AN OVERVIEW OF POTTERY CULTURE IN GANGETIC PLAIN IN CONTEXT WITH HUMAN HABITATION

Dr. Jagmohan Bhatnagar
Swami Purnanand Degree College of Technical Education, Muni Ki Reti, Uttarakhand
E.mail: bhatnagarjm@gmail.com

Abstract: The **Gangetic Plain**, one of the most ancient cradles of human civilization, has a rich and vibrant pottery culture that reflects its long history, diverse traditions, and deeply rooted artistic practices. The present study reveals that a rich pottery culture has developed time to time with reference to Human habitation in and around Gangetic Plain. From the utilitarian earthenware of early settlers to the intricate and symbolic pottery of later periods, the evolution of pottery in this region offers a fascinating glimpse into the cultural and socio-economic fabric of the Gangetic Plain. Early settlers used simple handmade pots for storing grains, water, and food. Over time, with the advancement of technology, particularly the invention of the potter's wheel, pottery techniques evolved significantly.

INTRODUCTION

The **Gangetic Plain**, one of the most fertile and densely populated regions in the world, has been a hub of human habitation for thousands of years. It extends across northern and eastern India, parts of Nepal, and Bangladesh, following the course of the Ganges River and its tributaries. The Gangetic Plain has been central to the development of ancient civilizations, including the **Indus Valley Civilization** and later **Vedic civilization (Rattan, et.al., 2021)**. The Ganges River is considered sacred in Hinduism and has been a centre for pilgrimage and spiritual practices for millennia. Cities like **Varanasi**, **Haridwar**, and **Prayagraj** are major religious and cultural hubs developed alongside these riverine ecosystems.

The Indo-Gangetic Plain has been instrumental in influencing the historical and archaeological landscape of India. This extensive plain is categorized into three primary regions: the Upper Ganga Plain, the Middle Ganga Plain, and the Lower Ganga Plain. With the exception of the northern foothills of the Himalayas, the entire Ganga basin is characterized by its flat terrain (Valdiya, 2016). From a geographical perspective, the Indo-Gangetic Plain is largely uniform and devoid of significant features, consisting mainly of Pleistocene and contemporary alluvial deposits deposited by the Ganga River and its tributaries. The examination of this area has been notably affected by human activities, alterations in river pathways, and riverbank erosion (Gangal et al., 2010).

The observable effects of human activity on the physical landscape, resulting from cultural presence since the dawn of civilization, are largely attributed to colonization. The establishment and expansion of a settlement in a specific area are shaped by the interplay of local ecological conditions, the cultural and social values of the residents, technological advancements, management strategies, and the evolution of settlement patterns over time. The concept of "settlement" refers to a structured human community, which can vary from simple agricultural land to intricate urban centers, or from transient encampments for hunters or miners to more stable residences for city dwellers and farmers (Ahlawat, 2017). Components of a settlement encompass streets, thoroughfares, parks, religious sites, and recreational facilities, alongside a wide array of buildings serving various functions. In their early stages, the features of settlements are closely tied to their environment and display basic designs. However, as society progresses and knowledge expands, there is a notable increase in the variety of their sizes and architectural forms (Jha, 2014).

The Upper Ganga Plain, a highly fertile area in northern India, has significantly influenced the development of ancient Indian civilization. Its extensive archaeological findings illustrate a persistent evolution of pottery culture, which mirrors the technological, social, and cultural advancements of the region's inhabitants. Spanning from the Neolithic to the medieval periods, the pottery discovered in the Upper Ganga Plain offers a detailed narrative of human progress, commerce, and ceremonial practices. The evolution of pottery culture in this region highlights its historical

significance and cultural depth. Beginning with its modest origins in the Neolithic era and advancing through the Gupta and Mughal periods, pottery has consistently evolved to meet the changing preferences and requirements of society. This lasting legacy not only enhances our comprehension of ancient civilizations but also emphasizes the enduring significance of this craft within Indian culture.

A notable advancement during this era was the rise of Ochre-Colored Pottery (OCP) between 2000 and 1500 BCE. This pottery is distinguished by its reddish-brown exterior, robust texture, and practical forms such as bowls and storage containers. It is linked to the late Harappan and early Vedic cultures, signifying the onset of a unique pottery tradition in the area. The earliest indications of pottery in the Upper Ganga Plain can be traced back to the Neolithic period, approximately 6000 BCE. Initial inhabitants crafted handmade, coarse red and grey pottery for culinary and storage purposes. The shift to the Chalcolithic period brought improvements in pottery techniques, including the advent of basic wheel-made pottery.

A significant development in the pottery culture of the Upper Ganga Plain occurred with the introduction of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) during the period of 700–200 BCE. This pottery, characterized by its highly polished and glossy black finish, is linked to the urban centers that flourished during the Mauryan and post-Mauryan eras. NBPW is noted for its thinness, excellent firing quality, and often features elaborate designs. The Iron Age, spanning approximately 1200–600 BCE, saw the emergence of Painted Grey Ware (PGW), which is emblematic of early Vedic culture. This type of pottery is distinguished by its fine, wheel-thrown construction and grey hue, embellished with geometric and floral motifs painted in black. PGW is intricately associated with the epic narratives of the Mahabharata and the archaeological sites of Hastinapur, Ahichchhatra, and Atranjikhera. The presence of PGW pottery reflects a structured society engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade, while its refinement and aesthetic qualities indicate the increasing sophistication of early Vedic communities.

The extensive adoption of NBPW in urban centers such as Pataliputra, Kaushambi, and Varanasi underscores the expansion of trade networks and the rise of a prosperous and cultured urban elite. This era signifies a remarkable advancement in the technological and artistic skills of potters. During the Gupta period (4th–6th centuries CE), redware pottery emerged as the predominant style, frequently characterized by elaborate incised designs and decorative elements. The sophistication of redware is indicative of the economic affluence and cultural flourishing of the Gupta period. With the rise of the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal empires, glazed pottery gained popularity, reflecting influences from Persian and Central Asian artistic traditions. These glazed ceramics, often embellished with floral and geometric designs, served both functional and ornamental purposes, illustrating the fusion of indigenous and foreign artistic styles. Traditional pottery continues to thrive in rural parts of the Upper Ganga Plain. Handmade terracotta items and utilitarian clay vessels are still crafted for everyday use, while decorative ceramic art caters to modern tastes. Pottery remains an integral part of the region’s cultural identity, often associated with religious rituals and festivals.

The Upper Ganga Plain serves as a representative example of India's extensive cultural development, encompassing a timeline that stretches from prehistoric adaptations to the establishment of sophisticated communities and urban centers in the early historic period (Kosambi, 1965). Settlement pattern studies in archaeology cover a wide array of topics, including ancient habitation trends, historical demographic analyses, migration, trade, exchange, and resource distribution. The Gangetic Plain laid the groundwork for agriculture in India, being home to the first agricultural communities. This region features the Upper Gangetic Plain (UGP), characterized by its vast sedimentary soils and perennial rivers, including the Ganga (Ganges), Yamuna, Ghagra, Gomati, Gandak, and various tributaries. Furthermore, it is regarded as the origin of much of the agricultural practices found throughout the country. The fertile soil and favorable climate of the river valleys and plains have historically attracted a significant human population, as these conditions are crucial for agricultural productivity and the advancement of both agriculture and civilization. The Upper Gangetic Plain, located in the western section of the larger Gangetic Plains, has been a pivotal area for agricultural development in India since the Neolithic period (Fuller, 2008). The region's unique climate and geography have encouraged local inhabitants to engage in the domestication of plants and animals, leading to a transition from a pastoral nomadic lifestyle to settled agricultural practices. These factors have significantly contributed to the region's swift economic growth and the enhancement of genetic diversity among various crops.

Today, India's economy is largely reliant on agriculture, driven by population growth, the establishment of new settlements, and the exchange of products and knowledge with other regions.

Pottery in the Upper Ganga Plain transcends mere functionality; it serves as a portal to historical understanding, encapsulating the socio-economic, technological, and artistic milestones of its communities. The progression of pottery styles—from the Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) to the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) and beyond—reflects the advancement of human settlements, agricultural methods, trade networks, and urban development. Additionally, pottery frequently held significance in religious and ceremonial practices, thereby intertwining it with the spiritual dimensions of the local populace. Comprehensive surveys employing remote sensing and GIS have uncovered Paleolithic and Mesolithic sites within the alluvial plains. Certain locations have been strategically selected for their elevated terraces and proximity to ancient river channels, demonstrating adaptability to changing river dynamics and water availability (Sontakke, 2023). Excavations at sites such as Lahuradewa and Jhusi have revealed evidence of early sedentism and agricultural practices, notably in rice cultivation. These settlements often comprised small groups of semi-permanent structures made from mud and reeds, as agriculture gradually replaced foraging. In Neolithic contexts, handmade pottery, typically unadorned or featuring simple cord impressions, has been identified. During this era, locally sourced clay was utilized for pottery production, which was subsequently fired in open kilns, resulting in a characteristically coarse texture.

A structured hierarchy of settlements developed, with smaller villages serving as agricultural zones surrounding larger urban centers, such as Hastinapura. This is supported by archaeological evidence from sites like Hastinapura, Atranjikhera, and Kaushambi, which illustrate that urban expansion was marked by fortifications, organized communities, and distinct social divisions. In-depth analyses of lithic assemblages indicate that composite tools were utilized during the Mesolithic period, while a broader range of tools was employed in the Neolithic era. Further research reveals that iron played a significant role in both agricultural practices and military endeavors during the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) and Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) periods. Additionally, archeobotanical studies have validated the existence of a mixed economy that included both agriculture and pastoralism. The agricultural landscape is primarily characterized by rice (Oryza sativa) and wheat (Triticum spp.), although there is also evidence of secondary crops such as barley and pulses (Singh, 2017).

Summary: Research indicates a significant transformation in settlement patterns, evolving from semi-nomadic or nomadic communities that relied on natural rock shelters and riverine environments for sustenance, water, and raw materials to established, permanent settlements, particularly in the lush alluvial plains of the Upper Ganga Plain. This period was marked by advancements in technology, including hunting and gathering practices, the use of quartzite tools such as hand axes, cleavers, and scrapers, and a focus on megafauna and plant resources. Environmental and cultural factors played a crucial role during the era of settlement and cultural evolution in the Upper Ganga Plain. Pottery, often imbued with religious and cultural significance due to its use in rituals and offerings, reflects both the region's unique cultural identity and its connections to broader traditions across the Indian subcontinent. The availability of water from the Ganga and its tributaries, along with the fertile alluvial soil, significantly shaped land utilization and agricultural methods. As tool-making progressed from stone to copper and iron, there were notable changes in trade, architecture, and agricultural practices. The interplay between indigenous customs and external influences, such as those from the Indo-Aryans and Mauryans, fostered a dynamic cultural and social landscape.

REFERENCES

[1] Adams, W.Y. (1968). Settlement Pattern in Microzomes, Changing aspects of neobianvillage during 12th century. In: Chang, K.-C. (ed.), Settlement archaeology. Palo Alto: National Press Books. Pp: 174-207.

[2] Agarwal, D. P. (1971). In: The copper Bronze Age in India. IGNCA: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi.

[3] Ahlawat, J. (2017). A Geographic Analysis of Settlement Patterns in Ancient India. Hindu, 4 (15): 684-689.

[4] Bose, N. K. (1971). In:Tribals in India. National Book Trust India, New Delhi.

[5] Fuller, D. Q. (2008). Neolithic cultures. Encyclopedia of Archaeology, 1:756–768.

[6] Gangal, K., Vahia, M. N. and Adhikari, R. (2010). Spatio-temporal analysis of the Indus urbanization. CURRENT SCIENCE, 98 (6): 846-852.

[7] Jha, M. (2014). Migration, Settlement, and State Formation in the Ganga Plain: A Historical Geographic Perspective. Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, 57 (4):587-627.

[8] Kosambi, D. D. (1965). In: The Culture and Civilisatoin of Ancient India in Historical Outline. Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, London.

[9] Pal, U. (2022). Problems and Prospects of Pottery Artisans: A Case Study of Lakhimari Village, Dhubri, Assam. Lakhimpur Commerce College Research Journal, 4(1): 61-78.

[10] Prasad, K. V. (2017). Pottery tradition of Neolithic culture in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, 4(7): 377-382.

[11] Rattan, M., Sidhu, G.S., Singh, S. K. (2021). History of Land Use in the Indo Gangetic Plains, India and its impact on population: A Review. Plant Archives 21(1): 532-537.

[12] Rauth, S. (2021). The study of traditional pottery making in West Bengal and it's connection with megalithic culture. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 9(2): 89-100.

[13] Saraswati, B. (1979). In: Pottery-Making Cultures and Indian civilization. Abhinav Publication, New Delhi.

[14] Singh, R. Y. D. (2017). Settlement pattern in upper Ganga valley: special reference to Tarai of Uttaranchal. International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, 7 (2): 148-164.

[15] Sontakke, P. V. (2023). Geographical backdrop for the study of prehistoric cultures in Middle Ganga Plain. Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research, 10 (7): 865-871.

[16] Valdiya, K. S. (2016). Indo-Gangetic Plains: Evolution and Later Developments. In: The making of India. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-25029-8_22.