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## **Archaeology as Practiced in Kashmir – A Critique**

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**Abstract:**

*This paper discusses the framework of archaeological works carried out to understand extant archaeological material culture and settlement patterns in Kashmir. Here in this paper, I highlight site-specific excavations and explorations which, by targeting only single aspects of archaeology (such as exposing and documenting structures), have failed in their real purpose of unravelling the different human activities associated with sites/structures. The individual sites explored or excavated in Kashmir were always regarded as representing a culture in itself, with traditional interpretations given in a cultural historic perspective. Through these excavations or explorations, disconnected information about site-types, their associated material culture, landscape features and chronology has been built up and followed in Kashmir. There are only a handful of sites that were excavated or explored with the purpose of studying issues of continuity or discontinuity among different periods, and it is through analysis of these sites that rudimentary information about settlement types becomes available and hence the topic of the current paper.*

**Keywords:** Material culture, systematic survey, Baramulla District, Kashmir

### **1. Critical Analysis of History of Archaeological Works in Kashmir**

The early records of Kashmir's antiquarian past come from its rich collection of indigenous records, such as the *Nilmaturana* and *Rajatarangini*. Other such sources such as *Lokaprakasa* (an 11<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit account about the old administrative practices, customs and folk lore of Kashmir), numismatics, oral tradition of history, myths and folklore have also been used (Bamzai 1973; 1994; Ghai 1994; Hasan 1974; Kak 1933; Stein 1989a,b; Sufi 1996).

Further historical and archaeological information about Kashmir comes from foreign accounts (such as Ptolemy's accounts on Kashmir in the time of Alexander; Si-yu-ki, Buddhist records of the western world; accounts of Kashmir by Chinese Buddhist pilgrims Hiuen Tsang and Ou-kong during 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century AD; Ain-i-Akbari by Abu-l-Fazl minister of Mughal emperor Akbar during c. 1590 AD, and so forth), traveller's accounts (such as François Bernier, traveller and personal physician of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb during 1656-1668; English traveller George Forster's journey to Kashmir in 1783; English geologist Frederic Drew's geographical account on Kashmir in 1875; English explorer William Moorcroft's travels in Kashmir during 1819 to 1825; Walter Lawrence's book on Kashmir during his stay as British settlement commissioner in 1890s, and many others).

More recent are the archaeological reports of excavations and explorations such as the Indian Archaeology reports (1966 onwards), Agrawal (1992), Agrawal (1998), Bandey (2009), De Terra (1942), De Terra and Paterson (2003), Joshi et al. (1974), Kak (1933), Pant et al. (1982), Sankalia (1971), Saar (1992); Shali (1993) and so forth. These varied sources on Kashmir's history and archaeology inform us about the material culture of various cultures and traditions embedded in the landscape of Kashmir, living patterns of people, subsistence and economies, and the connections and interactions maintained by the people there. They also inform us about the rule of many kings and their kingdoms. It is only from the excavation of a few prominent settlement and non-settlement sites that the veracity of many of the historical accounts or reports has been tested since archaeological works first began in Kashmir.

Antiquarian and early archaeological activity in Kashmir has a long history. Before the emergence of any official agency for undertaking archaeological activities, there were some pioneers. The earliest of these are explorer William Moorcroft and geographer G. Trebeck who provided an account of the Kashmiri people, their culture and monuments under Ranjit Singh's rule in 1819-1825 (c.f. William 1841). In the year 1842, during the Sikh rule of 1819-1846, traveller and explore Godfrey Thomas Vigne visited Kashmir and described it and its historical sites in his travel accounts (Bamzai 1994: 45). In 1875, Indologist George Buhler visited Kashmir to learn about Kashmiri and Sanskrit literature and manuscripts. In 1845, during the Sikh rule, explorer Charles Hugel described the temples of Avantipora and Martand (Hindu temples) in Kashmir.

It was Sir Alexander Cunningham, first Director General of Archaeological Survey of India who during the establishment of Dogra rule in 1848 in Kashmir, first provided a description of the ancient architectural style of Kashmir, which he called the 'Arian order of architecture' (Bamzai 1994: 46-47). He began to identify ancient Hindu temples such as Puranadhithana (modern Pandrethan, the old capital of Kashmir), Pravarapura (modern Srinagar), Jyestheshvara (Modern Gopadri hill or Shankaracharya hill Srinagar), Martanda (modern Martand), and so forth (Bamzai 1994; Stein 1989b: 439-484). His survey of the temple ruins throws light on the history of buildings mentioned in the chronicles of the *Rajatarangini* and later Sanskrit inscriptions. He discussed the development of the architectural style and its Greek and Roman influences. Similarly, he dealt with the subject at

length in the chapter on the 'Kingdom of Kashmir' in his *Ancient Geography of India*. Cunningham's research aroused a good deal of interest in the ancient remains of Kashmir, and in 1865 Bishop W.G. Cowie, Chaplin on duty in Kashmir, studied more temple ruins, especially those not discovered by Cunningham (Shali 1993: 21). However, Cunningham failed to contextualise these monumental structures, and did not connect the faith and beliefs of the population with their dwellings, their activities or landscape settings. For him the emphasis always remained centred on the design and architectural details of these buildings.

From 1865 to 1869 Major Henry Hardy Cole revealed more temples. In 1882 Mr. Garrick undertook excavations at Ushkar in Baramulla town to expose the structural ruins of Buddhist period. Similarly partial excavation by Lawrence, on duty as a land settlement commissioner, at Narasthan (Central Kashmir) also brought to light some interesting specimens of Buddhist temples and *vihara* (Buddhist monasteries) (Lawrence 1895: 162). Both Garrick and Lawrence were interested in structural architecture and no other material culture was recorded.

George Buhler's tour in 1875 resulted in the discovery of valuable material for the systematic study of the history of Kashmir. Although interested in the collection and study of Sanskrit and Persian scripts, he provided graphic and accurate descriptions of some old sites in Kashmir which he visited himself. In his tour report he mentioned how minutely studying the ancient texts like *Rajatarangini*, *Nilmatpurana*, and many other Sanskrit sources, was indispensable for studying the ancient geography of Kashmir (Stein 1989b). He was the first to call attention to the significant collection of literary materials which are available for a study of the building history and geography of Kashmir.

Archaeologist, explorer, geographer, and above all Sanskrit scholar, Sir Aurel Stein, visited Kashmir from 1888-1905. He was both fascinated by the monumental wealth and the literary work of Kalhana. Referring to Kalhana's work *Rajatarangini*, he said, "this was the earliest and most important of the Sanskrit chronicles of Kashmir and an exact identification of the very numerous old localities mentioned in it was indispensable for a correct understanding of the narrative" (Stein 1989a: 1). In 1900 he first published his monumental work in two volumes, the translation of *Rajatarangini* with detailed notes about the identification of sites and places with historical and geographical background. He also published his Memoir on maps illustrating the ancient geography of Kashmir (Stein 2005). His investigations in the field from 1900 to 1930 and subsequent publication record thus made it possible for other scholars and investigators to trace the unknown historical sites and structures with some accuracy.

The translation of *Rajatarangini* by Stein is the only work in the Indian literature which is considered reliable by many historians due to its character as a historical record (Bamzai 1973, Stein 1989b: 366; Sufi 1996). *Rajatarangini*, as Stein explains, is essentially a historical narrative of kings, but he also stresses that it acts as a guide to geography and topography of Kashmir and adjacent regions. Stein's translation gives an idea of settlement types in Kashmir from the early historic period. However, the narration of incidents prior to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD is thought to be unreliable due to inconsistent commentary and omission of many dates. Consistency in narration of events begins after middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD with the accession of *Pravarasena II*, an indigenous ruler who is credited with building the modern Srinagar (Kak 1933; Stein 1989b). However, it is only after c. the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD that the history of Kashmir begins without any break, with the accession of indigenous rulers with dates provided. It is also from this period that the account is authenticated by archaeological material culture from sites mentioned in this chronicle, for instance Parihaspora, Martand, and Tapar. Although *Rajatarangini* is very helpful for introducing the history and archaeology of the region, it is not a flawless, reliable account of earlier historic sources and descriptions. As places or settlements are recorded using their ancient Sanskrit names, they are often very difficult to relate to modern sites and settlements. The new names that have evolved since writing the *Rajatarangini* proved difficult for Stein to locate, despite meticulous study of the account. Stein has largely remained speculative about place names or events mentioned by Kalhana prior to c. 7<sup>th</sup> century AD.

In 1912, under Sir John Marshall, Director General of Archaeological Survey of India, Daya Ram Sahni deputed to Jammu and Kashmir excavated the important Buddhist site of Parihaspora (figure 1), 28 kms north west of Srinagar. Among the structures exposed, the most important were a stupa, a *chaitya* (halls enclosing the stupa) and a *vihara* (monastery). These monumental ruins provided important information about the Karkota rulers of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Chief among these was Lalitaditya Muktapada, who is credited with building Parihaspora (Stein 1989b: 300-303). As well as Parihaspora, Daya Ram Sahni excavated the Buddhist site at Pandrethan near Srinagar, and the Hindu temples of Avantisvamin and Avantisvara at modern Avantipora (8<sup>th</sup> century AD), 28 kms south east of Srinagar and Ushkar site in Baramulla town. He also undertook conservation work at other temples. R.C. Kak's excavation work at Harwan in 1919 revealed a fully-fledged Buddhist Settlement laid out on the terraced slope of the hill (Kak 1933). He also carried out exploration at the Dhathamandir or Bandi (Hindu) temple at Baramulla. His main contributions to Kashmiri archaeology were the compilation of a list of monuments and places of archaeological interest, maintenance of photographic and drawing records, and publication of reports on his findings (Kak 1923; 1933).

In 1938 M.S. Kaul excavated some Buddhist settlements in Gilgit and Kashmir. His most significant work was the excavation of ancient *Pratapapura* (modern Tapar in Baramulla District). A base, courtyard, enclosure wall, pathway and other architectural members were exposed. The town and the temple are attributed to King Pratapaditya II (7<sup>th</sup> century AD), son of Durlabhavardhana of Karkota dynasty and father of the famous King Lalitaditya of the later 7<sup>th</sup> century AD (Stein 1989a: 121-124).

In 1950 the Deputy Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, M.S. Vats, visited Kashmir to draft a scheme for the re-organisation of the Department of Archaeology, Research and Museums. During his two week long stay he dealt with the main objectives of the archaeological research in Kashmir. He thoroughly surveyed the history of the excavations conducted by the Department and studied the chronological sequence of the architectural masterpieces of the Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic periods. However, he criticised the lack of any attempt to bring to light the habitational sites or 'town sites' associated with the monuments. He recommended serious works to uncover such sites, which could reveal the life of the people and their dwellings, their material culture, amenities and the economic conditions, their customs and traditions (Agrawal 1998: 4-6).

## 2. Field Surveys to Determine Settlement Patterns

The first field survey in Kashmir was undertaken by the Yale-Cambridge expedition led by Professors H De Terra and T T Paterson in 1935 (De Terra and Paterson 2003). They carried out a detailed study of glacial sequences, lake sediments and associated human cultures in Kashmir, and in the process referred to some prehistoric sites (De Terra and Paterson 2003: 233-234; De Terra 1942). The work was more geological than archaeological in terms of aims and research questions but, by chance, their findings gave a new dimension to Kashmir's history and archaeology. They found the first evidence of the Neolithic material culture at a site called Burzahom (see figure 1), and pushed back the history of Kashmir, far beyond that provided by ancient written records (De Terra and Paterson 2003: 233-234; De Terra 1942: 483-484). Their work showed Kashmir and the adjoining plains contained essential data to indicate the presence of early humans in Kashmir (Neolithic material in Kashmir and Palaeolithic material in adjacent Potwar Region now in Pakistan) (De Terra and Paterson 2003). This initiated a wave of interest among archaeologists to carry forward this work through systematic fieldwork.

### 2.1. Palaeolithic Field Surveys in Kashmir

Sankalia (1971) surveyed Pahalgam (figure 1), 100 kms south east of Srinagar in the south Kashmir, with the objective of challenging De Terra and Paterson's findings, who said Palaeolithic material culture did not exist in Kashmir. The only aim of the survey was to locate Palaeolithic material so that a chronological gap could be filled. There was no explicit methodology in place or room to accommodate any other material culture encountered. The survey was completely unsystematic, based entirely on the whim of the surveyor. However, despite these issues, Sankalia successfully reported an Abbevillian handaxe and massive flake (considered by him to be the earliest in South Asia) dating to first interglacial and second glacial periods of lower Pleistocene (lower Palaeolithic) from well-stratified deposits, in the vicinity of the Liddar River (a tributary feeding Jhelum River) (Sankalia 1971: 558). Sankalia's findings aroused the interest of Joshi et al. (1974) who surveyed Pahalgam again in the 1970s in an attempt to locate more tools of this period and to verify the findings of Sankalia.

Bandey's (1997; 2009) focus was north Kashmir; he surveyed Manasbal lake in the 1990s (figure 1), 35 kms north of Srinagar in Ganderbal District with the aim of determining the presence of Palaeolithic material culture in Kashmir particularly towards north of Kashmir which until then was considered a marginal zone in terms of Palaeolithic findings. Although this survey was again Palaeolithic-centric, it was significant as Bandey took on board issues of Palaeolithic activity areas against a backdrop of landscape features, and came up with some important interpretations.

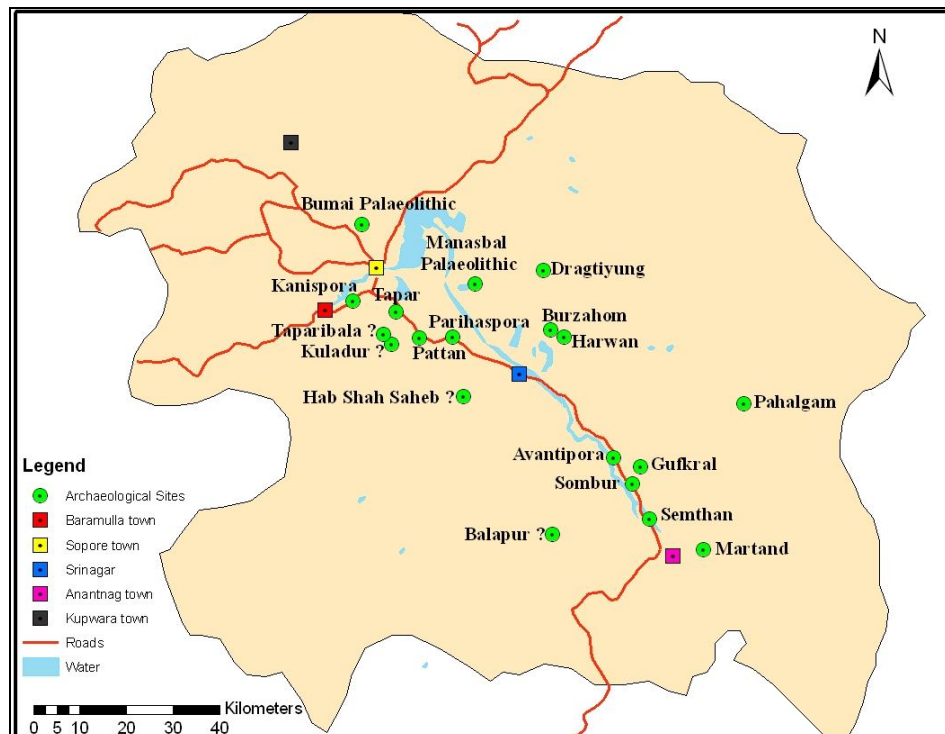


Figure 1: Location map of major excavated and unexcavated sites discussed in this paper (Mumtaz Yatoo)

### 2.2. Palaeoclimate Project of Kashmir under Agrawal

The first intentional attempt to study sites on a regional landscape basis was made during an interdisciplinary project called the Kashmir Palaeoclimatic Project (KPCP), initiated by Professor D.P. Agrawal in 1979-80 (Agrawal et al 1989; 1992), and sponsored by the Department of Science and Technology, Mumbai. The aim was to study, through multi-disciplinary investigations, the sedimentology, geomorphology, micropalaeontology, palynology, invertebrate and vertebrate palaeontology,

diatoms, isotopic geochemistry, and archaeology, so as to delineate the broad outlines of the climatic changes Kashmir experienced from the late Cenozoic period onwards (Agrawal et al 1989; Agrawal 1992).

The archaeological aim of the project was to discover new archaeological sites from Palaeolithic period onwards and to re-survey those already reported in Kashmir, and to explore the impact of climatic and environmental changes on the population during ancient times (Agrawal 1992: 207). In the course of these investigations, the experts discovered one site (Sombur, figure 1), thought to be Upper Palaeolithic, and tools resembling Palaeolithic types from the four Neolithic sites (Kuladur, Taparibala, Balapur and Hab Shah Saheb), as well as various Neolithic and early historic sites (Pant et al. 1982: 37-39). Their preliminary data showed that during the Neolithic and Kushan periods, the density and the distribution of sites increased dramatically; they suggested that this was because of warmer conditions being more conducive to settlement in Kashmir during these periods (Agrawal 1992: 217). However, their functional interpretational approach, and the lack of a methodological framework lead to a fragmented understanding of settlement archaeology. However, this multi-pronged investigation provided useful information as large areas of Kashmir were chosen for study. This study was also useful as it fulfilled its main aim of providing a detailed account of palaeoclimatic and palaeoenvironmental changes as recorded in the *karewa* profile of Kashmir. The two year survey was disrupted by political insurgency in Kashmir and came to an abrupt end.

### 2.3. Survey of Sopore and Bandipor Tehsils in Baramulla District

Most recently, a different kind of work was carried (Yatoo 2005) in the Baramulla District 45 kms from Srinagar (figure 2). This was exclusively an archaeological work, which was aimed at locating archaeological sites, village by village, in the two tehsils Sopore and Bandipor with the aim of gauging the archaeological potential there. Earlier chance discovery of archaeological material culture along the Jhelum Valley communication road by the Archaeological Survey of India and under the multidisciplinary survey by Palaeoclimate Project team reported the Neolithic and the early historic material culture in this area (Joshi 1990: 34; Mitra 1984: 16-17). However, only one site of all those reported has been partially excavated, exposing archaeology of the Neolithic and early historic periods. The necessity of re-evaluating the archaeological potential in the two tehsils (rather than focussing on Jhelum Valley communication route) led to the conception of this project which was carried under the title 'Archaeological Explorations of Sopore and Bandipor tehsils in District Baramulla, Kashmir'.

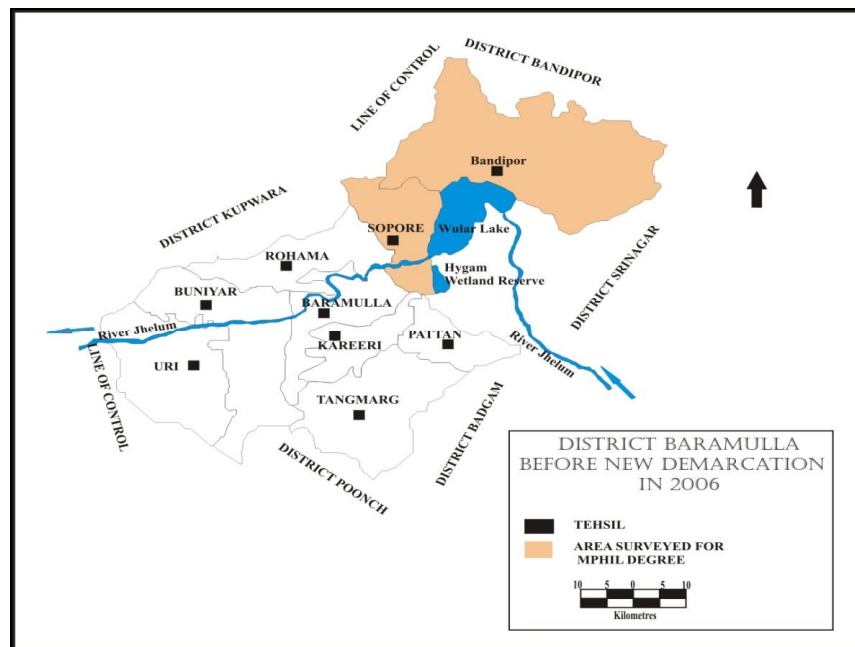


Figure 2: Shows the study area in Baramulla District, the Bandipor tehsil is now an independent district carved from Baramulla District in 2007 (Mumtaz Yatoo)

This survey, unlike others carried out previously in Kashmir had a systematic methodological approach. It recorded a total of 36 archaeological sites in the two tehsils of Baramulla District (see table 1). In spite of its weaknesses at its time, this survey was able to demonstrate the presence of archaeological material from diverse periods which pushed the history of the district back to the Palaeolithic period for the first time (see table 2). It was through this study that archaeological documentation of the two tehsils of district was initiated, however an important chronological gap was also revealed in the archaeological record. Analysis of the material culture showed the absence of Iron Age and Indo-Greek (which covers 1000 BC to 100 AD) material culture from the region. This was the first comprehensive study of a full region and went into much finer detail than any other study carried out in Kashmir. Unlike reconnaissance surveys by the Archaeological Survey of India, which were targeted towards communication routes, this work was somewhat similar to Agrawal's (Kashmir Palaeoclimate project) as both surveyed large areas (for their archaeological aims). The work was, however, different as it had the specific aim of identifying and recording

archaeological site patterns in the study region, a focus which was lacking in Agrawal's work. Furthermore, a methodological survey approach was devised for carrying out a village to village survey in the region. Prior to this work Baramulla District was believed to have been insignificant in terms of prehistoric archaeology, with the exception of Kanispora and other sites that lie on the Jhelum Valley communication route.

Sites types located	Number of sites located from each period
Upper Palaeolithic	1
Neolithic	3
Early Historic	6
Later historic	20
Medieval	2
Modern	4

Table 1: List of sites placed in a chronological order which were located from Sopore and Bandipor tehsils of Baramulla District during 2005 survey.

Archaeological Phases	Material culture found
Palaeolithic Sites	Hand axe was collected and rock engraving and rock shelters were reported.
Neolithic Sites	Four types of pottery and stone tools were reported and collected besides charred rice ( <i>Oryza spp.</i> ) and unidentified seeds were found from two burnished ware pots, human and animal skeletal remains were both found in the exposed sections and beneath the sections among the archaeological material culture debris.
Early Historic Sites	Pottery, terracotta, and stone bowls were reported and collected.
Later Historic Sites	Pottery, terracotta, stone structures, dressed stones, querns were reported and some collected.
Medieval Sites	Brickbats, coins and temple ruins were reported.
Modern Sites	Temples, mosques and mausoleums were reported.

Table 2 :List of major finds from all the sites in a chronological order from Sopore and Bandipor tehsils of Baramulla District during 2005 study.

### 3. Impact of Site-Centric Works on the Archaeology of Kashmir

The archaeological work started by Cunningham in 1848 continued unabated, despite being sporadic and site-specific, and archaeologists working in Kashmir have not shifted focus from individual sites or site-specific excavations or explorations to considering broader perspectives such as settlement patterning or spatial contexts. The many directionless surveys, with their lack of methodological approaches and analysis has created confusion in terms of understanding categories of material culture and chronologies that are yet to be resolved. However, the works of De Terra and Paterson, Agrawal, Kak, and Yattoo, which have some methodological framework, have indicated the potential for the understanding of sites in the context of landscape features. However, the aims of landscape archaeology, with systematic field and analytical methodologies are yet to be incorporated into the archaeology of Kashmir. The little work that has been achieved by settlement pattern studies remains the Palaeoclimate project of Kashmir and archaeological survey of 2005 in Baramulla District.

### 4. Salvage Archaeology and Excavations

In both exploration and excavation, Kashmir now has a fragmented archaeological record spanning prehistoric to modern times, and this still requires systematic probing and research. It was only during 1961 that a full-fledged excavation of the Burzahom, (see figure 1) in Srinagar District was carried out (Ghosh 1996: 11-12; Ghosh 1964: 17-21; Ghosh 1965: 9-10; Saar 1992). The results of this excavation were fascinating, revealing much about the site occupants' material culture, their habitations and architecture, their subsistence economy, their religious beliefs and burial practices, their interactions, trade and economy. Excavations at the site of Gufkral (see figure 1) revealed similar features to those found at Burzahom (Mitra 1984: 19-25; Rao 1986: 75-76; Sharma 1982; 2000: 85-100). Similarly, limited excavations at Kanispora (see figure 1) in Baramulla District by the Archaeological Survey of India (Indian Archaeology 2004: 30-48; Mani 2000) revealed another Neolithic site, overlain by early historic material culture. Excavations at Semthan (see figure 1) south of Srinagar near Bijbehara (Anantnag District), yielded significant results regarding the early historical period of Kashmir.

From the excavations at Burzahom, Gufkral, Kanispora, Semthan and Harwan, cultural similarities in material culture were traced in a wider context, which extends beyond Kashmir (Agrawal 1998: 68-69; Kaw 1979: 227; Lahiri 1992: 151-153, 243-244, 270, 377; Mani 2008: 230-233; Shali 1993: 86-89; Sharma 2000: 158-159; Stacul 1987: 124-125; Thapar 1985: 31-36; Thapar 1997: 71). Nevertheless, studies at these sites have been extensive, and they are the only source of information about the settlement and landscape of their respective chronological periods.

## 5. Conclusion

The archaeological record of Kashmir suggests activity in the region since Palaeolithic times. Further human activities in the region are attested by material evidence of the Neolithic period, Megalithic period, Mauryan period, Indo Greeks, Sakas, Parthians, Kushans, Huns, Dards, Turks, Mughals and Afghans (Bamzai 1994, Sufi 1996; Shali 1993). In Kashmir many cultures seem to have risen, flourished and assimilated in a way to create a confluence of different cultures. The discovery and description of this material culture was first initiated by General Cunningham in 1848 and has since been repeated by many in an unsystematic and site specific way. The works by Agrawal, De Terra and Paterson, Kak, Archaeological Survey of India, Yattoo, and so forth tried to shift attention from the site specific to the incorporation of broader settlement and landscape issues. They excavated or surveyed with the intention of revealing the distribution of sites but barring few lacked important systematic methodologies. The Baramulla survey of 2005 was a move forward, and is the sole example of a settlement based study in Kashmir. Therefore, based on previous information and advancement in the methodologies of surveying, a new way of recording and contextualising material culture with landscape features to determine settlement patterning in Kashmir becomes inevitable.

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