

# This tablet from Nepal could be a scene from Gita

## A Representation Of Krishna & Arjuna From Mahabharata

Kamini.Mathai@timesgroup.com

A nine-centimetre terracotta tablet that a Hong Kong-based art dealer bought from Nepal, depicting a charioteer wearing what appears to be Harappan headgear, and his four horses has been dated to about 1,000BC.

Chennai-based art historian Nanditha Krishna said that until now the earliest image of a horse is from 3rd century BC, which was the Mauryan Age. "But this tablet suggests that horses were in the eastern side of ancient India, which is present-day UP, Bihar and Nepal, 700 to 1,000 years earlier," says Krishna. The tablet was dated by UK-based Oxford Authentication



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using thermoluminescence.

Krishna, who heads the CPR Institute of Indological Research in Chennai, said the artefact was brought to her five months ago by art dealer Jeremy Pine, its present owner, for authentication and interpretation. "He purchased it in Nepal many years ago," says Krishna. The tablet shows a man holding four horses, standing behind a

half chariot with a spoked wheel. There are two figures in the chariot. One is presumably the charioteer, while the other is pointing in one direction. There are two quivers containing arrows.

She said the image is perhaps a representation of Krishna and Arjuna as the epic identifies the former driving a chariot drawn by four horses. "If the two figures are Krishna and Arjuna, this would be the earliest available portrayal of the Gita padasham scene of the Bhagavad Gita, going back to about 1,000BC.

The authentication, says Krishna, confirms that the date of the terracotta firing was between 2,300 and 3,600 years ago, which dates it between 1600BC to 300BC. "This date corresponds to the late Indus Valley culture (1500BC) and the historical period (600BC), known as the painted grey ware culture, lasting roughly from 1200BC to 600BC," says Krishna. Thermoluminescence dating is the determination by means of measuring the

accumulated radiation dose of the time elapsed since material containing crystalline minerals was either heated or exposed to sunlight.

The terracotta chariot, said Krishna, also seems to resemble a similar half-chariot from Sanauli in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat district, excavated last year, by Archaeological Survey of India. "The find is said to date to 2000BC-1800BC, although results will be published later. However, whereas the Sanauli wheel is solid, the Nepal wheel is spoked."

"I believe the terracotta tablet from Nepal adds yet another dimension to the mystery of the Mahabharata as well," Krishna said. "This period has been associated with the settlements at Hastinapura, and the five villages which the Pandavas asked from the Kauravas in the Mahabharata. The dating of around 1000BC could also mean the story of the Mahabharata was much older, and the terracotta tablet used as an illustration for ritual or story-telling purposes."