



Fig.1 : Exposed structures and findings at Sarnath (Courtesy ASI)

# Archaeology of Varanasi : Identification of the City and Satellite Settlements

Vidula Jayaswal

## INTRODUCTION

Archaeological findings of Varanasi reveal a comprehensive picture of settlements of the early historical period that witnessed Second Urbanisation of the sub-continent and emergence of the cities in the Ganga plain. The nature and hierarchy of these settlements could convincingly be explained through the Indian view of city and villages. It is often debated that the excavated urban sites of the Ganga plain fall short of a number of criteria laid down for identification of ancient cities by the western scholars. Contrary to this, many of the early historical sites of this region are mentioned as cities in the ancient Indian texts. This dichotomy between the archaeological findings and the literary accounts can be resolved to a great extent if the Indian concept of the 'city' is applied in the critical analysis of the data.

Sri Amlanand Ghosh in his significant monograph entitled *The City in Early Historical India* (1973), has discussed a number of parameters for testing and identifying urban and rural settlements of excavated sites. He cited almost all available important hypotheses and references in this course and most of his conclusions still hold good. In the past decades, postdating Ghosh's pioneering publication, new information and facts have come to light in Varanasi region, as is the case in the other parts of the country. Consequently, there is a need to incorporate and evaluate these findings in the light of Indian concept of urban centres and this is precisely the aim of the present article.

## THE EXCAVATED SITES OF KASHI-KSHETRA

### Sarnath

The history of archaeological discoveries in Varanasi district, which is addressed as Kashi-Kshetra, can be divided into four stages: 1. Exposure of the Buddhist pilgrimage at Sarnath, 2. Identification and excavations of the capital city of Kashi-

*janapada* (Varanasi), 3. Locating and digging of satellite settlements, and 4. Tracing the shift/expansion of the city area. The nine sites, - Sarnath, Rajghat, Aktha, Ramnagar, Tilmanpur, Kotwa, Asapur, Shooltankeshwar and Saraswati Udyan, which have been excavated so far have brought to light history and growth of the city and its supporting village settlements.

The initiation of systematic archaeological investigations in Kashi-*kshetra* is more than hundred years old now (Jayaswal. 2015: 59-64). Because, the first spade fell to expose the buried remains in a planned way was at Sarnath (Long. 83°2'E & Lat. 25°23'N) in the year 1905. Prior to F.O. Oertel, Mackenzie in 1815 and some others in the follow up operations had dug some parts of the site, but their excavation reports are not available. Still earlier (1793-94), Cheta Singh a contractor had conducted scavenging operations and though damaged some important monuments, had brought to light archaeological potentialities of this Buddhist pilgrimage.

Twentieth century initiated horizontal exposure of monuments at Sarnath. Though parts of the site, after Mackenzie, were also investigated by Cunningham and Kittoe, it was Marshall with Oertel, Konow and Nicolus, who surfaced almost the entire monument complex of Sarnath (Fig.1). Later, Sahni (1921-22), also conducted excavations at the site. As a result of which by the first half of the twentieth century Sarnath could be placed as one the most important ancient Buddhist pilgrimage on the map of the world heritage sites. The archaeological remains date the glorious time of Sarnath between Mauryan (third century BCE) and Gahadwal (twelfth century CE), periods.

It was after nine decades of the earlier archaeological operations, Sarnath was re-excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India. Excavations were conducted near the Ashokan pillar area, where an apsidal brick structure was exposed. On account of the nature of masonry and the floor this structure was dated by the excavator A.K. Sinha to the late Mauryan period (*Indian Archaeology 1992-93 - A Review: 99*). The discrepancy between the dates assessed by archaeological findings (third century BCE) and the narrations of the ancient texts, which suggest Sarnath to be contemporary to Buddha or even pre-Buddha (sixth century BCE, and earlier), remained unresolved, for a few more decades. In recent excavations of the site, (in the year 2014), by Mani and Srivastava, this gap was partly filled. Because, the team obtained charcoal samples, when dated by the MS

method, were valued to be of the fourth century BCE. This was, incidentally first absolute date for the remains of Sarnath, which pushes its archaeological history at least to pre-Asokan times (Jayaswal. 2015: 125). Sarnath, the mine of master piece sculptures, and a great religious centre of Buddhism, was also identified as *Rishipattan-Mrigdaya* of *Mahavastu* (Horner. 1954: 214). Surfacing Sarnath was the contribution of the first stage of archaeological operations in Varanasi region. Even though not a part of the city, Sarnath, as a famous pilgrimage, contributed substantially to the ancient Varanasi.

## **Rajghat**

The major contribution of the second stage of archaeological investigations in *Kashi-kshetra* was the identification of the capital city of the *Kashi-janapada*, Varanasi. Discovery of Rajghat (ancient city of Varanasi) was a chance finding, which was followed by a series of systematic excavations in the subsequent decades. In the year 1940, the left bank near the confluence of the rivers Varuna and Ganga was dug for the construction of Kashi Railway Station. During this non-archaeological digging large quantity of ancient remains, structures, coins, pottery, beads, seals and sealing came to surface. When brought to the notice of the Archaeological Survey of India, a senior archaeologist, Krishna Deva was deputed to conduct systematic excavations. He excavated southern part of the mound near Malviya Bridge (Deva. 1944) (Fig.2). Among other rich findings, the excavations revealed seals engraved with legend '*Varanasi nagar*' (the city of Varanasi). Such seals which were used in the activities of trade and commerce are also reported from the other ancient cities of the Ganga plain. On account of the rich collection of antiquities, including coins, seals and sealings, it was possible to identify Rajghat locality as the ancient city of Varanasi. I prefer to use *Kashi-kshetra* for the region, and Varanasi for the ancient city at Rajghat.

After this assertion it was imperative to extensively excavate the site. In the sixties of the twentieth century, a team of archaeologists from the Banaras Hindu University, under the direction of A.K. Narain conducted large scale excavations at Rajghat (Narain & Roy. 1976: 19). The digging of the site continued for about ten years. As a result of this, the origin, growth and extension of the capital city (Table-1) of *Kashi-janapada* could be reconstructed (Narain & Roy. 1976). Antiquity of this site was then estimated to be of *circa* 800 BCE, which was later confirmed by the MS dating of the sample from Period I (Jayaswal & Mani. 2016: 20).



Fig.2 : View of exposed structures, Rajghat excavations, 1940

Table-1: Culture-sequence of Rajghat (after Narain & Roy. 1976: 21-35)

PERIOD	DATE	SIGNIFICANT CULTURE REMAINS
Surface	British period	Coins of East India Company.
VI	Mughal period	Coins of Akbar (r.1556-1605) & Sher Khanshah Suri (r.1538-1545). Glazed Ware & other antiquities of Mughal period.
V	c. 700-1200 CE	Disturbed horizon. Red Ware & Grey Ware. Decorated pots (incised & embossed). Terracotta mother goddesses (hand-made & moulded). Stone beads.
IV	c. 300-700 CE	Gold coins of Chandragupta (c.319-350), Kumargupta (c.415-455) & Skandagupta (c.455-467). Seals & sealing Red Wares. Terracotta figures of Gupta & postGupta styles.
III	1 <sup>st</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> century CE	Most prosperous period Kushan & Late Kushan remains. Township (brick houses, well, market). Red Wares. Terracotta figures. Beads of semi-precious stones. Iron tools. Copper pots.
II	3 <sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE – 0 CE	Features of Urbanization Red Ware dominates, Grey Ware very restricted. Large vases, lids, bowls, pan with handle. Stamped design - <i>Tri-ratna</i> & <i>Dharmachakra</i> on clay models. Beads of semi-precious stones Iron and copper objects.

C	400-200 BCE	Degeneration of Northern Black Polished Ware, Emergence of Coarse Grey Ware. New forms in Red Ware ( <i>karahi</i> , carinated <i>handi</i> ). Mud structures. Hand and mould made Terracotta figures.
I B	600-400 BCE	Emergence of Northern Black Polished Ware, continuation of Black-and-Red Ware & Black-slipped Ware. Construction of protective devices. Sanitation, mud & thatched structures. Terracotta animal handmade (in Red Ware & Grey Ware fabric).
A	800-600 BCE	First occupation. Pre-Northern Black Polished Ware Black-and-Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware, Red Ware. Pre-structural. Iron & bone tools, Terracotta objects & human figure (?).

The site was re-excavated in the year 2014 by me with B.R. Mani on behalf of Jñāna-Pravāha and Archaeological Survey of India (Jayaswal & Mani. 2016). We focused on exposing pre-Gupta deposits as our main aim was to obtain samples for absolute dates from the earlier deposits.

Table-2: Comparative Chronological Sequence of Rajghat: Earlier and Recent Excavations

Periods proposed by Jayaswal & Mani (2016)	Periods proposed by Narain & Roy (1976)
PERIOD-IV: Kushan	PERIOD-III: 0 – 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century CE
PERIOD-III: Post-Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)	PERIOD-II: 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century BCE – 0 CE
PERIOD-IIB: Late-NBPW PERIOD-IIA: NBPW	PERIOD-IC: Late-NBPW PERIOD-IB: Mature NBPW
PERIOD-I: Pre-NBPW	PERIOD-IA: Pre-NBPW

The archaeological horizons at Rajghat were formed in about two thousand seven hundred years (Jayaswal & Mani. 2016). The earliest habitation is dated 800 BCE and the latest to the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE. If the tomb of Lal Khan, which stands above modern surface is also included in the ancient remains of Rajghat, the occupation of the site would further prolong. In fact, with some short disruptions the locality continued to be under occupation till modern times. The excavators have arranged

the chronology of the underground deposits between Pre-NBPW and the British periods (Narain & Roy. 1976: 28-31), and *Janapada* and early historical times (Jayaswal & Mani. 2016: 20) (Fig.3). All the four periods of Rajghat, which were identified in the later excavations, and the three lower-most culture horizons demarcated by Narain and Roy are relevant for the present theme, and form basis for the subsequent discussion.

### Aktha

The field studies conducted in twentieth and twenty-first centuries mark the third stage of archaeological investigations in *Kashikshetra*. This was the period of discovery of satellite and feeding centres of the



Fig.3 : View of exposed remains at Rajghat, 2014

Buddhist pilgrimage and the city of Varanasi. In this venture one very significant site came to light. Aktha (Long. 83°01'E & Lat. 25°22'N) was discovered in 1990 (Jayaswal. 1998: vii), and was excavated first in 2001-2002 and, successively in 2002-2003 and 2008-2009 (Jayaswal. 2009a). Situated near modern Paharia Mandi (market), Aktha is a small village, at the southern periphery of which is an extended low mound (Jayaswal. 2009: 209-211). The centre of this mound is considerably high and is covered by a cluster of broken sculptures of medieval period (Fig.4). Another significant image found earlier from the vicinity (eastern periphery of the mound), was a large Yaksha image, which is now housed in the site Museum of Sarnath. At the southern periphery of this mound, on the left bank of the river Varuna is a very high and conical mound. It is locally known as Jhauajharan, and could be identified with the stupa mound, which was perhaps visited by Xuanzang when he went to Sarnath from the city area (Jayaswal. 2015).

Confined to two localities, the excavations at Aktha revealed eighteen archaeological layers and five cultural horizons (Fig.5):

Period I : Pre-NBPW or Later Vedic times.

Period II: Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) / *Janapada* times.



Fig.4 : Mound at Aktha

Period III: Maurya-Shunga period.  
 Period IV: Kushan period, and  
 Period V: Late/Post-Kushan period  
 (Jayaswal. 2009: 54-58).

Aktha during Later Vedic period was a small hermitage type of settlement. In the subsequent *Janapada* and *Maha-janapada* periods this settlement was enlarged, and became more affluent than the earlier village. But the rural nature of Aktha continued, as before, also in the succeeding periods. This was in spite of the fact that other contemporary settlement, Rajghat on the bank of Ganga, developed into a city. But, the settlement was enriched by trade and commerce, as good quantity of Mauryan and

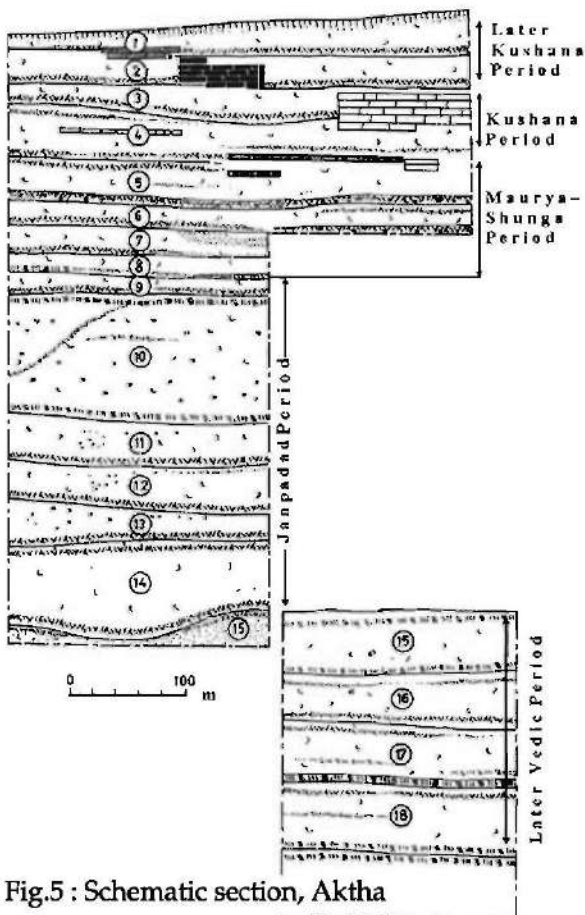


Fig.5 : Schematic section, Aktha

Kushan coins were found from the deposits at this site (Jayaswal. 2009: 217-221). The entire archaeological sequence of Aktha falls within the time-span under consideration, and shall be inset at appropriate places.

### **Ramnagar**

Situated on the right bank of the river Ganga, Ramnagar (Long. 83°17'E & Lat. 25°16'N) is a township known for the fort of Maharaja of Banaras. Ancient habitation at Ramnagar, has a wide spread. It is a stretch of about three kilometres between the Fort and the Shastri bridge (on the National High Way). But, the ancient settlement appears to be confined to the bank and does not extend beyond half a kilometre from the river side. Ramnagar Fort (the major structure built in stages between 1750 and 1752) occupies northern part of the mound (Fig.6). The other parts of this mound were also covered here and there by small modern structures. Besides, the mound had received damage from severe erosion activities in the past, which can be seen in the form of deep gullies. As a result, the bank of Ramnagar, as well as the ancient mound is divided into small units, which are known by different names. The main localities are : Golaghat, Oriyaghat and Kuttaghat. All of these localities have *kachcha* or *pukka* approach to reach the water of the river and are presently used as *ghats*. Two localities, the Oriyaghat and the Golaghat were excavated by the team of archaeologists and geologist of the Banaras Hindu University between the years 2005 and 2007 (Jayaswal, Shukla & Sharma. 2016).



Fig.6 : View of Ramnagar mound

The schematic chronology unearthed at Ramnagar, revealed ten metre thick archaeological deposits, divided into sixteen layers and five cultural periods: the Late Kushan, Kushan, Post-Northern Black Polished Ware, Northern Black Polished Ware and Pre-Northern Black Polished Ware periods. An interesting feature of the natural soil the yellow earth and an Aeolian layer was that it was resting over a dried pond bed (Jayaswal, Shukla & Sharma. 2016: 65), which formed base to the habitation accumulation. Material remains exposed at Ramnagar were significant as to suggest that it was of a craft-settlement.

Along with the valley of the river Varuna the banks of Rajapur-nala, were also identified as important region during our survey. The sides of Rajapur-nala were dotted with a number of small mounds, which formed a chain from the left bank of the river Ganga to Saranath (Fig.7). Most of the mounds, like the ones near modern villages at Asapur, Kotwa and Rajapur, could be identified as ancient settlements of stone carvers (Jayaswal. 1998: 175-211).

Location of a chain of chiselling workshop sites on Rajapur-nala was not a chance discovery, but, the result of a well-designed investigation strategy (Jayaswal. 1998). For instance, it was noted during our ethnographic studies that the primary requirement for the workshops producing stone sculptures was the constant supply of the raw material. For this reason, the modern carving centres were found located at such places, which are well connected by metal roads. An ancient channel, which was connecting the river Ganga to Sarnath was traced during our field

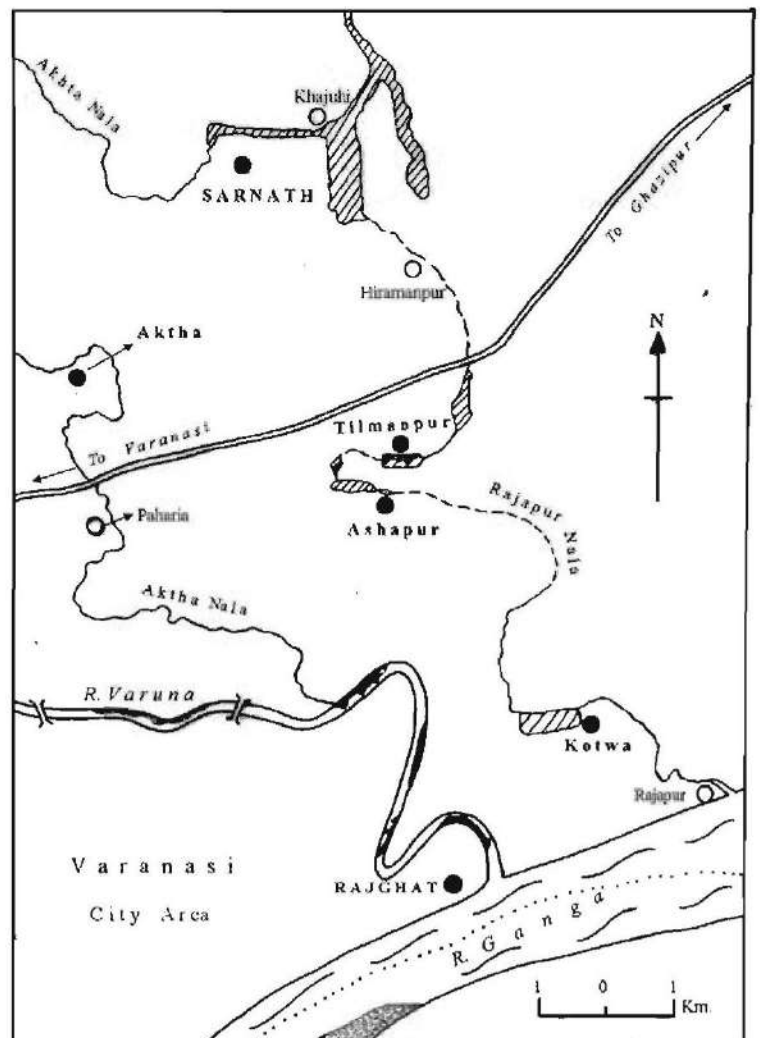


Fig.7 : Map of sites located on Rajapur-nala

survey. This dried-up rivulet, Rajapur-nala, was one of the significant routes. The large blocks of raw material from the Chunar hills to Varanasi were being brought through the main river Ganga. Thereafter, these were diverted to the workshop sites, by Rajapur-nala (Jayaswal. 1998: 116-117). Identification of ancient workshops was also facilitated by noting main features of the modern stone carving centres of Varanasi. The wide open space with collection of stone-chiselling *debris* and finished and half-finished pieces were common to both, the modern and the ancient workshops belonging to the carvers. The ancient chiselling workshop sites, thus discovered were small rural settlements with minimum artefacts of daily utility. Two of these sites, Kotwa and Asapur, were excavated.

### **Asapur**

Asapur (Long. 8302'15"E & Lat. 2521'22"N) is located about two kilometers south of Sarnath on both the banks of Rajapur-nala (Jayaswal. 1998: 175-183). Though number of antiquities was limited, yet the Kushan and Gupta traits were pronounced here. The Surya image, of Gupta period, presently kept in Bharat Kala Bhavan, was the only finished product found at the site. Other carvings were half finished or broken refuge. Asapur appears to fulfill, primarily, the demand of Gupta and post-Gupta sculptures at Sarnath.

### **Kotwa**

The modern village of Kotwa (Long. 8303'15"E & Lat. 2520'20"N) is a small settlement situated on the left bank of Rajapur-nala, close to its confluence with the river Ganga. Excavations at Kotwa revealed four floors, on and around which rested huge accumulation of stone *debris*, indicating large scale chiselling of sandstone. Associated with these were potsherds and broken pieces of carvings. On account of the typology of the pots and style and subject of the carvings, a date bracket between *circa* first/second and eleventh/twelfth centuries CE, could be ascertained for the chiselling operations at this site. The archaeological horizons at Kotwa, correspond by and large with the history of stone sculptural art of Varanasi-Sarnath region and the three periods which could be identified are the Kushan, the Gupta and the Post-Gupta. On the other hand, the remains of Asapur appear to be reminiscent of chiselling activities of the Post-Gupta/early-Medieval periods.

## Tilmanpur

The small mound of Tilmanpur (Long. 8302'0"E & Lat. 2521'35") is located on the bank of the abandoned channel Rajapur-nala, and on one of the major land routes, connecting east and west of north India. Dating between *circa* fourth/third century BCE and second/third century CE, this was a very small rural settlement (Jayaswal. 1998: 123), and was completely devoid of imposing brick structures, planned dwellings, and other civic amenities. Trade items like beads of semi-precious stones or other luxury items were also not found at Tilmanpur. Absence of *deluxe* ware, the Northern Black Polished Ware and some typical forms, sprinkler and moulded spouts, etc., which characterize Kushan and Gupta pottery collections of urban sites of the Ganga plain, were also unrepresented. Similarly, though Shunga and Kushan horizons could be ascertained, no moulded terracotta plaque was unearthed at this site. Non-urban nature of this site was attested by the findings.

## Shooltankeshwar

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, archaeological investigations in Kashi-*kshetra* were directed to expose expansion of the city settlement. It was realized that all sites which were discovered so far clustered primarily in the north and north-east of the capital city. No site was reported from western peripheral area. Similarly, indications from the earlier findings suggested that the nucleus of the city had shifting tendency towards west and south-west. This was also the pattern of expansion of Varanasi city in the past. The region around Muradev village was, therefore, surveyed in 2012-2013. A scatter of small and short lived settlements was discovered along the left bank of the river Ganga (Fig.8). Characterized by single occupancy these were very small mounds. The noteworthy sites were -Shooltankeshwar, Rudauli, Mudadih, Chitauni, Churamanpur and Gosaipur. The surface indications suggested that these were single culture (Kushan) sites.

The mound at Shooltankeshwar was the most prominent place which was available for digging. It was excavated during 2012-13 under my supervision by the team of Jñāna-Pravāha - Centre of Cultural Studies and Research, Varanasi. Located near Madhavpur village (Lat. 2512' & Long. 8252'), Shooltankeshwar is locally famous for the Shiva temple, which occupies the highest part of the left bank of the river Ganga. The site is about 20 km south-west of Rajghat, and about

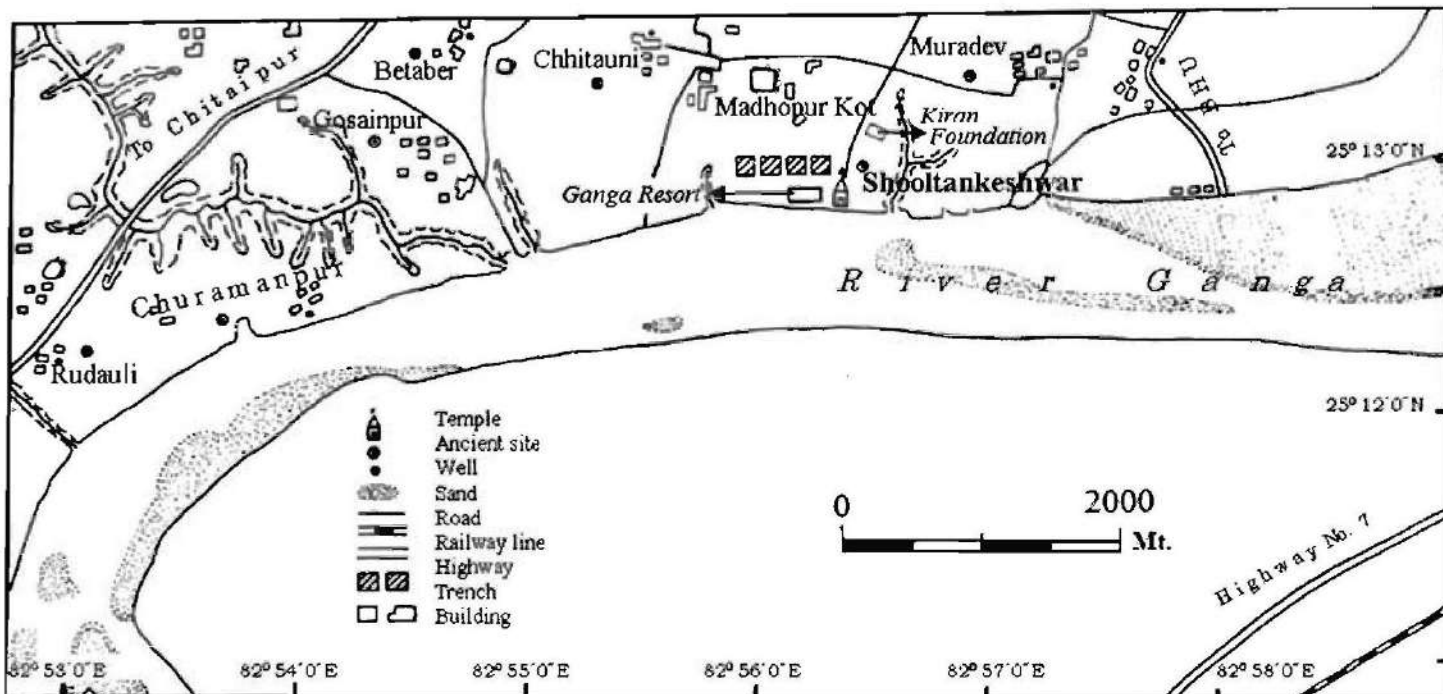


Fig.8 : Location of sites around Shooltankeshwar



Fig.9 : View of excavated trenches, Shooltankeshwar

10 km upstream of Ramnagar. The northern part of the mound, behind the Shiva temple was excavated (Fig.9). The thickness of archaeological horizon in the excavated trenches ranged between 1.50 and 0.65 m. And, the antiquities obtained from these layers were marked by Kushan features.

### **Saraswati Udyan: the very heart of the present city**

Except for Sarnath, all the other above described excavated sites of Varanasi evidence desertion after Kushan period. The logical assumptions and ethnological records suggest that the nucleus of the city had shifted from Rajghat to Dashashvamedha *ghat* (south) and Chowk area in the historic times. This hypothesis was to be confirmed by digging the nucleus of the present city. Saraswati Udyan, a small park, located in Pukka Mahal area, (Long. 8300'40.48"E & Lat. 2518'37.24"N) was subject to probing by me under the auspices of Jñāna-Pravāha - Centre for Cultural Studies and Research, Varanasi, in the year 2015-2016. Situated in the outer periphery of Kashi-Vishwanath temple, near its second gate, i.e. Saraswati Phatak, the site is part of the densely populated area of Mir-Ghat on the left bank of the river Ganga. The archaeological horizon exposed at Saraswati Udyan was around fourteen meter thick and was divided into six periods.

For the reconstruction of chronology of the exposed section of the historical period, coins and pottery play significant role. The series of coins found embedded in various layers of Saraswati Udyan, served as a yardstick for the identification of cultural periods. Two coins, one of Mitra dynasty (150-50 BCE) associated with the earliest floor and the other of Bhoj I Parmar (c.1010-1055 CE) were very helpful for fixing the early history of occupation. The coins issued by Gangeyadeva of Kalachuri dynasty (c.1015-1041 CE) and Akbar made possible to ascertain the dating of upper layers. On account of the succession of layers, techno-typology of ceramic and the associated coins, the cultural periods of the site were identified as:

Period VI	:	British	(Bricks with Roman script)
Period V	:	Medieval	(Copper coins of Akbar)
Period IV	:	Gahadwal	(Kalachuri coin)
Period III	:	Gupta &Pratihar	(Bhoj I Parmar: III B)
Period II	:	Post-Kushan/Early Gupta	(Mitra coin)
Period I	:	Late Kushan	



Fig.10 : Exposed section at Saraswati Udyan

The findings of early periods, Late Kushan to Gupta are relevant to the present theme and these have been elaborated in the following segment of the article.

Remains of Period I were retrieved from Layers 21-18, a deposit of about one and a half metre in thickness (Fig.10). The natural soil beneath the first occupation, Layer 21, was hard and consolidated, suggesting a long exposure,

before it was inhabited by the first group of people. The deposit of Period I, though appears to have traces of floors, as was recorded in Trench-B2, no prominent structure was noted.

The main ceramic of Period I was Red Ware, which was mostly made of medium fabric and was well baked. The collection of earthen pots, the only dated remain from the earliest habitation of Pukka Mahal, was dominated by steep, straight and slanting-sided bowls and lids. The rim in most cases was made featureless, slightly extended, but occasionally incurved. Though marked by Kushan features, when pot morphology of Period I of Saraswati Udyan was compared with the pottery of Sringaverapura, a well-documented Kushan site, similarities between the two were only marginal. Further, such pot forms which associate Kushan levels at other sites of Ganga plain, like carinated *handi*, *karahi*, *sprinkler*, etc., were also conspicuous by their absence here.

The exercise of comparing techno-typology of pottery from Period I of Saraswati Udyan with that of Gupta period earthenware obtained from Bhitari, though suggests common features, reveal certain notable diversions too. However, the pottery under study had a number of common features which were noted in Late Kushan period of Aktha and Ramnagar. The Tank area of Sringaverapura is dated to Kushan times (Lal. 1993: 14) while Bhitari is a Gupta period temple site, dated on account of palaeography and plastic art style between 450 and 550 CE (Jayaswal. 2001: 202). The above discussion on ceramic of Period I of Saraswati Udyan suggests that this collection may be placed in between these two time brackets, and be addressed as Late/Post-Kushan.

Beginning of habitation in Pukka Mahal, as late as, in Late/Post-Kushan times, is significant. Because, it confirmed the hypothesis, that this locality was occupied after the desertion of other ancient settlements of Kashi-*kshetra*, when Kushan dynastic power was fading. The 2.40 m thick deposit of Period II was separated into four Layers - 14-17 in our field records. All the layers were almost horizontal with no striking disturbance and were associated with monumental constructions. Two structures and a brick floor were exposed in this period. All the three appear to form part of one large structure complex. This was the earliest distinct phase, which could be dated to Post-Kushan/Early Gupta Period. A high wall covering 2.36 m of length, was composed of brick-jelly foundation. It was wider at the base where its side (southern) was receding

from bottom to top, and was almost perpendicular at the top. It was composed of broken bricks in set in clay mortar. Though only part of it could be unearthed, its early constructional features could be noted. The facade of this wall was attained by using length of the bricks at the sides. Such structural details resembled retention wall exposed in Tank area of Sringaverapura (Lal. 1993: Pl.XXXIII) and also outer walls of temple complexes exposed at Bhitari (Jayaswal. 2001: Figs.34 & 35). But, in masonry technology its construction and perhaps utility was closer to Gupta brick structures exposed at Bhitari.

A thick platform-like structure composed of seven courses was attached with the above wall almost from the junction of the widening lower and straight upper part, after 10 courses from the foundation. The bricks used in this platform were both complete (38 x 22 x 8 cm) and broken. This platform was covered by a brick-jelly over which was constructed a brick floor. It was composed of complete bricks (40 x 20 x 8 cm), designed by placing bricks upright length-wise in rows and then in slanting fish-bone pattern. Only small part of it could be exposed. But, the grandeur of this floor is well attested from its masonry and dimension. This structure was not only the earliest floor of Saraswati Udyan, but was marked by a specialized masonry skill seen in some monuments of Kushan (Lal. 1993: Pl.XXIII) as well as Gupta times (Jayaswal. 2001: Fig.37) in the middle Ganga plain.

The nature of antiquities obtained from Period II of Saraswati Udyan evidence continuation of basic medium, shell, iron and semi-precious stones, of Period I, for making artefacts. But in each category many more types were produced. The collection even now was marked by both Kushan and Gupta characteristics. But, in the absence of figurative forms with specific stylization and decoration on artefacts it is not possible to draw further inferences. However, the change in the morphology of earthen pots was noticeable in Period II. Comparative analysis of the ceramic forms of Period II of Saraswati Udyan with Kushan pottery from Sringaverapura, and Rajghat (Period III), and Gupta pottery from Bhitari and Rajghat (Period IV), suggests that some forms of both the periods were though found in our collection, the pottery of Saraswati Udyan was not carbon copy of one or the other.

The most significant finding from Period II was a circular copper coin identified as an issue by Mitra dynasty. Addressed as '*Ayodhya Series*', it was

issued by a later dynasty ruling the region of Ayodhya, . . . "after the end of Kushāṇa rule in the eastern U.P." (Sircar. 1990: 174). Though it is difficult to read the name of the issuer, the typology of this coin does suggest that the earliest structure-complex of Saraswati Udyan, was contemporary to the later Mitra rulers ruling eastern Uttar Pradesh, in around third century CE.

Associated with Layers 13 to 9, the deposit of Period III was about 3.40 m thick, and was marked by almost horizontal layers with no marked disturbance by pit or dump. The lower horizon associated with Layers 13 and 12, was characterized by findings closer to the Gupta masonry, while the upper horizon comprising Layers 10 and 9, may be dated to Pratihar times. It may be interesting to note that in Layer 11 occurrence of artefacts was negligible. A coin of Bhoj I of Pratihar dynasty (837-845 CE), was found from Layer 10. The above two layers of Period III, accordingly could be placed in ninth century CE. In view of limited area and also small number of antiquities, the entire deposit, Layers 13 to 9, has been classified under Period III and are placed contemporary to Gupta (Period IIIA) and Pratihar (Period IIIB) dynasty rule.

The upper horizons of Saraswati Udyan were disturbed by pits and dumps. Elaborately carved panels of sandstones, therefore, were out of context, and could be dated on stylistic grounds.

## **THE EARLY HISTORICAL SETTLEMENTS OF KASHI-KSHETRA**

The sites of Kashi-*kshetra* mentioned above reveal a complete sequence of settlement history dating between the first quarter of second millennium BCE to the Modern times. But according to the present theme, only earlier part of this long sequence requires a contextual analysis.

It has been stated by Ghosh that, the 'early historic period' may be taken to have commenced in around sixth century BCE. He takes this time as 'the turning point for north India', . . . as, 'it was dominated by royal personages and religious teachers whose historicity is not in doubt' (Ghosh. 1990: 13). The time also witnessed consolidation of political and administrative systems. The scholar-archaeologist writes, . . . 'Politically, *janapadas*, with fairly well-defined boundaries, had been formed, and soon a few of them grew into *Maha-janapadas*.' This was also the time for the makeup of cities, which according to Ghosh was, - 'a major innovation of the early historical period'. And, Varanasi is recorded to be

listed among the six great cities mentioned in the Buddhist literature (Ghosh. 1973: 15-16).

According to this parameter, the archaeological horizons dating from the sixth century to the very end of the BCE, is to be demarcated for the present discussion. The archaeological horizons of *Kashi-kshetra* which fall within this time-span are - NBPW and Post-NBPW culture periods. The Pre-NBPW is also touched upon, as this horizon provides background to the focused phase, both chronologically and culturally. Prevalence of NBPW (early and mature phases), accordingly, denotes the time span covered by the *Janapada* and *Maha-janapada* times. While, Late/Post-NBPW period appears to be contemporary to the Mauryan and Shunga times.

The recently obtained scientific dates from some of the NBPW horizons de-orient the above correlation of archaeo-historical sequence. It may be recalled that when Ghosh published his above-cited book, all the NBPW horizons were dated to sixth-third centuries BCE. But, in the light of recent dates associated with the NBPW remains like Ayodhya and Ramnagar, 1000 BCE and 1200 BCE, respectively, the earlier date-bracket is pushed back at least to about five hundred years or more (Mani. 2011: 234 and Jayaswal, Shukla & Sharma. 2016: 67). It remains an open question whether the new and revised dates for *Janapada* to Mauryan times be accepted and traditional historical accounts be adjusted within it, or the early and extended time-span obtained by absolute date is to be truncated, as to accommodate the proposed time bracket by the traditional history? There is a need to resolve this issue by archaeologists and historians, sitting together and discussing it at length.

While going strictly by the absolute dates, the Pre-NBPW horizon with late dates (Period I of Rajghat: 800-600 BCE), NBPW levels (Period II of Rajghat, later part of Period II of Aktha and Ramnagar 600-200 BCE) and Post-NBPW horizons (Period III of Rajghat, Aktha and Ramnagar: 200 BCE to the beginning of CE) of *Kashi-kshetra* may be selected for the reconstruction of the beginning and growth of urbanization in our part of the country. The early Pre-NBPW levels of Varanasi (Period I of Aktha and Ramnagar) provide significant backdrop to the late Pre-NBPW and NBPW, of our area. The following discussion, therefore, commences with this prelude stage. Chronologically, Sarnath which witnessed visit of Lord Buddha and donations by Mauryan emperor Asoka, also forms part of the select

time span. But, the site had an independent history of its growth, and was not part of the process of urbanization.

## **NATURE AND HEIRARCHY OF SETTLEMENTS OF ANCIENT KASHI**

For the sake of assessment of the nature of excavated sites in Kashi, examination of relevant archaeological data has been organized in chrono-cultural sequence and briefed below.

### **The Rural Ambiance of the Pre-NBPW/Later Vedic Times**

The first occupation at main sites of Kashi-Rajghat, Aktha and Ramnagar, is of Pre-NBPW Period. 'Pre-NBPW' is a non-committal nomenclature, which denotes sequential placement of the culture horizon in relation to the NBPW phase. Lying beneath the NBPW horizon, this phase in our region and elsewhere in the Ganga plain is marked by culture diversity (Jayaswal. 2017: 80-82). Its long time-span is divisible within three date-brackets, - 2000/1800 - 1200 BCE, 1300/1200 - 900 BCE, and 900/800 - 600 BCE. In Kashi the date-bracket of Pre-NBPW has been ascertained as 1800-600 BCE. The horizon of intermediate date-bracket, - 113/1200 - 900 BCE, has so far not come to light in our region. The proposed date-bracket of Pre-NBPW is characterized by two technological stages, knowledge of copper and iron.

In Kashi the earlier dated Pre-NBPW horizons are reported from Aktha and Ramnagar, while the later phase was encountered at Rajghat. But, remains of only iron-using communities have so far come to light. At Aktha iron was in use right from its first occupation and so was the case at Rajghat. Period I of Ramnagar though has not revealed iron, it was also devoid of Chalcolithic features. The twin chronological divisions of the Pre-NBPW phase of Kashi were: the Later Vedic times (1800-1200 BCE) and incipient stage of formation of *Janapadas* (800-600 BCE). One may note that the proposed date-brackets of the two socio-political stages are a bit on the higher side by the estimation of Ghosh and some of the other scholars, who have dated *Janapadas*/NBPW as *circa* 500 BCE (Ghosh. 1973: 14) and the Later Vedic phase to around 1400-1000 BCE (Pande. 2001: 258). I have discussed this issue in some of my earlier publications (Jayaswal. 2009: 2015) and would only like to emphasize that the absolute dates cannot be ignored for the set of information which are derived from a source of debatable antiquity.

The quarter to one meter thick Pre-NBPW deposit of Period I at Ramnagar is characterized by the dominance of Black Slipped Ware. The other noteworthy pottery was Black Painted Pale Red Ware with pink slip. Bowl and dishes were the main shapes of these *deluxe* wares. The major bulk of Red Wares of the period, is inclusive of both table ware and storage and cooking pots. The other noteworthy categories were pottery-disc, terracotta ball, dabber and stone pestle. In view of cultural remains, particularly ceramics, the Black Slipped Ware of Ramnagar reveal closeness with the early dated pottery of the Pre-NBPW horizons like - Period III (1200-600 BCE) of Atranjikhhera and Period I (1800-1450 BCE) of Aktha. Similarly, with some exceptions, the Red Ware pots of Ramnagar show affinities with red pots, and typology of the vessels with the dated horizons of 1450-1200 BCE of the Ganga plain. It was further noted that Black-and-Red Ware, which does occur at many Chalcolithic and early iron-using sites of the middle Ganga plain and is also reported from Pre-NBPW horizons of Kashi, Period I at Aktha (Jayaswal. 2009: 61-62, Figs.11 & 12), and even Period IA of Rajghat (Narain and Roy. 1977: 24 & 33-34, Fig.6), is absent at Ramnagar.

The deposit of Period I at Aktha was a little less than three meters (2.70 m) thick. The entire deposit was marked by uniform culture contents, such as Black-and-Red Ware (Fig.11), Black Slipped Ware, Hay Impressed Ware (Fig.12) and Red Wares. The other artefacts were bone points, iron objects and pottery-discs. Clay-rammed floors with post-holes, and traces of fire was also significant (Jayaswal. 2009: 57-94; Jayaswal. 2009b). The pottery-discs or the *Kapalas* (Fig.13) found in good quantity at Aktha, suggest that the site was occupied by people indulging in Vedic ritual practices. On the other hand the main ceramic of Period I at Aktha was Hay Impressed pottery, which is also reported from the early iron smelting sites, Malhar of Chakia district (Tiwari, R et.al. 1999-2000: 69-98).

Aktha and Ramnagar stand side by side as far as their antiquity is concerned (1750-1450 BCE and 1800-1580 BCE, respectively). But the two sites differ from each other in the use of earthen wares and nature of dwellings. The Hay Impressed and Black-and-Red pottery at Ramnagar are absent. These two ceramic traditions, however, are the hallmark of Pre-NBPW horizon at Aktha. Similarly, the Black Slipped Ware, the characteristic pottery of Period I of Ramnagar is very restricted in the contemporary remains at Aktha. Besides, at Aktha at least remains of three floors were exposed in Pre-NBPW horizons, while



Fig.11 : Black-and-red Ware potsherds, Period I, Aktha



Fig.12 : Hay-impressed potsherds, Period I, Aktha

at Ramnagar one thick mud wall (?) or platform was traced in the lowest layer. The two sites, therefore, appear to represent diverse cultural communities of *Kashikshetra* in the Later Vedic times.

The factors governing the above cultural diversity may be explained by some Vedic references pertaining to the administrative setup of villages. "The *grama* was probably made of little knots of houses. . . of several branches of one family (*kula*)" . . ., with *kulapa* as the guardian governing the administration. Practically self-contained, the *gramas* were "rural in conception" (Apte. 1971: 359), and also appear to be self-contained administrative units. The Pre-NBPW stage of the middle Ganga plain in general and Kashi in particular is characterized by diverse rural cultures. Each of these village settlements, *gramas*, perhaps were small self-sufficient administrative and economic units utilizing different pots and pans and dwelling in different types of shelters.



Fig.13 : Kapalas used in Vedic rituals, Period I, Aktha

The colonization of eastern region, between the Saraswati and the Sadanira rivers, is suggested by the story of *Videgha-Mathava* in the *Shatapatha-Brahman* (Eggeling. 1872: 104-6). The specific detail is as follows: "Mathava, the king of Videghas, accompanied by his priest Gotama Rahugana, was carrying the sacrificial fire from the bank of Saraswati over Kosala eastwards across the Sadanira. The kingdom which was established by him, was known as Videha, after his tribal name 'Videgha'." The instance is accepted as Aryanization of the eastern region, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and is suggestive of colonization of the middle Ganga valley by the western migrating communities. Ghosh has also quoted this story to reiterate "the origin of the *janapadas* from their founders, conquerors and colonizers" (Ghosh. 1973: 33). A change from the tribalism to the territorial rule is viewed in this example. Ghosh further stated that, "It was by this process, in addition to conquests, that the chiefs of the ruling tribes organized their *janapadas* in the Indus-Ganga plains during the later Vedic times. . ." (Ghosh. 1973: 32).

Location and archaeological findings of Aktha indicate that this was a settlement contemporary to the west-ward migration of Vedic people, who were expanding habitat in the northern plain of the river Ganga. Significantly, Aktha has revealed evidence for Vedic way of life in the form of routine performance of *yajna*-rituals and nature of shelters (Jayaswal. 2009). If this is accepted then colonization of Varuna valley in *circa* first quarter of second millennium BCE, was perhaps the 'fresh land' inhabited by the immigrants from the west, supporting one of the proposed hypothesis by Pusalkar for Aryan Colonization of Vindhyan-Ganga region (Pusalkar. 1971: 318). Therefore, it may be held that Aktha was a resort settlement due to its location on the land and trade route. It remained an *ashram-grama*(hermit), for more than thousand of years, providing dwelling facilities to the sages and *rishis* in the course of their movement between Himalayas and Ganga plain, as is suggested by the concept of *Rishi-pattan* in the Buddhist texts (Jayaswal. 2015: 197-8).

### **Rural-Urban Progress: The *Janapada*/NBPW Period**

The Northern Black Polished Ware period is a well ascertained archaeological horizon of *Kashi-kshetra*, as is the case with other sites of the Ganga plain. Characterized by the *deluxe* ware NBPW, the horizon rests over the Pre-NBPW

without hiatus. The cultural remains of this phase, though marked by continuity in terms of rural scenario, became refined as the production increased. From the simple rural living of the Pre-NBPW, the march now can be viewed towards urbanism. Ghosh has suggested that in archaeological records urban traits are countable in terms of occurrence of *deluxe* pottery, increase in decorative objects and mass production of mould-made clay figurines, coins, planning in the settlement, remains of monuments and fortification, etc. (Ghosh. 1973: 5). Strictly speaking, by these parameters the NBPW stage appears to be deprived of urban features and at most be addressed as 'Proto-Urban' or the affluent rural stage.

It was mentioned earlier that the time bracket for NBPW phase has to be revised in view of the recent C<sub>14</sub> dating. Countable between *circa* 1200 and 200 centuries BCE, this period of about 1000 years is divisible within two phases. It may be recalled that the Pre-NBPW of Rajghat Period IA is of 800-600 BCE, which falls within the proposed time bracket of NBPW. It is not the only example. Period II underlying the mature NBPW of Agiyabir is dated to 900-600 BCE (Singh & Singh. 2004: 23). Such instances have been addressed by me as 'Proto-NBPW' on account of the material remains as well as their chronological positioning. And, it may not be out of context to identify the 'Proto-NBPW' and the 'Early NBPW' remains as of *Janapada* times and the Mature NBPW phase related to the *Maha-janapada* period. Similar to the generic relationship proposed for the politico-economic systems, the techno-cultural attainments also reveal this possibility. This tendency is well demonstrated at Rajghat.

During recent excavations of Rajghat, Black-on-Red Ware was identified as one of the characteristic potting technology of Period I (Jayaswal & Mani. 2016: 21-27). The two, Black-and-Red Ware (BaRW) and Black-on-Red Ware (BoRW), were very frequent and of good quality. It may be mentioned that in case of BaRW, the interplay of black and red surfaces was the result of inverted firing technique (Fig.15). But in case of BoRW, the core of the pots maintained various shades of red, but bi-colour combination of the surface was achieved by slip (Fig.14). A wide range of red, e.g. terracotta, pale red, ochre, buff, and sepia was noted on the shards. Similarly, various shades of black, e.g. light and dark grey dense and black, covered remaining part of the pots. The slip applied and turned in twin shades formed clear line of division, suggesting application by brush in case of BoRW. But, in case of BaRW, the black and red surfaces, which also were found in

Fig.14 : Black-on-Red Ware bowl, Period I, Rajghat



Fig.15 : Black-and-Red Ware, Period I, Kashi-Rajghat

different hues, the dividing lines were hazy as the covered portion had infiltration of Oxygen. In both the categories of earthen wares, inner and the outer surfaces were lustrous. In case of BoRW a very thin coat of glaze covered the surface. But, due to the imperfect technology, cracks were formed. Both of these potting technologies continued in the succeeding phase and found typical group of mature NBPW kit at Rajghat. The bi-chrome category of NBPW of Period II, fine variety of BaRW and BoRW occur in wide range of shades of red and orange, black and grey. This suggests continuity and mastery of these potting traditions which culminated into production of bi-chrome. And, one of the centres where it was mastered was the capital city of *Kashi-janapada*.

### **Origin and Growth of the Capital City**

The first occupants of Rajghat, the identified capital city of Kashi, were using BSW, BaRW and BoRW. They cleared the swampy natural surface of the triangular confluence area of Ganga and Varuna rivers in around 800 BCE (Narain & Roy. 1976: 22). This horizon, assigned by us as Period I, and by Narain and Roy as Period IA, is recorded to be completely devoid of structural remains. But, material remains show a combination of advanced technological knowledge and simplicity in the utilitarian items. They used “iron implements, tools of bones and large number of terracotta objects like pottery discs (both un-perforated and with single perforation), wheels, balls, ear ornaments, skin-rubber and stoppers” in addition to stone objects and “beads made of terracotta, paste and bone” (Narain & Roy. 1976: 22). Typical pottery types of this 'Proto-NBPW phase' were BSW, BaRW and BoRW. This village appears to have existed for about two hundred years (*circa* 800-600 BCE) and suggest growth of the capital city from this village.

The process of growth from rural to urban socio-economic format, which is evident in Varanasi in late Pre-NBPW phase, was perhaps due to the upcoming traders and the administrative system associated with the political governance of the *Janapada* times. Ghosh has discussed this aspect in the light of the hypothesis proposed by the western scholars (Ghosh. 1973: 18-19). In the archaeological findings of Ganga valley this proposition is well attested. At a number of excavated sites remains of capital cities were overlaid with affluent villages and a continuity of rural and urban ambience is evident in pre-and-*Janapada-Maha-janapada* times.

In the succeeding Period IB/IIA, NBPW of Rajghat along with the continuation of earlier culture traits, advancement in pottery production and

richness in other utility items were glaring. Terracotta objects like pottery-disc, bead, etc., continued, in addition to some new forms, like double perforated pottery-disc. Similarly, number of beads, bowls and weights in stone increased (Narain & Roy. 1976: 23-24). The art of clay modelling was represented by the handmade animal figures, elephant and bull, in grey and red fabric, and even anthropomorphic images. The culmination of the Grey Ware technology in this period is marked by the preponderance of the NBPW which not only forms a good percentage but appears in various kinds of surface treatments. A range of colours from shining black to golden and also some painted shards reveal the *deluxe* character of this earthen pot collection (Fig.16). The other earlier wares like BSW, BaRW and BoRW also continued.

At Rajghat, the paucity of structural remains in mature NBPW phase is conspicuous. However, remains of reed impressions and fragments of mud plasters are suggestive of shelters made of perishable medium (Narain & Roy. 1976: 24). That perishable material was being used at the time for major structural activities was also attested by the traces of a large wooden platform (34 m long and 5 cm thick) along the bank of the river. But the most significant structural activity of this period is a collective effort to construct a flood protective device in the form of a clay embankment. It was about 5.10 m high with basal width of 10.80 m. After some time, this embankment was raised further by 1.10 m. There appears some compulsion to live by the side of the river Ganga even though the settlement was threatened on and off by periodical floods. The date for Period IB on account of the  $C_{14}$  date of 490+-100 BCE is accountable to *circa* sixth/fifth to fourth centuries BCE (Narain & Roy. 1976: 24).

The following horizon, Period IIB of the city site was assigned to the Late NBPW phase (Jayaswal & Mani. 2016: 19). Continuity of the general characteristics in this period (Period IC of Narain and Roy) was marked by occurrence of the coarse variety of NBPW, restricted proportion of BSW and BaRW. The new potting traits were the emergence of coarse Grey Ware and a variety of shapes in Red Wares. The noteworthy shapes of the latter were pear-shaped vase with variant, *karahi* with applied loop-handle, carinated *handi*, saggar-baked dish and shallow bowls with flat base (Narain & Roy. 1976: 24-25). Structural activities in the form of mud wall, mud floor and several ring wells mark some advancement over the earlier phase. The use of mould for making

figurative clay images and a number of un-inscribed copper cast coins are other important indications of urbanization. This phase has been dated between *circa* 400 and 200 BCE (Narain & Roy. 1976: 25).

Varanasi according to the ancient literature was a flourishing city during the time of Buddha and Mahavira. Ghosh has stated that among the few features of an early historic city, . . . “The most persistence feature is the *parikha*(moat). . . and the *prakara*(rampart)” (Ghosh. 1973: 51). Traces of a wooden platform parallel to the river Ganga was exposed at the site, which was later covered by heap of earth. The excavators have identified this structure as embankment to protect the settlement from the floods (Narain & Roy. 1976: 22-23). If this is accepted, then one of the parameters for identification of an urban centre appears to be lacking at Rajghat during the *Maha-janapada* times. The morphology of the mound of Rajghat may explain the paucity of rampart.

The location of the capital city of Kashi-*janapada* was very strategic for more than one reason. The settlement was occupying a raised ground encircled on three sides by river channel. North and south by the rivers Ganga and Varuna, respectively, and east by the confluence of the two (Fig.17). To the western side was perhaps dug a moat for the protection of the city area. Such a protective natural and artificial geomorphology alone suggests politico-administrative importance of the settlement.

The layout and imposing structures are other diagnostic features of a city, which are also not quite distinct in the archaeological records of Ganga plain, as well as in Kashi-*kshetra*. The size of the settlement at Rajghat appears to have enlarged during the NBPW period, fulfilling one of the criteria of urbanization. It has been suggested by other scholars also that the paucity of structural remains during the mature phase of the NBPW was due to the use of perishable material. I have discussed in my earlier publications that in case of Varanasi one gets elaborate descriptions of wooden structures in Buddhist literature. The *Jatakas* mention large colonies of carpenters in Varanasi, who were constructing timber houses for the city dwellers. They were preparing and bringing wooden architectural parts from the forests located upstream of the city by navigation and constructed one or two-storied buildings as per the requirement (Jayaswal. 2011: 65-67). Even during Late and Post NBPW periods when brick was used in building structures, mud and wood were infused in large quantities. For instance, the



Fig.16 : NBPW shards, Period II, Rajghat

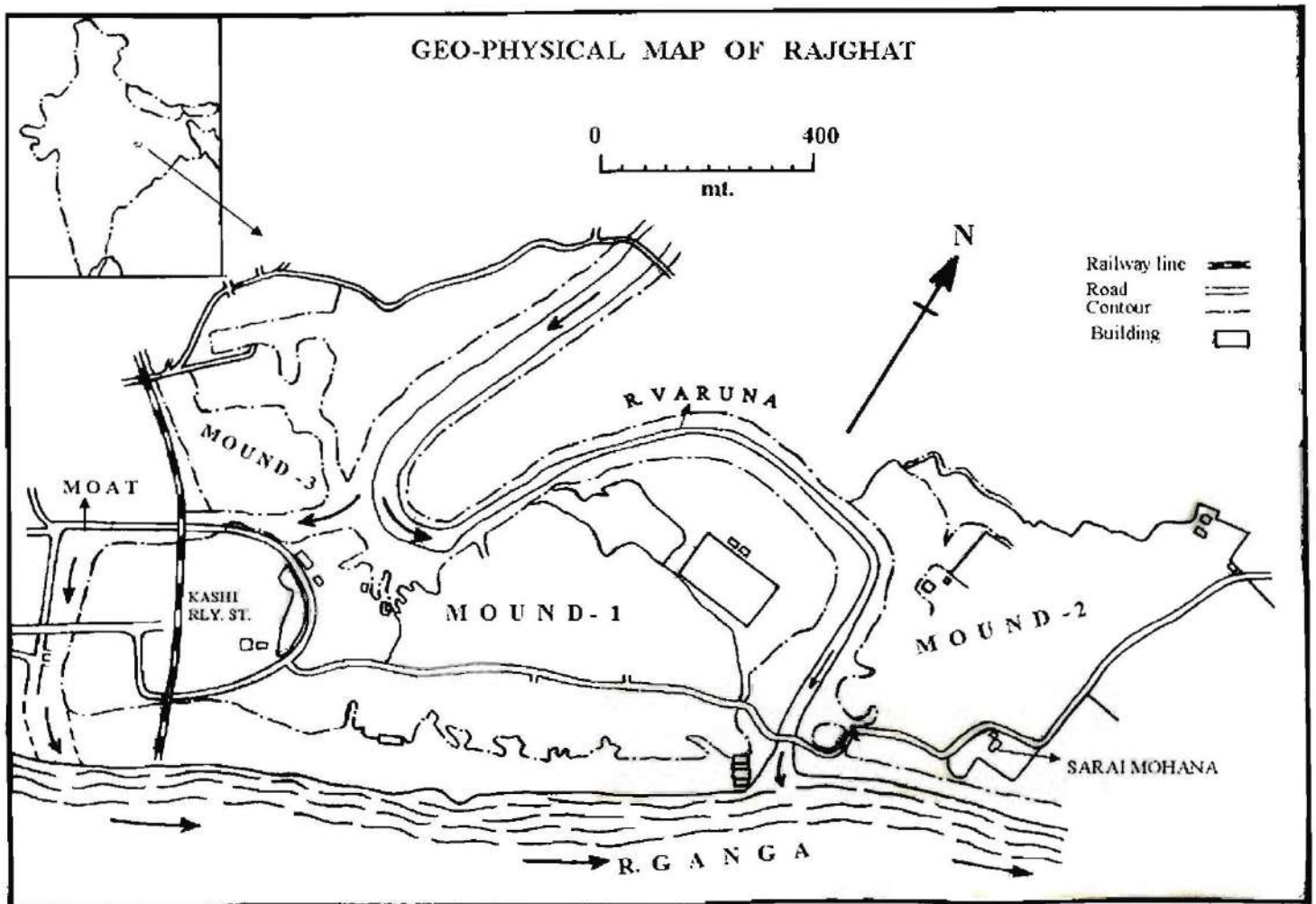


Fig. 17 : Contour map of Rajghat mound

structures of Maurya and Shunga times exposed at Aktha and Ramnagar suggested that over the mud wall of half height was paved two courses of bricks before cutting holes for fixing posts to hold thatched roof and upper part of the shelter (Jayaswal. 2011: Fig.46). The use of wood with bricks and stone continued till at least Gupta period in Ganga plain, as was noted at Bhitari (Jayaswal. 2001: Pl.VB). Though physical remains of structures are not found, glimpses of flourishing settlement with dwellings in proper orientation may be ascertained from the literary descriptions. It may, therefore, be held that Rajghat had perhaps marched across the rural threshold during Mature NBPW period, but had yet to attain the status of a cosmopolitan.

The other well demarcated NBPW cultural horizon of *Kashi-kshetra* was exposed at Oriyaghat, Ramnagar. Besides NBPW, the main ceramic, BSW, Grey Ware, a thick variety, both painted and unpainted, were associated with *Janapada* and *Maha-janapada* levels. The other findings from Ramnagar included pottery-disc, terracotta ball, beads of semi-precious stones, faience, glass and terracotta and variety of utility articles made of bone, iron and copper, shell, glass and stone. The structural remains were found in the form of rammed floors and post-holes. The 3.60 m thick deposit of the period exposed at Oriyaghat, revealed two phases. The earlier phase (Layers 15-13) of Period II was characterized by classical variety of NBPW, in which fragments of monochrome shards with and without paintings were noteworthy. While from the later phase (Layers 12-10), thick and degenerated NBPW potsherds in restricted count were retrieved. Traces of embankment made of rammed stone and heap of earth were encountered at Oriyaghat (Fig.18) and Golaghat (Fig.20). This structure was dated to the late NBPW as it was super imposing the mature NBPW phase. The mature NBPW phase of Ramnagar appears to be similar to Period IB of Rajghat, and the later to the Period IC.

A flourishing craft production settlement during *Janapada* and *Maha-janapada* times (Period II), Ramnagar was perhaps a *mandi-grama* (market-village). While digging traces for production of the *deluxe* ware NBPW (Fig.19), and semi-precious stone beads were obtained. Located on one of the major navigation route of north India, the river Ganga, pottery and beads and similar other items were easy to trade from this site. An interesting observation was also made at Oriyaghat. The NBPW pottery, though produced locally in the periphery of the

settlement, was not utilized by the local inhabitants, suggesting its production basically for export.

### **The Urban Ambience: Maurya-Shunga/Late-Post NBPW Period**

Post-NBPW levels are well demarcated in *Kashi-kshetra*. All the three major sites, Rajghat (Period II), Aktha (Period III) and Ramnagar (Period III), where Maurya-Shunga remains have been unearthed are dated between *circa* third century BCE and beginning of the CE. Monuments at Sarnath and sandstone quarries at Chunar further unveiled process of stone carving in this period.

Period II of Rajghat is significant as it has revealed that around third century BCE, the settlement entered into the stage of urbanization (Narain & Roy.



Fig.18 : Rampart of NPB period, Ramnagar



Fig.19 : NPBW kiln, Period II, Ramnagar



Fig. 20. Remains of Embankment, Golaghat, Ramnagar

1976: 26-28). Traces of population growth and expansion of settlement with use of durable medium for construction have been recorded from the site (Narain & Roy. 1976: 26). Profuse use of burnt bricks (50 x 31 x 5 and 48 x 28 x 5 cm), houses built on mud platforms or thick foundations and terracotta perforated tiles (for covering roof) were characteristic features. But, decline in the earthen wares was striking. Not only use of Grey Wares vanished, but the Red Wares now became more utilitarian and comprised large vases, basins and bowls with straight sides. Increase in trade and affluence in economy is reflected by large number of seals and sealing and copper cast coins. A marked development of lapidary is noticeable in decorative beads made of agate, carnelian, chert, coral, crystal, lapis-lazuli, quartz, shell, glass and faience.

The Post-NBPW period of Ramnagar, is represented by 2.44 m thick deposit. The most imposing structures of the period were the platforms/embankments composed of rammed stone, burnt clay, and clay heap (about 60 cm thickness) located towards eastern and southern periphery of Oriyaghat mound (Figs.18 &20) and northern end of the Golaghat mound. The rammed base of these was perhaps covered with compact clay. It is difficult to visualize their actual height, as after falling in disuse in the subsequent period, these were encroached by Kushan structures. The fortifications, of about 10 m width, perhaps encircled both the settlements individually. The fortifications unearthed at Ramnagar are much smaller in size in comparison to the fortification of the early historic city sites of the middle Ganga plain (Jayaswal & Kumar. 2012). But, there are references in the ancient texts that small settlements (Ghosh. 1973: 62-63), and even villages were also fortified (Pande. 2001: 267-8). It may be held that the ancient settlements of Ramnagar, in spite of being less-extensive, were protected by small-sized fortifications.

Contrary to Rajghat which appears to have witnessed urbanization during this period, Aktha retained rural character of the earlier stage, in Period III also. However, a sudden increase in various activities and expansion and consolidation of the settlement are noteworthy. Besides, culture traits of the earlier period appear to undergo change. For instance, black pottery with lustre, so characteristic of the *Janapada* times discontinued. *Deluxe* quality ceases to exist, and the Red Wares were marked by utilitarian tendency. Finding of coins not only support the dating, but also suggest that coins in good amount were used at Aktha,

particularly during Shunga phase. The variety of coins includes Punch Marked silver coins from lower levels, and 18 copper cast coins of *Janapada* series from later part (Shunga horizons). Though located at the junction of land routes connecting various parts of the Ganga plain and in spite of this advantage, Aktha did not develop into a trade centre as is reflected by other categories of antiquities.

Two phases which were demarcated in the exposed remains of Period III at Aktha, may roughly be assigned, respectively, to Maurya and Shunga periods. In the earlier phase, i.e. Mauryan, an enclosure wall towards the western side (traced up to the length of about 10 meter) and another wall at the southern side (98.4 m long) of the settlement were exposed. Within this enclosure were clustered the dwelling shelters. Houses were characterized by paved floors, mud packing for the enclosure wall, and placement of complete large bricks length-wise in one or two courses, over which post-holes were dug. The houses thus appear to have had half lower walls over which roof of tiles or thatch was tied with the help of wooden posts. This practice marks transition between the earlier structures made with mats and grass and the later buildings of the Kushan times constructed entirely of bricks.

The settlement of Aktha during Maurya-Shunga times had progressed towards comparatively stable shelters than the earlier period. Also, the residential area in the rural setup was demarcated and protected by an enclosure wall. This wall was not very imposing as to suggest fortification of urban sites, but corroborates literary descriptions in which even *grama* are said to have *pura* (Pande. 2001: 267). However, no organized planning of structures could be noticed except for soakage pits and ring wells which were located outside the periphery of dwelling area. Strong religious bias at this settlement was evident in the form of ritual pots, floors with burnt alignments, placement of bricks and post-holes. It may therefore, be conjectured that while Rajghat developed into a city during Mauryan times, Aktha remained a hermitage-village. To be more specific, it was a *parava-grama* or the resort village with religious bias.

The above discussion suggests that the Post-NBPW period of *Kashikshetra* had reached the stage of urbanization which can be identified in the archaeological findings without a question mark. The socio-economic complexities which developed with the formation of kingdom during the Mauryan times resulted in the makeup of a flourishing city with permanent dwellings having civic facilities, material affluence reflected in coinage and

scripts and also mass production of clay figurines. These archaeological remains appear to fulfill most of the parameters laid down for the identification of urbanization.

The hierarchy of settlements briefed by Ghosh on the basis of ancient Indian literature into three socio-economic units were *grama*, *nigama* and *nagara* (Ghosh. 1973: 46-47). It is also said that *nigama* in its makeup is close to a city, and means a market-place. I have mentioned above that Aktha throughout its history appears to be a *parava-grama* or *pattana* (resort settlement). Ramnagar was a *nigama* or a *mandi-grama* on the navigation route of north India. It also fulfils the criterion of a *shakha-nagara* as it was a craft-cum-market establishment near the cosmopolitan. Undeniably, the *mula-nagara*, or the capital township, was Rajghat. Varanasi, with its satellite settlements appears to have attained undisputed urban status, at least archaeologically, during Mauryan period. Interestingly, the city at this point of time ceases to be a capital and maintains the reputation of being a centre of crafts and trading hub. Also, the glorious period of the *mula-nagara* was yet to follow (in Kushan period) when the city became densely populated and was strewn with numerous brick-structures identified as residences of affluent and general masses with civic facilities and market places (Jayaswal. 2011: 121-125). The nucleus of Varanasi after Kushan period shifted towards west, i.e. Dashashwamedha and Mir Ghat area, as is attested by the recent excavations at Saraswati Udyan.

*Note: This theme was prepared for Shri Amlanand Ghosh Memorial Lecture for 2018. Limited copies of the text were circulated to the audience hence, in view of making it available to the interested readers, an edited and revised version of the same is presented here.*

## References

- Apte, V.M. 1971. "The Age of the Rik-Samhita". Book V. Ch. XIX. *The Vedic Age. The History and Culture of the Indian People*. Bharati Vidya Bhavan. Bombay, pp.387-406.
- Deva, Krishna. 1944. 'Excavations at Rajghat near Benares' *Annual Bibliography of Indian History and Indology*. Bombay Historical Society. Bombay. Vol.III: XLI-LI.
- Eggeling, Julius (trans.). 1882. *The Shatapatha-Brahmana. According To The Text Of The Madhyandina School*. Vol.V. The Sacred Books of the East. Vol.44. (Reprinted 1990). Atlantic Publishers &

Distributors. New Delhi.

- Ghosh, A. 1973. *The City in Early Historic India*. (Reprint 1990). Indian Institute of Advance Study and Munshiram Monoharlal Publishers. Shimla and New Delhi.
- Horner, I.B. 1954. *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhim-Nikaya)*. Vol.1. Pali Text Society (Reprinted 1995). Oxford.
- Indian Archaeology 1992-93: A Review*. 1979. 'Excavations at Sarnath, District Varanasi. (ed.) Director General, Archaeological Survey of India. New Delhi: 98-99.
- Jayaswal, Vidula. 1998. *From Stone Quarry to Sculpturing Workshop : (A Report on the archaeological investigations around Chunar, Varanasi & Sarnath)*. Agam Kala Prakashan. Delhi.
- Jayaswal, Vidula. 2001. *The Royal Temples of the Gupta Period : Excavations at Bhitari*. Aryan Books International. New Delhi.
- Jayaswal, Vidula. 2009. *Ancient Varanasi: An Archaeological Perspectives (Excavations at Aktha)*. Aryan Books International. New Delhi.
- Jayaswal, Vidula. 2009a. 'Antiquity of Varanasi as revealed by the Excavations at Aktha (2008-09)'. *Purātattova*. Bulletin of Indian Archaeological Society. No.39. pp.141-146.
- Jayaswal, Vidula. 2011. *Adikashi se Varanasi tak*. (Hindi). Aryan Books International. New Delhi.
- Jayaswal, Vidula. 2015. *Buddhist Landscape of Varanasi*. Aryan Books International. New Delhi.
- Jayaswal, Vidula. 2017. 'Early Historic Archaeology of Varanasi: Ceramics as Culture Identity'. *From Local to Global. Papers in Asian History and Culture*. Prof. A.K. Narain Commemoration Volume. Eds. Kamal Sheel, C. Willmen and K. Zysk. Vol.1. Buddhist World Press. Delhi, pp.66-99.
- Jayaswal, Vidula and Manoj Kumar. 2012. 'Urban Traits and Kushan Settlements of Ganga Plain'. *Glory of the Kushans: Recent Discoveries and Interpretations*. Ed. Vidula Jayaswal. Aryan Books International. New Delhi. pp.343-360.
- Jayaswal, Vidula and B.R. Mani. 2016. *Early History of Varanasi: Recent Excavations at Rajghat*. Aryan Books International and Jnana-Pravaha. New Delhi and Varanasi.
- Jayaswal, Vidula, U.K. Shukla and M. Sharma. 2016. *Varanasi and Ganga: A Geomorphological and Archaeological Investigation in Varanasi*. Aryan Books International and Jnana-Pravaha. New Delhi and Varanasi.

- Lal, B.B. 1993. *Excavations at Śringaverapura (1977-86)*. Vol.I. Archaeological Survey of India. New Delhi.
- Mani, B.R. 2011. "Review of Book *Kampil-Archaeological Study of a Site in the Ancient Kingdom of Panchala*. Written by Dallaporta, Annamaria & Lucio Marcato (2011)", *Purātattva* No.41, New Delhi. pp.234-235.
- Narain A.K. and T.N. Roy. 1976. *Excavations At Rajghat (1957-58,1960-65)*. Part I. *The Cuttings, Stratification and Structures*. Banaras Hindu University. Varanasi.
- Narain A.K. and T.N. Roy. 1977. *Excavations At Rajghat (1957-58, 1960-65)*. Part II. *The Pottery*. Banaras Hindu University. Varanasi.
- Pande, G.C. 2001. *Vedic Samskriti* (in Hindi). Lokbharati. Allahabad.
- Pusalkar, A.D. 1971. 'From the Accession of Parikshit to the end of the Bārhadhratha Dynasty'. *The Vedic Age. The History and Culture of the Indian People*. Vol.I. Ch.XIV. Bharati Vidya Bhavan. Bombay: pp.271-323.
- Singh, P. and A.K. Singh. 2004. *The Archaeology of Middle Ganga Plain - New Perspectives (Excavations at Agiabir)*. Indian Institute of Advanced Study and Aryan Books International. Shimla and New Delhi.
- Sircar, D.C. 1968. 'The Śaka Satraps of Western India', *The Age of Imperial Unity*. The History and Culture of Indian People. Vol.II (fourth edition), Ch.XII. Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan. Bombay: 175-189.
- Sircar, D.C. 1990. 'North India After the Kushana', *The Age of Imperial Unity*. The History and Culture of Indian People. Vol.II. Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan. Bombay.
- Tiwari, R. et.al. 2000. "Excavations at Malhar, District Chandauli (U.P.) 1999: A Preliminary Report". *Pragdhara*. The Journal of the U.P. State Archaeological Department. No.10. Lucknow, pp.69-98.