Coexistence of Culture and Civilization: A study in Terms of Indus Valley Civilization and Chalcolithic Cultures of Ganga Plain

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***Abstract**: Indus Valley Civilization represents the process of first urbanization in India. This civilization is remarkable for its general uniformity and standardization in architecture, ceramics, weights and measures, arts and crafts etc. But such uniformity in 3rd millennium B.C. is indeed unique as it was also the time that saw the rise of numerous regional cultures like Neolithic culture, Neo-Chalcolithic Culture and Chalcolithic Culture. These cultures flourished outside Harappan universe as their contemporary counterparts and were marked by their distinct cultural traits which were vastly different from the Indus fabric. This way, 3rd millennium B.C denotes a wonderful time in history because this was the period which saw the coexistence of Culture and Civilization for the first time in India. The present paper tries to study this very theme of dichotomy of culture and civilization in India in terms of Indus Valley Civilization and regional Chalcolithic Cultures as a mean to understand the growth, contact and influence of one over the other.*

Keywords: Culture, Civilization, Chalcolithic, Ganga Plain, Late Harappan Phase, Ochre Colored Pottery, Copper Hoard

Introduction

Like the introduction of food production and the advent of metal technology, growth of urbanism is indeed a great historical achievement of mankind (Singh, 1983:100). Indus Valley Civilization represents this very process of first urbanization in India. This civilization is remarkable for its general uniformity and standardization in architecture, ceramics, weights and measures, arts and crafts etc. But such uniformity in 3rd millennium B.C. is indeed unique as many regional rural cultures flourished outside Harappan universe as their contemporaries and were marked by their distinct cultural traits which were vastly different from the Indus fabric. This way, 3rd millennium B.C denotes a wonderful time in history because this was the period which saw the coexistence of Culture and Civilization for the first time in India. The present paper tries to study this very theme of dichotomy of culture and civilization in India in terms of Indus valley Civilization and regional Chalcolithic Cultures of Ganga Plain.

The Civilization

The word civilization denotes the emergence of cities. Urbanization and civilization are more or less synonyms. However, civilization has more abstract and grander connotations. It refers to a specific cultural stage generally associated with cities and writing which tend to go together. Over the years, there have been three different trends in defining the city. One is to narrow down the diagnostic features for instance, monumental structures and a large population. A second trend is to identify more specific criteria such as settlement size, architectural features and a uniform system of writing, weight and measures. A third view is towards a more abstract definition, highlighting features like cultural complexity, homogeneity and far reaching political control (Singh 2012: 134).

However varied the characteristics for identification of a civilization may be, Indus valley culture is unanimously accepted by scholars all over the world, as representing a civilization. None the less, it is one of the first civilizations of the world. The civilization, as we know it, extended, far beyond Indus valley, in the combined alluvium of the western Indus and eastern Saraswati river systems (Chakrabarty 2006: 136). The central zone of this civilization lay in Sindh and Punjab, principally in the Indus valley. From there it spread southwards and eastwards. In this way it covered parts of Punjab, Haryana, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan and fringes of western U.P. It extended from the Siwaliks in the north to the Arabian Sea in the south and from Makaran coast in the west to Meerut in the north east. The area formed a triangle and accounted for about 1,299,600sq.km. No other culture zone in the third millennium B.C. in the world was as widespread as the Indus valley civilization (Sharma. 2005: 75). Indus civilization covered an enormous area within which there was great ecological variety-alluvial plains, mountains, plateau and sea coasts. The resource potential of this area was rich enough to generate the food surplus. The diversity of the subsistence base may also have been an important sustaining factor-if one food resource failed, people could turn to other (Singh 2012: 156).

All scholars agree on the urban character of the Indus culture. Indus urbanism is defined on the basis of large central cities surrounded by an irregular network of smaller towns, villages, hamlets and temporary camps of pastoral communities. The uniformity probably reflecting the imposition of a superimposed pattern is nowhere clearer than in town planning (Allchin 2003: 171). The basic layout of the larger settlements; whether cities or towns, shows a regular orientation. At Harappa, Mohenjo-daro and Kalibangan, this consists of two distinct elements: citadel and lower town surrounded by a massive fortification wall. However, there are some variations in this scheme of planning as evident in Lothal, Banawali and Dholavira where one fortification wall encircling the citadel and Lower town; Radial fortification and three divisions of city instead of usual two along with the presence of a stadium are found respectively. The principle streets at best were laid out with controlled skill. There appears to have a general coordination in the measurements of streets.

Wheeler tried to define identifying features of the Indus civilization by the alternative or accumulative presence of Indus seals, Indus script, motifs like intersecting circles, ceramic forms like goblets with pointed base, perforated jars, S profile jars, Dish on stand, triangular terracotta cakes and certain beads. To these one may add town planning (streets in grids, underground drains, fortified townships), brick dimensions in the ratio 4:2:1 and typical copper objects like barbed triangular arrowheads with holes, bent bladed knives etc (Agarwal and Kharakwal 2003: 23). Besides these, Indus valley civilization is also noted for the production of steatite seals, beads of semi precious stones, terracotta figurines and shell bangles. The material culture of this civilization is indicative of prosperity, richness and specialization. Such a development must have been achieved by a strong administration and a progressive economy that heavily relied on trade. The combined efforts of the two aided by advanced technological knowledge helped in rise of civilization along the banks of Indus and Saraswati.

Chalcolithic Culture of Ganga Plain

Chalcolithic culture implies a chronological stage when man started using copper and stone implements. Technologically, the term 'Chalcolithic' is applied to the pre Harappan phase. However, in various parts of India, Chalcolithic cultures followed Bronze Age Indus civilization. Here we consider principally such cultures as came in the later part of the mature Indus valley civilization. Chronologically, there are several series of Chalcolithic settlements in India. Some are pre Harappan, others are contemporaneous with the Indus civilization and yet others are post Harappan. In the Ganga plain, the Chalcolithic culture is represented by the Late Harappan culture, the Ochre colored pottery culture, the copper hoards and the Black and Red ware phase.

Late Harappan Phase

There are almost 70 Late Harappan sites in the doab region, mostly along the higher banks of the tributaries of Yamuna. Of these, three sites have been excavated-Alamgirpur in Merrut district and Hulas and Bargaon in Saharanpur district. The late Harappan occupation at these sites may go back to before 2000 B.C. there is very little structural evidence from the late Harappan sites in the doab. With some exceptions, houses were generally made of wattle and daub. The pottery is made from well levigated clay and includes both handmade and wheel made types with both coarse and fine fabrics. Incised and painted designs are found on ceramics. The other artefacts found at these sites included chert blades, stone querns and pestles and bone points. Few copper objects-a broken blade from Alamgirpur and a fragmentary chisel and some rings from Bargaon were recovered. Terracotta bangles, beads of terracotta, steatite, agate, carnelian and faience; circular and triangular terracotta cakes, terracotta animal carts and wheels are also reported from these sites. List of plant remains from these late Harappan sites is impressive- rice, barley, wheat, oat, jowar, ragi, lentil, pea, moong, cotton, castor, almond, walnut and fruits. This was clearly an agricultural community with a diverse and well established base (Singh 2012: 214).

OCP Culture

OCP represents the next chalcolithic culture in the doab region. The period covered by the Ochre Colored Pottery culture may roughly be placed between 2000 and 1500 B.C., on the basis of a series of scientific datings. It appears, however that at no place did these settlements last for over a century or so. They were neither large nor spread over a wide territory. The OCP settlements are usually small (up to 200-300 sq m) although there are a few larger settlements such as Lal Qila (632 sq m). Due to disturbed nature of the deposits and the small area covered by the excavations, very few structural remains were found at most OCP culture sites. Generally, houses were made of mud. Apart from pottery, very few artefacts have been found at OCP culture sites. These include querns, stone beads, bone tools, terracotta figurines, wheels, bangles, beads etc. Few objects of copper like hooked spearhead, pendant, bead, arrowhead, celt and copper harpoon were found from these sites. Plant remains showed the presence of wheat, barley, gram, khesari and rice. Thermo luminescence dates from Atranjikheda, Lal Qila, Nasirpur and JhinJhina range between 2650 and 1180 B.C. The OCP culture thus can be seen as a late contemporary of the matured and Late Indus civilization with certain sites showing contacts between them (Singh 2012: 217-18; Allchin 2003: 256; Sharma 2005: 62). It has been observed that OCP occurs in three stratigraphic contexts.

OCP without copper hoard (Rajpur parsu)
OCP with copper hoards (Sapai) and
OCP with Late Harappa overlap (Bargaon and Ambakheri)

Moreover, at least two broad categories of OCP culture can be identified- a western zone represented at Ambakhari and Bargaon, that shows links with the Indus tradition and an eastern zone represented at Lal Qila, Atranjikheda and Sapai that does not display any such links (Singh 2005: 217).

Black and Red Ware Culture

BRW phase is represented at Chirand, Senuwar, Koldihwa, Lahuradeva, Malhar, Taradih, Chechar Kutubpur, Sonpur, Narhan etc. The general timeframe of this culture is 1500-800 B.C. (Allchin 2003: 258). These are largely confined to eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. C14 dates available for the beginning of Chalcolithic culture at Koldihwa appears to be too old to accept as they are even older than the known dates of Neolithic. There is however another date, PRL 223, 1440=120 B.C. (uncalibrated) (Agarwal and Kharakwal 2003:185). The earliest calibrated date range for Chalcolithic period at Chirand is 1936-1683 B.C. (Chakrabarty 2006: 267). This period is related with the appearance of copper and dominant Black and Red ware. The earlier feature of period I otherwise continue. At Senuwar, sub period IA is followed without any break by sub period IB which is called Neo-chalcolithic purely on the basis of the presence of copper fishhook, a piece of wire, a needle and an indeterminate object. But otherwise there is not much change from the earlier period except the introduction of some new crops like bread wheat, kodon millet, chick pea, green pea and horse gram. There are

four radiocarbon dates available for the lower levels of period IB on the basis of which the beginning of Neolithic-chalcolithic period at Senuwar may be fixed around 1800 B.C. (Narayan 1996: 487). Period II at Lahuradeva, beginning from about 2000 B.C. was characterized by an acclaimed presence of copper artefacts. In continuation of the ceramic industries of period I, this period was marked by the appearance of plain and painted Black Slipped and Black and Red wares. The proportion of spouted/lipped vessels and bowls/dish on stand increased many folds. Earthen storage bins, baked terracotta tiles, steatite beads, semi precious stone beads etc indicate considerable spurt in the material prosperity. Noteworthy is the extension of occupational area in this period. The extent of settlement between 2000 and 1000 B.C. and their specific location along with rich cultural assemblage at Lahuradeva points out the view of ascertaining them as a village or larger than village (Tewari et al. 2006:39). The most important outcome of excavations at Lahuradeva is the appearance of copper artefacts from the lower levels of sub period IB. Amongst them a copper arrowhead and a copper fishing hook are most noteworthy. On the basis of radiocarbon dates and on stratigraphic considerations, these finds may be placed in early 3rd millennium B.C. Since the oldest earlier copper finds have been found in circa 2000 B.C. context, these copper artefacts from Lahuradeva are so far the earliest known representatives of this metal in Ganga plain. Important amongst the associated culture material of this period includes beads made of steatite, carnelian and semi precious stones, bone awls, bone/antler bangle and stone scraper (Tewari et al. 2006 : 44).

Thus we see that the Chalcolithic culture of the Gangetic plains is remarkably interesting purely on account of its various associations. It's most prominent association in Ganga plain can be seen with Neo-Chalcolithic stage. This form of occurrence makes it very clear that there is a lack of pure Chalcolithic stage in this area. Here, from approximately the middle of third millennium BC we see fully agricultural and pre metallic villages with a wide range of crops on the river banks (Chakrabarty. 2006:268). When metal makes its appearance both its presence and appearance did not impart a distinct change in cultural assemblage. It appears that the chalcolithic sites of U.P. and Bihar knew the art of copper smelting but they show little use of copper. Remains of structures are poor indicating post holes and round houses. Sizable settlements do not figure in the plain areas until the coming of the Iron Age. However they have rich and varied agricultural background. These Chalcolithic sites of Ganga plain relate to 1500-700B.C. or even later (Sharma 2005: 68).

Culture and Civilization

The birth of Indian culture must be distinguished from the birth of civilization in India. Civilization is the fabric of material life i.e. the external conditions of labor and leisure while culture is the inner meaning or value sought to be realized in life as a whole. Civilization is realized in terms of external behavior, its means and conveniences. It depends on positive science, technology and social institutions and represents man's control of natural and social forces. It may be defined as the social means for the realization of utilitarian purposes. Culture, on the other hand, is the pursuit of those

purposes which men deem truly worthy of themselves in their freedom. While the cultural patterns tend to be individual, significant and profound, the patterns of civilization tend to be common and external. Contact between civilizations tends to foster a quicker development in them through exchange of goods and techniques and the need for competitive survival. Fruitful cultural contacts are more difficult because they require a deeper communication of minds and hearts (Pandey 1985: 48).

Civilization and culture are not two opposite poles, but interdependent and interacting parts of a larger cultural and ecological system. The emergence of cities has to be viewed as part of a longer history of human settlements, both rural and urban. The story of civilization is one of increasing cultural complexity, a widening food resource base, greater technological sophistication expanding craft production, social stratification and the emergence of a level of political organization (Singh 2012:135). However, it is important to keep in mind that even a civilization has a culture of its own. Every culture may not be indicative of civilization but every civilization is bound to have a culture. The cultural cycles of different scope and duration have been prior to as well as concurrent with the phases of civilization cycles. This concurrence is made possible by the fact that even within the same civilization area, different classes, communities and religions are not always uniformly subject to conditions of civilization. The change from culture to civilization epoch has thus meant not a total change of style but a change in the dominant style i.e. in the change of politics and the ethos underlying it. Such a change has meant within the continuity of the Indian tradition a growing coherence where the dominant style no longer agrees with the spirit of the traditionally accepted ideas. This has been specially so because the culture civilization cycles have also recurred within the span of India's history and proto history, more than once (Pandey 1985: 46).

Discussion

Most traditional archaeological historical studies use a linear sequence of periods and events to categorize and discuss the continuities and change in the human adaptive strategies. Traditions and phases are not totally distinct phenomena because of their interactions through economic, social and ritual interaction systems. However, such a sequential approach imposes a linear evolutionary mindset regarding the development of culture and civilization. We fail to realize that even during the times of great civilization, there were hamlets, village settlements and towns in parts of India both within and outside the spread of civilization. This is to say that the fact that the Indus civilization was urban does not mean that all or even most of its settlements had an urban character. A majority were in fact villages. The cities depended on villages for food and perhaps also labor and various kinds of goods produced in the cities found their way in the villages. As a result of the brisk urban-rural interaction, the typical range of Indus artefacts reached even small village sites.

This distinction between rural and urban character of cultural fabric was partly due to

the relative distance and interactions between them and partly due to the use of different metal and technology. Although most Chalcolithic cultures existing in a major part of India were younger than the Indus valley Civilization, they did not derive any substantial benefit from the advance technological knowledge of the Indus people (Sharma 2005: 71). The Chalcolithic culture had an essentially rural background. During its continuance, the supply of copper was limited. Though we find copper mines in eastern India, few copper tools have been found in the Chalcolithic sites of Bihar and neighboring states. People were unaware of the art of mixing tin with copper and thus foraging much stronger and useful metal called bronze. With the discovery of metals and metal working and the growth of agricultural knowledge and of the means of applying them practically, the economic structure of the village underwent slow changes.

A comparison of the Indus copper artefacts and the copper hoard objects shows striking differences in typology and alloying techniques. About 46 % of the copper hoard objects had up to 7% arsenic alloying. On the other hand, only 8% of analyzed Indus artefacts show arsenic alloying. This indicates two different methods of copper alloying prevalent in two different areas amongst two different cultures. The evidence of copper hoards also suggests that between mid 3rd and 2nd millennium B.C., the upper Ganga Plain had emerged as a distinct copper manufacturing area with interactions extending into the regions of Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Deccan, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Singh 2012: 219). It may be observed that the metal technology played different roles in Indus valley civilization and Chalcolithic cultures of Ganga Plain. According to Sahi, it played a great role in the Indus urban context while its role in the Gangetic doab was not very crucial (Sahi 1983: 20). Mere knowledge of copper technology wasn't sufficient enough to bring about drastic change in culture. In a slow moving society, the impact of copper was also slow because of lesser application of practical uses of copper technology. Moreover, in Ganga plain, we find earliest use of iron dated to 1800-1700 B.C at Raja Nal ka Tila and Malhar (Tewari etal. 1998: 100). This shows that both copper and iron technology were contemporary at some point of time in the Ganga plain. It is however significant to note that despite having this technological knowledge, there was no marked change in the material culture of this region which had to wait till 6th century B.C. to see the rise of its first cities.

Thus, we see the co-existence of culture and civilization in India with regard to Indus valley civilization and Chalcolithic culture of Ganga valley. To conclude, it may be said that India is a country of tremendous survivals. She carries her stone age along with her; her atomic age exists besides Chalcolithic; her cities flourish amidst villages; her culture-civilization dichotomy still prevails today. The refusal to reject and the capacity to transform is surely a characteristic peculiar to the Indian ethos.

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