Excavations at Basadila Tilatar, District-Gorakhpur Uttar Pradesh (India)

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I. Introduction

The ancient site of Basadila Tilatar (Lat. 26° 47' 10" N and Long. 83° 55' 30" E) is located in Sardar Nagar block of Chauri-Chaura sub-division of Gorakhpur district, Uttar Pradesh, about 25 Km. east of the city headquarter of Gorakhpur (Fig. 1). Basadila Tilatar is about 500 m east of road going to Sonbarsa from Phutahawa market, which is about .20 km east of Gorakhpur on Gorakhpur-Deoria road.

The site came to light for its wooden structure during the renovation and enlargement of a pond to the western fringe of the village Basdila Tilatar by the villagers under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of the Government in 2010-11. The pond measuring 65 m east-west and 55 m north-south has an average depth of 3.5 m having steep slope on its sides (Plate I). The evidence of wooden structure made of sal tree planks was found towards the western side of the pond.

Fig 1: Location map of Basdila Tilatar, Gorakhpur, U.P. (INDIA)

The villagers came across the wooden structure towards the western side of the pond while digging the pond to make pucca steps to the western side of the pond, some 2 to 2.50 m below the present surface. When the Department of Ancient History, Archaeology and Culture, Gorakhpur University was informed by the village Pradhan, the author visited the site with his research students in June 2011. Considering the significance of the site with wooden structure a proposal to excavate the site was submitted to the Archaeological Survey of India to understand the real context and nature of the structure and stratigraphy and archaeological context of the site. The excavation was conducted in a unique manner by Dr. Shitala Prasad Singh, Excavation Director and Associate Professor, Department of Ancient History, Archaeology and Culture, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur and the author of the excavation under the supervision of Prof. Vipula Dubey, Head, Department of Ancient History, Archaeology & Culture, D.D.U. Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur and Prof. J.N. Pal,Professor and Ex. Head, Department of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology, University of Allahabad. Shri V.K. Khatri, Dr. Harendra Yadav, Raj Kumar, Jitendra Kumar Yadav, Ravi Prakash and Kamalesh Kumar also participated in the excavations.
II. Excavations and Cultural Sequence

Four trenches (5x5m.), named A1, A2, B1 and B2 were laid in the area where wooden structure was found. As the wooden structure was found confined in Trench A1, it was selected for the excavation. To understand the stratigraphic position of the wooden structure baulks measuring 50 cm across the structure both north-south and east-west were left. Thus the Trench A1 was divided in four segments which were named as a, b, c and d (Fig. 2, Plate II). All the four segments of Trench A1 were excavated.

Segment a: Segment a lies in the north-east portion of the trench. As this segment has the area lying outside the wooden structure, it is significant to understand the nature of the structure. The layers 1 to 4 and partly layer 5 were excavated in this segment. These layers measuring 75 cm, 80 cm, 65 cm, 40 cm and 35 cm are compact deposits of yellowish and brownish clay which yielded potsherds of northern black polished ware and associated red ware. Further excavation in this segment was not possible due to water logging.

Fig. 2: Plan of Trench A1, Basdila Tilatar, 2013

Segment b: This segment lying in south-east part of the Trench A1 contains major portion within the wooden structure (Plate III). The excavation in this segment was done mainly within the structure in its southern part. At the depth of 2.20 m the plank of wooden structure was located. The width of the wooden slabs is 40 cm and the thickness is 30 cm. There are chools on the corners cut in the slabs for fixing tightly the planks from each other. The space within the structure is 2.90 m X 1.32 m. Deep digging in this segment was done upto the depth of 5.80 m below the datum. In total 17 sal wood planks were found. The nature of whole of deposit here is marked by alternate silt and fine muddy clay deposits (Fig. 3). It is very difficult to demarcate the layers here, because of the water logging and silty nature of deposits from top to bottom. The antiquities, therefore, obtained in this segment were recorded depth wise. Some of the artifacts recovered from this segment within the wooden structure are as under:

- At the depth of 2.72 m below datum: shell, charcoal and potsherds.
- At the depth of 3.36 m below datum: a small vase (Lota) of fine red ware.
- At the depth of 4.51 m below datum: burnt clay lumps and leaf impression on wet blackish clay clod (Plate IV).
- At the depth of 4.72 m below datum: burnt clay lumps, potsherds, charred wood and leaf impression on clay.
- At the depth of 4.98 m below datum: charred wood and animal bone fragment. Two pieces of charred wood, measuring 29 cm and 24 cm respectively and having width of 10 cm are part of a window, which have circular grooves with 2.5 cm diameter and 5 cm depth (Plate V).
- At the depth of 5.04 m below datum: spouted vessel of red ware (Plate VI).
- At the depth of 5.11 m below datum: small vase with rope on its neck.
- At the depth of 5.13 m below datum: potsherds of red ware and grey ware.
- At the depth of 5.15 m below datum: fish bone (Plate VII).
- At the depth of 5.17 m below datum: turtle bone (Plate VIII) and bird bones (Plate IX).
- At the depth of 5.32 m below datum: bird bone with cut mark.
- At the depth of 5.37 m below datum: fish and bird bones
- At the depth of 5.38 m below datum: quern fragment of sand stone and iron knife (Plate X).
- At the depth of 5.42 m below datum: leaf impression on wet clay, potsherds, bird bone and stem of plants.
- At the depth of 5.50 m below datum: charcoal, mango seed, charred wood, potsherds and a complete pot with lid.
- At the depth of 5.55 m below datum: bowls of Northern Black Polished ware (Plate XI), pots of grey ware and red ware and iron arrowhead and nail (Plate XII).
- At the depth of 5.74 m below datum: deep basin, globular jar and potsherds.
- At the depth of 5.80 m below datum: small and medium sized vases.

Fig. 3: Section (on a-b) of Trench A1, Facing East, Basdila Tilatar, 2013

Segments c and d: These segments are in south-west and north-west parts of Trench A1. As the segments c and d are on the steep slope its top deposit measuring from 75 cm to 1 m is a recent dump yielding brick bats, potsherds and cloth pieces. Layers 1 measuring about 1 m is a deposit of light brown clay yielding small potsherds of red ware. This layer has revealed a good number of terracotta human and animal figurines, terracotta lamp, perforated discs of terracotta and terracotta beads (Plate XIII, Plate XIV and Plate XV). Layer 2
of light yellowish clay has a thickness of about 80 cm. Layer 3 has a thickness of 65 cm. It is a compact yellowish clay deposit and has yielded red ware and grey ware potsherds. Layer 4 having a thickness of 40 to 45 cm is a compact brownish clay deposit yielding potsherds and fragments of charcoal and bone fragments. Layer 5 was excavated only upto the thickness of 35 cm. As there was water logging below this depth the excavation could not be done below 3.42 m below datum in segments c, d and a. Trial digging at BDL 2, about 2 km east of the village Basadila Tilatar at a raised ground revealed burnt bricks of Kushana period and Kushana pottery. It can be concluded that the site was occupied from early NBPW period to Gupta period. As the name of the site (Basadila Tilatar, meaning the village was occupied after removing a mound) suggests the occupational deposit was removed before the present village was re-inhabited. The artefacts mainly the ceramic industry suggests that the wooden structure brought to light in Trench A1 was constructed in the early NBPW phase and it was in constant use up to Gupta period through the Sunga-Kushana periods. The material remains recovered from the site may tentatively be divided into three cultural periods: (1) NBPW, (2) Sunga-Kushana and (3) Gupta.

The findings of the excavation are of much archaeological and historical interest. Though firm stratification could not be obtained due to water logging, the earliest evidence seems to be that of Northern Black polished Ware (NBP) of about 6th Cent. B.C. Then there is evidence of Sunga-Kushana occupation and sporadic evidence of Gupta period. The pottery from the site can be divided in red ware, NBP Ware, black-and-red ware and grey ware. The other archaeological material include animal, fish, turtle and bird bones, iron objects and terracotta. It can be concluded that the excavations carried out at the Early Historic site of Basadila Tilatar, District Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, have brought to light new features like agriculture objects and terracotta. It can be concluded that the site was occupied from early NBPW period to Gupta period. As the name of the site (Basadila Tilatar, meaning the village was occupied after removing a mound) suggests the occupational deposit was removed before the present village was re-inhabited. The artefacts mainly the ceramic industry suggests that the wooden structure brought to light in Trench A1 was constructed in the early NBPW phase and it was in constant use up to Gupta period through the Sunga-Kushana periods. The material remains recovered from the site may tentatively be divided into three cultural periods: (1) NBPW, (2) Sunga-Kushana and (3) Gupta.

### III. Distribution of Potsherds other Scientific Studies

**Table 1: Main Excavated sites showing the Main Ceramics of Iron Age in Middle Ganga Plain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Cultural Periods</th>
<th>Ceramics</th>
<th>Common Shapes</th>
<th>Decoration</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sohagaura</td>
<td>Pd. II</td>
<td>Black Slipped, Black and Red Ware</td>
<td>Jars, bowls, dish-on-stands and few sherds of globular vessels, vases etc.</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Chauryedi 1985: 103-04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pd. III</td>
<td>Black and Red ware, Black Slipped Ware, Red ware and Grey ware.</td>
<td>Variety of bowls, globular vessels, basins and jars.</td>
<td>Rows of dots/ dashes in ochre colour, short strokes, linear pattern and applique patterns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chirand</td>
<td>Pd. II</td>
<td>Black and Red ware, Black Slipped Ware and Red Ware</td>
<td>Dish-on-stand, long-necked jar, lipped bowl, basin, bowl on ring-base, spouted vessel, perforated pot, lipped jug etc. lotas with high neck and corrugated shoulder.</td>
<td>Groups of dashes and wavy or straight lines in white on black surface.</td>
<td>Gosh 1989 : 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jhansi</td>
<td>Pd. II</td>
<td>Black Slipped ware; Black Burnished ware, Red Ware and Black and Red Ware</td>
<td>Bowls with varying profile i.e. pedestalal, convex sided and hemispherical splayed out rim; lipped vessels and footed and perforated vessels etc.</td>
<td>Few Red Ware sherds containing painting in black pigment.</td>
<td>Misra et.al. 1995-96:64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khairadih</td>
<td>Pd.I</td>
<td>Black and Red ware is divisible into four categories i.e. A, B, C &amp; D which showed an improvement in their preceding one in surface treatment and clay processing, Black Slipped ware (both two are plain as well as painted), Red Ware (slipped and unslipped) and Black ware distinct from Black Slipped ware</td>
<td>BRW : various types of bowls (perforated, legged, ring base and small channeled), vases basins and dishes</td>
<td>Wavy line, oblique stroke and semi circles.</td>
<td>Singh 1987-88 : 28-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BSW : corrugated bowl, flat base bowl, flanged bowl, straight sided bowl, hemispherical bowl and convex sided bowl</td>
<td>Group of slanting or oblique lines, concentric arches and solid dots applied by finger tips.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RW : vase with flared out rim, perforated legged bowl, pedestal base bowl, bowl with globular or avoid body, deep and shallow basins.</td>
<td>Group of multiple vertical storkes in cream colour. Some applique design (twisted rope) has also been found</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Phase</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senewar</td>
<td>Pd. II</td>
<td>Besides the continuation of earlier ceramics, new wares are Black Slipped ware, Burnished Black ware (both are plain as well as painted), Black painted red commonly known as Black on Red and unslipped and slipped Red ware which latter being plain and painted both.</td>
<td>Dish-on-stand, bowls with pinched lip, straight sided deep bowl; vases with vertical featureless long rim and bulging body, splayed out rim; Various kinds of dishes, basins, tubular spouted vessels etc.</td>
<td>Singhal 1995-96</td>
<td>79-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agtabir</td>
<td>Pd.I</td>
<td>White painted Black and Red ware (mostly medium to coarse fabric), Black Slipped ware (limited quantity but in fine fabric) and Red ware.</td>
<td>BRW : bowls, storage, jars, lipped basins and dish-on-stand BSW : deep bowls, lota shaped vessels and pedestal bowls Red ware : legged perforated bowls with several performances at the base and vases.</td>
<td>Tripathi &amp; Upadhyay 2009</td>
<td>52-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahuradeva</td>
<td>Pd. II</td>
<td>Plain and painted Black Slipped ware, Red ware, Black and Red ware and Black and Greyware.</td>
<td>Increasing number of dish on stand, bowl on stand, pedestal bowl, perforated legged vessel, lipped vessel, disc based bowl, button based lids and spouts.</td>
<td>Tewari et. al. 2005-06</td>
<td>72-73</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pd. III</td>
<td>Same as above period with slight variation in fabric and legation.</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
<td>Tewari et. al. 1996-97</td>
<td>80-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raja-Nal-Ka-Tila</td>
<td>Pd.I</td>
<td>Black and Red, (plain and painted) Black Slipped ware, Red ware, Grey ware. Rusticated, rippled and burnished varieties are presented in considerable proportion.</td>
<td>Bowls and water vessels, storage jars and few miniature pots. Except the depiction of a deer, geometric pattern, pot firing incised design are also evident Paintings generally executed in black pigment.</td>
<td>Tewari et. al. 1999-2000</td>
<td>70-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pd. II</td>
<td>Black and Red ware (plain and painted), Black Slipped ware, Grey ware, Red ware.</td>
<td>Bowls, dishes, vases, conical based pots, perforated and footed pots, button-based goblets and footed bowls etc. Mainly geometric patterns linear designs.</td>
<td>Tewari et. al. 2005-06</td>
<td>72-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malhar</td>
<td>Pd.I</td>
<td>Red ware (plain andcorded), Black and Red ware (plain and corded) and black ware; mostly pots are made on slow wheel. However, handmade variety is also represented.</td>
<td>Various types of bowl and vases. A few dish-on-stand, beaker, lipped bowl, perforated legged bowl etc. Thick and thin bonds inner or outer surface of the pot sherds in mostly black pigment.</td>
<td>Tewari et. al. 2005-06</td>
<td>72-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pd. II</td>
<td>In this period new feature has come i.e. Black Slipped ware and fine Grey ware with the continuation of earlier ceramics.</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
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Acknowledgements

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Fig. 1: 1-3 Dishes (N.B.F.W.), 4-6 Bowls (N.B.F.W.), 7-10 Dishes (Black Slipped Ware), Hasanlila Tilatar
Fig. 2 : 1 Basin (B.S.W), 2-4 vases (R.S.W), 5 Bowl (R.S.W), 6-7 vases (Red ware), 8 Bowl (Red Ware), Basadila Tilatar
Fig. 3: 1-3 Vases (Red Ware), Basadila Tilatar
Fig. 4: 1-4 Vases (Red Ware), 5-6 Bowls (B.S.W), 7 Lota (B.S.W), 8 Vase (Red Ware), Basadila Tilatar
Fig. 5: 1-3 Bowls/Basins (R.S.W) 4 vase (Red Ware) 5 Lid/Bowl (Red Ware), Basadilla Tilatar

Fig. 6: 1 Handli/Basin (Red Ware), 2 Basin (Red Ware), 3 Handli/Matka (Red Ware), Basadilla Tilatar
Fig. 7: 1 Bowl (Red Ware), 2 Vase (Red Ware), 3 Vase/Handi (Red Ware), 4-6 Vase (Red Ware), Basadila Tilatar
Fig. 9: 1 Lid (Red Ware), 2-3 Basins/ Handi (R.S.W.), 4 Bowl (Red Ware), Basadila Tilatar

Fig. 10: 1-2 Basins (Red Slipped Ware), 3 Diga (Red Ware), 4 Basin (R.S.W), 5 Vase (Red Ware)