

Gharial god and Tiger goddess in the Indus valley

Some aspects of Bronze Age Indian religion

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Abstract: In the Mature Harappan period seals and tablets produced about 4000 years ago, gharial crocodile is portrayed as a 'horned' being. As in the famous Pashupati seals (M-304), this horned gharial deity is the central figure surrounded by a typical set of animals. A female being, often connected with tigers, is seen coupling together with the gharial in a fecundity scene in an Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) creation myth. A number of seals show a man on the tree along with a tiger below. This shaman on the tree and tiger motif is linked archaeologically with the gharial deity in the sky, and the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh-like goddess shown between two tigers in IVC tablets and moulds. Also, the same shaman on tree along with a tiger motif is seen in the 'horned' gharial "Master of Animals" seals. A comprehensive evaluation of the imagery recorded in the Indus glyptic art is needed to understand the pan-Indus founders' myth cycle, and the iconography is illustrated with pictures of the IVC sealings. These religious myths of the gharial and tiger divinities are at least as important as the tree goddess worship in M-1186 with a shaman, markhor goat and seven women in front of a bodhi fig tree.

1.0 Gharial God as Master of Animals

In Mohenjo-daro seals (M-304, M-1181), a deity wearing buffalo horns and sitting in a yogic posture is depicted. It has been called as Proto-Śiva or Paśupati because of the surrounding animals: a tiger, an elephant, a water buffalo, and a rhinoceros (Figure 1). Among the inscribed signs, the appearance of fish has been taken to indicate as star/god due to Dravidian homophonic principle (Chapter 10, [1]). Gharial, a large crocodile-like reptile living in the Indus waters, and fish have been considered divine by the Indus agricultural society. Both fish and gharial are shown as divinities in the sky in Indus valley seals.



Figure 1. The 'Proto-Śiva' seal from Mohenjo-daro (M-304)

The two ibex shown beneath the throne of the horned god in Figure 1 have their faces turned backwards. This conventional head posture denotes attention in IVC art as attested in a variety of seals. For example in the case of tigers, mode of attention

in the seals (a) with a shaman on the tree and a tiger below (Sections 2.0 and 3.0) and (b) the tiger turning its face backward towards the Gharial god (Figures 5 and 6).

Harappan worship of the Goddess



(a)



(b)

Fig. 14.14. Proto-Elamite seals from Susa Co-Da, c.3000-2750 BC. Bulls and other animals are represented in sitting posture, both (a) in profile and (b) also as seen from the front: with their legs turned to either side. After Amiet 1980a: pl. 37, no. 570 (=a) and 569 (=b).



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 14.15. Proto-Elamite seals from Susa Co-Da, c.3000-2750 BC. (a-c) Bulls sitting with legs bent double and fully turned to either side, seen from the front. After Amiet 1972: pl. 25, no. 1017 (=a); and Amiet 1980a: pl. 38, nos. 581-2 (=b, c).



Fig. 14.16. A seal from Mohenjo-daro (M-1181) with a multifaced anthropomorphic god squatting on a throne that has hoofed legs. This so-called 'yoga' posture may simply imitate the Proto-Elamite way of representing seated bulls (fig. 14.15). The deity's arms are both full of bangles; the crown on the head has buffalo horns and a fig branch.



Fig. 14.17. A seated male deity with hooved legs bent double beneath and turned out to either side, seen from the front. There is a dot beside the head (originally presumably one on either side). Seal impression on a potsherd found in 1975 at Tepe Yahya in Kerman, southeastern Iran. Period IVA, c.2200-1800 BC.

Figure 2. Page 250 from A. Parpola, Deciphering the Indus script, 1994 (Note the fish sign in M-1181, Fig. 14.16 in Parpola's book)

The 'yogin' divinity was worshipped by the Indus people and this fact is evident from M-453 and M-454 because of the presence of worshippers (Figure 3). Serpents,

perhaps related with god Muruku, seem to be represented in the inventory of Indus signs as a cobra with expanded hood.



M-453



M-454

Figure 3. The deity with worshippers and serpents

The horned yogin deity is shown with gharials and snakes on both sides in M-013 (Figure 4). When compared with Figure 4, it is possible that the god in Figure 3 is horned as well.

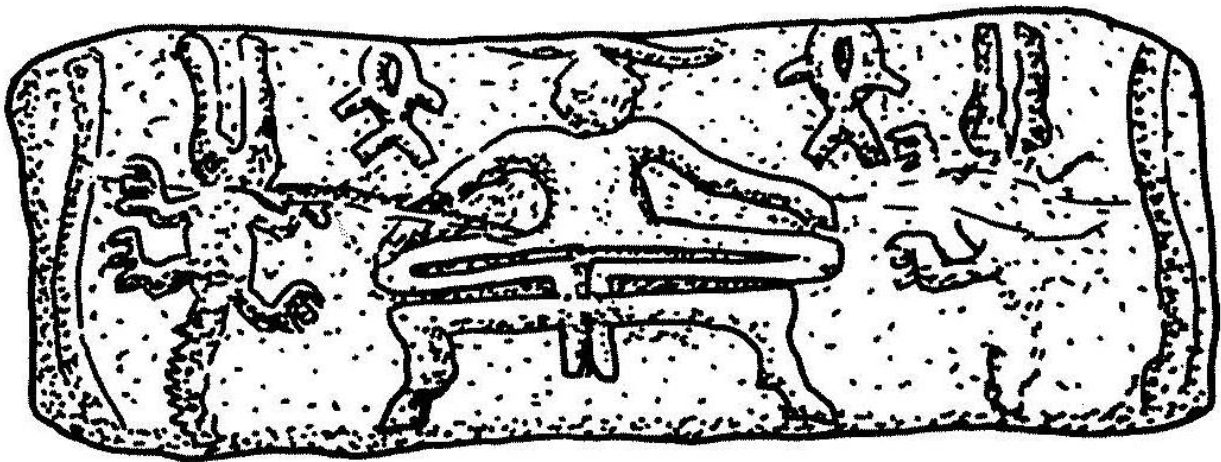


Figure 4. Horned yogin deity surrounded by fishes, gharials and snakes (M-013, Parpola [1], pg. 186 remarks that it is at Ashmolean museum, Oxford)

In the Indus valley civilization, the gharial was considered an aspect of the horned deity (Figures 5, 6 and 7) and it is often portrayed as a “Master of Animals” in a variety of mass-produced moulds and seals. Gharial is shown wearing the horns of bison bulls (*Bos gaurus*) or buffalo (M-1395 in Figure 6). Significantly, the same kind of animals adorn the sides of the Gharial-Paśupati god in Figures 5, 6 and 7 as

in the so called Paśupati or Mṛgapati (Figure 1) seals: *tiger, elephant, rhinoceros and bison/buffalo*.



Figure 5. Horned Gharial-Paśupati as “Master of Animals” [2]

In the webpage [2], a note is published, “Terracotta sealing from Mohenjo-daro depicting a collection of animals and some script symbols. This sealing may have been used in specific rituals as a narrative token that tells the story of an important myth.”



Figure 6. Horned Gharial-Paśupati crowned with buffalo horns (mass-produced IVC seals)

All living beings, mammals living on land including humans, water animals such as the large gharial and vegetation are represented in the horned Gharial deity myth. The head of the tiger is turned backwards in a mode of attention, and there is a tree standing near it. Upon a branch of the tree, a man sits (his body flexed like the letter S). His face is towards the gharial while the double hair buns (see M-440, Figure 7) at the back of his head are near the side of the tree. The motif of the

shaman on the tree (kino tree? Section 3.0) with a tiger below is portrayed independently in a number of seals (Figure 11 in Section 2.0).

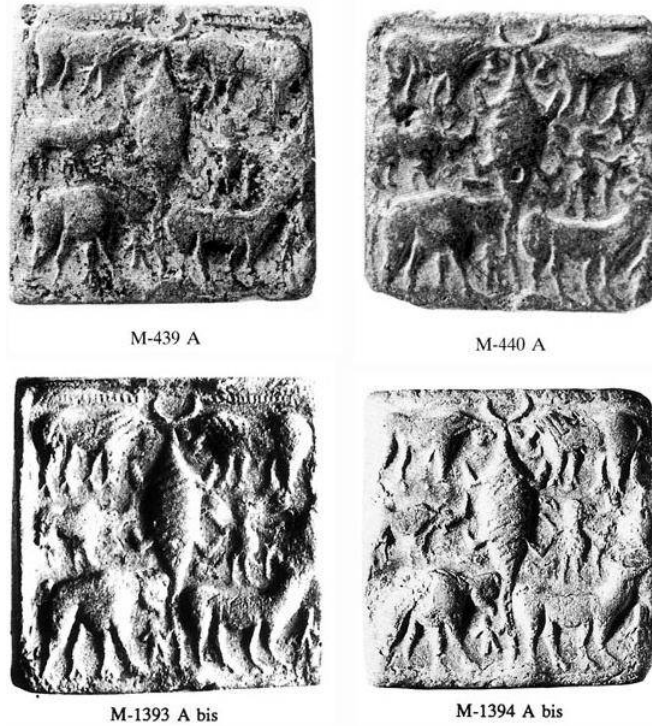


Figure 7. A number of seals of Gharial- Paśupati [3]

The most prominent part of the mature gharial males which can grow up to 20 feet in length is the long snout sporting a ghara 'pot'. This crocodile is called 'karā' in old Tamil literature. "Ghara" is formed from the Dravidian word for pot (*kuḍam/kaḍam* > *kara(ka)/ghara*). Indian gharial has the genus name, "gavialis" due to misspelling of its native name, gharial. The bulbous growth at the tip of the male gharial makes it a visual luring tool and a sonic resonator to create buzzing hum to attract females. The ghara pot-bulb is also used to make water bubbles associated with the mating rituals of the species. Another name for this crocodile is 'makara' and this again is derived from the lengthy snout of gharials, an adaptation to catch small fish. Tamil mukam/mukarai 'face' (Cf. Sanskrit mukha). A sentence "avaṇ mukaraiyaip pāru" means 'look at his face'. The makara is a crocodile (cf. J. Ph. Vogel) and its name originating as *makara* < *mukara* (cf. *maṇḍa* < *muṇḍa* 'head'; *aṇḍa* 'egg' with loss of word-initial m in *maṇḍa*, as in *āmra* 'mango (tree)' < *māmara*).

It is usual in dictionaries attributing makara etymology to Dravidian. "A large crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*) of southwest Asia, having a very broad wrinkled snout. Hindi maḡar, from Sanskrit makara, crocodile, of Dravidian origin." [4] The black-colored Kāmadēva, Hindu god of Love is makara bannered, and Varuṇa, the god of dark celestial ocean has makara (gharial) for his vāhana mount. The gharial's ghara and snout are sold as aphrodisiac in India for long. Further data on Gharial coupling

with the Indus goddess of tigers in Indus valley civilizational art, representing sky and earth respectively are given in Section 4.0.

Figure 8 shows the pictures of the Indian gharial which has a great longevity. The resemblances, e.g. its four legs, between the photograph of the gharial in Figure 8 with gharials displayed in IVC seals (Figures 5 and 19) are remarkable.

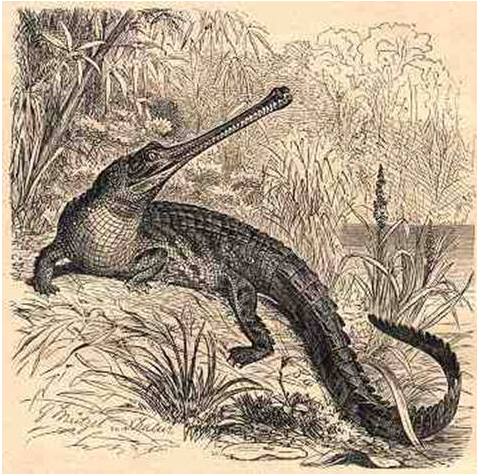


Figure 8. Indian gharial in its natural environment

2.0 Goddess as Mistress of Tigers

A number of portraits of a female divinity interacting with a tiger (Figure 9) or standing in between two tigers (Figure 10) have been unearthed by Indus valley archaeology. In Figure 9, it looks as though the tiger is charging away from the semi-human semi-bovid horned goddess, but its face is turned backwards to take orders from the goddess. Here, she may be just bringing under her control a powerful animal spirit of which she is considered the divine mistress.



Figure 9. A female being interacting with tiger [5]



M-306



M-308



Figure 10. Gilgamesh-like female being in between tigers

Even though the Harappan elites had extensive trade relations with Mesopotamia, the West Asian glyptic art of Gilgamesh in contest with lions was not represented exactly, but was modified in the Indus valley culture. In fact, the IVC avoided representing lions in their art, as a contrast to lions seen in West and Central Asian art. In IVC, female figures in three dimensional ceramics are made with a hairstyle strung together like bulbs, and faces resembling birds [6]. The bird-like female “contesting” tigers are shown in Figure 10 from samples of IVC glyptic art.



M-309



K-49



H-163



M-309

Figure 11. Shaman on the tree and an attentive tiger below

In widely attested depictions in the Mature Harappan culture, a shaman on a tree and a tiger, possibly as a hierophany of the Indus mother goddess, are shown (Figure 11). In this important motif, the head of the tiger is turned backwards so that it can pay attention to the man on the tree. The person on the tree in Figure 11 is possibly male since he wears the double hair bun, comparable with the double hair bun worn by warriors in Figure 12. Also, the double hair bun of the shaman is visible on the man who is facing the gharial in the Gharial-Paśupati seals (Figures 5-7).



Figure 12. Combat scene (K-65)

For a clear example, Figure 13 shows a tablet from Harappa [7] and its webpage states, “Molded terracotta tablet (H2001-5075/2922-01) with a narrative scene of a man in a tree with a tiger looking back over its shoulder. The tablet, found in the Trench 54 area on the west side of Mound E, is broken, but was made with the same mold as ones found on the eastern side of Mound E and also in other parts of the site (see slide 89 for the right hand portion of the same scene). The reverse of the same molded terra cotta tablet shows a deity grappling with two tigers and standing above an elephant.” Here the shaman is sitting in a horizontal cantilever beam-like branch of the tree, and it is very likely that the shaman shown in Gharial-Paśupati seals (Figures 5-7) is sitting on the tree branch with one hand holding on to a vertical branch and his legs are hanging free in the air. For comparison, another Indus seal [M-310] with the same motif is also included in Figure 13. The sitting posture of the shaman in Figure 13 recalls that of the priest-*pūcāri* in front of the goddess in the Bo tree in the famous Indus seal M-1186 [8].



Figure 13. Man-in-tree with a tiger below

3.0 River, Plant and Animal names in Indus valley culture

The naming of the long snouted crocodile as gharial based on keen observations of Nature was discussed in Section 1.0. This phenomenon of giving names to fauna and flora based on their individual characteristics is also observable in old Tamil sangam texts. It has been suggested by linguists that the river name, Sindhu comes from a useful tree, date palm: “There is some evidence to support the notion of Dravidian as a major language of the Indus valley civilization. I have pointed out elsewhere that the inventory of food plants reconstructible for PDr-1 show a fairly

good fit with those known from the Indus valley sites (Southworth, [9]). ... (2) The word for ‘date’ is reconstructible to the PDr-1 level as **kīntu* or **cīntu*; the PDr-2 form would have been **cīntu* (pronounced [*ci:ndu*] or [*si:ndu*]). A similar form, *mu-kindu* ‘wild date palm’, is reconstructed for proto-Bantu by Nurse (1983:142). The source of these words is unknown, but both the Indus valley and West Asia are possibilities. Dates were known in the Indus valley (Vats 1940:547), and the region of Sindh on the lower Indus is well-known for this fruit. An interesting possibility is that the very name for this region, and the original name for of the Indus itself (OIA *sindhu-*), is connected with this Dravidian word for ‘date’- whether the fruit was named after the region (“fruit of Sindh”), or the region after the fruit (“land of the dates”).” [10].

IVC iconography shows that palm trees (*tālam*, Dravidian genus name) such as talipot palm, toddy palm, date palm, marshy date (*hīntāla*) trees were sacred. In IVC, a filter is represented in hundreds of seals in front of animals such as unicorn [11]. Its name perhaps was *vāruṇi* (< Dravidian *vār-* ‘to trickle, to flow’, *vārttal-* ‘to pour’. Cf. *ūruṇi* ‘village water well, tank’). From Monier-Williams dictionary: *vāruṇī* “Varuṇa’s female Energy (personified either as his wife or as his daughter, produced at the churning of the ocean and regarded as the goddess of spirituous liquor) TĀr. MBh. R. Pur. ; a partic. kind of spirit (prepared from hogweed mixed with the juice of the date or palm and distilled), any spirituous liquor MBh. Kāv. &c. ; N. of Śiva’s wife.” The later god Varuṇa is discussed further in Section 4.0. Both talipot palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*) and toddy palm (*Caryota urens*) are called *śrī-tāli*. The talipot leaves are used for writing. Its beautiful gold-like bloom is rare, and comparable with stripes on a tiger.

Old Tamil has many words from this root, *cī-* ‘date palm’. In Tamil, *cīmāru*, *cīka-kaṭṭai/cīva-kaṭṭai* (cf. *pāka-kāy/pāva-kāy* ‘green bitter gourd’) is ‘broom made out of date palm leaf stems’. Tamil retains *cīntu/īntu*, *cīku/īku*, *īṅku*, *īṅcu*, *īyal*, *īrntu*, *īlam* etc., for date palm. Sri Lanka’s name Ceylon/Zeylon is related with Tamil *cīkal/cīyal* ‘date palm’ and sangam texts use *īlam* ‘toddy’ as the name for Sri Lanka. In Ceylon, royal dynasties were named as *Sinda-kula* ‘Sindhu clan’ and had marital relations with kings in south India [12]. As lions were not present in Sri Lanka or South India, *cīkalam* ‘land of palm trees’ gets linked with lions (*siṃha*) only from 4-5th centuries CE (first in *Dīpavamsa*). At that time, Pallava dynasty of south India with some connections to Iran had lion as royal emblem. Pallavas had major impact with Sri Lankan royalty through marriages and art [13].

Lions (*siṃha*) are feline animals mentioned for their thunder-like roar and so also, horses and chariots find prominence in Ṛgveda, but are absent in the Mature Harappan culture. Tigers and rhinoceros which occur in many Indus seals are missing in the Ṛgveda. Obviously, tropical jungle animals such as tigers and rhinos were not

significant culturally to the immigrating Aryans entering after the decline of Indus civilization. The rhinoceros name, *kāṇḍā* (Tamil) is related with *kāḍu* 'forest' (cf. *kuḍam/kuṇḍā* 'pot' etc.). Tigers emit a low-frequency sound that can travel long distances through thick jungles, and have excellent night vision. While hunting in darkness, dawn or dusk, they get close enough to their prey, and go for the kill with a final powerful pounce. The name of tigers in later Vedic texts, *śārdūla* is possibly related to *kārdūla* 'pouncer of the night', (*kār* 'dark/night' and *tu-* 'to leap, to pounce'). The word pair, *kārdūla:śārdūla* 'tiger' is comparable with sets such as *karkoṭa:śarkoṭa* 'serpent', *karkara:śarkara* 'pebbles', *koṅku:śaṅkha* 'conch shell' [14].

The best known sign among Indus sign lists is the fish sign which has been suggested to have the meaning of deity/astral star due to Dravidian homophonic principle. The fish sign having both meanings (*mīṇ* 'fish/star') Indus culture has parallels in ancient scripts, according to I. Mahadevan, "the arrow sign in the Sumerian script had the phonetic value *ti* with the meaning "life" as /*ti*/ stood both for 'arrow' and 'life' in the Sumerian language" and "the picture of a 'goose' stands for 'son' as the two words were homonymous in the Egyptian language." [15]. For the tiger imagery in Indus seals, the homonymic theme can be applied as well. Trees such as *vēṅkai* (*kino tree*), *ñāḷal* (tiger-claw tree '*pulinakak koṅṛai*') have been said to share some features of tigers in Dravidian myth and folklore. 2000-years old sangam poems describe dark hills covered with gold-like flowers of *vēṅkai* trees resembling like tigers and leopards. Also, when young girls go near the kino tree, and shout '*puli, puli*' (tiger! tiger!), kino trees bend and drop their flowers from high branches in sangam legends. In dravidian, *vēṅkai* means both tiger as well as Indian kino (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) tree.



Figure 14. *vēṅkai* (Indian kino) flowers and *vēṅkai* (tiger)

A possible suggestion for the identity of the tree shown in Indus seals with a man with double-bun hairstyle in the tree and tiger such as in Figures 7, 11 and 13 is the *vēṅkai* (Indian kino) tree. From the Indus valley, Kulli slip-painted terracotta jars (Third millennium BCE) with a motif alternating with a tiger followed by a tree (Figure 15) are available on the antiquity market [16]. The shaman is seen in Indus glyptic art to offer worship either to the tree or to the tiger in Figure 16. Tigers as a manifestation of the Indus goddess is further discussed in

Section 4.0. The jar in the middle shows tigers alternating with both a young plant and a grown-up tree with the same theme (Figure 15). This is significant because in IVC rituals, plants of the tree are shown carried by people (M478, Figure 17). The tree in the Indus jars could be parts of talipot palm or toddy palm.



Figure 15. Indus valley jars (Third millennium BCE)

In the tree worship seal (Figure 16), the *kōlam* geometric pattern on the left side of M-478 is noteworthy and the ritual is known as ‘*kaḷam eḷuttu*’ [17]. An altar, threshing floor is *kaḷam* formed from the verb, *kaḷai-* (to remove, to expel, to weed, to extirpate as a disease or evil eye etc.). The threshing floor as in *ulū-khala* found in Vedic texts is likely related with Dravidian *ural-kaḷam* (cf. *ural* – mortar; *ulakka* – pestle) and circular worker platforms which have central pits for holding wooden mortars have been unearthed in Indus sites [18]. In the Indus seal with the shaman kneeling before the tiger (Mackay, Plate LI), a load-bearer sign (*kāvaḍi*) is depicted [19].



M-478 Mackay, plate LI
 Figure 16. A worshipper in front of (i) a tree and (ii) a tiger



Figure 17. A ritual with tiger tree (spirit)

In Figure 17, important rituals with trees and people are portrayed. It might have involved planting of some tree plants (palms?), and stages of harvesting of branches of *vēnikai* trees in annual festivals determined by astrological calculations (e.g. equinoxes). The tree-spirit with branch-like arms bounded between two persons carrying young plants of trees might indicate a subdued forest/animal spirit. This tree harvest ceremony was possibly linked as a substitute for “domesticating” the tiger, a manifestation of the Indus goddess. The purpose was to bring the tree/tiger spirit under control to aid in hunts, to cast disease and evil eye away, and to protect people and crops of the farming communities year around from wild animals. Some form of “domestication” of tigers is shown with a feeding trough in front of the tiger (M-288) and as in Figure 19, an oblong wheel is shown above it. The harvested tree with its branches cut and two trunks left, on the left side of M-478b is shown with a roof over it. Among Indus signs, the fish sign is shown quite often with a roof above it. I. Mahadevan, “Agricultural terms in the Indus script”, 2007 has explained roof signs for crop shares [20]. Ganweriwala terracotta artifact from new excavations shows a roof over the “yogic” deity. The roof symbolism is a marker of the divine or high status in IVC signs and art (cf. old Tamil *vēntu* ‘king, god like Indra’ < *vēy-* ‘to cover/protect, to put roof’). Elephants were caught from the wild in IVC, and were trained is indicated by the presence of carpets on them in seals.

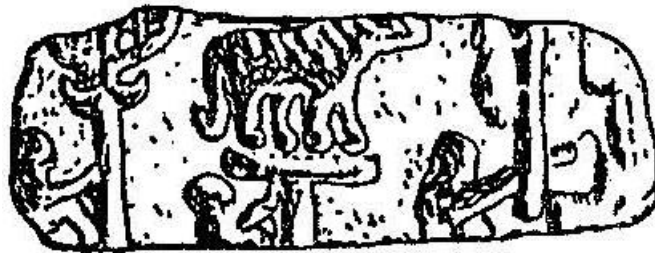


Figure 18. Tiger standard carried in Indus religious festivals

The importance of the tiger in IVC religion and culture is seen in the standards carried aloft in the festivals recorded in Indus seals. G. Possehl, *The Indus civilization*, (2003), pg. 146, shows Indus sealing with processions, possibly in Mohenjo-daro (after Marshall, 1931). The two standards carried above the crowd in processions are (a) a striped tiger (Figure 18) and (b) a bull or cow. Trained elephants were possibly paraded in IVC processions as the Gilgamesh-like goddess is shown above an elephant (Figure 10 and 19).

4.0 Creation Mythology of the Indus Civilization: Coupling of Gharial god and goddess of Tigers

A very significant archaeological discovery from Harappa has been made. This Harappan find interlinks the whole motif complex of a major aspect of Indus rituals (Figure 19). The shaman in the tree and tiger motif is presented together with (a) the seated horned great being and goddess between tigers and (b) the gharial god watching from above the buffalo getting speared by the goddess. IVC Archaeologists, J. M. Kenoyer and R. H. Meadow write: "Although neither of these specific molded terracotta tablet pieces comes from Trench 11, four less well preserved examples from the same mold(s) were found in debris outside of the perimeter wall in that area, clearly establishing a second half of Period 3B date for these tablets. Note the rear of the buffalo and the front of the gharial in the left tablet which overlaps with the iconography of the right tablet, although in this case they do not seem to come from the same mold. (See also Images 89 and 90.)" [21].

Figure 19 shows these Indus narrative tablets which display the Harappan myth complex of the gharial god and goddess of tigers. Three male-female pairs are portrayed, (a) seated yogin-like deity and a goddess between tigers. The female gender of the deity is clear due to the well-formed breasts of the figure just like the female in Figure 9. (b) a male shaman on the tree with a tiger below, an aspect of the Gilgamesh-like goddess and (c) the gharial god floating in the sky watching the battle from above where the water buffalo is being speared by the goddess. The deity spearing the buffalo is very likely a female because of the slender limbs depicted. In addition, in the so called 'proto-śiva' seal (Figure 1) an attacking tiger and a water buffalo are depicted on opposite sides of the horned being, where the tiger represents the fully theriomorphic form of the Indus goddess attacking the buffalo (A. Hiltebeitel, "The Indus Valley 'Proto- Śiva' Reexamined through Reflections on the Goddess, the Buffalo, and the Symbolism of vāhanas," *Anthropos*. 73, [1978], pp. 767-97). Assuming that the buffalo spearing deity as a male would break the gender pattern of these IVC narrative tablets.



Figure 19. Indus narrative tablets

The female goddess fighting the buffalo demon (Figure 19) is again shown with the buffalo in the IVC seal, H-176 (Figure 20). The oblong wheel above the goddess in Figure 19 is depicted twice in H-176. The goddess wears a long, broad 'tail-pendent' (*vāl-kōmaṇam*) which starts from the top of the head and hangs down the back. In IVC art, 'tail-pendent' ornament of the female is seen in (i) goddess inside the fig tree in M-1186 [8] (ii) the buffalo-horned, bovid-hooved *mahiṣī* goddess in M-305 with distinct female breasts, (iii) goddess in between two warriors (K-65 in Figure 12) and (iv) 'tiger-centaur' lady (M-311, K-50) which may be impersonators of the goddess of tigers, rather than the tiger goddess herself, because 'tiger-centaurs' [22] wears goat horns which are little lower in hierarchy than bovid horns. On the other side of H-176 (Figure 20) the 'yoginī' goddess adorned with a 'tail-pendent' ornament (like M-305) along with the shaman on the tree with the tiger below.

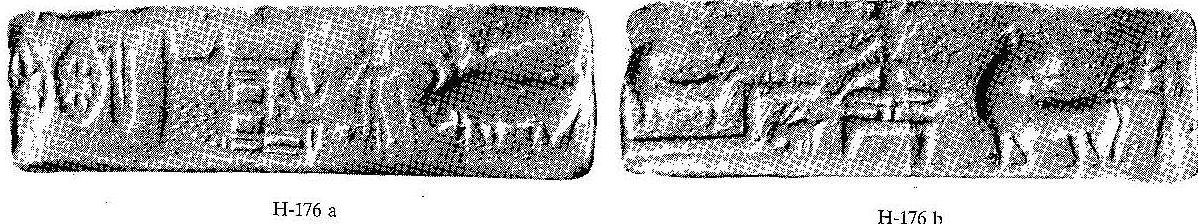


Figure 20. Goddess with buffalo on one side and as 'yoginī' and a man on the tree with a tiger below (H-176)

Indus seals exist where fish is shown floating in the sky above the subject to mark the divine status of the subject. Figure 21 is one such seal (M-298), where the composite unicorn and short horned bison bull is shown with a fish above it. Indus artists knew to depict scores of animals and it was their choice to show the gharial god in the sky directly above the scene where the goddess kills a buffalo with a barbed spear (Figure 19) which can be compared with the fish in the sky above unicorn-bison composite in Figure 21. Given the status of the gharial deity, a suggestion for a scissors-like Indus sign is that it is the gharial. This sign is repeated twice in 'proto-Śiva' seal (Figure 1) and occurs also in the man on the tree seal (Figure 13) with the tiger. Tamil word, *mutalai* 'crocodile' is from *mutu-* 'ancient', *mutal* 'first'.

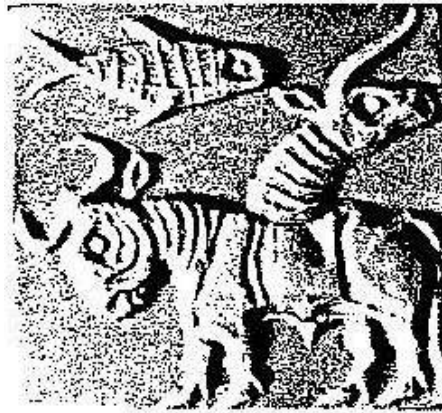


Figure 21. Fish above the composite animal of unicorn/bison bull



Figure 22. Makara crocodile
(as a linga sprout, and with a nymph)

In Buddhist and Hindu art, the makara crocodile is often associated with fertility (Figure 22). In historic India, the gharial deity of the Indus valley civilization re-emerges as the *vāhana* of Varuṇa, the lord of the Sky and of Rain in the Vedas. Varuṇa seems to have absorbed many functions of the Indus gharial sky-god. In the horizon where ocean and sky meet, the liminal figure of the gharial was able to cross into the sky in IVC mythology. Varuṇa, is the lord of darkness riding the sky in a gharial (Figure 23) who maintains the order (Ṛta) of the Cosmos. He finds the sun hidden in the cosmic waters, and sets it free in the sky. For getting male children,

one has to pray to *varuṇa*. The stars are the 1000 eyes of his spies who help him to maintain Ṛta and to dispense justice. "The *Purāṇa* texts contain an interesting conception about the pole star, which seems to be explained by its Dravidian name *vaṭa-mīṇ*. In reply to the question, why the stars and planets do not fall down from the sky, these heavenly bodies are said to be bound to the pole star with invisible 'ropes of wind'. These 'ropes' seem to refer to the air-roots of the cosmic banyan tree, which God Varuṇa is said to hold up in the sky in the earliest Indian text dating from c. 1000 BCE (*Ṛgveda* 1.24.7), a conception naturally following from Dravidian *vaṭa-mīṇ* 'north star' = 'banyan star' = 'rope star' " (Parpola, Kyoto lecture, [23]).



Figure 23. Varuṇa on gharial crocodile in the Cosmos



Figure 24. Indus seal showing IVC Creation Myth, Earth Goddess of Tigers coupling with Gharial Sky God [24]

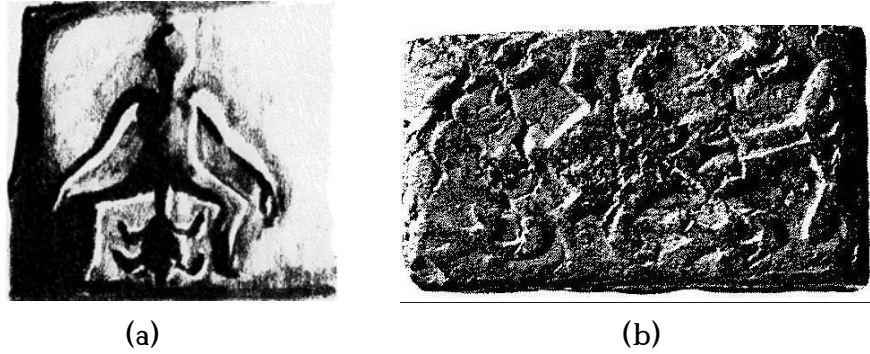


Figure 25. (a) Gharial god and Earth goddess (source: P. Rawson, 1972) and (b) Indus terracotta seal showing a gharial with fish (H-172)

Indus ritual seals show the important myth of the goddess of the tigers mating with the gharial god (Figures 24 and 25). Even though J. Marshall misidentified in it some “plant sprout”, it is actually the Gharial deity coupling with the Earth mother. This is associated with the creation mythology in the Indus valley. In fact the “plant” has a thick round center which is problematic if it really were a plant, and the four so called “leaves” are visually consistent with the four legs of the gharial deity in the IVC seal depictions (Figures 5, 6, and 7). The mother goddess in Figure 24 has legs wide apart and her hands are shown in the same fashion as the proto-śiva seal (Figure 1). At her left side are shown a pair of rampant tigers (cf. Figure 10 also) and these are regarded by Marshall as two genii, animal ministrants of the deity. In ancient Egyptian myth, the sky goddess, Nut unites with the male god of the earth, Geb. But in Bronze era Indus culture, the genders of sky and earth deities are reversed: the earth mother (some times represented as tigers) couples with the sky god represented as the long-snouted gharial (Figure 24). Figure 25 (a) is “Drawing of seal representing female in intercourse with a phallic crocodile, c 2000 BC, stone, from Harappa” (Philip Rawson, *Indian Art*, pg. 9. Studio Vista: Dutton Picturebook, 1972). In the Indus seal (Figure 24), the gharial is represented as stout reptile due to restrictions of space availability for the artisan. This form of gharial depictions is seen in Indus amulets (H-705, H-172) which show just the gharial without earth goddess (Figure 25.b). The depictions of gharials in Figures 24 and 25b are nearly identical. In Indian art (early centuries BCE), nude goddess and crocodile are shown together in ring-stones around a central hole [25].



Figure 26. Indus seal showing a couple on one side, and the gharial deity watching wild animals like tiger below

The creation myth of the gharial god and earth goddess is further explained by the presence of sexual scenes in amulets (M-489). In the terracotta amulet (Figure 26), one side shows a human couple mating and on the other side, the gharial deity from the sky above is shown watching the earth below just as the gharial is shown above the buffalo versus goddess battle scene (Figure 19). The earth mother's tiger leads in the row of wild animals, and after it, leopard, rhinoceros and elephant follow.

5.0 Summary

In this illustrated essay, a Harappan creation myth of a gharial sky god and a goddess of tigers has been described with examples from seals produced in the Indus valley civilization. It is important to study the whole myth complex with available seal images and signs, and modern imaging and microscopic technology will aid in the proper understanding of this pan-Indus Founders' mythology. Some key concepts in IVC imagery have been explained through references to old Tamil sangam texts. The sedentary agricultural civilization of the Indus people developed their mythology built around tropical animals such as bisons, buffalos, tigers, rhinos, fish and gharials. After the IVC decline, these animals do not occupy a high place in the nomadic Aryan mythology. Instead, horses (and chariots) and lions gain new importance in myth replacing legends of tigers, rhinos, fish and gharials. It is hoped that new materials related to the creation myth of the Indus culture will become available through archaeologists' spade in the future.

Notes:

1. A. Parpola, Deciphering the Indus Script, Cambridge university press, 1994.
2. Figure 5 is from <http://www.harappa.com/indus/32.html>
3. Steve Farmer sent these pictures for me upon request. My thanks to him.
<http://www.safarmer.com/Indo-Eurasian/M-439andrelated.jpg>
4. Dravidian etymology for makara and English mugger,
<http://www.yourdictionary.com/ahd/m/m0467700.html>
5. My thanks to Francesco Brighenti and Max Dashu for explaining aspects of tiger mythology. The goddess (Figure 9) is from J. Marshall, Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization, London, 1931, I, Pl. XIII: 17; 111, Pl. CXI: 357.
<http://www.suppressedhistories.net/indus/tigers.html>
6. Bird-like women ceramic statues in Indus culture.



7. Harappan tablet, H2001-5075/2922-01
<http://www.harappa.com/indus3/185.html>
8. Worship of the goddess in the fig tree (M-1186)



9. F. Southworth, Ancient economic plants of South Asia: linguistic archaeology and early agriculture, pp. 649-68 in Languages and cultures: studies in honor of Edgar C. Polome, 1988.
10. F. Southworth, The reconstruction of prehistoric South Asian language contact, in The uses of linguistics (ed. E. Bendix), New York: New York Academy of Sciences

Also, (i) For Brahui language as an ancient remnant in Indus region and not moving to Pakistan/Iran from East or South India just 800 or so years ago, David W. McAlpin, Velars, Uvulars, and North Dravidian hypothesis, JAOS 123, 521-546, 2003.
(ii) R. W. Nixon, The Date Palm-"Tree of Life" in the Subtropical Deserts. Economic Botany, 5:274-301, 1951.

11. Iravatham Mahadevan, The sacred filter standard facing the unicorn: more evidence. South Asian Archaeology. 1993, Helsinki
<http://www.harappa.com/script/mahcult.html>



Hindu god of agriculture, *Balarāma/Saṃkarṣaṇa*, is shown drunk with a toddy cup. Like Buddha under the bodhi tree, Balarama is shown under a palm tree, and holds a plough. Balarāma's sangam Tamil name means "white" complexion - *vāli* (cf. *pāl* 'milk') and *veḷḷai* ('white' and 'toddy'). Farmers' title in Dravidian, *Veḷḷāḷa* (Tamil) and *Velama* (Telugu) is related with *Balarāma*. Likewise Karnataka toponyms such as *Bēḷūru* (*vēḷ-ūru*, the Hoysala capital), *Beḷagām* (*veḷa-grāma*) and even Ṛgvedic *Vaila-sthāna*. As Balarāma, palm-wine made from palm-milk is also white in color. In weddings, *tāli*, made of palm leaf, is tied around the bride's neck. Children are made to wear palm-leaf necklaces string with tiger teeth (*pulippal tāli*) and, Manjusri, a Buddhist bodhistatva (from Skanda-Kumāra) is shown in bronzes with *pulippal tāli* necklace.

12. T N Cuki Cuppiramaniyan, The Pallavas of Kanchi in South-East Asia, Swadesamitran, Madras, 1951.

13. (i) P. Schalk, *Iḷam < sihalā? : an assessment of an argument* , 2004, Uppsala, Sweden
(ii) D. K. Dohanian, The Mahayana Buddhist sculpture of Ceylon 1977, New York
(iii) J. Holt, Buddha in the crown : Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist traditions of Sri Lanka Oxford University Press, 1991
(iv) A. Parpola, Pandaîe and Sîtâ: On the historical background of the Sanskrit epics. Journal of the American Oriental Society 2002, 122 (2): 361-373.

14. Word pairs with k-/ś- should be compared between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian by linguists. Some examples are,

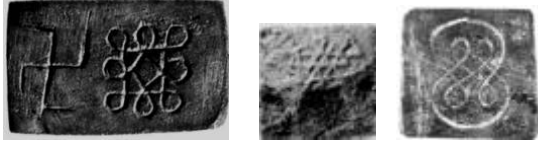
- (a) Dravidian *kīl-/kīṭ-* "to scratch, to split, to draw a line" with Sanskrit *śīta* 'furrow'.
(b) *śīlimukha* 'arrow' : *kīlimukam*.
(c) *karkoṭa:śarkoṭa* 'serpent'. Sangam texts have many references to serpents as 'gem-givers/holders' *kal* = (gem) stone, *koṭa* = giver
(d) Indian words, *kakoṭa: śakoṭa* 'wheel, cart' are derived ultimately from ancient Near East (Sumerian *gigir*, Hebrew *galgal*).
(e) *karkaḷa* - stones, so small bricks used in agnicayana, *śarkara* (< *karkara*) 'pebbles' (also, sugar).

15. I. Mahadevan, Towards a Grammar of the Indus Texts: 'Intelligible to the eye if not to the ears'. Tamil Civilization, 1986, Vol. 4, Nos. 3 & 4. pp. 24-28

16. Asian art, Art of Indus valley section in <http://www.barakatgallery.com/>

17. There are different types of *kōlam*: *neḷi-*, *iḷai-*, and *kampi-*. *kampi-kōlam* without dots are used for yantras. M. Ascher, The Kolam tradition, American Scientist, 90, 1, 2002.

Indus seal 'geometric patterns':



Here is an ancient love poem from Sangam literature. A priest of Murukan prepares an altar (kaḷam) and does his ritual trance.

Vēlaṅ priest is useless!

In that confused time
when no one realized
that it was the broad fragrant chest
of the chieftain in the countryside of forests and waterfalls
descending from high mountains where *aṇaṅku* dwells
which caused [my] desire and suffering,
the women of ancient wisdom proclaimed:

"She will be soothed
by worshipping *Neṭuvē!*
whose strong arms are famous
for wiping out those
who do not bow to him."

In the awe-inspiring midnight,
to invite *Muruku*,
red millet mixed with blood
was scattered as offerings,
to the loud singing in the shrine,
the spear was garlanded,
the threshing-floor (*kaḷam*) polished.

while [my] lover came to cure me
of the debilitating illness of love,
like a mighty tiger who moves fast,
hiding in a shelter watching the elephants as its prey,
so that the watchmen of the large house
in our beautiful home
do not see him.

He wears wreaths with many flowers
buzzing with honey bees,
which grow in plenty near the waterfalls
on the slopes fragrant with sandal.

He comes to fulfill the desire of my heart
with his lust,
and whenever I make love to him
so that I swoon in the soul's ecstasy,

I must laugh, really,
when I see the waste
spent here on the useless priest with the spear!

- *akanāṇūru 22*

The female author is called "The Lovely Eyed One who Sang About Religious Frenzy" (*veṛi pāṭiya Kāmakkaṇṇiyār*). From K. Zvelebil, "The nature of Sacred power", *Acta Orientalia*, 40 (1980), pp. 157-192.

18. Indus worker platforms



19. (i) Hilda Kuper, An ethnographic description of Kavady, a Hindu ceremony in South Africa, *African Studies*, 18, 3, 1959, pp. 118-132

(ii) A. Parpola, On the Harappan 'Yoke-Carrier' pictogram and the Kavadi worship. *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies*. Madurai. 1981, Vol. I: pp. 2.73-89.

20. IM, Agricultural terms in the Indus script, 2007

<http://www.harappa.com/arrow/indus-agricultural-terms.pdf>

21. Indus narrative tablets,

http://www.harappa.com/indus5/page_440.html

22. "Tiger centaur" female (K-50)



23. A. Parpola, Study of the Indus script. *Transactions of the International Conference of Eastern Studies*, no. 50 (2005): 28-66. Tokyo

http://www.helsinki.fi/~aparpola/tices_50.pdf

24. M. S. Vats, 1943, Vol. II, Plate XCIII

25. J. N. Banerjea, *The development of Hindu iconography*, 1985 (1956), Calcutta, pp. 170-173. pg. 172, "Marshall observes about the Taxila discs, 'In these ring-stones, which are quite small and used perhaps as *ex voto* offerings, nude figures of a goddess of fertility are significantly engraved with consummate skill and care inside the central hole, thus indicating in a manner that can hardly be mistaken the connection between them and the female principle.' The association of the mother-goddess of some of these discs with alligator or alligators is also of unique importance and interest from the point of view of the developed Śakti cult in India. In mediaeval Parvati images of Bengal, an alligator (or iguana, *godhā*) is almost invariably

shown on the pedestal." Many IVC sites throughout the Indus river valley have their place names ending in *-kōṭ* (cf. Tamil *kōṭṭai*). Sculptures of the now forgotten goddess *Kōṭṭavī* are found in north India.

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