

Facets of Neolithic Culture in Saryupar Region, Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Neolithic was a very important stage of the history of human culture when humans were no longer dependent entirely on nature but had started to exploit nature to their own advantage. The term 'Neolithic' was first used by Sir John Lubbock in his book titled *Prehistoric Times*, published in 1865. The term 'neo' means new, and 'lithic' means stone. Unlike the Palaeolithic period, people in this period began to use polished stone tools and axes, often called celts. The Neolithic tools appear more refined and polished. The Neolithic cultures were pastoral and farming cultures, but without the knowledge of metal implements. They used polished stone tools, lithic tools, and pottery. In the Neolithic period, humans started to cultivate plants and domesticate animals. The agro-pastoral culture developments of the early Holocene were labelled as 'Neolithic Revolution' by V.Gordon Childe.

Keywords: Neolithic culture, tools, cord-impressed ware, agriculture, holocene, Saryupar, Kosala

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Introduction

The Saryupar region situated in the Shivalik foothills of the Himalayan in Middle Gangetic Plain of eastern Uttar Pradesh, between geodetic co-ordinates 26°05' to 28°30'N and 80°57' to 84°09' E. It delimits the International boundary of Nepal in the north; its western and southern boundary is demarcated from river Ghaghra (Saryu) and the eastern boundary is bounded by river Gandak. It covers an area of 33000 sq km with the extension maximum length of 260 km from east to west and a width of 160 km from north to south.ⁱ The Saryupar plain consists of eleven districts of Uttar Pradesh i.e. Bahraich, Balrampur, Basti, Deoria, Gonda, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Sant Kabir Nagar, Siddharthnagar and Sravasti.

The Saryupar region is a part of Kosala region. Its earliest reference available in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (I.4.1.14-17), where mentioned the river Sadānīrā has created the boundary between Kosala and Videha state.ⁱⁱ It is identified with the modern river Gandak/Gandaki. Kosala has also been mentioned as one of the countries of the Vedic Aryans in *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*.ⁱⁱⁱ While Kosala is mentioned as a country in Sanskrit texts, like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, its territorial extent is not properly defined. Panini also makes mention of Kosala in his *Ashtadhyayi* (4.1.17). As a *mahajanapada*, Kosala is for the first time mentioned in Pali Buddhist texts, *Anguttara-Nikaya* (I, 213, IV, 252 etc.), *Samyutta-Nikaya* (IV, 374) and *Majjhima-Nikaya* (II, 124) etc.

The ancient state of Kosala is generally corresponding to the historical region of Oudh of northern India. It was bounded in the west by the river Gomti, in the south by the Sarpika or Syandika (Sai) river, to the east by the Sadanira (Gandaka) which act as the border between Kosala and Videha, and to the north by the Himalayan range. The country of Kosala was divided into two parts- north Kosala and south Kosala, evidently by the river

Saryu.^{iv} Sravasti and Kusavati were its capital towns respectively. It covered the territory of the Kalamas of Kesaputta and the Sakyas of Kapilavastu. The *SuttaNipata* also refers that the inhabitants of Kosala lived besides Himavanta (Himalaya), endowed with the power of wealth.^v The *MajjhimaNikaya*, also, mentions the Buddha as a Kosalan.^{vi}

The rise of Kosala in the northern India was played an important role in the political circumstances during 6th century BCE. It consists of some important cities—Ayodhya, Saketa and Savatthi or Sravasti. Ayodhya was a city on the bank of river Saryu and Saketa is generally supposed to be the same as Ayodhya and possibly adjoining cities. Sravasti is the huge ruined township known as Saheth-Maheth on the right bank of the river Rapti in district Shravasti.

According to the *Ramayana* and Puranas the progenitor of Kosala kings was Ikshvaku.^{vii} The descendants of Ikshvaku ruled at Vaisali, Mithila and Kusinara.^{viii} The lists of rulers of Ikshvaku dynasty from Ikshvaku to Prasenajit, the contemporary ruler of Bimbisara, were mentioned in Puranas.^{ix} Of these several rulers have been mentioned in Vedic literature. The later names of Puranic list are also mentioned in Buddhist literatures i.e. Sakya, Suddhodana, Siddhartha, Rahula and Prasenajita.^x

In the Buddhist time, the kingdom of Kosala was a feudal state, in which a few republics (*Ganas* or *Samghas*) were embodied in its sovereignty. Among them, the most important were the Sakyas of Kapilavastu, the Koliyas of Ramagrama, the Moriyas of Pippalivana, and the Mallas of Kusinara and Pava. Of these, the chief republic was the Sakya state of Kapilavastu and its great significance naturally derived from the fact that Gautama Buddha was Sakya by birth.^{xi} The Sakyas claimed that they belong to the Ikshvaku dynasty of solar race, and of Kosala Kingdom. King Prasenajit also took pride in narrating himself as a fellow-citizen of Gautama Buddha.

The area of study is a part of Ghaghara-Gandak interfluvium (the Saryupar region) of the middle Ganga plain.^{xii} The area is diagonally divided by the river Rapti, while the river BurhiRapti, Kuwana, Manwar, Bisuhi, Ami, Rohini, Chhoti Gandak and other small tributaries are the other streams of the area. The northern area of the district has a *tarai* belt of marshy lands with intervening uplands which is followed in the south by the rather wider belt of marshy lowlands and having marshy lakes and depressions. The region has alluvial sedimentation, except for boulders and debris of various periods and nature carried down by the rapid hill streams in the north. It yields sand, silt and clay on the surface and gravel, sand, silt and clay in the sub-surface. The region has an abundance of ground water fed and rain fed rivers. The landscape of this area is controlled by the climate, which has acquired under the fluvial environment of different energy due to varying discharge of the river. The region can broadly be categorized into two areas—river basin areas and interfluvium (inter-channel) areas. The river basin area comprises silt and sand deposited by the rivers having high discharge and hence a high level of energy, while silt and clay is the main composition in interfluvium areas deposited by aqueous environment having low energy. Most of the rivers flow from north to south and the average slope from north to south is 0.9 m.

The earliest evidences of hominids in Indian sub-continent, have been found to the north of the Saryupar region of UP, in Siwalik range of Himalaya of Nepal, by the team of scholars of USA and Nepal under a research programme of “Quaternary explorations in the Siwalik of Nepal”. An upper left molar of *Ramapithecus* had been obtained by the team during the exploration, along the Tinau Khola, near Butwal in district Bhairahwa, Nepal. It was the first evidence of *Ramapithecus*, which was dated approximately eleven million years old.^{xiii}

The Palaeolithic evidence has not been reported in the area of Saryupar region by the earlier scholars and also not in present study. But to the north of the Saryupar plain, there are several sites of Palaeolithic period which have been found in the Siwalik range of Nepal. The Dang-Deokhuri valley has a wide range of cultures viz, Lower Palaeolithic with Acheulian assemblage, large cores and flakes; Middle Palaeolithic, Upper Palaeolithic, which is continued up to Mesolithic and Neolithic.^{xiv}

Alexander Cunningham was the first person who explored few archaeological sites in the area. Thereafter Carlleyle and Führer investigated the area and mentioned some archaeological sites in their report. Number of sites have been explored by the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi; Directorate of UP State Archaeology, Lucknow; Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi; DDU University, Gorakhpur; and University of Lucknow, Lucknow in this area, which are belongs to Neolithic to Medieval periods. Among these explored archaeological sites of the region few have been excavated by the DDU University, Gorakhpur; Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi; and Directorate of UP State Archaeology, Lucknow. These sites are Sohgaure^{xv} and Imlidih-Khurd^{xvi} in Gorakhpur district, Lahuradewa^{xvii} in SantKabir Nagar district.

The typical Neolithic settlements have not been recovered till present in the region. Albeit generally Neolithic settlements yielded coarse variety handmade red ware with cord impressions on the exterior and rusticated ware. Another feature of Neolithic period was early farming especially in the Saryupar region. The Period I of Lahuradewa belongs to Neolithic period, which is reported as Early Farming Phase by the excavator. The Archaeological explorations in the middle Ganga plain over few decades have provided valuable evidences related to the Neolithic culture. Such type of sites have been reported from Gorakhpur, SantKabir Nagar, Ballia and Allahabad Districts of Uttar Pradesh and Saran, Patna, Vaishali, Gaya and Rohtas districts of Bihar State. Some important excavated sites in Uttar Pradesh include Sohgaure^{xviii} and Imlidih-Khurd^{xix} in Gorakhpur district, Bhunadih^{xx} and Waina^{xxi} in Ballia district, Lahuradewa^{xxii} in SantKabir Nagar district and Jhusi^{xxiii}, Hetapatti in Allahabad district and Chirand, ChecharKutubpur, Taradih and Senuwar in Bihar. Of these, Sohgaure and Imlidih-Khurd in Gorakhpur district, Lahuradewa in SantKabir Nagar belong to Saryupar region of Uttar Pradesh.

Sohgaure

Sohgaure(26°31'30" N; 83°25'25" E) is situated near the confluence of Rapti and Ami rivers, and located about 32 km southeast of district headquarters of Gorakhpur. It is excavated by department of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology, DDU University Gorakhpur, under the direction of G C Pande in 1961-62.^{xxiv} Once again, the site has been excavated in 1974-75 by S N Chaturvedi of same department of DDU University Gorakhpur.^{xxv} The excavation comprises five cultural periods on the site.

The earliest culture of Sohgaure assigned as period I, belongs to Neolithic period with a deposit of 70 cm. It comprised handmade and ill-fired potsherds of cord-impressed red ware in medium to coarse fabric. These potsherds are very tiny to determine the shapes. It is simply categorized in to three varieties—corded ware, rusticated ware and plain red ware.^{xxvi}

The corded ware is found in medium to coarse fabric. The cord-impressions comprise beaded vertical lines and other patterns on the exterior surface of the wares. These wares are usually ill-fired and made of gritty clay containing paddy husk, straw, etc. The exterior surface of some potsherds is red while the interior surface is either black or grey. The core of such potsherds is sometime black with red outlines. Shapeless sherds are recovered in this ware.

The potsherds of rusticated wares have the application of an extra coating of clay on the exterior surface of the wares, which also contains paddy husk, straw, small grits, etc. The potsherds in this ware are in medium fabric and ill-baked. Sometime the cord-impressed potteries have also rustication. Shapeless sherds are recovered in this ware.

The sherds of plain red ware are found in medium to coarse fabric. The clay contains small grits, paddy husk and straw. A sherd of dull red ware of coarse fabric bears leaf impressions on the exterior. Such type of pots had been dried on the bed of leaves.^{xxvii}

Beside pottery, there is only one fragment of terracotta discoid object of 13.5 cm diameter with a lenticular section found in this period.^{xxviii}

Imlidih-Khurd

This site^{xxix} lies between 26°30'30" N; 83°12'05" E in district Gorakhpur, on the boundary of districts Gorakhpur and Sant Kabir Nagar. It is situated on the left bank of the river Kuwana (Kuano), a tributary of Ghaghra. The excavations revealed four cultural periods at the site. The lowest human occupied strata belong to Period I which is of Neolithic, assigned as Pre-Narhan culture.

Period I yielded handmade cord-impressed red ware in coarse fabric. It is the remarkable pottery of Neolithic assemblage at several Neolithic sites in India. The clay used in the pottery making was tempered with organic materials like sand and mica.^{xxx} These potsherds are fragile and generally ill-fired. Some potsherds bear a thick red slip on both the surfaces.

The main shapes in this ware are bowl-on-stand with incurved rim bearing cord-impressions on the exterior and interior, having bright red slip due to burnishing. The pedestal of this variety of bowls was made separately and luted to the main body. Globular vases have flaring rim and constricted neck, with cord-impressions bearing on the exterior below the neck. It has micaceous red slip on the exterior.^{xxxi} Carinated *bandis* have out-turned rim, expanding profile and has carination at the waist. There are many patterns including rope pattern, scratches, paintings, in-appliqué and incised, which have been found in cord-impressed red ware during the excavation.^{xxxii} The Neolithic people of Imlidih-Khurd made their houses with wattle-and-daub, having reed impressions in large quantity. The evidence of several mud floors with an average thickness of 25-30 cm, oven and *chulah* was also found in the excavations. There is 7 cm thick circular structure of storage bin having 85 cm interior diameter. The other finds include several micro beads of steatite, terracotta, agate and faience, bone points etc.^{xxxiii}

The remains of cereals and pulses, which are rice, barley, two varieties of wheat, and millets comprising *jowar* millet and pearl millet, lentil, field pea, grass pea, green gram and sesame; fruit remains including jujube, *amla* and grape have been found from period.^{xxxiv}

The faunal remains show that the cattle, sheep/goat and pig (?) had been domesticated. The wild animals are hog deer and large canis (wolf). The aquatic remains are two species of fresh water turtle, fish and Mollusca.^{xxxv}

Lahuradewa

The ancient site Lahuradewa^{xxxvi} (Lohradewa or Lahuradeva) (26°46'N; 82°57'E) is situated in Kuwana (Kuano)-Ami doab in Sant Kabir Nagar of Saryupar region, Uttar Pradesh. It was excavated by Rakesh Tiwari, et al, Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Uttar Pradesh, during the seasons of 2001-2002, 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2005-06.^{xxxvii}

The excavations revealed a 03 m thick cultural deposit, which is divided into five cultural periods. Period I is assigned as Early Farming Phase (Neolithic). The earliest Period I starting from the very opening of sedentary occupation deposit at the site is 60 to 68 cm thick. It has been subdivided into two sub-periods—IA and IB.

Period IA is represented by handmade coarse red ware and Black-and-red ware, which bear cord-impressions on the exterior surface. The incised decorations and red slip shows on few sherds. The clay contains small grits, straw and paddy husk and is not well levigated. The pots were generally made in two parts, the rim and the body were later luted and mostly coarse, porous with uneven core.^{xxxviii} Some of the Black-and-red ware and red ware potsherds bear black and red slip on their inner and outer surface, respectively. Burnishing has also been noticed on some of them.

The findings of wattle-and-daub suggest that the Neolithic settlers of period IA Lahuradewa lived in huts. Beads of semi-precious stones i.e. carnelian; micro disc beads of steatite; a tubular stone bead and a fragment of bone point were also recovered. Wild and domesticated varieties of carbonized rice and foxtail grasses have been recovered as archaeobotanical remains. Remains of charred and uncharred bones of *nilgai*, cattle, buffalo, birds and turtle shell were found as faunal remains.^{xxxix}

The handmade corded ware/cord-impressed ware and rusticated ware have also been recovered from the several explored archaeological sites in the area. The details about these sites are as under—

Bankatwa

The site Bankatwa/Bankata^{xl} (26°44'28" N; 82°45'20" E) is situated to the right of Kuwana river and 10 km to the southeast of the district headquarters of Basti. Potsherds of Cord-impressed red ware, black-and-red ware, black slipped ware, grey ware and red ware; microliths (cores, flakes and flake fragments) of chalcedony, quartz and chert have been reported^{xli} from the site.

Baragaon (Badgon)

The site Badgon^{xlii} (26°44'23" N; 82°49'04" E) is situated to the left bank of old channel of river Kuwana and 16 km. to the south east of the district headquarters of Basti. Microliths (cores, flakes) of chalcedony, quartz and chert; cord-impressed red ware, black-and-red ware, black slipped ware, Northern Black Polished Ware, grey ware and red ware have been earlier reported^{xliii} from the site.

Bariyarpur

The site of Bariyarpur^{xliv} (27°09'19" N; 83°41'04" E) is located to the east of the district headquarters of Maharajganj. The site has earlier reported by P S Chaturvedi^{et al^{xlv}} and VipulaDubey^{et al^{xlvi}} of DDU University, Gorakhpur. Shapeless sherds of corded ware and rusticated ware in medium fabric (handmade and wheel turned both); bowls in medium fabric of black-and-red ware, black slipped ware, and red ware reported from the site.

Daniapar/Daniawar:

The site Daniapar (27°03'14" N; 82°55'53" E) is located to the south of the district headquarters of Siddharthnagar at the distance of 40 km.

The site yields potsherds of corded ware (handmade and wheel turned both), Black-and-red ware, black slipped ware, orange-red slipped ware, grey ware and red ware.

Ghorhat

The site Ghorhat^{xlvii} (26°38'54" N; 82°57'30" E) is situated to the right of Katneha river and 22 km to the southwest of the district headquarters of SantKabir Nagar. Potsherds of corded ware (handmade), black-and-red ware, black slipped ware, grey ware and red ware have been reported from the site.

Jamuhat

The site Jamuhat^{xlviii} (26°41'14" N; 82°58'07" E) is situated on the left bank of river Katneha and 21 km to the southwest of the district headquarters of SantKabir Nagar. The site yields potsherds of corded ware (handmade), black-and-red ware, black slipped ware, grey ware and red ware.

Puraina

The site Puraina^{Dh^{xlix}} (27°04'51" N; 83°39'36" E) is located 13 km to the east of the district headquarters of Maharajganj. There is lake (Purainatal) situated to the north of the site. The site has earlier reported by P S Chaturvedi^{et al^l} and VipulaDubey ^{et.al^{li}} of DDU University, Gorakhpur.

The site yields potsherds of cord-impressed red ware (handmade and wheel turned both), rusticated ware, black-and-red ware, grey ware, black slipped ware, Northern Black Polished Ware and red ware. These potsherds are much fragile and eroded. The corded ware, rusticated ware and black-and-red ware pots were not made of well levigated clay. Burnishing also noticed on some of the potsherds of black slipped ware and grey ware.

Sonpipari

This site is lies between 27°23'42" N; 83°28'15" E and located to the northwest of the district headquarters of Maharajganj at a distance of 69 km by road. The site yields stone objects as damaged shouldered celt, part of ring stone and another stone artefact; potsherds of corded ware (handmade and wheel turned both), rusticated ware, black slipped ware, Northern Black Polished Ware, grey ware and red ware; terracotta areca nut shaped bead, *ghat*-shaped bead, fragment of animal figurine; pottery hopscotches and brick-bats.

Except mentioned excavated sites, among these explored archaeological sites, (Bankata, Badgon, Ghorhat, Jamuhat, Daniapar, Bariyarpur, Puraina *Dbus* and Sonpipari) belong to the Neolithic period with the presence of shouldered stone celt (Sonpipari), corded ware and rusticated ware (handmade); Black-and-red ware, black slipped ware and red ware. Karedihadi district Maharajganj has only a stone celt, while the other remains like pottery, belong to the Medieval period. The handmade corded/cord-impressed ware has been defined as Neolithic ware by Sankalia.^{lii}

In the context of Neolithic period, there are 03 excavated sites—Sohgaura^{liii} and Imlidih-Khurd^{liv} in Gorakhpur district and Lahuradewa^{lv} in Sant Kabir Nagar district in the Saryupar region. These excavated sites represent handmade corded ware, rusticated ware and Black-and-red ware with plain red ware. The radiocarbon dates available from Lahuradewa period IA, which is assigned as Early Farming Phase (Neolithic), are 5320±90 years BP (calibrated 4220, 4196 and 4161 BCE), 6290±160 years BP (calibrated 5298 BCE).^{lvi} It has the earliest occupational phase of human activity and agricultural practices may be assigned to as early Holocene period in 6th-5th century BCE. On the basis of these dates, the earliest cultural habitation (Neolithic period) of above three sites may be dated to 6th to 5th Millennium BCE.

At last, all the researches represents that the ecological condition not was suitable in middle Gangetic plain, particularly Saryupar area of Gangetic plain for human habitants during Pleistocene period before 10000 years. In the early phase of Holocene period, the third climatic phase^{lvii} (9200 to 5300 years BP) represents strong monsoon, often shows a wet phase during 7500 to 7000 years BP, which is accepted as the compatible condition of this period by the humans. Albeit there is no uniformity in the strong monsoon of this period, but it is many centuries' long periods of weaker monsoon emphasized by many century long periods of weaker monsoon circulation. On the basis of an analysis of these archaeological remains, it may be concluded that this area of Saryupar region was clearly inhabited first during 6th-5th Millennium BCE. Further researches may be pushed back the date of earliest settlers of this region to 8th-7th Millennium BCE.

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