



A Short Note on the Recent Discovery of Sanauli and its Harappan Connection

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Abstract

Recently, the archaeological site of Sanauli located in the Bagpat district of Uttar Pradesh has become the centre of attraction not only for Indian archaeological world but for almost all people interested in history also. The reasons behind this immense interest are the burials of the three chariots found alongwith eight graves of protohistoric period. The discovery was made in 2017. Details on this subject are therefore still wanting. The only article written by the excavating archaeologists Dr. Sanjay Manjul and Mrs. Arvin Manjul and some interviews of Dr. Manjul are our sources of knowledge in this matter till date. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive view on the recent excavation at Sanauli.

Key Words: Excavation, Sanauli, Harappan connection

Introduction

Questions that are the most important about this discovery are the identity of the persons buried here. What is the position in the history of India? Did they have any connection with Harappan Civilization? Or do these people have some distinct cultural identity? This discovery puts us in front of a number unresolved questions like those mentioned above. I have already said that our data base is very much meager in this subject, but we can get some idea on the basis of the little clues that we have received from this archaeological search.



Archaeologists have been working on the site since 2004. In the month of July of that year, some locals found some terracotta fragments and some human skeletons in an agricultural field in Sanauli. As soon as the news reached the archaeological community they hurried to the spot and felt the urgent need of archaeological excavations which was began in August 2005. A lot of information came out of this year-long excavation.

The excavations, led by Shri DV Sharma, revealed that the site was originally a cemetery. A total of 116 burials were discovered here during this period. According to the excavators, 'All the graves were found laid in northwest-southeast orientation as a rule, with head placed in the north, and legs towards the south direction' (Sharma et al. P. 167; 2006). Among them 52 are extended burials, 35 of the total burials are 'secondary' inhumations which yielded only the fragmentary bones of human and 29 burials are 'symbolic' which did not consist any human remains but only some grave goods.

Some of these burials are notable, such as the joint burial (we have seen this type of burial in Lothal also), the triple burial, the animal sacrifice with human remains (it should be noted that we have also found such kind of practice in Mehrgarh) and a child's grave. Archaeological excavations have also uncovered evidence of the practice of burying the dead in a large trough-like vessel with charred human bones, good amount of ash and jaw bones of animals along with over burnt mud lumps and brickbats. According to the excavators this trough displays the practice of cremation.

Archaeologists have identified the culture as the Late-Mature Harappan civilization. The estimated time period is 2200 to 1600 BC. One of these burials contains a copper antennae sword and a copper sheath of 'Copper Hoard' type. In fact, this discovery is very much important in Indian archeology because this is the first evidence of direct link between the Harappan and OCP/Copper Hoard culture. After examining the burial potteries excavators stated that, 'The pottery styles and other cultural assemblages recovered from Sanauli have shown definitive affinity with the late Harappan sites in the region, on the one hand, and with the OCP sites on the other'(Sharma et al.P.38;2004).

Recent excavation (2018) was carried out at a distance of approximately 120 meters from the earlier site of Sanauli. The main objectives of this excavation are to explore the extension of the earlier cemeteries and find out the settlement area.

From this excavation total 8 burials were discovered. Three coffin burials, three secondary and two symbolic burials (without any human remains) were discovered. In secondary burial context a twin burial was recovered also. But the most notable discovery is of course the three chariots associated with these tombs. Other important findings included a copper antennae sword measuring 42cm×5cm×.06cm, a torch, a dagger, and "8" shaped Shield (possibly made of wood and leather), and a copper helmet or crown.



The dagger was attached to a wooden handle with copper nails. The remains of a warrior like woman was found in a coffin along with other offerings. The remains of a decaying bow and arrowheads made of bone were associated with this burial. In some cases it has been observed that some rice and urad dal were placed in a terracotta bowl. Perhaps this is an indication that some kind ritual was performed before the burial was given.

Although a number of other artefacts have been found but the details are not very important here. The pottery is pretty much the same as before. However, Dr. Manjul has identified those as OCPs. But is there any kind of direct connection between the Harappans and those charioteers? I would like to draw the reader's attention to a few things.

In one of the coffin burials there were depictions of eight anthropomorphic figures on the lid. According to the excavator, 'The lid of the coffin is highly decorated and carved out in high relief. At the starting possibly a crown or royal insignia was depicted and followed by eight anthropomorph. The high relief carving was done in wood and after that thin copper sheathing was provided with the help of small nails/repit (?) to fasten it. During excavation we have found large quantity of nails insitu. At present, wood is fully perished and copper sheathing is also deteriorated badly.

A human skull has been exposed partially below the first and second anthropomorphic figures. All eight figures are depicted in similar style with minor deference in shoulder part and Aayudha holding in hand. The depiction is of a human, head adorned with the headgear of half rounded horn turning inwards and probably a peepal leaf in centre. Although the details of lower portion has not comprehensible but in three figures they have hold some object in their hand which may be the weapons (Aayudha) or some other object that belongs to the particular figure. These figures are one of the finest examples of wood and metal craftsmanship. Due to corrosion it became fragile and very difficult to expose. It also provokes us to rethink about the origin of iconographic representation of divinity.

The legs of coffin were also decorated with copper strips and triangles. Copper sheathing was provided both outer as well as inner side of coffin. A beautiful foliage design has been exposed on the outer side of the coffin'(Manjul and Manjul, p.224;2018)

Here one can find striking similarities with the peepal leaf symbolism of the Harappan world. The tradition of Ashwattha or the peepal leaf motif actually goes back to the pre/early Harappan times, whereas this symbolism is somewhat unique to the OCP/Copper Hoard culture. The same is also true in respect of the deity figure with horned headdress. Many Harappan seals bore this very symbolism of a deity with inwardly curved horned headdress. A comb made of horn has been discovered in a burial, with a humped bull depiction on the top. We must not forget that humped bull was a very common motif in the Harappan world.



Now I want to draw the reader's attention to a surprising similarity in the style and design of the Sanauli chariot wheels with a mature Harappan one.

From the Mature Harappan level at Lothal Shri S. R. Rao reported '...a solid wheel of a toy-chariot in alabaster carved with geometric and other designs,.' (IAR, P.18;1996). The triangular designs and

arrangements of the outer side of the toy wheel is very much identical with the Sanauli chariots (Figs.1 and 2). In both the cases the symbolism of radiating sun in three registers are exactly the same. The shape of the sun rays is also triangular. The similarity is so obvious that one can easily reach to the conclusion that those were the products of the same cultural world or they had a strong connection with each other. Actually the Lothal alabaster wheel was a miniature precursor of the Sanauli chariot wheels.



Fig.1.Alabaster toy wheel from Lothal.



Fig. 2.Sanauli chariot wheel.

Interestingly, to date no OCP culture site has been found with these kinds of Harappan symbolism. We should also keep in mind that in the excavations that took place in the first phase of the Sanauli excavations archaeologists have discovered a large cemetery belonging to the mature to late



Harappan period just 120 meters away from the recent find spot. So we can easily assume a strong case of amalgamation of the two cultures discussed above.

The connection between the Harappan and the so-called OCP culture is a matter of discussion and debate from the very beginning. According to the scholars like Sri S.P.Gupta and Sri K.N.Dikshit, OCP was a culture of middle Ganga-Yamuna Doab and those OCP people met Harappans in the upper Doab (Gupta, p. 8 and Dikshit, p. 9; 2005) when the latter were moving towards the east. Sri Dilip K.Chakrabarti also opined that, 'there is little doubt that the late Harappans and the OCP complex are

closely intertwined,' (Chakrabarti, p. 251; 2001). At 1971 seminar on OCP and NBP Prof. Suraj Bhan stated that some OCP ware 'evolved from the fusion of the Harappan and the Kalibangan (pre-Harappan)

or Siswal traditions,' (Bhan, p. 20; 2005) and some OCP were evolved from Siswal ware without any influence of the Urban Harappan culture (Bhan, p. 20; 2005). Thus a pre/ early Harappan connection was examined and proposed by Prof. Bhan as early in 1971. But he was not alone who has proposed such connection. In 1972 Sri Rafique Mughal identified some OCP like ware in the pre/early Harappan level of Jalilpur also (Mughal, p. 119; 1972). Moreover in his recent paper Sri Mughal mentioned about the Hakra Wares at Saipai. After examining the pottery sherds from Amri, Kot Diji, Sarai Khola and Lal Qila Sri R.S.Gaur stated that, 'The OCP of the Doab and the pre-Harappan deposits of the Indus valley are closely associated and belong to the same stock' (Gaur, p. 221; 1995). The close affinities between the pre/early Harappan Hakra wares were pointed by Sri M.D.N.Sahi in his several publications (Sahi, pp. 216-246; 2005, pp. 155-166; 2007, pp. 223-261; 2018). So we can conclude with some certainty that there was a strong line of connection between the OCP and Harappan people. The recent findings of the Sanauli cemetery should be evaluated in the light of the studies mentioned above. Not only that this discovery may resolve the age old debate about the connection between two very much important cultures of the Indian Subcontinent.

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