



Upper Ganga Plain And Settlement Pattern With Reference To Pottery Culture

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ABSTRACT :

This study examines the habitation patterns and cultural adaptations of the Upper Ganga Plain. The settlement patterns and cultural changes in the Upper Ganga Plain reveal how humans have interacted with technology, the environment, and sociopolitical systems. Archaeological research has uncovered numerous cultural sequences that have occurred throughout the history of human civilizations in the Upper Ganga Plain. Recent excavations have identified the existence of both Painted Grey Ware and Northern Black Painted Ware cultures, along with prehistoric cultures in the Upper Ganga Valley. The pottery produced in this region reflects the interaction among various civilizations, sociocultural customs, and technological advancements. Evidence points to a strong ceramic tradition that is deeply rooted in the ancient history of the Upper Ganga Plain.

Keywords: Gangetic Plain, Civilization, Settlement Pattern, Pottery Culture

The visible impacts that humans have left on the physical landscape through cultural presence since the beginning of civilization primarily stem from colonization. The formation and growth of a settlement in a particular region are influenced by the interaction of local ecological circumstances, the cultural and social beliefs of the inhabitants, technology, management practices, and settlement patterns over time. The term "settlement" describes an organized human community, which can range from basic farmland to a complex city, or from temporary camps for hunters or miners to more permanent dwellings for urban residents and farmers (Ahlawat, 2017). Settlement elements include lanes, roads, parks, places of worship, and recreational areas, in addition to the diverse range of buildings that fulfill different purposes. In the initial phases, the characteristics of settlements are closely linked to their surroundings and exhibit straightforward designs. Yet, as society and understanding develop, there is an increase in the diversity of their dimensions and structures (Jha, 2014).

The Indo-Gangetic Plain has played a significant role in shaping India's history and archaeology. This vast plain is divided into three main sections: the Upper Ganga Plain, Middle Ganga Plain, and Lower Ganga Plain. Except for the northern Himalayan foothills, the entire Ganga basin consists of flat plains. Geographically, the Indo-Gangetic Plain is predominantly flat and featureless, composed of Pleistocene and recent alluvial deposits brought by the Ganga River and its tributaries. Human activities, changes in river courses, and river erosion have significantly influenced the study of this region (Gangal et al., 2010).

The development of pottery culture in the Upper Ganga Plain is a testament to the region's historical importance and cultural richness. From its humble beginnings in the Neolithic period to its refinement in the Gupta and Mughal eras, pottery has continuously adapted to the changing needs and tastes of society. Its enduring legacy not only enriches our understanding of ancient civilizations but also underscores the timeless nature of this craft in Indian culture.

The Upper Ganga Plain, a fertile region in northern India, has played a crucial role in shaping ancient Indian civilization. Its rich archaeological record reveals a continuous evolution of pottery culture, which reflects the technological, social, and cultural development of the region's inhabitants. From the Neolithic to the medieval periods, the pottery of the Upper Ganga Plain provides a vivid chronicle of human advancement, trade, and ritual practices.

The earliest evidence of pottery in the Upper Ganga Plain dates back to the Neolithic period (c. 6000 BCE). Early settlers used handmade, coarse red and grey pottery for cooking and storage. The transition to the Chalcolithic period saw advancements in pottery technology, with the introduction of simple wheel-made pottery. A significant development during this period was the emergence of **Ochre-Colored Pottery (OCP)** around 2000–1500 BCE. OCP is characterized by its reddish-brown surface, thick fabric, and utilitarian shapes like bowls and storage jars. It is associated with late Harappan and early Vedic cultures, marking the beginning of a distinct pottery tradition in the region.

The Iron Age (c. 1200–600 BCE) witnessed the rise of **Painted Grey Ware (PGW)**, a hallmark of early Vedic culture. This pottery is fine, wheel-made, and grey in color, adorned with geometric and floral designs painted in black. PGW is closely linked to the epic traditions of the Mahabharata and the settlements at Hastinapur, Ahichchhatra, and Atranjikhhera. PGW pottery indicates an organized society engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade. Its refinement and aesthetic appeal suggest the growing sophistication of early Vedic communities.

A major milestone in the development of pottery culture in the Upper Ganga Plain was the emergence of **Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)** during the 700–200 BCE period. This highly refined, glossy black pottery is associated with the urban centers of the Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods. NBPW is thin, well-fired, and often features intricate designs. The widespread use of NBPW in urban contexts such as Pataliputra, Kaushambi,

and Varanasi highlights the growth of trade networks and the emergence of a wealthy and sophisticated urban elite. This period marks a significant leap in the technological and artistic capabilities of potters.

During the Gupta period (4th–6th centuries CE), **redware pottery** became dominant, often featuring intricate incised patterns and decorative motifs. The refinement of redware reflects the economic prosperity and cultural renaissance of the Gupta era. With the advent of the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal empires, **glazed pottery** became popular, showcasing influences from Persian and Central Asian traditions. These glazed wares, often adorned with floral and geometric patterns, were used for both utilitarian and decorative purposes, indicating the blending of local and foreign artistic traditions. 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. Pottery in the Upper Ganga Plain is more than a utilitarian craft; it is a window into the past, reflecting the socio-economic, technological, and artistic achievements of its people. The evolution of pottery—from OCP to NBPW and beyond—mirrors the growth of human settlement, agricultural practices, trade, and urbanization. Furthermore, pottery often played a role in religious and ceremonial contexts, linking it to the spiritual life of the region's inhabitants.

The Upper Ganga Plain is a microcosm of India's broader cultural evolution, ranging from prehistoric adaptations to the early historic establishment of advanced communities and urban centers (Kosambi, 1965). Ancient habitation patterns, historical population studies, migration, trade, exchange, and resource areas are just a few of the many subjects that fall under the umbrella of settlement pattern studies in archaeology. The Gangetic Plain created the foundation for agriculture in India by the first agricultural communities. It is home to the Upper Gangetic Plain (UGP), a huge expanse of sedimentary soil, and perennial rivers such as the Ganga (Ganges), Yamuna, Ghagra, Gomati, Gandak, and other tributaries. Additionally, it is considered the mother of a large portion of the agriculture that is practiced in other parts of the country. The Gangetic landscape's rich soil and hospitable atmosphere of river valleys and plains have attracted the bulk of human occupants over the millennia because these factors are essential to agricultural output as well as the growth and development of agriculture and civilization.

The Upper Gangetic Plain, which is the western part of the broader Gangetic Plains, has been a major site for the formation and growth of agriculture in India since the Neolithic era (Fuller, 2008). The region's exceptional temperature and landscape have attracted the local populace to domesticating plants and animals. Consequently, pastoral nomadic existence gave rise to sedentary agriculture. These elements contributed to the region's rapid economic development and the development of valuable genetic diversity in a range of crops. Due to population growth, new settlements, and/or the sharing of its products and knowledge with other regions, India's economy is today mostly dependent on agriculture.

Paleolithic and Mesolithic sites have been discovered in the alluvial plains through comprehensive surveys using remote sensing and GIS. At some sites, elevated terraces and proximity to paleo-channels are chosen, indicating flexibility in response to shifting river flows and water supplies (Sontakke, 2023). Excavations at places like Lahuradewa and Jhusi have shown early sedentism and agriculture, particularly rice production. Settlements sometimes consisted of small clusters of semi-permanent mud and reed structures as farming eventually supplanted foraging. Handmade pottery, usually plain or with simple cord imprints, is seen in Neolithic sites in the area. During this time period, clay that was readily available locally was used to make pottery, which was then baked in open kilns and frequently had a coarse texture.

A hierarchy of settlements emerged, with smaller villages acting as agricultural hinterlands surrounding larger cities (such as Hastinapura), as evidenced by findings at sites such as Hastinapura, Atranjikhera, and Kaushambi, which show how urban growth was characterized by fortifications, planned communities, and clearly defined social areas. Advanced studies on lithic assemblages have shown that composite tools were used during the Mesolithic and that more diverse toolkits were used during the Neolithic. Iron was used in both agriculture and warfare during the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) and Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) periods, according to further investigation. Archeobotanical studies have confirmed a mixed economy of agriculture and pastoralism. The agricultural record is dominated by rice (*Oryza sativa*) and wheat (*Triticum* spp.), despite evidence of secondary crops such as barley and pulses (Singh, 2017).

Conclusion: According to research, the pattern of settlements changed from semi-nomadic or nomadic groups that depended on natural rock shelters and riverine habitats for access to food, water, and raw materials to permanent settlements, especially around the Upper Ganga Plain's verdant alluvial plains. Hunting and gathering, the employment of quartzite tools (such as hand axes, cleavers, and scrapers), and a focus on megafauna and plant resources are all examples of technical advancement. Environmental and cultural influences were also observed during the period of settlement and cultural development in the Upper Ganga Plain. Because it was used in offerings and rituals, pottery frequently had religious and cultural importance.

In addition to demonstrating links with more general Indian subcontinental traditions, pottery patterns in the Upper Ganga Plain also represent the region's distinct cultural and historical trajectory. The water supply provided by the Ganga and its tributaries, as well as the fertile alluvial plains, greatly influenced land use and agricultural practices. As tools shifted from stone to copper and iron, trade, architecture, and agriculture were all changed. When indigenous practices interacted with external influences (such as Indo-Aryans and Mauryans), a vibrant cultural and social environment was produced.

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