

Geography of Early Historical Punjab

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The present paper is an attempt to study the historical geography of Punjab. It surveys previous research, assesses the emerging new directions in historical geography of Punjab, and attempts to understand how archaeological data provides new insights in this field. Trade routes, urbanization, and interactions in early Punjab through material culture are accounted for as significant factors in the overall development of historical and geographical processes.

Introduction

It has aptly been remarked that for an intelligent study of the history of a country, a thorough knowledge of its geography is crucial. Richard Hakluyt exclaimed long ago that "geography and chronology are the sun and moon, the right eye and left eye of all history."¹ The evolution of Indian history and culture cannot be rightly understood without a proper appreciation of the geographical factors involved.

Ancient Indian historical geography begins with the writings of topographical identifications of sites mentioned in the literature and inscriptions. These were works on geographical issues starting from first quarter of the nineteenth century. In order to get a clear understanding of the subject matter, now we are studying them in different categories of historical geography based on text, inscriptions etc., and also regional geography, cultural geography and so on.

Historical Background

The region is enclosed between the Himalayas in the north and the Rajputana desert in the south, and its rich alluvial plain is composed of silt deposited by the

rivers Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum. The location of the Punjab in the north-west of the Indian sub-continent is a matter of great geographical and historical significance. Archaeologically speaking, it is one of the most important areas to have revealed the remains of Harappan painted greyware cultures besides vestiges of the early historical period.

“Early historical” phase in Indian archaeology is still not clearly defined. Therefore, the clarification of the terminology and proper use of this term needs a proper consideration. Till date several attempts have been made by varied scholars to define “Early historical” but still a coherent approach is lacking. The term “Early historical” phase is to refer the period that stretches from the sixth century BCE to 300 CE. The markers of the early historic phase as designate are the emergence of territorial states, urban centers, and consolidation of stratified societies. This is further attested by the archaeological evidence of specialization of crafts, iron technology and the beginning of coinage.

Chronologically the Mauryas, the Indo-Greeks, and the Śakas all established their hold over Punjab, and this makes the situation complex. In the first century CE the Kushānas replaced the Śakas and under Kanishka (and even before Kanishka), and Punjab thereby became part of an empire that covered much of northern India. The Guptas appeared on the scene in the fourth century CE, and then arrived the Hūnas. Here we will discuss the geography of region based on text and archaeological records.

Physical Features

In the extreme north-eastern parts of the state, running from north-west to south-east, are the Sivalik Hills. This range extends from the river Ravi in the north to the river Ghaggar, near Chandigarh, in the south, stretching about 280 kilometers. In between the Ravi and Ghaggar rivers, the continuity of the Sivalik is broken by the rivers Beas and Sutlej. The tract spreads over the eastern parts of the present-day districts of Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur, Nawanshar and Rupnagar. The Sivalik hills rise abruptly along the western flanks from the 400 meter contour line to about 600 m. in the heights in the central ridge of the range. These beds have fossils of animals such as elephant, rhino and tiger. These series belong to Tertiary stage.

To the south-west of the Sivalik Hills lies the great alluvial plain of Punjab. The whole plain is formed of alluvial deposits of the rivers of Indo-Gangetic

System which have completely covered the old surfaces to a depth of hundreds of metres.² This alluvial tract has developed in a trough formed at the time when the Himalayas were being uplifted. The alluvial plain is drained by the rivers of the Indus System. Most of the rivers of this tract of Punjab have been shifting their channel courses. The alluvial deposits of Punjab plains are made of massive beds of clay and silt. Gravel and sand predominate near the hills. The presence of lumps and nodules of impure calcareous material in the form of irregular concretions is an important characteristic of the Punjab-alluvial plains.

Historical Geography

The Vedas are the earliest texts that provide us glimpses of the historical geography of ancient India. The Rig Veda in particular has immense information about the rivers. The most significant river for the Rigvedic people appears to be the Sindhu (modern Indus), and the hymns of the Rig Veda speak highly of *Saptasindhava* (Haptaḥendu in the Avesta) or the "land of the seven rivers." Watered by the river Indus and its eastern tributaries, the region appears to have been ascribed the title of divine land (*devanirmitadeśa*) in the Rig Veda.³ The earliest description of HNDSTN is derived from Sindhu (Persian Hindu; Greek Indus) and recorded in the Naqsh-i-Rustam inscription of Shahpur I (241-272 CE). The term HNDSTN, although it denotes the lower Indus valley only, is closely matched with the early mention of the Greek term "India" and Chinese term "Shen-tu."⁴

Jambu khanda vinirmāṇa parva within the Bhīṣma parva of *Mahābhārata* mentioned the seven concentric island-continent (*saptadvīpa*), which were sub-divided into a sub-continent styled "*varṣa*." The most important of the *dvīpas*, *Jambudvīpa*, the island continent of which Bhāratavarṣa constitutes the southern part, is also specifically mentioned by Aśoka in the third century BCE.⁵ The Hāthigumphā inscription of Khāvela (first century BCE) includes the name *Bhāradhavāsa* (Bhāratavarṣa), referring to northern India. K.P. Jayaswal and R.D. Banerjee have dated the Hāthigumphā inscription to the second century BCE.⁶ On paleographic grounds Sircar suggested the date of the Hāthigumphā inscription is first century BCE.⁷ The earliest known epigraphic record of Bhāratavarṣa, in which the word did not connote the entire sub-continent. The same inscription informs us regarding the *Uttarāpadha* (*Uttarāpatha*) which included the North-Western Province and clearly distinguishes from it Bhāratavarṣa.⁸

In *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, for the first time we find a discussion of the five-fold

division of India.⁹ The five sections are Udichīdīś (northern quarter), Dakṣiṇādīś (southern quarter), Prāchīdīś (eastern quarter), Praticīdīś (western quarter) and the Dhruvāmadhyamāpratishṭhādīś (middle quarter). The central or middle quarter was considered the most celebrated land and designated as Śiṣṭādīś (habitat of the noble people). H. C. Raychaudhuri placed the zone on the basis of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, stretching from Vināsanā or Adarsanā (near Kurukshetra in Haryana) to Kālakavana (near Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh).¹⁰ The 9th-10th century CE Sanskrit treatise *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā* of Rājaśekhara has a well-defined chapter on *deśa bibhāga*, in which the poet describes very precisely the divisions of countries, mountains and rivers, ancient *janapada*, routes of different region and so on.¹¹ The classical definition of *Uttarāpatha* in the *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā* of Rājaśekhara¹² is that after *Pr̥thudaka* (or modern *Pehowa* in the Karnal district of Haryana)¹³ lies the *Uttarāpatha*.

The name Punjab, meaning “the five rivers,” is the Persian form of the Sanskrit Pañchanada (Land of Five Rivers), which is found in various works including the Epics and Purāṇas. The *Mahābhārata* gives us to understand that the five rivers watering this land are the Śatadru (Sutlej), Vipāsā (Beas), Airāvātī or Irāvātī (Ravi), Chandrabhāga (Chenab) and Vitastā (Jhelum) together with the sixth which is the Sindhu (Indus), and that the people of the country were generally called Vāhikā or Bāhikā and also often Pañchanada, the names of some of their tribes being Jārtika (Jat), Āratta and Madra.¹⁴ The Āratta-deśa was another name given to Pañchanada and *Vāhikās* were the people living there. The Janapadas and the Republics ruled over by different peoples of the land were part of the Deśa. The Vāhikās were originally living in the region about the river Beas in the present-day Amritsar and Kapurthala districts which appears to be the center of this “geographical unit.” The epic records that the *Vāhikās* were the descendants of the two *Pisāchas* friends Vāhi and Hikā who lived on the bank of the river Vipāsā (Beas). The term *Vāhikā* later included all the tribes living in the Pañchanada or the Āratta country.¹⁵ One of the branches of the *Vāhikās*, which settled in Sākala (Sialkot), the Capital of the Madras, came to be known as the Jārtikas who were probably the ancestors of modern Jats. As the Vāhikas lived in a region beyond Kurukshetra and therefore outside the boundary of *Brahmāvarta*, the land of the Brāhmaṇas, the term Vāhikā was connected with the word bāhis “outside” and this was one of the causes of the semantic extension of the term Vāhikā (or Bāhikā) in the body of the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁶

The name Pañchanada also reminds us of two expressions found in the Rig Veda. The first of these is, of course, “the seven Sindhus” and “the five peoples,”

called Jana (also Mānuṣa, Mānava or Kṛṣṭi), often identified with the Anu, Druhyu, Yadu, Turvasa and Puru peoples mentioned in the Rig Veda. The same region is regarded as the habitat of a class of elephants called “Pañchajana” in the Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra* (II.2), but called Pañchanada in later works like the *Mānasollāsa* (1.2.180).¹⁷

Historical Geography of Punjab

It appears that the Sivaliks and related foothill zone constitute a geographical unit on its own. In Punjab, its northern point is Pathankot and the southern one is the area around Ropar. In between these two points lies the portion of Hoshiarpur.¹⁸ The Pathankot segment offers access to Chamba and Kangra. Although Chamba stands on its own as a political unit in the post-Gupta period, the hill belt of Kangra, as a part of the ancient state Trigṛta, has been well integrated into the plain area between Pathankot and Jalandhar. Significance of Ropar area is clear from the concentration of sites here from the Harappan phase onward. That the Harappans penetrated to the outer belt of the Sivaliks is shown by the location of sites like Dher Majra and Kotla Nihang Khan.

For historical geography of the Punjab it is necessary to define the region first. The Punjab of the Mughal times during the sixteenth century, Punjab under the Sikh and was not the same as the Punjab of the British period in the late nineteenth century. Before the time of Ākbar, some other terms were used for spatial or territorial identity. The oldest of these is the Rigvedic “*Sapta Sindhu*” which, has been interpreted as “the land of seven rivers.” The most important of these was the Indus, called Sindhu (the river). It is likely, therefore, that the other six rivers were its tributaries. Five of these were almost certainly the Jhelum (Vitastā), Chenab (Asiknī), Ravi (Paruṣhnī, also known as the Irāvati), Beas (Vipāś), and the Sutlej (Śutudrī), all of which figure prominently in the Rig Veda.¹⁹

Poetically Punjab has been described variously as a crowning canopy of India and an unconquerable gateway, *harit vāsanā*, i.e., land wearing green clothes, Brahmārṣi-deś and Brahmhāvarta, the land of sages and gods.²⁰ Celebrated in Vedic literature as Saptasindhu,²¹ the land of Mantradṛṣṭa ṛṣis (sages), it is known as Pañchanada²² in the *Mahābhārata*. The Greek historians have named Punjab as Pentapotamia.²³ Its present name is derived from the Persian words Panj (five) and Ab (water). The five rivers of the region have been a distinguishing feature of Punjab. Ancient Punjab included the area between the Indus and the Yamuna.²⁴ Suraj Bhan has tried to provide archaeological confirmation of the study of the

changing course of the river Yamuna by locating dry beds which may be taken to correspond to the various stages of eastward drift of the river.²⁵ Arthur Geddes' book *Man and Land in South Asia*, published in 1982, deals with the geographic factors in Indian history and described the water management systems of the Indus and the problems of physical survey and human assessment.²⁶ R.D. Oldham's "historical geographical study of the probable changes in the geography of Punjab and its rivers"²⁷ and H.G. Raverty's geographical and historical study of the course of dried-up Hakrā or the Mihrān of the medieval geographers in Sindh²⁸ are other significant works in this regard.

The term Pentapotamia, literally meaning the land of five rivers, figures in the *Geographikon* by Strabo (late first century BCE)²⁹ and the *Indika* by Arrian (second century CE).³⁰ Both based their accounts on the descriptions of Megasthenes, who seems to have travelled from Arachosia (Kandahar) to Palibothra (Pāṭaliputra) through Pentapotamia. The name Pentapotamia, in the sense of Punjab, could thus have been coined as early as the first century BCE, if not in the late fourth century BCE, by Megasthenes. The corresponding term Pañchanada figures in the *Arthaśāstra*.³¹ According to Kauṭilya, Pañchanada was also known for the good quality of its horses; the Haimāvata-mārga of Uttarāpatha was especially used for horse trade.³² The horse, and especially the high-quality war horse, was always a rarity in India and had to be regularly imported into India from the north-western borderlands of the subcontinent.³³ In a later text, *Kuvālayamālā* (c. 8th century CE),³⁴ there is a story of a greedy young man named Lobhadeva, a Sārthavāha's son, who wished to trade horses to Dakṣiṇāpatha and to increase the family wealth. He reached Dakṣiṇāpatha and camped at Sopāraka with an old *śreṣṭhin* (guild head/banker). In due course, he sold horses and earned enormous wealth.³⁵ Another interesting record from this text is that of a conference of merchants relating to their trade; the topic was the countries visited and the goods brought on return journey.³⁶ One said, "I went to Kośala with a troop of horses. The king of the country gave me a she-elephant-calf equal in value to my horses." Another said, "I went to *Uttarāpatha* with a load of betel nuts, and I bought horses out of the earned money profits." The abovementioned records attest that the *Uttarāpatha* area were very famous for horse trade. Latif³⁷ has rightly pointed out,

No country in the east presents the same variety of features as the land of five rivers. From tracts of most luxuriant cultivation and extensive green plains the traveller passes through the most arid deserts and busy jungles. Traversing the northern tracts he would consider Punjab as the garden of India. But as he approaches the south the barren sandy plateau to the

south-west, the west of Hissar on the south-east and the Bar of Chajj Doab presents a strange view.

Rivers

The fertility of the soil of Punjab has attracted human activity from very early times due to presence of its rivers. These rivers have played a major role in the making of various cultures which flourished in the time and space. In the Indian Punjab, presently there are three rivers, viz., Ravi, Beas and Sutlej as jointly known as Trigarta.³⁸

Sutlej

Sutlej³⁹ river was known as *Śutudri* in the Rig Veda. Greeks have recorded the name of this river as Gagros and Hydespes. Originating from lake Mansarovar on the southern slopes of Kailas in Tibet, Sutlej or Langchhan Khabab at an altitude of 4640 m. msl. flowing westward, crossing the border of China, enters into India at Shup ki la and flows through Shimdang, Rampur, Vilaspur, Bhakra Anandpur, Ropar and meets the river Beas at Hari ke patan.

Some scholars feel that Sarasvatī is a part of Sutlej. Sutlej being a very big river has been changing its course through the centuries. Greek geographers have noted that it was an independent river earlier which emptied in the Rann of Kutch. Moreover, in the last few years no substantial change has been noticed in the course of these rivers.

Beas

Beas⁴⁰ River was known to Vedic people as Vipās meaning “without fetters,” which marks its independent or erratic nature. Its description is available in the Rig Veda, Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭyādhyāyī* and the Padma and Bhāgavata *Purāṇas*. The Greeks called this river Hypasis. Originating from the hills of Kullu, and taking a southward course, passing through Kangra, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Kapurthala, it meets Sutlej near Hari ke patan. According to *Āin-i-Ākbari* the *saṅgam* or the confluence of Sutlej and Beas was very ancient. It records the length of this river as about 300 km.

Ravi

River Ravi⁴¹ is known in the Vedic literature as Paruṣṇi. Greek geographers named this river Hydraotes. Emanating from the hills of Kullu, Ravi passes through Chamba, Kangra and enters into Pakistan after Madhopur. It has a length of about 500 km in the Indian Union.

All these rivers are snow fed and erratic in nature with a very wide flood plain having boulders and sand lying on both sides of the river banks. These rivers are joined by many other tributaries.

Geo-political Issues

One of the significant geographical orbits of India in the post-Maurya period was the Oxus to the Indus orbit. However, this is an important point to remember, as the political history of this period demonstrates that it was not a colossal orbit but was divided into a number of distinct segments.⁴² The Indo-Gangetic divide in Indian geography became subject to the influence of political factors emanating from the Oxus to the Indus orbit. This scenario becomes far clearer under the Kushāṇa dynasty. Under them, the Oxus to the Indus orbit, including Kashmir and the sub-orbit of the Indo-Gangetic divide, became one political history of northern India in a big way.⁴³

In the context of geo-political issues, Punjab always witnessed many powerful foreign rulers as well as many local indigenous rulers. The political situation of the north-western part, particularly the borderlands of the subcontinent became noticeably complex from the close of the third century BCE and provided regular linkages with west and Central Asia because of its geographical location.⁴⁴ In discussing the political scenario of early Punjab, B. D. Chattopadhyaya remarks, “Punjab is generally seen as a region of constant interaction and movements—like a canvas forever changing colour as swift brushstrokes sweep across it with rhythmic regularity.” It is thus seen as a part of the *Saptasindhu* (seven rivers) horizon of the Rigvedic Āryans who subsequently moved to the Ganga-Yamuna basin or fanned out elsewhere. In later periods, what are seen as major events are the Achaemenid occupation, followed by the disruptive march by the troops of the Alexander, the inroads of the Indo-Greeks, the Scythians, the Parthians, the Kushāṇas and later the Hūṇas.⁴⁵ All these powerful rulers are mainly known from their coinages. Many early historical sites from Punjab and Haryana revealed coin and coin moulds. Wider circulation of bilingual coins in Greek and Kharoṣṭī script, attest their influences and covers a huge territory.⁴⁶ During this period of political changes and complexities trade and commerce still flourished. With the

rise of trade, the number and size of towns and cities began to increase in the Punjab, though major urban centres like Sanghol and Ropar reached their culmination during Kushāṇa period.

Early Historical Cities

The emergence of cities was made possible not merely by surplus produce in agriculture but also by the formation of states and trade networks with the rest of India and with western and central Asia. The importance of contacts of the Punjab with the world is best reflected in the scripts which became current during this period. Xuan Zang refers to the alphabet of India and it had several branches. He appears to have referred to the Brāhmī script and its regional variations. Some important ancient *janapada*/cities constituting an important unit for political geography of the present study area have been discussed below separately.

Jalandhar

Discussing the ancient city of Jalandhar, Grewal⁴⁷ mentioned that it is also described in the *Padma Purāṇa* as a “city studded with gems.” Existing as a town in the first century BCE, Jalandhar appears to have become a prosperous city in the time of Kanishka. The She-lan-ta-lo was long ago known as Jalandhar, the name of a city and district in the north of the Panjab as per Xuan Zang’s description.⁴⁸ There is hardly any doubt that cities and towns of the period were centers of technology, production and exchange. The presence of Brāhmaṇas in the urban centers and of Śramaṇas in the neighborhood suggests that cities were also the centers of learning and religious institutions. There is enough evidence to suggest that cities and towns were the centers of art.

Xuan Zang, proceeding with his description of Jalandhar, provides the following:

SHE-LAIS -TA-LO (JALANDHARA).

From Tamasavana a journey of about 140 li north-east brought the pilgrim to the She-lan-ta-lo (Jalandhara) country. This country was above 1000 li east to west and 800 li north to south, and its capital was twelve or thirteen li in circuit. The region yielded much upland rice with other grain, trees were widely spread, and fruits and flowers abounded; the climate was warm; the people had truculent ways and a mean contemptible appearance, but they were in affluent circumstances. There were above 50 Monasteries with more than 2000 Brethren who made special studies in the Great and Little Vehicles. There were three Beva-Temples with more

than 500 professed non-Buddhists of the Pasuupata sect. A former king of this country had been a patron of non-Buddhistic systems; afterwards he met an arhat and learning Buddhism from him became a zealous believer. Thereupon the king of "Mid-India" appreciating his sincere faith gave him sole control of matters relating to Buddhism in all India. In this capacity (as Protector of the Faith) the king of Jalandhara rewarded and punished the monks without distinction of persons and without private feeling. He also travelled through all India and erected topes or monasteries at all sacred places.⁴⁹

The She-lan-ta-lo of this passage was long ago restored as Jalandhar, the name of a city and district in the north of the Panjab.

Sanghol

Now we are proceeding to the most important and key site, Sanghol situated in the Fatehgarh Sahib district of Punjab state. Excavation reveals *stūpa* and monastery complex, numerous sculptures, coin and coin moulds. Xuan Zang refers to this city as the city of ten monasteries and was known as SHE-TO-T'U-LU.⁵⁰ The town with ten monasteries can be identified with Sanghol⁵¹ on the basis of the evidence of the *stūpa* and monastery excavated by the State Department Archaeology and Museum, Punjab. The name Sanghol can be traced back to Sanghol, Sangh-ul, Sanghpur—the town of the Buddhist monastic order. Terracotta clay Sealing with Gupta Brāhmī legend discovered from Sanghol mentions the name "Nandipurasya" and carries a representation of a bull to right above. Some scholars interpreted this as the evidence of Sanghol was known as Nandipura in the fifth century CE.⁵² Another traveler's description is as follows:

SHE-TO-T'U-LU.

From Kuluto the pilgrim travelled south, over a high mountain and across a great river, for above 700 li, and reached the country called She-to-tu-lu. This was above 2000 li in circuit, bounded on the west by a large river (supposed to be the Sutlej), and its capital was 17 or 18 li in circuit. It was an agricultural and fruit-producing country, and yielded much gold, silver, and other precious substances. The inhabitants were in good circumstances and led moral lives, observing social distinction and adhering devoutly to Buddhism. In and about the capital were ten monasteries, but they were desolate, and the Brethren were very few. About three li to the south-east of the capital was an Asoka tope above 200 feet high, and beside it were traces of spots on which the Four Past Buddhas had sat and walked up and down.⁵³

Sunet

Sunet lies about 6 km from Ludhiana bus stand and about 1 km from Ludhiana-Ferozepur road.⁵⁴ The present village is inhabited over an ancient mound. The place has been referred to in literature as *Sunetra*, after one of the three sons of Dhritarashtra of Kuru dynasty.⁵⁵ According to V. S. Agrawala, the present name of Sunet can be derived from *Saunetra* mentioned by Pāṇini.⁵⁶

Ropar

Ropar, earlier spelt as Rugar, in district Rupnagar, lies on the left bank of the Sutlej, where the river emerges into the plains from the Sivaliks. Excavation yielded a sequence of six cultural periods from Harappan to medieval.⁵⁷ The significance of the Ropar area is clear from the concentration of Harappan sites and succeeding cultural phases, and this zone served the access zone of major section of Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh, including Kulu area or Kulutā state of *Mahābhārata*.⁵⁸ In the center of settlements related to Harappan culture in the Punjab, the multi-culture site of Ropar appears to have been the node. Data will then have to be looked for in another area, that is the upper inter fluvial, submontane region.⁵⁹

Sugh

Sugh⁶⁰ or ancient Srughna was, as its rich coin finds demonstrate, was perhaps the center of a political unit in the Sivalik belt of Haryana. Cunningham⁶¹ identifies the city Srughna with the modern village of Sugh which “is surrounded on three sides by the beds of the old Jumna.” But as the measurements and distances given by Yuan-Chang, as usual, do not agree with those mentioned by Cunningham, we may perhaps regard the identification as not quite established. The earliest reference to this city is found in *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini, where he suggests Srughna to be a well-known city of his times.⁶² *Srughna* is perhaps identical with the city Turghna mentioned in the *Taittiriya Āraṇyaka* (vs. 1) as marking the north border of Kurukṣetra.⁶³ The city is mentioned several times in the early Pail literature and Patañjali’s references to the name of the city as many as six times indicate the premier position of the city in the second century BCE.⁶⁴ There are vast arrays of literatures that record the important of ancient city of Srughna.⁶⁵ Xuan Zang also mentioned the city of Srughna, giving the following:⁶⁶

It was above 6000 li in circuit, bounded on the east by the Ganges and on the north by high mountains, and that through the middle of it flowed the river Yen-mo-na (Jumna). The capital, above 20 li in circuit, was on the west side of the Jumna, and

was in a ruinous condition. In climate and natural products the country resembled Sthanesvara. The inhabitants were naturally honest: they were not Buddhists: they held useful learning in respect and esteemed religious wisdom. There were five Buddhist monasteries and above 1000 Buddhist ecclesiastics, the majority of whom were Hinayanists, a few adhering to other schools. The Brethren were expert and lucid expounders of abstract doctrines, and distinguished Brethren from other lands came to them to reason out their doubts. There were 100 Deva-Temples, and the non-Buddhists were very numerous.⁶⁷

The above description suggests that in this south-eastern part of Punjab, early historical development occurred from the beginning of OCP and PGW level and shifted its core area from north-west to Ganga basin in eastern Punjab. Early historical major sites like Sanghol, Ropar and other sites such as Sunet, Brass, Chhat, Ghuram revealed their culture sequence from Harappan to Medieval indicating their long history of existence. Excavated remains such as *stūpa* and monastery complex, coins, terracotta, sculpture and other objects found from excavation indicates towards a strong local network, trade and culturally prosperous state.

Gaṇa-saṃghas of Punjab

Punjab always witnessed the presence of non-monarchical groups even when it was ruled by powerful monarchies. *Gaṇa-saṃgha* tradition of the Punjab plains did not provide much space for the Brāhmaṇical mode of monarchical legitimation. Interestingly Brāhmaṇical literature is totally silent about the functioning of this *gaṇa-saṃghas*.⁶⁸ Some of the important *gaṇa-saṃgha* are The Trigartas, The Yaudheyas, The Udumbaras (Audumbara), The Vṛiṣhṇis, The Mālavas, The Agras, The Ārjunāyanas, The Kulūtas, The Kshudrakas, The Kuṇindas, The Śibis and others. Among them The Trigartas, The Yaudheyas, The Udumbaras and The Kuṇindas were more powerful and they occupied the huge area (Fig.1) specifically within the study area, as evidenced by their coin finds.

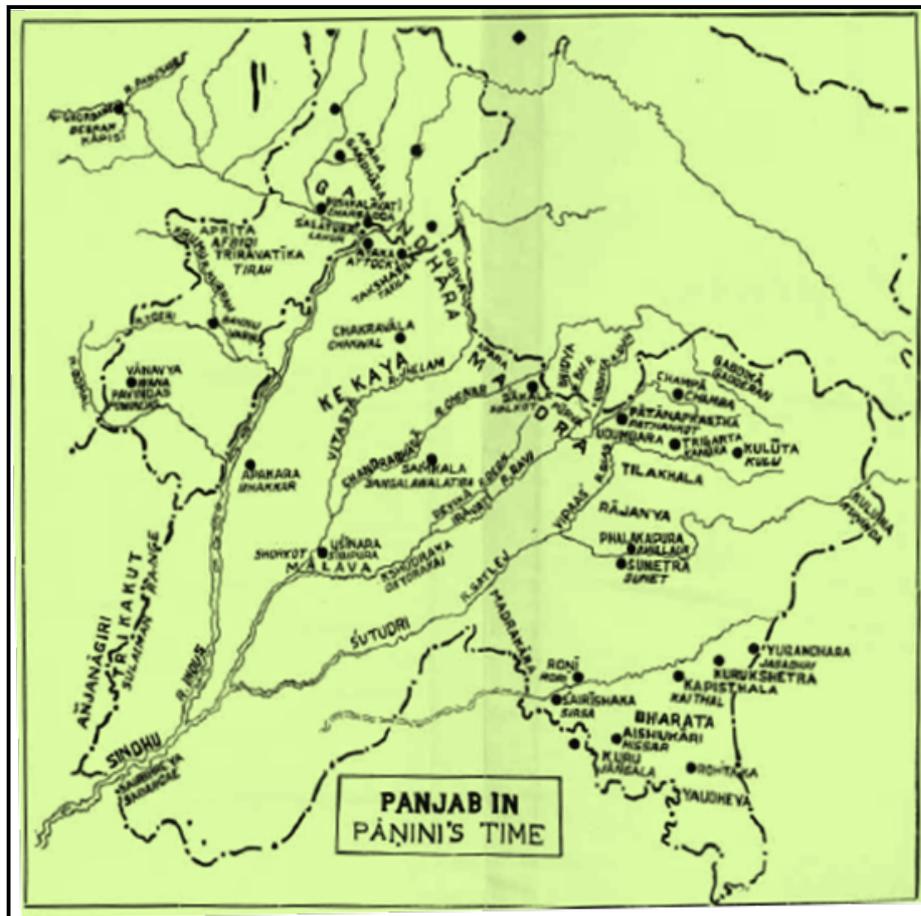


Fig. 1. Map of Punjab in the Panini's *Astadhyayi* (After Agrawala: Plate II).

The Trigarta

The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini refers to the Trigarta as an *āyudhajīvī samīgha*⁶⁹ depending mainly on arms. In the *Mahābhārata* the Trigarta fought on the side of the Kauravas. B.C. Law points out that Hemachandra's *Abhidhānachintāmaṇi* refers to Trigarta and Jalandhar as synonymous. The *Purāṇas* supposedly describe the Trigarta as mountain tribes. The proper geographical delimitation should logically comprise the entire area bound by the Beas on the west, Sutlej on the south, and the upper course of Sutlej on the east.⁷⁰

The Audumbara

The Audumbara group, generally located in the Pathankot area, is mentioned in Pāṇini⁷¹ and later textual sources, none of which, however, is specific about its territorial demarcation.⁷² The general scholarly opinion puts it in the Pathankot sector where some Audumbara coins have been found. The Audumbara area is fixed by the find-spots of their coins in the Kangra valley between the Ravi and Beas, and at Pathankot in Gurdaspur which the district at its mouth (Allan, *Coins of Ancient India*). *Udumbāravatī* as a river name might be some tributary flowing through the Audumbara country in which the town of the same name was situated.⁷³

The Yaudheya

The Yaudheya coins occur very widely, from Uttarakhand Sivaliks to west Punjab with scatters outside the main zone of distribution. Pāṇini's⁷⁴ reference to Yaudheya is the earliest known reference. The spread of their textual and epigraphic references is also wide—from Pāṇini to the Allahabad eulogy of Samudragupta, i.e., from c. fifth century BCE to fourth century CE. Thousands of Yaudheya coins and coin moulds have been found and possibly none more important than terracotta seal bearing the legend Yaudheya Janapada in Gupta period Brāhmī characters.⁷⁵ These establish the Yaudheyas not only as a tribe but also with occupying a political territory. Their coins and coin moulds are found profusely in many sites of Haryana and Punjab and almost in all directions.

The *Mahābhārata* mentions Rohitaka as the capital of the Bahudhāñyaka country from where a mint site of the Yaudheyas of Bahudhāñyaka was found by the late Dr. Birbal Sahni. Sunet mentioned as Saunetra by Pāṇini was a centre of the Yaudheya's from where coins, moulds and sealings have been found. The Yaudheya do not seem to have come into conflict with Alexander since they are not named by the Greek writers. The Johiya Rajputs who are found on the banks of the Sutlej along the Bahawalpur frontier may be identified as their modern descendants.⁷⁶

The Kuṇindas

In ancient Indian texts, Kuṇindas have invariably been located in the ūdīchya division and are known variously as Kulinda, Kuṇinda, Kaulinda etc. Kuṇinda (Greek Kulindrene) was known to Ptolemy as an extensive country including the region of the lofty mountains wherein the Beas, the Sutlej, the Yamuna and the

Gaṅga had their sources.⁷⁷ Pāṇini identified them as Kuluna seems to be the same as Kulinda and later Kuṇinda.⁷⁸ The *Māhabharāta* contains numerous references to the Kuṇindas as Kulindas living in the mountain valleys, and more specifically in the Himalayas and conquered by Arjuna during his conquest of the northern quarter.⁷⁹ The Rāmāyaṇa also mentions them. Varahāmihirā also refers to the great men of the Kuṇinda *gaṇa*. Various *Purāṇas* also mention the Kuṇindas. Kuṇindas mainly known from their coin finds. Cunningham identified the Kuṇindas with the modern Kunets and concluded that the Kuṇindas “seem to have occupied the hill districts both sides of Sutlej from time immemorial.”⁸⁰ There are two kinds of coin finds such as Amoghbhuti and Chhitresvara type and well distributed within and beyond their region. They issued mainly copper and silver coins. The early Kuṇindas were Buddhists as is evident from the Buddhist symbols on the coins.⁸¹ According to K.K. Dasgupta there is a marked difference between the style, size and the fabric of the Kuṇinda and anonymous coins.⁸² In our study area, Sanghol, Sunet and Ropar have profusely found the Kuṇinda coins and from Sanghol, Kuṇinda coin moulds also have been found.

Material Culture

Although the major drawback for this present study is the inadequate data, as not even a single excavation report is available. The excavation of most of the sites included a limited area and for a specific enquiry. Adding to the inadequacy and unavailability of the reports is a lack of elaborate discussions on available data. Despite this shortcoming, we have used whatever data that was available there including the scanty *IAR* report, and tried to visualize overall picture of the early historical Punjab.

The part of Indian Punjab experienced city formation during the beginning of second urbanization as evidenced from excavated remains. Most of the excavated sites have NBP ware with very occurrence of iron implements in good number attest to this fact. Many sites also have the evidence of agricultural grains such as rice, wheat, barley, pulses and so on further support the fact. Abundant terracotta votive tanks have been attested from both Taxila and Sonkh in the early historical phase (Mitra, Kshatrapa, Suṅga, Kushāṇa). While these may have been used for ritual purpose, but these are absent at Ropar. However, terracotta votive tanks have been recovered from Sanghol excavation situated 32 km. from Ropar. This issue needs to be further investigated.⁸³

The evidence of terracotta ring wells from Ropar and Chhat attests the ancient

soakage system, and from Brass a terracotta pipe of 30 m. long was found inside the house remains. All this speaks of developed drainage pattern implying a well-established city life. A sealing from Sanghol depicts three *stūpas* and bears a legend that was considered as sacred.⁸⁴ A Bodhisattva figurine made of terracotta has been found at Sugh.⁸⁵ A *stūpa* also found near Sugh at Chaneti and some remains of monasteries also traced around Sugh. Another Kushāṇa *stūpa* discovered at Asandh (ancient Asandhivat) in district Karnal, Haryana and it is located at a distance of 40 km south-west of Karnal.⁸⁶ The signet ring of an Indo-Greek king at Sunet indicates that Indo-Greek influence had crossed the Sutlej. At Sanghol, a sealing has been found bearing the image of Pallas with a shield in her outstretched right hand and a thunderbolt in her left hand. Another sealing depicts with realistic vigor an elephant trampling a lion. Seated on its hind legs, the lion is often depicted in glyptic, expressing strength and ferocity. The humped bull has been depicted, couchant or trotting.⁸⁷ Some of the other animals portrayed realistically are the tiger, bear, stag, horse, scorpion, and the dancing peacock.

Several Kushāṇa sites have been identified in the study area and among them, some excavated sites were urban centre. Sunet, near Ludhiana, became an urban center that flourished around 200 BCE and remained a prosperous town till about CE 300. Numerous ceramic assemblages have been found from all the early historic sites specifically from Sanghol and Ropar. Beads and bangles of terracotta, bone dice, ivory bangles, terracotta, seals and sealings have been found. The large number of seals and sealings indicates the importance of administrative activities. Coin and coin moulds of the Indo-Parthians and the Kushāṇas as well as those of the indigenous rulers have been found at Sanghol. Profuse amount of coin and coin moulds have been discovered from Sunet. Indo-Greek, Parthians, Kushāṇas and other coins also found from Ropar.

The major group of one hundred and seventeen sculptures was found in a pit area between the discovery point of *stūpa* and the monastery complex. All the sculptures made of red spotted sand stone which is available in the Mathura region and belong to Mathura school of art during the Kushāṇa period.⁸⁸ The study of Kushāṇa sculptures shows certain significant points; the first is that Sanghol (Fig. 3) was at the center of the direct route between Taxila and Mathura. The second one is that the monastic complex was important enough to draw both from the East and from the West. In the context of Buddhist architecture and iconography, the material remains of Sanghol stand as a unique landmark. It also gives us another image of the place of women in Buddhism and in the society of a

particular period.⁸⁹ It shows the prominence of the school, sculpture and the economic means of such as Sanghol (Fig. 2) as a cultural center, which may be connected to its strategic position on important trade routes.⁹⁰ The hypothesis of Sanghol being a wine production center during Kushāṇa period is the most fascinating facts and gets further corroborated from the depiction of a sculpture from Sanghol showing a lady taking wine.⁹¹ Distinct Kushāṇa housing remains, drainage system, religious complex, assembly hall, *stūpa* and monastery complex with a well of Kushāṇa period certainly marked the glorious days of Kushāṇa and their suzerainty in Sanghol.



Fig. 2. Routes and Nodes of the Uttarāpatha and the location of Sanghol (Neelis, 2011: 185).

Discussion

As we have observed, there are new directions emerging in the study of historical Punjab. However, what we are still missing is the involvement of the archaeological data. As far as the Indian Punjab is concerned, Trigarta is the exact geographical delimitation comprises the entire area bound by the Beas on the west, Sutlej on the south, and the upper course of Sutlej on the east. The terms, Pañchanada and Pentapotamia offered us the best imageries about the area of ancient Punjab. The process of the formation of the early cultural pattern of the Punjab as well as the beginning of its linkages is represented in the continuity revealed by the sequences of archaeological cultures in the Punjab before the middle of the first millennium BCE. The *gaṇa-saṁgha* formations in Punjab remained dominant in the early historical phase, despite a considerable increase of Punjab's linkages and changes in the structure of *gaṇa-saṁgha* formations.

What is important is that most of these groups began minting coinages from second century BCE. Thus Central Asian intervention in the form of Indo-Greeks, Scytho-parthians and Kushāṇas in the north west of the subcontinent forced the small ruling groups, exercising authority through a different kind of political ideology in various hubs of the Punjab, to migrate from their original habitat to other areas of the subcontinent like south-eastern Rajasthan.⁹²

There are the studies available on early Punjab related to Vedic geography, Harappan urbanism, river system, wild life, modern urban history and so on. But there are limited scholarly works available on the early historic scenario of Punjab. The reason might be unavailability of excavation reports, more focus on Harappan study and lacking of coherent approach on early historic geography. The issues of Vedic geography and the terms like Pañchanada in the sense of the Punjab have been well discussed in several published works. However, I have tried to discuss the Pañchanada which was famous for horse trade and also for good quality war horse in detail. Although there are number of researches on historical geography of Punjab and the ancient Punjab known as the land of five rivers, however Pentapotamia figuring in the Greek accounts is a term that defines geography of the Punjab very appropriately. The term Pentapotamia, meaning the land of five rivers includes the routes through which the Greek travellers traversed the area. The term figures in the two classical Greek texts on ancient geography and travel, *Geographikon* of Strabo (late first century BCE) and *Indika* of Arrian (second century CE) both of which summarized and quoted from Megasthenes.

The changing geographical patterns of Punjab are traced mainly from the river system. The Sutlej, once stood very near from Sanghol, now changed her course around 10 km. away from Sanghol. Excavated sites like Sanghol, Ropar shows the cultural continuity revealed the sources of archaeological cultures represents the process of the formation of early cultural pattern of the Punjab as well as the beginning of its linkages. The ancient texts also provide much information on sites like Sunet, Sugh and ancient cities like Jalandhar and Sanghol.

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Notes:

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²⁰ Madhu Bala, *Archaeology of Punjab*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1992, p. 1.

²¹ At that time, it included all the territory covered by 7 rivers, namely the sindhu (Indus), the Vitastā (Jhelum), the akesines (Chenab), the Paruṣhni (Ravi), the Vipās (Beas), the Śutudri (Sutlej) and the Sarasvatī.

²² Patañjali refers to Pañchanada which is to be taken in the sense of five rivers in B. N. Puri, *India in the time of Patanjali*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1990, p. 71; Subodh Kapoor, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Indian Geography*, Vol. 2, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 513-14; Pañchanada is the exact Sanskrit equivalent of the word Punjab, the land of the five rivers, and H. H. Wilson first translated the *Purāṇa* into English, has taken the word in this very sense, in Devendra Handa, *Tribal coins of Ancient India*, Aryan Books international, New Delhi, 2007, p. 139.

²³ Literally, the land of the five rivers (or Punjab), Ranabir Chakravarti, "The Mauryas," in

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³⁷ S.M. Latif, *History of the Panjab*, Central Press Company, Calcutta, 1891, p. 12.

³⁸ Madhu Bala, *Archaeology of Punjab*, p. 3.

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We have assumed that after the Beas-Sutlej junction, the river divided into two distinct parallel channels, as continued to be the case till the Mughal times. In Irfan Habib and Faiz Habib, *The Historical Geography of India (1800-800 BC)*, *Proceeding of Indian History Congress*, New Delhi, 1992, p. 79; see also Madhu Bala, *Archaeology of Punjab*, p. 4; Chakrabarti and Saini, *The Problems of Saraswati river and notes on the Archaeological Geography of Haryana and Indian Punjab*, pp. 1-38, 272-288.

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