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**The Coastal Sites: Possible Port Towns of the Harappan Period in Gujarat**

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**ABSTRACT**

From time immemorial, the Gujarat coast of the Arabian Sea has been an important threshold for voyagers, mariners and traders coming to the Indian subcontinent. The discovery of a large number of Harappan settlements along this coast and presence of significant quantity of standard Harappan objects in many sites of ancient Mesopotamia and Oman coast, viewed against the finding of objects of West Asian origin in Harappan sites, firmly establishes that there was a well-organized trade contact between these two regions. Excavations at Lothal in the sixties brought to light a unique and huge basin-like brick structure which was identified as a 'dockyard' of the Harappan period. This structure has created lot of curiosity among scholars and visitors to the site. After Lothal, a site on the southern shore of the Gulf of Kachchh, known as Kuntasi, has also yielded some remains that have been identified as those of a jetty. Saran, an estuarine port near Dholavira is another site which provides minimum parameters required for a jetty. Apart from these, there are several sites which have no evidence of a dock or jetty but are very close to the shore and linked with the sea or Gulf by a river or an estuary. This geographical setting is indicative of them being port sites. There is sound reason to believe that at least the fortified settlements along the shore of the Gulf of Kachchh were linked with each other through waterways and may have been transporting cargo to the nearest site across the Gulf. Till date more than forty-four sites of Harappan or Harappan affinities have been located along the Gujarat coast. Out of them nineteen are located on the Kachchh coast and twenty-five in Saurashtra and the mainland of Gujarat's coast. Of them, thirty belong to Urban Harappan and rest to the Late or Post Urban period. Total number of fortified settlement recorded so far are only nine. Most of them, except Lothal, are on the Kachchh or the Gulf of Kachchh coast. Of these, only three sites have yielded some remains which have been identified as 'ports' so far. In view of the above evidence, an attempt has been made to understand the role of these coastal sites as 'ports' in Harappan maritime trade.