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THE BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN CIVILISATION

Introduction

Civilisation marks the transition of early humans from nomadic lifestyles to settled communities. Ancient history witnessed many such civilisations flourish in the Indian subcontinent. This chapter explores the characteristics that define a civilisation and traces its evolution in the Indian

What is a Civilisation?

A civilisation is an advanced stage of human societies characterised by several key features:

- **Government and administration:** To manage complex societies.
- **Urbanism:** Town planning, growth, and management of cities.
- **Variety of crafts:** Management of raw materials and production of finished goods.
- **Trade:** Internal and external exchange of goods.
- **Writings:** Essential for record keeping and communication.
- **Cultural ideas:** Expressed through art, architecture, literature, oral traditions, and social customs.
- **Productive agriculture system:** To sustain villages and cities.

Civilisations began at different times and places. Notable early examples include the Mesopotamian civilisation around 6,000 years ago and the Indus civilisation in the Indian subcontinent begins with its northwest region.

Exam Question

Q: What are the key features that define a civilisation?

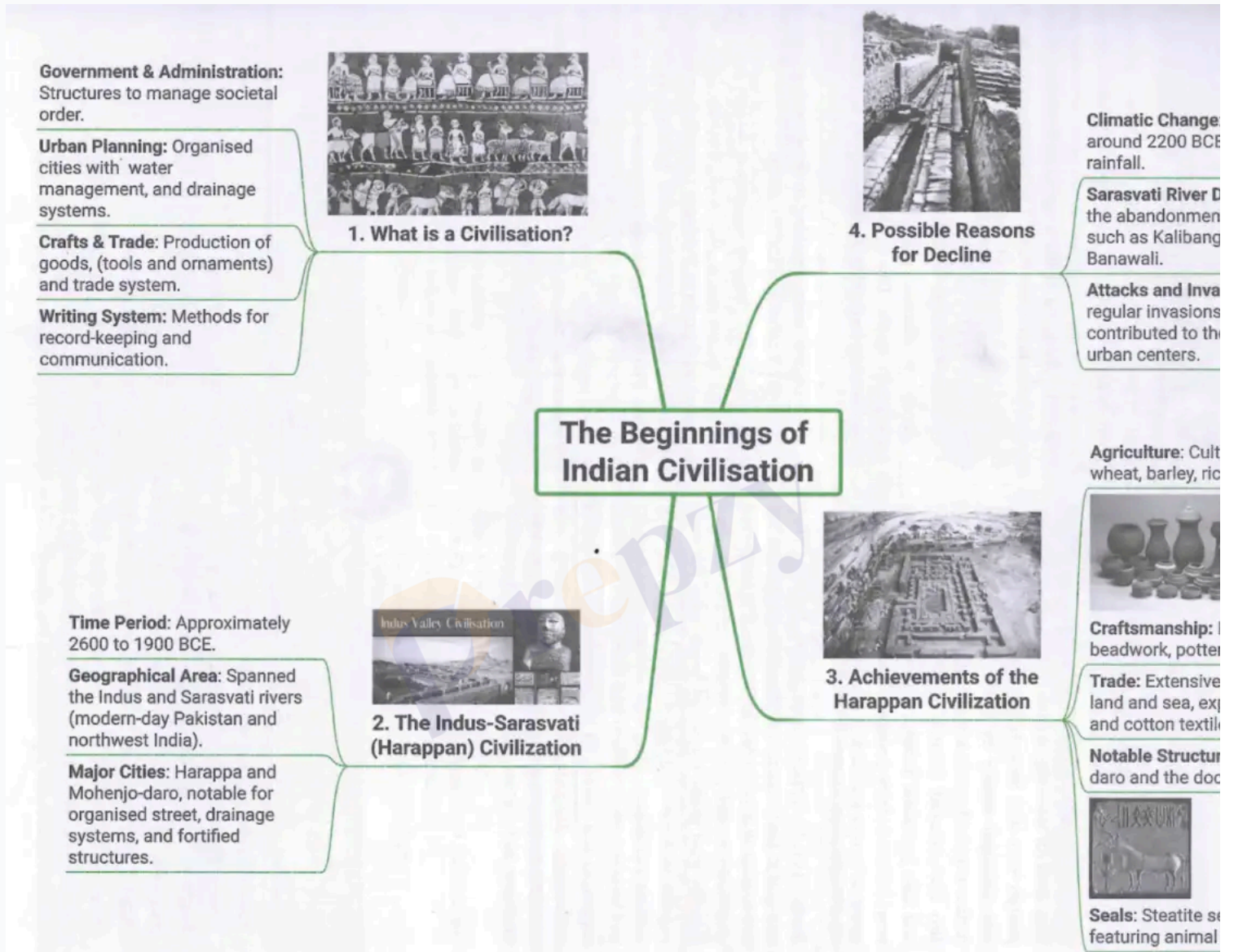
A: Key features include government and administration, urbanism, variety of crafts, trade, writings, cultural ideas, and a productive agriculture system.

The Harappan Civilisation

The plains of Punjab and Sindh, nourished by the Indus River and its tributaries, were fertile and suitable for agriculture. The Sarasvati River also supported settlements. Around 3500 BCE, villages grew into towns, and by 2600 BCE, towns developed into cities, marking the beginning of one of the world's earliest civilisations known as the Indus, Harappan, Indus–Sarasvati, or Sindhu–Sarasvati civilisation. Its inhabitants are called Harappans, named after the city of Harappa.

Town Planning

The Harappan cities, including Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, were carefully planned with wide streets aligned with cardinal directions. Cities were divided into the 'upper town' for the elite and the 'lower town' for common people. Large buildings like warehouses and the Great Bath served collective purposes. The quality of life was uniform, and buildings were made of bricks.



Water Management

Water management and cleanliness were priorities. Homes had separate bathing areas connected to a drainage system below the streets. They used wells, ponds, streams, and reservoirs. Mohenjo-daro used brick wells, while Dholavira had large reservoirs.

Agriculture and Eating Habits

Harappans cultivated cereals like barley, wheat, millets, and rice, along with pulses and vegetables. They were the first in Eurasia to grow cotton. Farming tools like the plough were used. They domesticated animals, practiced fishing, and consumed dairy products, turmeric, ginger, and

Trade

Harappans engaged in internal and external trade, exporting ornaments, timber, daily-use objects, gold, cotton, and possibly food items. Carved bangles were popular ornaments. Copper was likely imported. Trade routes included land, rivers, and maritime paths. Lothal had a large dock

distance trade.

Seals

Small seals made of steatite depicted animal figures and symbols, likely used to identify goods and traders. Their exact meanings remain unclear due to trade activities.

Exam Question

Q: Describe the town planning and water management features of the Harappan civilisation.

A: Harappan cities were carefully planned with wide streets aligned to cardinal directions, fortified with upper and lower towns. Water management features included bathing areas, drainage systems, and use of wells and reservoirs.

The End or a New Beginning?

Around 1900 BCE, the Sindhu–Sarasvati civilisation began to decline. Cities were abandoned, and inhabitants shifted to rural lifestyles without central administration, dispersing into small settlements.

Possible Reasons for Decline

- **Climatic Change:** From 2200 BCE, reduced rainfall and drier spells made agriculture difficult, impacting food supply.
- **Sarasvati River Drying:** The drying of the Sarasvati River led to abandonment of cities like Kalibangan and Banawali.

Earlier theories of warfare or invasions have been disproven due to lack of evidence. The decline is attributed mainly to environmental changes. Despite its abandonment, Harappan culture and technology influenced subsequent Indian civilisation phases.

Exam Question

Q: What were the main reasons for the decline of the Harappan civilisation?

A: The main reasons were climatic changes causing reduced rainfall and drying of the Sarasvati River, leading to agricultural challenges and urban abandonment.

Key Dates

Time Period / Year	Event / Change	Importance
About 6,000 years ago	Mesopotamian Civilisation began	One of the earliest known civilisations
Around 2600 BCE	Harappan or Sindhu–Sarasvati Civilisation began	Start of first urbanisation in Indian subcontinent
1920–21	Excavation of Harappa	Discovery of ancient city
1921–22	Excavation of Mohenjo-daro	Uncovering of major Harappan city

1924	Identification of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro	Recognition of Indus Valley Civilisation
Around 1900 BCE	Decline of Harappan Civilisation	Transition to rural settlements
From 2200 BCE	Climatic change	Environmental impact on civilisation

Keywords

- **Cardinal direction:** One of the four main directions: north, south, east, and west.
- **Elite:** Higher layers of society such as rulers, officials, and priests.
- **Excavate:** To dig out.
- **Fortification:** A massive wall surrounding a settlement or city for protection.
- **Metallurgy:** The technique of extracting and studying metals.
- **Reservoir:** A large natural or artificial lake used as a water source.
- **Settlement:** A place where people establish a community.
- **Tributary:** A river that flows into a larger river or lake.
- **Warehouse:** A large building used for storing products.

Solved Examples

Example 1

Question: Explain the significance of the Great Bath found in Mohenjo-daro.

Answer: The Great Bath is believed to have been used for ritual bathing or social purposes, indicating the importance of water management in Harappan society.

Example 2

Question: What evidence suggests that the Harappans were engaged in trade?

Answer: The presence of seals with animal figures, crafted ornaments like carnelian beads, and the dockyard at Lothal indicate active trade in Harappan civilisation.

Practice Set

Easy

- Define civilisation.
- Name two major cities of the Harappan civilisation.

Moderate

- Describe the town planning features of Harappan cities.

- List the main agricultural products cultivated by the Harappans.

Challenging

- Explain the possible reasons for the decline of the Harappan civilisation.
- Discuss the role of trade in the Harappan civilisation.

Answer Key

Easy

- Civilisation is an advanced stage of human society with features like government, urbanism, crafts, trade, writings, culture, and agriculture.
- Harappa and Mohenjo-daro.

Moderate

- Harappan cities had wide streets aligned to cardinal directions, were fortified, divided into upper and lower towns, and had uniform brickwork.
- Barley, wheat, millets, rice, pulses, vegetables, and cotton.

Challenging

- Climatic changes causing reduced rainfall, drying of the Sarasvati River, and environmental challenges led to decline.
- Trade involved exchange of goods like ornaments, timber, cotton, and use of seals and dockyards, facilitating economic growth.

Quick Reference

- **Harappan Civilisation:** One of the world's earliest urban civilisations located in the Indus Valley.
- **Urban Planning:** Cities with planned streets, drainage, and fortifications.
- **Agriculture:** Cultivation of cereals, pulses, and cotton.
- **Trade:** Internal and external trade supported by seals and dockyards.
- **Decline:** Due to climatic changes and drying of rivers.

Glossary

Cardinal direction

One of the four main directions: north, south, east, and west.

Elite

Higher layers of society such as rulers, officials, and priests.

Excavate

To dig out.

Fortification

A massive wall surrounding a settlement or city for protection.

Metallurgy

The technique of extracting and studying metals.

Reservoir

A large natural or artificial lake used as a water source.

Settlement

A place where people establish a community.

Tributary

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A large building used for storing products.

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