

## **CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF CHALCOLITHIC CULTURE in MIDDLE GANGA PLAIN**

**Dr. NEELESH KUMAR PANDEY**

Former Research Associate, Dept. of A.I.H.C& Archaeology

BHU, Varanasi

Today the middle Ganga plain is the most densely populated area of India. By the oncoming of the 1<sup>st</sup> mill-B. C. the plain is dotted with a large number of Neolithic-Chalcolithic settlements. The surrounding hilly tracts were already inhabited by the stone settlers in the Vindhya-Kaimur belt and the plateau of Chota Nagpur. In due course of time with transition from hunting-gathering to agricultural base of economy there appear to be a shift in ecological preference. Some sites found in Uttar Pradesh-Bihar confirm this contention. The district of Chandauli and Meja subdivisions of Allahabad district in Uttar Pradesh have yielded Stone Age sites. There are a good number of Mesolithic sites, which were witness to the sum of seasonal migration of the people from the Vindhyan range, appear in Pratapgarh district. Numerous graves of Mesolithic people are located on horse-shoe lakes. The Stone Age settlements in these areas really belong to the spurs of the Vindhyan Mountains. This is also true of the Paleolithic settlement found in Paisara village in Mongyr and Neolithic-Chalcolithic settlements in Senuwar in Rohtas district .Though these sporadic Stone Age settlements had started in various parts of Middle Ganga valley, the real breakthrough in the history of cultural life of the area comes with the introduction of metal technology. In middle Ganga plain continuous habitation begins with culture begins with a culture using Black-and-Red ware, initially in Neolithic environment. Supposedly it is comparatively later horizon of Neolithic Culture. The Chalcolithic culture in middle Ganga plain begins around 2000 B. C. that continues till the advent of Iron around 1000 B. C.

Here we propose to make an in-depth study of the middle Ganga plain right from the earliest levels of its continuous history starting with Black-and-Red ware with Chalcolithic culture. The Black-and-Red ware (B. R. W.) continues with some changes till early historic period. Most sites of the middle Ganga plain have a continuous occupation up to Sunga-Kushana period and Gupta-post Gupta periods.

Occurring in diverse contexts, Black-and-Red ware is a unique pottery tradition. Black-and-Red ware

was first discovered in 1945 and then Brahmgi in 1947 by R. E. M. Wheeler.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning the Black-and-Red ware occurred invariably with Megaliths and it acquired the designation of Megalithic ware. After independence, the archaeological forthcoming from different parts of country changed the supposed exclusive burial character of the Black-and-Red ware. It came to be associated with the archaeological cultures from Neolithic period to the end of first millennium B. C.<sup>2</sup>

Before going into the details of the cultural dimensions and other related issue of Black-and-Red ware, a few words about the technique of manufacturing of the ceramic may be in order here.

The Black-and-Red ware enjoys the nomenclature because of its appearance. It is a ware which is black inside and outside with black top. The results are obtained with a special technique known as “inverted firing technique”. In this technique, the pots are placed in an inverted position in the kiln, subjecting the exterior to oxidizing conditions and the interior to reducing conditions. Saw-dust or some vegetable material might have been fitted in the pots while firing under reducing conditions. As result, the interior turns black and the exterior dull red to buff in colour. It is a well-known that Black-and-Red ware is a product of inverted firing. However, some effort has been made to create some special effect of dullness in view of Majumdar.<sup>3</sup>

The B. R. W. in Middle Ganga Plain appears from Neolithic to N. B. P. W. period. For the convenience, we may divide its occurrence in Pre N. B. P.W. period in three cultural contexts, viz.

**(A)** Neolithic

**(B)** Chalcolithic

**(C)** In association iron in pre N. B. P. W. period.

**(A)** In Neolithic context, this pottery appears at sites like Chirand, Chechar Kutubpur, Taradih, Senuwar and Sohgaora etc. These Neolithic settlements demonstrate a rich cultural material. The people were generally living in the wattle and daub houses. Some of the houses at Chirand were circular in plan. The floors were made of rammed earth. Ovens of different shapes have been found at Chirand.<sup>4</sup>

The ceramic industry was dominated by red ware along with grey and B. R. W. Both plain and painted B. R. W. was found. This pottery was painted in white colour with linear pattern. Generally vase, bowl, deep bowl, dish, pan, footed cup were the prominent shapes. Several types of stone and bone tools were in use. Microliths were used in considerable number. Beads of various semiprecious stone are found at Chirand in numerous shapes.<sup>5</sup> Ornaments of terracotta, bone and

ivory were also used, as is attested to at Chirand<sup>6</sup> and Taradih.<sup>7</sup> several type of terracotta objects like ornaments and figurine are found at Chirand.<sup>8</sup>

The significant finds of Chirand neolithism handmade figurines of terracotta. Bull, serpent, bird and female figurines have been found hand modeled here. The culture subsisted on agriculture, cattle breeding and hunting and gathering. Grain like wheat, barely, mung, massor and rice etc. were cultivated this time. Cattle, sheep, goat, pig and dog were domesticated. Occurrence of charred bones and cut-marks on bones of several wild animals suggest hunting and fishing substantiated the economy heavily.

**(B)** In the Chalcolithic context the ceramic industry appears at sites like Sonpur, Narhan, Imlidih, Manjhi, Khairadih, Vaisali, Maner, Lahuradeva, Malhar, Oriup etc. During this period the B.R.W. industry became predominant and pottery was sophisticated. The people of this period were with slightly advanced material culture. The houses were made of wattle and daub. The floors were made of beaten earth and rarely of lime. Mud walls were also in use as evident at several sites. The houses were seemingly partitioned into a number of rooms by rising walls; one of them served the purpose of Kitchen. A number of armed clay has been found at Lahuradeva<sup>9</sup>. There are made in different direction and location on mud floors. These hearths are comparable with the modern ones, employed for cooking the food. Three different kinds of ovens, circular, semi-circular and dug out have been found at Oriup.<sup>10</sup> Agriculture, fishing and hunting seem to have been the main stay of their economy. Though metal agriculture implements have not been attested to from any site but a good list of cereals have been attested from sites like Narhan, Lahuradeva, Agiabir, Malhar, Chirand, Senuwar, Sonpur, Taradih and Oriup etc. Discovery of animals and fish bone from several sites indicates that cattle breeding, hunting and fishing were other important source of livelihood of these people. Several types of hunting tools were also used. Microliths were still in use. Beads of terracotta, stone and semiprecious stones have been discovered almost from all the Chalcolithic sites (Sites of Middle Ganga Plain). Copper bangles are also found from Oriup.<sup>11</sup> Copper wires were found at Chirand, Sonpur etc. Terracotta bead, animal and human figurines, metal objects, fragmentary bone pieces were also in use, though rarely. Several types of bones objects were being used. Ceramic industry was characterized mainly by B. R. W. Besides B. R.W., the potters also produced black, black slipped, red, cream slipped red and steel grey wares. Long necked jar, vase, bowl, dish and basin are the principal types noticed in the B. R. W.

(C) In the Pre N. B. P. W. Iron Age, B. R. W. has been reported from the sites like Rajghat, Prahladpur, Ganwaria and Narhan etc. During this period the material culture of the people remained same as in preceding Chalcolithic period. Only change was the introduction of iron in the Middle Ganga Plains.

The tradition of painting takes a dramatic turn by its reappearance in the Middle Ganga Plain. In this area the pottery was painted with white linear designs. The B. R. W. was relegated to a sub-ordinate position of being just an associated ceramic industry. In this area both plain and painted B. R. W. are found. Thus, it is obvious that Black-and-Red wares occur in different archaeological context.

## REFERENCES

- (1) Wheeler, R.E.M., "Brahmaigiri and Chandravalli 1947; Megalithic and other cultures in Mysore state," Ancient India, No.4. (July 1947- January. 1948), pp. 200 and 202.
- (2) Wheeler, R.E.M., Early India and Pakistan (1960) p.163.
- (3) Majumdar, G.G., The problem of Black-and-Red ware; A Technological Approach in (Ed).A.K. Narain, Megaliths in India, (Banaras, 1969)
- (4) Sinha, B. P., Archaeology of Bihar. K.P. J R I (Patna 1988) p. 82
- (5) Ibid. p. 82
- (6) Ibid. p. 83
- (7) I A R, 1981- 82, p. 10- 12
- (8) Sinha, B.P, 1988. Op cit., p83
- (9) Tiwari, R. R.K. Srivastava, K.K. Singh, and K.S Saraswat.2005-6, Further Excavation at Lahauradeva, District(U.P.) Pragdhara No.16, Journal of the up state Archaeological organization (Luck now), Puratattva No. 36, pp.68-75.
- (10) IAR, 66-67; p.6
- (11) Ibid. p.6