

Harappan necropolis in Gujarat reveal death rituals of 5,000 years ago

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In news—Excavations at one of the biggest necropolises of the Harappan era at Juna Khatiya village in Gujarat have shown ancient humans buried the dead with afterlife items like personal artefacts, sacred animals, and pots of food and water.

What is a necropolis?

- A necropolis is a large, designed cemetery with elaborate tomb monuments. The name stems from the Ancient Greek word which literally meaning “city of the dead”
- The term usually implies a separate burial site at a distance from a city, as opposed to tombs within cities, which were common in various places and periods of history.

Key highlights-

- The digging of this site in Kutch district began in 2019 and archaeologists found **rows of graves with skeletal remains, ceramic pots, plates and vases, beaded jewellery**, and animal bones that piqued their interest.
- Over time, **it emerged as one the biggest Harappan burial sites**, with the possibility of **500 graves**, of which about 125 have been found so far.
- These are from **3,200 BCE to 2,600 BCE, predating Dholavira**—a Unesco world heritage site—and several other Harappan sites in the state.

- The site is important because **others like Dholavira have a cemetery in and around the town, but no major habitation has been discovered near Juna Khatiya.**
- The site **demonstrates the transition from earth-mound burials to stone graves.**
- **The pottery from the site have features and style similar to those excavated from early Harappan sites in Sindh and Balochistan.**
- The artefacts can put the site in perspective of other pre-urban Harappan sites in Gujarat.
- **The rectangular graves were made of shale and sandstone, which are common rocks in the area,** and other than items like clay bowls and dishes, prized possessions like beads and bangles of terracotta, seashells, and lapis lazuli were interred with dead.
- The **majority of burial pits had five to six pots.** In one, 62 pots were found. They have not found any metal artefact from the site so far.
- **Some of the burial structures have boulders of basalt as coverings.** Pebbles of local rock, basalt, soil, sand, etc were used for construction, and clay was used to bind them together.

Burial practices in the Indus Valley Civilization-

- Across the Indus Valley, specific individuals, communities, and societies had their own normative methods of burial, suggesting religious and cultural diversity.
- **There were three known types of burial customs within the Indus Valley Civilization;**
 1. Complete burial of intact bodies.
 2. Full cremation, and
 3. Partial burials, containing only the bones of the deceased.
- Post cremation (burial of bones or ashes) was the most common form of burial custom in the Indus Valley.

- Even so, most cremation urns in Mohenjo-daro (Sindh, Pakistan) did not contain human bone remains, but rather ornaments that were possessed during life, animal bones, ash and charcoal.