

# The Beginnings of Indian Civilisation

Class 6 — History (Exploring Society: India and Beyond) — Chapter 6

NCERT Comprehensive Notes 2025-26

## 01 Overview

This chapter introduces us to the most ancient civilisation of the Indian subcontinent — the Indus-Sarasvatī Civilisation, also known as the Harappan Civilisation. Flourishing between approximately 2600 BCE and 1900 BCE, this remarkable civilisation demonstrated advanced urban planning, sophisticated water management systems, thriving trade networks, diverse agricultural practices, and a rich cultural life. The chapter explores the defining characteristics of a civilisation, traces the journey from villages to cities in the Indus and Sarasvatī river basins, examines the daily life of the Harappans, and discusses the possible reasons for the civilisation's eventual decline. As B.B. Lal noted, the Harappan society was characterised not by exploitation but by mutual accommodation — making it one of the most balanced ancient communities known to history.

### ★ USP Key Points

- ★ The Indus-Sarasvatī Civilisation flourished from approximately 2600 BCE to 1900 BCE, spanning around 700 years.
- ★ It is one of the three oldest civilisations in the world, alongside Mesopotamia (~4000 BCE) and Egypt (~3500 BCE).
- ★ Over 1,400 sites have been discovered across India and Pakistan, covering regions from Punjab to Gujarat and beyond.
- ★ Mohenjo-daro had approximately 700 brick wells, and Dholavira's largest reservoir measured 73 metres in length.
- ★ Lothal's dockyard measured an enormous 217 metres in length and 36 metres in width — equivalent to two football grounds.
- ★ The Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro measured about 12 × 7 metres and used natural bitumen for waterproofing.
- ★ The Harappans were the first people in Eurasia to grow cotton and weave it into cloth.

## 02 What Is a Civilisation?

A civilisation refers to an advanced stage of human societies. After the first human groups settled down and began practising agriculture, they gradually developed technologies such as construction, metallurgy, and transport. Over time, these communities evolved from simple agricultural settlements into complex, organised societies — civilisations.

### Seven Characteristics of a Civilisation

According to the NCERT textbook, a civilisation should have at least the following seven key characteristics that distinguish it from simpler forms of human society:

S.NO.	CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION
1	<b>Government &amp; Administration</b>	Some form of organised governance to manage a complex society and its many activities.
2	<b>Urbanism</b>	Town-planning, growth of cities and their management, including water management and drainage systems.
3	<b>Variety of Crafts</b>	Management of raw materials (stone, metal) and production of finished goods (ornaments, tools).
4	<b>Trade (Internal &amp; External)</b>	Exchange of goods within a city or region (internal) and with distant regions or other parts of the world (external).
5	<b>Writing System</b>	Some form of writing needed to keep records and communicate.
6	<b>Cultural Ideas</b>	Ideas about life and the world expressed through art, architecture, literature, oral traditions, or social customs.
7	<b>Productive Agriculture</b>	Enough agricultural production to feed not just villages, but also the cities.

**Key Insight:** All these characteristics are interconnected — productive agriculture is often considered the most fundamental because it frees people from food production, allowing them to specialise in crafts, trade, governance, and the arts.

## When Did Civilisation Begin?

Civilisation began at different times in different parts of the world. The region known as Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and Syria) saw civilisation emerge about 6,000 years ago (around 4000 BCE). Ancient Egypt followed a few centuries later (around 3500 BCE). In the Indian subcontinent, the Indus-Sarasvatī Civilisation developed around 2600 BCE, making it one of the three oldest civilisations in the world.

CIVILISATION	REGION	APPROXIMATE BEGINNING
Mesopotamian	Modern Iraq & Syria	~4000 BCE
Egyptian	Nile Valley, Egypt	~3500 BCE
Indus-Sarasvatī	Indian Subcontinent (NW region)	~2600 BCE

## 03 From Village to City — The Indus-Sarasvatī Civilisation

### Geographical Setting

The vast plains of Punjab (today divided between India and Pakistan) and Sindh (now in Pakistan) are watered by the Indus River and its tributaries. These fertile plains were highly favourable for agriculture. A little further east, a few millennia ago, another river — the Sarasvatī — used to flow from the foothills of the Himalayas through Haryana, Punjab, parts of Rajasthan, and Gujarat.

## The Transition to Cities

In this whole region, from about 3500 BCE, villages gradually grew into towns. With increasing trade and other exchanges, those towns further grew into cities. This critical transition happened around 2600 BCE. Archaeologists have given this civilisation several names — 'Indus', 'Harappan', 'Indus-Sarasvatī', or 'Sindhu-Sarasvatī' civilisation. Its inhabitants are called 'Harappans'. This development is also called the 'First Urbanisation of India'.

**Why are inhabitants called 'Harappans'?** The city of Harappa (today in Pakistan's Punjab) was the first of this civilisation to be excavated, way back in 1920–21, over a century ago. Hence, the civilisation and its people came to be named after this city.

## The Sarasvatī River

The Sarasvatī River, which today goes by the name of 'Ghaggar' in India and 'Hakra' in Pakistan (hence called the 'Ghaggar-Hakra River'), is now only a seasonal river, flowing only during the rainy season. However, during the time of the civilisation, it was a mighty river with many sites along its banks.

The Sarasvatī River is first mentioned in the Ṛig Veda, an ancient collection of prayers, where Sarasvatī is worshipped both as a goddess and as a river flowing 'from the mountain to the sea'. Later texts describe the river as drying up and eventually disappearing.

## Major Sites of the Civilisation

HARAPPAN CITY	MODERN STATE / REGION	SIGNIFICANCE
Dholavira	Gujarat (Rann of Kutch)	Three distinct zones; massive reservoirs; stone foundations
Harappa	Punjab (Pakistan)	First excavated city (1920–21); gave name to civilisation
Kalibangan	Rajasthan	Along Sarasvatī; wide streets visible in lower town
Mohenjo-daro	Sindh (Pakistan)	Great Bath; 700 brick wells; large planned city
Rakhigarhi	Haryana	Major city in Sarasvatī basin; one of the largest sites
Lothal	Gujarat	Huge dockyard (217 × 36 m); important port city
Ganweriwala	Cholistan (Pakistan)	Major city in Sarasvatī basin
Banawali	Haryana	Clay model of plough found here
Farmana	Haryana	Smaller settlement in Sarasvatī basin

**Think About It:** The term 'Indus Valley civilisation' is now considered obsolete because the civilisation extended far beyond just the Indus river valley — it covered a vast area from Sindh and Punjab to Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Haryana, including many sites along the Sarasvatī basin.

## 04 Town-Planning & Water Management

### Planned Cities

Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, now in Pakistan, were the first two cities of this civilisation to be discovered; their identification goes back to 1924, a century ago. The larger Harappan cities were built according to precise plans. They had wide streets which were often oriented to the cardinal directions (north-south and east-west). Most cities seem to have been surrounded by fortifications and had two distinct parts:

FEATURE	UPPER TOWN (CITADEL)	LOWER TOWN
Residents	Local elite — rulers, officials, administrators, priests	Common people — craftsmen, traders, workers
Buildings	Large structures for collective purposes (warehouses, granaries, baths)	Individual houses of various sizes lining streets and lanes
Construction	Same quality of bricks as lower town	Same quality for small and big houses alike

**Important:** Dholavira in Gujarat was unique — it had *three* distinct zones (not two like other cities), and the foundations of most buildings were made with stones rather than bricks.

### The Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro

The famous Great Bath in Mohenjo-daro is a small but elaborate tank measuring about 12 × 7 metres. It was constructed with carefully laid-out bricks and had waterproofing materials such as natural bitumen (a form of tar) applied on top. The tank was surrounded by small rooms, one of which contained a well. There was a drain in one corner to empty the tank from time to time and refill it with freshwater.

Archaeologists have proposed several possible interpretations for the Great Bath: a public bath for people, a bath for the royal family only, or a tank used for religious rituals. The first interpretation (public bath) is now ruled out because most houses in Mohenjo-daro had individual bathrooms. The debate between the other two interpretations continues.

### Water Management Systems

The Harappans gave much importance to water management and cleanliness. They often had separate areas for bathing in their homes, connected to a larger network of drains that generally ran below the streets and took waste water away.

#### ★ Water Management Highlights

- ★ Mohenjo-daro had approximately 700 wells made of bricks, regularly maintained for centuries.
- ★ Underground drainage systems ran below the streets in major cities like Lothal and Mohenjo-daro.
- ★ Dholavira had at least 6 large reservoirs, some built with stones and even cut directly into rock.
- ★ The largest reservoir at Dholavira measured 73 metres in length — massive for that era.

- ★ Most reservoirs at Dholavira were connected through underground drains for efficient water harvesting and distribution.
- ★ Individual homes had separate bathing areas connected to the city's drainage network.

**Think About It:** Building such elaborate reservoirs and drainage networks required a large organised workforce, precise planning, and some form of municipal administration — all of which point to a well-governed society with effective civic management.

## 05 Food & Agriculture

### Agricultural Practices

The Harappans created many of their settlements along the banks of large or small rivers. This was a logical choice — not just for easy access to water, but also for agriculture, since rivers enrich the soil around them. This intense agricultural activity was managed by hundreds of small rural sites or villages. Then as now, the cities could survive only if enough agricultural produce from rural areas reached them on a daily basis.

### Crops Grown by the Harappans

CATEGORY	CROPS / PRODUCTS
Cereals	Barley, Wheat, some Millets, and sometimes Rice
Pulses	Beans, Peas, Lentils (Dal)
Vegetables	A variety of vegetables
Cash Crop	Cotton — Harappans were the <b>first in Eurasia</b> to grow cotton
Spices / Others	Turmeric, Ginger, Banana (found in clay pot residues)

**Remarkable Discovery:** Scientific examinations of clay pots revealed surprising remains — dairy products (expected), and turmeric, ginger, and banana (unexpected). This shows how diverse and rich the Harappan diet actually was!

### Farming Tools

The Harappans made farming tools, including the plough. A small clay model of a plough was discovered at Banawali in Haryana. Some of these tools continue to be used by modern-day farmers, showing remarkable continuity across thousands of years.

### Animal Husbandry and Fishing

The Harappans also domesticated a number of animals for meat consumption and fished both in rivers and in the sea. This is known from the large numbers of animal and fish bones found during excavations at various Harappan sites.

## Pulses

A category of crops that includes beans, peas, and lentils (dal). These were an important part of the Harappan diet and continue to be staples in Indian cuisine today.

## 06 Trade, Crafts & Daily Life

### A Brisk Trade

The Harappans were engaged in active trade, not only within their own civilisation (other cities nearby or far away), but also with other civilisations and cultures within and outside India. This included trade with Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), Oman, and Iran.

EXPORTS	IMPORTS
Ornaments (especially carnelian beads)	Copper (not commonly available locally)
Timber	Other metals and raw materials
Objects of daily use (ivory combs, etc.)	Exact imports are not fully clear from archaeological evidence
Probably gold and cotton	
Possibly some food items	

### Maritime Trade — India's First Sea Trade

To conduct their trade, the Harappans used land routes, rivers, and the sea for more distant destinations. This represents the first intensive maritime activity in India. Several Harappan settlements are located in coastal regions of Gujarat and Sindh.

**Lothal's Dockyard:** Lothal, a small settlement in Gujarat, has a surprisingly huge basin measuring 217 metres in length and 36 metres in width — the length is just a little more than that of two football grounds! This basin was a dockyard — a structure used to receive and send boats for further transportation of goods.

### Seals — Identification of Traders and Goods

Thousands of small seals have been excavated from many settlements. These seals were generally made of steatite, a soft stone that was hardened through heating. They measure only a few centimetres and generally depict animal figures (unicorn, bull, horned tiger) with a few signs above them that are part of a writing system. However, this writing system and the symbolic meaning of the animal figures are yet to be understood. What is certain is that they somehow relate to trade activities.

### Craftsmanship

The Harappans were skilled craftspeople who worked with various materials:

CRAFT	DETAILS
<b>Carnelian Bead Making</b>	Reddish semiprecious stone found mostly in Gujarat; special drilling and decoration techniques developed
<b>Shell Bangles</b>	Conch shells worked into beautiful bangles using sophisticated techniques
<b>Copper &amp; Bronze Work</b>	Mastered copper working; adding tin to copper produced harder bronze for tools, pots, pans, and figurines
<b>Pottery</b>	Terracotta pots with painted designs (e.g., the 'thirsty crow' story pot from Lothal)
<b>Seal Making</b>	Steatite seals with animal figures and writing signs

## The Lives of the Ancients — Objects Found

Archaeologists have unearthed many objects made and used by Harappans, revealing both their daily life and cultural practices:

### ★ Remarkable Objects Found

- ★ **Bronze mirror** — found at Dholavira, showing personal grooming was important.
- ★ **Terracotta pot** — beautifully painted pottery from Dholavira.
- ★ **Stone weights** — standardised weights found at Dholavira, indicating a systematic measurement system.
- ★ **Bronze chisel** — a tool from Dholavira, showing skilled metalwork.
- ★ **Gamesboard** — engraved on stone, about 25 cm long (from Dholavira); Harappans enjoyed board games!
- ★ **Terracotta whistle** — about 4 cm long (from Karanpura, Rajasthan); used for amusement.
- ★ **'Priest King' statuette** — though it is not actually known who this figure was.
- ★ **'Dancing Girl'** — a bronze figurine from Mohenjo-daro, 10.8 cm high, showing confidence and artistry.
- ★ **Swastika seal** — showing this ancient symbol was already in use.
- ★ **Namaste figurine** — a terracotta figurine seated in the traditional 'namaste' greeting pose.

**Continuity with Modern India:** The 'Dancing Girl' figurine shows bangles covering an entire arm — a practice still visible in parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan today. The namaste gesture, the swastika symbol, and the 'thirsty crow' story (found on a Lothal pot) all demonstrate remarkable cultural continuity spanning over 4,000 years.

## 07 The End or a New Beginning? — Decline & Legacy

### The Decline (Around 1900 BCE)

Around 1900 BCE, the Sindhu-Sarasvatī civilisation, despite all its achievements, began to fall apart. The cities were abandoned one by one. If any inhabitants remained, they adopted a rural lifestyle in the changed environment — it appears that the earlier government or administration no longer existed. Gradually, the Harappans scattered over hundreds, if not thousands, of small rural settlements.

## Causes of Decline

Archaeologists have proposed many factors for the decline. Long back, it was thought that warfare or invasions may have destroyed the cities, but there is no trace of warfare or invasion. Indeed, the Harappans do not seem to have kept any army or weapons of war — it seems to have been a relatively peaceful civilisation.

Two factors are currently agreed upon by archaeologists:

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION	IMPACT
<b>Climatic Change</b>	A global climatic change from 2200 BCE onward caused reduced rainfall and a drier phase.	Made agriculture more difficult; reduced food supply to cities.
<b>Drying of Sarasvatī River</b>	The Sarasvatī River dried up in its central basin.	Cities like Kalibangan and Banawali were suddenly abandoned.

**A Peaceful Civilisation:** Unlike many other ancient civilisations, the Harappans do not seem to have maintained an army or manufactured weapons of war. No evidence of warfare or invasion has been found at any Harappan site. This makes it one of the most peaceful major civilisations of the ancient world.

## The Legacy

Although the cities disappeared, much of the Harappan culture and technology survived and was passed on to the next phase of Indian civilisation. The Harappans returned to rural settlements because a rural lifestyle gives easier access to food and water than an urban lifestyle. These reminders teach us how much human societies depend on climate and the environment for their well-being.

**Key Takeaway:** The decline was not a sudden destruction but a gradual transformation. The people did not vanish — they scattered into rural communities, carrying forward their knowledge, cultural practices, and traditions into the next phase of Indian history.

## 08 Glossary

### Civilisation

An advanced stage of human societies characterised by government, urbanism, crafts, trade, writing, cultural ideas, and productive agriculture.

### Metallurgy

The techniques of extracting metals from nature, purifying or combining them, as well as the scientific study of metals and their properties.

### Tributary

A river that flows into a larger river (or lake). For instance, the Yamuna is a tributary of the Ganga.

### Fortification

A massive wall surrounding a settlement or city, generally built for protective purposes.

### Elite

The higher layers of society, such as rulers, officials, administrators, and often priests who lived in the upper town (citadel).

### Reservoir

A large natural or artificial place where water is stored. Dholavira had at least six large reservoirs for water harvesting.

### Pulses

A category of crops that includes beans, peas, and lentils (dal). An important part of the Harappan diet.

### Steatite

A soft stone (soapstone) used by Harappans to make seals. It was hardened through heating after carving.

### Carnelian

A reddish semiprecious stone found mostly in Gujarat, used by Harappans to make highly valued beads for trade.

### Dockyard

A structure used to receive and send boats for transportation of goods. Lothal had a dockyard measuring 217 × 36 metres.

### Bitumen

A natural form of tar used by Harappans as a waterproofing material, notably in the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro.

### Urbanisation

The process of villages growing into towns and cities. The Harappan civilisation is called the 'First Urbanisation of India'.

## 09 Questions & Answers / MCQs

### NCERT Exercise Questions with Answers

**Q1. Why does the civilisation studied in this chapter have several names? Discuss their significance.**

**Answer:** The civilisation studied in this chapter has several names because it was named at different stages of discovery. Initially, when the first two cities — Harappa and Mohenjo-daro — were discovered in the Indus plains, it was called the 'Indus Valley civilisation'. It was named 'Harappan' because Harappa was the first city to be excavated in 1920–21. Later, as more sites were discovered along the Sarasvatī River basin (now called Ghaggar-Hakra), the names 'Indus-Sarasvatī' and 'Sindhu-Sarasvatī' civilisation came into use. The term 'Indus Valley' is now considered obsolete because the civilisation extended far beyond just the Indus valley — it covered a vast area including Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Haryana. Each name reflects a different stage of archaeological understanding and a growing awareness of the civilisation's true geographical extent.

**Q2. Write a brief report (150 to 200 words) summing up some of the achievements of the Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation.**

**Answer:** The Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation, one of the oldest in the world (c. 2600–1900 BCE), achieved remarkable feats. Its cities like Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, and Dholavira were built according to precise town plans with wide streets oriented to cardinal directions, fortified walls, and distinct upper and lower towns. The Harappans developed exceptional water management systems — Mohenjo-daro had 700 brick wells, while Dholavira had six massive stone reservoirs connected by underground drains. Their drainage systems, running below streets, show advanced civic planning. Agriculture was highly productive — they grew wheat, barley, millets, pulses, and were the first in Eurasia to cultivate cotton. Trade was extensive, spanning internal markets and international routes to Mesopotamia, Iran, and Oman, supported by Lothal's dockyard (217 × 36 metres). Skilled craftspeople produced carnelian beads, shell bangles, bronze tools, and terracotta figurines. The famous 'Dancing Girl' bronze and elaborately carved seals show artistic mastery. Their standardised weights and undeciphered writing system indicate sophisticated administration. This was a peaceful civilisation with no evidence of warfare — truly an extraordinary achievement.

**Q3. Imagine you have to travel from the city of Harappa to Kalibangan. What are your different options? Can you make a rough estimation of the amount of time each option might take?**

**Answer:** To travel from Harappa (in Punjab, now Pakistan) to Kalibangan (in Rajasthan, India), a Harappan traveller would have had several options: (1) **By river route** — Following the rivers (tributaries of the Indus and then the Sarasvatī), one could travel by boat. This would be a longer route but easier, taking perhaps 10–15 days. (2) **By land route on foot** — Walking through the plains, the straight-line distance is approximately 350–400 km. On foot, covering about 25–30 km per day, this could take about 12–16 days. (3) **By bullock cart** — Using animal-drawn carts along trade routes, the journey might cover 30–40 km per day, taking about 10–14 days. (4) **A combination of land and river routes** — Using boats where rivers allowed and walking where needed. The Harappans likely used well-established trade routes between major cities, as their extensive trade network required regular travel between settlements.

**Q4. Let us imagine a Harappan man or woman being transported to an average kitchen in today's India. What are the four or five biggest surprises awaiting them?**

**Answer:** A Harappan person in a modern Indian kitchen would be amazed by: (1) **Modern cooking appliances** — Gas stoves, microwave ovens, electric cookers, and refrigerators would be completely unimaginable as they used clay ovens and fire. (2) **Running water from taps** — While Harappans had sophisticated well and reservoir systems, instant piped water from a faucet would be astonishing. (3) **Variety of spices and food items** — Although they used turmeric and ginger, the enormous variety of spices, processed foods, oils, and imported ingredients in a modern kitchen would surprise them. (4) **Metal utensils of stainless steel and aluminium** — They used copper, bronze, and terracotta vessels, so shiny stainless steel would be unfamiliar. (5) **Tea, coffee, and potatoes** — These items were introduced to India much later and would be completely unknown. However, they would recognise wheat, barley, pulses, dairy products, and cotton cloth — familiar staples that connect ancient and modern India.

**Q5. Looking at all the pictures in this chapter, make a list of the ornaments / gestures / objects that still feel familiar in our 21st century.**

**Answer:** Several ornaments, gestures, and objects from the Harappan civilisation remain familiar today: (1) **Bangles** — The 'Dancing Girl' wears bangles covering an entire arm, a practice still visible in parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan. (2) **The Namaste gesture** — A terracotta figurine shows the 'namaste' greeting, still the most common greeting in India. (3) **The Swastika symbol** — Found on Harappan seals, it remains an auspicious symbol in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. (4) **The plough** — The clay plough model from Banawali resembles ploughs still used by farmers today. (5) **Terracotta pots** — Clay pots similar to modern matkas (water pots) used across India. (6) **Board games** — The stone gamesboard is similar to modern board games. (7) **The 'thirsty crow' story** — Found on a Lothal pot, this story is still told to Indian children after 4,000+ years. (8) **Beads and ornamental jewellery** — Similar bead jewellery is still popular in many Indian communities.

## Q6. What mindset does the system of reservoirs at Dholavira reflect?

**Answer:** The system of reservoirs at Dholavira reflects a mindset of advanced planning, community welfare, and environmental awareness. Dholavira, located in the Rann of Kutch (Gujarat) — an arid region — had at least six large reservoirs, some built with stones and even cut into solid rock. The largest measured 73 metres in length. These reservoirs were connected through underground drains for efficient water harvesting and distribution. This reveals: (1) **Forward thinking** — The inhabitants planned for water scarcity by creating storage systems. (2) **Scientific approach** — They understood water conservation, harvesting, and distribution. (3) **Community-oriented governance** — Such large projects required organised labour, central planning, and administrative coordination. (4) **Sustainability** — They aimed for long-term water security, not just immediate needs. (5) **High civic sense** — Maintenance of these reservoirs over centuries showed collective responsibility. This mindset of conservation and planned resource management is remarkably relevant even today.

## Q7. In Mohenjo-daro, about 700 wells built with bricks have been counted. They seem to have been regularly maintained and used for several centuries. Discuss the implications.

**Answer:** The existence of about 700 brick wells in Mohenjo-daro has several important implications: (1) **Large population** — Such a high number of wells indicates a large urban population that required substantial water supply for daily needs. (2) **Importance of cleanliness** — Having so many wells ensured clean, fresh water was accessible to all residents, showing the Harappans valued hygiene. (3) **Skilled construction** — Building 700 wells with precisely laid bricks required skilled masonry and engineering knowledge. (4) **Administrative planning** — The regular maintenance of wells over centuries implies a well-organised municipal administration that ensured public infrastructure was properly upkeep. (5) **Decentralised water supply** — Rather than one central source, multiple wells ensured equitable access for all neighbourhoods. (6) **Technological advancement** — The ability to construct deep, durable brick wells shows advanced construction techniques. (7) **Democratic access** — The distribution of wells across the city suggests water was accessible to all classes, reflecting the civilisation's egalitarian character.

## Q8. It is often said that the Harappans had a high civic sense. Discuss the significance of this statement. Do you agree with it? Compare with citizens in a large city of India today.

**Answer:** The statement that Harappans had a high civic sense is well-supported by archaeological evidence. Their cities had organised drainage systems below streets, standardised construction quality for both small and big houses, public wells maintained for centuries, large reservoirs for community water needs, and streets oriented to cardinal directions with proper planning. The uniform quality of construction for all houses suggests social equity. Regular maintenance of 700 wells and six reservoirs shows collective responsibility. The absence of weapons suggests a peaceful, law-abiding society. Comparing with modern Indian cities: many cities today struggle with inadequate drainage, haphazard construction, polluted water bodies, and poor waste management. While modern cities have far greater technology and resources, the civic discipline of the Harappans — maintaining clean streets, proper drainage, and equitable access to water — sometimes surpasses what we see today. The Harappan example teaches us that civic sense is not about technology but about the collective will to maintain public spaces, share resources fairly, and plan for the long term. We can definitely learn from their example.

## Additional Short Answer Questions

### Q9. What is the significance of the 'First Urbanisation of India'?

**Answer:** The 'First Urbanisation of India' refers to the transition from villages to towns and then to cities in the Indus-Sarasvatī region around 2600 BCE. This is significant because it marks the beginning of urban life in the Indian subcontinent. For the first time, people lived in planned cities with wide streets, drainage systems, fortified walls, and public buildings. This urbanisation required organised governance, specialised crafts, active trade, and productive agriculture. It set the foundation for all future urban developments in India and demonstrated that Indian civilisation was among the earliest in the world to achieve this milestone.

### Q10. Why is the term 'Indus Valley civilisation' now considered obsolete?

**Answer:** The term 'Indus Valley civilisation' is now considered obsolete because the civilisation extended much beyond just the Indus river valley. Archaeological discoveries have revealed hundreds of sites along the Sarasvatī River basin (now Ghaggar-Hakra), in Gujarat (Dholavira, Lothal), Haryana (Rakhigarhi, Farmana), and Rajasthan (Kalibangan). The Sarasvatī basin includes major cities like Rakhigarhi and Ganweriwala and has a high density of settlements. Therefore, names like 'Indus-Sarasvatī' or 'Sindhu-Sarasvatī' civilisation are more accurate as they reflect the true geographical spread of this ancient civilisation.

### Q11. Describe the role of seals in the Harappan civilisation.

**Answer:** Seals played a crucial role in the Harappan civilisation, primarily related to trade activities. Thousands of small seals have been excavated from many settlements. They were made of steatite (a soft stone) that was hardened through heating. Each seal was only a few centimetres in size and typically depicted animal figures (unicorn, bull, horned tiger) with writing signs above them. Seals likely served as identification markers for traders and their goods — similar to modern-day brand logos or trade signatures. They may have been pressed onto soft clay to seal packages of goods being transported, helping identify the sender and ensuring the package had not been tampered with. The presence of Harappan seals in distant locations like Mesopotamia confirms the civilisation's extensive long-distance trade network.

### Q12. What evidence suggests that the Harappans were a peaceful civilisation?

**Answer:** Several pieces of evidence suggest the Harappan civilisation was relatively peaceful: (1) No weapons of war have been found at any Harappan site. (2) There are no fortifications designed specifically for military defence against armies. (3) No evidence of destruction by warfare or invasion has been discovered at any site. (4) The Harappans do not seem to have kept any army. (5) The uniform quality of construction in both small and large houses suggests a society without extreme inequality or oppression. (6) B.B. Lal described Harappan society as being about mutual 'accommodation' rather than 'exploitation'. (7) The decline of the civilisation was caused by climatic and environmental factors, not military conquest. This peaceful character makes the Harappan civilisation unique among the great ancient civilisations of the world.

### Q13. Explain the significance of Lothal as a Harappan site.

**Answer:** Lothal, a small settlement in Gujarat, holds special significance in the Harappan civilisation for several reasons: (1) It has a massive dockyard measuring 217 metres in length and 36 metres in width — equivalent to about two football grounds. This is the oldest known dockyard in the world. (2) It confirms the Harappans' engagement in maritime trade, making it India's first major port. (3) A pot design found at Lothal depicts the story of the thirsty crow — a story that is still told to children today, showing remarkable cultural continuity over 4,000 years. (4) Its location on the Gujarat coast indicates the civilisation's connection with sea-based trade routes reaching as far as Mesopotamia and Oman. (5) It had a well-developed drainage system visible even today. Lothal demonstrates that the Harappan civilisation was not just a river-based civilisation but also a maritime power.

## Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

### 1. Which was the first city of the Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation to be excavated?

- (a) Mohenjo-daro
- (b) Dholavira
- (c) Harappa
- (d) Lothal

✓ **Answer: (c) Harappa**

### 2. The Great Bath is located at:

- (a) Harappa
- (b) Dholavira
- (c) Mohenjo-daro
- (d) Kalibangan

✓ **Answer: (c) Mohenjo-daro**

### 3. The Harappans were the first in Eurasia to grow:

- (a) Wheat
- (b) Rice
- (c) Cotton
- (d) Barley

✓ **Answer: (c) Cotton**

### 4. Dholavira is located in which modern state?

- (a) Rajasthan
- (b) Haryana
- (c) Punjab
- (d) Gujarat

✓ **Answer: (d) Gujarat**

**5. The dockyard at Lothal measured approximately:**

- (a)  $100 \times 20$  metres
- (b)  $217 \times 36$  metres
- (c)  $73 \times 33$  metres
- (d)  $50 \times 25$  metres

**Answer: (b)  $217 \times 36$  metres**

**6. Harappan seals were primarily made of:**

- (a) Gold
- (b) Bronze
- (c) Steatite
- (d) Carnelian

**Answer: (c) Steatite**

**7. The Sarasvatī River is mentioned for the first time in:**

- (a) Yajur Veda
- (b) Rig Veda
- (c) Atharva Veda
- (d) Sama Veda

**Answer: (b) Rig Veda**

**8. The Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation began to decline around:**

- (a) 2600 BCE
- (b) 2200 BCE
- (c) 1900 BCE
- (d) 1500 BCE

**Answer: (c) 1900 BCE**

**9. The 'Dancing Girl' bronze figurine was found at:**

- (a) Lothal
- (b) Dholavira
- (c) Harappa
- (d) Mohenjo-daro

**Answer: (d) Mohenjo-daro**

**10. How many brick wells have been counted at Mohenjo-daro?**

- (a) About 300
- (b) About 500

- (c) About 700
- (d) About 1000

✔ Answer: (c) About 700

**11. Which city of the Harappan civilisation had three distinct zones instead of two?**

- (a) Mohenjo-daro
- (b) Harappa
- (c) Dholavira
- (d) Kalibangan

✔ Answer: (c) Dholavira

**12. Carnelian, used for bead-making, was found mostly in:**

- (a) Punjab
- (b) Rajasthan
- (c) Haryana
- (d) Gujarat

✔ Answer: (d) Gujarat

## Case-Based Questions

### Case Study 1: Water Management at Dholavira

Dholavira, located in the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, is one of the most remarkable Harappan sites. Unlike most Harappan cities that had two parts (upper and lower town), Dholavira had three distinct zones. The city had at least six large reservoirs, some built with stones and even cut directly into the rock. The largest reservoir measured 73 metres in length. Most of these reservoirs were connected through underground drains for efficient water harvesting and distribution. In the foundations of most buildings, stones were used instead of the bricks commonly found at other Harappan sites.

1. How was Dholavira different from other Harappan cities in terms of its layout?
2. Why do you think the people of Dholavira built such elaborate water storage systems?
3. What does the use of stone instead of brick tell us about the local geography?

**Answers:**

1. Dholavira was unique because it had three distinct zones, unlike other Harappan cities that typically had only two parts (upper town and lower town). This suggests a more complex social organisation.
2. Dholavira is located in the Rann of Kutch, an arid region with very little rainfall. The elaborate water storage system of at least six reservoirs connected by underground drains was essential for survival in such a dry climate. It shows the Harappans' remarkable ability to adapt to their environment and plan for water scarcity.
3. The use of stone instead of brick suggests that stone was more readily available in the rocky terrain of the

Kutch region compared to the alluvial plains of the Indus where clay for bricks was abundant. This shows how Harappans adapted their construction techniques to local materials and geography.

## Case Study 2: Harappan Trade Networks

The Harappans were engaged in active trade, both within their civilisation and with distant lands. They exported ornaments (especially carnelian beads), timber, objects of daily use like ivory combs, and probably gold, cotton, and food items. Harappan beads of carnelian have been found at Susa in present-day Iran, and a Harappan ivory comb was discovered on the coast of Oman. Lothal in Gujarat had a massive dockyard measuring 217 × 36 metres. Thousands of seals made of steatite, depicting animals and writing signs, have been found across many Harappan settlements.

1. What does the discovery of Harappan objects in Iran and Oman tell us?
2. What was the likely purpose of the thousands of seals found at Harappan sites?
3. Why is Lothal's dockyard considered significant for understanding Harappan trade?

### Answers:

1. The discovery of Harappan carnelian beads in Iran (Susa) and an ivory comb in Oman proves that the Harappans had extensive long-distance international trade connections. Their goods travelled thousands of kilometres, indicating well-established maritime and land trade routes connecting the Indian subcontinent with the Middle East and Central Asia.
2. The seals were likely used to identify traders and their goods during trade — similar to modern business logos or signatures. They were probably pressed into soft clay to seal packages, ensuring goods were not tampered with during transport and confirming the identity of the sender.
3. Lothal's dockyard (217 × 36 metres — equivalent to two football grounds) is the oldest known dockyard in the world. It proves that the Harappans engaged in maritime trade, making it India's first major port. This confirms that the civilisation was not limited to river-based activities but was also a significant maritime power with sea trade routes reaching Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.

## Case Study 3: The Decline of the Harappan Civilisation

Around 1900 BCE, the Sindhu-Sarasvatī civilisation began to decline. Cities were abandoned one by one, and people returned to rural settlements. Earlier, it was thought that invasions destroyed the cities, but no evidence of warfare has been found. Archaeologists now believe two main factors caused the decline: first, a global climatic change from around 2200 BCE that brought reduced rainfall and drier conditions, making agriculture difficult; second, the Sarasvatī River dried up in its central basin, forcing the abandonment of cities like Kalibangan and Banawali. However, much of the Harappan culture and technology survived and was passed on to the next phase of Indian civilisation.

1. Why was the 'invasion theory' for the decline of the civilisation rejected?
2. How did climatic change contribute to the decline?
3. What do we mean when we say Harappan culture 'survived' despite the cities being abandoned?

### Answers:


1. The invasion theory was rejected because there is absolutely no archaeological evidence of warfare, destruction, or invasion at any Harappan site. No weapons of war, no burned buildings, no mass graves, and no signs of military conflict have been found. The Harappans appear to have been a peaceful civilisation that did not even maintain an army.
2. A global climatic change from around 2200 BCE caused reduced rainfall and a drier phase. This made agriculture much more difficult and reduced the food supply to the cities. Since cities depended entirely on agricultural produce from surrounding villages, a decline in farming output would have made urban life unsustainable.
3. Although the cities were abandoned, the people did not disappear — they scattered into hundreds of small rural settlements. They carried with them their knowledge of agriculture, craftsmanship, cultural practices (like the namaste, swastika symbol, and stories like the thirsty crow), and technologies. These were passed on through generations and became part of the foundation of later Indian civilisation, creating a cultural continuity that persists to this day.

### Exam Tips

- 🎯 Remember the 7 characteristics of a civilisation — this is a frequently asked question. Use the mnemonic: **G-U-C-T-W-C-A** (Government, Urbanism, Crafts, Trade, Writing, Culture, Agriculture).
- 🎯 Know the key dates: Civilisation flourished ~2600–1900 BCE; Harappa first excavated 1920–21; identification announced 1924; climatic change from ~2200 BCE.
- 🎯 Be clear about the different names: Indus, Harappan, Indus-Sarasvatī, Sindhu-Sarasvatī — and why 'Indus Valley' is obsolete.
- 🎯 For map-based questions, memorise the locations: Dholavira (Gujarat), Harappa (Pakistan Punjab), Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Mohenjo-daro (Sindh), Rakhigarhi (Haryana), Lothal (Gujarat).
- 🎯 Important numbers to remember: Great Bath =  $12 \times 7$  m; Dholavira's largest reservoir = 73 m; Lothal dockyard =  $217 \times 36$  m; Mohenjo-daro wells = ~700; Dancing Girl = 10.8 cm.
- 🎯 For questions on decline, always mention BOTH factors — climatic change AND drying of Sarasvatī River. Clearly state that invasion theory is rejected.
- 🎯 The Harappans' cotton cultivation is a unique achievement — they were the first in Eurasia. This is often asked.
- 🎯 For 5-mark questions on town-planning, cover: grid pattern streets, cardinal direction orientation, two/three town divisions, fortifications, uniform construction quality, and drainage systems.
- 🎯 Connect past to present: namaste gesture, swastika symbol, bangles tradition, thirsty crow story, plough design — these show cultural continuity and score extra marks.
- 🎯 For comparison questions (ancient vs modern), always give specific examples from both sides and end with a balanced conclusion.

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For Classes VI–XII | Maths · Science · Social Science

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