



SALIENT FEATURES OF DIFFERENT PHASES OF NEOLITHIC CULTURE IN KASHMIR

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Abstract: *There are many theories about the origin of Kashmir. However, the exact origin of the people of Kashmir is not fully established and could be an interesting subject for research. It is not known whether any anthropological or any DNA study of Kashmir has ever been attempted? There is only one definite and irrefutable scientific evidence about the beginning of human civilization in Kashmir and that is the Neolithic culture (new Stone Age). So far as the Neolithic culture of Kashmir is concerned, nearly forty Neolithic sites have been discovered, they are located on the elevated karewas deposits overlooking rivers and lakes. Very few of these have been excavated and the remaining sites are still waiting to be excavated.*

Key words: *Neolithic, Tools, Kashmir, Excavated, Burzahom*

INTRODUCTION

The Neolithic settlements are found over the top of the loess deposit which according to C¹⁴ dates pre-dates these settlements and is not at the same time with its formation. A systematic survey undertaken in the valley of Jhelum from Anantnag to Pampur resulted in the location of series of such settlements at Jayadevi-Udar, Thajiwor (near Bijbehara, Anantnag), Gufkral, Begagund, Dadsara, Hariparigom, Olchibagh, Panzgom, Pampur, Sempur and Sombur (all now in Pulwama district). This was followed by other sites at Gurhoma Sangri, near the Wular Lake, Damodar Karewas south-west of Srinagar, Brah 9.6 kms above the archaeological monument at Martand, Waztal 3 kms inside Srinagar-Pahalgam road above sacred spring at Mattan.

The archaeological exploration reveals now that Kashmir had a highly developed Neolithic culture spread throughout the length and breadth of the valley. In order to know the origin, diffusion and the development of such a culture it is but required that serious attempts are made to uncover any of these potential sites.

It is only then that datable evidence comes forth regarding the people, their houses, the amenities they enjoyed and the economic conditions they had to undergo to sustain themselves. The sites which are being excavated are below:-



1. Burzahom
2. Gufkral
3. Semthan
4. Kanishkapura

Phase I: A ceramic Neolithic (2900-2500 BC)

The stratigraphical layers belonging to the period from 2800-2500 B.C. were devoid of pottery hence the cultural stage was A ceramic in nature.^[252] On the basis of the finds of this period the archaeologists and prehistoric scientists have come to the conclusion that it was around 2900 BC that man started domestication of agriculture in Kashmir. This conclusion is based on the cereal remains found at this cultural level. Among the cereal remains grains of wheat, barley, and lentils were recovered. However this does not mean that the human beings completely parted ways with the age old practice of hunting and food gathering. This is substantiated by the fact that alongside grain remains bones of many wild animals namely Ibex, Bear, Wolf and Stag have also been recovered from this level of the Neolithic period. The domestication of agriculture was accompanied by the domestication of animals. The animals domesticated were sheep, goat and cattle. Like other Neolithic cultures we also find ground tools fashioned on stone and bone. The stone tools made by the people of this phase of Neolithic culture comprised axes, drills, picks, points, pestles, pounders, querns and mace heads. The bone tools encountered during this period are points, needles, harpoons and scrappers. Another important feature of this culture was that the people lived in underground pits which were circular, oval, rectangular or square. These, what may be called earth houses were dug on the karewas (udders). However during this phase no pottery has been found. This is why it is called A ceramic phase.

Phase II: Ceramic Neolithic (A) (2500-2000)

This period is marked by dominant continuities, i.e. the old culture continued in terms of crop and animal raising, hunting, tool making and pit dwelling. However a few additions were made during this period which marks it out from the earlier phase. Among the new developments mention may be made of the introduction of handmade pottery, as we for the first time come across different potteries namely thick coarse grey ware, fine grey ware and gritty dull red ware. The main pottery types include long necked jars, bowls and basins. The bowls and basins are characterized by ring or disc basis. On the basis of these parts are mat



impressed designs. During this period we find the presence of dog suggesting the domestication of this animal along with the other animals domesticated from the first phase. We also find some new crops namely pea, peach, walnut and apricot.

Phase III: *Ceramic Neolithic (B) (2000-1700)*

This phase is characterized by some far reaching developments in every sphere of life. For example we find that the people abandoned the underground pit and chamber dwelling instead made over ground houses made of wood, mud, bricks or both. Besides the traditional livestock we now find pig and horse also being domesticated. Similarly we find some new fruit crops namely grapes, vine and almond being cultivated. Some new stone tools namely double hold harvesters and spindle whorls are encountered for the first time during this period. Although stone objects are less prolific during this period bone tools were still in much demand and were better finished. The important tools made were arrow heads, harpoons, awls etc. Apart from earlier pottery types we also find some new introductions namely long necked jars and dish on stand with triangular perforated designs on stem region. A significant development of this period was the introduction of potter's wheel as we find a red ware painted pot with the depiction of a horned figure. We also find people making use of beads fashioned out of agate and carnelian. The people of this phase also demonstrated an appreciable artistic activity as is shown by two broken stone pieces with engravings; one piece depicts a hunting scene in which a stag is being attacked by two persons- from the rear with a long spear and in the front with an arrow. The upper portion of the slab depicts the two rising suns and a dog. Burzahom has yielded interesting information about the burial practices for the first time in the history of Kashmir. The burials are both of humans and animals. The graves pits were dug either beneath the dwelling pits or nearby. The burials were both primary and secondary.

Archaeologists have also found burial goods such as pottery, animals, precious stones etc. showing that people had faith in the life after death. The dead bodies were buried with red ochre.

CONCLUSION

All these features of Neolithic culture show that the people of that time were economically developed. In present times the people uses the techniques of making tools, pottery, and agriculture of Neolithic people. It is because of Neolithic culture that Kashmir came on the



Archaeological map of the world and also got worldwide importance. In short we can say that Neolithic culture brought a great change in the life of the people of the Kashmir and also developed them economically, because tourists from all sides of the world came here and spend lot money in order to visit these sites.

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