

An Archeological Study of Pot Sherds Found From the Site Garh Panchakot in Purulia District of West Bengal, India

¹Abhishek Bhowmick & ²Debasis Kumar Mondal

Abstract

Garh Panchakot is a historical site situated in the foothills of the Panchet hill in the Purulia district of West Bengal, India. It is a famous tourist spot which preserves the remnants of ancient temple complex and fort. During the visit to Garh Panchakot, present authors noticed huge number of pot sherds scattered in nearby jungle areas. These pot sherds bear the ancient features. Present study focuses on this ceramic assemblage found in and around the site. The study is done through systematic study and analysis of the potsherd that are found in the area. Focus has been given on morphological, technological and functional attributes. As an archeological reminiscence, present study may help to shed light on the past activities centering round the temples and some hidden facts of past history of Gar Panchkot.

Keywords: *Archeology, pot sherds, assemblage, activities, history, Garh Panchkot.*

Introduction

For the present study, the site Garh Panchkot is selected. The site bears the remnants of temples and fort. During the visit to Garh Panchkot, a number of pot sherds were noticed towards the northern part on the slopes of Panchet hill. The site is mainly covered by jungle. As there was no earlier works on pot sherds found at the site, the present study is taken up by the authors.

Before going into discussion of pottery and its attributes, it is important to highlight the history of the area. Limited archeological explorations in systematic manner were carried out in Purulia. Earlier the district was known as Manbhum. The area is an important part in Western part of West Bengal (Rarh) from archaeological point of view. Dalton, Beglar and Cunningham made an extensive study of the archeological heritage and history of the district (Ray 1961). As a part of Chotanagpur plateau, the area also yielded Paleolithic tools belonging to Middle Pleistocene period. Evidences of Neolithic culture also were found, which developed into pre-iron Chalcolithic culture in the area.

Purulia or Ancient Manbhum was known as *Vajra-bhumi* and according to Jain literature it was one of the 16 Mahajanapadas of eastern India. A number of Jain images which were found in different parts of the district and its adjacent areas dated to 10th and 12th Century A.D. Sculpture of Jain images also had been found from different archeological sites along

the river Kasai. The area was under the Pala and Sena dynasty earlier. Purulia came under the jurisdiction of British in 1765, Panchet Sadar in 1779, Jangal (24 Parganas) in 1805, Manbhum in 1833 and Purulia Sadar in 1838.

Earlier Panchkot or Panchet was the head-quarters subdivision of Manbhum district situated in 23°37' North and 86°47' East at the junction of the Barakar and Damodar rivers which formed a rounded ridge from North to South. The area is situated at the height of 1600 feet above the sea level. At the foothills toward the southern end there is remnant of an ancient fort. Four sets of earthen ramparts of more than five miles was artificially built and defended by deep and wide moats which were connected with the stream nearby. There were a number of gates on the rampart. Only five of which are found at present. These ramparts served two purposes; served as defensive mechanism of the fort and also as water reservoir for irrigation. A temple complex is noticed a little way off the fort.

There is controversy regarding the time period of building of the structure and of the owners of the fort. The inscriptions in Bengali script, found on the gates of Duarbandh and Khoriberi, refer to Sri Vira Hamira at a time of about 1600 A.D. There was no supportive document supporting whether the fort was built by Vira Hamira and subsequently was captured by Panchet Raja or was built by the Panchet Raja for their own protection from Vira Hamira and perhaps against the Muslim nobles. The reason for abandonment of the fort is also not clear. According to the story of Raghunath (1705-1720), a mysterious sickness affected the family. It may also been built in order to avoid the notice of the Muslim Governor or due to pressure from Chitra Sen Rai of Burdwan (Ray, 1961).

Objective

Present paper is an effort to shed some light on the unknown facets regarding the ownership, transfer of power and reason of abandonment of fort. The analysis of pot sherds found in and around the area is one of the effective tools to understand some important aspects of ownership of the fort and further concurrence or invasion by other powers. Main objective of the present study is to analyze the ceramic assemblage of the site Garh Panchkot in order to unearth some facts about the history of the area.

Literature review

The literature review for the present study is broadly divided into two categories. The first part is on the history of Garh Panchkot to understand the context of the pottery. The second part focuses on the understanding of the ceramic and its study in Indian context.

The study of ceramic is further divided into two sub-categories. The first category of the study focuses on understanding of the archaeologically excavated pot sherds. The main attributes taken for the study are stylistics variation, shape and probable use. Purpose also is to establish trade route in case of exotic variety of excavated sherds. Gupta (1988) focused on all the primary factors which helped in increasing the progress of Pottery industries in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India; such as growth, infrastructure of industries, employment, process

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and trends, working conditions and all the other related factors (Meadow, 1991). A number of study on Harrapan Pottery and its various attributes were done by Richard (1991), Dani and Masson (1992), Satyawadi (1994), Dani and Thapar (1996), Possehl (2002), Pruthi (2004), Chakrabarti (2006), McIntosh (2008) and Schug and Walimbe (2016). These studies not only provide the necessary details of Harrapan Pottery but also its stylistics variation, shape, probable use and also tried to understand trade route of the potteries. Apart from the above literature there are a number reports of excavation which came out in the publications of in Archaeological Survey of India and contain various descriptions of ceramics.

The second category of the studies included the ethnoarchaeological study of pottery and the potters. Ceramics are the most widely studied aspect of Ethnoarchaeology. Notable works were done by Allchin (1959, 1995), Ansari (1964), Biswas (1966), Bose (1982), Das (1961), Das and Ray (1966), Das Gupta and Syamchaudhuri (1966), Gupta (1966), Hashim (1989), Kramer (1990), Nagar (1969), Reddy (1981), Ray et. al (1982), Roux (1985-1986), Sinopoli (1988), Sinopoli and Blurton (1986), Mishra (2006), Nguille (2006), Prakash (2006), and Singh and Devi (2017). Various aspects of ceramics, such as forms (Manibabu, 2005; Miller 1982, 1985); distribution systems (Kramer 1991; Allchin 1995); kin and social relations among the potter communities (Kramer 1991; Ray and Das 1991) were also taken into account. Settar and Korisettar in the book "Archaeology and Interactive Disciplines" (2002) wrote that many ethno-archaeologists focus on ceramic archaeology, which brings technology of pot making into limelight and showcases the potter communities which revealed their lifestyle, social organizations, craft and social institution.

Methodology

The pot sherds were concentrated in some clusters. These were exposed due to erosion of the upper soil. The soil is blackish and sandy in nature. Various clusters have been studied. As the site is a heritage site of West Bengal, no digging was undertaken. Focus was given on surface finds and those which were exposed due to erosion of surface soil. Pot sherds distributed on the site are analyzed on the basis of attributes like colour, shape, firing and texture. Technology is also an important aspect of pottery. Frequency analysis of pot sherds is done. Ethno-archaeological studies have also been conducted to examine the origin of pots sherds and their similarities and differences with contemporary pot sherds.

Area and the site (figure 1 and Figure 2)

Purulia owes its name from a village which became the headquarters of the erstwhile Manbhum district in 1838. It is the westernmost district of West Bengal. The physiographic location of the district is distinguished as a transitional zone between the young alluvial plains of West Bengal and ancient plateau of South-east Bihar.

The Pleistocene and Holocene formation of the district was found in the form of older alluvium and new alluvium. The district is covered by residual soil formed by the weathering of bed rock. Gneissic soil is predominant which is subject to laterization. The color of the soil varies from light red to brown depending on the mineral content.

The site is located in Panchet under the jurisdiction of Nituria Police Station. It is about 55 km. from the Purulia town. It was an ancient kingdom situated at the foothills of Panchet hills at the Jharkhand-West Bengal Border. The River Damodar flows on the North to the North-East direction. Panchet reservoir is also found on the North to North-West direction. The river and water system act as a natural barrier for protection from enemies. The Panchet hill is green and forested. The plateau area of the hill in which the ancient kingdom was situated is on fertile alluvium land. The jungle area is full of *Sal*, *Mahua*, *Palash*, *Simul* trees. Different types of shrubs are also found. Tribal groups are also living in the area.

An ancient terracotta temple, marvelously crafted in "*Pancharatna*" (five pinnacles) style of architecture, is present at the foothills of the Panchet hills in the Purulia district of West Bengal. The walls of the temple are also decorated with various terracotta works. At present, it is being restored by the Archeological Survey of India. Around the main temple there are seven other structures. Among these, there is a structure which is similar to the ruins of platform for festivals, locally known as '*rash mancha*'. There are other ruins also. These are, remnant of another temple, built in *Jor-Bangla* style of architecture; ruin of an ancient gate which is ornated with beautiful works on the wall; and a wall with pillars and arches that can be compared with the ruins of a palace. Adjacent to this palace there is a two storied '*Shikhara*' styled architecture, which can be compared to an ancient watchtower. Along the Panchet hill slopes there is evidence of a stone building which is about 600 meters above the main temple which can be assumed to be a guard quarter or garrison. This is locally known as '*Garh*' which means 'Fort' and probably the name Garh Panchkot for the place, came from it.

Around 850 AD this was the seat of powerful kingdom of Shikhara kings of Panchet, who reigned for more than 800 years, in and around the region of Panchet hill and in areas adjacent to the Basin of Damodar River. Presently 'Telkupi' village on the southern bank of river Damodar, is considered as the past capital of the Shikara kindom, known as '*Tailakampa*' and is situated about fifteen kilometers away from Garh Panchkot. It is very unfortunate that after the construction of Panchet dam many such marvelous construction of this great kingdom went under water of the Panchet reservoir, which include beautiful stone and brick temples built in between 800AD and 1200AD. The Panchet Raja was still not much known to the historians who independently ruled a greater part of Purulia but eventually lost their kingdom with the annexure by the British during the late 18th Century A.D. (Biswas 2012).

The ceramics are present in abundance in and around this temple complex. These ceramics are thus very important in understanding some aspects of this kingdom.

Result and discussion

Pot is artificially carved out of clay, which serves human purposes. From pre-historic times the pots are manufactured. Various methods are applied for pot making, from simple hollowing out from a bigger chunk of mud to the complex wheel made glazed ceramic wares (Childe 1934). The craft specialization, hierarchy in society, innovative method like stylistic and color variation that helps to increase the sale is indeed the reasons which induced variety

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in pottery. To understand the archaeological behavior, ceramic or pottery plays a vital role. After stone, the pottery is considered as second most important and viable source of information which is less degradable than most of the artifacts used by human beings. Pottery is datable, identifiable and classifiable artifact. It is one of the major elements for studying the daily life of past communities (Settar and Korisettar 2002).

For the purpose of the analysis of the pottery, a total of one hundred sherds are taken into the consideration. The analysis of these potsherds is done on the basis of attributes like colour, texture, firing and decoration.

Colour

At first potsherds were classified on the basis of colour. These are Red Ware, Brown Ware, Black Ware, Black and Red Ware and Grey ware. Within the sample of 100 potsherds, the distribution of each type on basis of colour is identified (Table No 1). Red ware is maximum in number in the assemblage (60 %). Brown ware is of moderate frequency i.e. 28%. Black Ware (6 %), Black and Red Ware (4 %) and grey ware (2 %) are of minimum frequency.

Part of Pottery

Pottery has mainly three parts; rim sherd, body sherd and base sherd. The assemblage of potsherd of Panchkot shows the higher frequency of rim sherds (70 %) and rest (30 %) is body sherd (Table 2). No base sherd was found. In case of red ware and brown ware, rim sherds are more than body sherds. Black and red ware shows the equal frequency of rim sherds and body sherds. Whereas, number of rim sherds is twice than body sherd in black ware. In grey ware only two rim sherds were found.

Technique

The frequency of handmade pottery (66%) is more than wheel made pottery (34%). In case of red ware, handmade pottery (50%) is more than wheel made types (10%). Whereas in brown ware wheel made pottery (18%) is more than handmade pottery (10%). In black and red ware and grey ware, all the potsherds are handmade, whereas in black ware all the potsherds show that they were wheel made (Table 3).

Fabric

The analysis of the potsherds on the basis of fabric is done by following Orton et.al (2013) and Hunt (2017). Generally, the fabric is of three types Coarse, medium and fine. These are classified on the basis of different types of particles that are mixed with the clay as tempering materials. Pot sherds with fine fabric are made from well levigated clay mixed with fine sand. Medium fabric potteries are made from mixed type of clay tempering with grits and sands. Coarse pottery is made from rough clay which is not properly cleaned and kneaded.

Distribution of different types of fabrics varies in different pottery types. This is represented in Table No 4. In case of red ware medium fabric is of the highest frequency

(70%) and fine fabric is of the lowest frequency (13.33%). In case of brown ware, coarse and fine fabric is of equal frequency (35.71 %) and medium fabric is of minimum frequency (28.57%). In black and red ware all the pot sherds are of medium frequency. In grey ware and black ware all the pot sherds are of fine fabric.

Firing

Firing is an important attribute of pottery. Color of the core area, along the thickness, helps to identify the types of firing done. The color of the core of poorly fired pottery varies from white, grey to black. Well fired pottery has tint of dark orange to red in core part. A well oxidized kiln generally produces red core while the reduced firing may produce a white to grey core and black core. The red ware can easily be identified on the basis of color of the core.

Maximum number of ill-fired pottery is distributed in Red ware (70%) and black ware (66.67%). Among brown ware, 50% are medium fired pottery and 50% are ill fired pottery. Well fired pottery is found in red ware (10 %) and black ware (33.33 %). All the grey wares are well fired (Table 5). Greater control of firing produces higher temperatures and produces more durable pottery (Shepard 1956).

Shape

Shape of the pottery is important to understand the function. Shapes of the pottery are reconstructed with the help of rim sherds (Figure 4).. Bowls are more common compared to *handi* (*rice cooking pot*). Bowls are either flared externally or are without flare at the rim.. The *handis* are also with and without externally flared rim. Vase shaped bowl are also found. External flared plate in grey ware is also evidenced. Few designs have been noticed on the neck portion of the pot sherds. These are externally engraved and incised.

Ethno-archaeological study of contemporary pottery

For further clarification an ethno-archaeological study is conducted in the surrounding area to highlight whether these potsherds were discarded by local inhabitants or not. People living in the surrounding area belong to Santhal community, who are totally unaware about those pot sherds which were found in the surrounding areas of Garh Panchkot. These prove that those were not connected with tribal communities of the region.

Some morphological similarities and differences are found in the pot sherds, both in the context of past as well as in the present. Pot sherds found in the archaeological context have minimum similarities with the present ones. At present the communities of the area mostly use Red wares. Varieties of pot sherds found in the temple area include Red ware, Black and Red ware, Brown ware and Grey ware. Except for red ware other coloured types are not continuing at present. The varieties of pot sherds imply diverse use of pottery in the past. Perhaps all of those potsherds were not of local origin and were imported from other areas.

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It may also be presumed that the finer textured wares were used by the elites of the societies, where as the medium fabric ones were used by common people.

At present cooking vessels are more in use. When the functional aspects are considered, these are of the medium textured, which has capability of retaining of heat. The potteries used in the past are of medium to fine texture. There are huge number of pitchers, bowls, dishes and vases, which indicate vast use of these compared to cooking and household utensils.

The designs at the neck portion of the pot sherds also indicate that these were not used for cooking. Among present day potteries decorations are almost absent except for a few incised lines. Decorated pot sherds perhaps were used for the ritual purpose or it may be for the aesthetic purposes as well.

In consideration of technological aspects, handmade pottery are greater in frequency in the past, though both handmade and wheel made potteries were found. It is also interesting that contemporary people use cord impressed pottery which is absent in archaeological context of pots in the area.

Conclusion

Analysis shows that red ware is the most common type followed by brown ware. Black and Red ware and grey ware are of minimum frequency. Red wares are mostly handmade. Black wares are also handmade. Black ware and grey ware are of fine texture, whereas, red ware and brown ware are coarse in nature. Maximum number of pottery is ill fired. Medium fired pottery is found among red ware, brown ware and black and red ware. However, all the grey wares are well fired. Pottery found in the site Garh Panchkot resembles the pottery types of Rarh Bengal. No uncommon types or exotic pottery has been observed. This assemblage of pottery perhaps may reveal some aspects of past history and shed light on the controversy regarding the building of the fort by Vira Hamira and subsequently captured by Panchet Raja or built by the Panchet Raja for their own protection from Vira Hamira and perhaps against the Muslim invaders. It is plausible that the fort was built by the local Rajas from the agricultural background as no sophisticated pottery types that are made from exotic clay like porcelain are found. The pot sherds which were associated with the people once living the area for hundreds of years may be interpreted as the marker of their culture beside the historical evidences. The discussion opens up new studies like the origin and dispersal of pottery, their relation with human behavior and past activities to reconstruct the past history of the area. The ethnic identity related with the pot sherds may also be able to be interpreted. Different issues like the origin, development, related human behavior and nature of discard of pottery through time may open new areas of further research in the area.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Frequency distribution of potsherds on the basis of colour

Pottery types	No (%)
Red Ware	60 (60.00)
Brown Ware	28 (28.00)
Black and Red Ware	4 (4 .00)
Grey Ware	2 (2 .00)
Black Ware	6 (6.00)
Total	100 (100.00)

Table 2: Frequency distribution of potsherds on the basis of parts

Pottery Types	Body Sherds No (%)	Rim Sherds No (%)	Total No (%)
Red Ware	18(30.00)	42(70.00)	60(100.00)
Brown Ware	8(28.57)	20(71.43)	28(100.00)
Black & Red Ware	2(50.00)	2(50.00)	4(100.00)
Grey Ware	0(0.00)	2(100.00)	2(100.00)
Black Ware	2(33.33)	4(66.67)	6(100.00)

Table 3: Frequency distribution of potsherds on the basis of technique of manufacturing

Pottery Types	Wheel made No (%)	Hand made No (%)	Total No (%)
Red Ware	10(16.67)	50(83.33)	60(100.00)
Brown Ware	18(64.29)	10(35.71)	28(100.00)
Black & Red Ware	0(0.00)	4(100.00)	4(100.00)
Grey Ware	0(0.00)	2(100.00)	2(100.00)
Black Ware	6(100.00)	0(0.00)	6(100.00)

Table 4: Frequency distribution of potsherds on the basis of fabric

Pottery Types	Coarse No (%)	Medium No (%)	Fine No (%)	Total No (%)
Red Ware	10(16.67)	42(70.00)	8(13.33)	60(100.00)
Brown Ware	10(35.71)	8(28.57)	10(35.71)	28(100.00)
Black & Red Ware	0(0.00)	4(100.00)	0(0.00)	4(100.00)
Grey Ware	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(100.00)	2(100.00)
Black Ware	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	6(100.00)	6(100.00)

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Table 5: Frequency distribution of potsherds on the basis of firing

Pottery Types	Well fired No (%)	Medium fired No (%)	Ill fired No (%)	Total
Red Ware	6(10.00)	12(20.00)	42(70.00)	60(100.00)
Brown Ware	0(0.00)	14(50.00)	14(50.00)	28(100.00)
Black & Red Ware	0(0.00)	4(100.00)	0(0.00)	4(100.00)
Grey Ware	2(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(100.00)
Black Ware	2(33.33)	0(0.00)	4(66.67)	6(100.00)

Figure 1: Location of Garh Panchkot in satellite map



(Source: <http://www.maplandia.com/india/west-bengal/puruliya/garh-panchkot>)

Figure 2: A view of the site Garh Panchkot



[* Object too big for pasting as inline graphic. In-line.JPG *]



Figure 3: Potsherds found from the site

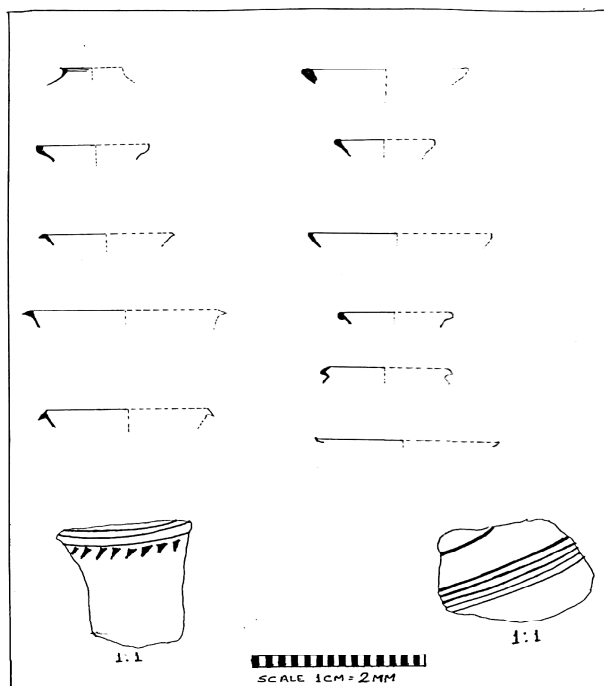


Figure 4: Shapes reconstructed from pot sherds

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Web Source

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Bio-profile of the Authors

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta

E-mail ID: anth.debasis@gmail.com.

² Guest faculty, Central University of Odisha

E-mail ID: anth.abhi@gmail.com;

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