Abstract

Jammu, a part of the present-day Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, is a region with notable historical significance, which has not been provided proper academic attention. Its strategic location on the crossroad between the valley of Kashmir and the plains of North India, has resulted in an exchange of material as well as cultural elements between the two entities, with Jammu serving as a bridge. This exchange is also manifested in the regional culture of Jammu and its outer plains. The influence of the barter could be observed in the several social, religious and cultural aspects of the region, seen through the available tangible sources from the area.

However, the region has received limited academic attention in the past, and the scholarly understanding of Jammu and its archaeological history is scanty. The importance of the area in the historical discourse has always remained undermined, primarily owing to the existing reconstruction of its past, mostly tracible from the medieval period onwards. Although, the hitherto archaeological data, comprising of the explorations and excavations carried out by the ASI (from 1961 onwards), revealed the basic cultural chronology of the region, there existed limitation in exploring the evolving man-land relationships. Recently, researchers from the Jammu University have begun studying the archaeological remains and historical context of the Jammu area (see Monica, 2011; Singh, 2012; Hans, 2013). These investigations use a documentary approach rather than conducting systematic exploratory surveys or re-examinations of excavated artefacts. These works make little effort to include environmental and ecological contexts into their reconstructions of the region's cultural past. Several studies have also examined the region's geographical characteristics and settlement growth in terms of resource usage

(Drew, 1875; Qazi, 2012). These do not, however, address the dynamic character of the historical man-land relationship.

The current research is a novel approach to reconstruct the history of the outer plains of Jammu in the new light of archaeological data. The research aims at locating settlements from Neolithic to Early Historic period to build up a verifiable and consistent historical narrative. This narrative in fact helps to highlight the contribution of the plains of Jammu in the bigger context of overall cultural development. The research majorly revolves around the role of landscape in shaping and developing the cultures of the area. ranging from Proto-historic to Early Historic period. Main objectives of the research include – the identification of ecological niches preferred by the people in the past; the dynamics of the man-land relationship, with regard to the exploitation of natural resources; the identification of factors influencing the localisation and integration of settlements in the outer plains of Jammu; a reinterpretation of the cultural history of Jammu vis-à-vis its adjoining areas; understanding the exploitation of water resources, other than the two major rivers – the Chenab and the Tawi – in the development of the settlements in the outer plains of Jammu; and a functional categorisation of the sites based on the size recorded during the exploration.

Explorations primarily in the areas of Akhnoor and RS Pura were carried out for four years (2015-2019). Attributes such as geographical settings, proximity from the nearest water source, and the size per site were taken into consideration.

Collection of data was based on random sampling method in the initial phase, followed by the selective sampling method. Artifacts, in the form of pottery and other antiquities, were collected from the sites, which were then subjected to further investigations.

For assigning cultural affiliation to the artefacts, comparisons at various levels were done. The process began with comparing the artefacts found at the sites in Jammu at an intraregional level. Due to the lack of published reports of excavated sites in the research area, the documentation of artefacts from these sites was limited. Therefore, sites of Sanghol and Ropar in Punjab were taken as index sites for intraregional comparisons. However, owing to the same aforementioned problem of lack of published reports, there were limitation in this method as well. Hence, two sites from the study area were chosen for section scraping to compare the material. In addition, comparison with excavated sites in Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and the Ganga plains was also carried out to better understand overall cultural contexts of material remains.

For a specific question of provenance of the glazed ware found from the research area, the scientific methods of XRF, ICPMS and SEM-EDX were performed. In order to understand the present-day social context of pottery production and use, and also to identify archaeological patterns of the past, ethnographic documentation of the potter community was undertaken.

The refurbished periodical classification was done by the researcher in order to incorporate the existing archaeological data. The cultural periods were defined with the help of relative dating (artifacts, pottery and other antiquities were compared with other sites) and through absolute dating of charcoal sample obtained from two scraped sections at two sites (Biyan Tibba and Satowali). As a result, a new scheme of four cultural periods were proposed: Period I- Neolithic/Harappan Period; Period II- 4-5th century BCE to 1st century BCE/ CE; Period III- 1st century BCE/ CE to 3rd/4th century CE and Period IV-3rd/4th century CE-10th/11th century CE. With the total number of 117 sites including sites documented by ASI and the sites surveyed in the current research, there are four identified periods in the research area – Period I with five protohistoric settlements, out of which three are doubtful; Period II (4th century BCE – 1st

century BCE/CE) with 17 sites; Period III (1st century BCE/ C.E to 3rd/4th century CE) with a rise in the number of settlements to 82; followed by Period IV with a further increase in the number of sites to 91.

In addition to the basic categorisation of the sites into different periods, an attempt was made to analyse the geographical and archaeological data on three major parameters: 1. Spatial location of the sites 2. Size of the sites and 3. Proximity to the water sources.

It was found that Period I, although, had a dearth of settlements, the sites were actively involved in the trading activities as has been documented in the case of the Harappan site of Manda. The spatial location of the site near the river Chenab must have facilitated the economic transactions. This utilisation of downstream movement of the river Chenab in the trading of timber as a commodity is in fact documented by Drew (1875) as late as the 19th century.

Period II witnessed a rise in the number of settlements to 17. One of the chief reasons for the increase in the number of sites is the commencement of increased commercial networking in the form of *Uttarapatha* or the northern trans-regional route. This route, according to Lahiri (1992), comes alive in sixth-fifth centuries BCE. Sialkot-Jammu forming one of the feeder routes to the main line of *Uttarapatha*, therefore, seems to be actively involved in the economic transaction peculiar of this period. That the area was a part of the larger cultural and political milieu is further seen when the spatial distribution of NBPW sites is considered.

Politically, forming part of Madra Janapada, the area under Period II seems to have come under the influence of the Mauryas, the Indo-Greeks, the Indo-Scythians and the Indo-Parthians as evident from the numismatic evidence.

These 17 sites are all located in the plains signifying the stable landscape opted for the settlements by the population. Away from the river Chenab, the major source of water to these sites seems to be the underground source, as the area has shallow level of ground water providing the resource all year round. The site size analysis reveals that these are small village settlements, most of them of under 2 hectares and two sites above 2 hectares. This pattern of increase of site size points towards site structuring which becomes further complex in the succeeding periods. All these sites fall within the diameter of 40 km, signifying the dispersed settlement pattern owing to the availability of land. Antiquities in the form of terracotta bangles most likely hint towards the emergence of local art and craft industry during this period.

Period III sees a sudden spurt in the number of sites to 82 mainly owing to the increased trading activity. Synchronising politically with the rule of the Kushanas and their decline, the area saw the emergence of the Buddhist centre of Ambaran on the bank of the river Chenab, most likely playing an important regional role as a link between Kashmir, Sialkot, Punjab and further North-west. As a result of the presence of a stupa, reliquary, and monastic institution in the area, it suggests that the place was of regional significance. It is important to highlight, however, that despite its regional significance, it lacked to have a permanent imprint on the larger, broader cultural developmental environment. This hypothesis is suggested by the fact that the area neither finds any mention in the itinerary of Chinese travellers nor in Rajatarangini. Nonetheless, the growth of the settlements in the upper reaches of Poonch and Rajouri indicate the need of inhabiting diverse places as a result of an expanded commercial nexus.

Settlements belonging to this period are spatially located in different micro-zones. Plains (with plenty of underground water), the Kandi belt (with rain fed agriculture, but availability of ponds) and the hills. In addition, an interesting

pattern of the colonisation of the old bed of left bank of the Chenab is also seen in this period. This is attributed to the increase in the rainfall, the data generated by lake cores (Trivedi et al., 2013; Trivedi & Chauhan, 2008, 2009; Kusumgar et al., 1995; Quamar, 2018), resulting in the temporary shifting of water course of the river Chenab, leaving a zone free of the ferocity of the river for the population to settle down. Sites located on the river route would have been involved in exploiting the rivers for trading activities. In fact the proliferated amount of trading in the area is evident from the presence of exotic material in the form of shell and precious material in the reliquary from the site of Ambaran. The evidence of inter-zonal material exchange of rice is also possible between the Kandi and the Plain area owing to the presence of rice tempered pottery from the sites located in the latter.

Like the preceding period, the settlements of this period are small villages, with 8 sites above 2 hectares. This points out the process of structuring of the sites probably involved in the resource acquisition process. These sites are clustered now within a diameter of 60 km signifying first, the growth in the population density and second, as already discussed, the inhabitation of different micro-zones, probably for economic transactions.

Period IV with 91 sites witnesses the increase in the cultural exchange with other areas as the material culture signifies. The presence of Rangmahal ceramic tradition hitherto undiscovered in the region, was primarily concentrated in Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat and is dated from mid to late first millennium CE, points towards the cultural interactions happening between these places and the outer plains of Jammu. The flow of artistic expression in the form of painting on the Rangmahal pottery would have taken the traditional trade route for its dissemination to the new cultural zone of Jammu. The presence of shell ornaments from this period from the site of Tibba

Name Shah signifies the involvement of the research area in the intraregional trade networking.

Buddhism retained a significant importance throughout this time, as seen by the Ambaran Buddhist establishment's extensive structural initiatives. Along with the rebuilding processes, the buildings are embellished with terracotta figurines. These would indicate the economic requirement of keeping the building, especially due to its structural weakness as a result of its placement on the Chenab's bank and to facilitate the now-thriving commerce. However, the site demonstrates the influence of Buddhism's overall collapse in the first millennium CE. Ambaran was abandoned in the seventh century, indicating that the study region experienced the same socio-religious transformations as the surrounding locations.

The intra-zonal interaction continues in this period as well, as has been indicated by the evidence of rice tempered pottery pieces found from the sites of the Plains.

Period IV encompasses the Late Kushana and Gupta dynasties politically. The fact that Madras and its neighbouring tribes, such as Arjunayana and Abhira, paid homage to Samudragupta is well documented in the Allahabad stone inscriptions (Fleet, 1888: 8; Singh, 2017: 343). Following the demise of the Kushanas, the Madrakas seemed to assert their independence (Agrawal, 1989: 49), but Samudragupta maintained their subordination to the Guptas.

Like in Period III, the sites in this period are also located in the same micro-zonal settings. But, now there is evidence of settlement again on the left bank irrespective of recurrent flooding. It seems that, because of population pressure, people have shown resilience to the frequent natural calamities and would have devised new strategies to deal with the floods.

The sites of this period, in a manner akin to the preceding periods, comprise of small villages, with seven sites above 2 hectares. The process of structuring is evident here as well, which probably involves the resource acquisition process. Located within a diameter of 100 km, the evidence of population growth is also visible in this period.

The present research sought to highlight the function of Jammu's outlying plains in the context of its geographical position and spatial distribution of sites in the overall cultural evolution of the region. Thus, the contribution of the current study is the development of understanding about the two primary functions the outer plains of Jammu: a. it facilitated the establishment of trade routes connecting the mainland to the highlands and vice versa via land and water routes; and b. it aided in the exploitation of resources and acquisition of raw materials in the higher reaches. In the latter case, basic resources such as lead, steatite, and timber have been referred to as value-added goods exported from Jammu. Thus, when seen in the larger framework of economic output, the area's functioning fits well into the narrative of urbanisation, it retains its rural character throughout. In other words, although the area has never had a significant supra-regional influence, it has always operated in the background as a nexus of minor villages. These villages facilitated the smooth operation of trade routes while also serving as satellite units for the adjacent metropolitan centres. The area's geographic position compelled it to become involved in and become a participant in trade operations.

Since its start as a habitation zone, the region of Jammu's outlying plains seems to have been part of the larger entity's expansionist programme, either in the south – on the mainland – or farther north. Jammu's contribution to cultural connectivity was significant in that it connected key cultural zones surrounding it (Kour in press). This is particularly intriguing when seen through the lens of

early historic urbanisation, in which urban centres were the dominant actors and tiny village populations catered to metropolitan demands. The regional contribution of these tiny, peripheral communities is critical for comprehending the evolution of the urbanised system as a whole.

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