

## THE GREAT BATH OF MAHENJO-DARO

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### ABSTRACT

The great bath of Mahenjo-daro the unique structure of Indus Valley civilization has demonstrated that as an iconic construction, it has deciphered not only the cognitive knowledge of the citizens of Mohenjo-Daro but also the scientific knowledge of the people of the same.

**Keywords:** Bath, Indus excavation.

Information about Indus Valley Civilization comes from the reports of excavation at places like Harappa and Mahenjo -daro. Excavation was conducted under the leadership of Sir John Marshal and Sir Mortimer wheeler. One Bengali archaeologist was also attached with it. He was Sri Rakhil Das Bandopadhyay. By now more than 1000 sites containing the relics of Indus Valley Civilization have been discovered. It is believed by the scholars that the Harappa, Ghaggar and Mahenjo -daro represents the heart of the Indus Valley Civilization. The excavated sites are located on the banks of river Indus, so it is termed as, Indus valley civilization.

This area is characterized by certain uniformities. The entire zone is a flat stretch of land of having similar subsistence pattern. It is an inhospitable country and except its peripheral area, is very dry in environmental character.

The Harappa civilization seems to have covered a very large area. Its area was larger than those of the contemporary civilizations like, Mesopotamian civilization, and Egyptian civilization. The biggest city of the Indus Valley Civilization was Mohenjo-Daro. Scholars estimated that around 35000 people used to live in Mahenjo -daro.

Mahenjo-daro and Harappa were more or less similar in town planning and city structure. The settlements of the cities show that both the cities were divided into high citadel and low city. Both the cities were divided into citadel on the western side and a lower town on the eastern side of the settlement. The citadel was built on a high podium of mud bricks. All the bricks were fire burnt and naturally hard and sturdy. The lower heighted area was the residential areas of common people used to live here.

The high area was used for administrative and ritual purposes. That means administrative and ritual centers were highly placed. In Mahenjo -daro and Harappa, the citadel area were separated from the residential areas. At Kali-bangan area, citadel and the lower city was clubbed into a single area.

Lothal, which site is located in Gujrat shows somewhat different type of alignments. Here the city was never divided into citadel and the low residential areas. Rather the whole area was square, in its layout. On the eastern side of the town was the brick made basin, which is identified by the archaeologist as the dockyard.

In the city Mahenjo-daro on the citadel area there was a big structure which identified as the great bath, used for many purposes. Archaeologists mainly pointed that the structure was perhaps used for preaching to many people at one time. Bathing as a process has a long history. Egyptians used to believe that staying clean was very important. They used to stay clean to lead a better life. Most Egyptians would bath every day. They believe that when they would take bath and become clean it would make God happy. They would do every possible action to make God happy. It is identified by the historians that the wealthy people used to have separate areas in their houses for bathing purposes. Poor people used to go to the Nile to dip in water. Even though the rich had bath houses, during bathing they used to go outside to bring water. They used to carry bucket-like structures to bring the water within their houses. People outside the houses used to fill water in the buckets, which are brought in, for bathing purposes. Early Egyptians used to spend long hours during ablution. In the long run they began to build big bathhouses and fixed huge bathtubs in the bath areas. Historians have identified that Egyptians had at least 46 types of bath areas where they could have long bathing sessions and could relax for long hours. Some of them used to have the facility of hot water within their bath areas. From 1100 BC bathing was an elaborate ritual in China with religious significance. Emperors, Buddhists and Taoist priests used to take bath every single day to keep their body and soul clean and healthy. Throughout the centuries the customs change into habits like the guests used to take bath before taking meals, often the children found heating water for parents to take bath. Royal families used to take bath in huge bath areas and used to get entertainment from it. In the Sung dynasty the public baths were popular with rubdown helpers at the outside of the bath.

The great bath at Mahenjo-Daro (30' x 23' x 8') formed a big part of hydropathic establishment. It stands on a 12 ft high mud brick platform measuring 165 ft x 145 ft. This platform is consisting of 12 (twelve) adjacent blocks. There were flights of steps on two sides and surrounded by several rows of smaller double-storied rooms. The bath was supplied by fresh water from time to time. The water was taken from a nearby well, brick-lined with gypsum mortar. The floor and wall of the bath have been made absolutely water-tight by three parallel vertical brick walls on the four sides. There was an emptying outlet to empty the bath from time to time. On the terrace of the bath, was a spacious corridor supported on pillars.

Near the south-west corner of the Great Bath is a Hamam, or hot air bath. Archaeologists had discovered the relics of another similar building, which shows that people of Mahenjo-daro understood the principle of the hypocaust bath. There was another bath room establishment consisting of two rows of bathrooms separated by a narrow passage. Each bathroom was having their own stairway, a narrow doorway and a carefully paved floor.

Great bath at Mohenjo-daro, was quite interesting in its features. Historians, archaeologists had pointed that it was quite far away from the residential areas and a large number of people could take bath at a time in this area. An outlet was there, for changing of water in regular intervals. Perhaps this practice was their experience-developed and definitely a milestone in their health practices. Perhaps this had protected the Indus Valley population from many water-borne diseases.

Structure of the great bath of Mahenjo-daro revealed and deciphered that 1) the structure was made sturdy by using fire-burnt bricks. 2) Provisions were there that the great bath water could

be changed in a regular intervals .Therefore they tried possibly to save the water from weeds moss lichens so that people are protected from skin diseases .3)Change of water perhaps protect the world's most ancient tank to remain free from weeds .4)The great bath of Mahenjo -daro was a bit far from common mens' dwelling place .No doubt it helped the regular dwellers to remain free of congestion of the city even during preaching or others when the Great Bath was in use. 5)Construction of this huge structure deciphered that the art of building had reached the pinnacle at that time .6)There were side rooms for changing clothes .The floor was made of burnt bricks .It suggest the general love of the citizens for cleanliness . 7)Use of Gypsum in the bath area reveals that they were intelligent enough to use the available minerals and perceived their uses and applicabilities.

Indus civilization has been visualized primarily through the study of its cities ,where Mahenjodaro is one of them .Archaeologists had identified that major part of the population of Indus were the rural inhabitants and there was regular rural urban interactions .Impact of ,cities on rural areas were a common and a regular factor .This paper is an attempt to decipher that the people of the city had used their scientific knowledge in making the great bath ,which is also popular as the ancient tank of the world .In the construction and maintenance of the great bath city dwellers used their day to day experiences which ultimately revealed their cognitive excellence .There are arguments surrounding the social organization of Indus Civilization asking that whether the civilization could be recognized as a 'State 'or not ?To say that Harappa civilization was 'A state 'is possibly not befitting .It has generally been envisioned as a form of political organization with a centralized leadership and economy .Archaeological evidences suggest for the development of 'regional polities or 'City States' with arrangements of centralized leaderships .The daily activities of the smaller rural areas would have been integrated into the overall structures of the dominant urban centres through control over production and exchange of agricultural goods as Indus was an agro based civilization .For this regular interactions larger structures were built to accommodate a huge population at one time for any such purposes maybe preaching or bathing at a single point of time .

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