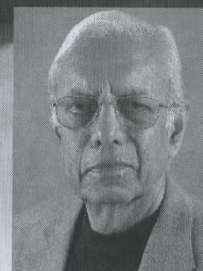


Saraswati - Sindhu Civilization



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As members of Sindhi community, have you ever wondered, why Sindhis, so small in number, have been able to achieve so much? Why after the catastrophic perils of the partition, they were able to rebound with such great resilience? Why are Sindhis generally peaceful and non-violent? Why are they considered great business-men? Why are they financially so advanced? The simple and obvious answer is – it is all in our genes. With utmost humility and gratitude, I narrate the ancestry and heritage of the community.

Around 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age, a cluster of seven rivers, the *Sapta Sindhu*—Sindhu (Indus), Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, Beas, Kubha and the now extinct Saraswati—emerged from the great Himalayas in the North, and travelling across the Western part of the Indian sub-continent, finally merged with the Arabian Sea in the South. In the course of their journey South, the colossal civilization--the Saraswati-Sindhu civilization, developed along this verdant belt, which was more widely spread than the civilizations of Egypt or Greece. The Saraswati River ran parallel to the Sindhu River, about two hundred miles east of it. This civilization reached its zenith in the period between 2500 BCE and 1700 BCE. More than fifteen hundred cities developed on the banks of these two great rivers. In these cities, roads were sixty feet wide, and there were brick and stone two-story houses, large community baths, and excellent gravity-operated drainage systems. There is evidence of art pieces, silk

and metal articles, crafts, leather seals, and a large variety of agricultural products and storage facilities. These ancient people established reliable marine transport and conducted a trade and cultural relationship with such distant lands as Egypt, Greece, Mesopotamia, Babylon, and others, thus making it an honored member of the earliest group of civilizations on Earth. The seeds of international commerce were sown here. Money transaction, including the *Hundi Havala*, again began at their hands. It is said that cotton and textiles were first produced in this region, and the art of navigation too was born here six thousand years ago. It is noteworthy that during this time period, when mankind still lived in caves in most parts of the world, these people were highly advanced. Written script also has been discovered on the seals pertaining to this ancient period, although proper deciphering of these writings still remains uncertain. Why and how this once-great civilization disappeared remains speculative. New evidence suggests it was due to the gradual drying up of the Saraswati River because of some structural changes in the north in the Himalayas.

For long, this great civilization remained buried and hidden. In 1922, it was discovered by British archeologists and new concepts about the history, culture and religion of India became known to the world. *Mohan-Jo-Daro*, or perhaps more correctly, *Moen-Jo-Daro* (the mound of the dead), was the epicenter of this highly developed society. This ancient site is in the central part of a small state of

Sind, which was earlier in the western corner of undivided India, and after the partition in 1947 became part of the new country Pakistan. Sindhis originally hail from this land.

The excavations of the Sindhu-Saraswati civilization, show evidence of the carvings of Shiva in his proto form as *Pasupati*, the lord of all animal kingdoms, and also in the *yoga asanas*, or yoga positions. There are also carvings of exuberant feminine deities, which would later be known as various forms of the Mother Goddess, Shakti. The naked figurines, in meditative poses of the lotus position and standing *kayotsarga* (relaxation with self-awareness), are very similar to those later adopted by the Buddha and the Tirthankars (humans who achieve enlightenment) of the Jain community. These carvings are said to point toward the concepts of God, as were prevalent in that period. The concepts of yoga and meditation too were probably born in this era.

Although Hinduism recognizes the Vedic teachings as its basic principles, the roots of this religion go back a long way, much earlier than the inception of the Vedas, probably in this period of the ancient Saraswati-Sindhu culture. It is now believed that the Vedas too were created on the banks of Sindhu; name of Sindhu River is mentioned no less than 176 times in the Vedas. No other river has been enumerated close to this!

Religion, spirituality and culture have flown through the veins of Sindhis for millennia of years. Today many are astonished at the extra-ordinary success of the microscopic community of Sindhi traders, establishing large business empires on all five continents of the world! The answer may be traced to the golden root-links of the past. They are the inheritors of the grand society, which flourished in peace, and not in blood-shed. They encouraged arts, crafts, jewelry, and other fine things of life. But above all, they were the earliest amongst the humans to search for spiritual answers to the mundane problems of mankind; they became fully anchored to faith in the Supreme God. Thus they blended rather splendidly the material and the spiritual aspects of life, which would sustain them through thick and thin.

From ancient times, India became a prosperous nation, bathed in milk and bedecked in gold. Prosperity however, is like honey, and always attracts the invading ants. These ancient people, living in high culture and peaceful pursuits, did not know much about self-defense and became easy prey for repeated attacks. Sindh became a portal of entry for the invaders; the Greeks, Persians, Scythians, Arabs, and Moguls invaded Sindh one after another, and plundered mercilessly. Many were converted; language changed as per the dictat of the rulers, the ancient Saraswati River dried up and Sindhu too changed its course time and again; the fertile land became part desert and a poor country. But surprisingly the character of the inhabitants remained stable; they remained peaceful, humble, and fully anchored to faith. Despite repeated assaults, they did not become violent and hateful; they preferred to remain resilient and rise as the phoenix everytime. They learnt the art of adoption and adaption in the most trying situations; they also became very pragmatic and realistic in their approach.

The religious pattern of Sindh has seen many ups and downs. The pre-historic religion of the Saraswati-Sindhu civilization was more in the nature of tribal character, with an open-arms approach. When the nomadic people of this region developed agriculture, they tended to settle down to more peaceful pursuits, opting for more refined activities of arts and culture in place of stressful behavior of hunting, roaming, and fighting for survival. Their earliest encounter with religion would have been in the form of viewing natural phenomena as magical and mystical occurrences. Their thinking might have posed questions such as "Who brings the sun in the morning?" Man started to attribute superior powers to an unknown command, beyond his strength and energy. He considered the sun, the sky, the fire, the wind, and other natural elements as **Gods**, the supreme authorities. These nature gods became prominent in the earliest Vedic scriptures. Soon they would realize that behind all these nature gods, there is the mystic, formless, **supreme divine power**. They called it *Brahman*, the transcendental, universal