

The Legacy of the Indus Valley Civilization

*The **Mother Goddess festival** celebrates different rituals and customs during ten days known as Navaratri, Dussehra and Durga Punja throughout the entire country usually in October. This year (2014) the festival begins on Sept. 29 and ends on Oct. 4. On the last day of the festival, Hindus celebrate that the force of good over comes evil and they are empowered to make personal changes then.*

Background

The great cities of the Indus Valley like Mohenjodaro and Harappa flourished for more than a thousand years during the third millennium BCE. The most ancient and best-preserved urban ruin on the Indian subcontinent, Mohenjodaro, had a considerable influence on the subsequent development of Indian cities.

According to archeologists, more than 40,000 people once lived in these two cities. The lives of these people revolved around visiting the great bath, home life, and trade with people as far away as Mesopotamia.

In more than a hundred excavated sites in the Indus Valley, hundreds of steatite seals have been found that once were used for trade with Mesopotamia, about 1,500 miles from the Indus Valley to Baghdad. Each seal is different but most of them had a form of writing that is yet to be deciphered.

According to the BBC Online Services a tremendous amount of information is known about India's first civilization from excavations primarily at Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Most people were poor, and did either farming, fishing or making things.

The richest people in an Indus city were probably people who owned a lot of land, or traders who controlled the buying and selling of luxury goods, such as rugs, jewels, minerals and metals. Rich traders loaded their goods on ships sailing off across the sea. They wore fine clothes, and lived in big houses with servants and perhaps slaves. Indus people did not use money. It's likely that wealth was measured by how much land a person had or how many cattle, or how many sacks of grain.

City planning

Mohenjodaro comprises two sectors: a stupa mound that rises in the western sector and, to the east, the lower city ruins spread out along the banks of the Indus. The lower

town, which is laid out according to strict rules, provides evidence of an early system of town planning.

The stupa mound, built on a massive platform of mud brick, is composed of the ruins of several major structures – a great bath, a great granary, and a pillared hall - as well as a number of private homes. The extensive lower city is a complex of private and public houses, wells, shops and commercial buildings.

Thick walls kept people cool in the heat of summer. Some houses had just one room and others had lots of rooms arranged around a central courtyard. All that is left today are the ground floors of houses that once had two or three floors. They cooked with wood and charcoal and their homes had a shower, toilet and waste disposal system.

Spiritual beliefs

In ancient Middle Eastern religions and in the Indus Valley Civilization, the mother goddess was the symbol of the earth's fertility. She was worshiped under many names and attributes. Essentially she was represented as the creative force in all nature, the mother of all things, responsible particularly for the periodic renewal of life.

They had spiritual beliefs that focused on women we now call goddesses for their lofty status in the community and powers of regenerating all life. From the early times, these goddesses could easily be indentified by their voluptuous breasts, huge hips and small waists. Many of the nude women about five inches tall are adorned with ornate heavy jewelry and crowns that are different for each goddess. A number of terracotta goddess images have been found in India's earliest civilization. Similar small goddess figures have been known in Mesopotamia.

One image of a small goddess from the collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco made about 1,200 to 1,400 BCE in terra-cotta is from Northern or Eastern India. She is about 5.5 inches, just the right size to hold in your hand for rituals. She is feeding a bird and holds fruit in her other hand that probably was part of a ritual. Her bushy long hair seems like part of her crown.

Another goddess image from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco has a powerful presence with her hands on her hips and she is adorned with an elaborate molded crown that extends out from her head about two feet. She has huge earrings that make the viewer focus on her face, open eyes and her large lips in a reserved smile.

There is a symmetrical balance with an invisible line from her crown down her face, the medallion between her breasts, through the image that suggests she is pregnant to her pubic triangle.

In the National Museum in New Delhi, there is a seal depicting a seated figure in a lotus position with his arms over his legs and his hands resting on his knees and he is surrounded by tiny images of an elephant, a bull, a tiger, and a stick figure person. Scholars think he is a prototype of the god Shiva. There may be influences between the Indus Valley civilization and later Hinduism as suggested by the ritual bathing, sacrifice, and goddess worship.

The Great Mother festival celebrated in October

The goddesses in India's first civilization influenced the Hindu Mother Goddess festival known as Navaratri celebrated throughout India for ten days and it honors all manifestations of the Mother goddess especially the warrior goddess Durga. Navaratri is filled with nine days of dramas, dance, cultural performances, fasts and feasts. The tenth day of the festival, called Dussehra, is devoted to celebrating Durga's defeat of the demon King Ravana with seven heads and ten arms. The story is recounted in the *Ramayana*, one of India's two great epic poems with a story that most Hindus know.

On the last day of the festival statues of the goddess Durga and Sita are paraded through the streets. The festival culminates with the victory of good over evil and effigies of the demon and his two brothers ten-feet tall are set ablaze. During this auspicious time, people are empowered to make psychological and other kinds of changes in their life.

The dates of the festival are determined according to the lunar calendar and this year (2014), the Mother Goddess festival starts on September 25 and ends on October 3.

What happened to the Indus Valley Civilization?

Between 1900 and 1700 BC, this great civilization started to fall apart. Trade with Mesopotamia stopped. The Great Bath at Mohenjodaro was built over. Their cities have almost vanished except for ruins dug into by archaeologists.

There is no evidence of war or mass killings. Indus Valley people seem to have been peaceful. If they had an army, they have left few signs of weapons or battles. It's more likely that the cities collapsed after a natural disaster like an earthquake that changed the course of the Indus River. Enemies might have moved in afterwards.

According to the observations by archeologists, Mohenjodaro, Harappa and many other smaller cities that have been excavated give us a picture of people who had complex city planning. The cities accommodated more than 40,000 people who once lived in these two cities.

The lives of these people revolved around visiting the great bath and they also valued cleanliness and sanitation in their homes. They undertook tremendous risks to trade

with people as far away as Mesopotamia around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. They traded luxury items and the first cross-cultural pollination began.

Both cultures had spiritual beliefs that focused on women that we would call goddesses today. Hundreds of years later, women and men embraced in sexual union as carvings on the walls of Hindu temples. They influenced women celebrated in the Mother festival.

These people learned to live peacefully with others very different from themselves. No weapons of war were found in any of the excavations. Long after the Indus civilization, skills such as trading, farming and brick-making were passed on and helped shape the cultures of India and Pakistan.

Sally Swope

Travel writer, journalist, and author, Sally had a destiny with Asia. For more than fifteen years she covered Asian culture for Bay Area publications and found ways to see Asia through planning, persuasion, and good luck. She left with an assignment for each trip and has contributed to *Art & Antiques*, *the New York City Tribune*, and *Yoga Magazine*. She is the author of *My Shangri-La*, *My Adventures in Asia*. Sally lives in San Francisco with her partner Rick Lawton, also a writer.