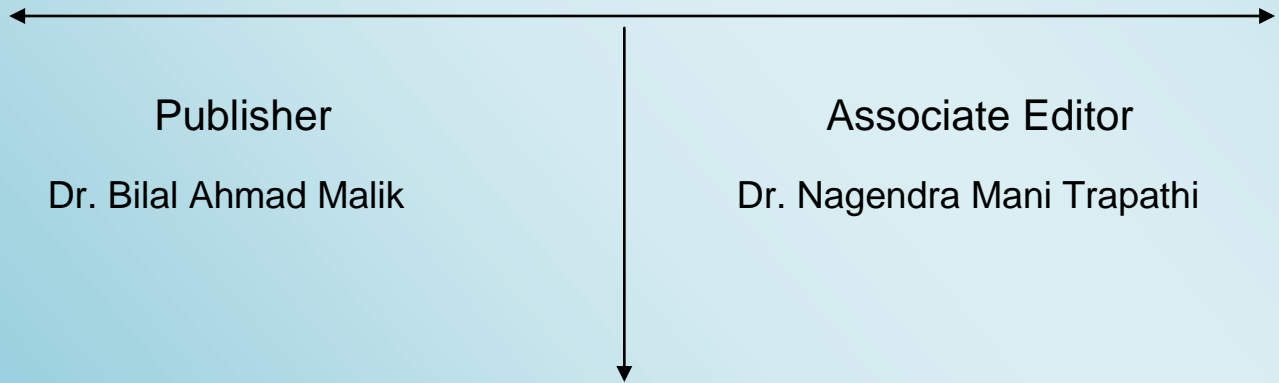


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THE NEOLITHIC CERAMICS OF KASHMIR-A RECENT STUDY OF NEOLITHIC SITES OF SOUTHERN KASHMIR

ABDUL ADIL PARAY

Abstract

This paper presents the study of ceramics that belong to the Neolithic period of Kashmir with special reference to their forms and functions. Due to limited published literature on the excavated artifacts of the period in Kashmir, the major concentration of this study is based on the unexcavated Neolithic sites of Southern Kashmir including Brah and Waztal in Anantnag district, Panzgom, Hariparigom, Begund, Olchibagh, Sombur, Dadsur and Gufkral in Pulwama district. The study is based on the specimens and Surface collections (Plate I – VI) in the form of fragments and shreds, so we are inevitably left with the alternative of conjectural reconstruction of the original shapes. Current work also focuses to derive the technical advances made in the art of Neolithic pottery making by virtue of contacts with the neighboring cultures and requirements induced by life styles. This study attempts to inquire about the production technology of the Neolithic pottery, the raw material and its preparation, shaping of pottery vessels, surface treatment and decoration and firing procedures. It is an attempt to investigate the distribution of pottery in terms of production centers or centers from which an assemblage of ceramics had originated. This research paper is also meant to figure out the most common shapes, designs, the decorations and to understand the consumption or uses of the pottery in the period under study.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Out of more than three dozen identified and explored Neolithic sites of Kashmir, only two have been excavated till date. So this study emphasis on the primary requirement for the future to ensure the increasing proportion of ceramic studies by excavating the explored Neolithic sites. There is also the need of using physical sciences to answer the real archaeological questions that go beyond the mere reconstruction or description of the production technology, distribution, functions and forms of Neolithic ceramics. In addition, this study may prompt the regional institutions to go for excavation of these sites, which can help to interpret the material culture in the overall environmental, socio-cultural, economic and historical context in which the pottery was produced. Moreover, one of the most important reasons of working on this topic is the deteriorating condition of the sites

due to human greed, which need the attention and care from the scholars of the subject and the concerned departments.

INTRODUCTION

The vessels or utensils made of clay and designed in different shapes and sizes with some purposes or usage is known as pottery. It is also known as ceramics derived from a Greek word 'Keromas' meaning 'burned stuff' or 'earthen ware'. The pottery being common man's utility since prehistoric times gives us enough information about his daily life and the society he lived in. Man has initially expressed his feelings, aesthetics and art through different means but pottery is one of the impressive means of his communication of ideas. After the water, the eatables, and stone tools, clay began to be more widely manipulated by the prehistoric population during the Holocene period. Its use was a part of more general processes of resource and social intensification and after agriculture it was used to manufacture pottery. Pottery is an important item that lends stability to settled way of life. The skill of making and using of pottery spread widely as prestige technology and as practical technology, but varied from area to area depending on specific needs and circumstances. The earliest settlers of the valley were unfamiliar with pottery but after some time they learnt its manufacture and use.

| S.No. | Site Name | Burnished | Coarse Grey | Combed | Ochreous Red | Fine Grey | Gritty Red |
|-------|-------------|-----------|-------------|--------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Gufkral | P | P | P | NP | P | P |
| 2 | Hariparigam | P | P | P | NP | P | P |
| 3 | Begund | P | P | P | NP | P | P |
| 4 | Dadsar | P | P | P | NP | P | P |
| 5 | Olchibag | P | P | P | NP | P | P |
| 6 | Sombur | P | P | P | NP | P | P |
| 7 | Panzgom | P | P | P | NP | P | P |
| 8 | Waztal | P | P | P | NP | P | P |
| 8 | Brah | NP | NP | NP | NP | NP | NP |
| 10 | Balapora | P | P | NP | NP | NP | P |

Key: P = Present, NP = Not Present

DESCRIPTION OF THE NEOLITHIC POTTERY OF SOUTH KASHMIR

Most of the Neolithic sites of south Kashmir have been identified and located on the basis of presence of the pot shreds of that period as pottery is sufficiently available throughout the Neolithic sites of Kashmir. A good number of earthen vessels and pot shreds of different colors, fabrics, shapes, forms and sizes have been recovered from the excavated Neolithic sites of Kashmir. Same is the case with unexcavated Neolithic sites of Kashmir. During the field survey of the sites under study pot shreds of different fabrics were collected from the sites. On the basis of color, texture and fabrics these pot shreds have been recognized of four types viz., Coarse thick grey ware, Fine Grey ware, Black burnished ware and Gritty red ware. The shreds of the different wares were found almost at every site but in small fragments except a few big pieces. Hence, it is not possible to draw the exact shapes of the pots or vessels from these shreds. Therefore, these pot shreds have been discussed in general on the basis of color, surface treatment, slip, texture etc and their conjectured shapes have been drawn (Plates V and VI). Neolithic pot shreds from four sites have been choosed and their description is given below (Plates I, II, III and IV).

PLATE I:

Item Nos. 1 to 6 in Plate I display the pot shreds collected from tne Neolithic Site Gufkral. No 1 is the shred of a shallow bowl with straight flared out body in thick medium fabric Burnished Grey ware made on slow wheel. It has featureless rounded rim. The diameter of the mouth of the bowl is 20.5 cm.

No. 2 is the shred of a globular bowl in dull red ware with black patches in medium fabric. The top portion of the rim is flattish concave with outward projecting narrow ludge. The low neck portion has nail pinch designs which seems to have been executed by a youngster considering the curvature of the nail. The diameter of the mouth of the bowl is 20.5 cm.

No. 3 is the neck and mouth portion of a relative straight sided pot in dull red ware of medium fabric made on slow wheel. The diameter of the mouth is 19.5 cm. The out curved featureless rim has rounded edge.

No. 4 is the neck and mouth portion of a coarse fabric dull red ware pot with out-flared rounded rim. The neck portion has gritty exterior finish which seems to have extended on the body. The diameter of the mouth of the pot is 26.5 cm.

No. 5 is the bottom portion of a black slipped ware having a hallow disc base in fine fabric.

No. 6 is the mouth portion of a pot in dull red ware of medium fabric having evidence of burnishing on the surface. The out-flared mouth is uniformly thick with rounded edge which seems to have been finished by hand. The diameter of the pot at mouth is 23 cm.

PLATE II:

From No. 1 to 6 of Plate II the shreds have been collected from Neolithic site Waztal of South Kashmir. The description of the items is given as under.

No. 1 is a piece of wide conical bowl in coarse dull red ware with uneven exterior finish. The diameter of the mouth of the vessel is 24.5 cm. the edge of the rim is gradually narrowed to give a rounded finish. It is slow wheel made pot.

No. 2 is the bottom portion of a pot in medium grey fabric having burnished finish on the both the inner and exterior surfaces. It is a wheel throne pot with a low disc base.

No. 3 is a pottery piece of a flared out rim of a pot in dull red medium fabric. The featureless rim has rounded finish.

No. 4 is a portion of an out-flared mouth of a big pot in medium fabric. The featureless rim has flattish termination at the edge. It is dull red ware.

No. 5 is the mouth portion of a pot with extremely out-flared rim made of medium red fabric, but coated with a slip that has given it grayish lustrous smooth finish. The gradually thickness of rim portion has rounded finish.

No. 6 is the neck portion of a pot with slightly slanting straight neck made in medium red fabric. The pot is given grayish slip giving it lustrous smooth surface.

PLATE III:

Plate III show the pot shreds collected from the Neolithic site of Sombur. Below is given the description of the pottery fragments collected there during field survey.

No. 1 is the mouth portion of a dull red ware in medium fabric with flared-out rounded rim with reduced thickness towards the exterior. It is a wheel made but the exterior has gritty appliqué finish. The diameter of the mouth of the pot is 22.5 cm.

No. 2 is a grey ware shred of a slanting straight sided mouth portion of a pot in medium fabric with rounded featureless rim. The diameter of the rim of the pot is 39 cm.

Item No. 3 of the Plate is a rim portion of a dull red ware in medium fine fabric with grayish slip on the interior which has turned reddish on exterior. The diameter of the mouth of the pot is 45 cm. The rim of the pot is rounded with thumb thick section having slightly slanting profile on the exterior.

No. 4 is the mouth portion of a dull red ware with flared-out rounded featureless rim in medium fabric. The diameter of the mouth of the pot is 21 cm.

No. 5 is the mouth portion of a pot in dull red ware of medium fabric with featureless flared-out rim in medium fabric.

No. 6 is the mouth portion of a dull red ware with straight curved sides having drooped down exteriorly extended rim in medium fabric. The diameter of the mouth of the pot is 19.5 cm.

PLATE IV:

Item nos. 1 to 6 of Plate IV are the pot shreds belonging to the Neolithic site of Hariparigom in south Kashmir. The description of the pot shreds is given as under.

Item No. 1 of the Plate V is a mouth portion of a fine red ware having near horizontal flared-out rim with slightly elevated and having out-ward double indent exteriorly. The inner portion of the rim also has deep indented line near the rim. The shred is given thin grayish red slip exteriorly. The diameter of the mouth of the pot is 14 cm.

No. 2 is the mouth portion of a hand-made Grey ware with slightly out curved rim. The rim portion is unevenly finished.

No. 3 is the mouth portion of a Grey ware in medium fine fabric with extremely flared-out rounded featureless rim, which is thinned down gradually towards the exterior. The neck portion is given slanting line decoration.

No. 4 is the bottom portion of a dull red ware in fine fabric with rounded bottom and with disc base.

Item No. 5 is a shred of a fine grey ware with exterior basket impression of fine reed. No. 6 is the shred of a grey ware in medium fabric containing basket impression exteriorly.

POSSIBLE SHAPES

The possible shapes (**Plates V**) of the pottery of hand-made grey ware of different shades like dull red, brown and buff were represented by bowls, vases and stems. Mat impressions are a recurrent feature on many types especially on pots having a flat base indicating their production on mats. Other varieties of fine pottery represented by bowls, globular pots, jars, stems, and funnel shaped vessels have been found. In addition, dishes with hollow stand, stems with triangular perforations and high necked jars with a flaring rims, globular body and flat bases, which might have deluxe ware of the period. The pottery was made through coiling technique. At some sites hand-made pottery comprised mostly coarse grey with small number of dull rough red ware, black burnished ware, with knobbed designs exist. The shapes represented are big jars, bowls, vases, and basins, dishes on stand with mat impressed bases, pinched designs, and reed impressions, oblique designs with rough interior and exterior surfaces. Pottery consisted of grey ware, burnished grey ware, wheel turned black burnished ware and a few red gritty ware shreds were also found which perhaps belonged to the late Neolithic period. The previous shapes continued in this period with an addition of funnel shaped vases and high necked jars with flaring rim, globular body and flat base. Decorations include mat and cord impressed bases, reed and straw impressions, pinched and oblique designs on the neck region etc. At both the sites many pots were characterized by graffiti marks.

OBSERVATIONS

From the above description of the pot shreds from the Neolithic sites of south Kashmir we come to know that the pottery of the Neolithic culture of Kashmir belongs to two technological classes i.e., medium coarse and medium fine fabrics in grey, black, and dull red ware. Coarse fabric is characterized by crude and handsome pottery in which clay used for manufacturing the pottery is not well levigated. And the different colors are because of uncontrolled firing. In fine fabric the clay used for manufacturing of pottery is well levigated, refined by elutriation and of small particles. Burnished grey ware, red ware and shades of these wares like black, ashy, buff etc. are main wares of this fabric. Both handmade and mostly slow wheel throne pottery was found at most of the sites under study. While examining the shreds it seems strip and coil techniques were utilized for the production of pottery. Handmade pottery could have been given shapes by pressing hollow ball of clay in thumbs and then thinning thin walls between the thumb and finger, specifically in shaping the small sized vessels. The neck and rims of the pots were made in various forms and mostly the pots were having disc bases. The main decoration types found on the pot shreds are nail impressions, basket impressions, grass and reed impressions, mat impressions, ridging and notches on the rims and the necks of the vessels. There is no evidence of colored or

painted pottery from any of the sites. The shreds of mouth portions of the vessels show that the pots were having flaring rims, short curved and straight long necks and wide and open mouths.

Contacts and affinity:

Coarse grey and black burnished pottery, found in Swat valley resemble with that of ceramics of Neolithic Kashmir. Some shades of pottery resemble with the pre-Harrapan and Harrapan wares, which show the connection between the two cultures. The debate over the nature, origin and contacts of South Kashmir Neolithic people is open and continue till the explored sites can be excavated to know more about the particular period.

CONCLUSION

Study of the prehistoric pottery helps us to know the society, culture, economy, and sometimes religious beliefs of the people. It throws light on the petrology, engineering skills, artisanship, and technological perfection of the people of that time. Archaeologically pottery is conceptualized interpretative tried suggesting that in the context of human social evolution. It has been considered as the alphabet of archaeology and archaeological history and an indicator of a country's civilization. It helps to reconstruct the history of a particular time and space as it is non-perishable in nature and its fragments are sufficient to indicate the age or chronology and the various cultural stages of the bygone societies.

The virtue of the Neolithic pottery of south Kashmir lies in the fine mastery of form and style The above given description of the shreds in plates I to VI suggest that Neolithic people of produced pottery of different shapes and sizes and for various purposes. The main uses of the pottery could have been storage of various things, cooking, dishes used while eating etc. It is obvious that the Neolithic folk of south Kashmir knew the skillful craft of pottery production, which had gone through different stages of pot making. However, what are lacking are the evidences for substantiating the different stages of experiments in pottery production. While as the handmade and wheel throne, pot shreds in different fabrics and colors clearly show that the Neolithic pottery of south Kashmir belonged to different sub-cultural phases and stages of Neolithic period.



Plate I Neolithic Pot Shreds from Gufkral



Plate II Pottery from Waztal



Plate III Pottery from Sombur



Plate IV Pot Shreds from Hariparigom

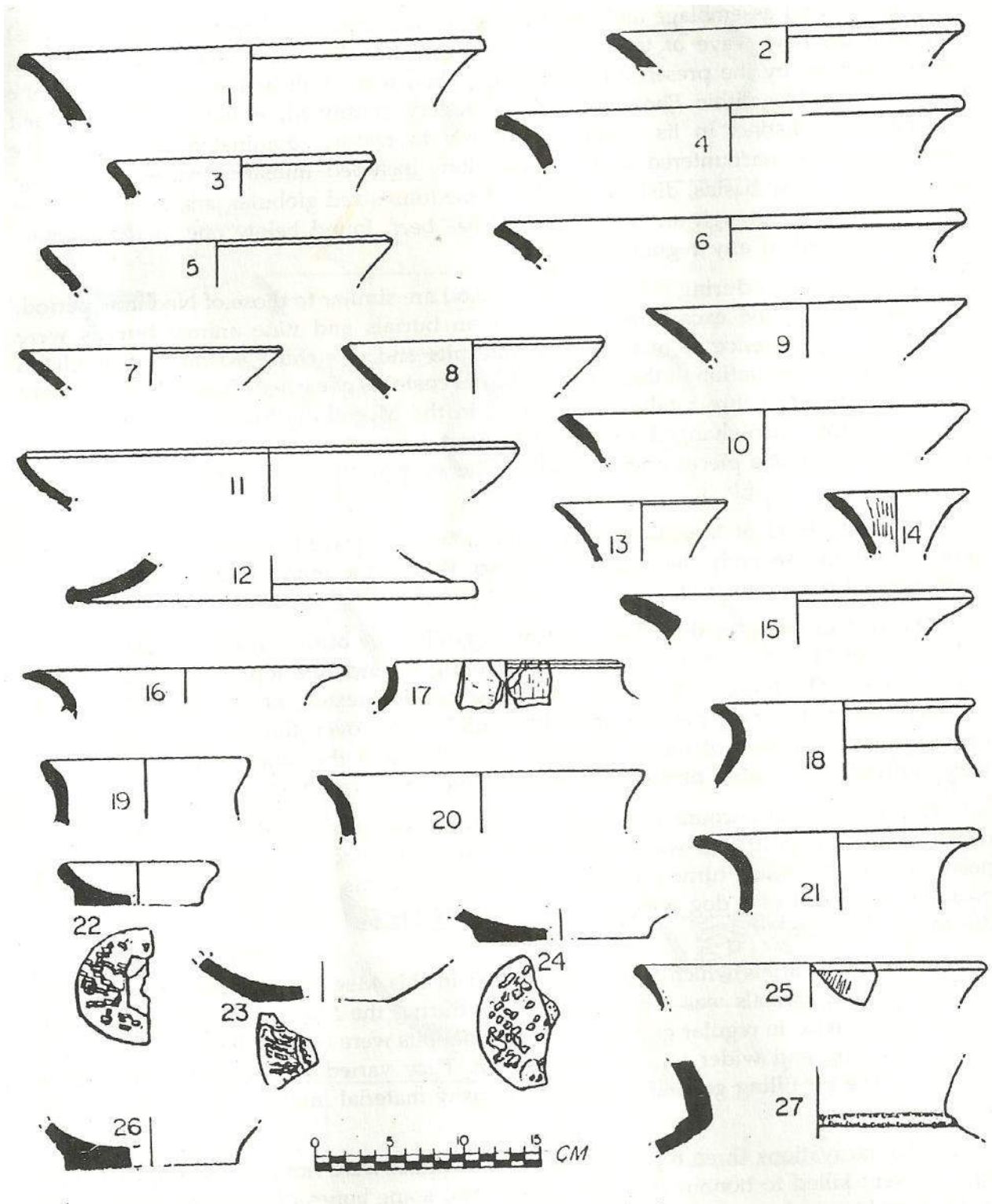


Plate V Probable Forms of Neolithic Pottery of Southern Kashmir

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