**Indus Valley Civilization**

According to the archaeological evidence, about 3000 B.C.E., there was a very highly developed civilization on the subcontinent of India known as **Indus Valley or the Harappan** civilization. It was a Bronze Age civilization that flourished from about 2800 to 1800 B.C.E.

It was very advanced, both materially and spiritually. Materially, the Indus Valley civilization was agrarian and exhibited a great degree of skill in irrigation and urban planning. There is evidence that the people had evoked a system of mathematics based on a binary model – the same model employed in modern computing.

The Indus Valley civilization was literate and developed scripts that unfortunately have not yet been deciphered.

In addition, there is ample evidence that the civilization enjoyed a very highly developed spiritual culture. Archaeological discoveries at two major sites, Mohenjo-daro and Harappa**,** and the written records of the Aryans, the Vedas, who described the religious behavior and beliefs of the people they came to dominate, bear witness to this.

The peaceful unfolding of the life of this great ancient civilization was rather abruptly interrupted sometimes between 1800 and 1500 BCE, either by some natural disaster or by an invasion. For certain after the demise of the Indus Valley civilization, the subcontinent was invaded from the northwest.

**Aryans Invasion**

The invading people were known as Aryans who originally belonged to a region somewhere in the Eastern Europe, modern Poland and Ukraine. The Aryans spoke an early form of Sanskrit, called Vedic after the earliest extant Indian texts - the Veda which can be read at present. They were very different from the people of the Indus Valley civilization.

The latter had been agrarian and sedentary, whereas the Aryans were nomadic and pastoral. They were unused to urban life. A warlike and expansionist people, they lived in large part on the spoils of conquest won from the peoples they subjugated in the course of their migrations.

The Aryans soon became the dominant civilization in the middle of the 2000 B.C.E.

**Religious Background**

Archaeological excavations have revealed a number of symbols important to the people of the Indus Valley civilization. These symbols have religious significance and are also sacred to Buddhism. They include the pipal tree (later known as the bodhi tree or ficus religiosa), animals such as elephant and deer, image of a human figure seated in a cross-legged posture, hands resting on the knees and eyes narrowed – clearly suggestive of the attitude of meditation.

The religion of the **Indus Valley civilization** evidently contained several important elements:-

1) **Meditation** was clearly present.

2) **Renunciation -** that is abandoning household life and living the life of a homeless ascetic was common

3) There was some **conception of rebirth** occurring over the course of a countless number of lives.

4) The sense of moral responsibilityextending beyond this life indicates some form of the conception of kamma.

5) A paramount goal of religious life – the goal of **liberation** that is freedom from the endless cycle of birth and death.

The religion of the early **Aryan** people contrasted sharply with that of the Indus Valley civilization:-

1) They revered a number of gods who were personifications of natural phenomena, including Indra, the god of thunder and lightning; Agni, the god of fire and Varuna, the god of water, to name a few.

2) The ascetic in the Indus Valley civilization was the preeminent religious figure, in the Aryan religious the priest was the most important.

3) In the religious value system of the Indus Valley civilization renunciation was paramount, whereas Aryans the most worthy state was that of the family man or householder.

4) The value of progeny was not emphasized in the Indus Valley civilization but Aryans gave priority particularly to the sons.

 5) The Indus Valley civilization emphasized the practice of meditation, while Aryan faith relied on the practice of sacrifice, which was its primary means of communicating with the gods, securing victory in war, obtaining sons and wealth, and finally reaching heaven.

6) Unlike Indus Valley civilization, the early Aryans had no conceptions of rebirth and kamma.

7) The notion of moral responsibility extending beyond the present life appears to have unknown to the Aryans. The highest social value was loyalty to the group, a virtue calculated to contribute to the power and cohesion of the tribe.

8) The ultimate goal of religious life for the Indus Valley civilization was liberation whereas heaven was the goal for the Aryans.

It is clear that the sets of religious attitudes, practices and values professed by these two ancient civilizations of India were almost diametrically opposed to each other. And yet, over the course of centuries of cohabitation, these two religious traditions did manage to merge and become, in many instances, practically indistinguishable.

However, there were two elements in the religious culture of the Aryans which were unknown to the Indus Valley people:-

1) **Caste system** – the division of society into social strata.

2) **Vedas** – the authority and infallibility of revelation of the ancient scriptures

These two cultures were not acceptable to the Indus Valley civilization, and they remained constant points of contention dividing the two major religious traditions of India.

**Merging of the Two Traditions**

From 1500 BCE to sixth century BCE is the history of the interaction between these two originally opposed traditions.

As the Aryan people gradually moved eastward and southward, settling and spreading their influence over most of the Indian subcontinent, they adopted a more sedentary pattern of life. Little by little, the opposing religious cultures of the two peoples began to interact, influence and even merge with each other.

Aryan expansion came to an end when the Aryans had spread across the plains of India. It brought about many social, economic and political changes:-

1) The tribal, nomadic and pastoral way of life of the early Aryans gradually changed to a more sedentary, agrarian and eventually urban pattern of existence. Majority of the population was living in urban settlements where the people were somewhat removed from the natural forces which had been personified in the gods of the early Aryans.

2) Commerce became increasingly important. Whereas priests and warriors had been the dominant figures in early Aryan society, now merchants became ascendant. In the time of the Buddha, this trend is evident in the famous disciples who belonged to the merchant class - Anathapindika.

3) The organization of society along tribal lines gradually became obsolete and the territorial state began to evolve, in which many people of different tribes existed together. The kingdom of Magadha, ruled by king Bimbisara, the famous patron and disciple of the Buddha, is an example of such an emerging territorial state.

These social, economic and political changes contributed to a growing willingness on the part of the Aryan people to accept and adopt the religious ideas of the Indus Valley civilization.

Although the Aryans had materially dominated the earlier, indigenous civilization of the subcontinent, the next thousand to two thousand years saw them come increasingly under the influence of religious attitudes, practices and values adopted from the religion of the Indus Valley civilization.

Consequently, by the beginning of the common-era, the distinction between the Aryan tradition and that of the Indus Valley civilization was more and more difficult to draw.

**References**

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**(2) Indian Buddhism by A.K. Warder**

**(3)** [**www.crystalinks.com/induscivilization .htm**](http://www.crystalinks.com/induscivilization%20.htm)