Challenges in Deciphering Harappan Script

Why in News?

Recently, the scholars have struggled to solve many subproblems to decipher the Harappan writing system.

- **Challenges –** Deciding if set of symbols actually represent a writing system.
- *Devising appropriate procedures* to isolate or segment the stream of symbols into a sequence of single signs.
- *Reducing the set of signs* to the minimal set by forming (its alphabet, syllabary, or inventory of signs) by identifying all allographs.

***Allograph** is the different representations of the same character in different typefaces. It is the same sign written in a variant form, for example a printed 'a' and a cursive 'a'*

- Assigning to each symbol their specified value, whether phonetic or otherwise.
- Trying to match these values to a specific language.
- **No multilingual inscriptions** – IVC had robust trade links with the contemporaneous Mesopotamian Civilisation whose cuneiform script was deciphered but there isn't any multilingual inscriptions found.

*The most famous multilingual inscription is the **Rosetta Stone**, which contains a decree passed during the reign of Ptolemy V in 196 BCE in 3 scripts: Greek, demotic (a later ancient Egyptian script), and hieroglyphics.*

- **Unknown Script and/or Language** – The Indus script is under the category of 'an unknown script writing an unknown language'.

3 basic categories of undeciphered scripts/languages
• An unknown script writing a known language. • A known script writing an unknown language. • An unknown script writing an unknown language.

- **Insufficient material evidences –** Although some 3,500 seals have been identified till date, given that each seal has on average only 5 characters inscribed, it isn't sufficient to decipher the script.
- This general paucity of information has made it difficult to decipher its script.

*The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister has announced a **$1 million prize** for*

deciphering the script of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

Reference

The Indian Express| Challenges in Deciphering Indus Script

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