



# **Nationalising the Harappan Past: India, Pakistan and Mortimer Wheeler in the Early Post- Colonial South Asia**

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## **Abstract**

The Harappan civilisation that was discovered in the early 1920s became a matter of intense debate in the decades following the partition of India in 1947. As the boundaries of the newly created nation-states, Pakistan and India were drawn, almost the entire excavated area associated with the Harappan civilisation went to Pakistan. And it inaugurated an era of academic politics in which Pakistani scholars and politicians claimed a five thousand years old antiquity for their nation-state based on the Harappan civilisation. On the other hand, the Indian archaeologists began searching for the Harappan sites in the valley of the Ghaggar (identified with Rigvedic Sarasvati River) – now dry, to justify India’s linkages with the same civilisation. In this academic politics, one British archaeologist, R. E. Mortimer Wheeler (the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India; from 1944 to 1948, and Archaeological advisor to Pakistan ministry; from 1948 to 1950) played a central role. This paper argues that the colleagues and several erstwhile students of this Englishman in both India and Pakistan participated in this academic politics. As they formulated new national historical frameworks, the

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Harappan civilisation was transformed into a first civilisational landmark in the history of both their respective countries.

**Keywords:** Mortimer Wheeler, Harappan civilisation, West Pakistan, Mohenjodaro, Rigvedic Sarasvati

## 1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, the national identity was intimately connected with the popular belief in the self-rule over a specific territory ('motherland'<sup>i</sup>) that its inhabitants could claim as their own because of historical reasons. To create such a popular belief both nationalist history and national identity rooted in 'motherland' were required. Neither India nor Pakistan could ignore this precondition, while they rationalised their existence as a nation-state after the withdrawal of the British. In spite of inheriting a modern administrative infrastructure from their erstwhile rulers, leaders/academicians of India and Pakistan had to re-conceptualize their respective histories to suit the post-partition political realities. The way the land and its people were sliced into two halves to create two nation-states, it was not possible to do the same with their common history and heritage without inventing new theoretical frameworks for reimagining their respective pre-partition pasts.

The major issue that the scholars of both the countries faced after partition was an anomalous division of their archaeological heritage, and it precipitated contested claims in India and Pakistan over the Harappan civilisation (also known as Indus civilisation). The Harappan civilisation was discovered in the early 1920s under the leadership of John Marshall<sup>ii</sup>, the Director-General (from 1902 to 1928) of the Archaeological Survey of India (hereafter, ASI), and had been identified as the earliest urban culture in the entire South Asia. As the boundaries of the newly created nation-states, Pakistan and India were drawn in the 1947, almost the entire excavated area associated with the Harappan civilisation went to Pakistan leaving only two Harappan sites, Rangpur (in Gujarat) and Kotla Nihang Khan (Punjab) to India. And it inaugurated an era of academic politics in which Pakistan claimed a five thousand

years old antiquity based on the remains of the Harappan cities within its political boundaries and Indian archaeologists had to undertake extensive spade work in the valley of the Ghaggar (identified with Rigvedic Sarasvati river) – now dry, to justify its linkages with the same civilisation in the aftermath of India's partition.

In this academic politics that was centered on the Harappan civilisation, this paper argues that a British archaeologist named R. E. Mortimer Wheeler, the last Director General of the ASI under the colonial government, played a central role. Both colleagues and several erstwhile students of this Englishman on the both sides of the border in the 1950s and 1960s, this paper will show, participated in this academic politics and nationalised the Harappan past of their respective nation-states.

## 2. Civilizing the natives

'For in India you are again the cakravartin; a ruler the wheels of whose chariot roll everywhere without obstruction, an emperor, a sovereign of the world. Literally, a wheel-turner; but who can doubt that the simple meaning of this word is really a Wheeler?' (Burton-Page, 1970).

The lofty attributes like *chakravartin* were attributed to Mortimer Wheeler by John Burton-Page, for whom Wheeler was a rock-star in the twentieth century British archaeology. However misplaced the attribute of *chakravartin* may appear in the above passage, the role of Mortimer Wheeler in the archaeological institutions of both the countries- India and Pakistan, was immensely influential in the years following the partition of India. His impact on the early post-colonial archaeology in south Asia was so tremendous that expressions such as 'typical wheelerian fashion', and 'wheelerian lines' were often used by archaeologists in India to define Mortimer Wheeler's approach to archaeology for several decades; Indian archaeologist actually took pride in employing 'wheeler methods' in their archaeological works (Sankalia, 1977: 894; Burton-Page, 1970). The 'problem oriented approach' and 'stratification oriented excavation' were two key methodological legacies of Wheeler that

remained popular in Indian archaeology in the early post-colonial times.

The same is evident from the illustrative career that he had in colonial India and then in post-partition India and Pakistan. He led the ASI from 1944 to 1948 as its Director General; after that he assumed the role of archaeological adviser to the Pakistan government (1948-1950) and played a strategic role in the creation of the National Museum of Pakistan in Karachi (Wheeler, 1955: 220) and National Museum of India in New Delhi (Ray 2008: 122-127). Although he formally left South Asia and settled down in Britain in 1950, his services continued to be sought by both Pakistan and India. Mortimer Wheeler on the invitation of the Pakistan Ministry of Education conducted an excavation at Charsada in 1958 and on the other side of the border he chaired the review committee that was constituted by the Ministry of Education for assessing the work of the ASI in 1965. He visited Pakistan again in the year 1968 as a part of the UNESCO's international team to develop a project for the conservation of the famous Harappan site, Mohenjodaro (Guha, 2003: 43). Mortimer Wheeler's interventions were sought to divide the archaeological and museum collections between India and Pakistan after the Partition, and his decisions were accepted by both the parties (Lahiri, 2012: 152-158).

The Viceroy of India, Lord Wavell, during the turbulent times of the 1940s had appointed Mortimer Wheeler - an Englishman, on the advice of Leonard Woolley, as the Director General of the ASI 'to reform the archaeology of the then undivided India' (Piggott, 1977: 635-36). In spite of the presence of several indigenous candidates who were competent and had a field experience in India, an Englishman having no-prior knowledge of Indian history was selected for the top post at a time, when a possibility of the power-transfer to the natives had become quite evident (Ray, 2008: 27-42). Mortimer Wheeler (1955: 179-180, 184) describes his arrival to India as a *campaign* to salvage the archaeology of India by taking up the reigns of 'the largest and most complex archaeological machine in the world'. One that had been established by his illustrious predecessors including Alexander Cunningham, John Marshall and Lord Curzon to carry out archaeological excavations,

preservation of India's monuments, maintenance of museums, collection of epigraphs, publication of reports and monographs, and above all to 'arouse in the growing Indian universities and ultimately among the educated public a new sense of values in matters relating to the material heritage of India'. In his memoirs, Wheeler (1976: 78-79) has consistently claimed that none before him had applied 'modern archaeological methods' in the excavations at Harappa in 1944, and criticized his predecessors including John Marshall for failing to resolve scientifically the questions related to the Indus civilisation. Yet, his major source of information regarding the Indus religion, crafts, trade, and other technologies was John Marshall's excavation report (Guha, 2015: 164-65).

In his memoir, Wheeler (1976: 32; 1955: 197-98) particularly highlights the ways he organized training schools in Taxila (1944) and Mohenjodaro (1950) to train the natives of various regions, religions and linguistic backgrounds in scientific and modern archaeology and enabled them to maintain the archaeological institution after the withdrawal of the colonial government. The Taxila school of archaeology, according to him was 'the first organized phase of a new Indo-Pakistan archaeology'. One of the results of this school was the training of several archaeologists, who later went on to hold higher posts in the archaeological institutions in both India and Pakistan. In this way, his pupils ('good nurtured children', Wheeler (1955: 187-89, 198) are claimed to have carried forward the 'basic function of the Archaeological Survey' by 'adding notably to our knowledge of the components of Indian civilisation'. Among his pupils, names of Amlananda Ghosh, S. R. Das, S. C. Chandra, B. N. Puri, B. K. Thapar, B. B. Lal, and M. N. Deshpande (in India) as well as A. H. Dani and Fazal Ahmad Khan (in Pakistan) are mentioned in his works; however, the credit for archaeological works and discoveries during his stay in India and Pakistan, Wheeler hardly ever shared with others. He introduced a separate excavation branch, a training-program, photography and drawing office, publication of reports (*Ancient India*, journal)<sup>iii</sup>, centralized conservation, problem-oriented archaeology and several other changes in the Archaeology of South Asia. Among the several sites that he excavated, the prominent ones were Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Arikamedu. Unlike Arikamedu that yielded the

Roman artifacts in excavations (Wheeler, 1976: 43-52), the Harappan sites found a new expression in his writings. Even though the credit for discovering the Harappan civilisation rightly goes to John Marshall, it was Mortimer Wheeler, who formulated a structured narrative of the origin and decline of this civilisation by fitting it in a colonial framework of oriental despotism and racial conflicts.

The long held view that the Indus cities were ruled by peace-loving people of 'democratic bourgeois economy' (V. Gordon Childe) was rejected by Wheeler, who after his initial surveys at Mohenjodaro and Harappa discovered the remains of fortification and ramparts. And he attributed a new label 'feudal' to the Harappan civilisation, in which both Mohenjodaro and Harappa had an imperial status under the Priest-kings in the third millennium BCE (Ray, 2008: 149-50; Wheeler, 1976: 69-71). This civilisation was founded through the arrival of an *idea* of civilisation from the west, Mesopotamia (the Tigris-Euphrates valley), which was lapped up by the people of the chalcolithic cultures of Baluchistan and adjacent areas to build the mega-cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa (Wheeler, 1953: 15). The sudden origin of this civilisation was credited to an *idea* borrowed from the Sumerians of the Mesopotamia and in the same manner, the barbaric hordes of the Aryans were accused for destroying at a quick as well as sudden pace the Indus civilisation. Following the already popular identification, Wheeler (1953: 93-95) described the Indus people as non-Aryans, whose religious practices associated with mother goddess cults, Shiva and Linga worship and water rituals later found a space in the Hindu religion, which otherwise was considered to be an Aryan product. In this way, the continuity in material culture was however rejected the continuity in spiritual beliefs (metaphysics) was endorsed.

Wheeler undoubtedly imagined himself as a medium through which the idea of modern and scientific archaeology was transmitted from the British raj to the natives, and in his memoir he claims to have preached as well as practiced during his stay in India the principle of hard, impartial and honest work, which had been 'one unitary virtue' of the British Raj 'during two centuries of whole or partial rule' in South Asia (Wheeler, 1955: 217). He

appears to have combined military metaphors in his archaeological thoughts, practices and teachings in Indian archaeology, and transformed the archaeological sites into 'a war zone, in which his superiority has to be displayed and his domination exhibited' (Chadha, 2002: 384-85).

### **2.1 Inventing the Indus roots**

In the year 1950, Mortimer Wheeler with the help of the national railway service organized a popular excursion from Karachi to Mohenjodaro to make the people of Pakistan aware of their ancient roots. On seeing the advertisement of this excursion, a huge crowd comprising money-lenders, shop-keepers, clerks, agents of various kinds along with their families boarded a train and throng up to the site of Mohenjodaro. All the arrangements for the stay, food and comforts were made for the visitors, who were lead and lectured by Mortimer Wheeler with the help of his colleagues amidst the ancient ruins of Mohenjodaro. The success of this popular excursion encouraged its organizers to organize one more excursion of similar nature later. This was a propaganda tactic, which according to Mortimer Wheeler (1955: 221-222) was 'an encouraging first attempt at the deliberate mass-education of a section of the semi-educated or uneducated public in the archaeology of their own country.'

In the year 1948, Mortimer Wheeler had become the archaeological advisor to the government of Pakistan and found the archaeological department of its new patron country a 'peculiarly ill-sorted and ineffective assemblage'. In the midst of a political tussle between the officials of India and Pakistan on the one hand and a widespread refugee crisis on the other hand, he claims to have worked tirelessly to salvage 'the vestiges of past achievements' and also to have made 'persistent attempts to make Pakistan aware of a past to root its present hopes and sufferings in some sort of traditional and confidential subsoil' (Wheeler, 1955: 220). Evidently, a lone Englishman as he saw himself was carrying the torchlight of knowledge and enlightenment at a time, when the leaders of two newly created nation-states of the South Asia were fighting for a maximum share of the loot (Wheeler, 1955: 220). The image of a true Englishman on a civilizing mission is repeated

again and again in his memoir, which deliberately draws a picture in which the natives are shown seeking the advice of a sahib, even after the end of the British Raj, to resolve their internal conflicts. However, it was not merely for the desire to civilize the uncivilized native, but also sheer opportunism that encouraged him to become the archaeological advisor of Pakistan. Here in Pakistan, he desired to conduct excavations at Mohenjodaro for both, material benefits as well as academic fame by rewriting the history of Indus civilisation.<sup>iv</sup> And he indeed successfully achieved both of his aims by capitalizing on the opportunity made available by the creation of Pakistan- a country, for which he also wrote the first government sponsored nationalist history of its own: *Five Thousand Years of Pakistan: An Archaeological Outline* (1950).

In spite of attaining 'a political nationhood' in 1947, Pakistan was not yet a nation culturally (Aziz, 1965: 35), and therefore, it needed urgently a historical narrative to reinforce its distinct national as well as cultural identity among its own citizens as well as international communities. Here the role of Wheeler became immensely significant for the new regime. In Pakistan, as an archaeological advisor, Mortimer Wheeler not only trained the future archaeologists, but also conducted propaganda through excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, in the creation of the National Museum in Karachi, and also by writing a book on the history of Pakistan – first of its kind.<sup>v</sup> He was involved in the foundation of the Pakistan Museum Association and presided over its first assembly at Peshawar (Wheeler, 1955: 222-27). He gave a historical lineage to the idea of a separate state Pakistan by tracing the roots of this modern nation-state back to a five thousand years old urban civilisation of the Indus valley. In addition to the cultural identity based on Islam, the physical landscape of West Pakistan was particularly suggested to have made this nation-state a distinct geographical unit historically. Wheeler (1950-11-14) identified the Arabian Sea in the south-west, the Baluchistan and Himalayan mountains in the west and north, and the Thar Desert in the south-east as the major physical boundaries, which except the Punjab plains lying between the Thar Desert and the Himalayas made West Pakistan an integral human as well as natural unit. The river Indus and its tributaries that had nurtured the first urban



civilisation of the South Asia in the third millennium BCE were expected to become the lifeline of the post-colonial West Pakistan, which was projected as a rightful inheritor of this long lost civilisation of the Indus valley.

The history that Mortimer Wheeler wrote for Pakistan helped develop a historical framework that failed to transcend the modern political boundaries and thus mainly focused on those historical developments that had happened within the post-colonial political boundaries of Pakistan. Instead of discussing the 'shared culture of the subcontinent', this book primarily focused 'on the heritage of the dominion of Pakistan' alone (Ray, 2008: 151-52). Once Wheeler introduced an idea of Pakistan's five thousand years old antiquity, it gained wider acceptance among Pakistani politicians as well as academicians primarily due to their belief in Indus civilisation's pre-Vedic, non-Aryan and thus non-Hindu character (Aziz, 1965: 40-41), and therefore Pakistan's Department of Archaeology, in collaboration with several foreign archaeological missions, began excavating ancient sites across West Pakistan to establish Pakistan's ancient roots.

The foreign archaeological missions conducted explorations as well as excavations in Kalat district (British expedition, 1948 and 1957), Quetta, Zhob and Loralai district (American Museum of Natural History, 1950-51), Las Bela and Sind (American Museum of Natural History, 1959-60), Baluchistan and Bahawalipur (Peabody Museum expedition, 1955) and Makran coast (University Museum of Pennsylvania, 1960) and these missions highlighted the presence of several rural chalcolithic cultures (both pre-and contemporary of the Indus civilisation) in Baluchistan; these cultures were suggested to have had cultural links with their contemporary cultures of Southeast Iran. The discovery of pre-Harappan cultural phase at Koti Diji (1955-56) and Amri (1959-62) also showed the possibilities of indigenous origin of the Harappan civilisation, and it was even suggested that the Harappans had borrowed certain features, for instance, certain ceramic motifs, system of town-planning and fortification from the Kot Dijians (Khan, 1964: 20-31, 39-43, 57-65). Following the archaeological surveys in Baluchistan, a possible origin of the Indus culture from the interactions between the rural

settlements of Baluchistan was suggested by the North American scholar, Walter A. Fairservis, Jr. (1967: 21-24, 41), who also discarded the role of 'Mesopotamian *idea*' in the birth of the Harappan urbanism.

As more and more pre-historic and proto-historic sites were discovered, the belief in Pakistan's antiquity strengthened among Pakistani archaeologists, and they began portraying Pakistan as a 'great oriental country' and the Indus civilisations as a "Proto-Pakistan" culture. A call for the creation of a new branch of learning named 'Pakology' for the study of Pakistan's great ancient heritage was made (Ali, 1964: iii). Especially, the West Pakistan began to figure as a distinct region that from time immemorial was closer to the West and Central Asia than India. Following the Indo-Pakistan War (1965), Ahmad Hasan Dani wrote the editorial for the second edition of *Ancient Pakistan: Bulletin of the Department of Archaeology* and in it he spelt out the cultural as well as geographical separateness of the West Pakistan:

'We are so much used to think in terms of the sub-continent of Pakistan and India that we generally miss the culture-patterns, which have grown in the centuries of historical unfolding in the different geographic zones. The British India of weighs heavy on our minds and presents a picture that cut across the perennial flow of life connecting the main theatre of activity in Central Asia with the arteries that go down the great land mass in the south. The British cut the flow at Khyber and diverted the route by sea to the English Channel. And thus the India of the British became a unit for them, and for which scholars have been busy to seek "unity in diversity" in their studies and solitudes' (Dani, 1965-66: 1).

The deteriorating relations between India and Pakistan had an impact on the ways the histories of both the countries were framed. As it appears from above, a consistent desire to cast off historical linkages with mainland India and also to keep the *two-nation theory* in the centre of historical discourse seems to have pushed the Pakisiani academia to invent polemical historical narratives to rationalize Pakistan's creation as a distinct nation.<sup>vi</sup> Since all the

major Indus civilisation sites including Mohenjodaro and Harappa were located in West Pakistan on the eve of India's partition, this civilisation was identified as a starting point of Pakistan's civilisational march and its culmination was suggested to be the formation of Pakistan as a modern nation-state.<sup>vii</sup>

## 2.2 India's dilemma

'Apart from general problem of approach and methodology, there are other problems of practical necessity from which we cannot escape for long. We have yet to find a college text-book which takes into account such practical problems as are born of change in geographical boundaries and of the advent of independence. For new historical writing on ancient India I believe that we shall have to follow one or other of the two approaches I propose to discuss now. One is strictly India-cantered or nationalistic, not in the sentimental sense but in the politically realistic sense, and the other is one which is based on a wider perspective with no boundaries of time and territory' (Narain, 1968: 24).

Following his reflections on the history writing in the post-Independence era, A. K. Narain underlined the conceptual problem that the Indian historians were confronted with due to the partition of India. Either the Indian historians could confine their historical narratives within the modern political boundaries, or they could adopt a perspective that would transcend the modern boundaries and focus on entire South Asia to discuss the historical developments in pre-partition India. Narain (1968: 27-28) questioned the history of India that would exclude the regions (e.g., Pakistan, Afghanistan) outside the modern political boundaries of India; he showed the theoretical problems that such a history would have in explaining the historical developments in India, corresponding to the historical events (e.g., Persian and Macedonian invasions, the Greek, the Shaka and the Kushana rule and so forth) of central Asia and Pakistan.

After the discovery of the Indus civilisation in 1920s, this civilisation had begun to figure as an integral part of India's ancient

past<sup>viii</sup>; but the partition that divided the archaeological landscape of South Asia into two halves, deprived India of almost all the major sites of the Indus civilisation. Consequently, in Mortimer Wheeler's (1947-48: 1-2) words, whereas Pakistan gained possession of 'almost the whole of the known extent of the earliest civilisation of India, that of the Indus Valley' besides the Buddhist sites of Gandhara region, India was left with major Mohammadan monuments of the Mughals and suchlike. To come out of this anomaly, he suggested Indian archaeologists to end their Indus-obsession and shift the focus of their study to the Gangetic valley that has 'given India a faith.' The new image of the post-colonial South Asia thus had been suggested on the eve of India's independence by Wheeler, who assigned the proprietorship of the Indus civilisation to Pakistan and of the Gangetic civilisation to India. However, the Indian scholars, particularly the archaeologists associated with the ASI, decided otherwise and they made the valley of Sarasvati River (Ghaggar) an area of their future research.

Following the partition of India, a new as well as distinct historical framework was invented through a careful selection, omission and modification of available literary as well as archaeological evidences to constitute a reference point for shaping the contours of national identity for Indian masses.<sup>ix</sup> Contrary to Pakistani scholars, the Indian academicians decided to make the entire South Asian region a part of their history of pre-partition India. Instead of accepting the modern political boundaries as a determining factor in their historical framework, Indian scholars preferred to perceive India as a cultural region. And the motto 'unity in diversity' (Mookerji, 2008) was embraced for defining the character of Indian civilisation, and this approach by showing the presence of India as a one cultural unit throughout its pre-partition history delegitimized the *two-nation theory*. This approach to India's history also corresponded well to the history writing tradition of the colonial India, in which entire South Asia used to figure as one geographical unit (See, Smith, 1907: 5).

In a response to Pakistan's exclusive claim over the Indus civilisation, the Indian scholars, particularly archaeologists, set out on a frantic search for their Harappan roots, and also questioned

the idea of 'five thousand years of Pakistan as well as 'ancient Pakistan' (See for instance: Puslakar, 1950: 28-29; Narain, 1968: 24-25; Grover, 1985: 8 Rao, 2008:249). Madho Sarup Vats (1951: 2), Director General of the ASI, gave a call to find pre-and-protoc-historical sites in India to show the presence of this civilisation within the political boundaries of the post-colonial India. The loss of Harappa and Mohenjodaro was a national loss, which had to be compensated by finding Harappan sites within Indian territories. As a result, the dry-bed of river Ghaggar gained attention of the Indian archaeologists and it's identification with the Rigvedic Sarasvati was widely accepted. In the 1940-41, Aurel Stein (1942) had conducted extensive surveys along the dry-bed of river Ghaggar-Hakra, and reported the presence of several pre-historic as well as historic remains within India's territory. The reports of Aurel Stein gave hope to Indian archaeologists and one such archaeologist, Amlananda Ghosh (1953) - an old colleague of Mortimer Wheeler, after taking cue from Aurel Stein's survey of Bikaner, surveyed the area along the now-dry river Ghaggar and its tributary (identified as Sarasvati and Driśhadvati) and he brought into light several Harappan sites.

The discovery of some of the major Harappan sites, viz., Sothi (1950-51), Rupar (1954-55), Lothal (1954-63), Kalibangan (1960-69), Surkotada (1964-68), Banawali (1974-84), Kuntsi (1987-90) and Dholavira (1989-90) strengthened the claims of India over the Indus civilisation.<sup>x</sup> Excavations at Rupar whereas showed a break between the Harappan and the Painted Grey Ware phase (Ghosh, 1953-54: 6-7), sites in Gujarat -Lothal and Rangpur, exhibited continuity from the Harappan to the post-Harappan cultures (Ghosh, 1954-55: 11-12). Several small Harappan sites, for instance, Lakhaval, Amra, Prabhas Patan-Somnath, Rojdi were reported from Saurashtra region (Ghosh, 1955-56: 7-8; 1958-59: 19-21). Lothal with a dockyard was identified as a major economic-centre (Ghosh, 1959-60: 16-18), and Kalibangan that had yielded remains of early-Harappan and Harappan cultures, was suggested to be an another provincial capital of the Indus civilisation on the bank of Sarasvati river in a same way Mohenjodaro and Harappan had been present on the banks of river Indus (Ghosh, 1960-61: 31-32). This impressive spade work of the Indian archaeologists was duly recognised by

Mortimer Wheeler, who revised several of his earlier views that confined the Indus civilisation to West Pakistan exclusively. In the third edition of his famous book, *The Indus Civilisation*, Wheeler (1968: 2-5, 131-34) underlined the presence of several Harappan sites in the Ghaggar (Sarasvati) valley and suggested a continuity of the Harappan culture in the Western India (termed, 'Saurashtrian Indus') even after the decline of the Harappan cities in Punjab and Sind regions.

### **3. On the Aryan question**

The Rigvedic deity Indra and his Aryan followers, according to Mortimer Wheeler (1953: 18), destroyed the Indus cities including Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Based on very limited skeletal and associated finds from Mohenjodaro, Wheeler created a narrative of a large scale massacre in this Harappan city and endorsed the theory of a racial conflict between the Aryans and the Dravidians. Prior to the discovery of the Indus civilisation, for over a century, Aryans had been seen as highly civilized people due to their association with the Vedic-Hindu culture. However the discovery of the non-Aryan Indus civilisation in the 1920s provided an opportunity to the people claiming Dravidian identity to put a claim on the Harappan cities. It was argued that Dravidians, who were the founders of the Indus cities, were not only civilized but had achieved a higher stage of civilisation before their defeat at the hands of barbaric and nomadic Aryan tribes (See for a discussion: Rammaswamy, 2001). Several Indian scholars, who had long claimed an Aryan ancestry for modern Hindus, particularly the upper castes, were hit by Mortimer Wheeler's Aryan invasion theory badly. They found it tough to reconcile with the fact that it had been the non-Aryans (Dravidians) and not the Aryans, who were the creators of the Indus cities. In other words, Aryans were less civilized than the non-Aryans and they actually destroyed the first urban civilisation of South Asia, massacred its inhabitants and in the place of the magnificent Indus cities, they erected petty rural settlements (See for instance: Majumdar, 1959).

In response to this scenario, the theory of the Aryan invasion was challenged and alternate views on the Aryans were proposed (See

for a discussion: Thapar, 1969; 1982; Kumar, 2018). One of the major critiques of Mortimer Wheeler was his former student B. B. Lal, who not only rejected the Aryan invasion theory but also identified Aryans with the Harappans (Guha, 2015: 195-96; See also: Lal, 1998). In similar fashion, on careful reading of Mortimer Wheeler's book, *The Indus Civilisation*, Amlananda Ghosh wrote a letter to Wheeler and pointed out the anomalies in the Aryan invasion theory (See for details: Guha, 2015: 197-198). The Aryans were suggested to be either the author of the Indus cities (Puslakar, 1950: 13; Gyani, 1966: 12-22; Prakash, 1976: 2-4), predecessors of the Harappans (Kane, 1953: 11-12), or even the contemporaries of the Harappans (Chattopadhyaya, 1964: 22). In spite of having different views, several Indian scholars rejected the identification of the Aryans as a distinct racial group; instead, the Aryans were identified as a mixed group of different races that had developed a distinct culture, and the Aryan creation- the *Rigveda*, was suggested to be a product of diverse cultural-contacts, racial fusions and composite culture (Dandekar, 1947: 27; Puslakar, 1950: 21, 24; Chattopadhyaya, 1964: 32; Thapar, 1969: 18).

Since none of the Harappan city, including Mohenjodaro and Harappa yielded remains of massive killing of people as well as conflagration, the invasion theory was rejected (Puslakar, 1950: 23-24; Kane, 1953: 12; Dales, 2000: 72-82) and diverse environmental factors (floods, earthquakes, desiccation of rivers) were identified as the main cause of decline of the Indus cities (Sahni, 2000; Dales, 1966; Raikes, 1963; 1964; Singh, 1971; Sarma, 1977). As the idea of Aryan invasion was dropped by the 1960s by several scholars, in its place the theory of Aryan migration (mostly peaceful) from either Europe or central Asia was proposed, and it soon found an official sanction with the publication of school text books by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). These textbooks not only projected the Harappan civilisation as an integral part of India's history, but also absolved the Aryans from the sins of destroying the Indus cities. The arrival of the Aryans was suggested to have taken place much after the decline of the Harappan cities and they were mentioned to have known nothing of the city life (Thapar, 1966: 40, 43; Sharma, 1977: 44-45).

However not all scholars abandoned the theory of Aryan invasions and racial identification of the Aryans vis-a-vis the Dravidians persisted in certain academic circles. Mortimer Wheeler was one such scholar, who consistently stood by his Aryan invasion theory and kept on accusing Indra and his Aryan followers for destroying the Harappan cities. Based on the vast spread of this civilisation over different geographical and ecological-climatic settings beyond the Indus valley, Wheeler (1968: 126-137) suggested that different causes, ranging from floods to tectonic disturbances to the Aryan invasions had impacted variously the different parts of the civilisation. In this way, he abandoned the idea of a 'uniform ending' in the third edition of his famous book on the Indus civilisation (published in 1968), and following the studies of G. F. Dales and R. L. Raikes, the decline of Harappan cities, such as Mohenjodaro, Amri and others in the lower Indus valley and the Makran coastline was argued to have been linked to the civic disorder caused by the recurrent floods and seismic disturbances. Such a civic disorder in the lower Indus adversely impacted the settlements like Harappa in the upper Indus valley (northern zone of the civilisation). But the final nail in the coffin was struck by the invading Aryan tribes, which destroyed the already deteriorated Indus settlements. Situation in the Saurashtra region (in Gujarat) was entirely different, according to Wheeler; and neither the floods nor the Aryans caused any destruction here.

#### **4. Finding the birth-place**

The withdrawal of the colonial government from India left behind two nations in conflict on the question of their antiquity. India had inherited a maximum share of the colonial administrative edifice as well as its legacy in the form of Archaeological survey, and much of its machinery after partition was directed by the Indian archaeologists to dig out the Harappan sites. The credit for laying the foundations of Pakistan government's Archaeological department goes to Mortimer Wheeler. In both India and Pakistan, besides the government run Archaeological institutions, several departments in universities were set up to conduct archaeological surveys as well as excavations. The publication of numerous



Archaeological bulletins and journals – *Pakistan Archaeology* (Government of Pakistan), *Ancient Pakistan* (Peshawar University), *Ancient India* (Government of India), *Indian Archaeology- A Review* (Government of India), *Puratattva* and *Man and Environment* (Indian Society for Prehistoric and Quaternary Studies), shows unmistakable influence of Mortimer Wheeler on the archaeological activities in the early post-colonial South Asia (Sankalia, 1977: 894; Khan, 1964: 6-7; Chakrabarti, 1982: 337-339; Dales, 1966a: 131). The aim of these publications was to make their own countrymen as well as the world beyond aware of the archaeological past and heritage of their respective nation-states. However, as the spade-work intensified, Wheeler's theory supporting a sudden appearance of the Indus cities due to the Mesopotamian *idea* was put to critical analysis.

The extensive archaeological surveys by the end of the 1960s firmly showed the presence of several Harappan sites in East Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Amlananda Ghosh (1965: 113-116) brought scholars' attention to the Sothi culture that had flourished in the Sarasvati-Drishadvati valley, and the remains of which had been identified in the pre-Harappan phase at Kalibangan (in Rajasthan). Ghosh suggested the presence of the Sothi culture at several other Harappan sites (Koti Diji and Amri) and identified continuity from the Sothi culture to the urban phase of the Harappan culture at cities like Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Based on these observations, he suggested the term 'proto-Harappa' for the Sothi culture and argued to look for the genesis of the Harappan culture within its immediate geographical-cultural landscape. Several of Ghosh's colleagues and contemporary scholars in India agreed with his views and complimented this new theory with praises as well as doubts. Y. D. Sharma (1965: 132-33) even though agreed with the basic premise of Ghosh's theory – indigenous origin of the Harappan civilisation, suggested the presence of different pre-Harappan cultures at Sothi, Amri, Nal, Zhob, Kuli and Kot Diji that all in varying degrees contributed in the Harappan civilisation. The entry of Saraswati with its identification with the Ghaggar-Hakra river (now-dry) into the debate on the Harappan civilisation subsequently allowed the Indian scholars to locate the footprints of this civilisation in the

ancient Hindu literature (the *Vedas*, the *Mahabharata* and so forth), and thereby, claim the inception of Indian civilisation in the Indus-Sarasvati plains (See, Gupta, 2011: 157-204).

Unlike India, where maximum spade-work was done by the Indian archaeologists, several foreign archaeological missions flocked into Pakistan following the partition of India, and conducted archaeological excavations as well as surveys in collaboration with Pakistani archaeologists (Dales, 1966a: 131). The archaeological excavations at Kili Gul Mohammad (1950-51), Kot Diji (1955-57), Amri (1959-62), Nindowari (1962-65), and Mundigak and Gumla (1971) by archaeologists of British, French, North American and Pakistani nationalities revealed the presence of several rural cultures that predated the Harappan civilisation within the boundaries of the West Pakistan (Guha, 2015: 201). However, it was North American archaeologists, who took the lead in developing new models for explaining the rise, growth and decline of the Indus civilisation. The entry of the North American archaeologists into South Asia for the study of the Indus civilisation particularly had happened at a time, when the influence of the British scholarship (for instance, Mortimer Wheeler) upon Indian archaeology was waning on the one hand, and both Indian and Pakistani scholars on the other hand were engaged in a debate to establish their exclusive claims on the Indus civilisation. As the area of the Indus civilisation expanded eastwards with the discovery of newer sites (e.g., Rupar, Kalibangan, Lothal, Alamgirpur and so forth), the North American archaeologists like Walter A. Fairservis, Jr. applied processualist model (Morrison, 1994: 190; Guha, 2014: 110-110) for the study of Indus cities and located the roots of Indian civilisation in the Harappan urban-rural landscape (Fairservis, 1967: 44).

The need for having a model to understand the Harappan civilisation was emphasized upon and model-making became a part of archaeological discourse in India. Soon the idea of indigenous evolution of the civilisation captivated the scholars' imagination, and several of them began developing models to explain this process of indigenous cultural-evolution (See for instance: Gupta, 1972-73). Alongside a demand began to be made

to change the name of this civilisation from 'Indus civilisation' – a nomenclature that confined this civilisation within the Indus valley, to 'Harappan civilisation' to acknowledge the presence of this civilisation in regions outside the Indus valley (Ghosh, 1965: 135-136). Several pre-Harappan cultures began to be looked and analysed within the scholarly discussions and rise of the Harappan cities was suggested to be from gradual evolution from a rural background of the first half of the third millennium BCE to a much more urbanised one towards the second half (Chakrabarti, 1972-73: 29). A cultural continuity from pre-Harappan rural cultures to the urban Harappan phase, which was followed by the several Late Harappan cultures in Punjab, Harayana and western Uttar Pradesh on the one hand and in Gujarat on the other hand was highlighted by both Indian and foreign archaeologists (Jacobson, 1979: 486-490). On the other side of the border, M. Rafique Mughal (1977-1978: 84-88) based on his extensive archaeological survey across the Indus valley identified the Koti Diji culture as 'Early Harappan' (early third millennium BCE) that continued into the next phase, i.e., Mature Harappan, and he suggested the centre of the Koti Diji culture to be in the Bahawalpur region (central Indus valley).

In 1974-77, Mughal (1990: 11-12; 2000: 188-200) undertook extensive surveys in the Hakra valley (Cholistan region of Bahawalpur district, in Pakistan) and further emphasized on the idea of indigenous evolution of the Indus civilisation from the early Harappan cultures of the Indus- Hakra valley. The new studies in Pakistan complimented the findings of Amlananda Ghosh in the valley of Ghaggar river (now-dried up), and thus in spite of their theoretical differences, archaeologists of both India and Pakistan reached to roughly the same conclusions. As the Hakra valley became the centre of archaeological analysis, it supported the Indian claims that the valley of the river Ghaggar was a centre of the Harappan civilisation in a same way the river Indus had been. Here it is noticeable that Ghaggar (upper valley) was the name of the same river that was called Hakra (lower valley) in Pakistan. Indian scholars have identified the Ghaggar-Hakra with the Rigvedic Sarasvati and based on this identification they, in subsequent decades, suggested a new nomenclature for the Harappan civilisation and it was: the Indus-Sarasvati Civilisation.

(See, Gupta, 2011). In this way, the archaeologists in India and Pakistan not only rejected the diffusion model (Mesopotamian origin theory) but they also showed that the rise of the Indus cities was not as sudden as Mortimer Wheeler had argued in his writings; rather, it had been the result of a process of indigenous cultural-evolution that started from the early-Harappan rural cultures and continued up to the mature Harappan phase and even after that, in the Indus and the Ghaggar-Hakra alluvial system.

## **Conclusion**

The academic politics following the partition of India pushed the politicians/scholars in both the countries, India and Pakistan to re-imagine their past to legitimize their post-colonial present. Whereas Pakistani scholars/archaeologists responded to this situation by embracing Wheeler's narrative of their past –restricted within Pakistan's modern political boundaries, Indian scholars and archeologists on the other hand adopted a historical framework that studied the entire South Asia's (Indo-Pak subcontinent) pre-partition history as their own. The first nationalist history of Pakistan rooted in the Indus valley from the pen of Mortimer Wheeler evidently had created a hermeneutical paradigm that allowed Pakistan to claim the five thousand years old antiquity on the one hand and the same framework on the other hand made the Indian archaeologists find post-colonial India's Harappan roots in the Ghaggar-Hakra (Sarasvati) valley. As the spade work progressed in Pakistan and India in 1950s and 1960s, Wheeler's influence waned and his erstwhile colleges as well as pupils conclusively disproved his theories (for instance, Mesopotamian origin and Aryan invasions). Their collective efforts established with or without the involvement of foreign scholars, the origin of the Harappan civilisation from the early Harappan rural cultures of the Indus (Kot Diji and Amri) and the Ghaggar-Hakra (Sothi) alluvial system. And in the process of reimagining of their pre-partition past, scholars/archaeologists of both India and Pakistan on the one hand used the craft of their erstwhile British sahibs (for instance, Mortimer Wheeler) to prove the theories of the same sahibs wrong and on the other hand, they transformed the

Harappan civilisation into the first major cultural milestone in the history of their respective nations.

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## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> For instance, the idea of Bharat Mata (Mother India) is one of the expressions that reflect the sense of belonging to a territory, and this idea was used in India's national struggle to mobilize the people against the colonial government. See for a brief comment: (Nehru, 2010: 52-54).

<sup>ii</sup> See for a detailed Narration of the events leading to the discovery of the Indus Civilisation: (Lahiri, 2005).

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- <sup>iii</sup> Mortimer Wheeler was a prolific writer and has left several books on his excavations and archaeological surveys. Besides writing an academic narrative on the Indus valley civilisation (in 1953) for the Cambridge university press, he has frequently written books for general reader. One of the distinctive features of his books is the artistic combination of lucid textual narration, photographs, drawings and maps. See for a comment: (Chadha, 2002: 388).
- <sup>iv</sup> In his letter to Stuart Piggott, Mortimer Wheeler in 1950 made a proposal to conduct an excavation at Mohenjodaro, which would be an 'all-British show' and bring 50% of the loot. See for more details: (Guha, 2015: 164-165).
- <sup>v</sup> Mortimer Wheeler informs us about his propaganda methods that included public excursions, lectures, bureaucratic negotiations, training schools, publication of journals and books, television interviews and so forth in his memoirs. (Wheeler, 1955: 220-228); See also, (Clark, 1960: 98-102). Similar information is provided by Stuart Piggott (1977: 627), who informs us about Mortimer Wheeler's propaganda methods that he adopted to shape public opinion in favour of the National Museum of Wales between 1920 and 1925.
- <sup>vi</sup> See for a discussion on the ways Pakistani intelligentsia following the partition underlined the separateness of Pakistan from India: (Aziz, 1965). The historical approach to trace the origin of Pakistan from its non-Islamic past was not accepted by everyone, and particularly, during Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship (1977-88) and after him the state machinery was used to promote Islam centric history of Pakistan. See for discussion: (Jalal, 1995; Giunchi, 2007). In 1990s, the idea of 'Pakistan's Indus roots' was adopted by Aitzaz Ahsan (a lawyer and a prominent leader of Pakistan People's Party) to counter the Islamic fundamentalism. However, he never rejected the two-nation theory, and he used the idea of 'Pakistan's Indus roots' to justify the creation of Pakistan as a nation-state different from India. (Ernst, 1996).
- <sup>vii</sup> In 2001, the UNESCO sponsored an international Colloquium on Indus Valley Civilisation from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> April in Islamabad (Pakistan), and in it scholars from various countries including India participated. Not only the claim of Pakistan on the Indus civilisation was stressed upon in this Colloquium by the Pakistani politicians and archaeologists, but also modern Pakistan was described to be 'a continuum of the Indus Valley Civilisation.' See, the forward (Samin Jan Babar), Preface (M. A. Halim), Message (General Pervez Musharaf), Address (S. K. Tressler), Inaugural address (Koichiro Matsuura) and several articles of Pakistani archaeologists in: (Halim, 2001).

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<sup>viii</sup> Following its discovery in 1924, the Indus civilisation became a part of popular as well as political imagination in India. One of the major political figures of the twentieth century India, Jawaharlal Nehru –the first Prime Minister of India, in his famous book, *Discovery of India* (1946) visualized ‘an underlying sense of continuity, of an unbroken chain which’ joined the ‘modern India to the far distant period of six or seven thousand years ago when the Indus Valley civilisation probably began.’ (Nehru, 2010: 67). See also: (Majumdar, et. al., 1953).

<sup>ix</sup> In the early 1960s, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) - an Indian government institution, set up various committees and boards to prepare school textbooks for different classes. The central aim of these textbooks was to create an image of unified India that would transcend region and religion identities and help the Indian children to think in national as well as international terms. (Chandrakant, 1966).

<sup>x</sup> For a brief survey on the discovery and nature of the Harappan sites, see: (Chakrabarti, 2013: 151-204).