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Ghosī-kā-Ṭīlā – A Protohistoric Settlement of Sarayūpāra Plain : An Archaeological Investigation

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The ancient settlement at Ghosī-kā-Ṭīlā (26°5', 83°30') called Nahuṣa-kā-Ṭīlā is situated on the bed of Choṭī Sarayū (Tons) river in district Mau, Uttar Pradesh (Map.1). An exploration was conducted by the present team at Ghosī-kā-Ṭīlā in the month of February 2011 that resulted some new dimensions. This mound lies at the back of the modern Ghosī bāzāra and shows a fortified area (c. 500 m East-West by c. 700 m North-South) (Chakrabarti, 1998, 103-118). A high mud rampart with openings, which possibly represents gateways on three sides, except the east, encompasses the mound. The rampart, which is basically made of mud but has a brick wall on top still rises 7-8 m from the level of the field and yields Black and Red Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware from its core. The towers are visible at the corners, and one could find northwest corners. Apparently, there was entrance on each of the four sides.

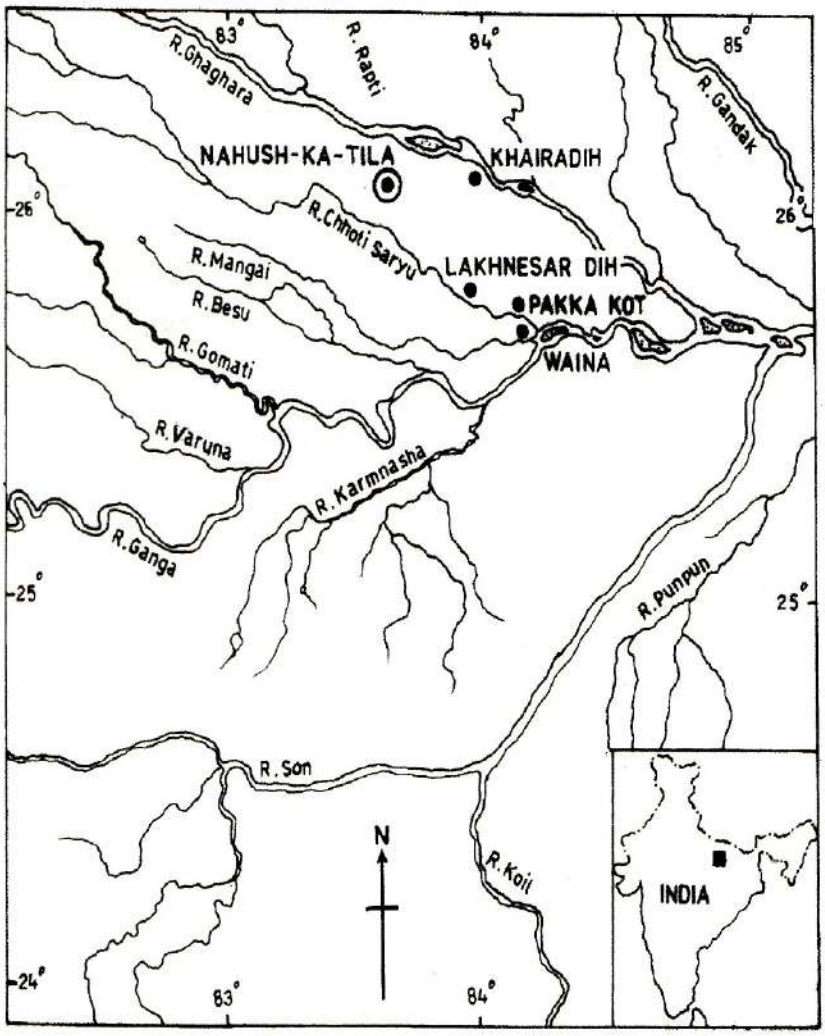
The Eco-System

Very little drainage of Azamgarh and Mau, the two adjacent districts, fall into river Ghāgharā. The only streams joining it are but a few minor nālās in the Kachāra of the north, such as Badrauhan and the Haha, and two small streams, the Pharhī and Basnai, which drain parganās Nāthūpura and Ghosī (Singh, 1965). While the drainage lines are in the initial stage of swamp the country in their neighborhood is, during the rainy season, little better than a large shallow lake.

Lakes

Lakes and jhīlas of the Azamgarh and Mau are not only numerous, but in many cases they are of considerable size. The more important of them are, in the south tract, known as Kotail, Jamuawan, Gumadih, Kumbh, Pukh, Asaune and the largest of all the Gambhiran. In the northern section of the Azamgarh, however, the only lakes that deserve mention are Koila, Kasila or Gasila, Kaili, Duhia, Birna, Ara Telhnam and Manchil. The Salona Tāla in Sagarī tahsīla is estimated to be over 3,600 meters long by about 2,750 meters broad, its depth being some

6 meters. The Pakrī Pewā Tāla in Ghosī tahsīla is 9.6 km long and 3.2 km broad while the Narja Tāla in Muhammadābād tahsīla and Ratoi Tāla in Ghosī tahsīla cover some 2023 hectares each. It is apparent from the above that the districts of Azamgarh and Mau are dotted with a large number of lakes, ponds or jhīlas of varying sizes. This does suggest some kind of a change in the drainage system causing formation of these water bodies.



Urban Settlement of Sarayūpār Plain

A widespread change resulting into the shifting of the course of Saryū/Ghāgharā towards a more northwestwardly direction and assumption of its deserted channel by Tons/Choṭī Saryū is the consequence. Many parts lying in this sector were left high and dry (Singh, 1973). There are reasons to assume that these large water bodies are indicative of the ancient channel of Saryū (Ghāgharā). That Saryū irrigated this land once is also indicated by the name Choṭī Saryū bestowed on the present river flowing to this area today.

The fact there was change in the course of river Ghāgharā has also been attested to by the discovery of some of the archaeological sites on the bank of the old Saryū through which Ghāgharā was flowing (as observed by the geographers). These sites range from the end of second millennium or beginning of first millennium BCE to the medieval period. Devi Prasad Singh (Singh, D.P., 1986, pp.345-355) has reported seven sites along with the old Saryū (Azamgarh Distt.), i.e. Brahmapur, Laxmanpur, Maharājganj, Ghosī, Nandana, Bilariāganj, Baniāpur and Boehnour. From most of these sites BRW, BSW, NBPW, GW and RW have been found. This indicates that the river was flowing in the present course of old Saryū up to Gupta period and then it changed its course.

Geographical and Ancient Human Settlement of Sarayūpāra Plain

The Sarayūpāra plain forms a distinct geographical entity, which is bounded on the south and the west by the Ghāgharā river, on the east by the Gaṇḍak and extends up to the foothills of the Himalayas. It is drained by several rivers like the Ghāgharā, the Kuwana, the Ami, the Rapti and the Choṭī Gaṇḍak. This region which is part of the vast Ganga plains attained its present form during the post-Tertiary period when this deep trough was filled up by fine alluvium brought down from the Himalayas, with an average thickness of 1300-1400 mts. The meandering of the rivers in Prehistoric times formed innumerable ox-bow lakes, some of which are perennial. These lakes are rich in aquatic fauna and the lands around them were covered with wild grasses, many of which had edible grains. With the onset of the milder climate of the Holocene, the marshy land gradually turned into good grassland which attracted small animals. Mesolithic hunters inhabited some of these areas, the evidences of which have been found on several sites in Pratapgarh district. In course of time, Neolithic man also inhabited these areas, the evidence of which has been found in the lower levels of Sahagaurā, Imlīḍīha, Khairāḍīha, Bhunāḍīha, Wainā, Pakkākoṭ, Lahurādeva and Narhan.

As archaeologists, we have been responsible for locating and excavating ancient human settlements in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh comprising the present-day districts of Basti, Siddharth Nagar, Gorakhpur, Maharājganj, Mau, Ballia, Mirzapur and Varanasi for well over three decades (Singh, 1994, 2004 and 1996). The excavated sites are Narhan, Imlīḍīha Khurd and Dhuriāpār in district Gorakhpur and Khairāḍīha, Bhunāḍīha, Pakkākoṭ and Wainā in Ballia district.

Previous Archaeological Work Done in Sarayūpāra Plain

Archaeological investigations in these parts included in Sarayūpāra plain were carried out for the first time by A.C.L. Carlleyle who explored some sites of archaeological importance in 1874-75 under the guidance of Alexander Cunningham. Subsequently in 1890, A. Fuhrer explored some sites.

It needs to be remarked that in spite of rich archaeological wealth and a hoary past, Ballia did not receive adequate attention of archaeologists in post-independence period. The first significant investigation was the discovery of a number of Chalcolithic settlements by the Banaras Hindu University in early sixties (IAR, 1963-64, p.43). Thus, Black-and-Red Ware was reported from Bhīmapurāḍīha, Bijalīpur, Gadabirghar, Lovika-kā-Ṭīlā, Mairāḍīha, Pakkākoṭ and Vainagaḍha. Subsequently, a more detailed archaeological excavation was conducted at Khairāḍīha (Tripathi & Singh, 2003-2004) situated on the right bank

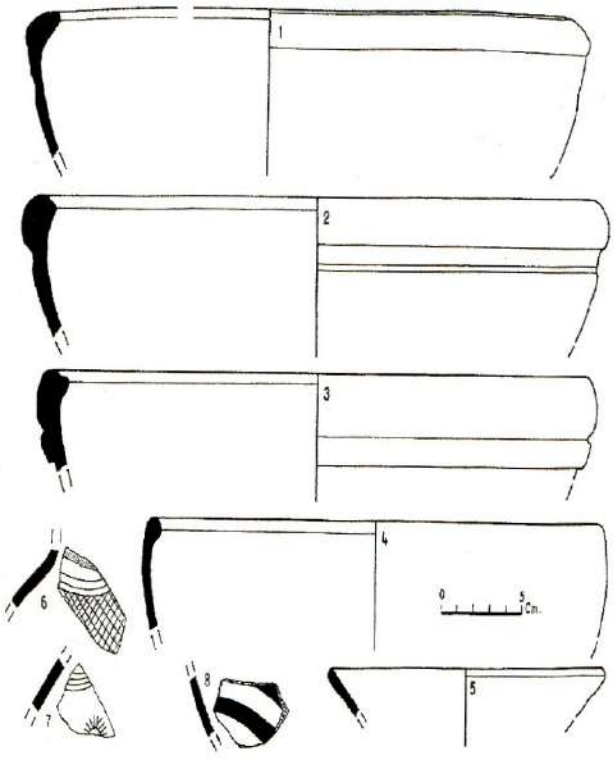
of the Ghāgharā in the north-western part of the district during the years 1980-86 and 1996-97. Recently, the archaeological excavations was conducted at Pakkākoṭ, district Ballia, in February-May 2011 (Dubey, et.al., 2012).

The ancient settlement extends in an area of more than 25 hectares. The mound is under active cultivation. Intensive exploration done by the present author has revealed that pre-NBPW and Black-and-Red Ware deposits and the habitation have been found from about 1500 BCE – 900 BCE (on the basis of ceramic evidence confined on the south-west part of the settlements). The main shapes of Black-and-Red Ware are bowls, pedestalled bowl, platter and vases. A few sherds of painted Black Slipped were also collected from the surface. On the main mound, it is suspected that the habitation goes back to NBPW times (900 BCE) and it continued to be inhabited till Kushan times. The site continued to be reoccupied during medieval as recovered by glazed ceramics. The site has not been excavated so far. However, a firm chronology can only be established after careful excavations.

The pottery collected from the surface is illustrated below :

Fig.1

1. Basin of Red Ware with incurved rim and vertical sides.
2. Basin with externally collared rim and a groove on the neck.
3. Basin of Red Ware with externally elliptical collared rim.
4. Basin with incurved, externally thickened rim and tapering sides.
5. Plate with featureless rim, outgoing sides and flattish base.
6. Fragment of scratching pottery.
7. A broken piece of terracotta dish of Red Ware having sun symbol in the centre and rope pattern on the edges.



8. Fragment of Black Slipped Ware, painted in white colour on the interior with the groups of vertical strokes, fine fabric.

Fig.2

1. Vase with flaring externally thickened clubbed rim.
2. A variant of the above but the rim is out-turned and collared while the neck is concave, coarse fabric.
3. High necked Jar/Vase with flaring externally thickened clubbed rim.
4. A variant of the above with nail headed, externally obliquely cut rim and concave neck, ill fired.
5. Jar/Vase with flaring externally thickened rim, a prominent rib below the rim and concave elongated neck.
6. Jar/Vase with flaring externally thickened rim.

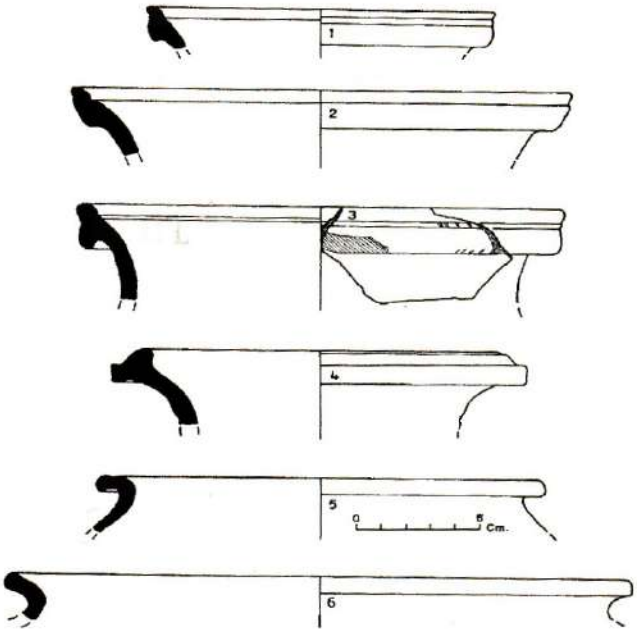
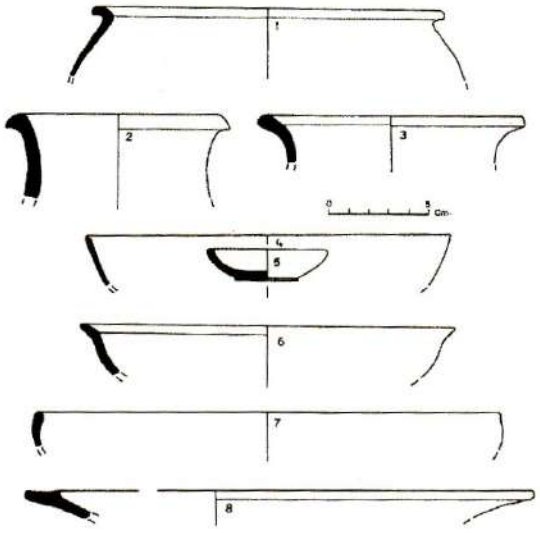


Fig.3

1. Vase of Red Ware with flaring rounded flattened from the top, insignificant neck and pear shaped body.
2. High necked Jar/Vase with flaring externally thickened clubbed rim of medium fabric.
3. A variant of the above but the rim is concave, coarse fabric.
4. Bowl of Red Ware with externally thickened flaring rim and sharply tapering sides of medium fabric.
5. Bowl of Red Ware incurved obliquely cut rim, tapering sides, flat base, thread marks at the base, fine fabric.
6. Basin of Red Ware with externally, elliptical collared rim.
7. Dish with incurved, internally thickened rim.
8. Plate with featureless rim, outgoing side and flattish base.



Our investigations have shown that the significant point which comes out clearly is that the geographical and ecological setting of a particular site went a long way into its development. A careful analysis of the ceramic industries and other artefactual data recovered from explorations shows the transition from rural to urban settlement at Nahusha-kā-Ṭīlā. The observation at Nahusha-kā-Ṭīlā has showed a stage-by-stage evolution towards urbanization. The beginning of second urbanization at Nahusha-kā-Ṭīlā is witnessed in Period II, which is marked by the use of NBPW. This phase marks the beginning of city-life (Singh, 2010 & Singh, 2012). The geographical situation of Nahusha-kā-Ṭīlā made it possible for its inhabitants to have commercial links with other contemporary towns and cities of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, like Rajghat, Khairāḍīha, Pakkākoṭ, Lakhnesarḍīha, Wainā, Pāṭaliputra, Rājgriha and Vaishālī. By the Kushan period Nahusha-kā-Ṭīlā had developed into a full-fledged urban centre.

The cultural relics obtained from this site are ascribable to Chalcolithic to Kushan period. The site continued to be re-occupied during medieval times as recovered by glazed ceramics. The pottery of Black and Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware, Grey Ware and Red Ware were recovered from the site. Black-and-Red Ware pots recovered are handmade and some of them are wheel made also. The pottery of Black-and-Red Ware is the other principal ceramic recovered from the site in a big quantity. The principal shapes in this ware are bowls, basins and vases, which are well comparable with pottery of Narhan I, Khairāḍīha I, Pakkākoṭ II, Wainā IB, Bhunāḍīha II, Imlīḍīha Khurd II and Lahurādeva II. The pottery of Black-and-Red Ware is made essentially on a fast wheel except for the large storage jars which are handmade. The ceramic repertoire is well comparable with the similar pottery of Chirānd, Bhunāḍīha, Wainā, Pakkākoṭ and Imlīḍīha Khurd. The people are rapidly destroying the cultural remains of the site and if the excavations are not conducted at the earliest, the site will loose its archaeological importance.

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