

The Chronology of Northern Black Polished Ware : Recent Perspectives

Dr. Anand Shanker Singh

Principal, Iswar Saran Post Graduate College, University of Allahabad, Allahabad, India

ABSTRACT

The Northern Black Polished Ware culture is an urban Iron Age culture of the Indian Subcontinent. In Indian Archaeology for the first time Northern Black Polished Ware has been reported from Bhita in the year of 1911-12¹ and since then it has been recovered from in different part of India the ware has been reported from since then it has recovered from different parts of India especially from northern India. Because of its initial discovery from the northern part of India; it's black colour; and polished/glazed appearance of the term Northern Black Polished Ware coined for this type of ceramic industry.

I. INTRODUCTION

Later on, however, when this type of ware were reported from the region outside the northern India, some scholars raised objection against the nomenclature proposed earlier that is Northern Black Polished Ware. Scholars mainly objected against the word Northern, because now distribution and extent not only restricted to the northern part of India rather had been recovered from the region beyond northern India like West Bengal, Orissa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat etc. In other words, the spread of Northern Black Polished Ware is not only restricted in northern India, it has been recovered southern, western and eastern parts of India as well as beyond the present political boundaries of India like Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka etc. Though, this ware appeared quit late in the southern and eastern part of

India. The question of nomenclature was discussed in depth during the annual conference of Indian Archaeological society held at the National Museum, New Delhi in 1971.

Curriculum of the scholars arrives to the conclusion that since the ware has had been used in Indian archaeology literature and therefore to avoid confusion amongst the scholars, it is accepted by the scholars to retain the term of Northern Black Polished Ware and since onwards, the nomenclature of this ware almost a settled issue in Indian Archaeology. Besides the nomenclature of this ware, scholars also raised a number of issues such as epicenter of the ware causes of polished on the surfaces, technique of the manufacturing, and composition of the assemblages etc from time to time.

The chronology of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) like other issues of Northern Black Polished Ware is not free from debate. Perhaps if we start looking at various issues from a different and new perspective some problems may be resolved in near future.

Northern Black Polished Ware has been reported in abundance with the Punch marked coins and un-inscribed cast coins in majority of the excavated sites. If there would have been a clear-cut date of these coins, it could well have been dated along with them, but as a matter of fact there are various theories in respect of their dates.² The date of the Punch marked coins ranges between 1000 BCE and 200 BCE but now it has been placed normally between the 6th - 5th century BCE and the 2nd century BCE. Hence, the date of the NBPW may be placed between the 6th - 5th century BCE and the 2nd century BCE on basis of above.

In the same way, the stratification of the excavation and C-14 determination (Radio carbon dates) also go a long way in fixing the date of the Northern Black Polished Ware, but in some cases it has been observed that the C-14 determination differs with the archaeological stratification. In this correlation, it may be mentioned that the C-14 determination is a more scientific method of dating an object than the date provided by the archaeological stratification, archaeological stratification that NBPW has been found in association with the Alexander's coin in mint

condition in Taxila at a depth of 6 feet below the surface level and also at a depth of 18 ft.³ This may go to explain that the NBPW at Taxila is pre-Alexandrian. Alexander's coins have now been dated between 330 BCE and 300 BCE. Thus, the date of the Northern Black Polished Ware, according to this evidence, will go back to either 600 BCE or 500 BCE.

Similarly, at Ropar, NBPW has been found from period III, C-14 date of the early level of period III is 480-100 BCE, while the date of the post Painted Grey ware level of this period is 390-100 BCE.⁴ It is clear from this that the NBPW of Ropar may be dated between the 5th century BCE and the 3rd century BCE. At Tamruk, Bangarh, Chandraketurgarh⁵ in the West Bengal and Sisupalgarh in Orissa in the east and Amravati in the south, it may be fixed between the 5th century BCE and the 3rd century BCE. Ujjain and Maheswar have been dated around the 5th century BCE of NBPW.^{6&7} The C-14 date of this ware at Besnagar also indicates that it belongs to the 5th century BCE (470 \pm 100 BCE).⁸

On the basis of archaeological objects reported from NBPW culture horizon at Jhusi near Allahabad, the NBPW and its associated ware, the proposed dates from 7th century BCE to 2nd century BCE. The C-14 dates of early, middle and late NBP Ware are 640 \pm 90, 550 \pm 90 and 250 \pm 90 BCE respectively.⁹ From Atranjikhhera, the NBPW reported found from period IV.¹⁰ The C-14 date of the early level of this period is 530 \pm 85 BCE, that of the middle phase is 295 \pm 100 BCE and the lowest level of this period has been placed in 265 \pm 165 BCE, as which may propose that

the NBPW people came here in the early 6th century BCE and continued till the 2nd century BCE. At Hastinapur, though it has been found in association with the Punch marked coins from period III, yet a few sherds occur below the level of the Punch marked coins. Since the Punch marked coins generally range between the 6th - 5th century BCE, it may be dated between the early 6th century BCE, and the early 2nd century BCE. NBPW has been reported from the transitional phase of the Painted Grey ware as a result of which some Painted ware sherds are associated with the Northern Black Polished Ware. The C-14 date of the early phase is 475-105 BCE while that of the late phase is 160-95 BCE. Thus the NBPW of this site may be dated between the 6th century BCE and 2nd century BCE.

So far no C-14 date has been fixed for the NBPW phase at Sravasti, though on the basis of stratification it has been placed in the 7th century BCE but at Rajghat, the C-14 date of period I B, yielding the Northern Black Polished Ware, is 440±110 BCE which may go to show that it belongs to either the 6th century BCE or the 5th century BCE. At Kausambi, it has been dated around 625 BCE on the basis of archaeological stratification, but two dates of period III yielding the Northern Black Polished Ware, have been determined on C-14 dating method; the one is 440-100 BCE and the other is 500±110 BCE which may go to show that it belongs to either the 6th century BCE or the 5th century BCE.¹¹ On the basis of material equipment and C-14 dates of Ayodhya, the

NBPW period may be assigned to circa 1003 BCE to 300 BCE.¹²

The scientific Radiocarbon dates so far available shows that NBPW in Uttar Pradesh ranges between the 7th century BCE and the 2nd century BCE but in Bihar, it may be assigned to an early date, both on the basis of stratification and C-14 dates.¹³ At Chirand and Sonpur, it has been reported from period II which follows period I B. The period I B at Chirand has been dated around 800 BCE on the basis of stratification,¹⁴ but C-14 date is 765±100 BCE.¹⁵ Thus the NBPW at Chirand may be placed in the 7th - 6th century BCE since the stratification does not show any break in the occupation. At Sonpur also, period I B has been dated between 850 BCE and 650 BCE on the basis of stratification, but C-14 determination has place it in 635-110 BCE, which indicates that it belongs to the 7th - 6th century BCE.¹⁶ At Rajgir,¹⁷ it has been dated around 3rd - 2nd century BCE while at Kumrahar¹⁸ it belongs to the 2nd - 1st century BCE on the basis of C-14 dates. The date at Rajgir is 260±105 BCE and 265±105 BCE and that of Kumrahar is 115±100 BCE.

A number of C-14 dates are available from Northern Black Polished Ware levels at different sites, which have been critically analyzed and correlated with NBPW deposits.¹⁹ However, on the basis of C-14 dates reported from Mathura, Lal has proposed the beginning of Period I at Mathura from circa 700 BCE and for the Period II and III circa 600 - 400 BCE and circa 400 - 250 BCE.²⁰ Although he also pointed out

that the end of NBPW at Mathura was unlikely to be later than 150 BCE. Agrawal and Kusumgar have proposed a time frame for the NBPW tradition between 600-50 BCE after taking into account C-14 dates and other aspects of Indian protohistoric cultures.²¹

The earliest date (1200 BCE) of Northern Black Polished Ware is reported from recently excavated site at Juafardif (Nalanda, Bihar).²² It is interesting to bring forth that there are not one or two but all-together four C-14 dates which are given early dates for NBPW levels. It further pointed out that these four dates have come from different layers which belong to middle phase of NBPW of period II. It may thus be seen that the C-14 dates of period II are consistent and justifiably indicate that the conventional date bracket for NBPW requires a fresh review at least for the sites of Middle Ganga Plain.

The emergent picture is that the beginning of NBPW could safely be pushed to circa 700 BCE, if not earlier (Ayodhya 1003 BCE & Juafardih 1200 BCE) and

therefore, the NBPW period ranges from 700 BCE to 50 BCE. The correlation of C-14 dates, stratigraphic position and other findings reveals the following chronology for the five stages of development.²³

Stage I	circa 700 BCE- 600 BCE
Stage II	circa 600 BCE- 500 BCE
Stage III	circa 500 BCE- 400 BCE
Stage IV	circa 400 BCE- 200 BCE
Stage V	circa 200 BCE- 50 BCE

Thus, it may be inferred on the basis of the above data and dates of the different sites yielding the NBPW that inscriptions were going on in different parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Middle Ganga plain) around the 7th century BCE and it became popular around the 6th - 5th century BCE.²⁴ The revised date of the NBPW may, therefore, be fixed between the 7th century BCE and the 50 BCE and not between the early 6th century BCE and the early 2nd century BCE as previously recommended by the archaeologists.

II. REFERENCES

- 1- Marshall, J. (1909-1910) : Excavation at Bhita, Annual report of Archaeological survey of India, Calcutta : 40
- 2- Nigam, J.S. (1961) : Northern Black Polished Ware' *Marg*, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (June) : 37-46
- 3- Ancient India, Number – 1 (1946), p. 27
- 4- Current Science (1965) - pp. 395-397
- 5- Indian Archaeology – A Review (1956-57)
- 6- Nigam, J.S. (1961) : Northern Black Polished Ware' *Marg*, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (June) : p. 38
- 7- Indian Archaeology – A Review (1959-60) - p. 24
- 8- Current Science (1965) - pp. 395-397

- 9- Mishra, V.D., J.N. Pal and M.C. Gupta : Further Excavations at Jhusi : evidence of Neolithic Culture, District Allahabad, *Pragdhara* 13 : 227-29
- 10- Gaur, R.C. (1983) *Excavations at Atranjikhhera*, Motilal Banarasidas, New Delhi
- 11- Current Science (1965) - pp. 395-397
- 12- Archaeological Survey of India Report on : Ayodhya 2002-2003, Volume I, Chapter X
- 13- Sinha, Prakash (2001) : Buddhist sites of the Age of Buddha : Archaeological evidence on Dating and Urbanization. In Life Thought and Culture in India (from c. 600 BC to c. AD 300), (Ed.) G.C. Pande, Vol. I Part-2. Publication in *History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture Series* (General Editor: D. P. Chattopadhyaya). Pauls Press, New Delhi
- 14- Nigam, J.S. (1961) : Northern Black Polished Ware' *Marg*, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (June) : p. 38
- 15- Indian Archaeology – A Review (1965-66)
- 16- Indian Archaeology – A Review (1959-60, p. 19 & 1959-60)
- 17- Nigam, J.S. (1961) : Northern Black Polished Ware' *Marg*, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (June) : p. 38
- 18- Altekar, A.S. and Mishra, Vijaya Kant : Report on Kumrahar Excavation, (1951-55), Patna (1959)
- 19- Possehl, G.L. (1988) : Radiocarbon Dates from South Asia, *Man and Environment*, XII : 169-96
- 20- Lal, B.B. (1958) : Mathura : A Re-assesment of the chronology of the crucial Northern Black Polished Ware Horizons, *Man and Environment*, Vol. IX : 109-112
- 21- Agrawal, D.P. and S. Kusumgar (1979) : Radiocarbon chronology of Indian Protohistoric Cultures in *Essays in Indian Protohistory*, (Eds) D.P. Agrawal and D.K. Chakravarti, Delhi : 375
- 22- Saran, S.C., N.G. Nikoshey, S. Nayan, J.K. : Excavation at Juafardih and its identification with Kulika, Tiwari, A. Arif and N. Saxena Puratatva Nunmer – 38, 2008(ASI, New Delhi)
- 23- Sinha, Prakash (2001) : Buddhist sites of the Age of Buddha : Archaeological evidence on Dating and Urbanization. In Life Thought and Culture in India (from c. 600 BC to c. AD 300), (Ed.) G.C. Pande, Vol. I Part-2. Publication in *History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture Series* (General Editor: D. P. Chattopadhyaya). Pauls Press, New Delhi
- 24- Ahmed, Jamil (2015) : Technology and Culture Change (Northern Black Polished Ware Culture in the Middle Ganga Plain), International E – Publication, Indore, p. 374