URBAN DWELLERS IN THE INDO-PAKISTAN SUBCONTINENT AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE INDO-EUROPEAN-SPEAKING PEOPLE

"Whence this creation has come into being; whether it was made or not; he in the highest heaven is its surveyor. Surely he knows, or perhaps he knows not."

*Rig Veda* (c. 1500-1000 BCE)

Introduction

Like Mesopotamia and Egypt, civilization in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent developed next to a steady source of water, the Indus River. Scholars believe that by c. 3000 BCE Neolithic settlements had given way to Indus Civilization in this region of the world. Some of the major urban centers of Indus Civilization would include Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (in Pakistan). Urbanism also developed in Kalinbangan, Lothal, and Sukotada (in India). By c.1700 BCE, Indus Civilization appeared to go into decline. After completing this discussion and the textbook reading you should be able to do the following:

- Identify the sources historians use to reconstruct the past of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.
- Describe how the urban revolution was represented in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.
- Explain the impact the Indo-European-speaking people had on India's early history.

I. The Rise of Indus Valley Civilization

A. The early history of the Indus Valley was dominated by a civilization referred to as Harappan (c. 2500-1500 BCE). It is named after the city of Harappa, one of its largest urban centers. It is argued by many scholars that the language used in this region was Dravidian.

Maps 324m01/02

1. The earliest remains of Harappan civilization have been dated to c. 2500 BCE.
   a) By c. 1500 BCE, however, it is generally agreed by scholars that Harappan civilization showed signs of decline.
   b) There is still much debate among scholars as to what possibly caused the decline of Harappan civilizations we will see later.

2. Between c. 4000 to 1500 BCE, Indo-European-speaking people believed to have originated in the Ukraine/southern Russia began migrating to different regions in Europe, Mesopotamia, India and Central Asia. By 1500 BCE, a group of Indo-European-speaking people who called themselves Aryans (noble people) began migrating into the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.

Map 324m03

a) Their arrival introduced to Indian history what many historians call the Vedic Age (c. 1500-1000 BCE).
b) It should be noted that not all scholars believe that the Indo-Aryans migrated into India. Others argue that they were a people indigenous to this region.

B. Unfortunately, sources have been limited both for the study of Harappan civilization and for the study of the Indo-Aryans.

1. In the case of Harappan civilization, their system of writing has not been deciphered as of yet by scholars.

   a) Consequently, we rely primarily on the archaeological record for information for reconstructing this civilization.

   b) Much of Indus Valley script has come down to us in the form of seals. These seals are flat and square or rectangular. They depict humans or animals which are accompanied by an inscription. These seals were used to create impressions on various mediums.

   Image 324i01: Seal

   c) A total of close to 400 signs have been identified as making up Indus Valley script.

   Image 324i02: Indus Valley Script

2. In contrast to the sedentary lifestyle of Harappans, the Indo-European-speaking people were initially pastoralists. Consequently, they transferred religious and literary texts orally.

   a) This method of transferring information would change about c. 600 BCE when Sanskrit, the language of the Indo-European-speaking people, was adopted into a writing system.

   b) You will be examining one source used by historians to reconstruct the Aryan past called the *Rig Veda* in the latter part of this lecture.

II. The Social, Economic and Political Organization of Indus Civilization

A. As noted above, Harappan civilization grew on the flood plains of the Indus River. Cities and towns were built near the shores of the rivers.

   Image 324i03: Harappa

1. They were constructed with mud bricks and kiln-burnt bricks. These cities were carefully planned. Massive "granaries" were built at each city along with citadels and other forms of monumental structures.

   Image 324i04: Harappa Air

   a) The Indus River was a destructive natural force because of its unpredictable flooding.
b) As a consequence, cities were frequently leveled and rebuilt. Mohenjo-Daro, for example, was rebuilt six times and Harappa rebuilt five times.

**Image 324i05: Mohenjo-Daro**

2. Any discussion of the makeup of social structure in Harappan cities leaves us, once again, with more questions than answers.

a) Since Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro had advanced levels of surplus, commerce and division of labor, social distinctions must have been similar to those present in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

b) Likewise, we know very little about the Harappan belief system. Unlike in Mesopotamia or Egypt, there are no buildings in Harappan cities that suggest they may have served as a temple. The bulk of public buildings in the city seem to be oriented around the Harappan economy (for storage thus called "granaries") or living quarters.

c) The seals that have survived seem to suggest that the Harappans may have exercised some sort of goddess worship along with worship of natural forces.

B. Archeological evidence suggests that Harappans traded with regions beyond the Indus Valley.

1. More specifically, scholars believe that regular trade existed between Harappa and Mesopotamia.

a) Harappan seals, beads, and weights have been uncovered in Mesopotamia. In turn, Harappans sought lapis lazuli and copper.

b) Scholars believe that Mesopotamian references to *Meluhha* were in fact references to Indus Valley civilization. These sources also note that products familiar to this region included ivory, carnelian and gold.

2. There is evidence of maritime trade leaving this region as well. The city of Lothal (India), for example, had a dockyard.

**Image 324i06: Lothal Dock**

C. Many scholars believe that Harappan political organization must have been similar to that of Egypt or Mesopotamia.

1. Once again, we face the same problem. A lack of deciphered documentary evidence makes it difficult to identify specifics of how this political organization was structured.

2. What happened to Harappan culture? As noted earlier, archeological evidence seems to point to decline beginning at about c. 1500 BCE.

3. One theory subscribed to by scholars is that the incursion of Indo-European-speaking people brought an end to Harappan civilization. Other theories suggest that flooding,
geological factors (erosion), pestilence, and changes in climate might have caused the decline of Harappan civilization.

**Image 324i07:** Harrapan

### III. The Arrival of the Indo-European-speaking People (c. 2000 BCE)

**A.** As previously noted, the Indo-European-speaking people were pastoralists believed to have originated in the Ukraine/southern Russian who migrated to regions that include Europe, Middle East, India and Central Asia.

1. Scholars argue that the development of India was shaped by this culture and its integration with local culture.
   
   a) As one historian has noted "Many of the institutions of of Indian life—especially the Hindu—trace their origin to an Aryan beginning. The Aryans not only contributed the Sanskrit language, the idea of caste society, and of religious sacrifice . . . but played a physical part in the clearing of land for large scale agriculture. What was more important was that these contributions generated further ideas and institutions through their acceptance or by arousing opposition to them."

   b) Linguists have reconstructed Indo-European-speaking people movement by tracing similarities in ancient languages. The table below includes an example this technique using the term father.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pitar</td>
<td>Pater</td>
<td>Pater</td>
<td>Padre</td>
<td>Vater</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. One group that migrated into the upper Indus Valley referred to themselves as the Aryans (noble people). They were pastoralists and had tribal political organization. They had domesticated the horse and made use of the two-wheel chariot.

   a) The language attributed to them is Sanskrit.

**B.** Many historians believe that the Indo-European-speaking people adopted agriculture and formed sedentary communities as they migrated into other parts of India. Punjab (five rivers) became the center of their civilization.

1. Once regions were subjugated, order and stability was maintained by the Indo-European-speaking people through their emphasis of hereditary distinctions "between individuals and groups, according to their occupations and roles in society." It served as a form of social control and an ordering of society.
a) This system laid the foundation for the caste (from the Portuguese casta) system (hereditary and unchangeable status).

b) It is generally agreed that social distinctions originated from differences in complexions between the Indo-European-speaking people and local populations. This is attributed to the use of the term varna (color) as a way of referring to major social classes.

c) By the year c.1000 BCE, the Indo-European-speaking people divided society into four major varnas. As society became more complex, subcastes called jati (determined by occupation) were introduced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Varnas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins (priests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kshatriyas (noble/warrior class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaishyas (commoners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shudras (workers/serfs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The early vedic corpus suggests that the status of women was higher than it would be in later years.

a) These sources suggest that women were given an education. For example, the Rig Veda notes that "An unmarried young learned daughter should be married to bridegroom who like her is learned."

b) Furthermore, it appears that women were not barred from public speaking.

c) Later sources, in contrast, assign women a different status. Located below is one such source. It is a fragment from the Law Book of Manu (c. 2nd century BCE to 2nd century CE):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading the Past</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law Book of Manu</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

148. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

149. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible.

150. She must always be cheerful, clever in (the management of her) household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure.
151. Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives, and when he is dead, she must not insult (his memory).

152. For the sake of procuring good fortune to (brides), the recitation of benedictory texts (svastyayana), and the sacrifice to the Lord of creatures (Pragapati) are used at weddings; (but) the betrothal (by the father or guardian) is the cause of (the husband's) dominion (over his wife).

154. Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.

155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women apart (from their husbands); if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that (reason alone) be exalted in heaven.

C. Vedic culture continued to expand reaching the eastern Gangetic plains.

1. This movement led to the establishment of *janapada* (small tribal kingdoms) in this region and would stimulate a second phase of urbanization. From the janapada would emerge sixteen *mahajanapada* (great communities) in c. 5th century BCE. These new urban centers were heavily fortified with moats and ramparts.

   Table 3: The Mahajanapadas

   **Middle Ganges Valley**: Anga, Magadha, Vrijji and Mallas

   **West of the Ganges Valley**: Kashi, Kosala, Vatsa, Kuru, Panchala, Matsya and Shurasena

   **North-west**: Kanmboja and Gandhara

   **Western and Central India**: Avanti and Chedi

   **Deccan**: Assaka

2. Magadha, founded by Bimbisara (5th century BCE), became the pre-eminent *mahajanapada*. With its capital at Rajagriha, Magadha's rulers successfully consolidated vast tracts of territories.

3. With the transition to a settled life, new form of political organization evolved: sacred kingship. Kings received their legitimacy from ritual investiture by Brahmin priests.

   a) Kings now began to be associated with "the maintenance of the cosmic order and fertility of the earth" and started to supplant aristocratic tribal republics.

   b) These new kings no longer owed their legitimacy from an election by members of the tribe nor were they limited through the required consultation with the *vish/jana* (council composed of all males) or the *sabha/samiti* (an aristocratic council).
IV. The *Rig Veda*

A. As Indo-European-speaking people migrated into the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, they brought with them religious concepts and a pantheon of naturalistic gods. Their world views were embodied in the Vedas (revelation/wisdom/knowledge), a collection of hymns, ritual texts and philosophical treatises compiled between c. 1500-500 BCE.

1. The oldest of the Vedas is the *Rig Veda*.
   
   a) The fusion of the Vedic tradition with local traditions served as the foundation for Hinduism.

2. The Aryan belief system is described as being polytheistic with nature based deities. Sacrifice was an important part of this system. For example, a fire sacrifice was practiced since fire was believed to be the liaison between humans and gods. The importance placed on rituals and sacrifice made priests (Brahmins) very important in society.

   **Table 3: Aryan Gods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dyauś</td>
<td>Father and sky god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indra</td>
<td>God of war and storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agni</td>
<td>God of fire and home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varuna</td>
<td>God of righteousness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   **Image 32408:** Indra

3. The *Rig Veda*, as previously noted, is a source that provides insights about Aryan belief system. They also provide information about Aryan society and culture as well.

   a) Other written sources available to historians include Vedic commentaries called Brahmas (c. 1000 BCE), philosophical speculations referred to as the Upnishads (c. 750-500 BCE), and epics (c. 400 BCE) such as the *Mahabharata* (about two rival Aryan clans) and the *Ramayana* (about King Rama).

   **Image 32409:** Scene from the *Mahabharata*

   b) Below are fragments from the *Rig Veda*:

**Creation Hymn**

*Translator's introduction: A time is envisioned when the world was not, only a watery chaos (the dark, "indistinguishable sea") and a warm cosmic breath, which could give an impetus of life. Notice how thought gives rise to desire (when something is thought of it can then be desired) and desire links non-being to being (we desire what is not but then try to bring it about that it is). Yet the whole process is shrouded in mystery.*

*Where do the gods fit in this creation scheme?*
The non-existent was not; the existent was not at that time. The atmosphere was not nor the heavens which are beyond. What was concealed? Where? In whose protection? Was it water? An unfathomable abyss?

There was neither death nor immortality then. There was not distinction of day or night. That alone breathed windless by its own power. Other than that there was not anything else. Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning. All this was an indistinguishable sea. That which becomes, that which was enveloped by the void, that alone was born through the power of heat. Upon that desire arose in the beginning. This was the first discharge of thought. Sages discovered this link of the existent to the non-existent, having searched in the heart with wisdom. Their line [of vision] was extended across; what was below, what was above? There were impregnators, there were powers: inherent power below, impulses above. Who knows truly? Who here will declare whence it arose, whence this creation? The gods are subsequent to the creation of this. Who, then, knows whence it has come into being? Whence this creation has come into being; whether it was made or not; he in the highest heaven is its surveyor. Surely he knows, or perhaps he knows not.

To Agni (Fire)

Translator's introduction: Agni, the god of fire, whose name is the common word for fire, is a terrestrial deity, only loosely anthropomorphic. He is most often compared to animals, with wood for his food and melted butter for his drink. He is the mouth by which the gods consume those items during the sacrifice. He is born from wood (as two sticks are rubbed together), but then devours his parents. As "Lord of the House," he is a guest in human dwellings in the form of the domestic fire.

How is Agni supposed to "bring the gods here"?

I call upon Agni, the one placed in front, the divine priest of the sacrifice, the invoker, the best bestower of gifts.

Agni is worthy of being called upon by seers past and present: may he bring the gods here! Through Agni may one obtain wealth and prosperity day by day, splendid and abounding in heroic sons.

O Agni, the sacrifice and work of the sacrifice, which you encompass on all sides—that alone goes to the gods.

May Agni, the invoker who has the powers of a sage, true and most brilliant in glory, come here, a god with the gods!

Whosoever favor you wish to do for a worshipper, Agni, that favor of yours surely comes true, O Angiras [member of a priestly family].

O Agni, you who gleam in the darkness, to you we come day by day, with devotion and bearing homage; to you, ruler of the sacrifices, keeper of the Rta [cosmic law], brightly shining, growing in your abode. So, be of easy access to us, Agni, as a father to his son. Abide with us for our well-being.
To Indra

Translator's introduction: Indra is a sky god and a war god who holds the earth and the heavens apart, on occasion making the earth tremble. As the counterpart of Zeus for the Greeks or Jupiter for the Romans, he is the god of the thunderstorm, who vanquishes drought and darkness. He is the most frequently mentioned god in the Veda, the most nationalistic, and the most anthropomorphic. The serpent which he slew was a demon of drought, who had bottled up the streams; but Indra shattered the mountain, releasing the streams like pent up cows. "The lowly Dasa color" whom he has "put in hiding" presumably refers to the indigenous peoples of northern India who had been overcome by the Aryan invaders and either moved into the forests or migrated southward.

What is Indra supposed to do for the weary, the weak, the needy priest (a Brahman, of course) and the singer?

The one who is first and possessed of wisdom when born; the god who strove to protect the gods with strength; the one before whose force the two worlds were afraid because of the greatness of his virility: he, O people, is Indra.

The one who made firm the quaking earth; the one who made fast the shaken mountains; the one who measured out wide the atmosphere; the one who propped up heaven: he, O people, is Indra. The one who, having killed the serpent, released the seven rivers; the one who drove out the cows by undoing Vala, (1) the one who generates fire between two rocks, victor in battles: he, O people, is Indra.

The one by whom all things here were made moving; the one who put in hiding the lowly Dasa color; the one who, like a gambler who has won the stake, has taken the enemy's possessions: he, O people, is Indra.

The one who is the terrible one, about whom they ask "Where is he?" and they say of him, "He is not!" He diminished the enemy's possessions like stakes [at a game]. Put your faith in him: he, O people, is Indra.

The one who is the impeller of the weary, of the weak, of the Brahman seeking aid, the singer; the one with goodly mustaches who is the helper of him who works the stones, who has pressed the Soma (2): he, O people, is Indra.

The one in whose control are horses, cows, villages, all chariots; the one who has caused to be born the sun, the dawn; the one who is the waters' leader: he, O people, is Indra.

The one whom the two lines of battle, coming together, call upon separately, the nearer and the farther, both foes; even the two who have mounted the same chariot call upon him individually: he, O people, is Indra.

The one without whom people do not conquer; the one to whom, when fighting, they call for help; the one who is a match for everyone; the one who shakes the unshakable: he, O people, is Indra.

Purusa, the Cosmic Person

Translator's introduction: This is one of the latest compositions in the Rig Veda, as it suggests a sort of pantheistic philosophy. Purusa is a cosmic giant, of whom the gods and the cosmos itself are composed; yet he is also the object of the sacrifice to the gods. From him then are derived the
gods in the heaven and, from the remainder, all the rest of what is, both the living and the non-living.

The top four castes are supposed to have been derived from Purusa: the Brahmans, the Rajanya (or Ksatriya), the Vaisya, and the Sudra. Which body parts are associated with each group, and what seems to be the significance of those parts?

Thousand-headed is Purusa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. Having covered the earth on all sides, he stood above it the width of ten fingers.

Only Purusa is all this, that which has been and that which is to be. He is the lord of the immortals, who grow by means of [ritual] food.

Such is his greatness, yet more than this is Purusa. One-quarter of him is all beings; three-quarters of him is the immortal in heaven.

Three-quarters of Purusa went upward, one-quarter of him remained here. From this [one-quarter] he spread in all directions into what eats and what does not eat.

From him the shining one was born, from the shining one was born Purusa. When born he extended beyond the earth, behind as well as in front.

When the gods performed a sacrifice with the offering Purusa, spring was its clarified butter, summer the kindling, autumn the oblation.

It was Purusa, born in the beginning, which they sprinkled on the sacred grass as a sacrifice. With him the gods sacrificed, the demi-gods, and the seers.

From that sacrifice completely offered, the clotted butter was brought together. It made the beasts of the air, the forest and the village.

From that sacrifice completely offered, the mantras [Rig Veda] and the songs [Samaveda] were born. The meters were born from it. The sacrificial formulae [Yajurveda] were born from it.

From it the horses were born and all that have cutting teeth in both jaws. The cows were born from it, also. From it were born goats and sheep.

When they divided Purusa, how many ways did they apportion him? What was his mouth? What were his arms? What were his thighs, his feet declared to be?

His mouth was the Brahman [caste], his arms were the Rajanya [Ksatriya caste], his thighs the Vaisya [caste]; from his feet the Sudra [caste] was born.

The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born; from his mouth both Indra and Agni [fire]; from his breath Vayu [wind] was born.

From his navel arose the air; from his head the heaven evolved; from his feet the earth; the [four] directions from his ear. Thus, they fashioned the worlds.

Seven were his altar sticks, three times seven were the kindling bundles, when the gods, performing the sacrifice, bound the beast Purusa.
The gods sacrificed with the sacrifice to the sacrifice. These were the first rites. These powers reached the firmament, where the ancient demi-gods and the gods are.

(1) The cave in which the cattle were imprisoned.
(2) A beverage made from the juice of a plant (probably a hallucinogenic mushroom) and used in religious ceremonies; also a god.

[http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_1/rig_veda.html]