

Distinction between Indus Civilization and Vedic Civilization

The history of ancient India is a glorious one; unfortunately we have very little information on this rich culture.

Let us look at two major civilizations of India - **Indus Valley Civilization / The Harappan Civilization** and **Vedic Civilization**.

These two civilizations have not only played a major role in the development of ancient India, but have also left a lineage that still continues to shape our present Indian culture.

MAJOR DIFFERENCES OF INDUS & VEDIC CIVILIZATIONS:

Some of the major differences that can be pointed out between these two civilizations are:

Indus Valley Civilization	Vedic Civilization
Indus civilization was more 'urban' and was 'business oriented'.	Vedic civilization was 'rural' and agriculture based
Indus valley people used baked bricks for construction.	Vedic people made use of bamboo and grass.
Indus valley people made equipments of stone, copper; however they were unaware of iron	Vedic valley people were aware of iron and made various equipments with it
Indus valley people worshipped 'mother goddess', Shiva, lingam and figurines	The Vedic people were yagna worshippers and created various gods.
Indus people respected 'oxen'	Vedic people worshipped the 'cow'

We can study other differences between the two civilizations under the following headings:

- i. Periodicity
- ii. Regional Spread
- iii. Urban Development
- iv. Society
- v. Occupation
- vi. Art, Architecture and Culture
- vii. Religious Activity

PERIODICITY:

Indus Valley Civilization:

Till 20th century, historians thought that the Vedic society was the earliest civilization of India. However study done by 2 archaeologists - Dayaram Sahani and Raakhaldas Banerjee proved that Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, though 1400 kms apart, were a part of one civilization older than Vedic.

Since the region spanned India across the coastal western belt and along the Indus River, the civilization was called Indus Civilization. Indus civilization was at its peak around 2500 B.C.E.

Vedic Civilization:

After the decline of Indus Civilization, a new civilization grew which was dominated by the Aryans and came to be known as the Vedic Civilization. The period extended from 1500 B.C.E to 500 B.C.E.

REGIONAL SPREAD:

Indus Valley Civilization:

The Indus civilization was spread across the Indus valley (river Sindhu).

It spread in the North from Harappa in Punjab province (Pakistan) to Bhogtrar in South Gujarat (1400 kms). In the east, there was Alamgir (Meerut) and to its West was Sutkagen Dor in Baluchistan, next to Iran (1600 kms).

Thus, the Indus valley spread across 12.15 lac sq.km.

Vedic Civilization

The Vedic period marked the entry of Aryans on Indian soil. There has been a huge debate on the origin of Aryans. Various scholars have postulated theories which are either supported or debated.

North Pole: Bal Gangadhar Tilak proposed that the Aryans came from North Pole. However there is no concrete evidence for this theory.

Asia: Scholars like Max Muller suggested Middle Asia could be the place of Aryans, whereas Rhodes thought it should be Bactria and Edward Meyer postulated the plateau of Pamir (Iran).

Europe: Penka and Hirt thought Germany as the base of Aryans.

South Russia: Based on archaeological, historical and linguistic study, Meyer, Peek and Gordon Childes postulated that South Russia should be the home of Aryans. Archaeological excavations in Russia unearthed horse skeletons, potteries, earthen wares which were strikingly similar to Aryans.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT:

Indus Valley Civilization:

The cities of Indus civilization were well planned and built with baked bricks of equal sizes. The streets were at right angle to each other with an elaborate drainage system.

There were public buildings, vast granaries and the Great Bath at Mohenjo-Daro.

Production of several metals like copper, bronze, lead and tin was carried out. The discovery of kilns proves that bricks were extensively used for domestic and public buildings.

Vedic Civilization:

It was mainly the rural civilization, centered round the village

SOCIETY:

Indus Valley Civilization:

The social life of Indus Civilization was that of a happy, satisfied society.

The society by large was “female dominated” and family was a central force.

Though the society was divided into 4 groups as per the occupation, it does not prove that there could be any discrimination since the housing structure proves that irrespective of the occupation, people lived in each others vicinity.

The people of Indus Civilization were vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian. Diet usually consisted of wheat, jowar, rice, sesame seed, dal, vegetables, milk and fruits. Meat of sheep, goat, pig, hen, duck as well as fish was consumed.

Excavations reveal that women of Indus valley liked to wear ornaments made of gold, precious stones, silver and copper. Men kept long hair, sported moustache and beard whereas women tied their hair in a bun. They also wore bangles made of glass and metal ware.

Vedic Civilization:

Compared to the Indus civilization, the early Vedic period civilization was “male dominated”. Though the women were known as “better half”, they were not allowed in politics and did not get share in family property.

The caste system of 4 varnas became prominent to such an extent that even the burial grounds were segregated.

The Brahmins and Kshatriyas fought for superior position, Vaishyas did business and paid taxes whereas Shudras were considered to be slaves of all the 3 varnas.

The people of Vedic civilization also followed vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian diet. Milk and milk products were an important part of diet along with vegetables and meat. People drank “soma ras” and played dice. Horse race, chariot race, music, dance were the favorite pastime.

In the Vedic civilization, metals like gold, silver, copper, tin, glass were in use. Iron utensils and equipments were also made during this period.

OCCUPATION:

Indus Valley Civilization:

The main occupation of Indus Civilization was agriculture. Wheat, jowar, sesame seed, bajra were grown. Animal farming was also carried out. They also grew cotton and wore clothes.

There were sites where ornaments and jewelry were made.

Trade was also another occupation and each merchant family had their own seal. Trading was usually done with neighboring regions of India, Persian Gulf and Iran.

Vedic Civilization:

The Vedic period people were rural oriented and had agriculture as main occupation. They ploughed sowed and reaped various crops like wheat, jowar, rice, moong dal, udad, sesame. They also reared animals like cows, bulls, horses, goats, donkeys, sheep, pigs and dogs.

It is during this period that ‘elephant’ was first domesticated.

ART, ARCHITECTURE & CULTURE:

Indus Valley Civilization:

Indus Civilization had mastered the art of using metals, mud, wood, glass for making ornaments, architecture and various forms.

They made terracotta vessels with decorative colors and design. They made toys, household utensils, agriculture equipments and ornamental things.

The people of Indus Civilization were good sculptors carving wood and stone in the form of “relief architecture”, statues and articles. Statues of various birds and animals were also found along with men, women and “mother goddess”.

The script still remains undecipherable.

Vedic Civilization:

In the Vedic civilization, metals like gold, copper, silver, tin were used to prepare various artifacts.

This period contributed to the Vedic literature namely Samhitas (Samved, Yajurved, Atharvaved, Rigved), Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads.

RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY:

Indus Valley Civilization:

The Indus Civilization people worshipped gods and goddesses. The figures found in excavation reveal some rituals and ceremonies.

Various terracotta statues of “Mother Goddess” have been discovered from various sites which prove that she was worshipped in nearly every home.

Many seal depicting rhinoceros, bull, leopard, elephant, ox were found suggesting that the Indus valley people revered them.

Vedic Civilization:

The religious dogmas increased during the Vedic period and old gods (multiple ‘nature gods’ like wind, water, fire, etc.) were replaced with new formed gods. Prajapati, Vishnu & Rudra Shiva became the new gods.

It was during this period that ‘animal sacrifice’ became rampant. Some large scale yagnas like Rajsuyagna, Vajpeya and Ashwamedh were performed.

The belief in soul, magic, tantra increased and people succumbed to blind faith. The only difference was that the Vedic gods were immortal whereas the human beings were not.

Evolution of Varna, Jathi / Caste System in India

The word caste has its origin from the Spanish word 'casta', meaning 'race', or 'a group having hereditary quality'. The term was applied to people of India by the Portuguese to denote 'Jati'. The word caste has created confusion in the sense that it is used to denote both Varna and Jati. There are four castes - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra. In fact these four are not castes but are Varnas. What we find today are not Varnas but Jatis. There are four Varnas and about 4000 Jatis.

Definition of Caste

Caste can be defined as hereditary endogamous group, having a common name, common traditional occupation, common culture, relatively rigid in matters of mobility, distinctiveness of status and forming a single homogeneous community. However, in the changing situation caste has adapted to many new features like having formal organisations, becoming less rigid and having a link with politics. Thus we may list from the above the following features of caste system.

- i. **Segmental division of society** - It means Indian social stratification is largely based on caste. There are various castes having a well-developed life style of their own. The membership of a caste is determined by birth. Thus caste is hereditary in nature.
- ii. **Hierarchy** - It indicates various castes according to their purity and impurity of occupations, are ranked from higher to lower positions. It is like a ladder where pure caste is ranked on the top and impure is ranked at the bottom. For example the occupation of Brahmins is that of performing rituals and teaching. It is considered to be the purest occupation; hence they are placed at the top of the hierarchy. On the other hand Sweeper whose occupation is cleaning and scavenging, is placed at the bottom of the hierarchy because of impure occupation.
- iii. **Restrictions on food, drink and smoking** - Usually different caste do not exchange food and drink, and do not share smoking of hukka among them. For instance, Brahmins do not take food from any other caste. It is a complicated process. For example in Uttar Pradesh, among Kanyakubj Brahmins, there are many sub-divisions. Each sub-division does not take food from other sub-division.

There are two types of food: 'pucca' (food prepared in ghee like puri, kachodi and pulao) and kuchcha (food prepared in water like rice, pulses, and vegetables curries). Some castes exchange only pucca food among themselves. Invariably, the high caste does not take anything from the low caste. The same principle is applied to smoking.

- iv. **Endogamy** - It indicates members of the caste have to marry within their own caste only. Inter-caste marriages are prohibited. However, among educated people, particularly in the urban areas, inter-caste marriages are gradually increasing.
- v. **Purity and pollution** - It is one of the important features of caste system. Purity and pollution are judged in terms of deeds, occupation, language, dress patterns, as well as

food habits. For example liquor consumption, consuming non-vegetarian food, eating left-over food of the high castes, working in occupations like leather craft, lifting dead animals, sweeping and carrying garbage etc. are supposed to be impure.

However, in recent times some high caste people are today doing all the above jobs, like working in a shoe-shop, shoe-factory, cutting hair in a beauty parlour etc.

- vi. **Occupational association** - Each caste has a specific occupation and cannot change the occupation. For instance, Brahmins do priesthood and teaching, Kayasthas maintain revenue records and writing. Sanyas are engaged in business and Chamars are engaged in leatherwork, etc. With new job opportunities available due to industrialization and urbanization some people have shifted from their traditional occupation.

However, in rural areas traditional occupations are still followed. Such cases are also found in urban areas like a barber has a hair-cutting saloon where he cuts hair in the morning and evening and simultaneously works as a peon in some office.

- vii. **Social and religious disabilities and privileges of a few sections** - The lower caste are debarred from doing many things like they are not permitted to enter the temple, do not use literary language and cannot use gold ornaments or umbrella etc. However, things have changed considerably; these restrictions are hardly found today.
- viii. **Distinction in custom, dress and speech** - Each caste has distinct style of life, i.e. having its own customs, dress patterns and speech. The high caste use pure language (sometimes use literary words), whereas, the low caste use colloquial (local) language.
- ix. **Conflict resolving mechanisms** - The caste's have their own conflict resolving mechanisms such as Caste Panchayats at the village and intervillage levels.

Difference Between Varna and Jathi

As mentioned earlier there are four Varnas. The first mention of Varna is found in Rig-Veda, i.e. in the Vedic era around 1500 BC. Varna means colour.

Initially there were no untouchables. The Varna system was relatively not rigid during the Vedic era (1500BC- 1000BC). During the later Vedic era, i.e. around 1000BC there has been a mention of "Asat Shudra" (untouchable community). Thus untouchability started around 1000BC.

Around 2nd century BC to 1st century AD, because of diversified occupations, several occupational groups emerged and came to be known by different Jatis.

Thus Varna Vyavastha is the textual model or book view of Indian social system, i.e. it is found today only in texts. Whereas, Jati is the contextual view or field view of Indian

social system, i.e. we find Jatis in reality today and not Varnas.

There are only four Varnas whereas, there are about 4000 Jatis. In each region about 200 Jatis are found.

The Varna had a pan-Indic hierarchy, i.e. Brahmins are on the top, Kshatriyas are at the second position, Vaishyas are at the third position and Shudras are found in the bottom of the hierarchy.

This hierarchy was uniform throughout India but in Jati a uniform hierarchy throughout India is not found. In the changing situation, in some areas Brahmins are on the top, in some other areas Thakurs (Rajput) are at the top. Today even the Dalits are found on the top in some areas. Thus secular criteria (economic and political) are found in the Jati system.

On the other hand In Varna vyavastha, ritual criteria (religious) is found. In Vama vyavastha, intially untouchable are not found. They are placed outside the Vama vyavastha, whereas, in the Jati vyavastha untouchables are an integral part of the system.

In Vama vyavastha, a person's status was not changeable, whereas, in the Jati vyavastha one can change one's status with improved socio-economic condition. Thus one should not take Vama and Jati synonymously.

Difference between Caste and Class

While a caste is hereditary, a class is non-hereditary in nature. A class system allows both exogamy and endogamy, permits mobility either up or down the system, and also allows an individual to remain in the status to which he was born. Thus a class is primarily based on socio-economic criteria.

There are three major classes found: Upper, Middle, and Lower. Each class is divided into two sub-divisions. They are upper-upper, and lower upper; upper-middle and lower-middle; and upper-lower and lower-lower.

A class is more open than the caste in the sense that mobility is allowed in the class system. It is not allowed that openly in the caste system.

Further, caste system is based on ritual criterion whereas, class is based on secular criterion. Ritual criterion means it is based on religious myths, secular means non-religious criterion like economic, political and social criterion.

However, in changing circumstances caste is also adapting to secular criteria. Consciousness is found in the class but not necessarily in the caste. However, today castes are also changing into classes in urban areas particularly in terms of economic criterion.

Changes in the Caste System

Changes in the caste system have been found in the last two centuries in general and in past 50 years in particular. Several processes like sanskritisation, westernisation, modernisation, dominant caste, industrialisation, urbanisation and democratic decentralisation have made consequent changes in the caste system.

They are as follows:

- i. **Sanskritization:** It is a process by which any low caste could adapt to the behaviour pattern, style of life, and culture of high caste and claim membership in that high caste. But they have to leave their unclean occupation and other impure habits like meat eating and taking liquor, etc. The untouchables were not allowed to sanskritize their status. Thus only middle castes could sanskritize themselves.

For sanskritization, a caste must have three conditions:

- (a) it should have a touchable status,
- (b) it should have better economic condition,
- (c) it should make a claim to membership into a high caste, by propagating some story or myth.

It is a group process and not an individual process. It is a lengthy process and not an overnight process. It does not lead to any structural change, only leads to positional change.

It means a particular low caste changes its position into a high caste in a particular area, whereas the caste structure does not change. Through this process a few lower castes in different parts of country have changed their status into higher castes.

- ii. **Westernisation:** It indicates adapting to western style of living, language, dress pattern, and behavior patten. In India largely the British influence has been found.

The features of westernisation are:

- (a) rational outlook (scientific and goal oriented outlook),
- (b) interest in material progress,
- (c) reliance on modern communication process and mass media,
- (d) English medium education,
- (e) high social mobility, etc.

The higher castes were first to westernise themselves. Later on, the lower castes also adapted to this process. It has largely influenced the rigidity of caste system and changed it into a flexible system, particularly in the urban areas.

- iii. **Modernisation:** It is a process which primarily relies on scientific outlook; rational attitudes, high social mobility, mass mobilisation, empathy, belief in liberty, equality

and fraternity; high level of motivation to do everything with perfection; specialisation and super-specialisation in work; active participation; and dealing with complex organisations. It also requires changes in institutional, structural, attitudinal, and organisational aspects at the social, cultural and personal level.

This has affected greatly the caste system in the sense that it has become more flexible. In urban areas castes are gradually becoming classes. In India we find an emerging middle class with a rational outlook and goal orientation.

Modernisation is a broader concept than westernisation. Any culture can modernise itself without adapting to western values. In our case we can modernise ourselves not by abandoning the tradition totally but by integrating the rational aspects of the tradition and suitable aspects of modernity.

Our caste system has adapted suitably to the modern practices, i.e. educating people, forming formal organisations and making people conscious about their existence.

iv. **Dominant caste:** In the 20th century, the phenomena of dominant caste has emerged. It means some caste becomes economically and politically dominant and virtually rules over other castes in the region. A caste can become dominant by having the features like:

- (a) large land holdings in the area (good economic position),
- (b) politically dominant (becoming a vote bank),
- (c) having a large population,
- (d) high ritual status,
- (e) English medium education,
- (f) having a tradition in agriculture (not tillers but landlords), and
- (g) having a tradition of violence (for dominance muscle power is essential).

However, today it is not limited to the high caste only but has been found among the lower castes also.

- v. **Industrialisation and urbanisation:** Both these processes have affected the caste system. With the growth of industrial towns and other cities, migration to these areas has gone up. In these areas following strict caste rules are not possible. There are public places like parks, restaurants, canteens, hotels, offices and communication systems like buses and trains etc. where inter-dinning and sharing of places are essential. Hence, a flexible approach has been adapted.
- vi. **Democratic decentralization:** Through the introduction of Panchayati Raj, local self-governments have been created in the villages. In the Panchayat reservation has been made for the lower castes. This has given an opportunity for the lower castes to empower themselves.
- vii. **Caste and politics:** It is not a new phenomenon since politics is a part of life always. During the Vama vyavastha, Brahminical supremacy was an example of politics.

Today it is said that castes have a close link with politics because castes have become vote banks, castes have become politically aware, there have been identification of castes with political parties and every caste has its own association.

In fact, the link between caste and politics has led to an empowerment among the lower castes. These castes / never had any opportunities to express themselves. Today they ventilate their feelings through elections and power lobby.

Dalit politics is one such example, where the Dalits are trying to assert their identities and have become successful in capturing power in various states.

However, the negative aspects of this link has been found in factionalism, i.e. the high castes always want to maintain their status quo. They are not able to accept the changing dominant position of the lower castes. This has led to frequent conflicts between high castes and low castes in several regions of the country.

However, this is only a transitional phase. Better education, mass awareness campaign and good employment opportunities would ensure smooth passage towards a progressive society.

- viii. **Caste and economy:** Traditionally, it was said that caste system has been functional for the society particularly in the economic sense. It is nothing but the Jajmani system. It is a system of traditional occupation for the lower castes, particularly the service caste.

The service caste is known as Kamin and they used to provide service to the higher castes known as Jajmans. The Kamins provided specialized skills and services to the Jajmans and in return used to get rewards in kinds (food grains).

The relationship between Jajmans and Kamins used to be a permanent and hereditary relationship i.e. after the death of the Jajman, his son used to be a Jajman and the same principle applied to the Kamins.

Thus it was a functional relationship in village India. However, due to introduction of market economy and land reforms the, Jajmani system gradually is being eroded.

In this manner, caste system has undergone many changes due to the above processes and it has adapted to the new socio-economic condition. In urban areas, today people do not adhere to caste norms. The only aspect where caste comes is that during marriage they still become endogamous. However, as mentioned earlier, some people have adopted to inter-caste marriage and inter- religious marriages.

Notes:

- The main basis of Indian social structure, i.e. the caste system.
- The caste system is an age-old phenomenon of Indian society.
- In the past it produced harmony between various groups by exchange of goods and