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# UNIT 5 ANTECEDENTS, CHRONOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD

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## 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to learn:

- how the Harappan Civilization was discovered,
- how its chronology was determined,
- how the village communities gradually evolved into the Harappan Civilization, and
- the geographical spread of the Harappan Civilization.

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Block 1 you learnt about the evolution of mankind from hunting gathering societies to agricultural societies. The invention of agriculture led to far reaching changes in human societies. One important result was the emergence of cities and civilizations. In this Unit you will be made familiar with the birth of one such civilization namely the Harappan civilization.

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## 5.2 AN OLD CITY IS DISCOVERED

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In 1826 an English man Charles Masson visited a village named Harappa in Western Punjab (now in Pakistan). He noted the remarkably high walls, and towers of a very old settlement. He believed that this city belonged to the times of Alexander the Great. In 1872, a famous archaeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham came to this place. The people of the surrounding areas told him that the high mounds of Harappa were parts of a thousand year old city. It had been ruined because of the wickedness of its king. Cunningham collected some archaeological objects from this site but he could not determine to which period of history they really belonged. He simply believed that these objects were probably from outside India. Thus, he concurred with the opinion of the people of the village that the city was about a thousand years old. However, in 1924, when another archaeologist John Marshall reported about

Harappa he talked about the discovery of a long forgotten civilization. This civilization was as old as the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Is it not curious? The people of the surrounding areas were indifferent to the remains of the city. Then an archaeologist came and informed us that the city was about five thousand years old. How could the people and the scholars form such different ideas? What could be their methods of dating an old site?

### 5.3 THE AGE OF THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

Archaeologists use various methods for finding out how old various settlements are. Let us see how Marshall concluded that the Harappan civilization was about five thousand years old and not one thousand years old, as believed by Cunningham. Marshall found that the seals, sealings, written script and works of art found in Harappa were totally different from those with which scholars were already familiar and which belonged to a much later period. Similar finds were reported in another place called Mohenjodaro in Sind. In Mohenjodaro the settlement lay underneath a Buddhist monastery belonging to the Kushan period. It has been found that in ancient times if a house was destroyed for some reason people would generally use the brick or mud of the house to prepare a plinth and make another house on top of it. Thus, if an archaeologist excavates an area and finds remains of a house beneath another house, he can figure out that the one below is older than the one above. That is why the deeper he digs the earlier he moves in the time scale. Thus, Marshall could find out that the houses below the Buddhist monastery must have been older than the Kushan period. Then, there was the evidence that people living in these settlements did not know the use of iron. This meant that these cities were part of an age when iron was unknown. Iron came in use in the beginning of the second millennium B.C. When Marshall published his discoveries some other writers found objects similar to those of Harappa and Mohenjodaro in Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian cities came into existence in the early 3rd millennium B.C. Thus, if anything Harappan was discovered in the ancient cities of Mesopotamia it would indicate that the people of Harappa lived at the same time. With these evidences scholars could figure out that the conclusions of the local population and Cunningham were incorrect. Marshall's chronology of Harappa has been further supported by new methods of dating, such as Radio carbon dating. Thus, scholars accept the following chronology for the pre-Harappan and Harappan cultures.

#### The Chronology of Pre-Harappan and Harappan Cultures

5500 B.C. to 3500 B.C.	Neolithic	In Baluchistan and the Indus plains settlements like Mehrgarh and Kili Ghul Muhammad came up. Beginning with pastoralism with limited cultivation and seasonal occupation of the villages, permanent villages emerged. Knowledge of wheat, barley, dates, cotton and sheep, goat and cattle. Evidences of mud houses, pottery and Craft-production found.
3500 B.C. to 2600 B.C.	Early Harappan Period	Many more settlements established in the hills and the plains. Largest numbers of villages occur in this period. Use of copper, wheel and plough. Extra-ordinary range of pottery forms showing beginning of many regional traditions. Evidence of granary, defensive walls, and long distance trade. Emergence of uniformities in the pottery tradition throughout the Indus Valley. Also, the origins of such motifs as Pipal, humped bulls, Cobras, horned deity etc.
2600 B.C. to 1800 B.C.	Mature Harappan Period	Emergence of large cities, uniform types of bricks, weights, seals, beads and pottery. Planned township and long distance trade.
1800 B.C. Onwards	Late Harappan Period	Many Harappan sites abandoned. Interregional exchange declines. Writing and city life abandoned. Continuation of Harappan Crafts and pottery tradition. The village cultures of Punjab, Sutlej-Jamuna divide and Gujarat imbibe the Harappan crafts and pottery traditions.

## 5.4 WHY IT IS CALLED HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

Beginning with the discovery of Harappa, nearly thousand settlements having similar traits, have been discovered. Scholars named it the 'Indus Valley Civilization' because initially most of the settlements were discovered in the plains of the river Indus and its tributaries. Archaeologists however prefer to call it the 'Harappan Civilization'. This is because in archaeology there is a convention that when an ancient culture is described, it is named after the modern name of the site which first revealed the existence of this culture. We do not know what those people called themselves because we have not been able to read their writing. Thus, we call them Harappans after the modern place Harappa where the evidence of this forgotten civilization was first unearthed in our times.

## 5.5 ANTECEDENTS OF THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

When we use the term "The Harappan Civilization" we are referring to a large number of cities, towns and villages which flourished in the 3rd millennium B.C. These cities and villages had formed a network of interaction over a large geographical

Map I : Sites of Early Harappan Period



space. This geographical space would roughly cover the areas of modern day Rajasthan, Punjab, Gujarat, Pakistan and some of the surrounding areas. If we study the remains left by the people who lived in these areas before the emergence of the Harappan civilization, we can have some idea of how cities emerged. Scholars believe that there was a time in human past when cities did not exist and people lived in small villages. One might ask what the ancestors of the Harappans were doing before they built up the towns and cities. There are evidences to suggest that the forefathers of the Harappans were living in villages and small towns. Some of them engaged in pastoral nomadic activities, and some went in for trade. The Harappan civilization represents the culmination of a long period of evolution of agricultural and semi-nomadic communities. So, let us review the pre-history of the Harappan civilization. We start with an understanding of their geography.

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## 5.6 GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

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The areas of present day Pakistan and North-Western India formed the core region of the Harappan civilization. These areas are characterised by dry weather and scanty rainfall. However, there are some important variations among these areas. Whereas the areas of Punjab and Sind are dominated by the alluvial plains of the Indus river system, the areas of Baluchistan are characterised by steep craggy hills. In North-Eastern Baluchistan the valley floors might provide some possibilities of agriculture. This area has been inhabited by another set of people also, namely pastoral nomads. These pastoral nomads with their herds of sheep, goat and cattle kept shifting from uplands to low lands in search of pastures for their herd. The areas of these border lands which cut out into the Indus plains are a continuation of the eastern Iranian Plateau. These hilly regions are fractured by many passes, like those of Khyber, Gomal and Bolan. These have acted as highways of traffic for nomads, merchants, warriors and various groups of people. The interaction among the population of the uplands of Baluchistan and plains of the Indus on the one hand and the communities of Iran on the other seems to be related to this geographical feature. The similarities in the climate and landscape of the Harappan civilization and those of Iran, Iraq borderlands had led scholars to hypothesize that agricultural communities must have emerged in these areas in roughly the same period. In Iran and Iraq agriculture began around eight thousand B.C. Let us see what are the evidence for the beginning of agriculture in and around the Indus system.

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## 5.7 ORIGINS OF AGRICULTURE AND SETTLED VILLAGES

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The earliest evidence for the emergence of agricultural communities comes from a place called Mehrgarh, near the Bolan pass in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan (Also see Unit 4 of Block-1). Beginning as a seasonal camp the place turned into a settled village in the 5th millennium B.C. itself. People in this place were growing wheat, barley, cotton and dates and tending sheep, goat and cattle. Mehrgarh is located at the place where the alluvial plains of the Indus join the uneven hilly plateau of the Indo-Iranian border land. People of Mehrgarh lived in mud houses which could sometimes have five to six rooms. By the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. many small and large villages had sprung up around the Indus, Baluchistan and Afghanistan area. The better known settlements among them are Kili Ghul Muhammad in Baluchistan and Mundigak in Afghanistan. In the Indus flood plains villages like Jalilpur near Harappa had come into existence. Once these agriculturists learnt to exploit the highly fertile flood plains of the Indus there was a sudden expansion in the size and numbers of villages. These agriculturists gradually learnt to exploit the Indus plains and to control the flooding of the Indus. Richer returns per acre planted resulted in larger surpluses. This led to an increase in the number of settlements in Sindh, Rajasthan, Baluchistan and other areas. They also managed to exploit stone quarries and mines useful to them. There are indications of the existence of pastoral nomadic communities in this period in the form of seasonal settlements. The interactions with these groups seem to have helped agriculturists exploit resources from other regions as the pastoral nomads are known to engage in trading activities

over the areas they cover during their travels. All this led to the development of small towns. The period of this new development is called 'the Early Harappan' because of certain uniformities found all over the Indus.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1 Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×).
  - i) John Marshall said that the Harappan Civilization was five thousand years old.
  - ii) People of the Harappan settlements were aware of the use of iron.
  - iii) It is called the Harappan Civilization because Harappa was the first site to be discovered.
  - iv) We have evidence to suggest that the forefathers of the Harappans were living in large cities.
- 2 Write ten lines on the geographical features of the early Harappan Civilization.

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## 5.8 THE EARLY HARAPPAN PERIOD

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We shall review the conditions of some of the settlements just before the emergence of the Harappan civilization. Many scholars call this period 'The Early Harappan' period because they believe that this was the formative epoch of the Harappan civilization when certain trends of cultural unification are in evidence.

### 5.8.1 Southern Afghanistan

In Southern Afghanistan there is a place called Mundigak. It seems to have been located on a trade route. That is why in the early Indus period, the inhabitants of this place were using artifacts which show affinities with some Iranian towns on the one hand and some Baluchistan towns on the other. Making an humble beginning as the camping site of some nomadic groups, the place grew into a township of impressive proportions. There is evidence of a defensive wall with square bastions of sun dried bricks. A large building with rows of pillars has been identified as a palace. Another large structure looks like a temple. A variety of potteries have also been discovered at this place. They were using naturalistic decorations showing birds, ibex, bull and Pipal trees. Terracotta female figurines similar to those found in contemporary sites in Baluchistan have also been found. They were also using bronze shafthole azes and adzes. Such semi precious stones as lapis-lazuli and steatite show their contacts with Iran and central Asia since these stones are not available locally.

### 5.8.2 Quetta Valley

To the South east of Mundigak is the Quetta valley. Here, in a place called Damb Sadaat, large houses having brick walls belonging to the beginning of the 3rd millennium B.C. have been discovered. Varieties of painted potteries similar to those of Mundigak have also been found. These people were using clay seals and copper

objects also. These discoveries indicate the presence of a prosperous community which had solved its food problem and established trading contacts with regions faraway. Similarly, from the surrounding areas there are reports of distinct art and pottery traditions. In a place called Rana Ghundai people were using finely made painted pottery with friezes of humped bulls in black. The pottery showed distinct parallels with those of the Quetta valley. Another excavated site Periano Ghundai has yielded female figurines of a distinctive type.

### 5.8.3 Central and Southern Baluchistan

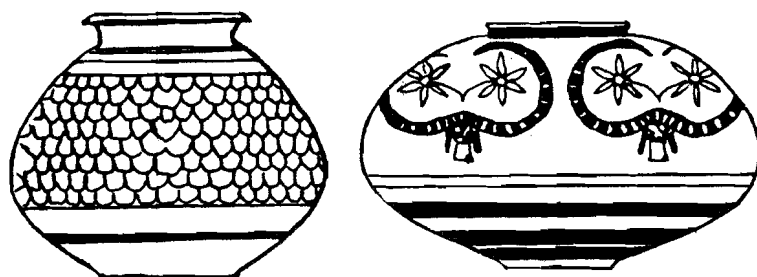
In the central and southern Baluchistan sites like Anjira, Togau, Nindowari and Balakot give us some idea of the early Harappan societies. These small villages and townships seem to fan out in conformity with the valley systems. In Balakot remains of large buildings have been discovered. Many of the sites in this area show evidences of contact with Persian Gulf. In Balakot the people who first inhabited the place were using potteries similar to those used in other contemporary villages in Baluchistan. However, in course of time they started using potteries similar to the ones used in the Indus alluvial plain. What is important to us is that the people of the entire Baluchistan province were using similar kinds of pottery. They show distinct influences from the Persian Gulf towns on the one hand and from the Indus valley towns on the other. They were using motifs on their pottery like the humped bull and Pipal which continued into the Mature Harappan phase.

### 5.8.4 The Indus Area

By the middle of the 4th millennium B.C. the Indus alluvial plains become the focal point of change. Many small and large settlements came into existence on the banks of the Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra. This area became the core region of the Harappan civilization. In the present discussion we shall try to show how these developments anticipate many of the characteristics of the Harappan civilization.

#### i) Amri

The Sind province corresponding to the lower Indus plains showed interesting development. At the site of Amri the habitations show people living in houses of stone and mud brick. They had constructed some kind of a granary also. They painted such animal motifs as the humped Indian bulls on their pottery. This motif was very popular during the 'Mature Harappan' phase. They were using wheel-made pottery. Similar finds have been reported in places like Tharro and Kohtras Buthi. They had fortified their settlements before the coming of the Harappan civilization.



1. a) Early Indus Pottery : Kot Diji      b) Early Indus Pottery : Kalibangan

#### ii) Kot Diji

Opposite Mohenjodaro on the left bank of the river Indus is the site of Kot Diji. The people living here in the 'Early Harappan' period had a massive defensive wall built around their settlement. The most interesting finds are their pottery. They were using a wheel-thrown pottery having decorations of plain bands of dark brownish paint. This kind of pottery has been reported from the pre-Harappan habitations in far flung places like Kalibangan in Rajasthan and Mehrgarh in Baluchistan. The Kot-Diji variety of pottery has been found along the entire stretch of the river Indus where settlements belonging to the pre-urban and urban phase of the Harappan civilization have been reported. This movement towards similar methods of decorating pottery indicates greater communication among the people of the Indus plains. It also anticipates the process of the convergence of cultures seen in the Harappan Civilization. Many of the designs

on the pottery were carried over to the urban phase. At the same time certain other earthen vessels showed similarity with those of Mundigak. This shows the enlarged interaction sphere of the early Harappan sites. In Mohenjodaro itself archaeologists have discovered occupation deposits to a depth of 39 feet below the modern level of the plain. Similarly, at the site of Chanhudaro, 'Early Harappan' habitation has been reported. At Mohenjodaro the early levels could not be excavated but many archaeologists believe that these occupation levels represented an 'Early Harappan' culture, probably similar to that of Kot Diji.

iii) **Mehrgarh**

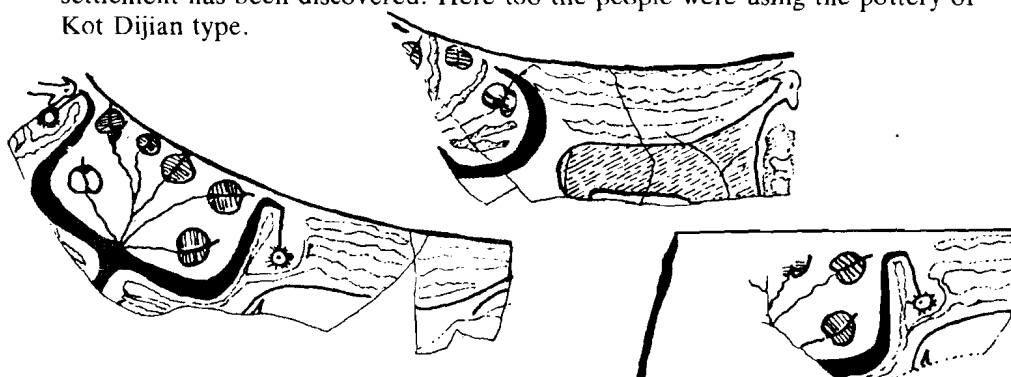
Earlier we talked about the site of Mehrgarh. In the period preceding the Harappan urbanisation, the people of Mehrgarh had established a prosperous township. They used to make various kinds of beads of stone. Lapis-lazuli, one of the precious stones used by them is found only in the Badakshan region of Central Asia. Many seals and sealings have been reported. Seals are used as a mark of authority in situations of interpersonal exchange. The Mehrgarh seals were probably used by merchants for guaranteeing the quality of goods that were being sent to faraway lands. Similarities in the designs of potteries, terracotta figurines and objects of copper and stone indicate that these people were in close contact with the neighbouring towns of Iran. However, most of the pottery used by the people of Mehrgarh was similar to the ones used in the neighbouring settlements of Damb Sadaat and the Quetta Valley. Similarly a large number of female terracotta figurines are also found. They are very similar to the ones found in Zhob Valley. These parallels indicate a close interaction among the surrounding communities.

iv) **Rahman Dheri**

If we follow the river Indus northwards we come across some more settlements which give us an idea of how people lived in 'Early Harappan' times. At a place called Rahman Dheri an 'Early Indus' township has been excavated. Oblong in shape with houses, streets and lanes laid out in a planned fashion, it is protected by a massive wall. Here too, beads of turquoise and lapis lazuli have been found. This shows their contact with Central Asia. A large number of graffiti found on the pot sherds could be the forerunners of the Harappan script. The independent pottery tradition in this area was gradually modified and supplemented by a pottery similar to that of Kot Diji. Seals, tools made of stone, copper and bronze have also been found.

v) **Tarkai Qila**

In the Bannu area, in the north west frontier province the site of Tarkai Qila has also yielded evidence of fortification. Archaeologists have discovered large samples of grains which included many varieties of wheat and barley, lentils and field pea. Tools for harvesting have also been found. In the same area, at a site called Levan, a huge factory site for making stone tools was discovered. The Harappans and their predecessors did not know about iron and copper was rare. So most of the people used tools made of stone. That is why in some places where good quality stone was available tools would be made on a large scale and then sent to distant towns and villages. The people in Levan were making ground stone axes, hammers, querns, etc. For this they were importing suitable rocks from the surrounding areas too. The presence of lapis lazuli and terracotta figurines indicates links with Central Asia. At the site of Sarai Khola which is located on the northern tip of western Punjab another 'Early Harappan' settlement has been discovered. Here too the people were using the pottery of Kot Dijian type.



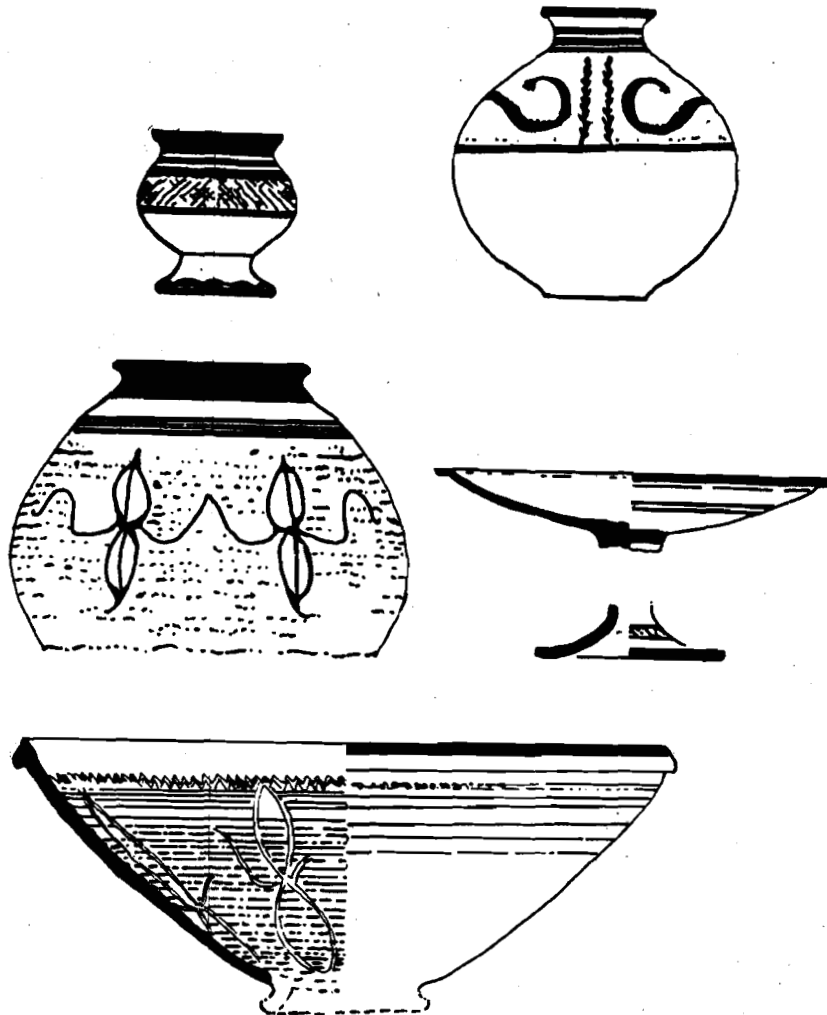
2. Painted pot showing heads of buffalo and pipal leaf decorations found in Levan.

### 5.8.5 Punjab and Bahawalpur

In western Punjab, Harappa is well known. During one of the excavations, habitations preceding the urban phase have been discovered. Unfortunately they have not been excavated as yet. The pottery found here seems to have similarities with the Kot Dijian ware. Scholars believe that these habitations represent the 'Early Harappan' phase in Harappa. In the Bahawalpur area about 40 sites of the 'Early Harappan' period have been located in the dry bed of the Hakra river. Here too the 'Early Harappan' is characterised by the Kot Dijian type of pottery. A comparative analysis of the settlement pattern of these sites shows that in the 'Early Harappan' period itself a variety of habitations had come up. Whereas most of the sites were simple villages, some of them were carrying out specialised industrial activities. That is why we find that most of the sites averaged about five to six hectares in size, Gamanwala spreads over an area of 27.3 hectares. This means that Gamanwala was larger than the Harappan township of Kalibangan. These larger townships must have carried administrative and industrial activities apart from agricultural activities.

### 5.8.6 Kalibangan

The site of Kalibangan in north Rajasthan has also yielded evidence of the 'Early Harappan' period. People lived in houses of mud bricks. The mud bricks had standard sizes. They also had a rampart around the settlement. The pottery used by them was different in shape and design from that of other areas. However, some of the pottery was similar to that of Kot Diji. A few varieties of potteries like the 'offering stand' continued to be used during the urban phase. A remarkable find was that of a ploughed field surface. This proves that even at this stage the cultivators already knew about the plough. In more primitive situations the farmers either simply broadcast the seeds or used hoes for digging the fields. With plough one can dig deeper using much less energy. That is why it is considered an advanced tool of cultivation having potentialities of increasing the food production.



3. Early Indus Pottery : Kalibangan

In the dry bed of Ghaggar, on the Indian site, several 'Early Harappan' settlements have been found. They seem to line the now extinct water ways of the region. Sites like Sothi Bara and Siswal have reported ceramic styles similar to those of Kalibangan. The exploitation of the Khetri copper mines in Rajasthan might have begun in the 'Early Harappan' period itself.

We have stressed upto the similarities found in the cultural traditions of diverse agricultural communities living in and around the Indus regions in the Early Harappan period. Beginning with small agricultural settlements the areas of Baluchistan, Sind, Punjab and Rajasthan saw the emergence of distinct regional traditions. However, the use of similar kinds of potteries, representations of a horned diety and finds of terracotta mother goddesses show the way to the emergence of a unifying tradition. The people of Baluchistan had already established trading relations with the towns of Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Thus, the 'Early Harappan' anticipate many of the achievements of the Harappan civilization.

We have seen the developments that took place over a period of nearly three thousand years. Cultivators colonised the alluvial plains of the Indus during this period. These communities were using tools of copper, bronze and stone. They were using plough and wheeled transport for the greater productivity of labour. Also unlike in Iran, where sheep and goat rearing was prevalent, the Indus people reared cattle. This gave them better possibilities of harnessing animal power for transportation and possibly cultivation. At the same time a gradual unification too took place in the pottery tradition. In the 'Early Harappan' period a particular kind of pottery first identified in Kot Diji spread over almost the entire area of Baluchistan, Punjab and Rajasthan. Terracotta mother goddesses or the motif of horned deity could be seen in Kot Diji or Kalibangan. Some of the communities surrounded themselves with defensive walls. We do not know the purpose behind the construction of these walls. It could be defense against other communities or it could be simply a bund against flooding. All these developments were taking place in the context of a much larger network of relationships with the contemporary sites of Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia.

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## 5.9 EMERGENCE OF THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

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In the backdrop of these processes of technological and ideological unification emerged the Harappan Civilization. The particular mechanisms of the birth of the civilization are obscure because we have not read their script and a lot many more excavations need to be carried out. Some of the general processes have been outlined above. The increasingly efficient technology and the exploitation of the fertile plains of the Indus must have given richer returns of grain production. This created the possibilities for larger surpluses. It would also lead to increase in population. At the same time trading contacts would be established with distant communities by the richer section of the society who would like to possess precious commodities. The larger surpluses would also permit the elaboration of non-farming specialisation. That is how the village priest could become the part of a clan of priests spread over the entire region. Similar processes will occur in the case of metallurgists, potters and craftsmen. In villages small silos for keeping grains would be transformed into elaborate granaries.

The existence of very many agricultural groups and pastoral nomadic communities in close contact with each other could lead to conflict among them. Once the agriculturalists had become prosperous they would attract other groups which might be less fortunate. The pastoral nomads are known to engage in trading and looting, depending on their own economic conditions.

The agricultural communities too could fight with each other for the control of more fertile tracts of land. Probably that is the reason why some of the communities surrounded themselves with a defence wall. We know that at the time of the emergence of the Harappan civilization many sites like Kot Diji and Kalibangan were destroyed by fire. We do not know the reasons behind this. They could simply be accidental conflagrations. However, what seems more plausible is the fact that among the various competing communities in the Indus region one set of people established their power over others. This signalled the beginning of the 'Mature Harappan'

period. Thus, the 'Mature Harappan' period would not begin on one particular date considering the large geographical space covered by the Harappan Civilization. It is likely that city as the centre of evolution emerged over a long span of time covering hundreds of years, but the city had arrived and it was there to dominate the entire north-west for the next seven-eight hundred years.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1 Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×).
  - i) People of the early Harappan period were involved in active trade with Iran and Central Asia.
  - ii) Many characteristics of the Mature Harappan phase had already taken shape in the plains of river Indus.
  - iii) There is no evidence of any communication between different areas of the Indus plains.
  - iv) The pottery used in Kalibangan was the same in shape and design as used in other areas, during the early Harappan period.
- 2 How did different areas of the early Harappan period evolve into a civilization? Write in ten lines.

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**5.10 LET US SUM UP**

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The discovery of the Harappan civilization holds a very special significance for the study of the Indian history. It altered the origins of the Indian history and stretched it much further back so as to put it at par with the other oldest civilizations of the world namely Egypt and Mesopotamia. The discovery of the Harappan civilization was a result mainly of the archaeological sources. In this Unit you learnt about the process through which the civilization came to be discovered, various details about the stages through which the early Harappan civilization passed, its gradual evolution and the spreading out into many areas. In the subsequent units of this block you will become familiar with many other aspects related to the society and economy of the Harappan people.

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**5.11 KEY WORDS**

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- Seal** : A piece of wax or stone or some other material, in which some design is carved. It is used as a means of authentication.
- Sealing** : The object carrying the stamp of the seal.

**Radio-Carbon Dating :** It is also called C-14 dating. It is a method of measuring in dead organic matter the radio-active isotope C-14 which disappears at a known and calculable rate.

**Nomadism :** A way of life associated with cattle herders and foraging communities. People do not stay at one place but keep moving from one place to another.

**Pastoral Nomadism :** A social organisation associated with cattle and sheep-goat herders who move from one place to another in search of pastures.

**Chronology :** The method of computing time.

**Alluvial Plain :** The area bordering the river bank on which fine material is deposited by the river in the time of flood.

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## 5.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

1 (i) ✓ (ii) × (iii) ✓ (iv) ×

2 See Section 5.6

### Check Your Progress 2

1 (i) ✓ (ii) ✓ (iii) × (iv) ×

2 Your answers should refer to increasing efficient technology, creation of food surplus, consequent growth in population, growing specialisation and increase in trade. Also see the end of Sub-sec. 5.8.5 and Section 5.9.