

CHAPTER 4-EARLY SOCIETIES IN SOUTH ASIA

Like the other civilizations we have studied, the Harappan society started in a river valley, the Indus in south Asia. Like the Nile, though less predictable, the Indus River flooded, providing new soil fertile for agriculture, developed in this region as early as 5000 B.C.E.. By 3000 B.C.E., the Dravidian society had begun. There were urban centers at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (“The Mound of the Dead”). Each of these cities had the hallmarks of modern cities: broad streets, markets, temples, and public buildings. And while there is no evidence of the kind of political system that existed, there are signs of some political control found in the use of standardized weights and measures and architectural styles with uniform brick sizes. For reasons yet precisely determined, Harappan society had almost entirely collapsed by 1500 B.C.E.

As Harappan society declined, a new migratory group, the Aryans (“noble people”), moved into south Asia. Unlike later groups, this was not an invasion but movement by people from one place to another. However, there were clashes between the Aryans and the established peoples up until about 1000 B.C.E. The Aryans brought with them a collection of literary and religious works, the most notable of which was a set of 1,028 hymns (to the Aryan gods) known as the Rig Veda. The Vedas gave their name to the period between 1500 and 500 B.C.E., the Vedic Age.

This period saw the expansion of the Aryans and the beginning of what would eventually become the complex caste system of India. Religion in the Vedic Age centered around a polytheistic (poly=many, theos=gods) set of gods, wherein the war god Indra was the chief deity. This was a religion based in ritual sacrifice used to gain reward from the divine powers, but came to include the Dravidic ideas of reincarnation. This blending of Aryan and Dravidic ideas included the Upanishads, which, like the Rig Veda, had its basis in early religious works and dealt with the ideas of samsara and karma, among others. These ideas helped to reinforce the class ideas of the caste system.

Key Concept 1.3. The Development and Interactions of Early Agricultural, Pastoral and Urban Societies

- II. The first states emerged within core civilizations.
- III. Culture played a significant role in unifying states through laws, language, literature, religion, myths and monumental art.