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Archaeological Explorations in Mathura District

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Mathura has been an important centre for archaeological activities since the discovery of first sculptural finding known as Silenus in 1836. Many archaeological sites were explored and excavated by various archaeologists including Cunningham, Growse, Vogel, Fuhrer, Pt. Radhakrishna and others in the pre independent India. In modern sense of archaeological science, these excavations proved destructive as mounds were cut only for the art objects and other antiquities. In the post-independence era, for the first time systematic excavation was conducted by the A.S.I. in 1953-54 near *Shri Krishna-Janmasthan*. The details of this excavation remains unpublished but a clear chronological sequence was established. The material published in *I.A.R.* 1954-55 refers to the beginning of culture with a hand made pottery associated with grey ware. Then it was followed by grey ware using people associated with Painted Gray Ware (P.G.W.) tradition, but no P.G.W. sherds from there were found. It was followed by the Northern Black Polished Ware (N.B.P.W.) culture and by then Sunga, Kushan, Gupta and later periods. Almost the same sequence was found by the German team at Sonkh site, about 25 km south-west-south of Mathura. Here the culture has started with the P.G.W. using people and then followed by same cultural sequence. In the 1973-77 excavations carried under the direction of M.C. Joshi, almost the similar evidence came to light at the site of Ambarisha in Mathura city but of a slightly later date than the Sonkh's earliest phase. Though, they worked mostly on the fortification aspect of Mathura city which was already mentioned by F.S. Growse, in a systematic way but about chronology excavators themselves present a contradictory approach.

The present author explored the whole district of Mathura and realized its potential as it is full of archaeological sites and antiquarian wealth. The other important sites are of Ghosana-Shahpur, Nandghat, located between Piprauli and Bhimgaon and Aring. The site of Ghosana-Shahpur has a large dimensions approximate of 900×600×13 m. On the surface of the site a good number of P.G.W. sherds were collected and in the N.B.P.W. periods it became a city settlement with increasing role in trade activities. It was a production centre for terracotta mother goddess figurines, bead manufacturing and metal work along with other activities. It was on the opposite bank of Yamuna on the ancient trade link going towards city-centres of Hathras, Aligarh, Koil, Ahichchhatra, Kampilya, Sankisa etc. from Mathura. In the later periods the site maintained it's importance and seems to have lost it only after invasions of Ghazni and others. Here other important aspect about the site is presence of early sherds of B & R Ware with mat impression which are generally dated prior to 15th century B.C. So further research is still required in this direction.

The site of Nandghat is situated in the Yamuna khadar, now-a-days having very difficult access. This site is being reported for the first time. It was a P.G.W. settlement of a size about 300×280 m which increased in size in the succeeding period and was probably abandoned in around early medieval times. On the side of this site the land is very infertile while on the opposite bank the soil is very fertile and this explains the reason for only 3 important sites dating back to at least 6th century B.C. in a long stretch of Yamuna khadar along the river line. The other two sites are Sehi-garh and Sakraya. On the opposite end of the river in front of Nandghat there are 3 major archaeological sites—Bhadravana, a P.G.W. onwards site and Eroli and Ogaha, at least Mauryan period onwards site. So this site of Nandghat was probably a major point of crossing Yamuna to go towards eastern side. Further research is required in this area as it may provide few important clues.

The site of Aring is 600×400×15 m in dimensions. It is very much disturbed as it was fortified cantonment in the Marhatha period. Some occasional findings of O.C.P. and late Harrapan sherds have been reported from here. In the list of Agra Circle it has been mentioned as O.C.P. site. In later periods—P.G.W. onwards, the habitation continued which is clear from surface findings. The finding of O.C.P. and related cultures is very much probable in the Govardhana region.

The another site near Mant (Mat), between the villages of Bhimgaon and Piprauli, is also a newly explored site which is very important in the sense that it was abandoned after P.G.W. and N.B.P.W. times. The author observed a kind of mud fortification and if it is so then it will be the earliest in this part of country. Vrindavana is just 4 km from here across the river.

List of P.G.W. Sites

Already known—Mathura, Chhata, Sanket, Nohjhil, Sakhitara, Aring, Sonkh, Ghosana, Sanoth.

New Explorations—Nandghat, Sehi-garh, Bhadravana, site near nahar between Bhimgaon and Piprauli, Govardhan, Pali-khera, Raja-Bali ka-Tila, Chowk Bazar, Railway track between Bhuteshwar and new bus stand, all in Mathura city.

In this list 2 or 3 sites were earlier known but P.G.W. was not reported from there.

List of N.B.P.W. Sites

Already known—All the P.G.W. sites except Chhata, Bharana-kalan, Jait, Parkham.

New sites—Mirpur, Parkham-gujjar, Jansuti, Arahara, Sakraya, Aiyara-khera, Khirari, Sonkh-khera, Taroli, Eroli-gujjar and all the P.G.W. sites.

Besides this about 25 isolated settlements belonging to early centuries of Christian era were located in the city of Mathura, of which about 8 are new explorations which generally are small sites.

In other parts of the district 110 Kushan sites were located out of which about 50 are completely new explorations while many others were just known as the find places of Inscription or sculpture.

In the explorations 15 new sites came into knowledge of which about seven sites were newly occupied in the Gupta period, especially in the area of Yamuna khadars near Nandghat and Shergarh. Other sites are early medieval in nature.

Conclusion

From explorations in the Mathura district it is clear that a huge number of ancient settlements existed through out the district. After the Palaeolithic finds from Govardhana hills, the possibility of the O.C.P. with late Harappan is very much there. Further research is required to prove this early antiquity.

The well accepted chronology of the district starts from P.G.W. times as total 18 spots are located providing this pottery. After P.G.W. which is very well associated with BRW, BSW and related pottery, chronologically assignable in the same date bracket of Atranjikhara, Noh and Hastinapura around 1000 B.C., there is a definite growth in the number of settlements in the so-called NBPW times. A total number of 25 sites are located belonging to this phase ranging B/W around 500 B.C. to 200 B.C. The term NBPW is certainly a misnomer in this region as the pottery belonging to this pre-Mauryan and Mauryan period is grey ware, along with BSW, BRW and general associated pottery. NBPW is found rarely and that too at deserted sites like Ghosana or Bhadravana. During the succeeding Sunga phase, an increase of 3 sites was noticed, thus making the number of Sunga period (200 B.C.-1st century A.D.) sites to 20. In the successive early historical level especially Kushan, the number of archaeological sites increased many fold which continued during Gupta and later periods. The total number of sites assignable to early historical times (1st century A.D. to 300 A.D.) is about 110. Some new sites definitely came into existence during Gupta period at Ohawa, Vehta etc.

The most significant aspect about the archaeological sites of Mathura is that except a few, all have continuous habitation. Finding evidences of pre-Kushan period is very difficult because at such sites, rarely the early pottery can be seen on the surface and also because except pottery, very few other antiquities like sculptures were used by those people. For Kushan onwards, for determination of cultural sequence, there is one advantage—the use of sculptures and luckily such broken pieces if found at village sites are kept over a village shrine and by observing these, Kushan evidence of the site is confirmed. The reason for mentioning all sites Kushan onwards is very important. Findings of inscriptions from such sites, also helps to provide a chronology to the site. But as sites are under modern habitation, it was not possible to find evidences either in the explorations. The absence of Mauryan and early stratas should not be taken granted, rather tentatively. Finding pre-Kushan evidence is also not certain stratigraphically like at Jansuit, NBP sherds were found at the top at Khirari where some area of mound is under cultivation. Mauryan grey ware was found at cultivated surface, sometime some terracotta objects helped in assigning the date like at Arahara and Parkham-gujjar. At some sites Kushan and little later structures are present on the top of the site. The ancient deposits are disturbed at the sites and in Mathura city. This disturbance is too high, though, one site near Bank colony under protection exceptionally appeared to be undisturbed, probably continued from Mauryan period onwards.

No evidence was found related to NBP culture, earliest sites were of pre-Kushan in nature, of about 4th-5th century B.C. This phase of 4th-5th century B.C. seems to be the period of the growth of settlements in Mathura District with the rise of population as well as the growing importance of the said area in this period. This aspect is also corroborated by literary sources like Panini and Patañjali.

The theory of the scholars who subjectively excavated some spots in Mathura City—that during P.G.W. period it was a rural settlement and got urban character in 2nd century B.C. on the basis of literary evidences as well as on the basis of archaeological finds. During excavations in 1973-77, P.G.W. sherds were found in stratigraphy only at Ambarisha Tila and this was taken as the final verdict. Actually the main problem was that they could not select the right spot for excavation and in Mathura city, which is practically a difficult task. From Chowk Bazar area, some 300 m distant from Ambarisha towards the main city, from a market construction digging a good number of PGW sherds were found by the present author in the disturbed deposit. The number of P.G.W. sherds was much higher that they were out showing the other potteries present there and this pottery belonged to best of PGW traditions anywhere in north India. In contrast to this, at Raja-Bali-Ka-Tila which is as lofty and exterior as Ambarish towards the opposite end of latter. Only 2 P.G.W. sherds were found and those

too belonging to late P.G.W. variety. Besides, at broad gauge railway track, in the ramp deposit many P.G.W. sherds were found. The reason to discuss all these things in great details is to prove that Mathura was a very rich and large P.G.W. settlement near the river Yamuna in the area of Chowk Bazar and Holi Wali Gali near Holigate which is very densely habitated, a traditional core market area of the city. With the increase in population, P.G.W. people occupied the outer fringes of their settlement at Ambarish and Raja-Bali-Ka-Tila and might be at Katra also (as the 1952-54 season's excavators said it to be a P.G.W. and pre-P.G.W. site). When Katra has come in discussion, one very important aspect here is that 1952-54 excavators had found a 40 cm thick deposit of crude handmade pottery using people below the P.G.W. levels. The present author is not aware of the fact that whether this deposit has been analysed scientifically or not, but this deposit definitely has the potential to change the whole archaeological scenario of Mathura region. As this hand made pottery in majority is not found in O.C.P. onwards cultures.

The area which was under P.G.W. occupation is very large and it may be larger than Atranjikhara's P.G.W. culture area but this area can never be excavated, but only sites like Ghosana can prove this aspect upto some extent. During the NBP times, there was a much increase in the population and many adjoining parts of the P.G.W. settlements were also occupied in this phase like Kans Qila, Katra-Govind Nagar area and many other areas in the densely habitated city which were occupied only in NBPW times. The topography of this main city is completely disturbed. Some of the natural Yamuna khadars were occupied in early historic times while some are archaeological mounds came into existence from protohistoric time onwards. The main roads passing through this main city should be the ancient roads which have not risen much in their height while most of the lanes in the area have developed with time.

During the Mauryan times Mathura region was well known as it is evident in many literary references of Indian as well as foreign writers. During the Mauryan times inspite of its importance, no Mauryan inscription has been found till now in this area is an enigmatic situation. From Mauryan time onwards it's status as a city increased very much, and it became a regional seat of power again in 3rd-1st century B.C., after the Mahajanapada age. During Kushan times, it became cosmopolitan city—the most important political and art centre in India. After the end of main Kushan dynasty, it retained the importance as local power centre. In successive periods-during and after Gupta, it's importance as a commercially and religiously important city still continued. But the royal importance declined a lot after the Huna invasion. The city passed through a phase of crisis in which is seen the upsurge of new power centres like Kannauj and a decline in the glory of Mathura. Whatever prestige this city was having was lost by the disastrous attack of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1017 A.D. and then under the various bigoted attacks of Muslims like Allauddin Khalji, Sikandar Lodi etc. Because of the religious importance of Mathura, Muslims preferred Delhi and Agra as a seat of royal administration and after loosing it's rich splendours Mathura just remained an important religious city which is in continuation till now.

Roshan Dalal in his article "Historical Geography of Mathura" has proposed theory without proper fieldwork in the area. He has divided the district in cis-Yamuna and trans-Yamuna tracts. Further proposed the cis-Yamuna area was first occupied by the people because of it's less fertile land and number of early archaeological sites is very less in trans-Yamuna region as the early settlers were not advanced enough to clear the dense vegetation there. Another aspect which he has highlighted is the growth of settlements in cis-Yamuna tract was based on the location of the city of Mathura as an important centre in Kushan times. Besides he has wrongly mentioned Kankali and Bhuteshwar as the P.G.W. settlements.

One important fact about river Yamuna is that inspite of being a geographical barrier, it was never such a huge hurdle in the movement of people or change in climate, rather it was means of navigation very important made for ancient people, since Harappan times onwards. The settlement pattern in the whole district is based on various environmental factors and among which the most important is the fertility of the soil, then the routes of linking, floods, attacks and other aspects. The concentration of archaeological sites is more or less same throughout the district except a few sites very close to city of Mathura which were probably working as the first suppliers to city people with various items. The concentration of archaeological sites is much less in the area, ahead of Mahavan, along Yamuna on both sides because of many reasons it is low lying frequently flooded area, it is one of the most fertile regions of the district and probably a little away from major links routes.

In such fertile areas of Ganga-Yamuna doab, most of the sites have disappeared by human activities and it is very difficult to find archaeological sites in such areas in large numbers. The copper-hoard and O.C.P. sites of Aligarh and Bulandshahar are not far away from trans-Yamuna sites, so it is wrong to think that only the cis-Yamuna tract around Mathura was occupied earlier.

Another very important aspect about the archaeology of Mathura region is the identification of the site of Carisobora, mentioned by Megasthenes in *Indica* and later on the same reference was taken by Arrian. Megasthenes has just mentioned that in the Soursenoi, Lobres flowed between Methora and Carisobora. It does not mean that these two cities were situated just in front of each other and Yamuna flowed between them but most of the scholars have taken it in this way only and on this basis tried to identify Carisobora with Mahavana. Besides Mahavana by Shiva G. Bajai, some scholars like Cunningham and Romila Thapar have proposed it's identification with Vrindavana. Here all these scholars forget the fact that from neither Mahavana nor Vrindavana any Mauryan evidence is reported. Even exploring the whole area author could not find any evidence prior to early medieval period, though some stray Kushan finds are known from both the places. Secondly, Vrindavana is situated on the same bank as is Mathura, so both these identifications are untenable. Author would propose the identification of great site like Hathras, Aligarh or Koel as the city of Carisobora and if it had to be just in front of Mathura, then Ghosana, a huge settlement with rich antiquities is the foremost choice and little possibility can be of Isapur-Hansganj if in future Mauryan and pre-Mauryan evidences are found from there.

Such type of archaeological explorations in an area helps a lot in understanding the ancient trade routes and their role in the development of settlements. It is a well known fact that Mathura was an important centre in national and international trade and most of the important routes passed through it or were well linked with other important routes like Uttarapath. It was a very important centre of *Dakshinapath*, *Aparantapath* and one branch of *Uttarapath*.

Let us have a close look at the nature of trade routes in the cis-Yamuna tract. The most important route was that coming from Taxila and also Multan to Indraprastha and then going to Kaushambi following Yamuna via Bateshwar. From Bateshwar area other route which was an important as Kaushambi route went via ancient Padmawati, Gwalior region to Eran, Vidisha region. From the same route one branch went towards Maihar, Bharhut-Satna, Rewa Region. These routes were almost same as are the modern routes. In Mathura region, NH-2 follows the same ancient route from Delhi to Agra and many archaeological sites along or near this route have already been discussed in the list of sites.

Besides this southward and south-eastward route, other important routes in N-W west, W-S-W and S-W directions passed from Mathura. The N-W route went towards Sohna. Gurgaon (one route

towards Rewari also from this route) via Mewat region and met various important routes—one towards Multan via Rohtak and other towards N-E Rajasthan. The second route went via Govardhan, Dig, Kaman to Alwar and Sikar sites, from where one route went towards Rangmahal region and one towards Sindh region via Nagaur, Jaisalmer. Routes via Nandgaon and Barsana were the part of N-W and western routes, both the W-S-W route went via Sonkh and Kumbher to Vairat but was less popular. The S-W route went from Mathura via Bharatpur to Vairat, Pushkara, Saurashtra as well as via Bayana, Karauli to Madhyamika.

The routes of trans-Yamuna were also as important as the cis-Yamuna routes. The most important route was via Ghosana, Raya to Hathras and Atranjikhhera, Soron region. The other route went from Mathura via Mahavana, Baldeva, Sadabad to Kampilya and Sankisa via Jalesar region. The former route was also used for going to Sankisa and Kampliya in Farukhabad district which further went to Sravasti, in the eastern direction. The other important route from Mathura went via Ghosana, Raya, Mat, Naujhil to Varana (Bulandshahar), Ahichchhatra and Hastinapur. Another route from Mathura went to Ghosana, Raya, Aiyarakhera to Aligarh, Koil and from there to Gangetic sites. Besides these important routes, there were so many link routes. Yamuna was crossed at various places in the district, the most important being Mathura-Isapur crossing, Mathura-Gokul, Sehigarh-Mat, Nandghat-Bhadravana, Iroli crossing being other important cross over points. Besides, the two pontoon bridges at Vrindavana and Shergarh might be ancient crossing points. Most of the archaeological sites are located on these routes or very near to them. All the major routes were linked with each other at various points in Mathura district itself and it seems that the number of archaeological sites in comparatively more in the sandwich or linking zone between two main routes like concentration of sites in between Bharatpur-Sonkh and Govardhana road is the highest in the whole district.

All these results are very tentative in nature and require further research. So many details of the research work cannot be explained here because of time constraint. A lot of areas in Mathura district itself were left for further explorations. The subjectivity of the research especially at the presently occupied ancient sites should always be kept in mind for any exploratory work in such an area.

Some New Art Studies

Mathura is arguably the most important centre for art studies in India. A large number of art objects ranging in date from NBPW times to Modern times have been reported from Mathura, some of which are lying in Indian museums and many have been exported or smuggled out to various western countries. A large repertoire is still under the archaeological sites or on surface lying uncared for Mathura is considered to be one of the most important centres for the development of various art and iconographic traits, starting from pre-Mauryan mother goddess figurines to the development of various cult images. There is no need to discuss all the art studies in detail as they have been done by some of the best scholars of the country. Only some new and important art findings will be discussed in this section.

1. Image from Jikhangaon

This image was found on a village shrine. A big animal probably a boar or elephant has been shown with three human figurines. One of the lady figure is trying to stop the animal by raising her hand. The central figure seems to be of a deity probably lord Krishna raising the Govardhana by his left hand and if this identification is true then the animal should be identified as a cow. On stylistic grounds this image can be dated to Gupta period about 5th-6th century A.D. (Pl. 4).

Besides, there were present some broken Kushan sculptural parts and a very peculiar pillar from Kushan Siva linga of conspicuous shape.

2. Image from Lohvana

This is a lower broken portion of an ancient image, being worshipped by villagers as Puranic Lohasura. The surface of image is applied oil. This image may be of a Yaksha.

Another important image found there belongs to Uma-Maheshwar in which Uma is sitting over the lap of lord. Besides there are some other broken images of the same period i.e., 8th-9th century A.D.

3. Stone plaque from Parkham

This stone plaque was found at a shrine in village Parkham-gujjar. It is a Sunga Apsara kind of lady having Sunga hairstyle, hair arranged in a beautiful knot over left side of the forehead. The whole sculpture is in low relief. The artist carved only head portion out (Pl. 1).

Besides from the same village two sculptures of some pot-bellied deity were also discovered and one of which may be of Kubera.

4. Sculpture from Sunrakh

This sculpture in red sandstone is broken in such a manner that only the torso is present. The image belongs to some royal person of 1st century A.D. The royal person was wearing a thick necklace and was holding a sword in the left hand tied downward with the waistband (Pl. 2).

5. Sculpture from Vehta

Two stone plaques were found from this village's shrine. Both are carved in medium relief on sandstone in the same type of poses as the Gupta rulers are shown on their coins. One figure is holding a bow in his left hand and the other hand is in akimbo pose. The other figure is holding a standard like object in his right hand while the left hand is broken. Both the figures are in standing pose. From the nearby area some other Gupta art objects were observed so these also might be belonging to Gupta period.

6. Sehi-Bihariji

This is a very beautiful sculpture of a Vaishnava deity holding *ayudhas*—*chakra* in upper left, *sankha* in lower left, mace in upper right while the lower right is in *varada mudrā*. On the basis of position of *ayudhas* it will be a Trivikrama type of Vaishnava image. The image is made over polished black chlorite schist as are found in south India. The various aspects of world—vegetal, animal and others have been shown on either side of the deity. On the top left and right corners lord Shiva and Brahma are shown. Two similar types of images were also found from the same spot in the past of which one is in a village temple while the other one is in a temple at Chhata. On stylistic basis these images belong to medieval period.

7. Mahisasuramardini from near Songaon

Son is a very important archaeological site and two early brahmanical images were observed around it. One image was of Ganesha belonging to early Gupta period at a shrine in the village itself and the Mahisasuramardini image was found in a nearby village in between Son and Unchagaon, (Pl. 5) where no archaeological deposit could be located. So this Gupta period image might have come

from either of these villages. The neck portion of the stone plaque is missing and in the surviving portion deity is shown trampling the animal shaped demon less than two of her feet and attacking him at the neck by a trident like object. Lion's head is shown in the background.

8. *Vishnu images*

Two Vishnu images were found at two different villages of the district, one at Allahapur and the other at Unchagaon. The Allahapura image was of Sheshashayi Vishnu, being worshipped as a goddess, and probably it was complete but covered with vermillion. The Unchagaon image was headless and was identified on the basis of *Srivatsa* and other ornamental details. Both these images were of Gurjar-Pratihara period.

9. *Images from Nandghat*

Three important images were observed at the very important archaeological site in Yamuna khadar. One image was well preserved, except the lost head portion. The image of the deity is very much like the famous Palikhera image of Silenus and the Bacchhalian scene. The deity is shown seated on a throne in *ardhaparyankasana* and is pot-bellied. In one of his broken hands he was possibly holding a wine cup. On either corner of the image female attendant are shown. On stylistic grounds, this image can be dated to late Kushan period (Pl. 3).

Another sculpture of almost same period has two pot-bellied persons in sitting posture, one of which is sitting on his haunches. The image is much mutilated and covered by accretions, so for proper identification it requires proper cleaning.

The third sculpture at the same spot is of a much later date of about 8th-9th century. It is a very complicated sculpture of which major part is broken. The deity is shown seated on an animal throne, probably Nandi in *sukhasana*. His feet rest on two human figures. Ganesha is shown on the lower portion of the sculpture. It seems that it is a Uma-Maheshwar sculpture with Shiva's family, in which goddess Parvati was sitting in the left side of Mahadeva's lap. Some other human figures are also shown in the right corner of the sculpture.

10. *Finds from Arahra*

One red colour terracotta figurine of about 2nd century B.C. was found at a temple shrine at Arahra. The head portion of it as well as leg portion of it was missing, but it was quite identifiable as a mother goddess by its Mauryan terracotta figurine features. Besides this, some broken Kushana images and a ring stone of early historical period were observed at the site.

11. *Hariti image from Kakretiya*

A Kushan period Hariti image, almost completely broken except the lower part. The deity was sitting on her haunches in European posture and was having a child in her lap of which two small legs could be identified in the severely broken sculpture. From the same spot one Buddha head is also said to have been found but now stolen.

12. *Brahma image from Mora*

During explorations carried out for the present work, the most remarkable and rare sculptural finding is from Mora, very famous for its inscriptions and the images, especially of a Vrishni Vira (Pl. 7). The sculpture is being worshipped by the village people as village devi. The sculpture is made of yellowish red sand stone and is about 3.2 feet in height and width. It might have been a part of a

temple niche or may be a separate deity. On stylistic grounds it can be dated to early medieval period, about 9th century A.D. The deity has been carved out in stone relief in a panel form. It is three headed having *jatamukutas*, large elliptical earrings. He is shown wearing a pearl necklace, a prominent *yajnopavita* and is four handed. The lower two hands are holding a peacock feather pen and a manuscript in right and left hands respectively. The upper left hand is broken while the upper right is possibly in *abhaya mudrā*. Armlets and wristlets are visible on his hands. The deity is shown sitting cross-legged and on haunches. Below the deity has been shown two swans holding fishes in their beaks. The whole sculpture is very much decorated and bordering has been done having flying *vidyadharas* and *vyalas* on either side of sculptural pilasters. On the basis of iconographic details, it can be identified as a Brahma sculpture. This sculpture is important not only as being a rare Brahma sculpture but also because it is representative of the continuity of the great art tradition at Mathura which was still an important centre of artistic activities during the mediaeval period. Finding of a large number of post-Gupta, early mediaeval sculptures from this region indicates that the actual decline in the history of Mathura occurred only after Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion.

Another very important and interesting sculpture from the same village is on a shaft-linga like thing and having four faces of varying features and dimensions. The top head of it had probably broken in past. All the faces are having *jatamukuta* and one of the faces is having prominent moustache. This sculpture belongs to about 3rd-4th century A.D. on stylistic grounds and may be of either Siva or Brahma.

Besides these a large number of terracotta mother goddess figurines of Maurya and Kushan period along with animal figurines were observed at Mathura city, Ghosana and various other sites (Pl. 6). A good number of sculpture fragments as well as architectural fragments of Kushan, Gupta and later periods in the form of *stambhas*, *saptamatrika*, *ashta-digpala* panels etc. were found throughout the district but because of lack of space and time these can not be discussed here. This information gathered through remaining art and architectural fragments is very fragmentary, as most the art objects have been smuggled out from almost all the sites, along with other factors. All these findings will help in the further study of art, iconography and cultural history of Braj region.

New Striking Ethnoarchaeological Studies

The culture of early historical period has been continuance till the recent times. Most of the art, architectural, religious and other traditions are still continuing in the society with some modifications and refinements. By studying the behaviour of people the author have found some interesting link between terracotta art of past and rituals held in modern times.

After palaeolithic art, terracotta art has been the earliest one in the history of art of mankind. A large number of terracotta figurines have been reported till now in the world context, making it a varied branch of art and archaeological studies. Terracottas are broadly classified as human and animal figurines and in human figurines the so-called mother goddess terracotta's form the most important and interesting group. These women figurines are thought to be of mother goddess because of their features and many a times their association with child and fertility. A lot of studies have been done on the ethno-archaeological aspects of terracottas but in the contemporary society their ritualistic use till now is not known but in Mathura there was a great scope for such studies as it is one of the exceptional regions where the ancient culture has continued till now without a major break. The various terracotta figurines found in early historical context were in vogue during various cultural periods, though there was significant refinement during Mauryan and Sunga times. Even then the archaic features of pre-Mauryan mother goddess figurines continued in Kushan period. Such type of

figurines is found independently as well as part of votive tanks. The tradition of making such type of handmade and primitive terracotta mother goddess with beak shaped facial features is still in practice in Braj region and these types of unbaked mother goddesses are made on the occasion of Karwa-chauth and Teej festivals in the month of Sravana. Here these figurines are made in large quantity following the Kushan proto-type. The present author, observed best examples of such figurines at the massive archaeological site of Shahpur-Ghosana, just 6 km distant from Mathura, across Yamuna. One very important aspect about these figurines is that these are directly not related with the mother aspect, rather with the well wishing for the husband by their wives. But the figurines are definitely related with some folk and local goddess.

The present ethnographic study suggest that during ancient times; specially Kushan period terracotta figurines may have served similar purpose on the festive occasions; as today terracottas are used during Teej, Karwa-chauth and such other festivities related with *sati*, *pativrata* aspect of Indian women.

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Pl. 1. Sandstone plaque, Sunga, Parkham, Gujjar



Pl. 2. Sandstone sculpture, Kushan, Sunrakh



Pl. 4. Red sandstone sculpture, 5th century A.D., Jikhangaon

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Pl. 3. Sandstone sculpture, 2nd-3rd century A.D.,
Nandghat



Pl. 5. Red sandstone plaque, 3rd century A.D.,
Between Songaon and Unchagaon



Pl. 6. Terracotta figurine, Kushan, surface of
fortification wall, Mathura



Pl. 7. Sandstone Brahma sculpture,
8th century A.D., Mora