



Report of a Recent Archaeological Exploration at Agiabir, Mirzapur District, Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract: This article provides an overview of a recent archaeological exploration conducted at Agiabir (Lat. 25° 13' 52" N, long. 82° 38' 41" E), located in the Mirzapur District of Uttar Pradesh. This exploration was carried out by a team of post-graduate students of the session of 2022-23 from the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology of Banaras Hindu University in the month of June 2024, under the guidance of faculty members of the concerned institution. The exploration at this site yielded several significant surface artifacts, enhancing the site's status as a prehistoric to early-historic location. Among the notable findings were various types of potsherds, terracotta objects, stone implements and iron slag. This paper aims to offer a detailed analysis of these artifacts, shedding light on their relevance and implications for our understanding of Agiabir site's historical and archaeological context on the basis of recent exploration.

Keywords: Exploration, Ring-well, Agiabir, Potsherds, Terracotta, Iron Slag, NBPW.

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Introduction

The field of archaeology offers a unique window into the past, allowing us to uncover and interpret the remnants of ancient civilizations and human activities. Through the meticulous processes of exploration and excavation, archaeologists piece together the stories of our ancestors, providing profound insights into how they lived, interacted and adapted to their environments. This report of field-work aims to delve into the fascinating world of archaeological exploration and excavation, highlighting the methods, challenges and ethical considerations that shape this discipline. Archaeological exploration often begins with non-invasive techniques designed to identify potential sites of interest without

disturbing the ground (Renfrew & Bahn 2016). This exploration reminds us that, despite the passage of time, the human experience is a continuous thread connecting us to those who came before and those who will follow. Throughout the process, archaeologists must navigate numerous challenges and ethical considerations. Preservation of sites for future generations, cultural sensitivity and legal compliance are paramount. Engaging with local communities and respecting their heritage ensures that archaeological work is conducted with the utmost respect and responsibility. The archaeological exploration at Agiabir, significant archaeological sites that has revealed valuable insights into ancient Indian history and culture. Here's an overview of what is typically involved in recent archaeological explorations and the key findings from Agiabir. It is a well-known archaeological site in India, located in Uttar Pradesh. The archaeologists have uncovered remnants of ancient structures, including foundations of buildings, which suggest the presence of a well-planned settlement. Various artifacts such as pottery, tools, ornaments and inscriptions have been found. These items provide clues about the technological advancements and trade practices of the time. Discovery of animal and other material remains offers insights into the different cultural aspects of the ancient inhabitants. Inscriptions, seal and sealing found at the site can reveal historical records, religious practices, and linguistic evolution. A team of archaeologists and post-graduate students of the session of 2022-23 from the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in the month of June 2024, under the guidance of faculty members of the concerned institution. In this present article, the surface findings is reported and an attempt has been taken to analysis these findings with the archaeological context.

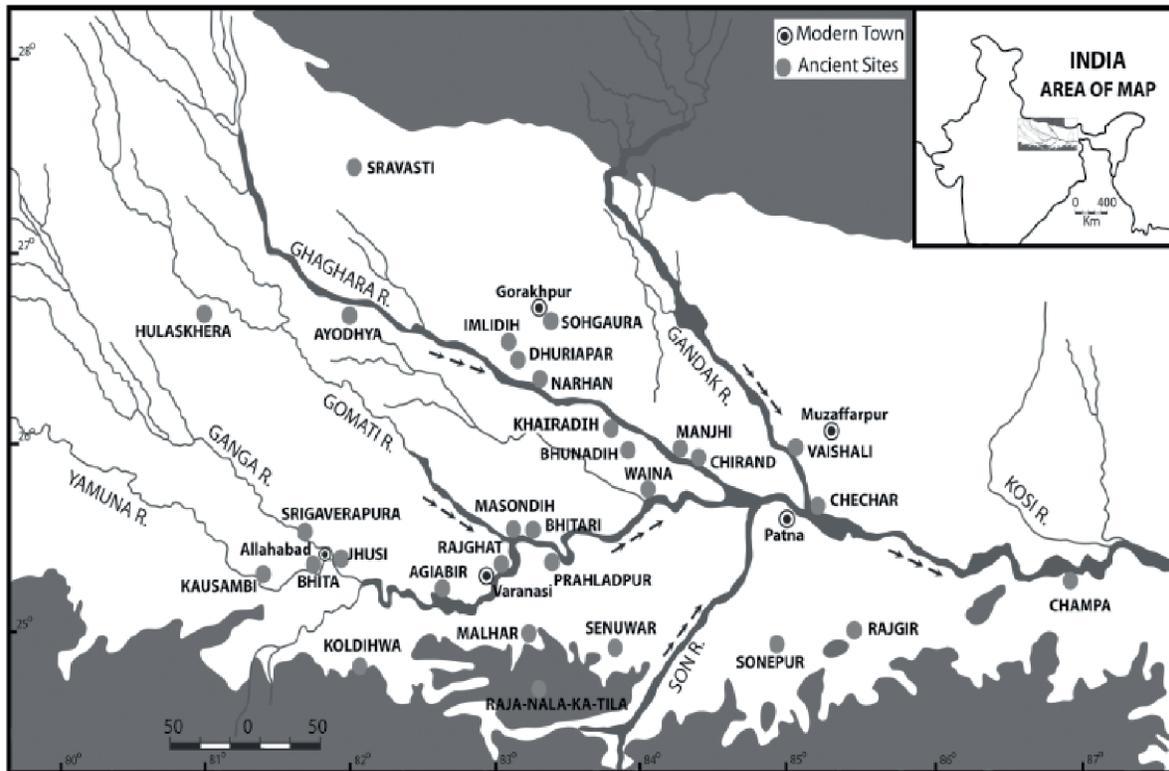
Location of Agiabir

The multi-culture site of Agiabir (Lat. 25° 13' 52" N, long. 82° 38' 41" E) is located on the left bank of Ganga, near Katka railway station on the Varanasi-Allahabad section of Northern Railway in District Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh (**Map 1**). The archaeologists find the settlement from prehistoric to early historic period at Agiabir (Singh & Shankar 2019: 168-191). The archaeological site is spread over 1 square km (main mound: 500 square m with 70 cm of deposit).



Map 1: Location of the archaeological site Agiabir, District Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh (Map Courtesy: Google Earth Pro)

The region is predominantly flat with fertile land, suitable for agriculture. The Ganges River is a significant geographical feature in the vicinity, influencing the local agriculture and lifestyle. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and a major cultural and religious center in India (Singh & Singh. 2004, Bhattacharya 2010, Kumar 2022: 94-106). Given its close location to Varanasi, Agiabir may contain archaeological remnants that provide insights into the ancient civilization and cultural practices of the area. Given its close location to Varanasi, Agiabir may contain archaeological remains that provide insights into the ancient civilization and cultural practices of the middle Ganga plain area (Bhattacharya 2010, Kumar 2022: 94-106).



Map 2: Major archaeological sites in the middle Ganga plain (After Joglekar & Singh 2017: 55)

Review of Earlier Researches

Agiabir has been a significant site for archaeological research due to its rich history and strategic location along the Ganges River. Several studies and excavations have taken place to uncover the historical and cultural significance of this area. The site of Agiabir was discovered by Ashok Kumar Singh in 1998 and it was reported in the *Pragdhara*, the Bulletin of the Directorate of UP State Archaeology Department, Lucknow (Singh 1999: 61-56). The Department of AIHC & Archaeology, BHU conducted archaeological excavations at Agiabir between 1999-2001 under the joint direction of Prof. P. Singh and Ashok Kumar Singh (Singh & Singh 2000: 31-55) and subsequently in 2005-2007. These excavations are vertical in nature and an uninterrupted cultural sequence of Chalcolithic period to Post Gupta period has been recorded.

Agiabir was first excavated by P. Singh and Ashok Kumar Singh in 1999-2000 (Singh & Singh 2000: 31-55). The second session of excavation at Agiabir was directed by the same excavators (Singh & Singh 2001: 157-159). After some days, this important archaeological site Agiabir was excavated by Vibha Tripathi, A. K. Singh and P. Upadhyay in the session of 2004-05 (Tripathi, Singh & Upadhyay

2005-2006: 1-38). Further excavation was done in the next session 2005-06 by Vibha Tripathi and P. Upadhyay (Tripathi & Upadhyay 2006-07: 121-129). In the session 2006-2007, Vibha Tripathi, A. K. Singh and P. Upadhyay again excavated the site Agiabir (Tripathi, Singh and Upadhyay 2008-2009: 50-57). Then the site was excavated by Ashok Kumar Singh & Ravi Shankar for the last time (Singh & Shankar 2017: 103-126, 2019: 168-191). After a long time, the site has again been explored in the month of June 2024 by the students of the post-graduation (Session 2022-23) class of the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology, BHU.

Table 1: Showing the Excavation Session and Excavator(s) of Agiabir Site

<i>SN</i>	<i>Excavation Session</i>	<i>Excavator(s)</i>	<i>Reference(s)</i>
1	2000	P. Singh & Ashok Kumar Singh	Singh & Singh 2000: 31-55
2	2001-2002	P. Singh & Ashok Kumar Singh	Singh & Singh 2001: 157-159
3	2004-2005	Vibha Tripathi, A. K. Singh and P. Upadhyay	Tripathi, Singh and Upadhyay 2005-2006: 1-38
4	2005-2006	Vibha Tripathi and P. Upadhyay	Tripathi & Upadhyay 2006-07: 121-129
5	2006-2007	Vibha Tripathi, A. K. Singh and P. Upadhyay	Tripathi, Singh and Upadhyay 2008-2009: 50-57
6	2015-2016	Ashok Kumar Singh & Ravi Shankar	Singh & Shankar 2017: 103-126
7	2018	Ashok Kumar Singh & Ravi Shankar	Singh & Shankar 2019: 168-191

Cultural Sequence of Agiabir Site

Excavations at Agiabir revealed significant insights into the region's cultural evolution. Conducted primarily on Mound-1, with limited investigations on Mound-2 due to funding constraints, the findings indicated that the earliest inhabitants settled along the banks of the Ganga on Mound-1 (Singh & Shankar 2017: 103-126, 2019: 168-191). Initial habitation was characterized by small, scattered communities occupying a restricted area. In subsequent periods (II and III), the deposits on Mound-1 became more regular, suggesting increased stability and organization among the settlers. However, during Period IV, around 200 BCE, the community transitioned to Mound-2 in response to the threats posed by the river's shifting course. This relocation coincided with the mid-phase of the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) culture, during which the inhabitants fortified Mound-2 with defensive structures, including walls, watchtowers and a moat. To know the cultural affinity of the adjoining area of Agiabir, an exploration was conducted by the author and his team along the left bank of river Ganga in Varanasi and Bhadohi (Sant Ravidas Nagar) districts during 2014-2017 (Singh & Shankar 2017, 2019). Several sites have been discovered which yielded the remains of Chalcolithic, Pre-NBP, Sunga-Kushana, Gupta and early medieval period deposits. The excavations delineated a cultural sequence spanning approximately from 2300 BCE to 700 CE, encompassing the following periods:

- Period I: Neolithic Culture (c. 2300 - 1500 BCE)
- Period II: Chalcolithic Culture (c. 1500 - 900 BCE)
- Period III: Early Iron Phase (Pre-NBPW with Iron) (c. 900 - 600 BCE)
- Period IV: NBPW Culture (c. 600 - 200 BCE)
- Period V: Sunga-Kushana Period (c. 200 BCE - 300 CE)
- Period VI: Gupta & Post-Gupta Deposits (c. 300 - 700 CE)

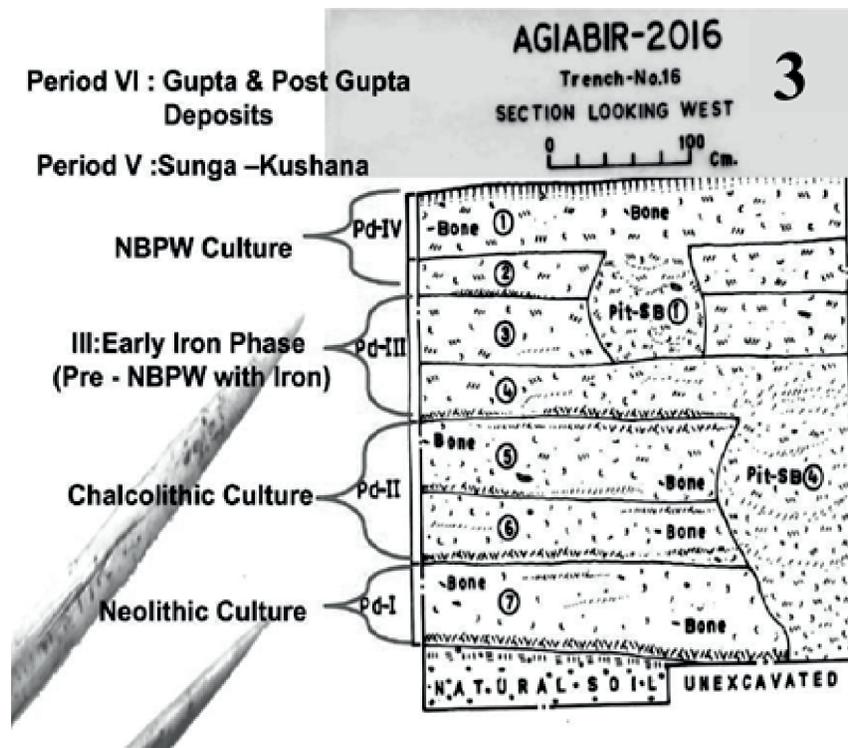


Figure 1: Section of the Trench 16 at Agiabir showing the cultural chronology in sequence (Photo: Shankar & et al. 2021)

Adopted Methodology

This is an interdisciplinary investigation, which aims at locating and understanding the potentials of an archaeological site. An archaeological site is based on several factors. Usually an archaeological site has a deposit which was formed as a result of cultural and natural processes. The team of the archaeologists and post-graduate students conducted this archaeological exploration. They basically explored the surface where they find a large number of potsherds, terracotta objects, iron slag, stone objects, animal remains etc., those were primarily identified by the experts (i.e. the faculty members of the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology at Banaras Hindu University). And after the exploration these findings were deeply studied by the team.

Description of Present Findings

The primary focus of the excavation was Mound-1, where ten trenches measuring 3 m x 3 m were opened across two distinct localities to investigate the pre-Chalcolithic deposits during the 2014-2015 season (Singh & Shankar 2017: 103-126). The excavations were conducted on the southern and western sections of Mound-1, adjacent to the Ganga River and a nearby *nullah*, respectively. In the southern fringe of the mound, a total of twenty-one trenches of the same dimensions (3 m x 3 m) were horizontally excavated in two separate localities. For the first time, evidence of pre-Chalcolithic deposits, dating to the Neolithic Period, was identified in this region. In these trenches, the Neolithic deposits were observed in the lowest layers, situated directly above the natural soil. The earliest inhabitants appear to have occupied the undulating surface of the natural soil in localized pockets. At Mound-2, the principal mound, vertical excavation was conducted, involving the opening of six trenches, each measuring 5 m x 5 m (Singh & Shankar 2017: 103-126). This approach aimed to further elucidate the archaeological context of the area. The present exploration involved a comprehensive

survey of the entire area encompassing both mounds. This means that researchers systematically investigated and analyzed the geography, structure and any artifacts or features present within and around the mounds to gather data and gain insights into their archaeological significance.



Figure 2: General view of Agiabir Mound (Photo: Mukant Bishwas)



Figure 3: General view of Agiabir Mound with the Ganga River (Photo: Mukant Bishwas)



Figure 4: Potsherds and other artifacts in the surface of Agiabir Mound (Photo: Mukant Bishwas)



Figure 5: Various types of potsherds and terracotta objects from recent archaeological exploration at Agiabir (Photo: Mukant Bishwas)

Pottery Findings

From the surface at Agiabir, a large number of potsherds has been reported. They are: Northern Black polished Ware (NBPW), Black Slip Ware (BSW), Gray Ware (GW), Red Ware (RW) etc.

The **BSW** consists of bowls characterized by an almost vertical, internally thickened, and sharply defined rim, with slightly convex sides (**Figure 6a**). These vessels are made of medium-fabric clay

and are treated with a black slip, giving them a polished appearance. A vase of similar fabric and slip treatment features a flaring, featureless rim and a slightly concave neck, with the sides of the vessel also exhibiting a flaring profile (**Figure 6b**). Fragments of basin of dull red ware with an arrow based and multi grooved rim, with convex profile having triple weak horizontal grooving on the exterior, of medium fabric (**Figure 6c**). The primary ceramic industries of this period at Agiabir include BSW, NBPW—some of which exhibit deluxe varieties in shades of silvery, golden, pink, and steel blue—GW and Red Ware RW. A significant quantity of painted sherds from NBPW were recovered during the excavation (Singh & Singh 2004). The most prominent vessel types among the first three wares (BSW, NBPW, and GW) include straight-sided and flanged bowls, as well as dishes with incurved rims. In contrast, the Red Ware primarily consists of bowls, imported lipped basins, and vases with appliqué designs. A particularly noteworthy discovery is a dish of NBPW with a handle and a thick slip, marking an important addition to the ceramic repertoire of this period. This find is significant not only for its rarity but also for its possible functional or symbolic role in the culture of the time.

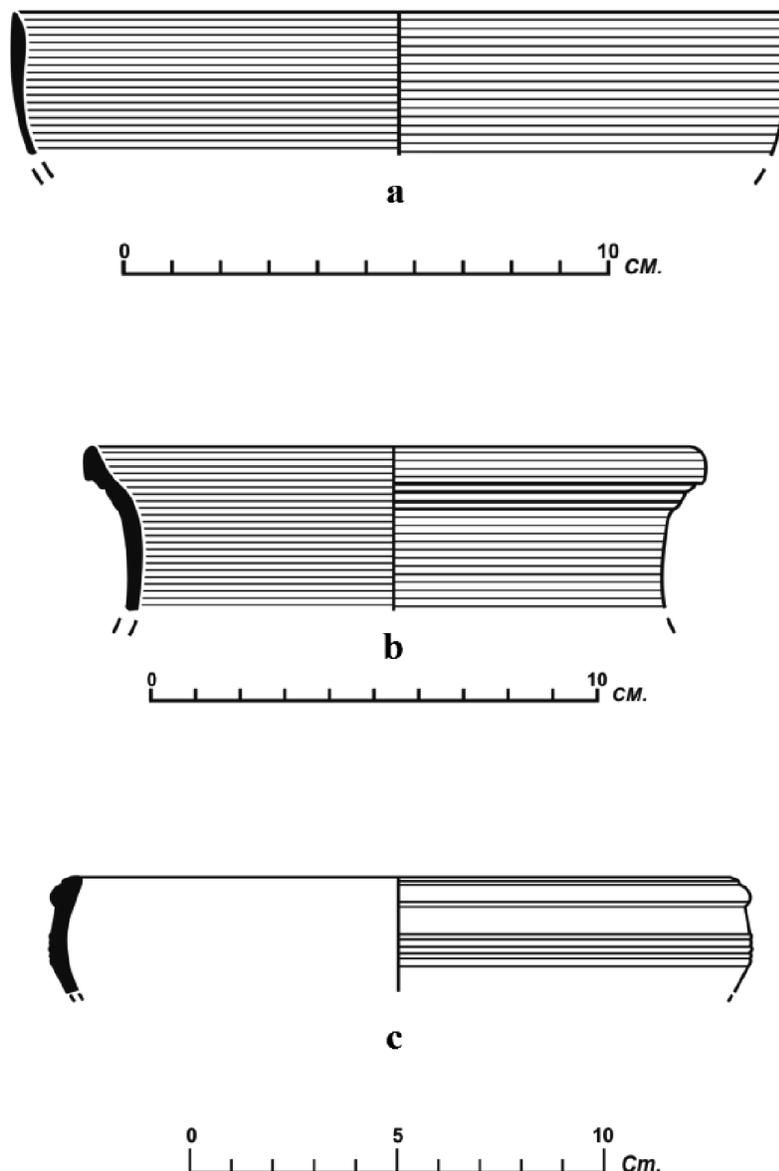


Figure 6: a. Bowl of BSW, b. Vase of BSW and c. Basin of red ware.



Figures 7-8: Various potsherds (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)



Figure 9: Potsherds from surface (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)

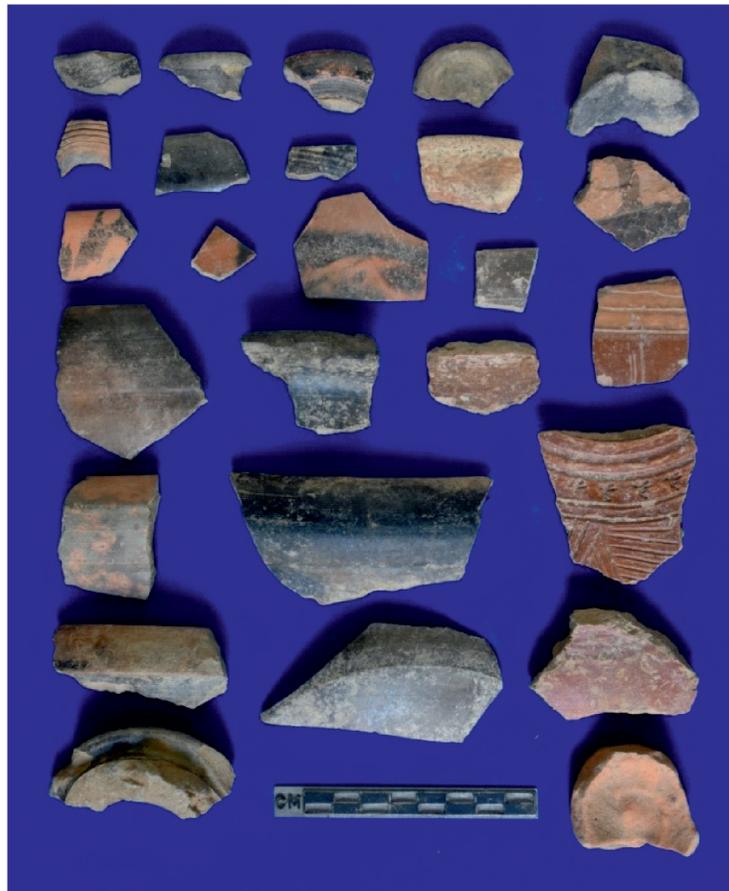


Figure 10: Various potsherds (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)



Figure 11: Various potsherds (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)



Figure 12: NBPW and BSW (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)



Figure 13: Some knobs (?) (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)

Fragments of ring-well of terracotta have been reported near the Ganga River at Agiabir, adding to the archaeological significance of the site. From the previous excavations, three ring-wells were exposed from Period V (Sunga-Kushana Period) (Singh & Singh 2004: 40). The discovery of these fragments suggests advanced water management practices in the area, reflecting the inhabitant's ability to harness and utilize local water resources effectively. The proximity of the ring-well fragments to the Ganga River may indicate that the community relied on this vital water source for both domestic and agricultural needs. The construction techniques and materials used in the ring-wells can provide insights into the technological capabilities and socio-economic organization of the society at Agiabir. The presence of ring-wells can enhance our understanding of cultural practices related to water use, including potential ceremonial or communal aspects associated with water management. The ring-well fragments contribute valuable information regarding the historical context of Agiabir and its connection to broader patterns of settlement and resource utilization in the region.

Terracotta Objects

Two mutilated human heads and two animal figurines, likely dating to Period V (Sunga-Kushana Period), have been discovered, although they are in a severely damaged state (**Figure 14**). One of the human heads features a hole and is partially defaced, while the other is comparatively larger and exhibits characteristics of a male figure, including well-dressed hair. This second head is also partly broken. The extent of the damage complicates the analysis, but these artifacts nonetheless offer potential insights into the artistic conventions and cultural practices of the time. Further examination and comparative study may elucidate their significance within the broader context of Sunga-Kushana art and society.

During this exploration, animal figurines were recovered from the surface, including a broken standing horse and some unidentified figurines (**Figures 15-16**). Both artifacts are significantly damaged and fragmented, limiting the extent of analysis. The horse figurine, despite its broken condition, may provide insights into the artistic styles and cultural significance of equine representation in the period under study. Further examination and potential restoration efforts could enhance our understanding of these figurines and their role within the broader context of the archaeological site.

A partially recovered skin rubber has also been discovered, featuring incised designs on both sides and exhibiting a reddish color with a wash (**Figure 14**). The remaining portion suggests that the artifact was likely rectangular or square in shape. The incised decorations may provide insights into the artistic practices of the period as well as potential uses of the rubber in various cultural contexts.

Fragments of terracotta discs have also been found (**Figures 17-18**). These discs are made of well-levigated clay and fired under oxidized condition, giving them a bright red surface color. The designs are confined to the edges on both sides. The important designs are rope and nail pattern.

Terracotta balls and discs may have served various practical purposes, such as weights for looms, such as weights for fishing nets, spinning devices, gaming pieces, or even components in rituals etc. (**Figures 17-18**). Their functionality can provide insights into the daily lives and activities of the communities that used them. Their use can provide insights into the daily activities and recreational practices of ancient communities. The design, size and decoration of terracotta balls can reflect the aesthetic preferences and artistic traditions of the culture that produced them. This can help researchers understand the cultural identity and social norms of the society. The production techniques used to create terracotta balls can reveal information about the technological capabilities of ancient potters. Analysis of the clay composition and firing methods may provide insights into regional variations in pottery production. The distribution of terracotta balls across different archaeological sites can

indicate trade networks and cultural exchange among communities. Their presence in various contexts can highlight interactions between different societies. Terracotta balls can assist in establishing a chronological framework for archaeological sites. By analyzing their stylistic and functional attributes, researchers can gain insights into the temporal phases of occupation.



Figure 14: Fragments of terracotta figurines and fragment of skin rubber (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)



Figures 15-16: Fragments of terracotta figurines (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)



Figure 17: Terracotta balls (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)



Figure 18: Terracotta Objects (Beads, Balls, Discs) (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)

Stone Objects

The lithic components uncovered during the excavation include a substantial collection of chips, flakes, bladelets, cores, and retouchers (Singh & Singh 2004: 69). The present exploration, has revealed several stone nodules, indicating evidence of local stone chiseling activities and the importation of raw materials to the site (Figures 19-21). This suggests a dual approach to lithic production, where both local craftsmanship and external sourcing of materials played a role in the site's tool-making activities. Further analysis of these lithic artifacts could provide valuable insights into the technological practices and resource management strategies of the inhabitants.



Figure 19: Some Stone Objects (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)



Figures 20-21: Some Stone Objects (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)

Metal Objects

The current exploration has revealed that, among the metallic artifacts, only iron slag has been reported. Agiabir stands out as a significant site for the discovery of copper objects, which include various items such as copper vessel, lota, knobbed lid, mirrors, as well as antimony rods, rings and wires. In addition to these, the site has yielded a range of iron artifacts, including swords, lampstands, nails, chisels, knives and spearheads. The present finding only the iron slags from this exploration are elaborated upon below:

Iron Slag

Two pieces of iron slag have been identified in the recent archaeological exploration, suggesting that smelting activities took place at Agiabir. Previous research has established Agiabir as a center for pottery, lithic object and bead production (Singh & Shankar 2022: 187-199, Singh & Singh 2004: 69-74); the discovery of iron slag preliminarily confirms its role as a workshop for iron smelting or iron object production. Iron slag is a direct byproduct of iron smelting processes. Its presence confirms that the site was involved in iron production, providing crucial evidence of the technological capabilities of the inhabitants. The composition and characteristics of iron slag can reveal the specific smelting techniques used, including the types of furnaces and methods of production, which contributes to our understanding of ancient metallurgy. The production of iron suggests a level of economic organization and resource management. Analyzing slag can help archaeologists understand trade networks, raw material procurement, and the economic importance of iron goods within the community. The dating of iron slag layers can assist in establishing a chronological sequence of habitation and industrial activity at the site, helping to place it within the broader context of regional development. Further scientific research is necessary to substantiate these assumptions regarding the site of Agiabir.



Figure 22: Iron Slag from Agiabir (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)

Animal Remains

Animal remains contribute significantly to the archaeological record across various cultural time frames worldwide, often appearing in substantial quantities. Their presence can be attributed to several factors, including remnants of leftover food, ritual practices, burial contexts, debris from manufacturing

processes, or post-death assemblages. In the recent exploration at the site, a tooth of animal was found among the surface findings (**Figure 23**). But further scientific research is necessary to accurately identify the species and assess the significance of these remains.



Figure 23: Tooth of Animal (Photo: Dr. Prabhakar Upadhyay)

Discussion

A careful analysis of the ceramic industries and other artefactual data from the limited excavations at Agiabir provides several significant insights into the early settlement's material culture, technological developments and socio-economic dynamics. These findings, when compared with other Narhan culture sites, reveal both continuities and regional variations that are key to understanding the site's role in the broader cultural landscape of the Ganga Plain.

As with other Narhan culture sites excavated by a team from BHU, the Black-and-Red Ware was the principal ceramic industry of the first settlers of Agiabir. It is important to note the regional variations in this ware. Unlike the type-site of Narhan, where the Black-and-Red Ware is characterized by fine fabric, the ware at Agiabir is marked by coarseness and the fine fabric typical of Narhan is either entirely absent or present in only a limited number of vessels. The linear white paintings that are a hallmark of the Black-and-Red Ware at Narhan (comprising about 20 percent of the pottery) are notably limited at Agiabir. In terms of vessel shapes, the lota-shaped vessel, common in Black-and-Red Ware at Narhan and other sites in the Sarayupar plain (such as Imlidih Khurd and Dhuriapar), does not appear at Agiabir. It is found at Waina in the Ballia district, suggesting that Agiabir shared certain ceramic traits with regions outside the immediate Sarayupar plain. Furthermore, the characteristic vessel shape known as the thali—a staple of Black-and-Red Ware at other sites in the region such as

Raja-Nala-Ka-Tila and Malhar—is completely absent at Agiabir during Period I, further illustrating regional differences in ceramic traditions.

The settlement's inhabitants in Period I exploited the Vindhyan hills, located across the river from Agiabir, to obtain siliceous stones for local bead and microlith production. The presence of microliths at Agiabir and Waina, alongside the absence of such tools in the Sarayupar plains, highlights a technological practice that was unique to these sites. The production of beads—which continued into the subsequent periods—was a significant economic activity at Agiabir and likely contributed to its prosperity, as beads were important items in local and regional trade networks. Despite the presence of bead-making activities at Narhan, it is noteworthy that microliths are completely absent from all other Sarayupar plain sites. This suggests that Agiabir may have been a specialized center for bead production, with its output playing an important role in the trade economy of the region.

In terms of material culture, Period I at Agiabir was largely devoid of metal artifacts, with the exception of a copper fish-hook. However, by Period II and III (the NBPW period), there is a marked increase in the use of iron tools and implements, with 30 iron objects from Period II and 56 iron tools from Period III. This surge in metal artifacts is significant, as it reflects the increasing sophistication of technology and the development of a metalworking industry at Agiabir. Notably, the site has yielded a substantial number of metal vessels, a rarity at other NBPW sites in India. Among the metal objects discovered, the iron lampstand from the mid-phase of the NBPW period is a particularly rare find. Such lampstands have not been found at any other site in India from this period, underscoring the unique status of Agiabir in the broader NBPW cultural sphere. The presence of these artifacts is indicative of a prosperous economy, supported by the metalworking industry and the flourishing trade networks that extended across the Ganga Plain.

The growth of Agiabir is also reflected in the spatial organization of the settlement. The first settlers occupied the western part of Mound 1, but as the population grew, the settlement expanded eastward along the Ganga River. The maximum expansion occurred during the mid-phase of the NBPW period (around 400 BCE), when the settlement spread to Mound 3. This expansion is indicative of the site's growing population and its increasing importance as a regional center. Furthermore, the emergence of new ceramic types—such as the handled dish—during this period reflects the prosperity of the site. The expansion and diversification of the ceramic repertoire signal a broader economic and cultural flourishing at Agiabir during the NBPW period.

Evidence of architectural development also suggests the growing importance of Agiabir during this period. Well-built walls of burnt bricks were exposed during excavations on the eastern fringe of the main mound, signaling advancements in architecture and construction techniques. This structural sophistication is consistent with the broader prosperity of the site during the NBPW and subsequent Sunga-Kushana periods (Period IV). The prosperity of Agiabir is further attested by the discovery of an ivory seal bearing the legend '*Skandanaga*', indicating the settlement's involvement in regional trade. Agiabir's strategic location, situated between several important townships—Kausambi, Bhita, and Jhusi to the west, and Rajghat (ancient Varanasi) to the east, with the Ganga River serving as a vital trade route—positioned it as a crucial node in the trade networks of the Early Historical period. The site likely served as a key trade center, facilitating the exchange of goods, materials, and cultural influences between these prominent urban centers.

The limited excavations at Agiabir have revealed important insights into the material culture, technological advancements, and economic prosperity of the settlement. The ceramic industry, characterized by regional variations, the manufacture of beads, the growth of metalworking, and the increasing architectural sophistication all point to Agiabir's role as a thriving urban center during the

Early Historical period. The site's strategic location between major townships and its active involvement in trade further underscore its significance in the broader socio-economic context of the Ganga Plain. Agiabir's prosperity, marked by its thriving trade, economic expansion, and technological innovation, makes it a key site for understanding the development of early historical urbanism in ancient India.

Concluding Remarks

The limited excavations and explorations at Agiabir have provided valuable insights into the religious beliefs and rituals practiced during the early centuries of the Christian era in the Mid Ganga Valley. The findings suggest the prevalence of the lotus-headed goddess cult in this region during this period, as evidenced by the discovery of terracotta figurines of the goddess at Agiabir. Similar figures have been found in previous excavations at Bhita, Kausambi, and Jhusi, supporting the idea of a shared religious tradition across these sites. The cult of the mother goddess, depicted with a flat body, stumpy arms and legs, pendulous breasts, and a cone-shaped head, has ancient roots, with similar representations dating back to the Jorwe culture (c. 1300–1000 BCE) at Inamgaon.

The terracotta figures from Agiabir, like those from Bhita, Kausambi, and Jhusi, are nude and adorned with a few ornaments such as a girdle, armbands, necklace, and anklets. These figures likely represent a fertility goddess, depicted in a birth-giving pose. The iconography is interpreted as symbolic of Mother Earth, the origin-ground or birthplace of all creation. The goddess's posture reflects both the reception of the male "seed" from the Sky and the birth-giving act, indicating her role in the continuous cycle of life originating from her inexhaustible womb. The lotus atop her head is a key symbol of the Earth-lotus (bhū-padma), a concept deeply embedded in Vedic and Puranic thought.

In addition to the figurines, the excavations have revealed ritual vessels, including a distinctive type of bottle-necked jar (often referred to as a sprinkler) with an additional perforation running through the neck and down to the body. These vessels, which were likely used in ritual practices, have been found in a limited number at sites such as Kausambi and Srīngaverapura. A similar type of bottle-necked sprinkler is commonly found in red polished ware at several sites in Gujarat, especially in the Saurashtra region, and dates from the 1st century BCE to the 5th century CE. Complete examples of this vessel type have also been reported from Amreli, Yeleswaram, Kausambi, and Kolhapur. According to Dhavalikar, this vessel type continued in use until the 7th century CE, appearing in sculptures and paintings. It is depicted in the Ajanta cave paintings from the Vakataka-Gupta period (5th century CE), where it is identified as the kundika, a water vessel mentioned in the Harsha-charita of Banabhatta. It is believed that Buddhist monks carried these vessels, and even Hieun Tsang, the Chinese traveler, is depicted in one illustration carrying it on his shoulder. The association of the kundika with Buddhism is further supported by the discovery of a specimen from Kausambi, where it was found at the Ghoshitarama monastery.

Conclusion

Though the research work revealed many important information of the study area, like other scientific field research this time-bound project also have limitations. As we have mentioned heretofore that the study is based on the surface collections from the archaeological sites, sometimes access to some of these sites become difficult due to some unavoidable situations. In some cases, accesses to the private collectors become troublesome due to collectors' unfair motives. The most important lacuna for not only this work but for the entire research world is that, the unawareness of the inhabitants of the study area regarding their culture and history. For this reason the unholy personnel make selling of the artefacts as their way of livelihood. Another important weakness of the study is that the unavailability

of large-scale archaeological excavation reports of the ancient sites of the area. It is important to note that the three seasons of fieldwork conducted at Agiabir were primarily exploratory in nature. The main mound at the site spans over 25,000 square meters, but only a small portion—less than 400 square meters—was excavated. Despite this limited area of investigation, the findings clearly demonstrate the significant potential of the site. The discovery of ritual vessels, terracotta figures, and other artifacts strongly indicates that a more extensive excavation at Agiabir could offer important new insights into the evolution of Indian culture in the Mid Ganga Valley. It is our firm belief that horizontal excavation at the site would provide a clearer picture of the stage-by-stage development of cultural practices, religious traditions, and social structures in this historically important region.

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