

Semthan: as a Neolithic site of Kashmir

Khursheed Ahmad Bhat

Department of history Jiwaji University Gwalior MP

Email ID: bhatkhursheed4@gmail.com

Abstract: *Kashmir is renowned for its attractiveness and usual outlook all over the globe. Its towering snow-clad mountains, dazzling spots, gorgeous valleys, rivers with freezing water, gorgeous lakes and springs and ever-green fields, intense forests and attractive health resorts, improve its magnificence and are a foundation of massive attraction for tourists¹. One of the renowned Persian writer Sheikh Sadia huge is supposed to have said, "If there is any paradise on earth, it is here in Kashmir". So far as the foundation of Kashmir is concerned here are a bunch of theories in relative to the foundation of Kashmir². However, the perfect starting point of the population of Kashmir is not exclusively documented and might be an exciting theme for study. It is not documented whether a few anthropological or any DNA study of Kashmir has still been attempted. There are only some accurate and overwhelming systematic proofs regarding the start of human culture in Kashmir. The most significant and satisfactory theory about the derivation of Kashmir is Stone Age culture, throughout which we can apprehension the start of human culture in Kashmir. Based on tool manufacture customs, the total Stone Age has been separated into three main stages i.e., Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures dated between 500000 BC to 3000BC³*

Keywords: *Dwelling, Cereals, Antiquities, Portray, punched marked etc.*

Introduction:

Semthan (75° 9' longitude- 33° 48' latitude) is located on a high plateau in the Anantnag district, near Bijbehara, on Jammu Srinagar National Road. The site consists of six small and tall contiguous mounds. At the highest point of the mound, the room storage is about 18 meters. A small excavation at Semthan was started in 1977 by the northwestern circle of India's archaeological investigation. Subsequently, a systematic work was carried out during three sessions from 1981 to 1983 under the direction of R.S. Bisht, the then superintendent archaeologist. In fact, in the words G. S. Gaur "Semthan excavation is a step towards reducing the gap between Neolithic and Kushan times in Kashmir". Semthan excavation has given a sequence of cultures to half a million years before the medieval era. Significantly, Semthan provided important evidence on two previously unknown cultures in the Kashmir valley, PNPB and NBPW. On other cultures, Indo-Greek, Kushan and Hun, the site provides more information. The major discoveries revealed by Semthan excavations on different successive cultures are given follows:

Period I – Pre-Northern Black Polished were Houses

This era shows normal structure movement which is borne out by consecutive floor levels. Nevertheless, no dwelling plan could be observed. However, it is possible that the former inhabitants of Semthan lived in hutments. This is

indicated by postholes and proofs of thatched top with well-known grass impressions⁴.

Antiquities

The main antiquities in Semthan comprise terracotta and bone beads. There are also proofs of the use of copper and iron as a number of copper pieces; an iron arrow head and iron slag were also recovered⁵.

Pottery

The significant discovery of this period is the presence of pottery which has been classified into five types of fabrics. 1. Sturdy red ware of fine paste made carefully on the wheel and treated occasionally with bright red slip. 2. A thin sectioned pottery with deep chocolate slip, 3. Dull ware with incisions making multiple wavy lines, criss-cross patterns, 4. Burnished gray ware, 5. Handmade crude ware of poor clay tempered with stone grits. The main shapes include a dish cum bowl on stand, deep level like lid with the central knob, a dabber based pot probably resembling gobbet, cooking vessels etc⁶.

Cereals

The remains of various cereals found at the Semthan site are rice, wheat, barley, mung and lentil. The largest quantity of cereals encountered is wheat followed by barley and rice. Very important evidence coming from Semthan is the grey ware found in period 1st and 2nd, most of which show affinity with the contemporary grey ware in the swat valley and also some kind of generic relationship with the late phase of the post Harappan pottery of the Banawali- bra phase of the plains in the Punjab and Haryana⁷. It is further testified to the coming of Aryans who began immigrating in Kashmir not later than 1500 as shown by the finds obtained from the megalithic period. Especially the multi-cropping

system, stone walled houses, rectangular stone sickles which along with horses and burnished grey ware in swat around 1700 BC have been explained in the context of immigrations of Indo-Aryans⁸. Recently a site has been spotted on the highest terrace of the village Hutmur overlooking the river Lidder. An exciting discovery was of plain grey ware under the remains of a later structure. The plain grey ware, as we know, is anterior to plain grey ware. A later work, Nilmatapurana, the canonical work of Kashmiri Brahmins written in 7th or 8th century A.D also records the arrival of Aryans⁹.

Period II- Northern Black polished ware

Having an occupational thickness of about 1.35cm this period is underlined by the following developments:

1. Presence of northern black polished ware in association with red and grey wares. However, the grey ware found here is different from that generally found in association with NBPW elsewhere. The common shapes were dishes, bowls, and vases¹⁰.
2. Cooking pots and rimless handles¹¹.
3. Punch marked copper and silver coins¹².
4. A rubble wall and the use of mud clods even for making of floors¹³.
5. Copper and iron objects as well as bone points¹⁴.
6. Terracotta balls and beads of semi precious stone and terracotta¹⁵.
7. Presence of new plants which were absent in period one namely Oat, Urad (fossilus mungo), pea etc¹⁶.

The finds obtained from period II especially NBPW, punch marked coins fit in big gap in the history of Kashmir as prior to this excavation; there was no conclusive evidence about the Mauryan occupation of Kashmir. The Ashoka mentioned in the Rajtarangni was declared by Kalhana as the local ruler provoking controversies about his real identity¹⁷. The Semthan finds set at rest the conflicting opinions by clearly demonstrating that Kashmir was a part of Mauryan Empire¹⁸. It is common place fact that where ever the Mauryan extended the boundaries of their empire, the political domination was accompanied by cultural conquest especially represented NBPW and punched marked coins found in all parts of Mauryan Empire. Although Kalhana calls Ashoka as the local ruler, his information about the belief of the ruler is faultless as they portray him a Buddhist ruler who constructed many Viharas and Stupas. It is significant to note that subsequently in the course of explorations many more NBPW sites namely Bonugantmula and Kanishpur in Baramulla were spotted showing wide spread distribution of Mauryan culture¹⁹. Understandably Mauryan impact on Kashmir proved of considerable significance considering the far advanced Mauryan culture underlined by intensive use of iron, wide spread rice culture, prevalence of writing, plenty of punch marked coins, NBPW introduction of burnt bricks and ring wells, rise of towns and elaborate administrative system²⁰. Significantly it is for the first time that we hear from any source about the foundation of a city. According to Kalhana Srinagar was built by Ashoka and the chronicler also credits Jaluka the successor of Ashoka for

having introduced an elaborate system of administration as he credits him for having established eighteen offices instead of seven existing by then²¹. The Mauryan period is also remarkable for the introduction of Buddhism, as most of the Buddhist sources attribute the introduction of Buddhism in Kashmir to Majjhantika a monk of Varanasi sent to Kashmir by Ashoka in accordance with his policy of sending missionaries to different countries to propagate Buddhism²².

Conclusion:

The Greek rule in Kashmir and Semthan was having an important place in that period. The proof of Greek coins and Greek stone images confirms that fact. According to the sequence of two cultures, Kashmir was associated with Northern India in the fields of art and growth of civilization. The staple diet during this era was wheat and rice in Kashmir valley. The pottery industry was successful throughout this period. The copper coins and iron tools were in use. Devdar trees were recovered at the places where we cannot dream those at present. The planting of Chinars started following the Devdar trees²³. All these features of Neolithic culture at Semthan demonstrate that the people in Semthan were economically developed and they were living a good life. In present times the people uses the techniques of making tools, pottery, and agriculture of Neolithic people. It is because of Neolithic culture that Semthan came on the Archaeological map. In short we can say that Neolithic culture brought a great change in the life of the people of the Semthan and also developed them economically²⁴.



References:

¹ Ibid p-2-6

² Magid Kagimu “*Religiosity for Promotion of Behaviors Likely to Reduce New HIV Infections in Uganda: A Study Among Muslim Youth in Wakiso District*”, December 2013, Volume 52, Issue 4, Journal of Religion and Health

³ Dar Mohd sajad “*Salient feature of different phases Neolithic culture in Kashmir*” Department of history Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalaya, Jabalpur, 2017, V-6 Issue -3 , p-112-115

⁴ Ibid

⁵ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/31808/10/10_chapter%205.pdf

⁶ Debala Mitra, “*Indian Archaeology: A review*” ,op.cit, 980-81, New Delhi, p-21

⁷ Yattoo Mumtaz A. “*Iron Age Material Culture in South Asia – Analysis and Context of Recently Discovered Slag Sites in Northwest Kashmir (Baramulla District) in Indi*”, p-1-8

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Painted_Grey_Ware_culture

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Black_Polished_Ware

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/32997/6/06_introduction.pdf

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ “*Encyclopaedia Of Indian Archaeology*” Vol.1, Archaeological Survey of India
JANPATH, NEW DELHI, p-10-20

²⁰ Baivab Ghosh “*The Significance of Mauryan Rule in Ancient India*” Article

<http://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/the-significance-of-maurya-rule-in-ancient-india/2181>



²¹ *“A History of Kashmir: Political, Social, Cultural, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day”*
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/early-indian-empires/v/chandragupta-ashoka-and-the-maurya-empire>

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_Kashmir

²³ Arjan Dev Majboor *“Semthan - The Prehistoric Period of Kashmir”* Koshur Samachar

²⁴ Mohd Sajad Dar, *“Salient features of different phases of Neolithic culture in Kashmir”* Department of History Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalaya, March 2017, Jabalpur, P-3-4