A Study of the Harappan and Sorath Harappan Settlement Features At Pithad in Jamnagar District with Special Reference to other Harappan Settlements in Saurashtra, Gujarat

Synopsis

The present study seeks to bring out a comprehensive picture of characteristic traits, origin and identity and extent of the Sorath Harappan settlements in Saurashtra. This is based primarily on a study of the Chalcolithic remains from Pithad (Jaidak) in Jamnagar district in conjunction with major excavated sites in Saurashtra. The main aim here is to investigate and elucidate the differences between the “Sorath Harappan” and “Sindhi Harappan” or Classical Harappan characteristics at the site and its catchment area, which will aid in developing a proper understanding of the Sorath Harappan cultural entity within the larger frame of the Harappan culture.

Archaeological investigations of Harappan sites in Saurashtra may be said to have begun systematically with the excavations at Rangpur by S. R. Rao in the 1950s and the establishment of the “Rangpur Sequence” (Rao 1963). It is significant because for the first time, it revealed direct stratigraphic relation of “Late Harappan” phase (Rangpur IIB) with that of “Mature Harappan” (Rangpur IIA). This was followed by the discovery of a number of Harappan sites belonging to the Rangpur IIB-C phase, thereby identifying Saurashtra as a potential zone for Harappan settlements. In 1990, Possehl and Herman (1990) following the excavations at Rojdi (Possehl et al. 1984 and 1985; Possehl and Raval 1989) proposed the term “Sorath Harappan” to describe the material assemblage from the site as comparable to Rangpur IIB-C phases; marking it as a “regional

1 The term “Sindhi Harappan” used by Possehl, although originally meant to refer characteristic cultural traits generally found associated with the Urban sites of the Harappa culture in the entire Indus valley, by default refers only to that of the Sindh region because the word Sindh/Sindhi has regional /ethnic connotations. The Urban Harappan features are found not only in the Indus valley proper but also in the adjoining regions in the east, south and west. Therefore the term “Classical Harappan” which does not have any restrictive regional connotation is used here to refer to the Urban Harappan traits.
manifestation of the Harappan Urban Phase", drawing on one of the ancient names for Saurashtra. By "Harappan Urban Phase" they refer to the phase coincident with the period of literacy and the making of the Classic Indus stamp seals in addition to several type-fossil artifacts of the Indus civilization.

There is a general agreement among scholars to the fact that "Sorath Harappan" or the material from Rojdi and Rangpur IIB-C sites are stylistically divergent from the Classical Mature Harappan sites in the Indus valley proper such as Mohenjodaro, Chanhudaro and Harappa. These sites present a simple material inventory and are relatively small in size as compared to the Classical Harappan sites even in Gujarat. However, the Sorath Harappan sites number far greater than the Classical Harappan settlements and interestingly the radiocarbon dates from these sites reveal of their being contemporary to the latter. These issues have put forward many questions that have not yet been fully resolved.

The studies so far have proposed several possible models for understanding the above development, many of them however are rather descriptive in nature than explanatory. Several researchers believe that there was a greater influx of Harappans into Gujarat with the collapse of the Indus Civilization in Sindh and Baluchistan (Possehl and Herman 1990; Sonawane 1992). But the "Sorath Harappan" settlements are the handiwork of these fleeing people is not acceptable, and hence they cannot be labeled as "Late Harappan". The dates from Rojdi in Saurashtra have proved beyond doubt the existence of the Sorath Harappan settlements during the flourishing Mature or Urban phase. Recent studies intend upon defining the contemporaneity in terms of core versus peripheral settlements, whereby the Rangpur IIB-C sites in Kathiawar represented the periphery (or a regional sub-culture) to the center that could have been Sindh or Kachchh (Possehl 1992; Verma and Menon 1999; Deshpande and Shinde 2005). Therefore it may be argued that these sites although did not posses the grandeur of the Classical Harappans, were unique and to some extent indigenous in their material inventory; yet possessing characteristic traits testifying to their "Harappan" legacy.

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All these divergent readings remain as mere suggestions in the absence of problem-oriented approach in dealing with these issues. Since the studies so far mainly revolved around describing Sorath Harappan in terms of pottery from Rojdi, there are several other cultural aspects remain undefined or ill-defined, which call for proper attention and study. The “Sorath Harappan” may be regarded as a useful model for explaining changes in a regional level in the material culture in Saurashtra during the third and second millennium BC.

In order to seek answers to the above queries, it is necessary to understand the extent of the Sorath Harappan traits. The material assemblage collected during the excavation from the site of Pithad (Jaidak) have been analyzed on a comparative basis with cultural traits in other Harappan sites like Rangpur and Lothal in the Surendranagar district, Rojdi, Kuntasi and Bagasra in the Rajkot district of Saurashtra and Surkotada in Kachchh. The antiquities and pottery from Pithad were further analyzed utilizing the Mohenjodaro pottery report (Dales and Kenoyer 1986) as reference for standard Classical Harappan pottery with an aim to bring out the differences and similarities between the two sites. To understand the nature of the settlement at Pithad as well the settlement pattern of the area, an intensive survey of the area within a radius of 20km from Pithad was undertaken. The materials collected during the survey were analyzed and compared with the excavated sites in the survey region. Comparison and correlation of artifacts were the basis for understanding the nature and relevance of the Sorath Harappan cultural attributes and defining the same. Though some of the sites continue up to the Early Historic and Medieval periods, these were not dealt with as they exceed the scope of the present study.

Within the above broad framework the following are the main objectives of the study:

- To study and document the Chalcolithic remains at Pithad with a view of understanding distinguishable features of the Sorath Harappan and Classical Harappan cultural traits at the site.
- To identify and define various cultural attributes of Sorath Harappan – architecture, specialized crafts, exchange or trade links etc.
• To understand the effect of environmental factors, the proximity of raw materials and the nature of raw materials on the typology of the assemblage.

• To delineate similarities and dissimilarities between the Sorath and Classical Harappan cultural traits.

• To study the extent and distribution of the Sorath Harappan characteristics in Saurashtra, with reference to the site of Pithad and other settlements in Jamnagar district and the adjoining districts of Rajkot and Surendranagar.

• To see if there is a pattern that can be established on the basis of above comparative study, that would help to define Sorath Harappan characteristics.

• To probe the origin of Sorath Harappan characteristics in the light of above studies, in the larger Chalcolithic cultural context in Gujarat.

• To determine the role of regional traits and their influence in the development of Sorath Harappan material culture.

References


The Organization of the Thesis is as follows:

CH 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of a brief introduction to the Harappan Civilization in Gujarat, with special emphasis on its regional character – arguments on the origin of the concepts of “Sorath” and “Sindhi”/Classical Harappan cultural traditions; current perspective of the problem and the objectives of the study in relation to the aforesaid issues.

CH 2: MATERIALS AND METHODS

This chapter deals with the strategies and methods adopted during the study. It incorporates a detailed note on the methods of site survey adopted by the researcher; the pattern of documentation and technique used for the artifact analysis. The methods used for the classification of the materials in order to bring forth the character of the Sorath Harappan material assemblage also form a part of this chapter.

CH 3: ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

This chapter discusses the environmental background of the area under study. Detailed information regarding the geography and geology of the Saurashtra peninsula, with particular reference to the study area, i.e. a radius of 20km with the village Pithad as its centre in the Jamnagar district, have been furnished in this chapter. Also studies carried out in the palaeo-environment of western India as well as the study area have been elaborated.

CH 4: HARAPPAN SETTLEMENTS IN SAURASHTRA: A BRIEF REVIEW

In this chapter, the antiquity and history of Harappan research in Saurashtra has been elaborated. Particular emphasis has been given to the origin, nature and chronological co-existence of the “Sorath” and Classical Harappan concepts. It also includes a note on the
context and current perspectives of Harappan research in general that forms a backdrop for the present study.

CH 5: ANALYSES OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSEMBLAGE FROM JAITAK (PITHAD)

This chapter discusses the chronological background of the site Jaitak and its catchment area/hinterland within the Jamnagar district. The chronology and nature of the Harappan affiliation of this site has been quantified based on the analyses of the material assemblage recovered from the excavation at the site and field exploration of other reported sites within an area of 20km radius from Jaitak. Architectural features at the site have been analyzed in detail in the light of evidence from other Sorath Harappan sites in Rajkot and Surendranagar districts. Emphasis has been given to the analysis of ceramics, the most abundant artifact. The pottery types found in this region have been defined and studied in detail. Besides ceramics, other common artifacts have also been analyzed and discussed here in detail.

CH 6: SITE CATCHMENT ANALYSIS OF JAITAK (PITHAD)

This chapter deals with definition, scope and contextuality of Site-Catchment Analysis of Jaitak (Pithad). It incorporates the description of the actual field survey undertaken within the area of 20km radius with Jaitak as its epicenter. Further, the results of the survey undertaken have also been highlighted.

CH 7: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is an overview of the results obtained from the study. It highlights the nature and character of the Sorath Harappan settlements in the region surveyed, with particular emphasis on Jaitak. The settlement pattern at Jaitak with respect to its neighboring sites has been discussed in detail. Also the subsistence economy of the
region has been discussed in conjunction with the archaeobotanical remains studied from various Harappan sites in Saurashtra.

CH 8: CONCLUSION

This chapter outlines the various conclusions drawn in this thesis based on the study undertaken.