

Excavations at Hastinapur

The site is situated in the Mav'n¹ *tehsil* (District Meerut), about 37 kilometres from Meerut city, and about 90 kilometres north-east of Delhi, between the parallels of 29°9' N to 78°3' E. At present, the Ganga flows at a distance of about 8 kilometres from the site, but, in ancient times, it flowed much nearer. Burhi Ganga flows to the east of the site at a distance of 1.5 kilometres.

Hastin'pura is mentioned in several ancient texts, particularly in the *Mah'bh'rata*. It was expected that excavations conducted at the site of Hastin'pura would shed welcome light on the period of the Bh'rata war.

Excavations at Hastinapur were conducted under the directorship of B B Lal, in 1950-1952. Remains of five periods, with gaps in between, have been found.

Period I— Of this period, only a limited area was excavated. The typical pottery of this period is Ochre-coloured pottery (OCP). This ware was not well fired. This ware was possibly applied a wash in orange-red to deep red colour. The wash used to rub off very easily. After the end of this period, the site remained uninhabited for some time.

Period II—The most important feature of this period is the presence of Painted Grey Ware (PGW). This pottery has painted decorations. This painting is usually in black over grey but sometimes it was executed in chocolate or reddish brown. The painted motifs consists of band around the rim, group of vertical and horizontal lines, dots, dashes, spirals, concentric circles, circles, semi circles, sigmas and *svastikas*. These paintings were executed either exterior or interior of the pots. The other

pottery assemblage was black slipped ware, black-and-red ware, grey ware and red ware.

There is no definite evidence for the construction of houses of burnt bricks, although several walls of unbaked bricks, with mud plaster, have been found. Important finds of this period include copper arrowheads and antimony rods; stone objects probably used as weight; glass bangles; terracotta animal figurines, discs, pendant and stamp. Charred grains of rice were also recovered. Faunal remains include humped cattle, buffalo, sheep, pig, deer and horse bones.

Lumps of iron are available towards the end of this period, but no finished products of that metal. The great flood, which destroyed the habitation of that period, has been identified by some scholars with the flood mentioned in the purāṇas, after which King Nichakshu abandoned Hastinapura, and settled at Kauṣāmbī.

Period III— After a gap, the site was again inhabited. The main pottery of this period is Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). Besides, black other hues in NBPW were golden and mercury. The pottery types in NBPW were bowls and dishes. The associated pottery of NBPW was grey and red wares. Grey ware includes bowls, dishes, handis and basins. The main types in red ware were pear-shaped vases, carinated handis, footed bowls, and basins.

There are houses of both burnt bricks and mud bricks, forming six construction periods. Bricks measuring 43x25x8 cm. and 37x23x7 cm. were used to construct these houses. Terracotta ring wells, soakage pits, drains made of baked bricks were other noteworthy findings of this period. Antiquities of this period include copper

nail-filers and antimony rods, iron arrowheads, chisels and sickles, terracotta figurines of men and animals, beads, discs, bangles, rings; beads of semi precious stones etc. A therianthropic figure with human face and animal body was a unique find. Copper and silver Punch-marked coins and uninscribed cast coins testify to economic progress. The habitation was destroyed by a great fire.

Period IV—After a gap of about one century the site was again inhabited. The main pottery of this period is red ware, which was wheel-made, and has black designs imprinted upon it. The main types are bowls with incurved rim, spouted basins, button-knobed lids, and ink pot type of lid. There are stamped and incised designs on the pot sherds. This includes fish, leaves, *triratna*, flowers, loops, lozenges and circles.

There are houses of burnt bricks, forming seven construction periods. Bricks measuring 35x23x7 cm. were used in these structures. Antiquities of this period include copper antimony rods, pins, a bell; iron nails, axe-edge, sickle, a bell and a pan; terracotta figurines of men and animals, spindle whorls, beads, discs, wheels, a toy cart, and votive tanks; one part of a stone grinder and lids; beads of semi precious stones; two inscribed potsherds, and an inscribed terracotta seal. The figure of a Bodhisattva Maitreya was also a very important recovery. Coins of the Kush¹òa king Vasudeo, Yaudheyas, and the kings of Mathura, too, are available.

Period V— After a long gap comes the next period, in which, red ware (sometimes glazed), ruins of burnt bricks, iron utensils, terracotta figurines, and a coin of Balban (1266-87 CE), have been found.

Chronology—Period V is dated to XI-XV centuries CE on the basis of Balban's coin and other materials. Period IV is dated between II century BCE and III century CE on the basis of Yaudheya and Kush¹ḍa coins; and pottery and antiquities. Period III is dated to VI-III centuries BCE on the basis of NBPW and punch-marked coins. Lal dated Period II to *c* 1100-800 BCE on the bases of the date of Nichakshu and the thickness of the deposit between Periods III and II. Period I seems to be earlier than 1200 BCE.

Conclusions—OCP is earlier than PGW, often associated with the vedic period, and PGW is earlier than NBPW. However, at some sites, like Bhagwanpura, PGW is co-terminus with Harappan ware.