

## **Glimpses of the Past: Harappan Civilization's Indic Heritage in Gujarat**

Rahul Raj, Research Scholar

Malwanchal University, Indore

Email: [rahulraj7601585@gmail.com](mailto:rahulraj7601585@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), also known as the Harappan Civilization, flourished across north-western South Asia from ca. 2600–1900 BCE. While the major centres of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro have long dominated scholarly attention, sites in present-day Gujarat, including Dholavira, Lothal, Surkotada, and others, offer critical insights into regional adaptations of Harappan urbanism, trade, and ritual practices. This article explores Gujarat's unique contributions to Harappan cultural heritage, examining material culture, maritime infrastructure, and long-term cultural continuities that bridge the prehistoric with the historical in western India.

**Keywords:** Indus Valley Civilization, Gujarat, Dholavira, Lothal, Harappan urbanism, ancient trade, South Asian archaeology

### **1. Introduction**

The Harappan Civilization, one of the world's earliest and most sophisticated urban cultures, spanned a broad geographic area extending from the plains of the Punjab and Sindh to the semi-arid zones of Gujarat. While mainstream studies have concentrated on sites like Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, the Harappan presence in Gujarat deserves special attention due to its strategic coastal location, architectural diversity, and enduring Indic cultural features. Scholars such as Possehl, Kenoyer, and the Allchins have identified Gujarat as a dynamic frontier where Harappan traditions met local innovations.

### **2. Dholavira:**

Monumental Urbanism in the Rann of Kutch Dholavira, located on Khadir Island in the Great Rann of Kutch, stands as one of the most impressive Harappan sites in India. Its unique town planning

features a tripartite layout—Citadel, Middle Town, and Lower Town—clearly demarcated by massive stone fortifications. This contrasts with the brick constructions common in sites like Mohenjo-daro, reflecting adaptation to local stone resources<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps most remarkable is Dholavira's advanced water management system, comprising large reservoirs, stone-lined drains, and storm water channels. The scale and complexity of this hydraulic infrastructure suggest a civic ethos centred on sustainability and environmental adaptation<sup>2</sup>.

The discovery of large inscriptions in the Indus script on ten Indus signs at the north gate of Dholavira—a rare find for any Harappan site—points to the symbolic and administrative importance of writing in public architecture<sup>3</sup>. The presence of ceremonial structures and open spaces suggests that Dholavira may have served not just as a trading hub but also as a ritual centre.

### **3. Lothal:**

Maritime Trade and Urban Integration Located near the Gulf of Khambhat, Lothal provides strong evidence of Harappan maritime enterprise. It is best known for its dockyard—a trapezoidal basin with brick-lined walls—interpreted by archaeologists as the world's earliest known tidal dock<sup>4</sup>. While the function of the dock remains debated, its presence supports Lothal's identification as a port involved in regional and long-distance trade.

Artifacts found at Lothal, including micro-beads, ivory combs, shell bangles, and seal impressions, indicate robust craft activity and commercial links. The standardized weights and measures recovered here suggest formalized systems of economic exchange aligned with broader Harappan practices<sup>5</sup>.

Kenoyer argues that Lothal likely served as a southern trade gateway, connecting interior settlements to maritime routes extending toward Mesopotamia<sup>6</sup>. The site's integration of local building materials and Harappan planning principles exemplifies how Gujarat's Harappan settlements adapted urban ideals to specific geographies.

## 4. Surkotada and Inland Expansion

Surkotada, situated in the Kutch district, represents the Harappan Civilization's inland expansion into arid regions. The site, which flourished between 2100 and 1700 BCE, includes fortified structures made from mud bricks and stone rubble<sup>7</sup>.

Excavations at Surkotada yielded both typical Harappan artifacts—such as painted pottery, terracotta figurines, and copper tools—and elements of local culture. Notably, faunal remains include bones of domesticated horses, prompting scholarly debate over their implications for the chronology of horse domestication in South Asia<sup>8</sup>.

Surkotada's strategic location between inland Gujarat and the Sindh coast suggests it played a role in overland communication and regional exchange, possibly linking larger urban centers to peripheral communities<sup>9</sup>.

## 5. Regional Identity and Cultural Continuity-

The Harappan settlements in Gujarat reflect a cultural symbiosis—blending core Harappan traditions with regional expressions. The use of locally available materials, the incorporation of circular house plans at some sites, and the persistence of ceramic motifs into later cultural phases all point toward long-term continuities<sup>10</sup>.

B. B. Lal emphasizes that the decline of urban Harappan centres did not spell cultural collapse but rather a transformation.<sup>11</sup> Gujarat, in particular, shows evidence of post-urban habitation during the Late Harappan phase, with continuity in pottery styles, agricultural practices, and symbolic traditions.

Artifacts such as terracotta figurines, bangles, and beads continued to be produced with minor stylistic changes, indicating the endurance of aesthetic sensibilities and craft techniques<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, ritual practices—such as fire altars and water purification structures—seen at sites like Dholavira and Kalibangan resonate with later Vedic and Hindu traditions, implying deep cultural memory<sup>13</sup>.

## 6. The Role of Trade and Connectivity

Gujarat's Harappan sites occupy a pivotal position in understanding the trade networks of the Indus Valley Civilization. Through maritime and inland routes, these settlements facilitated the movement of goods such as lapis lazuli, carnelian, marine shells, and cotton textiles.

Ratnagar's work on Bronze Age trade emphasizes Gujarat's role in connecting Mesopotamian markets with the resource-rich interiors of the Indian subcontinent<sup>14</sup>. Lothal and Dholavira's access to the Arabian Sea allowed Harappan merchants to interact with cultures in the Persian Gulf, Oman, and beyond<sup>15</sup>. This network of exchange was not merely economic but cultural, enabling the transmission of technologies, symbols, and ritual practices.

## 7. Archaeological Challenges and Conservation

Despite their importance, Harappan sites in Gujarat face threats from climate change, encroaching development, and limited public awareness. Seasonal flooding in the Rann, salt deposition, and urban expansion have imperiled sites like Dholavira and Surkotada.

Recent efforts by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), including the successful UNESCO World Heritage Site designation of Dholavira in 2021, mark important steps toward preservation<sup>16</sup>. However, broader conservation strategies must include community engagement, heritage tourism, and interdisciplinary research combining archaeology with environmental science.

## 8. Conclusion

Gujarat's Harappan heritage offers a nuanced perspective on the Indus Valley Civilization's cultural plurality. Far from being peripheral, sites like Dholavira, Lothal, and Surkotada reveal how core Harappan values—urban planning, trade, symbolism, and ritual—were refracted through local landscapes and traditions.

These settlements serve not only as archaeological records but also as cultural touchstones linking prehistoric innovations to historical and even contemporary South Asian identities. To glimpse the Harappan past in Gujarat is to witness a civilization in motion—adaptive, integrative, and enduring.

# INDIC HERITAGE AND CULTURE

*An International Open Access, Peer Reviewed Refereed, Yearly Multidisciplinary Journal*

ISSN (0): 2584-2862  
Vol.-4, Issue-I, 2025

## Footnotes

1. Possehl, Gregory L., *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002), 130.
2. Wright, Rita P., *The Ancient Indus: Urbanism, Economy, and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 104–107.
3. Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 82.
4. McIntosh, Jane, *The Ancient Indus Valley: New Perspectives* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 223–226.
5. Allchin, Bridget, and Raymond Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 201.
6. Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities*, 152.
7. Possehl, *Indus Civilization*, 205.
8. Lal, B. B., *The Saraswati Flows On: The Continuity of Indian Culture* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2002), 95.
9. Ratnagar, Shereen, *Trading Encounters: From the Euphrates to the Indus in the Bronze Age* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145.
10. Wright, *Ancient Indus*, 215.
11. Lal, *Saraswati Flows On*, 102.
12. Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities*, 168.
13. McIntosh, *Ancient Indus Valley*, 287.
14. Ratnagar, *Trading Encounters*, 162.
15. Possehl, *Indus Civilization*, 173.
16. Archaeological Survey of India, "Dholavira Inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Site," ASI Report, 2021.

## Bibliography:

Allchin, Bridget, and Raymond Allchin. *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark. *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Lal, B. B. *The Saraswati Flows On: The Continuity of Indian Culture*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2002.

McIntosh, Jane. *The Ancient Indus Valley: New Perspectives*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008.

Possehl, Gregory L. *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002.

Ratnagar, Shereen. *Trading Encounters: From the Euphrates to the Indus in the Bronze Age*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Wright, Rita P. *The Ancient Indus: Urbanism, Economy, and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.