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## LEGACY OF SAPT-SINDHU REGION: CULTURAL EVOLUTION AND PRESERVATION

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### ABSTRACT

The 'Sapt-Sindhu' refers to the ancient region encompassed by the seven rivers namely- the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Satluj and Saraswati and spans across the modern day Northern India and Pakistan. The region has had a significant impact on the cultural development of South Asia. Moreover, some of the oldest human civilizations including the Vedic Culture and Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) emerged here. It is undeniable that Sapt Sindhu played a significant role in the formation of early human history, not only because of its contributions to political, ecclesiastical, and socioeconomic life but also because it preserved cultural customs and practices that still influence South Asia's identity now. The present research explores the significance of Sapt Sindhu in the development of religious and social structures as well as its influence on the conservation of both material and intangible cultural treasures in the cultural evolution of the Indian subcontinent.

**KEYWORDS:** Sapt-Sindhu, Cultural Evolution, Cultural Heritage, Indus Valley Civilisation, Vedic Period.

### INTRODUCTION

The Sapt Sindhu region is one of the most important geographical and cultural regions in the ancient Indian culture and civilization and is frequently mentioned in the Vedic scriptures. The Rigveda makes prominent reference to 'Sapt Sindhu', which means "Land of the Seven Rivers", as a fertile and flourished area that fostered the early stages of social and cultural development. This area spans across the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, which includes portions of modern-day India and Pakistan as well as areas that were formerly dominated by

the powerful rivers of the Vedic era (Aslamkhan, 1996). The Sindhu (Indus), Saraswati, Sutlej, Ravi, Beas, Jhelum, and Chenab are the seven rivers of the Sapt Sindhu. These rivers, which flow into the Arabian Sea from the Himalayas, supported early civilizations and laid the foundation for the agricultural growth and expansion (Gourav and Sharma, 2023).

The confluence of rivers, their tributaries, and their impact on the nearby plains determine the somewhat arbitrary borders of the Sapt Sindhu Region. Situated in the northwest plains of the Indian subcontinent, the Sapt Sindhu Region is bordered to the north by the Himalayas, to the southeast by the Aravalli Hills, and to the southwest by the Arabian Sea. This area stretches into Pakistan's Punjab and Sindh provinces and encompasses portions of the present-day Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. It was one of the first areas to develop an agricultural economy because of its fertile alluvial plains, which were created by the silt that was deposited by its rivers. Research from archeological sites, especially those at Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Rakhigarhi, and Kalibangan, indicates that this area was a center of the Indus Valley Civilization contemporaneous with the Vedic era (Singh, 2023).

## RIVERS OF SAPT SINDHU REGION

**1. Indus:** The Rigvedic name of Indus river is 'Sindhu'. It is one of the longest rivers in Asia with a total length of around 3000 kilometers. It originates from Mansarovar in Tibet and falls into the Arabian Sea in Pakistan. It passes through China, India, and Pakistan and is an essential supply of water for hydropower, agricultural, and human use. The Sindhu is a significant portion of Punjab's river system, which translates to "land of five rivers." Eventually, the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej rivers merge to form the Indus. The river's rich floodplains are home to the Indus Valley. One of the oldest civilizations ever discovered was the Indus Valley Civilization, which flourished in this area.

**2. Jhelum:** The Rigvedic name of Jhelum is 'Vitasta'. It originates from the Verinag Spring in the Kashmir region of the Jammu and Kashmir union territory. From there, it travels to Azad Kashmir region, which is administered by Pakistan, and from there enters Pakistan. It is roughly 725 kilometers long and a tributary of the Chenab river.

**3. Chenab:** The Rigvedic name of Chenab is 'Askini'. It originates from the Bara Lacha Pass in Lahaul region of Himachal Pradesh and is formed by the union of two water bodies: Chandra and Bhaga. From there, it passes through the Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir union territory before entering Pakistan's Punjab plains, where it merges with the Sutlej River to form the Panjnad, which near Mithankot eventually flows into the Indus River.

**4. Ravi:** The Rigvedic name of Ravi river is 'Parushni' and is one of the tributaries of river Indus. It originates in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh and enters Punjab state close to Shahpur town in Pathankot. It leaves Indian territory at Goina hamlet which is roughly 80 kilometers from Lahore and falls into Arabian Sea in Pakistan.

**5. Beas:** The Beas River is named after Veda Vyasa, the author of the Indian epic Mahabharata, who is credited with creating it from the Beas Kund, its source lake. Rishi Vashishta, Vyasa's great-grandfather, attempted to offer his soul as a sacrifice by plunging into this river from a hilltop and strangled himself with several cords in order to drown himself. But to his rescue, the river changed its shape and turned into a sandbed. Because the cords broke throughout this route, Vashishta gave the river the name Vipasa, which translates to "cord-breaker". On account of this incident, the great Rishi opted to settle near the river, and made it a residence for some years. Thereby, it became known as Vashisht (after Vashishta).

**6. Satluj:** The ancient name of river Satluj is 'Shutudri'. After crossing numerous Himalayan valleys and entering India close to Shipki La Pass, it joins the Beas in Punjab, which then joins the Chenab in Pakistan and finally empties into the Indus. In Kinnaur, water from the freshly melted glaciers travel via numerous tiny streams that combine to form the Satluj river.

**7. Saraswati:** The Rigveda and other vedic texts describe this river as a mighty and powerful river. It is often identified with the Ghaggar-Hakra river system and is considered to be the vitality of Vedic civilization and the representation of spirituality and fertility (Geertz, 1973). Climate change and Tectonic activity were the factors that led to drying up of this river (Thapar, 2002).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the historical significance of the Sapt Sindhu region.
- To examine the role of the Sapt Sindhu region in the cultural evolution and heritage preservation in the Indian Subcontinent.
- To investigate the present day relevance of the cultural heritage of the Sapt sindhu region.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study utilizes a qualitative research approach to explore the historical, geographical and cultural significance of the Sapt sindhu region. This descriptive research made use of secondary data and sources to extract information from gathered literature. This

process involved examining various research articles, journals and academic publications to derive insights.

### **SAPT SINDHU AND INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION**

The Sapt Sindhu region provided the environmental and economic base for the development and growth of ancient urban civilizations in the Indian subcontinent. The Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) also known as Harappan Civilization was one of the world's largest and greatest civilizations. It flourished around 2500 BCE in the western region of South Asia, which is primarily comprised of modern day Pakistan and western India (Sharma, 2001). There is evidence from the archeological sites such as Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Rakhigarhi and Kalibangan that this area was a center of IVC (Singh, 2023). The rivers of the Sapt Sindhu were key to the growth of the IVC as they ensured an abundant supply of water, making agriculture viable in the otherwise arid region. Crops like wheat, barley and cotton which were necessary to sustain sizable populations were grown on the fertile plains of the river basins. Additionally, the rivers functioned as channels for transportation and promoting commercial and cultural interaction between the IVC and nearby areas like Persia, Mesopotamia and Central Asia.

### **SAPT SINDHU AND VEDIC CIVILIZATION**

The composition of the Vedas, the oldest texts in human history, in the Sapta Sindhu region signified a sea change in the subcontinent's intellectual and spiritual development (Jamison & Brereton, 2014). The rivers of Sapta Sindhu are mentioned numerous times in the oldest Vedic scripture, the Rigveda. These rivers have great spiritual value in addition to being essential to the people's way of life. The Rigvedic hymns portray the rivers as a source of material and spiritual prosperity, symbolizing the intersection of cosmic order and life. Several fundamental facets of Indian culture and philosophy were established by the Vedic civilization. The sacred rivers, whose movement represented the divine order and the cyclical essence of creation, were at the heart of the rituals, sacrifices, and social structures that arose from this time. Thus, it was believed that the Sapt Sindhu rivers were essential to the maintenance of Vedic customs, which for ages remained fundamental to Indian culture (Kumar, 2024).

### **CULTURAL EVOLUTION AND PRESERVATION**

- **Agriculture and Settlement Patterns:** The development of early urban settlements like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus Valley was facilitated by the rivers of Sapt Sindhu,

which allowed agriculture to thrive and ensure food security. The early societies were able to build permanent settlements because of the favourable circumstances these rivers provided for the agricultural practices.

- **Religious and Spiritual Practices:** Originating in the Sapt Sindhu region, the Vedic society was intricately entwined with its natural surroundings. The rivers considered sacred, were essential to many religious rituals. Water was frequently used in Vedic ceremonies as a symbol of life's flow and soul purification. The vedic literature regularly mentioned the functions of rivers in ceremonies, blessings and spiritual cleansing indicating that they were seen as having spiritual significance.
- **Social Structure and Identity Formation:** The societal structure of Vedic civilization was also significantly shaped by the rivers of this region. The early division of society on the basis of occupations gives foundation to the Varna system which subsequently developed into the Caste system (Kumar, 2015). Various responsibilities were given to the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras and these positions became more concretized with time which led to the origin of social stratification (Kumar, 2021). Along the rivers, the people established intricate social structures centred on trade, agriculture and religious rituals. Along with the material wealth, these rivers also played a crucial role in the formation of the cultural identity of the communities who were residing there. Various tribes and communities across different geographical areas began exchanging ideas, language and practices along the river banks.
- **Art, Architecture and Literature:** The art and literary work in ancient India was also significantly influenced and developed in the Sapt Sindhu region. The artifacts found from various archeological sites of IVC include stone and bronze statues, several copper toys, pottery, terracotta figures and Pashupati seals. The architecture of that period had urban features like proper drainage and sanitation system, town planning, etc. Takshila university, established in 700 BC, was one of the oldest universities in the world. It was located about 50 kilometers west of present day Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Sharda Peeth is a demolished Hindu temple and historic educational center situated in present day Pakistan administered Kashmir. Moreover, the important literary works that were developed in this region were the Vedic scriptures, Sanskrit language and Sharda script.
- **Transmission of Knowledge through Oral Traditions:** Oral tradition was one of the most important means of preserving Sapt Sindhu traditional customs. Due to the oral transmission of the Vedas, epic poetry, and hymns, the knowledge they contained was

preserved for centuries to come. In these oral histories, the rivers themselves were frequently mentioned as landmarks, highlighting their significance as cultural symbols.

- **Pilgrimage:** Because of the rivers' spiritual significance, people continue to revere them even in present time. Hindu, Sikh, and Jain ceremonies still heavily rely on rivers like the Sindhu and Saraswati. To maintain the link to the traditional spiritual rituals, pilgrims travel to these rivers or their contemporary counterparts. Over the years, these river-related customs have been preserved in part via the tirtha yatra (pilgrimage).
- **Influence on Modern Indian Culture:** Even in contemporary India, the influence of Sapt Sindhu is still felt. Throughout India, people still observe festivals, customs, and traditions that have their roots in the Sapt Sindhu region. The reverence for the Ganga, Yamuna, and other holy rivers reflects the idea that the river is a sacred and heavenly phenomenon. The Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharata, and other ancient manuscripts and literature pertaining to the Sapt Sindhu region have been preserved, guaranteeing that the region's knowledge and cultural values continue to influence modern Indian civilization.

## CONCLUSION

The region of Sapt Sindhu was essential to the development and maintenance of Indian culture and civilization. Being the birthplace of early human civilization, it made a substantial contribution to the construction of social institutions, literature, art, and religious customs that have influenced the Indian subcontinent for thousands of years. The sacred rivers continue to shape India's cultural awareness today as a representation of life, purity, and spirituality. It conveys a story of togetherness and cultural diversity and, for many, signifies a strong link to India's illustrious past. Being the cradle of the Vedic civilization, this area has been crucial to maintaining the rich intellectual, spiritual, and cultural legacy that still has resonance with people today. The mythological and historical importance associated with the Sapt Sindhu region—which includes the Sindhu (Indus) river and its neighbouring areas—are frequently used to express a vision of an India that is both cohesive and culturally diverse.

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