

New research on Harappan civilization

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Source: *The Hindu*

Manifest pedagogy: The recent research on the Indus valley civilization and Aryan's archeological and genetical has rekindled the old debate on the original inhabitants of India. Though the probability of a direct question on this in mains is not possible. But there is a good possibility of a prelims question on the same.

In news: Artefacts found in excavations carried out at Keezhadi in Tamil Nadu have determined a possible link between the scripts of the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) and Tamil Brahmi.

Placing it in syllabus: Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC)

Dimensions:

- Excavations and findings at Keezdi in Tamil Nadu
- Link of Keezdi with Indus valley civilisation and early Sangam literature
- Genetic studies on Indus valley people at Rakhigarhi

Content:

Excavations and findings at Keezdi in Tamil Nadu:

- In 2013-14, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) carried out explorations in **293 sites** along the Vaigai river valley in Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, Keezhadi of Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram districts.
- The artefacts unearthed by the ASI at **Keezhadi** pointed to an ancient civilisation that thrived on the **banks of the Vaigai.**

- **Carbon dating of charcoal** found that the settlement there belonged to **200 BC**, thus proved that urban civilisation had existed in Tamil Nadu since the Sangam age.

Findings from different excavations:

- **Ring wells made of terracotta**, which is an indicator of the **advanced water conservation technology** of that period.
- **Jewellery, fine gem stones, semi-precious stones and a dozen Tamil Brahmi inscriptions.**
- Beads of agate, Carnelian and quartz which indicate that they had **trade links with countries like Rome.**
- **Pottery** with **typical of Sangam Age Tamil names.**
- **Graffiti** on pottery, bone tools and iron weapons.
- A **fish symbol** which was both an art and as a 'sign representing a clan.
- **Red-and-black pottery**, groove tiles used for laying roofs and the typical **flat brick** which indicate that the city unearthed belongs to the Sangam Age.

The **TamilNadu State Department of Archaeology (TNAD)** has already collected **skeletal fragments** from Keezdi (Keeladi) and Adichanallur. It will enter into a tripartite MoU with **Madurai Kamaraj University and Harvard Medical School** to take up ancient DNA study of human bones excavated or to be excavated.

Link of Keezhadi with early Sangam literature and IVC:

The artefacts found in excavations carried out at Keezhadi have determined a possible link between the scripts of the IVC and Tamil Brahmi, which is the precursor to modern Tamil. An urban civilisation in Tamil Nadu that was contemporary to the Gangetic plain civilisation is another major discovery.

The cultural deposits unearthed during excavations at Keeladi could be safely dated to a period between 6th century BCE and the 1st century CE. This is the first time the date has been

officially announced by the TNAD. Keeladi artefacts are about 300 years earlier than previously believed – 3rd century BCE.

The report has stated that Keezhadi civilisation is the **“second urbanisation”** [the first being Indus] of Vaigai plains happened in Tamil Nadu.

Some archeologists have speculated that the languages of script of IVC (5000 BCE and 1,500 BCE), called the **Indus script could be Dravidian.** Now the samples featuring **graffiti** discovered from Keezhadi which date back to 580 BCE is believed to be the **link between the Indus script and the Tamil Brahmi.** Like Indus script, this also could not be deciphered till date.



Among the available scripts of India, the Indus scripts are considered to be the earliest one and were 4500 years old. A report released by the TNAD has stated that **these graffiti marks are the one evolved from Indus script and served as a precursor for the emergence of Brahmi script.** Around 1000 such signs are found.

It also indicates that the Sangam era began much earlier than what was once thought and people in the Sangam period were literate as early as the 6th Century BCE. The finding was based on around 50 **potsherds** discovered which had names of people written in Tamil-Brahmi script.

The report suggests that among 70 samples of skeletal fragments of faunal remains which were collected from the site, species such as cow and ox, buffalo, sheep, goat, Nilgai, blackbuck, wild boar and peacock were identified. While some animals were used for agriculture purposes, some were consumed.

Genetic studies on Indus valley people at Rakhigarhi:

- A recent DNA test of a woman who died 4500 years back at Rakhigarhi showed that she did not possess the **R1a1 gene—the 'Aryan gene' of the Bronze Age people**.
- This finding argues that the IVC people had an **independent origin**.
- The researchers contend that the theory of the Harappans having **Steppe pastoral or ancient Iranian farmer ancestry** thus stands refuted.
- The researchers found an absence of Anatolian-related ancestry which is the hallmark of the spread of farming to the west.
- However, the Iranian-related ancestry they detected in South Asians comes from a lineage that separated from ancient Iranian farmers and hunter-gatherers before those groups split from each other.
- The researchers suggest that as the Harappans traded with Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Persian Gulf and almost all across South Asia, there was bound to be movement of people resulting in a mixed genetic history.
- Thus India had a heterogeneous population right from the beginning of settled life.
- Hence it was concluded that **farming in South Asia was not due to the movement of people from the farming cultures of the west and that local foragers adopted it**.
- The discovery cast doubts on the colonial **Aryan Migration Theory (AMT)**, which states that India was invaded by Aryans, a fair blue-eyed nomadic tribe from Europe in 1,500 BC who drove out the dark, snub-nosed Dravidians to South India.
- The chronology of Indian languages also disproves AIT post the excavations in Haryana.
- Tamil, a proto-Dravidian language which originated during 2,500 BC, is considered the world's oldest discovered language.
- The **genetic map of the Lady of Rakhigarhi shows that the original inhabitants of Harappa could have been Dravidians with more South Indian traits than today's**

North Indians.

It is difficult to believe that a nomadic, pastoral tribe like the Aryans could develop a sophisticated language like Sanskrit, while no written language has been discovered as used by people of the urbanised IVC. Hence AIT is believed to be a Colonial Distortion.