proof in archaeology that there was large-scale

migration of people from central or western Asia into the Indian subcontinent around 1500 B.C. Second, archaeologically there is no proof that the Aryans destroyed the Harappan civilization and laid the foundation of a new Indian civilization. In fact, although the Rig Veda repeatedly refers to hostilities and wars between different groups, the so called clashes between Aryan and non-Aryan communities and cultures are not documented in archaeology.

However, since the Rig Veda is the earliest collection of religious hymns available to us, its importance as a document of history is immense. The hymns provide such insights into various aspects of an early society as would not be available in archaeological evidence. From them we get insights regarding the nature of economy, social organisation, kingship and political organisation, religions and cosmological beliefs and so on. Much of this information is relevant also for understanding the nature of Indian society at later stages.

Check Your Progress 1

1)What are the four Vedas? Which Veda belongs specifically to the Early Vedic period?

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2) Is the theory of the Aryan invasion acceptable in the light of the archaeological excavations?

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6.4 FINANCIAL SYSTEM

The Early Vedic society was pastoral, cattle rearing being the dominant occupational activity. A pastoral society relies more on its animal wealth than agricultural produce. Pastoralism is a subsistence strategy adopted by people who live in areas where large scale agriculture is not feasible

due to some environmental and to a certain extent, cultural constraints. Hymns of the Rig Veda yield extensive evidence of the importance of cattle in the Early Vedic society. Many linguistic expressions in the Rig Veda are associated with the cow (gau). Cattle were the chief measure of wealth and a wealthy man who owned many cattle was called 'gomat'. The terms used for conflicts and battles in this period were gavishti, gavesana, gavyat, etc. The former literally means 'to search for cows'. The terms themselves suggest that possession of cattle was the bone of contention between groups and led to occasional inter-tribal fights and conflicts. The Panis, who were the enemies of the Vedic people, are stated in the Rig Veda to have hidden their wealth, mostly cows, in the mountains and forests. The Vedic God Indra was invoked to release these cattle. This reference suggests that cattle raids were common. The raja or the chief is called the 'gopati' or one who protects cows. In the Rig Veda, Godhuli is used as a term for a measure of time. Distance is called gavyuti. A daughter is called duhitr or one who milks the cows. Kinship units are labelled as gotra.

All these terms are derived from gau and suggest that social religions and all important areas of Rig Vedic life centred round the rearing of cows. Literary references to pasture lands, cow pen, dairy products and domesticated animals are also found in most of the hymns and prayers. Compared to the very substantial linguistic evidence for cattle rearing in the Rig Veda, agricultural activities find very few references. Most of the references to agriculture are of a later date. Apart from 'Yava' or barley, no other grains are mentioned.

The Early Vedic people did not use iron technology. Copper, with which they were familiar, did not have as much value in agricultural operations as iron implements. Stone tools (like axes) were used and these are mentioned in the Rig Veda. Fire was used to burn down the forest cover and shifting agriculture was practised. Further, the region under discussion receives low rainfall and all the rivers mentioned in the Rig Veda i.e. the Sutlej, Indus, Ghaggar, Ravi etc. are known to change their courses frequently. Without the facilities of large scale irrigation which were not developed in this period, the alluvial lands near the rivers could not be cultivated on a permanent basis. Thus the hoes, sickles and axes

mentioned in the texts, were probably used for slashing purposes or shifting cultivation.

The evidence of pastoralism as well as shifting cultivation suggests that the people were either nomadic or semi-nomadic. They moved out of their villages with their herds for a certain period in order to feed their cattle. The literary and the archaeological sources do show that the people did not lead a fully sedentary life. The mobile character of the population is seen in the term 'vis' which also implied a settlement. The suffixes Punar (vis), Upa (vis) and Pra (vis) were constantly used, and the settlements were qualified by them to mean settling near (asettlement), re-entering (a settlement) or coming back (to the settlement).

Gift exchange and redistribution had an important economic role in the society. Tribal conflicts led to the payment of tributes and prestations, i.e. bali, to the victorious chiefs by the defeated or the subordinate groups. The rest of the clansmen of the victorious tribe had a share in the spoils and booty won in the war. The chief also fed and gave gifts to his clansmen during ceremonial occasions. This was done by him to acquire prestige. Evidence of trade and commerce in Early Vedic society is meagre. There was no concept of private property based on land ownership.

6.5 SOCIAL LIFE

The Early Vedic Society was a tribal society, in which social relations based on kinship ties were predominant. The society was not divided according to caste lines, and even the rajas (kings), the purohitas (priests), the artisans etc. were parts of the clan networks. The tribe was referred to as the jana and many references to the different tribes are found in the Rig Veda. Inter-tribal conflicts were frequent, an example being the battle of the Ten .Kings mentioned in the Rig Veda. Some of the tribes, which fought in this battle, were the Bharatas, the Purus, the Yadus, the Druhyus, the Anus and the Turvasus.

Tribal conflicts, as mentioned earlier, were related to cattle raids, cattle thefts etc. The chief of the tribe was the raja or the gopati. He was the

leader in battle and the protector of the tribe. His office was not based on heredity, but he was selected from amongst the clansmen. The warrior category was the "rajanya". Many clans (vis) formed a tribe. The clans settled in villages or grama. The basic social unit was the Kula, or the family, and the Kulapa i.e. 'one who protects the family' denoted the eldest male member or the head of the family. Tribe (Jana), Tribal Unit (Vis), Village (Grama), Family (Kula), Head of the family (Kulapa) was the hierarchy seems to be prevalent in those times.

Society was patriarchal. The birth of a son was the common desire of the people. The importance given to the male members is reflected in the hymns, where the desire for a son is a constant prayer. Even though society was patriarchal, women had also important position in it. They were educated and they had access to the assemblies. There are also instances of women who composed hymns. They had a right to choose their partners, and could marry late. However women were always thought to be dependent on their fathers, brothers or husbands. Education was imparted orally, but the tradition of education was not very well developed in this period.

The authors of the Rig Vedadistinguished themselves from other groups whom they called Dasas and Dasyus. The Dasas are described as dark, full-lipped, snub-nosed, worshippers of the phallus and of hostile speech. They were rich in cattle and lived in fortified strongholds. We learn about another people called the Panis who were wealthy in cattle treasures. The term Pani came to be associated with merchants and wealth in the subsequent ages. These groups fought and befriended each other from time to time and one cannot define them as separate racial or the linguistic groups or example.

The most famous chief mentioned in the Rig Vedais Sudasa who led the Bharata tribe in the battle of the ten kings. The Dasa ending in his name might suggest some links with the Dasas. However, the presence of different groups in the same area might have contributed to the emergence of the Varna system. Various occupational groups such as those of weavers, smith, carpenters, leather workers, chariotmakers, priests etc. are also mentioned. The chariotmakers occupied a special social status.There are no references to beggars, wage-earners or wages in the Rig Veda. However, society was economically stratified, and we

do find references to rich people possessing chariots, cattle, etc. and making generous gifts of them.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What do you understand by 'pastoral society'? Why was it the dominant occupational activity of the Early Vedic people?

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2) What was the importance of cattle in the Early Vedic Society?

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6.6 POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The tribal polity was not completely egalitarian society. A division is found in the Rig Veda itself, which is seen in references of two groups- the Rajanyas, or those who fought the wars, and are credited to be the senior lineage, and the rest of the clansmen or the vis, who formed the junior lineage. Though none of the groups occupied a distinct social hierarchy, constant conflicts and inter-tribal wars helped to create a division in the society. The growing needs for more pasture lands, cattle for the protection of people and their settlement all probably contributed to an increase in inter and intra-tribal conflicts and warfare. The clans held large yajnas or sacrifices to help the warrior groups in the wars. In these yajnas the officiating priest or the purohita acted as the mediator between his clansmen and the Gods. He also invoked the Gods' blessings for the tribal chief, for his success in the wars. Initially, the whole clan participated in these yajnas on an equal footing. Large scale distribution of wealth, food, etc. was made during these sacrifices and members got an equal share.

But with the growing incidence of conflicts and fights, yajnas or sacrifices also became important and the purohita assumed a special

status in the society. In the later part of our period, they received a major share of the gifts from the rajas, and assumed a superior position vis-a-vis the other clan members.

The office of the raja also assumed importance on account of wars, etc. and the division between the senior and the junior lineages became sharper. At what point of time these political distinctions became apparent isdifficult to state, but we must remember that the 10th book of the Rig Veda contains the "Purusha-Sukta" hymn, and in the Later Vedic texts we find evidence of the superior rajnaya groups, assuming the status of the Kshatriya--a separate Varna by itself. These developments took place after 1000 B.C. This does not mean that the society was stagnant during our period of study. In fact it was changing slowly but surely leading to the development, in the Later Vedic phase, of a complex socio-political structure.

Tribal assemblies e.g. the Gana, Vidatha, Sabha and Samiti are mentioned in the Rig Veda. The Sabha may have been the council of select clan members and the Samiti perhaps comprised the whole clan. These assemblies performed the functions of the government and administration and were also involved in the selection of the raja from amongst the clansmen. They thus kept the power of the warriors in check. However, as stated before, though we do not find well defined political hierarchy in the Early Vedic set up, the changes during the period gave rise to a socio-political hierarchy which manifested itself in the origin of the Varna system during the "Later Vedic phase". Early Vedic Society was governed by tribal values and norms and was largely egalitarian.

6.7 FAITHS AND BELIEFS

The religious ideas of the Vedic people are reflected in the hymns of the Rig Veda. They venerated the natural forces around them (like wind, water, rain, thunder, fire etc.) which they could not control, and invested nature with divinity conceived in human forms, which were mostly masculine. Very few female deities were venerated. The religion thus reflected the patriarchal society and was that of primitive animism. Indra

was the God of strength, who was invoked to destroy the enemies. He was the God of thunder and was the rainmaker who was asked periodically to release the water. He could not be vanquished. Thus thunder and rain (natural phenomena) were related with strength, which was personified in a masculine form, represented in the God Indra. The concept of a tribal chief, who was a warlord, is also found represented in the character of Indra.

Agni, next in importance to Indra, was the God of fire. He was considered to be an intermediary between heaven and earth i.e., between Gods and men. He dominated the domestic hearth and marriages were solemnized in his presence. Fire destroyed dirt and germs, and hence Agni was considered to be pure. The importance of Agni can be related to that of the yajna or sacrifice in the Early Vedic society. It was supposed that the oblations offered to Agni were carried to the Gods in the form of smoke. Varuna personified water, and he was the upholder of the natural order of the universe.

Yama was the God of death and had an important place in the Early Vedic religious belief. There were many other Gods e.g. Surya, Soma (also a drink), Savitri, Rudra etc., and hosts of celestial beings like Gandharvas, Apsaras, Maruts to whom prayers and hymns were addressed in the Rig Veda. The Vedic religion was sacrificial. Sacrifices or yajnas were performed: to invoke the Gods in order to grant boons--either victory in battles or for acquisition of cattle, sons etc.

We find some hymns dedicated to the power residing in the sacrificial implements, especially to the sacrificial altar, to the stones used for pressing the Soma plant, to the weapons of war, drums, mortars etc. Hymns and prayers were recited in these sacrifices and generally priests performed these yajnas. The growing importance of sacrifices in the Vedic society resulted in the growing importance of priests as well. The ritual of sacrifice also led to the growth and development in the knowledge of mathematics and animal anatomy. Elementary mathematics was necessary to make the calculations which were required to establish the positions of various objects in the sacrificial area. Also, the frequent sacrifices of animals led to a knowledge of their anatomy. For the Vedic people, the world grew out of a vast cosmic sacrifice and was not maintained by the proper performance of sacrifice. Religion was

not based on magico-ritual formulae, rather it stressed direct communication with the Gods through sacrifices, hymns etc. Gods were not worshipped for the spiritual upliftment of the people, or for any other abstract philosophical concept, but were invoked to grant material gains.

Sacrificial religion is a religion of the pastoral people. Animal sacrifice is rampant in the pastoral society, where the older animals who can no longer produce milk or meat, or used for breeding purposes, i.e. those who are no longer economically viable, are killed in order to lessen the burden on their owner. Hence animal sacrifice was one way of destroying the old animals and thus had an important role in the society. In the agrarian society however older animals are employed in the fields, used for traction purposes and hence the destruction of animals is frowned upon by a society which primarily depends on agricultural activities. Thus the Vedic religion reflected the patriarchal pastoral society and was materialistic in perspective.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What was the position of the Rajan in the Early Vedic polity?

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2) Discuss the nature of religion of the Early Vedic period.

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6.8 GROWTH OF VARNA

Varna is a term that literally means colour. However, in the Vedic context (and lateras well), it is used to designate social categories. Such designations can be viewedfrom at least two perspectives. One, some people, in this case the priests, can claimthe right to assign status/ranks to themselves as well as others. Two, these ranks or labels can be accepted/

rejected/ modified by those to whom these are assigned. Letus examine the situations in which the term was used, and its implications.

One way in which the term is used in the Rig Vedais to distinguish between twoVarna, the arya and the dasa. There have been long debates on the distinctivefeatures of these categories. Initially, in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century,it was suggested that the difference between the two Varna was racial. However,these racist perceptions have been called into question, and it is evident that whilethere were social differences in early India, these were not categorised in terms ofrace. What is likely is that the aryas and the dasas differed in language, culturalpractices and in religious beliefs and practices.

References to the arya and the dasa occur in specific sections of the Rig Veda; inhymns addressed to Indra, where the deity is invoked to ensure the victory of thearya over the dasa or praised for having defeated and overcome them. However,these references are not very plentiful; all told less than forty references in a text thatruns into more than 10,000 verses.More frequently, we find social groups being identified using two terms, whichsometimes appear to be synonymous. One is the term jana(which is used till datein several Indian languages and means people). The second is the term vis fromwhich the word Vaisyawas derived. Both the terms refer to groups of people whoconstituted a community with shared interests — economic, political and ritual.

Present day scholars often consider these terms to be equivalent to our notions oftribes or clans. There are indications that the janaor the vis functioned as a militia,participating in raids on rival groups. It is also likely that they participated in assemblies,where the dominant role was probably played by priests or chiefs.At this stage, the janaand the vis were not regarded as Varna. However, thereis occasional mention of the arya visand the dasa vis, which may suggest thatsometimes the terms vis and Varna were thought to be interchangeable.

There is, however, one spectacular and frequently cited reference to the four foldVarnaorder in the Rig Veda. This occurs in the tenth Mandala, one of the latestsections of the text, in a hymn known as the purusasukta. This describes thesacrifice of a primeval man and visualizes creation as emanating from this sacrifice.In this context, it is stated that the Brahman emerged from the mouth of this man,the Khastriyafrom his arms, the

Vaisya from his thighs, and the Sudrafrom his feet.There are two ideas that are implicit in this conceptualisation: one that the four foldorder is of divine origin, and hence cannot be questioned, and second there is a clearcut hierarchy amongst the Varnas, with the Brahmans at the top of the order, andthe others ranked below.

Apart from the purusasukta, there are very few references to Varna categories inthe Rig Veda. While we do have references to priests, they are not invariably identifiedas Brahmans. The term Khastriya, too, occurs infrequently. And the only referenceto the Vaisya and the Sudra is in this single verse mentioned above. Therefore,scholars have argued that the idea of Varna was relatively undeveloped in the earlyVedic phase.

It is in the later Vedic phase that we find evidence of a number of new developments,and a growing preoccupation with identifying men in terms of Varna, as well asdefining the contents of Varna identities. It is useful to visualize these identities as crystallizing around three concerns: access to the ritual domain, access to politicalpower, and access to resources. As is obvious, these concerns were interwovenrather than watertight compartments. Besides, as mentioned earlier, the texts at ourdisposal are brahmanical, so we often get to see resolutions from the brahmanicalpoint of view, which need not necessarily have been accepted by members of the other Varnas. Besides, not everybody necessarily accepted Varna as a category ofidentity. These qualifying remarks need to be kept in mind in the course of thefollowing discussion.

To start with the ritual domain, we notice two or three different issues being explored.One of these is the issue of ritual specialists: who were to be regarded as Brahmans?Here what emerged as a resolution was a combination of the criterion of birth andknowledge of the ritual tradition or Shruti, in Sanskrit. It appears that birth wasregarded as a necessary but not a sufficient condition. The proclamation and theacceptance of these criteria meant that effectively men who were assigned to otherVarnas, as well as women were excluded from legitimately acting as ritual specialists.

The second problem centred on participation in the ritual that on what basis werepeople to be involved in the proceedings? Here wealthy patrons (especially Khastriyas)were recognised as being of crucial importance. Others, including wives of thepatrons, their sons, and their

supporters, were also included in the ritual, where theywere expected to play specific roles.

The third issue was of the significance to be assigned to rituals. During the laterVedic and post-Vedic periods, there was a move away from the actual performanceof rituals to a contemplation of their inner significance, which in turn led to thephilosophical speculation of the Upanishads. This, as may be expected, probably poseda challenge to the status of Brahmans as ritual priests.By the time when the Dharmasustras were composed, the Brahmans claimedexclusive control over the ritual domain. Six 'means of livelihood' were recognizedfor them: these included studying and teaching the Vedas, performing and gettingsacrifices performed, giving and receiving gifts. At the same time, the texts recognizedthat these options could not be exercised in all situations, and included a series ofprovisions, catalogued as apaddharma or rules to be followed in a crisis, which couldbe adopted by Brahmans in situations where legitimate modes of livelihood were notavailable.

If the Vedic tradition records a systematic attempt on the part of the Brahmans tomonopolize claims to the ritual domain, it is also marked by recognition that politicalpower, which was becoming consolidated, should ideally belong exclusively to theKhastriya. Later Vedic literature is replete with myths, legends and rituals that discussthe regulation of access to political power. These explore two or three differentpossibilities.

The first possibility that is explored is that of rivalry, or competition between theBrahman and the Khastriya. As may be expected, the texts resolve these conflicts bysuggesting that the Brahman is inevitably victorious. But, at the same time, theauthors insist that the ideal situation is one not of competition but of co-operationbetween the two, and that the ideal ruler should acknowledge the supremacy ofthe Brahmans. We may never know whether this represented reality but it is likelythat the relationship between the Brahman and the Khastriya varied in concretesituations.

The second situation that is discussed is the relationship between the Khastriya and thevis or Vaisya. This is visualized less as a situation of rivalry and more as one wherethe basis of mutual support was being called into question. There is a constant refrainthat in the early Vedic

context the relationship between these two categories washarmonious and they were mutually supportive. However, in the later Vedic situation,the Khastriya is visualized as appropriating resources from the vis, and in this context,the resentment and resistance of the vis, as well as the threat of withdrawing supportseems to have been real. So, efforts were made to establish some kind of understandingbetween the two. One means of achieving this was by incorporating important membersof the vis within the administrative structure. We find this happening with the villageheadman, or the gramani, who was recognised as one of the supporters of the king.

The Dharmasutras lay down the 'means of livelihood' for the Khastriya as well.Three of these, viz. studying the Vedas, getting sacrifices performed and making gifts,are common with the Brahman and the Vaisya. The other pertains to collecting taxes,administering justice and protecting the people. Curiously, some of the major post-Vedic ruling lineages, such as those of the Nandas, Mauryas and Sungas are notrecognised as Khastriyas. It is also worth noting that whenever the fourfold Varnaorder is mentioned in Buddhist and Jaina traditions, the Khastriyas are invariably placedfirst, before the Brahmans. This would suggest that the norms for political relationsthat the Brahmans attempted to lay down were not invariably followed.

Turning to the question of material resources being tied to Varna, it is evident thatthe Brahmans were ideally supposed to depend on gifts as a means of livelihood.For Khastriyas, resources were to be obtained from warfare, as taxes that could belevied as wages for protection that was to be offered to subjects, and as fines leviedfor offences. The Vaisyas were conceived as the backbone of the system,with the Dharma Sutras prescribing that they could engage in agriculture, pastoralismand trade.

If we examine the archaeological record, it is evident that both agriculture andpastoralism had been practised in the region for a very long time. The evidence ofsites associated with the NBP would indicate that trade was developing as well. Thisis suggested both by the evidence of the spread of this distinctive pottery, as well asby the wide dispersal of punch marked coins.

The Sudras figure marginally in the later Vedic tradition. They are occasionallymentioned as participants in rituals, but wherever they were

present, this was viewedas a situation that required special ritual precautions. More often than not, they wereassigned roles that underlined their subordination in society. And in the later DharmaSutras, the only role assigned to Sudras is that of serving the three higher Varnas. Wealso find the beginnings of notions of untouchability, although these are not sharplycrystallized at this stage.

Yet, the texts reluctantly acknowledge that there were alternatives, and that in somesituations, Sudras could be wealthy. We also know that ruling dynasties such as theNandas were regarded as being of Sudra origin by some. Therefore, it is clear thatthe Varna order was not as fixed as the Brahmans may have ideally wanted it tobe and that variations and contestations were possible.

6.9 KINSHIP AND PATRIARCHAL ASSOCIATIONS

The early Vedic context presents us with a variety of evidence on kinship relations.Gods (and occasionally Goddesses) are visualized in kinship terms: as fathers, brothers,and even sons. We also have depictions of conjugal relations. It is likely that theseimages of the divine world were based on human practice.The bond that figures most commonly is the father-son tie. This is envisaged as oneof mutual support: just as the father supports the son when he is small, the son isexpected to support the father in his old age. At another level, there are frequentprayers for brave sons in the Rig Veda. Prayers for daughters are virtually absent,although there are several prayers for children in general.

This situation continues almost unchanged in the later Vedic context, where we findseveral rituals being prescribed to ensure the birth of sons as well as to reinforce thebonds between father and son. These include rituals like the Agnihotra or the dailyoffering to the fire that was prescribed for the householder, as well as major ritualssuch as the Asvamedha and the Rajasuya. What is more, we begin to find statementsviewing daughters as negative elements, as source of sorrow for their parents.The father-son bond was also visualised as extending beyond the immediate pair.

This idea was developed through the concept of the pitr, the patrilineal ancestor. Thepitrs are relatively unimportant in the Rig Veda, being mentioned most frequently in thetenth Mandala, which, as noted earlier, is a relatively late section of the text. However,they are assigned far more importance in the later Vedic tradition, where they wereinvoked on virtually every ritual occasion. The pitrs were generally defined as threegenerations of male patrilineal ancestors: the father, the grandfather and the greatgrandfather. Offering prayers to them meant that their memories would be preserved,while those of other ancestors, including matrilineal kinsfolk, would be marginalised.It is likely that emphasizing the father-son bond was important in situations of resourcecontrol, where claiming to be part of a specific lineage was often a means of stakinga claim to the inheritance of its resources.

While the emphasis on patrilineal ties seems to grow over time, relationships withother kinsmen are envisaged as being more complicated. We can look at these undertwo heads: kinsmen related through marriage and kinsmen who arevisualized as potential rivals.The first category would include the father-in-law and the maternal uncle. The latteris virtually unknown in the early Vedic tradition, and the former figures in a textknown as the marriage hymn, which is part of the late tenth Mandalaof the Rig Veda.Both are accorded respect and recognition, as well as special hospitality, especiallyin the post-Vedic tradition, which would suggest that bonds with these categorieswere regarded as increasingly important.

The second category included those designated as the Bhratrvya and the Sapatna.The first term means brother-like man, while the second means rival (the literalmeaning seems to be men who either share a common wife or are related througha woman who is the wife of one of them). Both these terms are extremely rare inthe Rig Veda, but become important in the later Vedic situation, where rituals weredesigned to resolve conflicts with the Bhratrvya and the Sapatna. Usually the resolutionwas envisaged in terms of elimination/destruction and/or appropriation of the resourcesof these rivals.

Other kinsmen were designated as samana (literally equals), sva (one’s own) orsajata (those who shared a common birth). Later Vedic rituals

were often designedto win the support of these groups but at the same time to treat them as subordinates.

What we can suggest then is that kinship relations were being envisaged in terms ofconflict and inequality. The only important exception to this was the father-son bond.Perhaps the most dramatic and systematic changes that were envisaged were thosewithin the household. The Rig Vedacontains a variety of terms that were used todesignate the household. Some of these may have been synonyms; in other cases,it is likely that the terms stood for different institutions. Two of the terms that haveattracted considerable attention are dam or dama and grha.The dam was envisaged as a household under the joint control of the husband andwife, who were called the dampati (dual). They were expected to be harmonious, andof one mind, to work in accord with one another. What is more, both sons anddaughters seem to have been welcome in the dam.

The situation in the grha appears have been rather different. It was envisaged as aninstitution with a single male head, known as the grhapati. The grha is recognizedas an important social unit in the later Vedic tradition, where references to alternativemodes of household organization decline sharply. Ultimately, it becomes virtually thesole form of household that is recognized in texts such as the Grahya Sutras.The ideal grha was expected to have three components: a patni or wife who wasideally a virgin belonging to the same Varna as the pati, cattle– the basic productiveresource, and sons. The functions assigned to the grhapati include offering hospitalityand resources to the priest and the king, as well as to other both within and outsidehis home. He was also expected to perform rituals. The grhapati figures as animportant social category in Buddhist tradition as well, where he was regarded as anideal patron of the Buddhist sangha. It is evident that the later Vedic/post Vedic textsare preoccupied with consolidating a vision of the social order as patriarchal, with thegrhapati as a nodal figure in the entire process.

6.10 LET US SUM UP

In this Unityou have learnt about literary and to some extent archaeological sources which help us thereconstruction of the Early Vedic society. In the light of the archaeological sources it is difficult to accept the notion of a large-scale Aryan migration. The Early Vedic economy was mainly pastoral and cow was the most important form of wealth. Agriculture had secondary importance in the life of the Early Vedic people.

The Early Vedic society was tribal and basically egalitarian. Clan and kinship relations formed the basis of the society and family was the basic social unit. Social divisions based on occupations had started but there was no caste division. In the Early Vedic polity the tribal chief or the Rajan and the priest or the Purohita had important positions. Among several tribal assemblies the Sabha and the Samiti played very important roles. Though there was no well-defined political hierarchy in the Early Vedic set up, the tribal polity was not completely egalitarian. The Early Vedic people personified the natural forces, e.g. wind, water, rain, etc. and worshipped them as God. They worshipped God not through any abstract philosophical concept but for material gains. There was growing importance of sacrifices or yajnas in the Vedic religion. What you must remember is that this society was not static but dynamic. Between 1500 B.C. and 1000 B.C society was constantly evolving and newer element in the economic, social, political and religious sphere were operating to transform its structure.

It is important to keep in mind that the Vedic texts are vast and diverse, and that they span an enormous period. As such differences are to be expected in these texts. In so far as social histories are concerned, they permit us to reconstruct brahmanical perceptions and prescriptions about the ideal society. These need not necessarily correspond entirely with social realities. As far as Varna is concerned, it was of marginal importance during the early phase, and acquired importance as a classificatory system during the later Vedic period. However, it is clear that Varna identities were never the sole identity available to men. It is also evident that the contents of these identities were reformulated over time. Kinship relations were also subjected to definition and crystallization during this period. We can trace the consolidation of patrilineal identities, and the emergence of a grhapati centred household.

The Vedic texts envisage rituals as a mode of communication of social norms and values. These included notions of social hierarchy, of support and subordination. However, there is evidence of deviation and change, and these messages were probably not automatically accepted.

We have also examined the term 'Varna' and the way it was used and the implications associated with it. Further we have discussed in great details the kinship relations in the patriarchal societies.

6.11 KEY WORDS

Artefacts: Something made by human being, e.g. a simple tool or weapon archaeological interest.

Bali: Tributes and prestations paid to the victorious chiefs by the defeated groups.

Clan: Large family group, found in tribal communities.

Kinship: Relationship by blood.

Nomad: Member of a tribe that wanders from place to place and who has no fixed home.

Patriarchy: Male dominated family or tribe.

Animism: The attribution of a soul to natural objects and phenomenon.

Semi-Sedentism: Settlers who do not settle in a place permanently and move to a new settlement.

Shifting agriculture: After the use of a land for cultivation for, a short period, it is left and fresh land is used.

Stratigraphy: Layers detected in the excavation. The basis for detecting these layers could lie in the different soil types or different artefacts found in the excavated profile.

Sacrificial Fire: Fire lit up at the ritual of sacrifice in which grains or whatever the material to be sacrificed is put.

Vertical Trenches: Small diggings in archaeological excavation done vertically at specific points rather than the excavation of whole sites.

Militia: A band of armed men.

Primeval man: Man of the first age of the world.

6.12 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1) Discuss the role Varna played during the Vedic times. Was it the sole identity available to men of this period?

2) What was the significance of *pitr*?

3) How was the relationship with the other kinsmen getting more complicated in this period?

6.13 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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6.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Among the literary sources we may first refer to the four Vedas: Rig Veda, Samveda Yajurveda, and Atharva Veda. Out of these the Rig Veda is the earliest text and belongs to to the early Vedic period. The word 'Veda' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Vid', which means 'to know'.

2)Earlier scholars believed that the Indo-Aryans caused the downfall of the Harappan civilization by destroying the Harappan towns and cities. They quoted Rig Vedic hymns which invoke Indra to destroy the dwellers of the forts. But archaeological evidence has shown that the

decline of the Harappan civilization was not caused by any large scale destruction brought about by an alien invading group.

Check Your Progress 2

1) The Early Vedic society was pastoral, cattle rearing being the dominant occupational activity. A pastoral society relies more on its animal wealth than agricultural produce. Pastoralism is a subsistence strategy adopted by people who live in areas where large scale agriculture is not feasible due to some environmental and to a certain extent, cultural constraints.

2)Cattle were the chief measure of wealth and a wealthy man who owned many cattle was called 'gomat'. The terms used for conflicts and battles in this period were gavishti, gavesana, gavyat, etc. The former literally means 'to search for cows'. The terms themselves suggest that possession of cattle was the bone of contention between groups and led to occasional inter-tribal fights and conflicts.

Check Your Progress 3

1) A division is found in the Rig Veda itself, which is seen in references of two groups-the Rajanyas, or those who fought the wars, and are credited to be the senior lineage, and the rest of the clansmen or the vis, who formed the junior lineage. At what point of time these political distinctions became apparent is difficult to state, but we must remember that the 10th book of the Rig Veda contains the "Purusha-Sukta" hymn, and in the Later Vedic texts we find evidence of the superior rajnaya groups, assuming the status of the Kshatriya--a separate Varna by itself.

2)The Rid Vedic people venerated the natural forces around them (like wind, water, rain, thunder, fire etc.) which they could not control, and invested nature with divinity conceived in human forms, which were mostly masculine. Very few female deities were venerated. The religion thus reflected the patriarchal society and was that of primitive animism.

UNIT-7 CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE

STRUCTURE

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to know about the sources which enable us to study the later Vedic Society,the changes in the social, political, economic and religious structure during thelater Vedic period, andthe economic and social implications of a change in technology with theintroduction of a new metal, i.e. iron.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The period which you are going to study now extends roughly from 1000 B.C. to 600B.C. By this period some of Vedic tribes had moved from the 'Sapta Sindhava'region to the upper Ganga Valley and other adjacent regions.During the period of this shift a number of changes in their social, political, economicand religious structure took place. In this unit we shall be discussing the majoraspects of these changes.

7.2 SOURCES

We get both literary as well as archaeological sources to study this period.

7.2.1 Literary Sources

The later additions specially the 10th Mandala to the Rig Veda Samhita, Sama Veda,Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda samhitas are the other Vedic texts which areassigned to the later Vedic phase. The Sama Veda samhita is a book of prayers andchants which are from the Rig Veda, modified and set to tune for the explicit purposeof singing them during rituals. The Yajur Veda elaborates the rituals which accompany the recitation of hymns.The rituals and the hymns in this Samhita document the social and political milieuof this period.The Artharva Veda contains the folk tradition of this period and represents popularreligion. It is a good source for understanding the socio-religious conditions of thecommon people.

These Samhitas are followed by a series of texts called the Brahmanas, which arecommentaries on the Vedas. They explain the social and religious aspects of therituals and throw light on the Vedic society. Although it would be wrong to take anyperiod of early Indian history as the 'epic' period as such the two Sanskrit epics, theMahabharata and the Ramayana are rich in information on different aspects of earlyIndian society. Historians believe that the core of what is reflected in these epics canbe traced to the later Vedic phase. The geographical focus of the phase was on theterritories of the upper Ganga basin and the middle

Ganga basin, although otherregions are also mentioned. In the epics also the major events took place in thisregion. We must however remember that there is nothing to prove that the storiesnarrated in the epics were actual historical events. Secondly both the epics tookcenturies to reach their present shape. So there are many types of societies which wemay find reflected in the epics.

7.2.2 Archaeological Sources

The literary sources repeatedly refer to the areas of Western U.P., Haryana andRajasthan. The period assigned to the later Vedic phase is circa 1000 B.C. to 600B.C. Many communities and cultural groups are mentioned in the texts. Thus,particular pottery forms cannot be identified with some tribe or group. However, inthe same geographical region some agricultural communities flourished in roughly thesame time bracket. These communities used a particular kind of pottery called thePainted Grey Ware (PGW). Thus, these archaeological finds would reflect thematerial conditions of the later Vedic society.

More than 700 PGW sites have been found along the Upper Ganga Basin. Theirdistribution extends from the dry beds of the river Ghaggar in Bahawalpur andnorthern Rajasthan, to the watershed of the Indus and Ganges and theGanga-Yamuna Doab. The eastern limit of this ware is restricted to the northernplains of the Ganges, as the site of Sravasti indicates. Some important PGW sites areAtranjikhera, Ahichhatra, Noh, Hastinapur, Kurukshetra, Bhagwanpura andJakhera.

The Banas culture of southern Rajasthan, which has been dated from 2000 B.C to 1400B.C., may have possibly extended to the Ganges Valley at around 800 B.C. Thus,these Black and Red Ware users can also be related to the present period.Archaeology does not document the eastward shift of the 'Vedic Aryans", a shiftwhich is suggested in the literary texts. Archaeology does not document any singleculture shifting eastwards. Thus there remains a large gap between the nature of theliterary and the archaeological sources. There is however the general point that thelater Vedic society as well the society reflected in archaeology was a society which hadused iron.

Iron objects are common to most of the PGW sites. The Carbon-14 dates fromAtranjikhera, Jodhpura and Noh suggest that in the context of the Gangetic plainsthis metal was introduced around 1000-800 B.C.The exploitation of the iron ore in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal and Punjab, and later inSouth Bihar, was an indigenous phenomenon. The Rig Veda mentions "ayas" whichmay refer to Iron, though the archaeological evidence relates iron to the Later Vedicperiod. Literary sources provide ample corroboration of this. The Yajur Vedaqualifies "ayas" as Syama ayas, and the Brahmans speak of Krishna ayas. Both thewords refer to a black metal which means Iron.Recent excavations suggest that the megalithic people of south India too werefamiliar with iron technology. Hence we can no longer talk in terms of theintroduction of iron technology into the Indian subcontinent by the migrant Aryans.

7.3 IRON TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT

An important question to be asked here is: does the knowledge of iron lead to anyadvancement in the metal technology of the period? Similarly one would also like toknow the extent to which the introduction of a new technology changes the materialmilieu of the society.

The evidence of the LaterVedicperiod suggests a transition from a pastoral society toa sedentary agrarian society. It was earlier suggested that the socket axes made ofiron were extensively used to clear the forests and the Gangetic doab for permanentcultivation. It was also believed that iron tipped ploughshares and hoes increased theefficiency of the agricultural implements which furthered agricultural activities. Thusscholars believed that the knowledge of Iron technology was an important factor forthe development of agrarian economy. However, we now know that the Later Vedicperiod was neither purely agrarian, nor was it well advanced in iron technology. Therich iron ore mines of Bihar were still not exploited and the technology of smeltingiron was primitive. The objects which are found in the excavations are iron tipped arrowheads,spearheads, etc. i.e. weapons of which the largest number comes from the Ahichhatraexcavations. Sickles,hoes, axes are rarely

found in the excavations. One ploughsharehas been reported from Jakhera which probably belongs to the end of this period.Thus, from the excavations, it appears that the use of iron was restricted to makingweapons. Iron did not influence the agricultural technology until the second half ofthe first millennium B.C. when the marshlands and monsoon forests in the middleGangetic valley were gradually cleared.

In the Later Vedic period, clearing of forests by burning was carried out in the upperDoab. We have the description of the burning of the Khandavavana in theMahabharata to establish the city of Indraprastha. Iron tipped weapons and horsechariots helped military activities which were rampant in this period and have beenextensively documented in the Mahabharata. However, in subsistence relatedactivities, iron technology had practically no role.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Write a note on literary sources of later Vedic period.

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2) Write about the impact iron technology had on Later Vedic society.

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7.4 THE NATURE OF THE ECONOMY

The growth of agriculture in the Later Vedic period was made possible by theavailability of vast tracts of fertile alluvial lands of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and themiddle Ganga valley-an area which was slowly settled throughout the firstmillennium B.C. However, the later Vedic texts reflect the continued importance ofpastoralism.

Both archaeological and literary sources document the introduction of rice as thestaple diet of the people. The PGW and Banas culture yield charred grains of ricefrom the excavated sites. The Vedic texts mention

Vrihi, Tandula and Sali, alldenoting rice. It appears that cropping was practised now, and the fields grew bothbarley and rice. The elaborate sacrifices of this period, e.g. the rajasuya, includeofferings of grain along with milk, ghee and animals. The twelve sacrifices prescribedin the AtharvaVeda for acquiring material benefits recommend the gifts of cows,calves, oxen, gold, cooked rice, thatched houses and well cultivated fields to theBrahmans. The items of the offerings are a clear indication of the growingimportance of sedentary settlements and agriculture. Later Vedic texts also refer toeight, twelve and even twenty four oxen yoked to the plough. Though the number ofoxen mentioned is symbolically possible, the reference suggests that plough cultivationwas familiar in this period.

7.4.1 Importance of Pastoralism Declines

Pastoralism was no longer the main subsistence activity of the people as it was in theEarly Vedic period. Mixed farming which included cultivation and herding was theoccupational norm of this period. Agricultural activities in this phase were not labourintensive. The sites from where rice remains are found in the excavations are locatedon the elevated areas of the Doab. This suggests that wet rice cultivation which islabour intensive was not practised as yet.Mixed farming led to the rise of sedentary settlements. The PGW deposits aregenerally 2 to 3 metre deep and indicate that people were living in the same spot for along time. At Bhagwanpura and Jakhera, the excavations show that the earlier phaseof circular huts made of wattle and daub or wood were replaced in this period bymore substantial houses with earth walls. Thus durable materials were being used forhouse construction owing to the adoption of a sedentary life style.

7.4.2 Changes in the Functions of the Rituals

Given the fact that we are examining ritual texts, it is perhaps necessary to look attheir social significance more closely. As we have seen, there are two broad categoriesof texts under consideration: those that include mantras, and those that are explanatoryor justificatory in nature.The mantras are in the nature of prayers. The ability to learn and chant

mantras wasrestricted to a select few, the priest, and in some situations the patron of the sacrificeor the yajamana. As such, access to the mantras in itself could have constituteda basis for social differentiation.

Mantras also tell us about the hopes, fears and aspirations of those who used them.While there are some prayers for intangibles, many of the prayers were designed forspecific, material goals. These included acquiring cattle in particular and animals ingeneral, winning battles, getting progeny. Interestingly, while many of these are visualizedas collective goals in the Rig Veda, the use of mantras and rituals in the later Vedictradition seems to be more individuated, with provision for a single sacrificer/patron,who was expected to benefit from the performance of the ritual.

It has also been argued that the visualization of the deities in the ritual context mightreflect the social order. For instance, if prayers are addressed to Agni, and if Agniis conceived of as a divine priest (as indeed is often the case), then one can arguefor the importance of the priest in human society. It has also been suggested thatgiven that Goddesses are marginal in the Vedic tradition (in terms of numbers, prayersaddressed to them, as well as invocation in the ritual context), it is likely that womenwere subordinated in society. While such reconstructions are plausible, we need toremember that the connection between religious imaginations and social realities isnot always neat.

At another level, most rituals can be understood as occasions of public performances.These were significant in a variety of ways. Any ritual occasion, by definition, hasan aura of sanctity associated with it, as it is a situation where Gods and men (andoccasionally women) are brought into contact with one another. As such, ritualperformances may carry far greater weight than ordinary routine modes of socialcommunication. While rituals can have a range of functions, they are also used tolegitimize social relations.

As an extension of this, the roles performed by men and women in the ritual contextacquire a heightened significance. We have seen how priestly roles were oftendefined as exclusive and central to ritual performance. It is likely that these could beused to claim authority in other social contexts as well. The Dharmasutras suggestthat Brahmans claimed exemption from taxation, and from capital punishment. Wedo

not know how far this was acquiesced in by rulers, but the possibility that suchclaims were influential cannot be altogether ruled out.

Other participants included the yajamana or the patron of the sacrifice. This couldbe an aspiring chief/king or the grhapati, ideally the head of a household and a manbelonging to one of the first three Varnas. A basic criterion for eligibility was accessto resources required to perform the ritual, pay the requisite sacrificial fees, and offerhospitality to those who attended the ritual. Thus, an ability to perform a sacrifice wasa public proclamation of status.

By extension, the success of the ritual required the participation of other people, apartfrom the yajamana. Some of these were probably simply spectators, who could bemore or less adequately impressed by the ritual displays. Others were men andwomen who were connected with the yajamana, as his supporters, including hiskinsfolk. In major rituals such as the asvamedha or the rajasuya they could bedrawn from other Varnas. Their presence was taken to be a public statement of theirsupport for the yajamana as well as an implicit and at times explicit recognition oftheir subordination.

Similar principles evidently operated as far as the presence of kinsfolk was concerned.For instance, men who were identified as the sva or the sajata were assigned rolesthat can be designated as supportive but subordinate. The wife too, had an identicalrole. What is more, she was visualized as somewhat instrumental. Her presence inthe ritual was frequently envisaged as a situation that was conducive to procreation.

In other words, she was regarded as a symbol of fertility that could be used in theritual context.These inclusions and exclusions hold true for the rituals that were designated assrauta (derived from the word sruti or revealed tradition), and which included arange of sacrifices such as the daily agnihotra, the fortnightly new and full moonsacrifices, and grand, elaborate rituals such as the asvamedha and the rajasuya.Unfortunately, we do not have the means of assessing whether and how often suchrituals were performed. Buddhist tradition and the epics indicate that some of theelaborate sacrifices may have taken place, but even in these narratives, the historicityof specific accounts remains unverifiable.

What we do know is that in the post Vedic situation, a whole range of domestic ritualswere brought within the purview of the brahmanical

tradition, through the compositionand compilation of texts such as the Grhya Sutras. Here, two or three trends arein evidence. On the one hand, many srauta rituals were simplified, so that they couldbe performed by the average householder. On the other hand, a wide range of ritesof passage, associated with occasions such as birth, marriage and death, werebrahmanized. This was done through a threefold strategy: by recommending the useof Vedic mantras, by suggesting that a priest should be present on such occasions,and by insisting on the setting up of a sacrificial fire. As may be expected this wasprobably intended as a strategy for introducing the ideals of Varna and genderhierarchies within the household.

The extent to which such strategies succeeded is uncertain. Post Vedic brahmanicaltexts produced long lists of "deviants" i.e. people who violated social and ritual norms.These included Brahmans who did not learn the Vedas, who performed sacrificesfor those who did not meet the criteria laid down in the texts, who did not performthe soma sacrifice and so on. The lists grow longer with the passage of time.

To sum up, the Early Vedic society rituals were performed to bring about the welfare of theentire tribe. Gods were worshipped for ensuring victory over other tribes, grantingcattle and sons. It was also an occasion for the chiefs to distribute wealth. In the LaterVedic society the function of the rituals underwent a subtle change. Rituals becamemuch more complicated which could continue for years. Thus only the rich couldperform them. The spirit of collectivism was reduced. Sacrifices were performed toensure control over rest of the tribe. Gifts were no longer given to the entire tribe.

Rather the chief gave gifts to the Brahmans who performed sacrifices for him. Therituals were so complicated that it needed expert Brahmans to perform it since awrong incantation could bring disaster to the performer. The performer of sacrificeswas supposed to grant super human status to the chiefs meaning that they weresuperior to rest of the tribe. For this service the chief passed on a large part of hiswealth to the Brahman priest. Thus, the rituals became a mechanism for ensuring thematerial and spiritual superiority of the chiefs and the Brahmans.

7.4.3 Emerging Importance of Land

Land was cultivated through family labour and the help of domestic servants andslaves. In this period, initially land was owned by the clan or the vis. When clanownership gradually changed to family ownership the grhapati or householderbecame a man of wealth. The vaisyas (those who originally belonged to the vis) werethe producing class in the society and they became the source of wealth andsubsistence for the Kshatriyas and the Brahmanas who did not actively participate in food production. The Vaisyas had to give prestations to the Kshatriyas in lieu of thelatter protecting the lands, and dana and dakshina to the priests for their moralupliftment. The vis/vaisya, characterizing the house holding economy, became themainstay of economy. Prestations and dana to the non-producing classes helped inthe distribution of subsistence goods. There are no references to the sale of land.Visvakarma Bhauvana, a ruler, was rebuked by Prithvi (the earth) when he tried tomake a grant of land. This textual reference suggests communal ownership of landover which the vis had major participatory rights.

7.5 POLITY AND SOCETY

The transition from a predominantly pastoral to a mixed farming economy had agreat impact on the character of the Later Vedic society and polity. The main trendsof changes were: Tribal identity of the Early Vedic society gradually gave way to territorial identity and consequently the nature of chiefship changed.The social structure which was based on relations within a clan and was largelyegalitarian in the Early Vedic period became much more complex. This type ofsociety is marked by inequality. Even the same clan was divided into groups, someof which could have high status in society and some low status.

7.5.1 Polity

Jana was used in the sense of people or tribe in the Rig Vedic period, but now theconcept of janapada emerged. Janapada meant the area where the tribe settled. Theword rashtra was also used for the first time in the Later

Vedic texts. However, it was still not used in the sense of a state with well defined territories.

The Kurus, who were formed from the union between two major Vedic tribes-theBharatas and the Purus, are mentioned in texts as occupying the area in the upperportion of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Similarly, the Panchalas are mentioned aspeople who occupied the middle portion of the Doab, called the Panchala desa. Thisindicates that tribal identities were merging with territorial identities. It is also statedthat when the Kurus and the Panchalas came together, their authority over the upperand middle reaches of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab was complete. These changes in therelationship between the Jana and the area over which it wielded control helpedtowards the formation of the mahajanpadas and janapadas by the 6thcentury B.C.

Tribal Chiefs and Warriors

When tribal groups came to be associated andidentified with particular territories, it also brought about a change in the status andfunctions of the tribal chiefs. The rajan or the chief was no longer involved only incattle raids but emerged as the protector of the territory where his tribesmen settled.The rajanya which already was a superior lineage during the RigVedic period, nowbecame the 'Kshatriya' i,e. those who held power over dominions, which is the literalmeaning of the word 'Kshatriya'. The Kshatriya class based their power on their roleas the protector of their tribes and the land over which their tribes settled. The vishad to pay prestations to the Kshatriya, in lieu of the latter's protection and thus thestatus of the vis was progressively subordinated to the Kshatriya lineage. Bali andBhaga no longer meant prestations given at will, but gradually assumed the forms ofregular tributes and taxes.

Tribal Assemblies

The change in the status of the Kshatriya or the warrior class isalso reflected in the changing nature of the tribal assemblies. The sabha became moreimportant than the samiti during this period.Reference to rajas in the assembly or the sabha suggests that they helped the king inhis duties. The office of the raja or the chief was not based solely on birth but the choice of rajas was restricted to the Kshatriyas.

Raja's Legitimacy

In the absence of firmly established principles of heredity and primogeniture, consecratory rituals became very important for the ruler in order to assert its rule. Hence ceremonial sacrifices like rajasuya, asvemedha and vajapeya were performed on lavish scale. In the RigVedic period, the asvamedhayajna was a small affair. But in this period, this was performed to subjugate otherareas and legitimize the ruler's hold over alien lands. The other yajnas includedprayers for the rulers' health and all three were in essence legitimizing methods,employed by the raja to proclaim his superiority and power. For instance thesacrificer was proclaimed as a raja in the course of the rajasuya. These sacrifices werefound to be of relevance in later periods also when new kingdoms and new monarchsemerged. They used sacrifices to give religions legitimacy to their power.

The raja was also required to integrate his territory with resources, economicproduction and distribution which enhanced his status considerably from a mereraider, or a leader of battles. However, he was not yet the sovereign. The fact that hewas elected and could beremoved put severe constraints on him, since he wasanswerable to the clan Also, he did not appoint the other rajas who helped him withhis duties. They were chiefs in their own right. What is important is that theKshatriya lineage gained a distinctly superior status during this period, the reason being that the concept of territorial identity was established now. Thus territorybecame the physical manifestation of the ruler's power to rule.

Tribal Conflicts

The nature of the intra-tribal conflicts and conflicts within tribesalso changed. Fights were no longer mere skirmishes over cattle, now the acquisitionof land was an important element in these disputes. The necessity of increasingterritory can be connected with the growth of population within the tribes. Ironweapons and light wheeled chariots driven by horses raised the efficiency of thefighters. The Mahabharata depicts intra-clan warfare between the Kauravas andthe Pandavas of the Kuru clan.

The Priest

With the rising importance of the rajanya Kshatriya, the Brahmanas toobecame important since they legitimized the office of the ruler through theconsecratory rituals. The redistribution of wealth through

dana and dakshina on suchoccasions was primarily from the Kshatriya yajamana to the Brahman priests. Theelaborate consecratory rituals suggest that initially the power of the raja was not sosecure and hence he had to provide proof of his ability to rule. The status of theofficiating priests became at par with the Gods, in the later period. It was felt that theGods had to be propitiated with yajnas and the officiating Brahman had to be satiated with dana. Thus the channel of redistribution was between the two higher status groups, and political supremacy was slowly becoming the domain of the Kshatriya.

7.5.2 Society

We have already read about the declining status of the vis and the ascendancy of theKshatriyas and the Brahmanas. Society was thus composed of unequal groups. This hymn describes the origin of the four Varnas, i.e. Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisyaand the Sudra, from the body of the universal creator, Rajapati. The 'Hymn of thePrimeval Man' comes from the later portion of the Rig Veda. Thus hymn for the firsttime describes the origin of the four Varnas. It says ....."When they divided the Man, into how many parts did they divide him? What was his mouth, what were his arms, what were his thighs and his feet called?The Brahman was his mouth, of his arms made the Kshatriya, his thigh became the Vaisya, of his feet the Sudra was born".

The symbolism which is projected in these hymns is that Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisyaand Sudra are limbs of the society. However, these limbs did not have equal status.TheBrahman was compared to the head whereas the Sudra was compared to thefeet,In social life Brahmans were considered the highest Varna because society couldcommunicate with Gods with the help of Brahmans only. The Sudras on the otherhand performed menial tasks and included slaves captured in wars.

Concept of Varna

The system of Varna had the following features:

a) statusby birth

b) a hierarchical ordering of the Varnas (Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra) withBrahmana at the top and Sudra at the base.

c) rules of endogamy and ritual purity.

The Varna system is further tied with the concept of Dharma i.e. universal law, andthe Varna dharma was an attempt to establish a social law for a systematic functioningof the society. However, the Varnashrama dharma was not properly developed in theLater Vedic society. The division of social groups was based on occupation alone, and society wasstill flexible, where one's occupations did not depend on birth.Even in the later times i.e., post Vedic, the Varnashrama dharma described the ritual status ofeach group. The Varna system did not prevent the non Kshatriyas from claimingKshatriya status and becoming rulers (examples being the Nandas and the Mauryas)nor Brahmans from claiming political suzerainty (e.g. the Sungkings).

Thus the theoretical model of the Varna system could never be rigidly enforced in the post-Vedic period. It is likely that during the LaterVedic period, with the shift in the geographical focus, the Vedic people encountered many non Vedic tribes and considerable interaction must helped formation of a composite society. At least the AtharvaVeda depicts a host of non Vedic religious practices which were sanctioned by the priests. However, tribal endogamy through strict marriage rules was the aim in order to maintain the purity of the tribe. Also, the growing importance of the Kshatriyas and the Brahmans in the society made it imperative to maintain their exclusive superior status, as compared to the rest. During the LaterVedic period however, the concept of Varnawas rudimentary in nature. 'The notion of untouchability for instance is absent.

Gotra

The institution of Gotra (literally meaning-cow pen) appeared during this period. As against tribal endogamy (marriage within tribe) people practised Gotra exogamy (marrying outside the gotra). Gotra signified descent from a common ancestor and marriages could not take place between couples belonging to the same Gotra.

Family

The patriarchal family was well established and the grihapati acquired a special status.Since householding economy was gaining predominance, the position of the householder too acquired economic importance. The rights on land were based on usage, and communal ownership of land prevailed. The grihapatis were wealthy and their ritual role was that of a

yajamma (i.e. he who orders sacrifice). Their wealth did not come from gifts, but was produced by their own efforts. Through yajnas, which they were bound to perform to gain merit, a part of their wealth got channelled to the Brahmans. Despite the presence of some women philosophers and the references to a few queens participating in the coronation rituals, women were considered subordinate to men, and were not involved in any major decision making.

Three stages of life

Three ashramas, i.e. stages of life were prescribed and these stages were represented by the brahmachari (studentship), grihastha (householder), vanaprasthi (partial retirement from householding life by living in the forest). It seems that the fourth i.e. the sanyasa (or complete retirement from active participation in the world) stage of life was not known till the time that the upanishad were written. The sanyasis or the ascetics in later periods were individuals who protested either passively or actively against the Vedic social structure.

7.6 RELIGION

The texts of this period indicate two different religious traditions: the Vedic, which is documented in the Sama Veda and Yajur Veda samhitas and the Brahmans, and the non-Vedic or perhaps the folk tradition extensively documented in the AtharvaVeda. The fact that the Atharvan religious tradition was considered to be part of the Vedic suggests assimilation of different cultures and beliefs into the Vedic religious system. The YajurVeda Samhita and Brahmanas document the sacrificial religion of the period. Sacrifices became very important during this period and they assumed both a public and private character. The public sacrifices e.g. the Rajsuyas, Vajapeya, Asvamedha were conducted on a massive scale, where the whole community participated. Some of the rituals performed in these sacrifices show elements of a fertility cult. For instance the Asvamedha yajna required the chief queen to lie next to the sacrificial horse, where the queen represented the earth, and this ritual was thought to ensure the prosperity for the king. A number of agricultural rituals were performed in the Rajasuya and the Vajapeya

yajna. The periodical rejuvenation of the earth and its fertility are some of the themes which were included in the ceremonial yajnas.

7.6.1 Priestcraft

Later Vedic texts reveal the elaboration of rituals which were complicated and needed professional men, trained in the art of performing them. Vidhis or rules for performing the sacrifices were formulated and the Vedic sacrifices no longer meant simple offering of food/oblations to the fire. The types of offerings and sacrifices etc. differed according to the needs of the patron or the yajamana. Sacrifices were now endowed with mystical symbolism and every ritual act was endowed by mysterious power. A new science of priestcraft emerged because of the complexities involved in the performance of these yajnas whether private or public. Thus a class of priests became specialists in the performances of Yajnas. There were even different sets of priests for performing different stages of the same sacrificial ritual.

7.6.2 The Changing Gods

Two prominent Early VedicGods, Indra and Agni lost their importance. Prajapati thecreator became important.This phenomenon also represents the importance ofsedentism now, since creation myths are important in the agrarian groups. Rudra, aminor deity in the RigV eda, became important now and Vishnu was conceived as the creator and protector of the universe. Pushan who protected cattle in the formerperiod now became the God of the Sudras.The changing status of the deities is inindication of the change in the character of the tribes from pastoral groups tosedentary agriculturist groups. The Early VedicGods who represented naturalphenomena were slowly discarded and the personification of natural elements asdivine beings became very complex. It was no longer easy to find the natural elementwhich represented a particular God from the hymns of the Later Vedic period.

7.6.3 Folk Tradition

The Atharva Veda is a mine of information regarding the folk tradition. Its contentsare radically different from the Vedic sacrificial religion and

it is concerned morewith magic. The contents of this Veda cover different aspects of human life. The hymns deal with the cure for diseases, prayers for health, charms for the prosperity of home, childrencattle and fields, charms to produce harmony, charms concerned with love and marriage or conversely rivalry and jealousy etc.

The Atharva Veda thus documents the kinds of superstition and beliefs which wereprevalent. The term Atharvan indcates a magical formula and the Atharvan priestsofficiated in this religion. Gods of the Vedic tradition were invoked but the reasonsfor which they were invoked were trivial and individualistic. Many Godlings and spirits such as pisachs, rakshasas and so on (some malevolent and some benevolent), wereinvoked either to bring good fortune or to cause havoc and destruction to one'sfriends and foes respectively. The invocations and the chants related to the domesticand the household and were close to the daily cycles of existence of the commonman.

For example, Indra was asked to kill the houserobber, the worm in the body and thewolf devil. The Ashvins were entrusted with the protection of agriculture and thekilling of rats. Savitri was summoned to fix a place where a new home could be built.Pusan was invoked to bring harmony and safe delivery of babies, while Surya wasinvoked to remove demons.Towards the end of this period, a strong reaction against the priestly domination andagainst the complexities involved in the yajnas resulted in the formulation of aphilosophical doctrine which is enunciated in the Upanishads. These texts emphasizedthe knowledge of the atma or the soul as against ritualistic practices and the wastefulexpenditure which accompanied sacrifices. Thus the materialistic aspect of thereligion was discarded and religion was raised to the realm of philosophy. TheUpanishads emphasized the changelessness and indestructibility of the soul which in away seemed to emphasize the need for stability and integration in a period when thejanapadas and mahajanapadas, i.e. republics and monarchies were emerging.

Thus we find that a great change in religious beliefs and practices had taken placebetween the Early Vedic and the Later Vedic period.This change was partly related tothe shift from pastoralism to agriculture. The religious changes of this period would paralleland reflect the socio-

political and economic changes that had taken place from theEarly Vedic to the Later Vedic phase.

Check Your Progress 2

1)How the function of rituals changed in later Vedic period?

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2) Highlight the changes occurred in polity and society in later Vedic period?

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3) Why the status of Kshatriyas increased in later Vedic period?

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4) What was the status of Varna system in later Vedic period?

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5) Write a short note on the changing nature of deities in later Vedic period.

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6) What is the subject matter of Atharva Veda?

_____

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_____

7) What led to the formulation of Upanishads?

7.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you got to know that the Vedic society was changing from pastoral nomadic lifestyle to a settled agricultural society but iron was yet to play an important role in agriculture;that in the process well defined political units were established, laws were codified and a distinct social stratification emerged; that the Vedic and the folk religious tradition of this period were increasingly coming together while maintaining their identity; that in this process of change some minor Gods of early Vedic period e.g. Rudra, became more important while the earlier important Gods e.g. Indra became less important; that both the literary and archaeological sources of this period have to be read together to get an overall picture of the period.

7.8 KEY WORDS

Consecration: The process of giving importance or legitimacy.

Double Cropping: To grow two crops on one piece of land simultaneously.

Endogamy: Marrying within e.g. within a tribe, caste or a gotra etc.

Exogamy: Marriage outside e.g. a caste, gotra etc.

Fertility Cult: A ritual/religious practice where human birth or process of birth is emphasised.

Folk Tradition: Traditions of the common people.

Gift Economy: An economy in which gifts play an important role in maintaining its institutions.

Labour Intensive: An activity where labour or man power is used relatively more than technology.

Sedentary: Stationary or remaining at one place.

Stratification: Division in to levels; e.g. social stratification means division of society in to different kinds according to some criteria e.g. caste, wealth etc.

Prestation: Service or offering required by custom or promise.

7.9 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1)Write a note on literary and archaeological sources of later Vedic period.

2) How the economy underwent a change in later Vedic period?

3) Emphasize on the political and societal developments that took place in later Vedic period?

7.10 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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7.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) The later additions specially the 10th Mandala to the Rig Veda Samhita, Sama Veda,Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda samhitas are the other Vedic texts which areassigned to the later Vedic phase. The Sama Veda samhita is a book of prayers andchants, modified and set to tune for

the explicit purposeof singing them during rituals. The Yajur Veda elaborates the rituals which accompany the recitation of hymns.The Artharva Veda contains the folk tradition of this period and represents popularreligion.

2) It is suggested that the socket axes made of iron were extensively used to clear the forests and the Gangetic doab for permanent cultivation. It was also believed that iron tipped ploughshares and hoes increased the efficiency of the agricultural implements which furthered agricultural activities. From the excavations, it appears that the use of iron was restricted to making weapons. Iron tipped weapons and horse chariots helped military activities which were rampant in this period and have been extensively documented in the Mahabharata.

Check Your Progress 2

1) In the Early Vedic society rituals were performed to bring about the welfare of theentire tribe. Gods were worshipped for ensuring victory over other tribes, grantingcattle and sons. It was also an occasion for the chiefs to distribute wealth. In the LaterVedic society the function of the rituals underwent a subtle change. Rituals becamemuch more complicated which could continue for years. Thus only the rich couldperform them. The spirit of collectivism was reduced. Sacrifices were performed toensure control over rest of the tribe. Gifts were no longer given to the entire tribe.

2)Tribal identity of the Early Vedic society gradually gave way to territorial identity and consequently the nature of chiefship changed.The social structure which was based on relations within a clan and was largelyegalitarian in the Early Vedic period became much more complex. This type ofsociety is marked by inequality. Even the same clan was divided into groups, someof which could have high status in society and some low status.

3) TheKshatriya lineage gained a distinctly superior status during this period, the reason being that the concept of territorial identity was established now. Thus territorybecame the physical manifestation of the ruler's power to rule.

4)The Varnashrama dharma was not properly developed in theLater Vedic society. The division of social groups was based on occupation

alone, and society wasstill flexible, where one's occupations did not depend on birth.Even in the later times i.e., post Vedic, the Varnashrama dharma described the ritual status ofeach group. The Varna system did not prevent the non Kshatriyas from claiming Kshatriya status and becoming rulers (examples being the Nandas and the Mauryas)nor Brahmans from claiming political suzerainty (e.g. the Sungkings).

5)The changing status of the deities is inindication of the change in the character of the tribes from pastoral groups tosedentary agriculturist groups. The Early VedicGods who represented naturalphenomena were slowly discarded and the personification of natural elements asdivine beings became very complex. It was no longer easy to find the natural elementwhich represented a particular God from the hymns of the Later Vedic period.

6)Its contentsare radically different from the Vedic sacrificial religion and it is concerned morewith magic. The contents of this Veda cover different aspects of human life. The hymns deal with the cure for diseases, prayers for health, charms for the prosperity of home, childrencattle and fields, charms to produce harmony, charms concerned with love and marriage or conversely rivalry and jealousy etc.

7)Towards the end of this period, a strong reaction against the priestly domination andagainst the complexities involved in the yajnas resulted in the formulation of aphilosophical doctrine which is enunciated in the Upanishads. These texts emphasizedthe knowledge of the atma or the soul as against ritualistic practices and the wastefulexpenditure which accompanied sacrifices. Thus the materialistic aspect of thereligion was discarded and religion was raised to the realm of philosophy.