A CERAMIC STUDY OF THE HARAPPAN BURIALS FROM NORTH GUJARAT

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BY

ABHIJIT MAJUMDAR

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANCIENT HISTORY

FACULTY OF ARTS

M.S. UNIVERSITY OF BARODA

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SUMMARY

A great deal of research has been carried out on different aspects of the Harappan Civilization since the discovery of the two important sites; Harappa and Mohenjodaro in Indus Valley, more than seven decades ago. In spite of all these efforts, the Harappan culture still remains an enigma, as precious little has been understood about this dynamic culture. With every new site discovered, a new facet of the culture come into fore. However, in recent years, with the input of new scientific and methodological approaches, the understanding about this enigmatic culture has increased many folds. As a result, many old concepts about its beginning, development and survival have either been expanded or replaced by fresh hypotheses.

With their innovative ideas and stupendous adaptive skills, the Harappans survived for a long period of time spanning about four millennia showing stages of development, maturity and decline. One of the important aspects of the Harappans that kept them in good stead and surviving for such a long time was their apparent mobility and proliferation over a large area consisting of a number of eco-zones with diverse environmental variables and economic incentives (Chitalwala 1989). The enterprising Harappans demonstrated their skill in selecting suitable environmental niches during their multi-directional expansion. These factors and accessibility to natural resources were largely responsible for the growth, expansion and long survival of the Harappa culture. Every region, it seems, have been occupied by the Harappans for a specific purpose, for procuring raw material, avail-
ability of suitable agriculture land or excellent pastures for their animal folks.

The gradual development of the Harappan community from the Neolithic phase has been traced within the Indian Sub-Continent. The developmental phases of the Harappa culture has been termed differently by various scholars. Traditionally, the Harappan Civilization was understood by the material culture recovered from the sites of Mohenjodaro, Harappa and other major Urban centers. This phase came to be known as the Mature Phase of the Harappa culture or ‘Mature Harappan culture’. Anything that stratigraphically proceeded this phase was identified as ‘pre-Harappan culture’ or ‘proto-Harappan culture’. The phase succeeding the Mature Harappan occupation was termed as ‘Late Harappan culture’. However, the significance of these terms were not clearly defined and have been used in different contexts. Mughal (1970: 359-378) developed and defined the term ‘Pre-Early Harappan’ and ‘Early Harappan’ for the incipient phase of the Harappa culture. Early Harappan for him is the assemblage that stratigraphically precedes the Mature Harappan occupation and contains a number of cultural traits that are characteristic of the subsequent mature phase. The Pre-Early Harappan occupation falls between the pre-pottery Neolithic and the Early Harappan phase.

Possehl developed an alternative scheme describing the Harappan occupation as Pre-Urban, Urban and Post-Urban phases (Possehl 1977, 1990). The Pre-Urban phase goes back to the initial development of food production in the Indus Valley and encompasses the Pre-Early and Early Harappan phases of Mughal. He, however, clearly defines the little understood Post-Urban phase of the Harappa culture.
For the present study I have followed Mughal's terminology, Early Harappan, to designate the phase immediately prior to the Mature Phase as the term has some merit and is very clearly defined by Mughal (Mughal 1970: 6).

Gujarat seems to have possessed remarkable potentials during the Harappan times, as it has proved to be one of the densely populated regions in the entire Harappan domain. Extensive studies since 1930's has not only led to the discovery of more than five hundred sites, showing different degrees of Harappan affiliation, but also substantially increased our understanding of the Harappa culture in Gujarat.

Until recently, it was assumed that the earliest settled Chalcolithic communities in Gujarat were associated with the Urban/Mature phase of the Harappa culture (circa 2550-2000 BC). Though Rao and Sankalia proposed the existence of a pre-Harappan occupation in Gujarat before the arrival of the Harappans, no serious thoughts were given to this proposition. However, excavations carried out at Loteshwar (north Gujarat) and Padri (Saurashtra) and the re-analysis of archaeological data from previously excavated site at Prabhas Patan and Lothal (both in Saurashtra) have suggested that prior to the incoming of the Harappans, Gujarat was already inhabited by several regional non-Harappan Chalcolithic communities. Calibrated radiocarbon dates for this cultural phase from the stratified levels at Loteshwar, Padri and Prabhas Patan go back to the second half of the fourth to the first half of the third millennium BC, making them more than half a millennium earlier than the Urban/Mature Harappans.
The author classifies these Chalcolithic cultures as the regional pre/non-Harappan Chalcolithic communities. These were the population that developed independently and though later came in contact with the Harappans, maintained their own identity. But when a settlement is denoted as Early Harappan, to the author, it means the early phase of the Harappa culture or what Mughal describes as ‘Early Harappans’ (Mughal 1970: 6). Early Harappan is the phase when the Harappa culture was in the process of developing into a Mature/Urban culture. There is a clear distinction between these two pre-Mature Harappan cultures. Early Mature/Urban Harappan is a mosaic of different pre-urban cultures like Amri, Kot Diji and Sothi, which one way or the other helped in the making of Mature/Urban Harappan culture. But how much the regional Chalcolithic cultures of Gujarat, such as the Micaceous Red ware, Anarta ware, Pre-Prabhas and the Padri ware cultures contributed to the development of the Harappa culture is still uncertain. Therefore, as the present evidence stands, it is appropriate to designate separate identity and nomenclature to these two cultural groups.

The notion that the Mature/Urban Harappans were the first to have moved into the region of Gujarat is now proved otherwise with the recent research in north Gujarat. The present work deals with the movement of the Early Harappan elements from Sind, further south into north Gujarat. This was first evidenced from the extended inhumation and pot burials unearthed from Nagwada, a site in Surendranagar District of north Gujarat. The pottery found from these burials as grave goods do not show similarities with the classical Mature Harappan pottery, rather it shows affiliation with the vessel forms recovered from the Early Harappan levels at Kot Diji, Amri, Balakot and Nal (Hegde et.al. 1988). Analogous pottery types have also been reported from secondary fractional burials from the cemetery at Surkotada.
The pottery associated with the burials at Nagwada since then has been termed as 'Burial Pottery', because of its context of occurrence as seen from Surkotada and Santhli. The latter site, situated in Banaskantha District of north Gujarat, yielded two extended burials with ceramic similar to the one found from the burials at Nagwada. However, the discovery of this ceramic from the regular habitation levels at Moti Pipli and Mathutra indicated that this group of pottery was not confined to the burials only. Thus, an attempt is made here to systematically evaluate this ceramic group and clarify its status within the ceramic assemblage of north Gujarat. The main aim here is to review the 'ritualistic status' bestowed earlier to this ceramic group and to understand the nature of its existence.

Since the discovery of this ceramic from the burials at Nagwada, ten more sites have been discovered within the region of north Gujarat. These new discoveries question the earlier notion that the pottery was exclusively associated with the Chalcolithic burials. Hence, in the present state of understanding, it would be more appropriate to associate these ceramic types with the Early Harappan phase.

The evidence shows that the Early Harappans were properly entrenched into north Gujarat and got accustomed with the local environmental conditions. The association of local ceramic cultures like the Anarta ware and
pre-Prabhas ware with the Early Harappan pottery suggests some kind of interaction mechanism existing between these communities in Gujarat.

CHARACTERISTIC OF THE EARLY HARAPPANS IN NORTH GUJARAT

The Early Harappan assemblage in north Gujarat is mainly represented by ceramics, along with a few other artifacts. The ceramic assemblage exhibits an amalgamation of Early Harappan cultural traits of various region. As stated earlier, the ceramic features from north Gujarat are analogous to the Kot Dijian and Sothi pottery. The vessel shapes, broad band at the neck, loops at the shoulder etc. all show the Kot Dijian feature, while the bowls with everted rim and the use of white pigment for decoration show an Sothi influence.

Apart from this, some features of Amri, Nal and Balakotian pottery are also seen here. This indicates that the Early Harappans accumulated various traits within their strand by the time they arrived in the region of north Gujarat. It is possible that the movement of the Early Harappans into this region was during later part of the Early Harappans phase, at the time, when different traits were beginning to conglomerate and emerge as a single/uniform culture. It might also be possible that the people before moving into this region came in contact with different groups and adopted a few traits from each of these groups.
COURSE OF EARLY HARAPPAN MOVEMENT

The question arises as to which route did the Harappans pursued to reach north Gujarat and from where did they migrate. Towards the west of north Gujarat, the furthermost settlement with Early Harappan assemblage is Surkotada. However, the Early Harappan ceramics have been found mainly from the burials and only a few from the habitation level. Dholavira gives evidence of Early Harappan ceramic, but in a very insignificant amount, and is predominated by an indigenous pre/non-Harappan pottery. Towards north, the Early Harappan settlement in north Gujarat extends upto Suneth, bordering the Great Rann of Kutch. Sites on the southeastern Sind have been located upto Gharo Biro and Kot Khori (Khan 1981). These sites have an Early Harappan/Kot Dijian occupational deposit. Possibilities are that the Early Harappans might have travelled southeastwards from Sind crossing the Rann into north Gujarat.

Recently, Dr. Vasant Shinde of the Deccan College, Pune, explored the area south of Kalibangan along the dried bed of River Saraswati. He located a few sites yielding ceramic assemblage similar to those found from north Gujarat (Shinde: personal communication). Therefore, another probability is that the people from Rajasthan moved further southward towards north Gujarat. Both the possibilities have their own merit and cannot be discounted till further exploration is carried out in these areas.

The next logical question that arises is the motive of the Early Harappans to travel to a rather hostile territory. The reasons might be either because of the population pressure they had to move out of the core region and spread out into a new, hitherto unexplored territory or in the quest for raw materials for
their ever-growing industries. The Early Harappans arrived in the region of north Gujarat which has a few sources of raw materials. The picture can be more clear if one glances at the settlement pattern and subsistence economy of the Early Harappan community of north Gujarat.

SETTLEMENT AND SUBSISTENCE PATTERN

If one glances at the pattern of settlements of the Early Harappan community of north Gujarat, it does not differ much from the pattern of settlements adopted by the Chalcolithic communities who continued to thrive in this region even during the subsequent centuries. Almost all the Chalcolithic settlements in north Gujarat are situated on top of the fossilized sand dunes. These dunes are invariably associated with small depression that accumulates monsoon run-off and carries water for at least seven to eight months.

The present study shows that the sites belonging to the Early Harappan phase are very rare in the southwestern part of north Gujarat - in the Rupen estuary. Only two sites, Nagwada and Panchasar, were so far located in this part of north Gujarat. The number increases to nine as one moves further northwards in the estuary of Banas and further north. No such sites are reported from the estuary of Saraswati.

Of the eleven sites belonging to Early Harappan phase, six have been excavated till now. It was observed that the Early Harappan pottery occurred only in the burial context at two sites where as the other four yielded the same from the habitation levels. It is interesting to note that so far, there are no evidence of burials in the latter sites. As the information available for the
rest of the sites are from surface survey, it is difficult to ascertain the context of this pottery. But the amount of pottery recovered from these explored sites and their distribution on the mound\(^1\), along with the presence of this group from the habitation at few excavated sites, suggest that they belonged to the habitation level.

The settlements belonging to the Early Harappan phase are very small, the smallest being .01 hectare. The artifacts scattered on the mound are found in small clusters and the habitation deposits are also very superficial, with the exception at Moti Pipli. No structural remains were encountered at any of the sites, though a few post-holes were found from the same levels of the burials at Nagwada. The important aspect in the settlement pattern of this community is that the settlements are situated within the radius of about 20km. from Moti Pipli.

Moti Pipli, measuring about 3 hectare with a deposit of 50cm., is comparatively a large site. This is the only site, which gave evidence of a few artifacts of this culture other than pottery. Because of the badly disturbed nature of the mound, no structural remains could be unearthed. Small-scale craft activity of shell and stone was carried out at the site, evidence of which can be seen from the industrial waste and debitage. Few copper implements have also been found from the same context.

Industrial debitage and finished products of stone, shell and terracotta suggests that some kind of manufacturing activity was carried out at Moti Pipli and local resources were exploited for acquiring raw materials. Metal

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\(^1\) Though the Early Harappan pottery is found in small clusters from most of the explored sites, it does not indicate that the ceramic had come from some disturbed burials.
was not unknown to the inhabitants of Moti Pipili as quite a number of copper artifacts were recovered from the site.

It is possible that the Early Harappans were attracted to the region to extract these raw materials. Gastropods like *Chicoreus ramosus*, *Fasiolaria trapezium*, *Turbinella pyrum*, *Lambis truncata sebae* etc. are found along the southern shore of Gulf of Kutch while Ratan Timba in Banaskantha District and Mardek Bet in Little Rann of Kutch are known for rich deposit of semi-precious stones. Similar evidence is seen at Datrana where the lithic industry might have attracted the Early Harappans whose presence is seen at the later phase of the occupation at the site.

Another cause that might have attracted the Early Harappans into this region is the vast and rich pasturelands. The sites in the region of north Gujarat are found in clusters, located close to each other on the margins of the eastward extension of the depression which connects the Great and the Little Rann of Kutch. Clustering of sites could also be seen around Korda and Jhandada, on either side of a very large depression, locally known as *Sandher* (Ajithprasad and Sonawane 1993). These low-lying, flat wastelands generally remain marshy throughout the year and are designated as salty waste. Although they are unsuitable for agriculture, contiguous land around such depression forms good pastureland for cattle and sheep/goat, as they support many types of grass. Fodder like *bokana* (*Cressa critica*), *kharidhar* (*Aeluropus logopoides*), *soma* (*Echinochloa colonum*), *jinko soma* (*Panicum flavidum*), *zinzvo* (*Chlaris barbats*), *jejur* (*Crotolaria medicuginea*), *dhaman* (*Cenchrus ciliaris*), *ukarel* (*Heliotropium ovalifolium*), *mancho* (*Ductyloctenium aegyptium*), *kantari* (*Oligochaeta ramosa*), *dabhdo* (*Desmostachia bipinna*), *sangatara* (*Crotolaria baurhea*), *dhaman* (*Cenchrus setigerus*), *mansu*...
(Chlaris montana), sukali (Heteropogeon contortus), garadu (Polytoca barbata), bhatdu (Themeda ciliate) and lapdi (Arijtida redacts) (Chokshi 1991: 61) have an excellent growth here and help enhance higher milk production due to higher protein content which induces lactation in cattle.

The spread of the artifacts, thin habitation deposits and close clustering of the sites with very few permanent structural remains indicate that these were temporary settlements or pastoral camps, occupied seasonally. A large number of cattle and sheep bones collected from the sites indicate that they formed an important part in the economy of the Chalcolithic settlements.

Even today pastoralism plays an important role in the subsistence economy of the people in north Gujarat and looking at the evidences gathered from the settlements, it can be postulated that pastoral activity was prevalent even during the Harappan times in this region. Agriculture, if at all practised, might have been on a small scale.

From the evidences gathered from the region of north Gujarat, it could be inferred that their adaptive responses to the ecological situations might have included agro-pastoralism. The Early Harappans are known to have utilized different ecological niches within the Greater Indus Valley, including different responses in the form of subsistence practices and cultural articulation as seen in southeastern Sind, the Gomal Valley, Bannu Basin and Cholistan (Mughal 1990: 187).

It is known that certain kind of exchange system exists between the migratory hunter-gatherers and pastoralists with the settled communities. At present also such exchange systems are seen where the pastoralists and
hunter-gatherers sell young stocks, dairy products, woolen textiles etc. or honey, animal skins, baskets and other products of the wild and buy cereals, cloth, tobacco, and iron axes and knives (Allchin 1977). They also act as carriers of all sorts of goods and sometimes as labourers.

The interaction of the sedentary and non-sedentary population during the Harappan times has been demonstrated at Lothal and Langnaj (Possehl 1980: 67-77). A similar trade network might have been prevalent in north Gujarat where the Early Harappan pastoralists procured and traded raw materials to the settled population.

A complex interaction system might have been prevalent in north Gujarat where the pastoralists carried out dual activity of herding their animals as well as procuring raw materials.

The site of Moti Pipli might have commanded a special place in the Early Harappan occupation in north Gujarat. The location of other settlements of the Early Harappan community within a radius of 20km. from Moti Pipli also proves the strategic importance of the site among the Early Harappan settlements.

**CHRONOLOGY OF THE EARLY HARAPPANS IN NORTH GUJARAT**

The time bracket for the movement of the Early Harappans into the region of north Gujarat is still surrounded with uncertainty. At present, there are no radiocarbon dates available for the Early Harappan phase from any of the excavated sites in north Gujarat. However, at most of the sites, this group of
ceramic is associated with Anarta pottery. The Anarta tradition is dated to as early as second half of the fourth millennium BC from Loteshwar (Sonawane and Ajithprasad 1994: 136, Table-5)\textsuperscript{2}. Moti Pipili gave evidence of Early Harappan pottery in association with Anarta pottery and a few artifacts of Urban Harappan phase which might have just started appearing. It can, thus, be said that the site of Moti Pipili and the existence of Early Harappan ceramic can be dated just before the transformation of Harappa culture into a Mature/Urban phase or the transition phase between the Early and the Mature Harappan phase.

At Nagwada, the burials with Early Harappan pottery have been found within the habitation area dug into the natural soil and probably belonged to layer 5 occupation. No habitation deposit of the Early Harappans have been found from the site. The lowest level of occupation is dominated by Anarta pottery, though Harappan ceramic is also present at this level. While at Datrana IV, this group of ceramic has been found at the fag end of the Chalcolithic occupation, which is dominated by pre-Prabhas ceramic (Ajithprasad 1998). The pre-Prabhas culture at Prabhas Patan (Somnath) has been dated to \textit{circa} 3000-2800 BC (Dhavalikar and Possehl 1992: 72-73).

Reviewing the burials from Surkotada, Possehl (1997: 84) states that “... the remains indicate that they (the burials) are probably a part of the Early Harappan, or the Early/Mature Harappan Transition of Kutch”. In the same review, however, Possehl remarks that “… while the pottery from Surkotada cemetery is Early Harappan in style, it does not necessarily follow that it dates to the time prior to the advent of the Mature Harappan phase”. The burials have been designated to Surkotada IA, though they have not been

\textsuperscript{2} This tradition however has a long life span continuing upto the Post-Urban Harappan phase.
stratigraphically correlated. Though a few sherds of Early Harappan ceramics were reported from the early levels of the habitation at Surkotada, the context were not properly described. It is possible that the earliest phase may fall within the time-bracket of the Early-Mature Transitional phase to which these burials belonged. The present evidences from Nagwada, Moti Pipli, Datrana and Surkotada suggest a time bracket of 2800 BC to 2550 BC for the penetration of Early Harappans into Kutch and north Gujarat.
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