

Report III

Ramnagar Excavation : 2007

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In continuation of last season, excavation at Ramnagar was conducted during the months of March and April 2007 under the direction of the present author, in joint collaboration of Banaras Hindu University and *Jñāna-Pravāha*. As was noted earlier, the ancient deposits at Ramnagar (83° 17' E & 25° 16' N) has a spread of 3 kilometers from the Fort to the Shastri Bridge. This wide spread is divided by a number of gullies. The promising and high portions are utilized as *ghāṭs* by the present inhabitants of Ramnagar. Each *ghāṭ*, - be it Hanumanghāṭ, Kuttaghāṭ, Golaghāṭ, Koriyaghāṭ, Pipraghāṭ or Oriyaghāṭ, is on one mound and is of considerable height. It was noted that the cutting side of river Gaṅgā is along the series of these *ghāṭs*, where the water is very deep, and natural cliff very high. Oriyaghāṭ and Golaghāṭ were subjected to probing in this season. This is because it was aimed to ascertain the chronological sequence and spread of the ancient habitation at this site. Besides, to determine the nature of the earlier exposed massive platform/embankment at Oriya-ghāṭ it was also thought relevant to determine the old landscape of the region. For this, nature and chronology of the Quaternary deposits of the high cliff (about 20 m), over which the earliest human occupation rested, was also subject of probing.

Oriyaghāṭ, where excavations were conducted earlier, five new trenches were dug in this season. Trench-B'3 was excavated in view to determine the nature of the embankment, and also to confirm the chronology of this locality. The total depth reached in this trench was 8.40 m below the surface. The most significant finding was the width and extent of the platform, the base of the "Embankment". The thick rammed platform (about 50 - 70 cm thick) was encountered at the depth of 4.80 m below the surface, and was found extending in an area of 3.75 m north-south, while it's east west axis was traced in an area of about 2.50 m. Almost at the same level another platform, similar to the earlier one, was encountered which continued eastwards. A gap of about 0.50 m was noticed between these two platforms.

Each of the platform was about 8 m wide (north-south) and 6 m long (east-west). Composed of burnt blocks of clay which were rammed with compact clay, this

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provided base to about one and a half meter thick yellow compact clay deposit, the *clay bund*. Surrounding this structure were buried traces of water born sand and silts, indicating that this structure was a protective device against rising water.

The chrono-cultural sequence exposed in this trench was similar to the one which was exposed in Trench A1 (excavated in 2006). However, the archaeological *debris* in Trench B'3 was less than that of the other. Almost all the cultural horizons were present in this trench also. For, the lower Layers, 5 to 10 revealed NBPW and associated wares; while Layers 5 to 9 were associated with Grey ware and the late and post NBPW findings. A small part of Maurya-Śuṅga structure was encountered in Layer 6, while a platform with a concentration of large terracotta figurines of Kuṣāṇa period was associated with Layer 4. This platform appears to be related to some ritual in which offering of large sized male and female figures were in practice. This trench was particularly rich for antiquities. Besides, good quantity of potsherds of the NBPW ware, Black and Red ware, Black slipped ware, and painted Red ware, terracotta figurines of both animals and human were noteworthy. An elephant of NBPW fabric and *Naigameṣa* figurine were unique finds. In the other categories terracotta balls, pottery-discs, terracotta and stone beads, copper bangles, iron objects etc., were recovered in good number from NBPW and grey and red wares from Maurya-Śuṅga levels. The significant findings of the Kuṣāṇa levels were the tenon-head, terracotta horse, elephant, *Naigameṣa* and terracotta and stone beads. Presence of Gupta period can be gleaned through some terracotta figurines but there was paucity of typical examples.

Trenches B'1 and C'1, which were excavated this year, were close to the earlier Trench C'3, in which evidence for the production of NBPW was identified. A total deposit of about 7.75 m was dug. A roughly circular kiln in the form of a pit with plastered sides with mud was exposed, along with a large jar which also appears to be part of the pottery production process. This horizon (Layers 4 - 8) was very rich for NBPW potsherds, which were found in a wide range variety.

Two trenches, Trench D'3 and Trench E'3 which were located on the southern slope of the mound revealed the nature of a mud platform and the basic formation of the mound. This platform was situated at the lower depth, just in front of the embankment. The extension of this trench up to the lower portion of the slope of the mound provided a good sequence of the Quaternary deposits. Dating samples and soil

samples were collected from this dig, with a view to ascertain the palaeo-climate of the region at the time of its ancient habitation.

A new locality, the Golaghāt was also selected this year for archaeological investigations. Three Trenches A'1, B'1 and C'1 were excavated here. In Trench A'1, half of which was exposed due to the non-archaeological digging operation, section scraping gave a sequence of 19 Layers. At about the depth of 1.50 m to 4 m from the surface, was marked the horizon, which was full of structures. Long wall running north-south were seen on the upper part, while the lower walls were located in east-west orientation. On account of the antiquities and the brick sizes (38 × 27 × 6 cm and 48 × 28 × 7 cm) these structures could be dated between the Kuṣāṇa and the Mauryan times. At the depth of 3.50 m below the surface was encountered a ring-well, which had 9 courses. This was located at a distance of about 2 m from the structure complex in the north. Three successive floors (at the depths of 4.90; 5.60; and 6.10 m below the surface respectively) were found adjoining the ring-well, but below its working level. The lower levels yielded NBPW potsherds (Layers 14 to 18), while the levels contemporary to the use of ring-well (Layers 9-13) could be dated to the Post NBPW/Maurya-Śuṅga period. That the area exposed in Trench A'1 was periphery of the Golghāt settlement is attested not only by the ring-well, but also by a rammed platform which was exposed further north. Its locus indicated that it was earlier than the ring-well, since it was encountered at the depth of 4.26 m in Trench B'1 and C'1. Similar to the one exposed at Oriyaghāt, this platform was also built by ramming of burnt clay lumps with yellow clay, and was 9.80 m wide (north-south), 6 m long (east-west), and 60-65 cm thick. It was noted that topography of the mound at this place is almost similar to Oriyaghāt, - deep gully/palaeo-stream cutting inland from the river Gaṅgā. The two embankments were constructed on the side of these gullies at the periphery of the ancient habitation width-wise as to stop entrance of water inside the settlement, whenever there was rise of water level in the main river, and spread of back water in these gullies/palaeo-channels.

At Golaghāt, a narrow but deep trench was excavated towards the river face. This cutting was 2 m wide and was cut through 20 m thick cliff, exposing the deposits from the surface to the water level of the Gaṅgā. Here the top 5 m contained archaeological horizons (of seemingly late and post NBPW periods), while the lower ones were the quaternary formation. Samples, for dating and soil analysis, were collected from this deposit, by Dr. U.K.Shukla, the Geologist of the Banaras Hindu

University. Since paleogeomorphology and palaeo-water bodies of Ramnagar appears to influence human settlement to a very great extent, it is attempted to ascertain the paleoclimate and topography of the region.

The findings from Ramnagar indicate that the site was occupied extensively at around seventh/eighth century BCE., almost contemporary to the occupation history of Kāśī-Rājghāṭ. The thick deposit of NBPW and late NBPW with rich collection of pottery and artifacts of luxury nature (beads, pendants, bangles) indicates that it was an affluent settlement and perhaps a trade centre. Production of *deluxe* ware and stone beads at the site is also indicative of it's being a craft based settlement. The glory of this site appears to continue throughout the Mauryan and Śuṅga periods. But, after Kuṣāṇa period Ramnagar appears to have been abandoned.

