JOURNAL OF INDIAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES
Vol. 1 No. 2 (July-December 2025); pp 144-158

Study of Vanishing Remains of the Kashmir Neolithic Culture: An Overview

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Abstract

In this study, we studied the importance and characteristics features of Neolithic culture in the Kashmir valley. It is also evident from archaeological studies done that the Paleolithic culture in Kashmir was followed by the more advanced culture i.e. Neolithic Culture in which the stone tools and other implements were made more skillfully by using new techniques along with the process of polishing. The term Neolithic is the combination of two Latin words Neo plus Lithic, Neo means "New" and Lithic means "Stone" this term "Neolithic" is also known as "New Stone Age" in which the culture transmits from hunting-gathering to a production economy. Neolithic culture in Kashmir valley is contemporary to Harappan Civilization. It has already been established that the first settled life in Kashmir can be traced back around 3000 BC during the time of Neolithic culture. Various archaeological remains suggest that the peoples of Kashmir Neolithic lived in pit dwellings to protect themselves from the cold and warm weather of the valley. About forty-three Neolithic sites are reported so far in Kashmir valley but only four of them are excavated systematically by the Archaeological Survey of India and some archaeologists. These sites are Gufral, Burzahom, Semthan and Kanispur. A large number of Kashmir Neolithic cultural remains were collected during these excavations such as tools, potteries, shell objects, bones objects, metal objects, living structures, stone objects, and terracotta objects. It suggested a sign of great cultural development during that time. However, we also see the Harappan Cultural material features in Kashmir Neolithic cultural materials which indicate the trade relationship between Kashmir Neolithic and the world's one of the oldest civilizations i.e. Harappan Civilization. The Harappan Site Manda at Akhnoor in the Jammu district on the right bank of the Chenab River plays an important role in the trade connections between Kashmir Neolithic and Harappan civilizations. This paper is aimed to study various cultural aspects, the development of the Kashmir Neolithic, their trade contacts with other civilizations, and how a well developed Kashmir Neolithic culture turns into ruins.

***Keywords**: Neolithic Culture, Kashmir valley, Harappan Culture, Hunting-Gathering*

Introduction

It is well known that the Valley of Kashmir is also known as heaven on earth. Geographically Kashmir valley lies in the lap of the western Himalayas with a height of 1800 meters above main sea level. The valley of Kashmir is very rich having different natural sources from ancient times. Due to this reason, we can see continuous development in the Kashmir valley from time to time during ancient times. The Paleolithic culture in Kashmir valley was followed by a very rich and advanced culture i.e. Neolithic culture. During Neolithic culture, peoples were so advanced in the tool making industry as well as in the domestication of various animals like horses, sheep, cattle and bulls. Besides this, the people of the Neolithic also started farming wheat, linseed, and barley. Kashmir Neolithic peoples were also so advanced in making the polished stone tools, Celts, harvesters, and arrowheads with skilled and advanced technology. Artefacts and cultural materials recovered from Kashmir Neolithic cultural site indicate the close trade contacts of the Kashmir Neolithic with northwest India, China, and central Asia. About forty-three Neolithic sites are reported in Kashmir valley so far (Figure-1), but only four are excavated systematically by the Archaeological Survey of India and some prominent archaeologists. These sites are Burzahom (IAR 1960-61:11, 1961-62: 17-21, 1962-63: 9-10, 1964-65: 13, 1965-66: 19, 1968-69: 10, 1971-72: 24), Gufkral (IAR 1981-82: 19-25) and Kanispur (IAR 1998-99: 30-48), Semthan first Small excavation in 1971 and later on three by R.S. Bisht from 1981 to 1983.

After the Paleolithic, the ecology and environment get changed and a new stone tools industry was established with the farming and domestication of animals, making and the use of the different types of pottery. The Kashmir Neolithic culture has consisted of both ceramic (with pottery) and aceramic (without pottery). De Terra and Patterson (1939:234) were the first who reported the Neolithic settlements at Burzahom in Kashmir valley. They also reported Nunar (Ganderbal) from the seventh feet depth level resembling the same deposit at Burzaoham. Later on, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) conducted investigations throughout the Jhelum valley, from Anantnag to Pampur, and unearthed Neolithic remains from nine different locations, including Sombur, Begagund, Hariparigom, Gufkral, Thajiwor, Pampur, Olchibag, Panzgom, and Jayadevi-Udar. Pottery from these locations includes burnished, coarse grey, combed, and gritty redware, as well as mace heads and celts. Gufkral and Olchibag were two of the sites where evidence of pit homes was discovered. This was also observed at the Sempur. Burzahom megaliths have been discovered at Begagund,

Gufkral, Haripariqom, and the Pampur (IAR 1962-63:9). Pit dwelling structures were also discovered 10 kilometres southwest of Srinagar on Damodar Udar (IAR 1961-62:98). A polished stone axe and a harvester were unearthed on a high terrace near Wular Lake in Gurahoma-Sangri, resembling the similar types found at Burzahom (IAR 1961-62:98). Many archaeological sites in Kashmir have revealed Neolithic stone tools and pottery, as well as megalithic stones that are referenced in the Indian Archaeology: A Review reports (IAR 1960-61:11, 1961-62: 17-21, 1962-63: 9-10, 1964-65: 13, 1965-66: 19, 1968-69: 10, 1971-72: 24), (IAR 1981-82: 19-25) (IAR 1998-99: 30-48). (Pant et al. 1982:38) found 16 additional Neolithic sites in Kashmir. These places had a separate ceramic industry, with ochreous redware, burnished ware, coarse grey ware, combed ware, and gritty redware. With the typical Neolithic wares, a lithic industry defined by big choppers like discoidal cores, borers, flake knives, and scrapers was discovered. Pant et al. (1982) reported the ceramic and aceramic Neolithic Culture from the archaeological sites such as Kuladur (Baramulla) and Khan Sahab (Budgam), while aceramic Neolithic culture from Pyathpathur (Baramulla), Huin, Malpur, Batachar, and Nilnag. Specific features on the remains i.e. thermally damaged stones and tools formed on flakes and cores, as well as grinders and pounders, are found at these sites. Back knives, elongated parallel-sided double scrapers, and waisted tools are often associated with the aceramic phase of the Neolithic period in these sites (Pant et al. 1982:38).

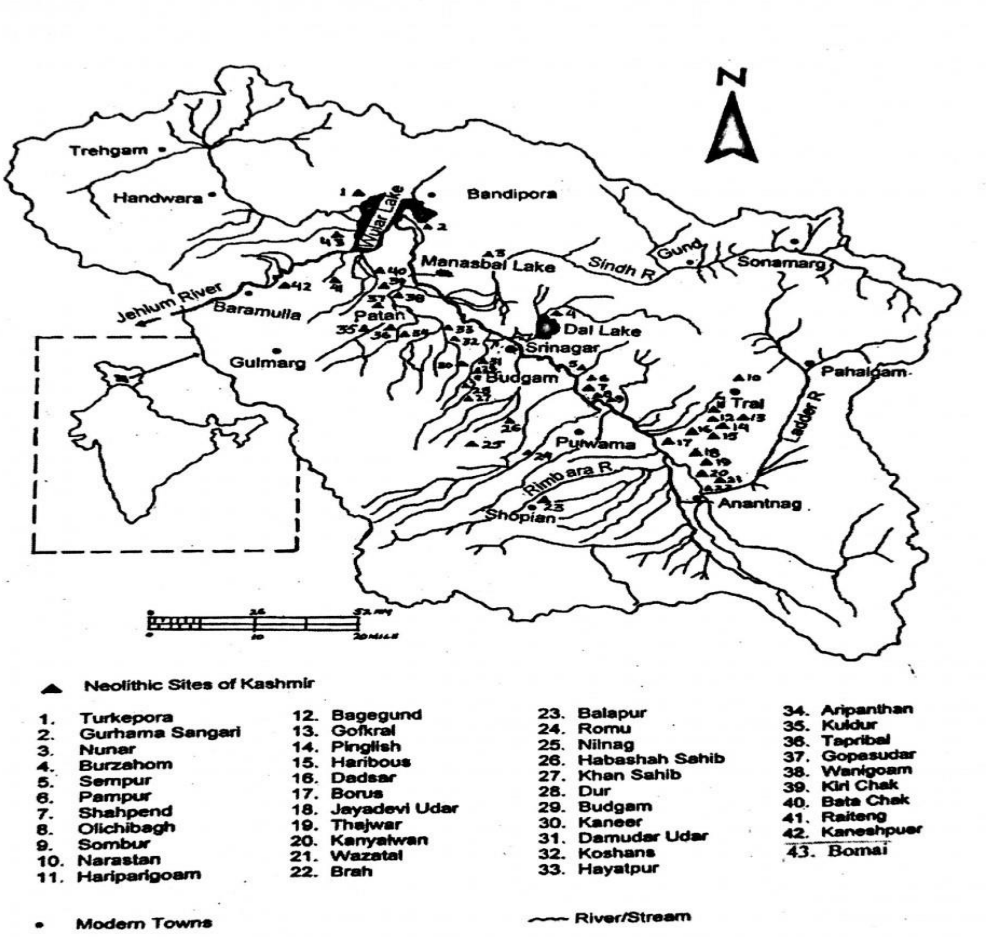


Figure-1. Map of Neolithic sites in Kashmir (after Bandey 2009:104)

House Structure

The Kashmir Neolithic peoples usually lived in pit dwellings to protect themselves from the cold weather. They used to dig a pit dwelling compacted a deposit a Karewa. The presence of ash, charcoal, hearth, ceramic assemblage, stone tools, animal bones, and human burials in the pits are indicative of the fact that these pits were used for residential purposes. The existence of multiple post-holes on the edge of these housing pits suggested the possibility of a superstructure constructed of either wood or grass covering them. Several rectangular and square pits, drainage systems, post-holes, a hearth, and other features were discovered during the excavation of Burzahom. The habitation pits, dug out in the Karewas, were initially noticed in era one. On the plan, these pits are circular or oval, narrow at the top and wide at the bottom. Large and compact living pits, dug into loess (dust like soil). deposits, round or rectangular on the plain with a small mouth and broad bottom, were made up by the peoples of the Gufral site. At the top, the diameter of these housing pits varies from 3.80 to 1.50 meters. Several post-holes and hearths were discovered around the periphery of pits. The

presence of a mud chunk with a reed impression suggests a structure above pits, while in the earlier stage, rectangular hearths were discovered, and in the later phase, rectangular and oval-shaped hearths were discovered. It was interesting that the floor and walls of the pits were coated with mud paste.

The analytical analysis also revealed that circular pit evidence was recovered at the Kanispur archaeological site and in the second phase, evidence of four consecutive floor levels and a rectangular home was recovered. In the same way, a significant amount of bone tools, stone tools, and ceramics were recovered on the ground level, as well as the indications of a diaper pebble wall. On the slope of the Kanispur site, remains of painted terracotta tiles with a big disc pattern are recovered (KNP-2) (IAR 1998-99: 30-48). There was no evidence of a floor layout at Semthan, so it is assumed that the residents of Semthan lived in hutments.

Tools

Tools were an important part of the Neolithic people's life, as they were mostly dependent upon tools and farming. The Neolithic tool industry was so advanced and people used polished tools which were made from either bones, metals or stones. In Kashmir Neolithic culture, peoples generally used harvesters, celt, scrapers, pounders, double-sided scrapers, and knives. Most of the tools were made from the core and flakes. When we talk about the stone celt, a total of twenty-eight stone celts are reported from the Burzahom, Gufral, and Kanispur sites along with many other unfurnished stone celts. Besides this mace head was also a remarkable finding from Kashmir Neolithic sites. Two types of mace heads were reported from Kashmir Neolithic i.e. disc mace head and club macehead (Fonia, Burzahom excavation report 1960-71). There are also burnishing stones, hoes, stone axe, knives, chisels, double edge points, harvesters, and double haled harvesters reported from the Burzahom (Fonia, Burzahom excavation report 1960-71). On the other hand pounders Querns, piercer-cum-scraper, and bells are reported from the period 1A and period 1B of Gufral sites (Sharma 1981: 54-55). They also used the bone and ivory for tool making such as needles, harpoons, scrapers, arrowheads, pen-shaped points, knitters are reported from the Burzahom (Fonia, Burzahom excavation report 1960-71), and points-needles made up of bone are reported from the Kanispur, while needles, arrowhead, and awls are reported from the Gufral (Sharma 1981: 54-55). At the same time, it is noticed that tools made from metal were also used in the Kashmir Neolithic culture such as antimony rods, arrowheads, harpoons, spare heads, bangles, and complete rings, bar celts. Complete pins made from metals reported from Burzahom (Fonia, Burzahom excavation report 1960-71). Chisels, needles, and

complete pins are reported from the Kanispur and complete pins, ear-nose pins and hairpins, needles, coil head, and complete pin are reported from the Gufral respectively (Sharma 1981).

Ceramic assemblage

Ceramic assemblage is the basic need of the people's similarly ceramic assemblage also help us to understand the various aspect of past settlement. Initially, Kashmir Neolithic peoples were not so much aware of the manufacturing of potteries but with time they learned how to manufacture potteries. That's why we called Kashmir Neolithic culture aceramic (without potteries) as well as ceramic culture (with potteries) culture. Before the introduction of the wheel made technology people used handmade potteries. Kashmir Neolithic culture has witnessed a variety of potteries used by them such as basins, bowls, lotas, dishes, tsoads (small pitchers), voars (lotas), noats (pitchers), pyala (bowls) type, a few smaller taok (dish) types, Mathas type (storage vessels), pots, dish-on-stand, vases, pots, dish-on-stand, vases, bowls, plates, basins, spouted bowls, cooking pots. Archaeological remains also show that Kashmir Neolithic peoples also used different kinds of wares such as red ware, red gritty ware, steel grey ware, fine grey ware, and burnished blackware which are reported from the Burzahom (Fonia, Burzahom excavation report 1960-71). Redware, red dull ware, buff ware, grey ware, coarse grey ware, and black ware are reported from the Kanispur (after Mani, 1998-99). Grey ware, burnished grey ware, burnished black ware, and rough thick dull ware are recovered from the Gufral (Sharma 1981) and bright red slip, burnished grey ware, handmade crude ware, and plain grey ware are excavated from the Semthan. The Kashmir Neolithic ceramic assemblages were plain as well in decorated forms because many of the pots had decorative designs on them. A horned deity painting was seen on a spherical pot in this sequence, which is quite similar to the features of pots found in Gumla, India and Kot-Diji, Pakistan. Which shows the close contact with Kot-Diji (Pakistan) and Gumla (India) with Kashmir Neolithic.

Important types and features of the Kashmir Neolithic pottery

i. Hemispherical bowl with ring base.

ii. Bowls without curved sides, which is probably a stand.

iii. Deep bowls are cups with straight sides or out curved sides.

iv. Funnel-mouthed vessels.

v. Small elongated vessels with a bulging belly, cylindrical neck, and ring base.

vi. Large high-necked jar in steel grey ware.

vii. Small, wide-mouthed vessel with a beaded rim.

viii. A small thick based dish or plate.

Semi-precious Stones

Semi-precious stones play an important role to understand the economic conditions of the particular settlement. The peoples of the Kashmir Neolithic were not so advanced in using precious stones. Only carnelian, agate, and light green Jade were witnessed in Kashmir Neolithic culture. Literary data revealed that a total of 886 carnelian beads (59.30 %) and 87 agate beads (34.53 %) are reported from the Neolithic period of the Burzahom, however, it is interesting that 864 carnelian beads were recovered from a pot of the second period of Burzahom (Fonia, Burzahom excavation report 1960-71). A small number of carnelian beads are recovered from Burzahom and Gufral Agate beads are reported from Burzahom and light green zade beads are reported from Gufral (Sharma 2000). Terracotta and bone beads are reported from the Semthan and Kanispur witnessed the absence of any type of precious or semi-precious stones.

Terracotta objects

Terracotta objects are essentially dominating items and significant sources of information regarding philosophy and traditions. A large number of terracotta objects are reported from the Neolithic sites in Kashmir such as terracotta bangles, terracotta pendants, and terracotta marbles. The description of terracotta objects is given below: Bangles: Bangles are a very traditional Indian ornament and represent solitary status. The nine terracotta bangles are reported from the Gufral (Sharma1981: 9). A few terracotta bangles from the Kanispur; the V-shaped terracotta pendant from the Gufral (Sharma 2000:97); two dozen broken marbles from the Kanispur and six terracotta marble from the Gufral (Sharma 1981:9); the terracotta coil-head from the Late Neolithic period of the Gufral are recovered respectively, similarly, two terracotta beads are found at the Burzahom site (Fonia, Burzahom excavation report 1960-71) and terracotta beads are another remarkable recovery from the Semthan site.

Religion

It appears that these people had certain religious beliefs based on their burial rituals. The presence of ochre on human and animal skeletal remains shows a magic-religious belief. Sacrificial killings are demonstrated by burying pets with human bodies. The presence of separate dog and wolf burials suggests that the inhabitants believed in totems. Skull trepanning is a sign of magical or medical belief.

Society

The archaeological sites of Burzahom and Gofkral in particular, as well as other sites in general, show that the settlers of Neolithic culture lived in villages and constructed a variety

of buildings for their needs. Almost all amenities were provided for living together. A communal property, empty village land would have been utilized for cow penning, potter kilns, tool manufacturing workshops, storage pits, and other purposes.

Burial Practices

In Period II, both inhumation and supplementary burials have been discovered in Neolithic Kashmir. The bones were excarnated and dressed in red ochre, according to the secondary burials. While no red ochre treatment was detected on bones interred in secondary burials, in a couched, embryonic stance, with their skulls pointing north-east or south-east (Sharma-1998). In the human graves, grave materials were recovered. Animal bones were placed alongside the human bones, suggesting that they were sacrificed in honour of the deceased. Burial pits were typically round or rectangular and coated with lime. Trepanning has also been discovered. (IAR-1962-63).

Art

At Burzuhom, an etched stone slab depicting a hunting scene was recovered, the depicting specifying a hunter piercing an antler from behind with a long spear and another hunter throwing an arrow from the front. Two Suns and a dog are depicted in the upper section. An engraving of an abstract hut design was found on another slab (Kaw, 1979). In North Kashmir, a rock engraving was discovered near Bomai, Sopore, in which depiction is shown as masked guys hunting (Banday-2003).

Contacts and Affinities

The material culture recovered at Burzahom and Gufkral's excavation sparked questions regarding these people's origins, relationships, affinities, and interactions with other societies. In response to these questions, Sankalia (1974) concluded that the people of Neolithic Kashmir were not indigenous, but rather 'colonists' from elsewhere. Khazanchi (1977-78) although backing Sankalia, believed they could have come from Central Asia, specifically North and Central China. He made his case based on similarities between Kashmiri material culture and Neolithic cultures from North and Central China, Shilka Valley, and several Neolithic sites in eastern Siberia, Russia (Khazanchi, 1977). However, Pant et al. (1982) pointed out that the Neolithic culture exhibits different evolutionary indicators, with significant technological links with Kashmir's previous Paleolithic culture. Burzahomites have similarities with Neolithic peoples in north and north-west China and Central Asia, according to the Allchin, owing to the shared practice of animal burial in these locations (Allchin and Allchin, 1983). The skeleton remains were compared to the Harappan cemetery R. 37 series, and some were found to be of west-Asian ancestry (Sharma,1998). The pottery, pit homes,

ground stone tools, bone tools, and even Masur, wheat, barley, and rice found in Swat valley are similar to those found in Neolithic Kashmir. The pre-Harappan painted pots found at Kot-Diji, Banawali, and Sarai Khola resemble the Burzahom painted pot with the horned deity (Sankalia-1974). A number of Harappa-style beads were recovered from Burzahom and Gufkral, demonstrating a link between these two societies. Bandey (2009) believes that the Neolithic people of Kashmir did not move from China because the two are completely different in terms of racial and genetic characteristics. The dispute concerning Kashmir Neolithic's nature and origins will continue until the studied sites can be unearthen to learn more about the period.

How we are losing our glory

The Burzahom site was first discovered by a Yale-Cambridge Expedition in 1936. The Frontier Circle of archaeological survey of India carried out very comprehensive excavations and examinations between 1960 and 1971. Ceramic vases, pots, bones, and stone tools have been recovered dating from the Neolithic to the monolithic age. Here, subterranean residences with dogs and goats as pets, as well as pit burials coated in limestone, have been uncovered, comparable to the Indus Valley civilization. The property was is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage status in 2014, and the application is now being considered. The site's details, as well as justifications for its universal significance, can be found on the UNESCO List of Tentative Sites.

Destroyed by cricket fans

What began as a minor cricket match among Burzahom village residents has grown into a huge T-20 tournament known as the Burzahom T-20 Cup. According to reports, 30 teams competed for this trophy in the state championship during the past two years. And the solitary standing monolith has been vandalized with the words "T-20 Cup" painted in white on the ground photographs.

Cricket fans regularly abuse and vandalize this valuable archaeological site, as evidenced by satellite pictures taken after it was added to the tentative World Heritage Sites list. The centre has a real cricket pitch, and the boundary marks pass through the excavated sections.

Satellite imagery shows at least two to three huge tents pitched on different days, as well as numerous cars and motorcycles parked at the location. A big white cloth measuring 35 meters in length and 5 meters in width has been laid out, most likely as a pitch cover. It is folded in the next image.

A new road has been built to allow automobiles onto the site, completely disregarding the environment of the World Heritage Site. Cricket pitches and vehicles are clearly shown in satellite images. (Figure-2 to Figure-4)



Figure-2 Big Busses at Burzahom Site. (Google Earth Image edited by Author)

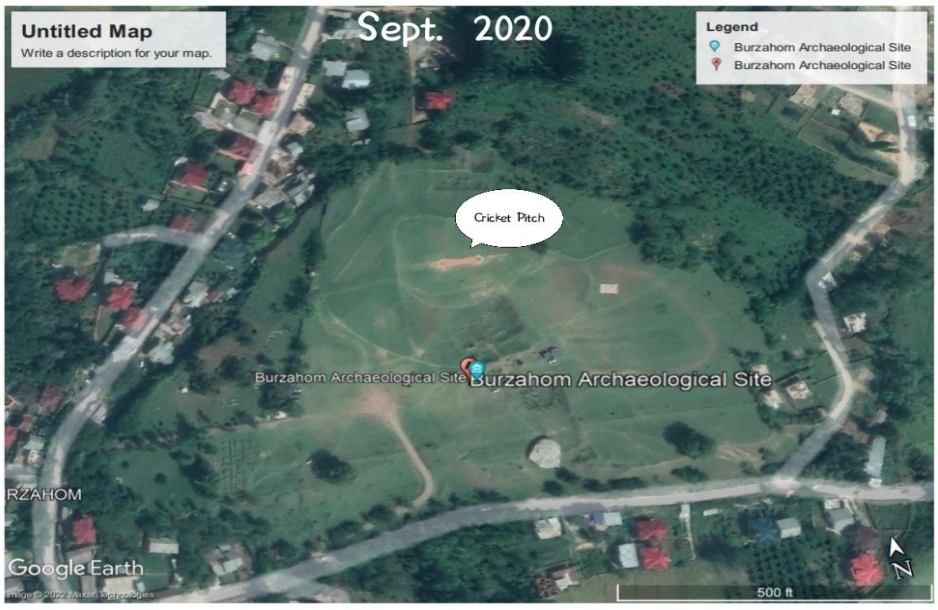


Figure-3 Cricket Pitch at Burzahom (Google Earth image edited by Author)



Figure-4 Tents and vehicles at Burzahom (Google Earth image edited by author)

Illegal excavations and encroachment

Illegal excavations are visible across all the Kashmir Neolithic Archaeological sites in Kashmir valley. The sites aren't well-protected, much alone and do not have specific security measures in these places. There is no security fence and encroachment protection on any site in Kashmir valley, also there are no mandatory buffer zones for such major sites currently. Indeed, an orchard has been established on the premises by planting mature trees, as observed in most of the locations (Figure-5).

The construction of three huge residences at Burzahom has recently encroached on previously illegally dug land. The government should deal harshly with such flagrant vandalism and encroachments. Security should be put in place around the sites, which can potentially generate the economy through controlled guided visitors.

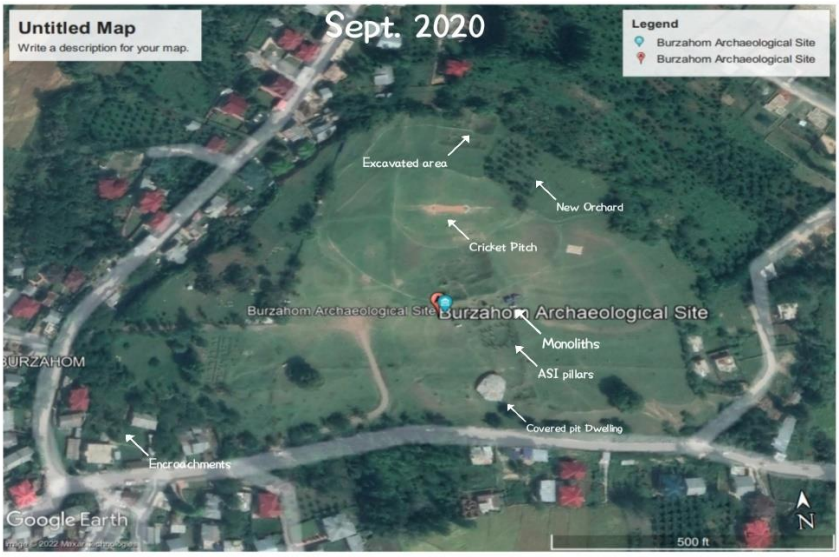


Figure-5 Overall view of Burzahom Site (Google earth Image edited by author)

Exploitation by Bollywood

Heritage sites have been used for filming movie scenes and songs on numerous occasions. Martand Sun Temple near Anantnag town, an ASI monument designated protected, was used to film the "Bismil" song sequence from the film "Haider." Ground images were taken during the nearly month-long filming to show how the location was taken over by the Bollywood crew and locals, the latter seeking to get a glimpse of the action by sitting chaotically on the walls and temple, which was already in ruins. (Figure-6)



Figure. 6- satellite image of Martland Sun Temple-Anantnag (Google Earth image edited by Author)

There are so many other factors responsible for the destruction or damaging the archaeological sites in Kashmir valley. The exploitation and destruction of sites by the local peoples are the main reason behind which is due to the irresponsibility of the government end. The state and central governments did not pay attention to the ancient sites in Kashmir valley or the Jammu region. The tense environment in the valley is also one of the main reasons behind the vandalization of the archaeological sites and monuments in Kashmir valley. Government should take appropriate steps to protect the glory of Kashmir valley and at least should fence and made a courtyard across all the archaeological sites and archaeological monuments.

Conclusion

The ecological conditions of the Kashmir valley played a significant role in the origin and development of settled life for earlier farming communities. The earlier settled life in the Kashmir valley can be traced back to about 3000 BC. The location of the Neolithic settlements in Kashmir is very interesting. A cluster of forty Neolithic sites is located in the Kashmir valley but no single Neolithic site is recovered in other areas of the Jammu and Kashmir state. Archaeological studies suggested that the ecological conditions of the Kashmir

valley played an important role in the origin as well as expansion of the settled life of earlier farming communities. Geomorphological features showed that the region of the Kashmir valley has a large concentration of alluvial deposits. The rivers and lakes might have played an important role by providing high-quality agricultural land as well as irrigation facilities, along with the provision of different varieties of wild animals and plants. The region was also an important resource area for many varieties of metallic ores and minerals. Hence, the Kashmir valley has provided opportunities for the development and establishment of the Neolithic culture in the region. It is significant to note that the people of Neolithic culture are permanently settled here and successfully developed their traditions, custom, and ritual practices. The people's of this culture also established a successful trade network with contemporary cultures. Different varieties of the Harappan material were recovered during the Neolithic period of Kashmir including dish-on-stand, perforated jars, high-necked jars, copper objects (antimony rod, harpoons, bangles, ear, and nose rings, etc.), semi-precious stone objects (blades, carnelian and agate beads), terracotta objects (bangles, beads, and pendants) and steatite beads, etc. Hence, the main aim of this study is to find out the nature of the trade network between the Kashmir Neolithic and Harappan civilizations. The results of the present study have revealed an interesting and unexpected phenomenon and the same is discussed below in brief:-

The people of Kashmir Neolithic and Early Harappan culture (Hakra culture) were living in the pit dwelling complexes. The excavations of both cultures revealed a quiet number of rectangular, oval, and square shape pits having different functions in nature such as dwelling, cooking, storage, industrial and garbage systems, etc. In 3000 BCE Kashmir Neolithic had a great contact with other civilizations such as China and the Harappan Civilizations. The Kashmir Neolithic settlement was so advanced in the tool making industry, Ceramic industry, and farming activities. There are around four dozen Neolithic sites reported in Kashmir valley but only four of them were excavated systematically by archaeological survey of India or by other prominent archaeologists. But due to the ignorance of the government and local peoples, these sites are vandalized and destroyed. The illegal digging, illegal encroachments, playing cricket and Bollywood activities on the archaeological sites, and the non-fencing absence of courtyards are the main reason behind the destruction of the archaeological sites in Kashmir valley. We suggest that the government (either state or central or both) should take necessary steps and measures to protect the valuable archaeological sites as well as the archaeological monuments in Kashmir valley, such as fencing across the whole site/monuments; making courtyards etc. The government can impose entry tickets at Archaeological sites and

monuments, which will gain the economy and will be helpful for the maintenance of the site or monuments. If the Archaeological Survey of India and the Government of Jammu and Kashmir take the necessary steps to care for these archaeological sites and monuments in Kashmir valley, in that case, the vandalisation or destruction of these sites and monuments may be controlled. At the same time, the Archaeological Survey of India should also plan to conduct more explorations as well as the excavations at all Neolithic Sites Across the Kashmir valley. It will not help the students and researchers but also general people to understand much more about the valuable remains and materials of our glorious past.

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