

**Understanding Harappan Religion through Material Evidence: Mother Goddess,  
Pashupati Seal, and Ritual Practices**

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**ABSTRACT**

*From 2600 to 1900 BC, the Harappan Civilization (also called the Indus Valley Civilization) was home to one of the most unique ancient societies. Other ancient civilizations left behind written records, but not the Indus Valley. Because of the Indus Valley's ancient society's unique culture and the material evidence archaeologists uncovered, like bricks, seals and terracotta, researchers have formulated theories about the Harappan religious and spiritual practices based on the artifacts. The most prominent artifacts found throughout Indus Valley and Harappan sites were the terracotta Mother Goddess statues. Many statues exist, and it is believed that due to the artifacts' emphasis on and exaggeration of breadth around the abdomen and chest, they are representative of an agrarian view of abundance and practice of domestic rituals. Generally, the existence of terracotta Mother Goddesses indicates that the practice of religion and spirituality around the Harappan Civilization aligned with the focus on the forces of nature and fertility. The Pashupati seal is a noteworthy artifact that depicts the god Shiva and is believed to be a Shaman of nature and fertility due to the seal's depiction of a horned nature surrounded by animals. The existence of the seal is evidence of the Harappan's articulation of animals and the integration of nature within the Harappan belief systems. Another prominent artifact that is evidence of organized and systematic practices of cleansing is the Great Bath at Mohenjo Daro. This artifact is large and well constructed, indicating that cleansing rituals included communal involvement. The Great Bath also signifies the collective practice of worship and cleansing within the urban life of the Harappan religion. Unlike the other prominent civilizations of the ancient Near East with towering monumental religious structures that are isolated, Harappan civilization's religion was incorporated within the daily life of its urban civilization. Analyzing comparatives between the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians brings up some methodological issues. Despite the fact that their ancient civilizations preserved detailed scriptures that illuminate their pantheon, their traditions of religious application, Harappans have to be speculated. The lack of such written evidence results in the balancing game for these scholars to be played with the comparative constructs, and the many*

*similarities or the scarce differences that exist. There remain some Harappan practices that do foreshadow and appear to be the building blocks for developing some South Asian practices. The reliance on the proto-Shiva imagery and the ritualistic fecundity, and the structures of ritualistic baths that resemble the orthodox practices of rituals (traceable to modern-day Hinduism), makes the defense of the presence of a continuum prone to reductionism. The gap that the unbroken evidence of the Harappan people and their practices yields, offers many possible and plausible interpretations. The Harappan religion was a convenient system of symbols that merged religion, civilization, and nature that modern thinkers interpret as having great importance to fecundity, purification, and ecological balance. Though the Harappan people's beliefs and practices appear to be fixed and detailed, there are traces of modern religion, that suggest a continuum.*

**Keywords:** *Harappan Ritual Practices, Great Bath, Archaeology and Religion, Ancient Belief System, Indus Script, Religious Symbols, Material Evidence*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Harappan Civilization, existing from 2600 to 1900 BCE, was one of the first sophisticated urban societies. With settlements from the Indus and Ganges River Valleys, they also built settlements in the area of Pakistan and northwestern India, including Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Dholavira, and Kalibangan. Other distinguished urban centers of the ancient world, the Harappan Civilization had complex social stratification, urban planning, and drainage and sewage systems, and also possessed a standardized system of measurement (Possehl, 2002; Wright, 2010).

Although the Harappan civilization was advanced, little is known about Harappan Religions. This is due to the fact that the Indus script has still not been fully deciphered to this date. Unlike in Mesopotamia and Egypt, Harappan religion can only be reconstructed through evidence and information we can gather from artifacts. These include terra cotta figurines, trade seals, amulets, burial practices, and large monuments and structures.

When and how Harappan religions are placed in history is determined by the reconstruction process of these scholars. The first reconstruction was done by John Marshall in 1931 when he drew comparable relationships with Hindu practices, where he saw a figurine as the representation of the Mother Goddess, and he saw seals as the representation of the god Shiva. More recent scholars, including Kenoyer (1998) and Ratnagar (2004), were cautious and contextual, and warned against the use of hindsight.

This paper examines Harappan religion by analyzing Mother Goddess figurines, the Pashupati seal, and what the unexplained/postulated practices/relics that are presumed to have been religious in nature. The study as a whole aims to gain a better understanding of the continuity of religions and cultural practices from early South Asia.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The mystery in the Harappan Civilization's religious beliefs alongside their impressive urban culture and development have led to extensive research in the area. Since the Indus people left no record in the form of books, historians and archaeologists study their artifacts to understand the people of the Indus Valley to have a better perspective of their religion. These artifacts are as diverse as seals, small figurines, burial places, architectural sites and rituals. Because of this, researchers have speculated and provided hypothesis in given time frames whether Harappan civilization established some form of religion.

Some of the earliest, if not the first, interpretations of religion in the Indus Valley Civilization were comparisons of religious beliefs in the Indus Valley and Hindu beliefs. One of the first people to excavate

Banhore, John Marshall, is one of most well know archaeologists who first interpreted the artifacts from Mohenjo-Daro as representations of primitive Hindu beliefs. He first referred to the small terracotta figurines as Mother Goddesses. It is from this small figurine that Marshall speculated Harappan Civilization practiced a worship based on religion of fertility. He is also known for arguing the Pashupati seal is the first written representation of Lord Shiva based on the horned figure seated in a meditative pose, thus, having the first horned figure surrounded by animals. His interpretation of this Pashupati seal is also the first reference of percipience to Hinduism through the Harappans.

The study of Harappan culture includes interest in the interpretation of figurines of the Mother Goddess. Various researchers showed interest in the evidence of figurines in Harappan sites in placing the significance of these figurines in the context of domestic worship and fertility worship. Scholars such as Gregory Possehl (2002) and Jonathan Mark Kenoyer (1998) interpreted these figurines as ritual or symbolic embodiments of domestic practices. Kenoyer subscribed to the idea of diverse and multiple contexts for these figurines and proposed the need to move away from the notion of strictly religious icons and to consider the context of practices in which they were fashioned. Kenoyer went further in this regard and argued for the contexts in which these figurines were fashioned to be regarded as toys or social constructs.

The imposition of Harappan religious practices as proto-Hinduism is both anachronistic and speculative. Scholars such as Shereen Ratnagar (2004), who studied Harappan practices, registered their abhorrence regarding such practices. Such interpretations of the Mother Goddesses and proto-Shiva were critiqued as retrospective readings of evidence, the basis of which lacks surrealism in the context of religious studies and ambiguity regarding the practices of ancient religious traditions. Ratnagar indicated the significance of contextual practices and their relative significance, imposing the need to cast aside the intersection of ancient practices and modern-day religious practices. Ratnagar's approach, published in her research, remains vital and significant in studies of Harappa.

The Pashupati seal is possibly the most debated religious artifact from the Harappan Civilization. Marshall interpreted the seated horned figure as an early prototype of Shiva due to the figure's yogic posture and its association with animals. Although this interpretation continues to be dominant, many scholars have proposed alternative interpretations. Kenoyer, for example, explained that although the seal may convey a powerful ritual figure or a powerful deity, the seal's association with Shiva is inconclusive. Some scholars have speculated that the figure may be a shamanic leader, a local deity, or a leader that personifies nature. Because of this, the seal can be interpreted in numerous ways.

Rituals and religious beliefs from the Harappan Civilization can be understood from the discovery of ritualistic burial and grave structures. Excavations from the Harappan sites of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa excavations reveal a formal burial structure that is characterized by the placement of pottery and ornaments, as well as other grave goods alongside the deceased. According to Rita P. Wright, 2010, grave goods and other practices signify beliefs related to death, spiritual identity, and even possibly an afterlife. Harappan burial practices appear less elaborate relative to the civilizations of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt. This may signify the centralization of Harappan religious authority in a tradition that does not signify monumental structures.

Architectural features such as the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro have been explored through the lens of religion. Marshall believed the Great Bath was an example of early South Asian religions' court customs of ritual purification. Kenoyer as well as others have suggested that water purification may have had symbolic/ceremonial significance in the Harappan society, but they are all unwilling to draw definitive conclusions, as they lack written record. Fire altars at Kalibangan and Lothal have been connected with rituals as well, but their purpose has not been agreed upon by scholars.

Today, scholars have been successful in exploring Harappan religion and have taken into consideration the evidence available from the Indus Valley, the Mohenjo-daro civilization, and the rest of the South Asian region. Harappan religion cannot be simplistically viewed as a precursor to elements of Hinduism. It formed elements of the sophisticated civilization with transition, custom, and socio-economic activities, and organized society.

When examining Harappan religion, scholars have taken an approach which advocates a middle ground position. Earlier, scholars focused on connections to later Hindu customs, and now, to be more critically based on the study. Through the research of artifacts and practices, and structures, scholars have traced the Harappan religion, and although many practices remain obscure, the Harappan civilization was not devoid of religion.

### **SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

The primary obstacles to reconstructing the religious beliefs of the Harappan civilization (c. 2600-1900 BCE) are the lack of written documentation, due to the undeciphered Indus script, and the absence of epigraphically preserved oral or literary traditions. There are many classes of artifacts and structures, such as terracotta figurines, seals, the remains of buildings and graves, and amulets and other symbols. Each type of evidence provides a different aspect of the Harappan way of life, and evidence of Harappan religion remains obscure, as their religious life, like their other traditions, remains largely undocumented. Some of these artifacts are decorated terracotta figurines, which perhaps represent the most common classes of artifacts to be found, and which are known from numerous sites to be of both humanoid and animal form. The figurines of the female sex have given rise to a significant volume of research due to their potential association with fertility, and hence, religious practices. The Great Bath, located at Mohenjo-daro, is a well-known structure that points to Harappan civilization's interest in the construction of edifices used to carry out certain custodial and ceremonial community functions and, thereby, indicative of the Harappans' society's consciousness of religion. The burial sites, especially, evidence their practices of disposing of the bodies of the dead as reflected by their notions associated with a religion concerning Life and Death. They used amulets or other articles of minor symbolism as protection from the evils of society and placed articles of symbolism of a minor degree of value.

Archaeological methods that construct context and association guide the interpretation of these materials and rely on excavation techniques that form the basis of these methods. Controlled excavation provides the necessary documentation of the location and depth and spatial relationships of artifacts within the site. Stratigraphy, the study of soil layers, is fundamental to establishing chronological sequences when using the stratified layers to determine relative age and to ascertain changes in material culture over time. Distribution of artifacts in different parts of the site whether in residential, industrial or public spaces provides contextual information. E.g. the location of figurines in the domestic spheres might indicate household rituals, while placed in the public or specialized zones indicate rituals of a community or an organization.

Despite these methodological strengths, the interpretation of the Harappan religious data is, and will remain, incomplete. Fragmentary data as a result of poor preservation due to erosion and damage, as well as the lack of reconstruction, also severely limit interpretations. Most importantly, due to the lack of deciphered texts, interpretations are largely unjustified and scholars are rather forced to draw conclusions based on analogy, contextual information, a pattern or a combination of all. This largely interpretative process requires due caution and strict methodology to avoid overgeneralization and misinterpretation.

Typological analysis aids historians and archaeologists in overcoming challenges by classifying artifacts into categories and types based on their physical characteristics and their aesthetics. This analysis can be

useful to identify the patterns related to production, distribution, and usage of artifacts. For example, the symbolism or cultural meaning of a design shared by several figurines found from different locations can be advanced if the design is found to be the same. This analysis helps interpret why certain standardized artifacts were permitted to be created, in contrast to why variable artifacts were created.

Comparative archaeology aids in developing sophisticated methodologies. This is the analysis of artifacts used by other Civilizations, be it ancient or contemporary, and comparing how they were used, particularly those of Harappan, Mesopotamia, or those of the later Civilizations of South Asia (such as Mother Goddess' Breasts). The interpretation of certain early Civilizations as fertility cults, particularly in the case of late South Asia, has influenced how early Civilizations used certain artifacts, such as those Fitting the Goddess. Although it can be beneficial to a research analysis, the use of comparative techniques is potentially a source of multiple interpretations, the use of later cultural artifacts in lieu of their framework. Therefore, its application should be done with cognizance of the frameworks and the temporal and cultural contexts.

Another viewpoint is functionalist approaches. They focus on the possible social roles of artifacts in Harappan society. From this perspective, artifacts can be seen, practically, as symbols in relation to the role they played in social integration, or in the case of symbols, in social rituals. The Great Bath at Mohenjodaro, for example, is often regarded as a ritual purification pool, which indicates a social, common practice in the integration of social beliefs, or social identity. In the same way, at the household level, amulets or some tiny figures, sculptures, etc. may have also had social, protective, or ritual roles. Integrating religion or Pratha into daily social practices, as in the case of household social practices, is essential, not Pratha as a distinct social practice.

On the other hand, in post-processual religion, the emphasis is on the irrational, subjective, or symbolic aspects of things. More so, things may be interpreted by different, potentially infinite, means. The post-processual view indicates that Harappan religious symbols, animal imprints on seals, or anthropomorphic figures can mean different things to different community members. Unfinished, post-processual analyses also indicate the complexities and multiplicity of religious practices, which makes Harappan religious practices even more multifaceted and ambiguous, yet complex and out of the ordinary as well.

Combining these methods leads to a collective approach that overcomes the deficits of the other methods as a result of the absence of textual evidence. In the framework of the typological classification, post-processual analysis adds interpretative richness of social meanings, and post-processual analysis adds the interpretative analytic dimension of the cultural process. These methods do not eliminate the uncertainty that accompanies them, but they do overcome the deficits of the absence of the textual evidence to a certain degree.

The absence of the written record is, of course, the most serious obstacle in the study of the Harappan religion. In the case of civilizations that have syllabic and alphabetic scripts, the study of religion is aided by the religious texts, mythology, and iconography of the religions. Consequently, they need to examine the evidence of the material culture as an indirect sign. This means that the results of that analysis are largely dependent on the methods used for the analysis of the data. In fact, researchers do need to be careful in avoiding the application of a certain modern or later cultural paradigm to the ancient cultural context. Relying on evidence is key to a theoretical analysis.

Given that the Harappans were not a culturally homogenous society, this evidence is essential. These religious practices, as well as cultural practices, and settlements different from other societies to some degree suggest this claim. To sum up, the evidence for Harappan religion is dismissed in an overly generalized fashion since the term Harappan in itself indicates the Harappans were not uniform in their cultural practices, religion and ideology.

The material culture of ancient Harappans throws need careful, multidisciplinary examination in the study of ancient Harappan religion. Archaeological sources may provide traces of symbolic systems and practices of ancient religion. Harappan religion will be better understood with careful excavation, stratigraphy, and the use of space. Ancient religion may also be understood through various modes of analysis, such as the typological, comparative, and even, the post-processual. With broken artifacts and the lack of ancient text, religious worship will be described as a symbolic practice with traces of ancient religion. With subsequent practices, religious worship may also be defined and described as an interpretive symbolic practice.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Using both methods of research, both historical and archaeological, this study aims to analyze the religious ideologies and practices of the Indus Valley Civilization. Due to the Indus inscription not being interpreted, research relies heavily on expression and visual evidence over written material. This study relies primarily on religious symbolism, religious motifs, and intellectual assessments to draw conclusions regarding the articulation of the religion of the Harappans.

With respect to Harappan religion, this research study describes all of the significant archaeological excavating findings, including the Mother Goose figurines, the Pashupati seal, burial practices, and the terracotta objects, the ritual platforms of the Great Bath and the fire altars. Simultaneously, this study looks at the interpretations of many historians and archaeologists in order to evaluate these discoveries. It also employs a comparative historical methodology to consider the establishing of the Harappan religious practices and later religious practices of South Asia.

This research study is qualitative in content and primarily relies on secondary sources. Visual evidence was obtained from various published books, research articles, excavation reports, research journals, and works made public in writing by the prominent scholars John Marshall, Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, Gregory Possehl, Shereen Ratnagar, and Rita P. Wright. These scholarly published materials encompass and embody various ideas regarding the interpretation of Harappan religion.

I analyze the collected information within the framework of content analysis and comparative interpretation. I compare these classifications and critique various forms of scholarship and students' works on fertility worship, proto-Shiva faith, ritualistic purification, and burial practices. I also focus on the ongoing discourse related to the connection of Harappan religion and the subsequent Hindu traditions. Since the Indus script is not deciphered, I understand that most of the interpretations are indeed conjectural and can't be substantiated.

In general, this method directs early religious Harappan activities and relations to the most related records in the social sciences and humanities, providing the Harappan Civilization an equitable and even measure of the scholars' available works while religious concerns and activities of the Harappan Civilization and their practices are concerned, while also indicating the evidence shortcomings.

### **MOTHER GODDESS FIGURINES AND FERTILITY SYMBOLISM**

One of the most common types of artifacts in many of the Harappan excavation sites (including the main urban sites of Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, and Chanhudaro, as well as many of the smaller sites in the Indus Valley) are the terracotta female figures. Their abundance, wide geographic distribution and great variety of design have resulted in many scholarly works attempting to interpret the role and significance of terracotta female figures in the Harappan civilization's religion, symbolism, and social structure. These figures are made of clay and baked at low temperature, and show great variety in their forms and postures,

and the types of decorations and adornments they bear. These types of figures feature popularly exaggerated and stylized representations of womanly forms that emphasize the hips, the breasts, and the stomach to interpret and illustrate the depiction of fertility.

The works of Marshall (1931) have provided a considerable influence on the early interpretations of these figures, since he was the first to interpret these as 'Mother Goddess' figures that the Harappan civilization worshiped. Some archaeology studies of the ancient Near East, in particular of Mesopotamia and Egypt, have suggested that in these cultures Harappan civilization also may have had similar types of rituals that were focused on a fertility goddess to do with the livestock, tillage and, in general, the well-being of the community. These figures were to be sculptured and, therefore, the natural, creative powers brought forth through the goddess they represented. The sculptured emphasis on the attributes of fertility, represented the symbols of abundance (plenty) and regeneration of the seasons, and the cycle of life as well as the cycle of life.

Since Marshall's initial research, others have expanded upon and revised his hypothesis. One study examined the classification of Harappan rod-like female figurines using a typological analysis. This analysis classified figurines using their form, style, and other features. From this analysis, researchers noted many differences in these classifications and suggested this may indicate the figurines were not made from a single model. One set of figurines was found in a seated position with elaborate ornaments and headdresses, suggesting the owners of the figurines may have held a different social or ritual position. Other figurines were found standing with exaggerated hips and were portrayed with indeterminate features, indicating the emphasis was on their body. Other figurines were found adorned with ornaments such as necklaces and girdles. The ornaments and headgear were possibly indicative of the fashion or rituals of the time.

Researchers sought to explain these differences and challenged the hypothesis of a single Mother Goddess. The purpose of these figurines may include other ritual practices or use as a symbol within the Harappan society. Some research suggested the positioning of the figurines reflected social or familial practices, as opposed to a practice of religion. Some of these practices may include the utility of the figurines as offerings to ensure the protection and prosperity of the household or used as playthings (Possehl, 2002).

The analysis of the figurines has also benefited from a more comparative approach. Some scholars prefer focusing on the Harappan figurines of women and their links to fertility-related icons from the Near East. Deities like Inanna and Ishtar from Mesopotamian myths were believed to enchant fertility, sexuality, and the cycles of agriculture, and their images reflect the same attributes. These kinds of comparisons across cultures indicate that there was a symbolic relationship between woman and fertility that was common in the earliest agrarian cultures, and this relationship may also have been reflected in the Mesopotamian cultures. While such parallels offer useful frameworks, they need to be applied carefully. Closer links between the Harappan Civilization and Mesopotamian or Egyptian cultures have yet to be developed, and the similarities in the icons may simply be due to a broader type of relationship in the use of human symbols.

Among the critics of the Mother Goddess hypothesis, both Possehl (2002) and Ratnagar (2004) demand a more flexible reading of evidence that places the emphasis on contextualization more than on the simplistic notion of extending the boundaries of the fertility cult or a female deity beyond the evidence. One of their main criticisms is for the lack of a clear and standard aesthetic that appears across the figurines. The later periods of history have clear depictions of deities, especially the Harappan period that appears to be in the middle of this continuum, as the figurines demonstrate a stylistic range that is not inconsiderable, thus leaving a singular visual legacy of an absolute deity very costly, if not impossible. The appearance of

Harappan figurines in domestic environments as opposed to religious ones further suggests that these figurines may have been utilized for various functions.

The figurines' spatial distribution helps reveal their functions. Many figurines were discovered in residential regions. These are commonly found alongside household artifacts that include pottery, tools, and hearths. This grouping suggests that these figurines were somehow involved in household and community domestics. Community domestics possibly involved offerings, prayers, or acts that were symbolic in nature and related to fertility, safety, and well-being. Therefore, the grouping of figurines in these contexts asserts that the Harappan Civilization integrated religious or symbolic practices of their daily lives beyond the large public spaces of a community such as their households.

The interpretation of these figurines as objects of direct devotion or worship are therefore predisposed to being analyzed within a Harappan context as well. The absence of religious outing or large religious monuments to be identified or confirmed in Harappan cities mean that the evidence is scant for, or does not allow or suggests, the interpretation of rituals and practices in Harappan cities. Regardless of how the Great Bath is interpreted, it is unequivocally true that the Harappans did not have as evidence or rely on the established religious hierarchies, or beakers, as were found in the monuments on the sand that fell from the measures of Mesopotamia or the Egypt. Therefore, or Provided of this evidence, true or not, it has caused either the Harappan religion to depend, or be more than highly suggested.

Another notable component is the symbolic and ideological aspect of the figurines. From a post-processual perspective, functional objects possess meanings that reflect the values and social relations of a social group. Harappan female figurines may have been an illustration of social roles, cultural values, and other aspects like femininity and fertility. These values may vary regionally and change, suggesting a diverse list of values, preferences, and rituals.

Likewise, the significance of the figurines may have been subject to historical change. The Harappan Civilization spanned a number of centuries and a significant area, accommodating numerous social, economic, and environmental changes. The altered ways in which the figurines were produced and sold may have represented cultural practices of the people. Conducting a longitudinal analysis of this artifact through a case study may aid in grasping the abrupt changes.

While appreciating the evidence, appropriate weight should be accorded to both the potential religious signification of these figurines, as well as the bounds of our knowledge. The case of fertility symbolism should be duly appreciated by the correlating visuals and the cross-cultural case. It is, however, erroneous to presume that all of these figurines were used in the same way and carried the same esoteric meanings. The figurines should be viewed in the context of a vibrant and diverse material culture, wherein a single object could serve multiple functional purposes and carry meanings of varying character.

In conclusion, the terracotta female figurines represent an important element of the Harappan Civilization and enable researchers to address some of the symbolic and possibly religious characteristics of this ancient society. Female figurines are also supportive evidence of Harappan civilization in terms of their widespread and likely culturally defined distribution, their distinctive characteristics and association to contexts which relate to the concepts of fertility, reproduction, and health. However, due to the presence of an extensive assortment of female terracotta figurines, the absence of a singular form and the absence of a relating textual base, it is difficult to declare these figurines as manifestations of a single Mother Goddess or to provide a singular, uniform function. Therefore, all interpretations should be made with respect to the fact that Harappan society is of a great variety and complexity. With the advancement of archaeological techniques and the associated development of archaeological science, the role and the significance of Harappan Civilization will be illuminated further.

### **THE PASHUPATI SEAL AND THE PROTO-SHIVA HYPOTHESIS**

The Pashupati seal is one of the most talked about and recognizable artifacts of the Harappan Civilization. It was found in Mohenjo-daro. This small steatite seal is one of the most important artifacts with its intricacies and the interpretation of Harappan religion. This seal shows a figure seated in a pose which is interpreted to be a yogic posture. This figure has multiple animals surrounding it. These animals as interpreted are elephants, tigers, rhinoceroses, and buffalo. The figure has been interpreted to possibly have a stylized frontal representation and/or possibly a headdress of horns. The surrounding animals and the combination of the figure's headdress, as well as, elaborate pose have resulted in a broad of interpretations of this seal which has made it the center of focus to Harappan religion and symbolism.

This seal's first, and also one of its most important interpretations, was made by John Marshall in 1931. Marshall helped to develop the theory picturing this figure as possibly the early incarnation of the Hindu god, as Marshall referred to him, Shiva. Of course, this figure was referred to as "Lord of Animals," a description of Shiva. As Pashupati was also the lord of animals, the interpretation of seated figures as evidence of control and dominion over the natural order would support this. Additionally, the animals surrounding this figure as evidence of control helped reinforce this.

Marshall's hypotheses were innovative for the time and continue to inspire the academic and non-academic communities in regard to Harappan religion. He proposed a theory on the relationship of culture and religion between the Harappan civilization and the more recent traditions of South Asia, especially with Hinduism. His theory would push the origin of certain religious ideologies, such as the worship of Shiva and yoga, backwards in time. However, the attractiveness of the hypothesis in academic circles is contrasted with its criticism.

Marshall's hypotheses have primarily been questioned in regard to both temporal and religious context of the Harappan civilization and those that came successively. In the opinion of Kenoyer (1998) and Ratnagar (2004), it is a questionable practice to ascribe certain meanings to souvenirs of ancient civilization due to a possibility of losing that ancient civilization's original context. The gap between Harappan civilization, which died in approximately 1900 BC, and the Hinduism traditions that came subsequently suggests speaks of a possibility of a definite continuity in temporal context of those traditions. Therefore, the judgment that the figure on the seal is Shiva is actually more of a hypothesis than a conclusion.

The concerns regarding the Pashupati Seal as depicting the early stages of Hinduism has led to the development of alternative interpretations. One assertion is that the figure in the center is more likely to be a local deity instead of an emerging Hindu symbol, medieval or modern. The horned headdress and animal associations prevalent among the figure's attributes in the seal signify the presence of indigenous local symbolism in the Harappan tradition (compared to modern Hindu structures) and bear no connection to latter (modern) religious structures. The figure may be designed as a Shaman or a ritual specialist posing in a trance, an assumption that has some support in anthropology, where shamans serve as the bridge between the human and the animal or spiritual realms, and are often depicted as spirits in a state of a trance and as an altered state of consciousness' companion to other species.

In the absence of evidence identifying the seal as depicting specific deities, the imagery on the seal may be more symbolic than random. Under this assumption, the figure and the accompanying beasts associate the seal design as a representation to human-animal-nature relationship. Many post-processual ideologies in archaeology also support this opinion that the material culture is collection of symbols and to a great deal, is a product of hybrids, in a given context, of multi-meaning dimensions that are to be organized radically.

Iconographic analysis of the Pashupati seal helps evaluate these interpretations. One of the most striking features of the central figure is the horned headdress. The headdress may consist of a pair of curved horns, and may also include an extended element at the center such as a projection or a plume. In various ancient cultures, horns were associated with the divinity or were thought to represent power or strong fertility. In the Arts of the Harappan Civilization, a horned headdress may signify one of the elevated status figures, either divinity, or ritual or symbolic. Here, without the textual supports, the exact value for the form is unknown.

Regarding the figure of Pashupati, striking examples of the forehead band and horned headdress have all drawn their attention to various theories. The seated posture is one of the key examples. Set postures with the feet and heels drawn beneath the body have also been interpreted as a type of form of meditation have been interpreted as a type of form of a type as a type of form of a type as a type of form of meditation. Here, the theory of the proto-Shiva hypothesis is supported, due to the later presences of Shiva with ascetic postures and practices. However, even the yoga posture as a yogic form is in itself a value. The Harappan Civilization could symbolize Control, or Ritual Control, or Ritual Posture of the Academy.

The surrounding animals are an added measure of detail surrounding the seal. The choice of the African elephant, the Bengal tiger, the Indian rhinoceros, and the Asiatic water buffalo maybe indicates a purposeful selection. The animals are maybe chosen to depict strong elements of nature, depict an ecosystem's diverse range, or symbolize strong and dangerous elements of nature, or fertile strong beasts. The animals surrounding the seal could depict the area or relate to the layout of the seal, its design or maybe the intended purpose of the seal. It is possible to view the seal as a representation of the connection and the balance relationship the people of the Harappan civilization have with the surrounding ecosystem.

Understanding the contextual framework of seals in the Harappan civilization also aids in the interpretations. Seals in ancient civilization probably played a significant role in trade and the administration. Seals were also etched in decorative designs, which suggest seal designs also had meaning and purpose. The balance of elements, the decoration in the Pashupati seal, and the added design may be to symbolically express the social organization that governs the religion, and provide an illustration of the layout of the residence. Trade, administration, and the homemade seals don; also, the addition of the decorative designs and elements along the seal betoken their personal elements.

It is necessary to analyze the existing evidence without falling into interpretative bias. The Pashupati seal, while distinctive, is just one of many artifacts and therefore cannot be used to make assumptions on the entirety of Harappan belief systems. It is difficult to gauge the prevalence or significance of these seals within the Harappan culture due to the small number of seals and the absence of corroborative evidence. Furthermore, the design variation of seals from different locations may also be indicative of the regional difference and diversity in systems of beliefs and cultural practices.

Within these boundaries, the Pashupati seal is complex and multidimensional and therefore cannot be interpreted in simple terms. The proto-Shiva hypothesis in particular is highly debated, however, it is a possible interpretation among many others. An interpretative view should be cautious and context dependent. It should be flexible and adaptive to the evidence, to varying degree of interpretative possibilities.

In closing, the Pashupati seal shows how Harappans may have thought about their religion. The seal shows a deity-like figure surrounded by animals. This may have been a shaman. This may have been the harbinger of power and practice in nature. This may have been a proto-Shiva figure, the Harappans had their own complex practices within their religion. With only the seal, the iconography of Harappans, and archaeology, we must take care with the evidence we have and the conclusions we make. This has the potential to change

for the better with the continued advancement of and support for archaeology and the Pashupati seal in the religion of the Harappans. The Pashupati seal works with the advancements we make and the discoveries we have to strength the support for Harappans, their religion and the seal itself.

### **SYMBOLISM AND SACRED ANIMALS IN HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION**

Seals and terracotta objects feature animals prominently in the Harappan Civilization. Their depression-like etchings of animals held either social, cultural, or religious significance for the Harappans. Their symbols of nature included the peepal tree, and with the above-mentioned animals, offered a great deal of insight into the possible thought ideology, or religion of the Harappans.

Among the most visible creatures in Harappan art is the bull, especially the humped variety known as the zebu. These bulls were portrayed showing their great muscular, humped, and horned structure. The bull can be seen on seals and other Harappan artifacts, showing its importance. Many scholars see the bull as a sign of strength and fertility. This is most likely due to the agrarian society depends on both animal and human labor. The associations between bulls, as well as other animals, and fertility can be found in many ancient cultures. This is especially true of the Harappan arts. The bull signified agricultural abundance in the plowing and bull transport. This symbolism of the bull as a transport bull to the plowing (agriculture) has been used for many of the Harappa artifacts. The symbolism of bulls in other cultures in the later South as a transport bull to the plowing (agriculture) has concordances with many of the Harappa artifacts.

Elephants were frequently shown as Harappan art representations with other animals. However, Harappan art is particularly a bull. Harappan art uses a sidelong depiction. In particular, their large body, trunk, and tusks are illustrated in art. It is common to think of them as denoting, dominance, intelligence, or their trunk. These characteristics may also be presumed about elephants in Harappan Civilization. The elephants in Harappan art possibly show their environment. In the third millennium BCE of this region, elephants were commonly found. Some researchers even think elephants in Harappan art represent the power of elite or powerful groups of their society. However, because Harappan art has little representation of elephants and even less textual information, the type of research is speculative. More commonly found in Harappan art than elephants, are rhinos. Harappan art has special symbols of large animals. Because of their special place in the large animals, rhinos were likely powerful and possibly symbolically powerful. They are well known for their aggression and strength. Because of their large bodies and thick skin, they represent protection. They likely represent the same animal in Harappan art as they do for large animals. In the large animals of Harappan art, the distinction and representation of large animals for the social and natural order of animals, denoting certain associations is likely found.

The most fascinating and researched figure of Harappan animal symbolism is referred to as the “unicorn.” This supposed creature is characterized as having one big horn extending out of its singular forehead. The body of the unicorn is stylized as being either bull-like or antelope-like. The Harappan unicorn has appeared on a multitude of stamps. The unicorn, in its multiple representational appearances, has never been documented in the natural world. Because of the lack of animal candidates to represent, the unicorn is primarily understood and classified as a symbolic or mythical figure. The evidence of unicorn stamps on various seals and found in various locations substantiates that the figure was most likely understood to represent something specific within the Harappan world. Due to the substantial quantity of unicorns found

on trade seals in multiple locations, the figure was most likely understood to represent the Harappan world's trade and merchant class. Other scholars argue it is possible the unicorn was a cherished ideal or sacred animal of Harappan religion. The seals that depict unicorns and also contain a symbolic object believed to represent ritual or religion further support the position of the mystery. The lack of textual evidence of the unicorn figures means one of the primary puzzles in Harappan civilization remains.

Aside from the representation of individual animals on seals, the Pashupati seal's use of multiple animals at once may show the use of animals for aesthetics of layered meaning, where animals could convey different relationships, meanings, where animals could be used to express conceptual relationships and ideas. The representation of differing animals may be used for divisions, how humans, animals, and gods, or even different aspects of the world work, which may be differentiated or categorized, or correlated within a world where multiple species exist. Aligning with the Pashupati seal, the analysis of earlier societies where animals were used to show a relationship where animals work structurally to show a relationship where animals work with humans or where animals work with humans as the mediators of the relationship. Therefore, the analysis of kits and where animals are used as the basis of the relationship suggest that the mediation used to show a relationship where animals are used as the basis.

Among the myriad, possibly culturally rationalized animals present in the Indus Valley civilization, primarily, religious structures. □ signs of the stony insculture are also found. Even in later South Asian cultures, the fan tree shows association with primal and sacrificial paradigmas and worship, primitive symbolism, and offerings of trees, being the mutual boundary, the tree of the worship, and the supporter of the sacrificial world, interprets to the Indus Valley recognition of the cave and the relationship with the tree worship within the society. Due to the peepal tree's symbolism and later data, or causal relationships in the cave, the finds also support an early relationship with Nature and a revering of the tree within the society. The symbolic relationships of trees, or temples, possibly support the observation where civilization recognizes the physiology of trees and structures as life-sustaining.

Harappan iconography's use of animals and plants suggests that nature was important to the civilization's symbolic and possibly spiritual perspectives. Instead of concrete anthropomorphic deities or massive structures of worship, Harappan deities may have celebrated the importance of nature and the numerous aspects it contains. This attitude may have been framed by the society's ecological and economic conditions, for they were largely dependent on agriculture, pastoral practice, and the harnessing of the environment's natural resources.

Nevertheless, Harappan symbolism ought to be treated as exceptional. Like the other details of Harappan religion, the meanings of animals and trees can only be conjectured, for the texts are not deciphered. Although studying other cultures of the same time frame can offer valuable ideas and perspectives, it can be dangerous to impose a new age meaning or outside associations into Harappan symbolism. Ratnagar also reinforces the importance of placing the interpretations solely in the research findings of the Harappan culture in the Indus valley.

Additionally, the differences in how animals are depicted in various locations suggests greater complexity within the Harappan civilization relative to the standardization of the symbols. The selection and the meaning of the symbols would be determined by regional differences (i.e. ecology, economy, social organization). For example, in local iconography, the animals which were depicted could be those animals which were of greater economic importance and were more common. Significance of the iconography relates to the greater complexity of the Harappan civilization.

The symbolism of animal and plant (especially the Peepal tree) depictions in Harappan material culture allows us to begin to infer Harappan religion. The bulls, elephants, rhinos, and Harappan unicorns of the

seals with plant depictions illustrate the symbolism of strength and protection and of social structure and identity. There was an importance of the plant depictions. The tree depictions on some seals emphasize reverence of the Harappans to nature and the nurture (spirit and fertility). Although we do not know the full import of the symbols, the iconography begin to explain the Harappan religion and the culture of the Harappans.

## **RITUAL PRACTICES AND SACRED SPACES**

Studying archaeological evidence can help elucidate the various ritual customs and the organization of the Harappan Civilization's spiritual world. In the absence of deciphered texts, one has to rely on remnants of structures, the organization of spaces, and the related artifacts to provide clues on aspects of religious life. Compared to its contemporaneous civilizations like Mesopotamia and Egypt, where monumental edifices and inscriptions of organized temples indicate organized religions, the Harappan Civilization provides a less apparent and dispersed image of ritual ceremonies. Given the findings, there are religious practices of a formative nature, with the tradition of religious purification, ritual symbolic acts, and perhaps cyclical or seasonal ceremonies in the private as well as the public spheres.

### **The Great Bath**

The Great Bath is one of the major and most important structures tied with the ritual practices of the Harappan Civilization. It is located in the ruins of Mohenjo-daro, and is one of the largest baths ever built in the ancient world, measuring approximately 12m x 7m x 2.4m and is believed to have been hand-crafted to perfection. The tank was located at the end of a series of rooms and hallways. The walls and floor of the tank and the passageways were built out of a form of a precursor to what is now known as concrete and were lined with bricks and then were made to be completely water proofed with a seal of asphalt. The tank then was most likely completely water-tight. Subsequently, the tank was then likely accessed from both ends via a set of stairs. The entire structure indicates a highly advanced and well-planned system of engineering with precise construction accuracy and sequencing.

The Great Bath has long been viewed by scholars as a site of ritual purification (Kenoyer, 1998). Water, cleanliness, and access control strongly suggest this structure did not serve the purposes of a typical bath. Instead, it served the purposes of a special ceremony. The adjacent rooms may have served as changing rooms, preparation rooms, or the spaces of the ritual specialists. The elevated placement of this structure in the citadel area suggests that it served an important social, and perhaps, a religious purpose.

The concept of ritual bathing originated from the later South Asian traditions. Water is believed to be a purifying element and is essential to almost all religious evolving practices. Although an example of what is known as direct succession cannot be used, it is reasonable to argue that the presence of a highly developed water structure in the Harappan context suggests that the importance of the ideas of purification, cleansing, and perhaps, spiritual renewal for the purposes of social cleansing or the social cohesion of the society cannot be ruled out. The Great Bath may have served the purposes of community social cleansing activities, such as purification, and rituals, and the social cohesion of the society.

On the other hand, some scholars have attempted to provide convincing evidence to the effect that the Great Bath may have served administrative and elite purposes, or that in some instances, its use may have been both symbolic and practical. However, the control of water and the emphasis on its isolation from the regular family spaces strongly suggests that the Great Bath should be regarded as a ritual structure.

### **Sacred Fire Sanctuary**

Brick-lined or dirt enclosure structures, especially in a Kalibangan case, represent repeated burning constructions that would be suggestive of ritual. However, Ash, charcoal, and occasionally animal remains suggest that there may have been controlled fire-related transactions.

These firebox constructions have been identified as fire altars. Some of them propose that there may have been Vedic rituals advocating the worship of fire, also referred to as Agni. There are suggestions that fire, as a mediator, involved the construction of similar compromises. As a result, the construction of such structures may have advocated a loss of culturally-belongs or an early practice of customs.

Most of these frameworks remain disputed Rajnagar, 2004. This remains equally possible that these frameworks remain disputed. These structures do hold the purpose of religious worship or even the practice of fire as a rational or fundamental right to Harappan.

These right structures do hold the purpose of worship or must rational or abstract to Harappan culture.

From a functionalist lens, fire altars were probably meeting points for the community where social ties were strengthened. Symbols of fire may also cast light on transformative, purifying, or even communicative facets involving the supernatural. Of course, the ultimate interpretation is still pending, which perhaps is indicative of the difficulties tied to identifying religions of the Harappans.

### **Burial Customs**

Through showcasing cultures, burial customs tell a lot about Harappans ideas of death, ideas of the beyond, and ideas of the rituals that ought to accompany death. Evidence of different burial traditions—ranging from in situ extended burials to burials followed by post-interments or even shallow grave memorials—has been uncovered at several archaeological Harappan sites. The graves themselves were unadorned and often dug in a way that constrained the position and orientation of the body.

Grave goods were also sometimes included in a grave, which could explain post-humorous intervention in the individual's positioning during the burial. Furthermore, grave goods lent inanimate objects a post-humorous value, perhaps even a role in the afterlife. The placement of grave goods could also explain the communal ideas of the Harappans involving transitional post-humorous mechanisms and also individual intervention in the individual's positioning during the burial.

Unlike the rest of the communities, Harappans were a humble community. They engaged in simple funerary practices and thus, the absence of a high degree of social stratification is indicative of a community that didn't have a high degree of religion or even a high degree of funerary culture, to warrant excessive death rituals (Possehl, 2002).

The way funerals were observed may have indicated a culture that did not concern itself with elaborate right of passage ceremonies explaining their understanding of the afterlife and their indifference to how the afterlife would be portrayed. It could also be attributable to the absence of the materials that could have been used to perform the possible right of passage. There are varying types of burials which may be attributed to the varying beliefs and traditions as opposed to a culture that observed a common phenomenon.

### **Household Shrines and Domestic Rituals**

Like the other ritual centers, the Harappan settlements also had ritual centers and practice spaces beyond these centers. Excavation results show the presence of small ritual practice spaces that could have served

shrine functions. These spaces show the presence of platforms, niches, and artifact clusters, which include figurines and decorated objects.

The presence of these features suggests that worship in the homes of Harappans could have made domestic worship a significant feature of their practice. Rituals conducted in the home could have been rituals related to offerings, prayers, and symbolic acts for health, protection, and the general welfare of a household.

Adopting ritual spaces within everyday architecture reveals that spirituality was a part of the day-to-day life of a community. This diverges from those models that consider religious systems as formal institutions or solely a priestly hierarchy. Therefore, household rituals were possibly most productive in carrying beliefs and practices for the sustenance of social and cultural continuity from one generation to the next.

There are several issues when employing the concept of household shrines in the study of houses. From a methodological perspective, the distinction of household shrines has its limitations. There are many instances when large buildings that contain small rooms and structures are regarded as ritual spaces. In many instances, the religious character of the spaces is view of direct or logical assumptions. Nonetheless, the repetition of large structures that contain small spaces in several houses has brought a logical view for the assumption of being part of the ritual practices of the household.

#### **Encapsulation of daily life with indifferent ritual**

Considering the evidence gathered from the Great Bath, fire altars, how the dead were treated, and household shrines, we can conclude that ritual practices in the Harappan Civilization were varied and integrated in many facets of daily life. It is safe to say that rituals were exercised in both the public and the private domain. A safe assumption would be that a community operating in a spiritual, social, and practical integrated worldview placed high value on spirituality.

The use of water, fire, and earth in the Great Bath, ritual installations, and burial practices, respectively, indicates a symbolic and ritualistic connection with natural elements. Water, fire, and earth may have represented the core components of life in their belief systems of balancing and ordering life. This practice is also consistent with the rites and beliefs of other ancient peoples, in which there is a strong relationship between the forces of nature and the practices of religion.

The Harappan religion system may also have been less hierarchical and more community-focused. The lack of monumental temples may indicate the absence of a center of worship and a system of authorities. In Harappan religion, the practice of religion was community-based, and the rituals were performed by individuals, families, and local groups, mainly in the absence of a specialized priest class. This community-based system would seem to have been of great diversity, and would have contributed to the complexity of Harappan religion.

#### **Final Thoughts**

Archeology has revealed many aspects of Harappan civilization, including the details of their rituals, religious practices, and possibly sacred spaces, albeit indirectly. Examples are the Great Bath, fire altars, the shrines in the homes of the citizens, and the ways in which the deceased were treated. Rituals and practices common in daily living are reflected in the examples as citizens were likely to have their own set of beliefs. The depictions of Fire and Water likely give insight into their practices of purification. Though, due to the lack of written records from the civilization, the testimonies in the Archeological findings are likely to be altered, and updates are expected to be provided. It is fair to say that Harappan society was

likely to be made up of an integrated system of beliefs and practices that were given be valued to the civilization.

### **CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION**

An important and unresolved question in the study of South Asian archaeology is the lasting impact cultural and religious practices of the Harappan Civilization (c. 2600-1900 BCE) have on future traditions on the subcontinent of South Asia. Due to the absence of formally written documents from the Harappan period, it's quite difficult to even come up with an approach for this question. Primarily, researchers examine whether practices, cultural elements, and symbols from the Harappan civilization made their way into the popular religious traditions and practices of later civilizations. The impact of the Harappan civilization on later civilizations is a complex situation on its own. These complexities are attributed to the varying schools of thought on the nature of cultural change, and the gap between the collapse of the Harappans and the rise of the Vedic civilizations.

There are a number of elements of Harappan material culture that have been suggested to show continuities with post-Harappan South Asian religions. Examples include continuity of fertility symbols, associating certain animals to deities, water-related rituals, and representations of postures akin to that of yoga. While these elements are not conclusory and definitive, they heuristically show the direction of cultural borrowing and cultural reinterpretations of the signs and symbols of material culture over the years.

Fertility symbols have the strongest case of cultural continuity. Terracotta female figurines found at Harappan sites are terms articulated as a Mother Goddess. In post-Harappan religions and South Asian belief systems, as seen in Hinduism, such Goddesses are widely depicted as symbols of fertility and motherhood, creation, and generosity. It can be tempting to create a linear argument connecting these Harappan symbols and post-Harappan значение of deities, but they still remain relative. Placing a female as a representation of motherhood and creation of fertility is found in a multitude of cultures worldwide. This, in connection with the fertility symbols found in South Asia, may denote certain concepts with relative consistency, and with prolonged flexibility over the years.

The use of symbolism surrounding animals may also help explain historical continuity. In the case of the Harappans, numerous animals, including the bull, elephant, and rhinoceros, are typically depicted in these cultures' seal and Harappan iconography. The bull is a special case because of the iconography's later association with the bull, in the Hindu religious context, and the bull's association with the god Shiva. The association of the bull in both the Harappan and subsequent traditions may signify a cultural core shared with respect to the cultural continuity of iconography's symbolic language of strength, fertility, and agriculture. However, like with fertility symbolism, the prevalence of animal symbolism in the iconography of the Harappan culture presents a case for caution. Symbols that resemble the same meaning (but quite not exactly) could be independently invented, overlapping cultural ideas may change the meaning of signs (in this case animal signs) dramatically in later eras, or they may change quite a few times throughout the ages.

The Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro in Harappan culture exemplifies the other significance of the culture of South Asia, which is the continuity of practices of ritual purification associated with bathing and other practices. Washing in a body of water is a form of ritual is a cultural practice widespread in all cultures, and purification and a source of renewal for the user, of spiritual and religious significance related to the cultural practices of the Harappan society and the later Indian civilization. Symbolic use and value of water, as a source of renewal and purification in the bathing rituals, has perhaps formed the core culture of the Hindu society, with respect to the symbolic language of the core indicators of renewal, and reflects the

continuity of cultural practices in the Indian society, across ages. Without inter-cultural contact and trade, earth elements' manipulated, culture-centered practices, which served as a source of renewal and an aid for spiritual and religious purification.

The suggested continuity between Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) and Harappans include the “yogic” postures of the figures on the Pashupati seal. The central figure of the seal represents the early form of yoga practice. It is stated that the practice of yoga is an integral part of the philosophy and religious practices of South Asia. If the early symbolic representations of meditation and samadhi are accepted to be early practices of yoga and self-control, then the traditions of yoga practice suggest that physical postures have been part of South Asian practices for centuries. Though the practice of identifying these postures as “yogic” is itself controversial, as reflected in the modern world, the practice of yoga in the postures is significant. Therefore, while these hypotheses appear to have some form of evidence, they should be considered only as such, and interpreted cautiously.

While the suggested continuities are important from the IVC/ Harappans and their traditions perspective, scholars agree on the importance of recognizing transformations and discontinuities of these traditions. One of the influential frameworks that emphasize these aspects is provided by Mortimer Wheeler (1968). He stated that the collapse of the Harappan Civilization was followed by cultural transformations that were manifested in the arrival of the Indo-Aryan tribes. In this sense, the Vedic traditions that are attested in the second millennium BC are regarded as an entirely new system of culture that is signified by different languages, different beliefs and rituals, and different forms of social organization. In brief, the postulates of this approach suggest that any of the possible continuities between the Harappans and their traditions and the later traditions should be viewed as the result of comparative limited cultural interaction rather than direct relationships.

Instead, some scholars have argued that innovation, flexibility, and reinterpretation, rather than sharp cultural breaks, should be recognized. For example, South Asian historian Romila Thapar (2002) twines together the multifaceted cultural shifts and transformations of the subcontinent, looking at how established practices and values are the matrices for the creation of new and distinct practices and values (rather than their rigid predecessors being supplanted). In a similar manner, Asko Parpola (1994) speculates that the symbolic systems and ritual practices of Harappan culture may be the sources of the later South Asian religions. Hence, persistence and change may be the components that embody the cultural continuum.

In parallel, transformation is a key concept in this context. Unlike the continuity hypothesis, the concept of persistence has the potential for cultural elements being interpreted differently, and being flexible and adaptable. For example, a cultural symbol of fertility for the Harappans (in the riverine plains of undivided India) may have had differing meanings in the later ravines of the Indus, but may culturally remain in a continuum. It is possible that the alterations in the social and the natural and the imagined environments also brought changes to the symbolic systems of ritual bathing and animalistic symbols.

Archaeologists and historians have shown various levels of fluidity for the transition from the Harappan to post-Harappan period. There was both change and continuity across the regions, alongside local and intercultural dynamics. This is important to note, as there is a subcontinental scale of documented change and continuity. However, most evidence suggests that there are multiple individual paths for cultural development that are more important than a singular form of change over time.

Memory and cultural transmission is also crucial in this time period. Prior to written records, cultures preserved knowledge through four repeating methods. Knowledge could have also been preserved through people's actions, shifts in meaning, and ritual practices. These methods also preserved and shifted

associations that were symbolic. A culture's memory is useful for understanding the enduring practices and themes of cultures, such as nature's fertility, reverence, and purification in South Asia's heritage.

Finally, the evidence left to sift through is beyond the Harappan Civilization's texts, and is neither comprehensive nor sufficient. Without deciphered texts, it becomes paradoxical to postulate the intercultural beliefs of this period. Therefore, both of relative continuity and relative discontinuity should be precluded, as both extremes are equally untenable. This is the unified assumption of most. Complementarity and reinterpretation to perceptions of continuity and change, should be topmost when considering the diversity and complexity of cultural activity.

Ultimately, the topic of continuity and change between the Harappan civilization and the succeeding South Asian spiritual traditions is an open question and with good reason, is of great importance. Some agricultural symbols, sacred animals, ritual bathing, and possibly other forms of yoga could show areas of continuity. However, all of these things should be interpreted very carefully, as they lack the evidence to support them and could be the result of some process that is completely independent of the civilization in question. This is the most plausible potential solution to the question of Harappan and subsequent South Asian spiritual traditions. Discontinuous cultural traditions and cultural replacement, along with other forms of evolution and reinterpretation that occur as a result of Indigenous people's practices, must be seen on a sliding scale. The traditions of the South Asian religions owe a great deal to the faith and spirit of the Harappan Civilization. The most important legacies of that civilization include the survival of these traditions and the gradual evolution of these traditions with an intertwined balance of change and continuity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study of the Harappan Civilization's religion is seen as one of the trickiest topics in South Asian archaeology. Written records have not been deciphered, so scholars only have the culture through which people expressed their beliefs. Therefore, the access that others have to the materials is indirect, provisional, and subject to change. However, despite all of this, the Harappans expressed their various beliefs through various means of symbolization.

There is a lot of evidence that suggests that some form of religion, spirituality, or belief in the Harappan Civilization. People have drawn some conclusions that there is religion, or some symbolic belief about the Upper Harappans and the Lower Harappans, as they expressed their beliefs through houses, along with other symbols, the figurines they created, and the seals, and burial remains people have found. Religion of the Harappan people also consisted of a social structure built around the concern of fertility, the idea of Mother God, the issue of the balance of Mother God, the urge to grow and expand and to prosper, as seen in the Mother Goddess figurines.

Religious observances were a part of Harappan religion. The Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro is largely seen as one of the structures of their religion with the said religion of the Harappans revolving around water and cleanliness and a belief and a concern about renewal. Further evidence can be taken from the presence of an organized control of fire. Fire pits and fire installations in various parts of Kalibangan also suggest Harappans believed that there was life after death.

The data seems to show that the Harappan religion was not centralized, like the religions of other ancient empires. It seems more decentralized, and was practiced both in the home and in the community, and was not limited to formal shrines. Many of the houses had small shrines, which suggests that there was no restriction on the beliefs and meanings that people assigned to what was part of their daily lives and the civilization's daily government functions.

There is no consensus to what extent Harappan religions and South Asian traditions are related. Many scholars agree that there is some level of continuity with some elements. However, some argue that there is some cultural discontinuity as there is a lack of direct evidence and there is a substantial time gap. The most moderate views argue that continuity cannot be presumed, but some of the symbolic themes could have been either further developed and/or re-defined in subsequent cultural traditions (Thapar, 2002; Possehl, 2002).

Harappan religion is not a rule-bound religion and cannot be categorized as such. However, it can be categorized as a symbolic religion, which is expressed in daily life as well as in ritual practices. The various sources seem to describe religion as a nature based, fertility based and cleansing religion. However, there is a lot of uncertainty on what the meanings of the religions are. There are a lot of different ideas that can be developed to explain the available evidence. Of course, the discovery of other related evidence would be necessary, as would further developments to the ability to decode the Indus letters.

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