Dholavira - UNESCO World Heritage Site

Why in news?

Dholavira, the archaeological site of a Harappan-era city, has recently received the UNESCO world heritage site tag.

What is the Dholavira site?

- The IVC (Indus Valley Civilisation) city is located on a hillock near present-day Dholavira village in Kutch district.
- [Dholavira, a village with a population of around 2,000, is the nearest human settlement at present.]
- It was discovered in 1968 by archaeologist Jagat Pati Joshi.
- The site's excavation between 1990 and 2005 under the supervision of archaeologist Ravindra Singh Bisht uncovered the ancient city.
- It was a commercial and manufacturing hub for about 1,500 years before its decline and eventual ruin in 1500 BC.
- [Since the excavation at the site, the ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) has developed a museum here.
- Near the ancient city is a fossil park where wood fossils are preserved.]

What are the distinct features of the site?

- Dholavira is the fifth largest metropolis of IVC.
- It comes after Mohen-jo-Daro, Ganweriwala and Harappa in Pakistan and Rakhigarhi in Haryana of India.
- The site has a fortified citadel, a middle town and a lower town.
- There are walls made of sandstone or limestone instead of mud bricks in many other Harappan sites.
- There area cascading series of water reservoirs, outer fortification, two multi-purpose grounds, and nine gates with unique designs.
- The site also has a funerary architecture featuring tumulus - hemispherical structures like the Buddhist Stupas.
- Unlike graves at other IVC sites, no mortal remains of humans have been discovered at Dholavira.
- Memorials that contain no bones or ashes but offerings of precious stones, etc. add a new dimension to the personality of the Harappans.

What were the key economic activities?

- Remains of a copper smelter indicate that Harappans, who lived in Dholavira, knew metallurgy.
- The traders of Dholavira might have sourced copper ore from present-day Rajasthan, and Oman and UAE, and exported finished products.
- Dholavira also used to export timber.
- It was also a hub of manufacturing jewellery made of shells and semi-precious stones, like agate.
- Such beads peculiar to the Harappan workmanship have been found in the royal graves of Mesopotamia, indicating trade with the Mesopotamians.

What led to its fall?

- Its decline also coincided with the collapse of Mesopotamia, indicating the integration of economies.
- Harappans, who were maritime people, lost a huge market.
- The local mining, manufacturing, marketing and export businesses got affected once Mesopotamia fell.
- From 2000 BC, Dholavira entered a phase of severe aridity due to climate change and rivers like Saraswati drying up.
- Because of a drought-like situation, people started migrating towards the Ganges valley.
- Or, they moved towards south Gujarat and further beyond in Maharashtra.
- [In those times,the Great Rann of Kutch, which surrounds the Khadir island on which Dholavira is located, used to be navigable.
- But the sea receded gradually and the Rann became a mudflat.]

What is the significance of UNESCO recognition?

- Dholavira became the fourth site from Gujarat and 40th from India to make it to the UNESCO list.
- It is the first site of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) in India to get the tag.
- The UNESCO listing became possible because the site was found free from any kind of encroachment, a rarity in India.
- [Though it was excavated recently, the Dholavira site has remained free from encroachment in historical periods as well as in the modern era.]
- The UNESCO has termed Dholavira as one of the most remarkable and well-preserved urban settlements in South Asia dating from the 3rd to mid-2nd millennium BCE.

What are the other Harappan sites in Gujarat?

- Before Dholavira’s excavation, Lothalwas the most prominent site of IVC in Gujarat.
- Lothal is in Saragwala village on the bank of Sabarmati in Dholka taluka of Ahmedabad district.
- Excavated between 1955 and 1960, it was discovered to be an important port city of the ancient civilisation, with structures made of mud bricks.
- From a graveyard in Lothal, 21 human skeletons were found.
- Foundries for making copperware were also discovered.
- Ornaments made of semi-precious stones, gold etc. were also found from the site.
- Besides Lothal, Rangpur on the bank of Bhadar river in Surendranagar district was the first Harappan site in the state to be excavated.
- Rojdi in Rajkot district, Prabhas in Gir Somnath district, Lakhabaval in Jamnagar, and Deshalpar in Kutch are among other Harappan sites in the state.

Source: The Indian Express

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