

Archaeological Excavations at Paṅr (Samastipur district, Bihar)

Paṅr(25.41'N 85.48'E) is situated 5 km. northwest of the Dalsinghsarai subdivisional HQs. in the dist. of Samastipur in Bihar. It is 110 kms northeast of Patna. The mound where most of the diggings took place is known as Pandavasthana. Sizeable lakes surround the site from three sides, and the river Bālan flows two kms. to the south. The Ganga is approximately 22 kms. south of the site. Lakes have been formed by the dead beds of Ganga and Balan. Pandavasthana is a low mound, 2 meters in height and about 38 acres in size. In addition, historical settlements at Paṅr are not confined to the mound but extend up to the lake (chaur) area.

Excavations conducted by the K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute during the last several seasons have revealed a 7.50 thick cultural deposit, divisible into five phases. The first settlers at the site used red ware, grey ware and black-and-red ware. The shards in red ware and grey ware show lustrous burnishing on the exterior while the interior is rough and hard-brushed. Several shards show evidence of luting and rustication. Particles of sand and mica are mixed in clay. Many of the types and shapes closely resemble that of the Neolithic Chirand.

At Paṅr I, people used bone objects such as arrowheads and points, beads made of steatite and agate and terracotta objects like beads and hop scotches. The calibrated radiocarbon dates provided by the BSIP, Lucknow, for period I of Paṅr, represented by layer (17) and (18) at Paṅr XII range between 2412-4261 BC, the latter date being an isolated one while the cluster of dates fall within the 3rd millennium BC.

How to designate Paṅr I? We do not have any Neolithic tools at the site. Yet the radiocarbon dates are early, in fact, much earlier than the Neolithic Chirand. The potshards of the earliest phases of the two sites closely resemble each other.

At Lahuradewa (Sant Kabir Nagar dist. U.P), Period I has radiocarbon dates ranging between 9000-3000 BC, and it does not yield any Neolithic tools. We are still to study in detail the floral and faunal remains of Paṅr I. Therefore, whether Paṅr I belongs to Neolithic phase or to Early Farming phase (as the Lahuradewa I has been described) must be decided taking into account the entire assemblage. Yet, such early dates for human culture in the Ganga Valley and the absence of lithic tools at several sites such as Narhan,

Lahuradewa and Paṅr open up new possibilities. One would also argue for re-examining the materials of Pandu Rajar Dhibi (Panduk, Burdwan) in this light.

Till recently, it was believed that the antiquity of human settlements in north-central Bihar comprising districts such as Samastipur, Begusarai, Darbhanga and Madhubani was not so deep. But recent diggings at Chechar, Ramchaura and Paṅr have shown the antiquity of the region to be much older. Our explorations in the surroundings of Paṅr have brought out several sites yielding Neolithic shards as at Bhaddiya about 20 kms. south of Paṅr or chalcolithic shards as at Mangalgarh 35 kms northeast of Paṅr and at Manda 30 kms north of our site.

At Paṅr II, people began to use black-slipped pottery in addition to the earlier types. The shards frequently exhibit clay mixed with paddy-husks. Certain shards in black-and-red ware and grey ware have white paintings in form of white dots, straight lines, oblique lines, and receding curves. The shapes are dishes, bowls, dishes- on-stands, vases and basins. During period II, the people began to use copper as is evident from the copper hooks and bangles discovered from this horizon. But bone was more commonly used for making tools and weapons. Several bone arrowheads, points, pins, styli, bangles, beads and pendants have been retrieved from this horizon. The profuse use of bone and the evidence of copper hooks would suggest that, during the period II, people practiced hunting and fishing for their subsistence. But the retrieval of charred grains and the presence of paddy-husks in shards from this horizon indicate the practice of cultivation. Paṅr II has all the ingredients of a chalcolithic culture.

At Paṅr, as in several other sites, there is a phase between the chalcolithic horizon and that of the NBPW, when iron makes its appearance. From Paṅr IB, the iron objects discovered so far include an arrowhead, a blade and an unidentified object.

During the period III, represented by NBPW, the frequency of bone tools and weapons does not decrease. Among bone antiquities, compared to 3 pins, 18 arrowheads and 9 points belonging to chalcolithic phase, we have 5 pins, 21 arrowheads and 21 points during the NBPW phase.

During NBPW phase, iron and copper begin to match bone as a medium for making objects. Among the iron objects are nails, daggers, spearheads, knives, sickles, a ploughshare, a harpoon and a hoe. Copper objects include antimony rods, earrings and

finger-rings. Thus iron was used for productive purpose and weaponry, and copper was shaped into ornaments. Among the terracotta objects from Paṅr III, beads and sling balls are most numerous. The terracotta balls are well-fired and were catapulted by some device to serve as missiles. Several human and animal figurines have been discovered from this horizon. Sometimes, the symbols of spoked wheel have been punched on the body, and there are matted impressions on the head.

During the terminal phase of Paṅr III, copper punch-marked coins and cast coins make their appearance. These, together with the luxury objects and the deluxe ware in this horizon indicate that the site was becoming associated with a broad circuit of exchange.

Period IV at the site, belonging to Śunga-Kuṣāṇa phase, is marked by vigorous structural activities. It reveals two broad phases, phase I having bricks measuring 42x22x5cm, and phase two having bricks of 38x22x5cm. This horizon has yielded ring wells, having 24,13,13 and 6 courses respectively.

During the Kuṣāṇa period, glass objects appear in greater frequency, and it replaces copper as a material for making ornaments. Bone is clearly no longer important for making tools and weapons.

During the Śunga period, terracotta figurines were made at Paṅr, as is evident by several human and animal figurines discovered from this horizon alongwith a mould. During the Kuṣāṇa times, terracotta corn-rubbers and spindle-whorls were produced in great quantity.

Paṅr V belongs to Gupta times, and is represented by red-slipped ware having thin rims and structural activities marked by the reuse of old bricks. Among the antiquities, an inscribed ivory ring and a bone seal, having the name Indracetasya inscribed on it are worth-mentioning.

The site was abandoned in post-Gupta times. The present-day village seems to have been settled around the turn of the eighteenth century.