

THE EARLIEST SETTLEMENT AT CHECHAR -KUTUBPUR

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ABSTRACT

Great civilization generally developed along the river banks. In the earliest time, micro-culture grew near the banks of perennial water sources like rivers and lakes. Gandak emerging through the Himalayas provided perfect condition for growth of sustainable human settlements. Many small and camp dwelling settlements were hidden in the womb of the Gandak plain. Chirand, Chechar-Kutubpur and Panr are the sites where the evidence of Neolithic settlement has been found. The micro- level Neolithic settlement took place at the time of late Pleistocene age. Settlement started directly on the yellowish compact-calcareous clayey earth. Perhaps, Mesolithic men migrated towards the Gandak plain from the Siwalik range of the Himalaya as well as the Vindhyan range. Earliest Chechar men were technically sound. They learnt the technique of tool making, kiln firing, pot making, stone bead and micro- tool making, food production, food cooking, house making, painting, use of pigments etc. There appears to be constant transaction between Chechars and other Neolithic sites such as Chirand, Panr, Maner.

Keywords: Ceramic, Gandak, Grey ware, Himalayas, Neolithic settlement, Pleistocene, Red ware.

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological site Chechar-Kuttubpur (25°36'30"N, 85°21'15"E) is situated about 20 km. south-east of Hajipur, on Hajipur – Mahanar road, along the northern bank of the river Gandak, under Bidupur block in the district of Vaishali. The mound is spread over an area of 800 m wide in north-south direction and about 2 km. long in east-west direction. The major portion of the cultural mound has been eroded by the river Gandak. There is a lowland (depression) area, about 2 km north to the mound and a paleo-channel, named Ghaggar flows from west to east in - between depressions.

The cultural and archaeological evidences (sculptures, mound, structures etc.) have been found from Hajipur to Mahanar, continuously along the river bank. There are several solitary mounds explored by the author which is spread from west to east in the lowland like Chaur

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area at Dhighi Kala, Bajitpur Malahi, Majhauri, Khajabatta and Dhanauti. The Chalcolithic and NBPW(Northern Black Polished Ware) associated potsherds have been recovered from these mounds. Most of the excavations have been conducted at the Kutubpur in 1913-14 and 1977-78. Several trenches have also been laid at Chechar in 1988-89. The archeological importance of this mound came to light, when the mound was eroded by the river Gandak. Large number of antiquities and other cultural materials including brick structures came to light. Some other cultural materials were also collected by local people. Chechar-Kutubpur is multicultural site. The archaeological excavations have been conducted by the A.S.I. in 1977-78 and 1988-89. In 2013-14, Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Bihar has conducted deep investigation. The settlement patterns started here by nomadic-hunting people during meso-neolithic period. Archaeological excavations at Chechar-Kutubpur led the discovery of nine phases of cultural occupations:

Period 1st (a) - Meso-neolithic (Aceramic culture)

Period 1st (b) - Neolithic (Red Ware)

Period 2nd – Chalcolithic (Black & Red Ware)

Period 3rd – Iron Phase

Period 4th – NBPW Phase

Period 5th – Sunga – Kushan Phase

Period 6th – Gupta Phase

Period 7th – Pala Phase

Period 8th -Pre-Mughal glazed ware phase

The settlement pattern at micro-level, started here by the nomadic-hunting people on the yellow compact calcarious clayey earth at the time of late Pleistocene age. Siwalic or Vindhyan Mesolithic migrants shifted towards the perennial river valley in search of food. They settled in this region and made their aceramic culture for a very short period. Large number of Microlithic flake and core tools of chert, chalcedony, agate, carnelian, crystal, quartz, and sand stone were recovered from the Pleistocene deposit. The important tools were blade, scraper, lunette, burins, knife, cleaver etc.

The earliest ceramic settlement started on the silty alluvial soil of deep grayish in colour of fine texture having calcarious nodules and mica particles. The earliest settlers were the hunter-peasantry society, who used to indulge in farming, cattle rearing as well as hunting. They have also made several types of potteries which was hand-made. The red ware is dominant pottery. Black and red ware and burnished grey ware have been discovered. The corded and mat impressed red ware as well as rusticated ware (RW, BRW) used by the people. These people used bone tools (arrow head, point, pins, bodkins, chisels etc.), microliths (core and flake tools)- blades, burins, scrapers, lunettes, knife, points needle, beads of terracotta and semi-precious stones etc. In the recent years, many neolithic sites have been discovered in Indian sub- continent and Eastern Asia such as Chirand, Chechar, Panr(4261-2412BC), Maner, Lahuradeva(9000-3000BC), Imlidih Khurd, Sohgaora, Jhusi, Hetapati, Senuwar, Taradih,

Golbai Sasan, Kuchai, Koldihwa, Burzhom, Gufakaral, Utnoor, Brahmagiri, Tekkalkota, Narsimhapur, Piklinal Mehargar, Xlanrendong cave (21000-19000BP), Yuchanyan cave (21000-13800BP), Dingsishan Nanchuangtuo (11,500-11000BP), Donghulin (11000-9500BP), Hutouliang in China, Odai Yamamoto (16540-13070BP) and FuKui cave in Japan; Gasya (13000BP), Gromatukha (12,300BP), Ust- Karenga complex (11,200BP), Usti-Kyakhta (12,595BP) in Russia (Siberia)

CERAMIC INDUSTRY

The red ware, black and red ware and grey ware (burnished and unburnished, both), corded mat, impressed red ware sherds are found from the Neolithic context in Indian sites and out of India. The post-ochre painting incised and appliqué decoration is found from Utnoor, Golbai Sasan, Senuar, Taradih, Piklial, Sangamkallu, Brahmagiri and other sites. The long tubular spouts found from Chirand, Chechar-Kutubpur and Panr, have no parallel among Indian neoliths. Various types of pottery have been discovered from the Chechar- Kutubpur neolithic sites.

The ceramic associated with the Neolithic culture at Chechar-Kutubpur includes red ware, grey ware and black and red ware. The pots are mostly hand-made. The surface treatment is found applied on the red ware, black and red ware and grey ware.

RED WARE

Red ware was a dominating pottery style and had various shapes, size, types and fabric used by the primitive society. The shapes in ware are vases, jars, spouted vase, bowls, perforated bowls, perforated legged bowls etc. The section of the pottery is micaceous, gritty and rough, core is generally black. The sand mixed clay was used for the manufacturing of the potteries. Sometimes, paddy husk was mixed with clay for the manufacturing of thick section potteries. Potteries are generally well fired. Vases and storage jars are generally of medium size with globular body. The neck portion in all the vases/jars is luted with main body. Pots are mostly handmade. The dabbing and beating marks are prominently traced on both surfaces. The upper part of the vases/jars are burnished and treated with the thick or thin slips in different shades of red pigment such as brick red. Chocolate, tan, pale red or buff is the dominant colour. The treatment was applied on the upper portion of the outer surface and down to neck of inner surface. The rough surfaces of the pots were made smooth due to thick surface treatment and by burnishing. The rustication was achieved by the help of finger or with the help of brush. These types of pots have been found from the Chirand and Panr in the Gandak Plain. The rustication on the pots of Neolithic strata at this site is so fine-grained that it can be compared with rusticated pre-Harappan pottery from Kalibangan and Amri. Some sherds of corded and mat impression are recovered from the Chechar- Kutubpur. Some sherds have tortoise shell like impression. Long tubular spout and channel spout luted with body of the vase has been reported from Chechar, and is unique of its kinds. Its height is prolonged to the height of rim. Vases/Jars are used for cooking and storage purpose. Some sherds contain the soot mark; which throw light on the use of the pots. Sherds of buff ware also found in good number.

Decoration

The decoration patterns were always applied on the rim, neck and shoulder portion. Potteries are decorated with appliqué rope design graffiti marks representing different designs, incised lattice designs, oblique and parallel lines and other patterns. Vermillion decoration applied on the rim and shoulder portion, Ocher Painting of solid circle and parallel lines applied on the shoulder portion has been traced.

Bowl

Red ware bowls has been found in less frequency. It has generally deep globular base, vertical straight sides and featureless or everted rim, micaceous, rough section with blackish core. It has medium fabric, made with levigated clay and well fired. The lipped bowl, perforated bowl and perforated legged bowl, oval bowl, stand and footed bowls have been recovered from the Neolithic strata. Generally, the inner surface has been smoothened on the application of slip and burnishing over it.

Basins and dishes are conspicuously absent. It is only found in the late phase of Neolithic period.

Grey Ware

The burnished and unburnished plain grey wares have been discovered from the Chechar-Kutubpur in good frequency. The important shapes are bowl, small vases and goblet only, which are made of levigated clay mixed with sand and has porous rough gritty thin to thick blackish grey section and mild fired, medium fabric and everted knife edged rim.

Bowl

Generally medium and small sized bowl have been found. Burnished grey ware bowls are treated with thick coat of slip in different grey shades i.e. dark grey to pale yellowish grey and burnished by burnisher. Post-firing ocher painted burnished grey ware sherds have been encountered mostly from the transitional stratum of Neolithic- Chalcolithic. Pedestaled and plain based bowls are found from here.

Vases

The burnished and unburnished grey ware sherds have been recovered from Chechar-Kutubpur. Sometimes both surfaces are treated with grey slip or sometimes only outer surface and inner surface of pots are treated with slip and inner lower portion remains untreated. The inner surface make rough with the scooping. Small size vases (like *Lota*) have been recovered.

Black and red ware

Very less frequency of this ware has been found at the earliest stratum. The section of this ware is micaceous rough and gritty. It was medium fabric and well fired, sometimes treated with thin slip or sometimes devoid of surface treatment. At early phase, the section of the BRW is not deep black. It is smoky black but at later phase burnished BRW comes into the tradition. The hard and strong slip was used for the surface treatment. The important shapes are vase/jars, bowls, dish-on-stand etc.

Vases

Vases have the same features as its contemporary red ware. It has long concave neck, splayed out everted knife- edged rim with wide mouth and globular body. It was sometimes decorated with appliqué rope design and different patterns of incision.

Bowls

Deep bowl with globular base and straight or convex sides, featureless or everted /adverted rim bowls were found. Lipped and channels spout, perforated and footed bowls were also found. Bowls are treated with slip and both surfaces are highly burnished and smooth.

Dish

Poorly developed rim and sides of dish have been found. It is absent from the lower stratum of Neolith. It comes from the upper strata.

Dish-on- stand has also been found in the upper strata. In the basin, the same is totally absent.

Black slipped ware has been found at transitional phase of Neolithic- Chalcolithic or at very later phase of the Neolith.

Cord- impressed Pottery

As the term suggests, cord-impressed or mat-impressed pottery bears cord or mat- impressions mostly on the outer surface, either partially or fully. Impressions are made either as a decorative pattern or the surface is roughened with a paddle wrapped with a cord or mat or the remains of pot's surface over the surface of pot giving the impression of cord or mat at the time of beating and dabbing during leather- hard condition. These impressions can be, either as stylistic or technological or both, besides its functional aspect, if there is any. Sometimes impressions are prominent or sometimes very faint. All the terms, like cord- impressed, cords marked, mat impressed and corded wares, are used to designate this kind of pottery. This pottery has a long antiquity in India and Asian context.

Evidence of House

Earliest people at Chechar-Kutubpur lived in hutment and on the leveled floors. They made their house with reed, bamboo and leaves of grasses and plants. The excavation of paved floors, pot holes, large number of the chunk of burnt clay with reed & bamboo impression, burnt floors throw light on the house planning of the earliest settlers. The hearth and oven were used for the cooking purposes. People lived in a hut made up of reed walls with mud plaster. They made semi-solid paste of mud with the help of husks for the application on the reed wall. They made their roof with grasses.

Food –habits

The earliest settler of Chechar-Kutubpur used hunting, fishing, animal rearing and seed production for their livelihood. They knew the farming technique. They used to hunt big and small animals, birds and fishes as bones of these fauna have been found in fairly good number. The cutting, splitting and cracking marks are found on the bones. Some bones are charred.

They used bone-marrow which is a rich source of healthy food. Besides these, they might have been collecting roots, leaves, corns, stems, fruits and seeds from the nature. Paddy husk have been found in the burnt clay and section of the coarse ware which is an evidence of cereal cultivation. The evidence of hearth and oven, charcoal, ash, soot marks on the ground and vases give important and valuable information about the cooking and food habits of the earliest settlers.

Antiquities

The implements made of bone, antler, stone and shells were found during the excavations and the surface collection include arrow heads, pins, points, scraper, bodkins, awls, needles, borers, styluses, ground stone celt, cleaver and microlithic tools (scraper, blades, pins, point, lunettes, knife etc.). Earliest settlers used beads of semiprecious stones (like agate, Chalcedony, crystal, jasper, Carnelian, steatite, terracotta and bones. They used hopscotch for the playing habits. The evidence of factory site has come to light. Earliest settler brought raw material of semi-precious stones and made their tools and ornaments. Discoid and drum- shaped beads of steatite have been found in good number. Big size of TC balls has been found which was used for the hunting or playing purposes.

The earliest settlers were well organized and systematic. They established technically sound society in rural environment. They had sufficient knowledge about the cultivation of cereals, plants, animal rearing, ceramic industry, tool making, cosmetics, house making and food cooking. They lived in community. They also established social structure. According to the Brahmanical text, *Satapatha Brahman*, Videgha Mathava settled an organized society on the eastern bank of the Sadanira. Perhaps, these sites from Hajipur to Mahanar allude to the mythical sites which were described in different ancient texts.

DISCUSSIONS

As far as the origin of pottery is concerned in entire India and Asia, earliest people first started pottery making, at very restricted scale when they were food gatherer and lived between the hilly range and perennial river banks. But as time elapsed, they settled at the river bank, and established aceramic primitive simple rural economic and cultural society. They mastered animal rearing and food production. It was a critical moment of history. The first Cultural Revolution occurred. After the domestication of grains and expertise in cultivation, they started ceramic culture at the river banks. On the basis of the presence of rice husks, phytoliths and paddy straw found at the most of the Neolithic site, suggest that the invention of pottery was necessitated due to the need of problem of food storing and cooking of food grains. The hunting and fishing were the possible earlier economic activities rather than the cereal production. People have used pottery for cooking meat, fish and especially for extraction of fat from the animals. A comparison of the manufacturing technique, surface treatment and decoration styles of the early pottery found in India, suggest a similar development of pre-historic cultures with minute variations. The wide distribution of early pottery making in India and other parts of Asia can be explained as the result of inter-societal interaction of people living in different environmental condition. The earliest ceramic of this site show

homogeneity with Panr, Chechar, Senuwar and other Neolithic sites. The earliest settlers of Chechar-Kutubpur had used stone, bone, terracotta and wood carved tools. Early settlers used to make their bows and arrows, spears, forks, tridents, strainer, projectile for missiles, all made of wood. But the evidences of wooden tools have not yet been recovered from this pre- historic site because it is degradable organic material.

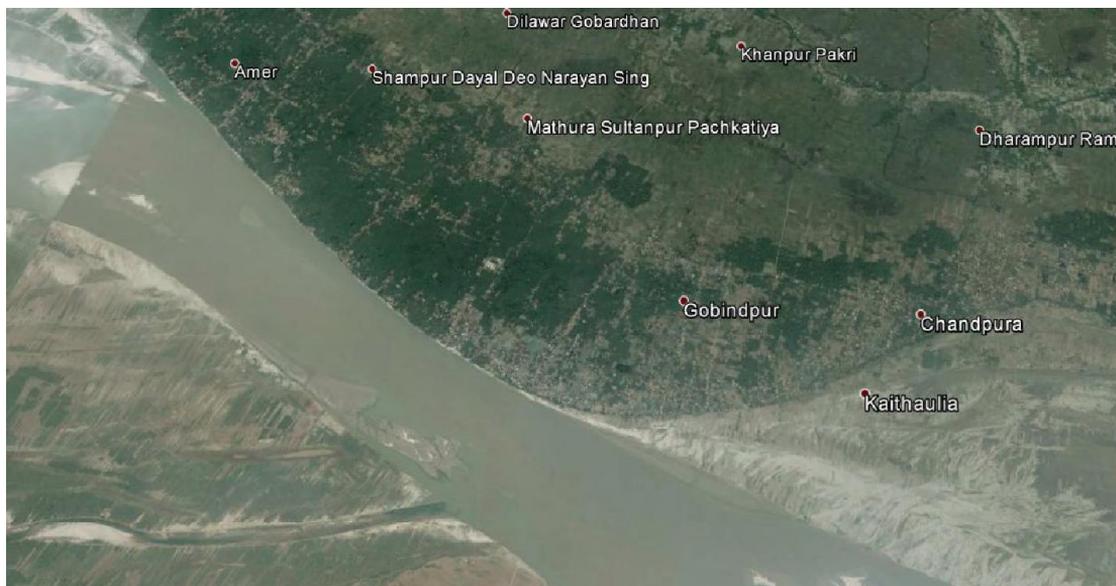


Image 1: Satellite image of Chechar, Vaishali District, Bihar



Figure 1: Stone Beads



Figure 2 : Raw Material



Figure 3: BRW Sherds



Figure 4 : Coarded ware



Figure 5 : Decorated Potsherds



Figure 6 : Coarded ware



Figure 7 : Coarded ware



Figure 8: Stone Tools

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