

GENDERED URBANISM: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND LEGAL ROLES IN INDUS AND MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This research paper shows the comparative analysis of women's rights, political role, and socio-economic authority in Indus and West Asian Civilization of Mesopotamia, comparative analysis through the gender and political archaeology has been made to accomplish this research paper. No significant research has been made previously in Pakistani context to assess women's rights beyond history through archaeological perspectives. Ample archaeological evidences are available in Indus Civilization articulating the multi-dimensional role and contribution of women in social fabric, religious appearance and most importantly in economy. Archaeological record shows women as most influential political figure in Indus Civilization through careful expert analysis based on discovered female figurines, ornaments, seals, spindle whorls and the world-famous statue of dancing girl. The large number of female figurines from Indus are interpreting the sanctity, fertility and worship of mother goddess. The prominent statue of dancing girl with confident visibility shows feminism as one of strong cultural representation. It is still debatable even having matriarchal or matrifocal system along with majorly symbolic appearance doesn't mean to have women a political authority. Comparatively, documentary evidences at Mesopotamia reveal women were expert wine maker, best healer, trade in charge and had right of proprietorship. Hence, due to undeciphered Indus script no written record but artifactual evidences strongly suggest the centralized role of women in textile, crafts, house management and in rituals. Through the lens of redefine androcentric notions of ancient urbanism. The Mesopotamian written records, Law sections, tablet manuscript and record of Ziggurats are sufficient evidences for proving women's proprietorship, inheritance, Business inclusion, dowry and key role in temple-based economy. Outcomes of this research paper will provide baseline to historians, social scientists and women rights activists to devise future policies to promote and protect women rights.

Keywords: Bronze age Women's socio-economic role 1, Indus & Mesopotamia 2, Gender archaeology 3, Fertility & Symbolism 4, Comparative analysis 5.

Introduction: since decades the research has been made on women rights in ancient civilizations, warfare, gigantic architecture, elite kinship were the early archaeological interpretations were deemed for defining early civilizations (Wylie, 1991) such male dominant narratives were overwhelmingly confronted by feminist intellectuals which undermined the women's

socio economic role (Conkey & Spetor, 1984). Urbanization, fertile lands, trade, effective administration and craft specialization were the key factors of Indus and Mesopotamia at another side some complication & dilemma are still there, Mesopotamia has deciphered its written records which Indus don't yet but relying on artifactual evidences (wright,2010). This difference raises

questions over interpretation and explanation. This research paper goes through gender archaeology and ethno archaeological models to reconstruct women's key role in both civilization,

the purpose isn't to prioritize but to know how gender was treated and taken in ancient urban civilizations.



Fig No.01, Map showing trade route in-between Indus & Mesopotamia, Source: Wikipedia

Literature review: Possehl (2002) carefully analyzed the economic and social structure of Indus civilization, focused on significance of craft specialization and trade activities, he talks of women role for urban development in terms of economy.

Bahrani, 2001, elaborated the gender role in Mesopotamia and interpreted the written records representing women's role in ritual and economy, more particularly and symbolically.

Wright, 2009, says uniform house pattern, craft specialization were linked to women's contribution in economy and gendered based potentials and spaces.

Schmandt-Besserat 1992, examined the tablets found from Mesopotamia, showing women's role in weaving, trade, house management which is linked to city development system.

Biagi 2004, carefully analyzed the Bronze Age figurines declaring them as major evidence showing social space for women in religion and craft production.

Conkey & Spector 1984, instituted the concept of feminist archaeology, criticized male dominance in analyzing early civilization and focused on legitimate assessment to highlight women's role.

Gender historiography in Indus and Mesopotamia: early Mesopotamian historical records based on royal courts highlights dominance of male rulers while undermining feminine role, but at same scholars, historians' emphasis the most influenced role of temple women and noble priestesses (Bahrani, 2001). Same, experts on Indus relate the female figures with fertility and all implementation of mother goddess (Possehl, 2002). Critiques stresses over simply relying reading rather than contextual studies (Conkey & Spector, 1984). Recent studies describe standardized urbanism, craft specialization and house management are key factors for understanding social organization (wright. 2010).such trends divert the monumental absence to daily routines, where working women are visible only through the archaeology.

Women's rights in Mesopotamia: Babylonian king Hammurabi gave world's first written constitution, the law of Hammurabi legally

protected women's right like dowry, marriage contract, right of divorce, inheritance and proprietorship (Roth, 1997). Women could regain their dower and could make business deals. Widowed women had authority over property holding, could look for butter and bread for their children. Temples worked as institutions which safeguarded and further strengthened the feminine legacy & authority, chief priestesses had authority over estate and over looked economical activities. Manuscript found from tablets described the women supervision and their wages (Bahrani, 2001). However male dominant laws had authority over marital affairs which shows male gendered control (Pollock 1999). Consequently women enjoyed numerous economic perks and privileges within patriarchal framework.

Women agency in Indus Civilization: due to lack of written record, status of Indus women can be assessed archaeologically, grave goods suggest meager difference which reveal no any gender based social difference was made (Possehl, 2002). Uniform Indus town planning with no royal architecture, some of researchers are of opinion that Indus had joint governance pattern (wright, 2010). Spinning weaving, fabric, bead making, ceramics and well organized and specialized craft activities were mainly performed through female workers (David & Kramer 2001). This material based analysis clearly indicate women contribution in economy and production. Exuberant number of female figurine must be dealt carefully instead considering them as matriarchy, gender archaeology sets apart their figurative representation from administrative dominance (Conkey & Spector, 1984).

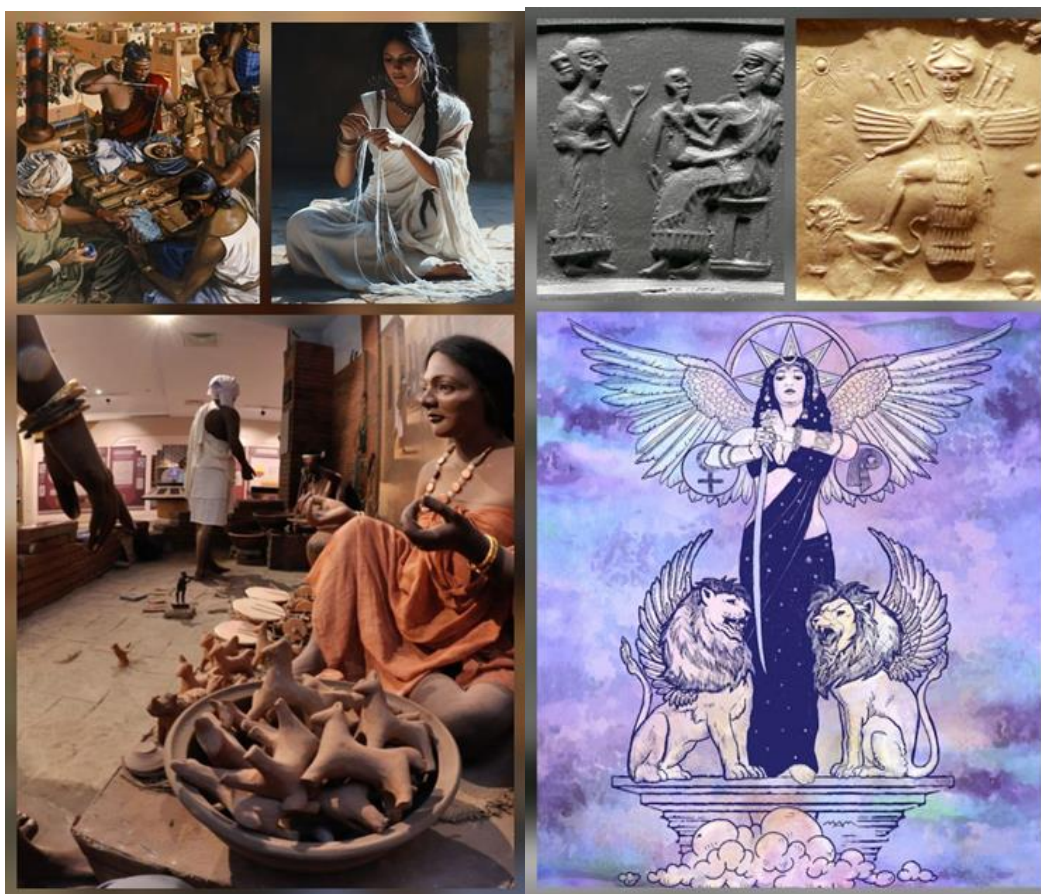


Fig No.02-03 showcasing women's social, political economical & religious role in Indus & Mesopotamia (02- Indus women contributing in economics, 03- Mesopotamian goddess Inanna)

Urban development: relied on surplus production and organized manpower, temples in Mesopotamia hired women workers, particularly in textiles manufacturing and farming practices (Bahrani 2001). Ration record list written in cuneiform language described the managerial role of women which further consolidate women's role from local level to institutionalized economies. The Indus merchants traded locally and up to Mesopotamia, specialized craft and technology standardized weight system indicate well established economy (Wright 2010). Artifactual evidence suggest effective house management obviously backed by women contribution to the urban civilization.

Religious and Political role of women: Inanna was the highest rank goddess of Mesopotamian

religion, written records confirms women as high rank priestesses performed rituals and economic control (Pollock, 1999), such examples prove that women could hold official religious authority while in Indus female figurine, artifacts make feminism more symbolic rather than political figure (Conkey & Spector 1984).

Normative & Gender role: code of Hammurabi devised clear clause for inheritance, marriage, sexual conduct and for veiling (Roth, 1997), these laws were made in patriarchy system but same ensure the women proprietorship usually and legally. But in Indus on material based analysis which suggests that there was no gender discrimination.



Fig. No-03-04, Religious and cultural symbolic representation of Indus women, Mother goddess common women dressing pattern and dancing girl: Source: Harrapa.com.

Comparative analysis: clear evidence based distinction is surfaced through this analysis, Mesopotamians has clear written records, hence contrary in Indus studies are made on cultural

material but both civilizations prove women's key role and authority in economy and religion, development in both civilization was result of organized labor and craft specialization not on

gendered women's contribution in craft, agriculture and in religion were the main sources in development of both civilizations.

Conclusion: Assessing socio economic and women rights in ancient civilization was not so simpler, women of Mesopotamia enjoyed all perk and privileges within codal framework, women's agency in Indus is very much clearer through archaeological studies and evidences based on surplus production, economic sustainability and urban craft organization, gender based interdisciplinary research enhance understanding of ancient urban development, challenges and male dominant narrative. Accepting women's contribution gives deep historical perspectives to current discourse of equitable development and equal gender opportunities.

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