



Recent Archaeological Exploration at Shivasewak Patti and Tikri, Sant Ravidas Nagar Bhadohi District, Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract: The Sant Ravidas Nagar (Bhadohi) district of Uttar Pradesh, situated in the Middle Ganga Valley between Prayagraj and Varanasi, represents a significant locus of cultural development and transformation across ancient times. Archaeological surveys and excavations in this region have consistently demonstrated a deep antiquity of human settlement, extending back several millennia. This paper presents recent investigations at Shivsevakpatti (25°17'13"N, 82°19'47"E) and Tikri (25°17'42" N, 82°21'50"), where systematic explorations have yielded a diverse assemblage of material culture, including architectural remains, ceramic sherds, terracotta artefacts, iron slag, bangle fragments, and other antiquities. These findings provide substantive evidence of continuous habitation from prehistoric phases through the historical period, thereby underscoring the archaeological richness of the district. The study aims to contextualize these discoveries within the framework of preceding research and to offer a systematic description of the recovered antiquities. By integrating new data with earlier investigations, the paper seeks to illuminate the long trajectory of cultural development in Bhadohi and reaffirm its enduring significance within the archaeological heritage of the Middle Ganga Valley.

Keywords: Middle Ganga Valley, Tikri, Shivsevakpatti, Archaeological Exploration, Pottery, Ceramics, Iron Slag, Antiquities, Cultural Sequence

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INTRODUCTION

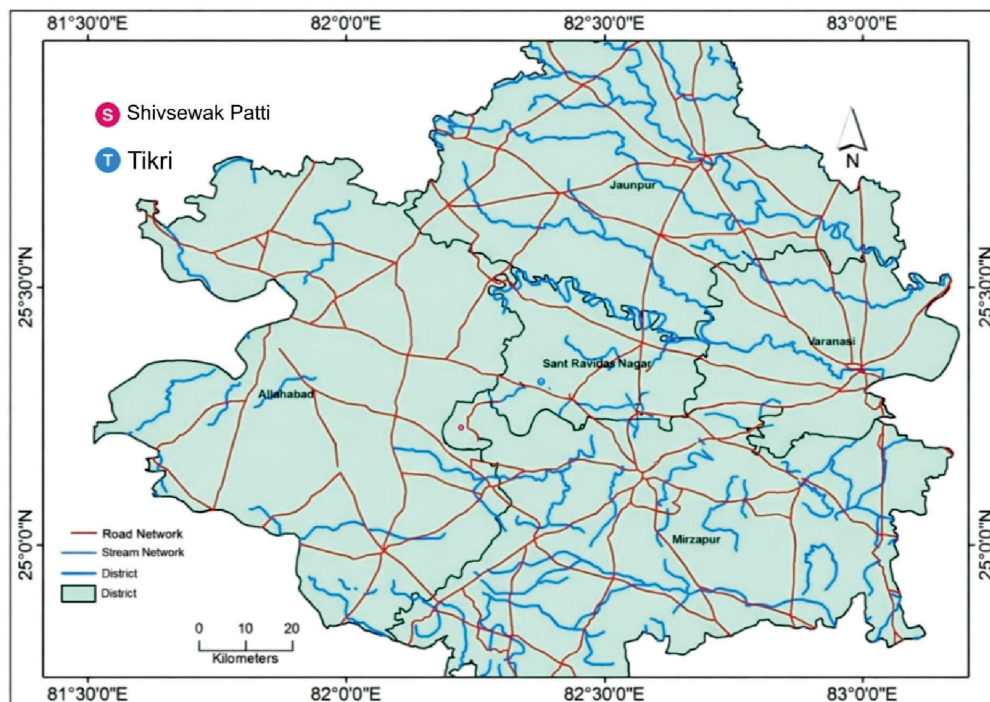
The Earth has long been conceived as the ultimate repository of cultural memory, wherein civilizations emerge, flourish, and eventually dissolve back into the soil. This cyclical process of rise and decline leaves behind stratified remnants that form the foundation for subsequent cultural trajectories. The study of these buried legacies is indispensable for understanding humanity's future, as it is intrinsically anchored in the material and intellectual achievements of the past. Historians and archaeologists,

therefore, continually endeavour to uncover these hidden chronological layers, thereby reconstructing the continuum of human experience. In alignment with this pursuit, exploratory field investigations were undertaken at the archaeological sites of Shivsevakpatti and Tikri, located in the Gyanpur tehsil of Sant Ravidas Nagar (Bhadohi) district, Uttar Pradesh. Modern archaeological practice emphasizes non-invasive methodologies, guided by the principles of minimizing physical disturbance, safeguarding cultural sensitivity, and preserving site integrity for future scholarship. Within this ethical and methodological framework, systematic surveys were conducted at Shivsevakpatti (25°17'13" N, 82°19'47" E) and Tikri (25°17'42" N, 82°21'50" E), both strategically situated in the Middle Ganga Valley—a region of profound historical significance that continues to yield fresh insights into ancient Indian cultural development.

The explorations revealed vestiges of early architectural planning, indicative of organized and sustained human occupation. A diverse assemblage of material culture was recovered, including ceramic traditions, terracotta artefacts, bangle fragments, and utilitarian tools. Of particular importance is the discovery of iron slag, which provides direct evidence of metallurgical activity and attests to the technological proficiency of local communities. This material points to localized iron-working traditions and suggests the existence of small-scale industrial production. Collectively, these findings furnish a robust empirical foundation for reconstructing the socio-economic and cultural milieu of the region's ancient inhabitants, thereby reaffirming the enduring significance of Sant Ravidas Nagar (Bhadohi) within the archaeological heritage map of the Middle Ganga Valley.

LOCATION

The archaeological sites of Shivsevak Patti (25°17'13" N, 82°19'47" E) and Tikri (25°17'42" N, 82°21'50" E) are situated in the Gyanpur tehsil of Sant Ravidas Nagar (Bhadohi) district, geographically positioned on the left bank of the river Ganga, lying to the right of the Sitamarhi-Jangiganj road (Map 1).



Map 1: Location of explored Sites

Shivsevak Patti is located two kilometers east of the Koirauna market. The Tikri site, on the other hand, lies along the Tikri-Jagapur road, approximately 700 meters from the Sarai Jagdish railway station. Both the settlements are roughly equidistant—about 75 kilometer—from the major cultural and historical centres of Prayagraj and Varanasi. These sites can be accessed via the Jangiganj-Sitamarhi route, which branches off from Jangiganj on the Varanasi-Prayagraj National Highway-19 (Formerly NH-2).

Their proximity to the regional river system further highlights their spatial significance. The Ganga flows just one kilometer away from Shivsevak Patti, with Berwan Ghat serving as the nearest riverbank. Conversely, the river is situated at a distance of approximately six kilometers from the Tikri site, where the closest access point is known as Semradhnath Ghat.

PREVIOUS WORKS

Sant Ravidas Nagar Bhadohi acquired its status as an independent administrative district on June 30, 1994. Prior to this demarcation, the territory functioned as an integral part of the Varanasi district. Consequently, archaeological and historical studies conducted in this geographical expanse before 1994 are generally documented under the purview of Varanasi and its adjoining regions. The fertile floodplains shaped by the Ganga, Varuna and Morva rivers, which traverse this district, naturally fostered an ecosystem highly conducive to human sustenance. This ecological advantage allowed the tract to serve as a continuous habitat for ancient communities over extended epochs, resulting in the periodic discovery of various archaeological sites and antiquities across the region. Earlier investigative surveys conducted by Dr. Ravi Shankar¹, a researcher from Banaras Hindu University (BHU), were instrumental in bringing the Shivsevak Patti site to scholarly attention. His initial explorations yielded fragments of Red Ware dating to the Kushan and Gupta periods, alongside brickbats, glass bangles, terracotta figurines and iron slag. Even during his fieldwork, Dr. Ravi Shankar had documented the detrimental impact of earthwork undertaken under the MGNREGA scheme on the site's preservation.² Over subsequent years, unregulated commercial earth extraction and modern building construction have severely compromised both the topographical integrity and the cultural stratigraphy of the settlement. Tragically, at present, this archaeological site is on the verge of complete obliteration.

In addition to Shivsevak Patti, Dr. Ravi Shankar carried out comprehensive exploratory work at the Tikri site. His investigations there successfully recovered Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) and ceramic assemblages spanning the Shunga, Kushan, Gupta, and Post-Gupta periods. Furthermore, the site yielded a diverse array of terracotta and stone antiquities, notably accompanied by the discovery of copper coins.³

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology formulated for the present study was systematically designed to document, recover, and analyze archaeological data from Shivsevak Patti and Tikri while strictly adhering to the principles of non-invasive archaeology. To reconstruct the cultural sequence and spatial dynamics of these settlements, a multi-stage investigative approach was employed, encompassing intensive field surveys, spatial documentation, and comparative artefact analysis.

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENT FINDINGS

Spatial and Structural Analysis of the Archaeological Site at Shivsevakpatti

The archaeological site at Shivsevakpatti, spanning a vast area of 500×500 meters, is intersected by roads from all four cardinal directions (Fig. 1). The present study focuses specifically on the 200×200-meter

excavated area, the excavation of which was driven by commercial and private reasons, as well as the sale of soil to brick kilns. Based on the excavation patterns and for analytical convenience, the site is delineated into the following segments:



Fig. 1: Satellite view of the archaeological site (Image Credit: Google Earth)

The Eastern Sector

The eastern portion of the site has been excavated to a depth of three to five feet, resulting in the formation of prominent earthen ridges along its boundaries (Fig. 2). The excavated area measures 78.5×8 meters. The eastern ridge reveals exposed brick fragments and ceramic assemblages. The bricks are found in a fragmented state, while the ceramic yield is dominated by Black-and-Red Ware (BRW) and Red Ware. Similar potsherds are scattered across the northern periphery of this sector.

The West-Central Terrane

The western terrane encompasses an area of 105×23 meters. Extensive soil extraction within an 18×30-meter patch has increased the depth of this section to approximately 10 feet. This excavation has exposed a brick structure, which, *prima facie*, appears to be the architectural remains of a chamber. Another brick structure is observed in the southern part, terminating near the road constructed to the west.

The Western Quadrants

Adjacent to this is a 78×29-meter sector. Its southern part is level ground, featuring brick structures at three distinct points. The southern structure corresponds to the extension of the aforementioned large



Fig. 2: The eastern portion of the site

wall reaching the road, while the distance between the other two walls is approximately 23 meters. This area is strewn with numerous fragmented potsherds (Fig. 3), primarily belonging to Red Ware and Black Slipped Ware (BSW). Architectural remains and ceramics in the southern part have been significantly damaged due to recent digging. Iron slag has also been recovered from here.

Another western segment, measuring 95×30 meters, is the most archaeologically rich part of the site. Its southern subdivision (50×31 meters) yielded brick structures, a potter's dabber (Fig. 4), and



Fig. 3: Scattered potsherds on the ground surface

specimens of Black-and-Red Ware and Red Ware (Fig. 5). Dabbers were historically used by potters to shape clay vessels and were made of terracotta. The recovered specimen is a terracotta dabber of red fabric, similar to those reported from various sites in the Sant Ravidas Nagar district. The associated Red Ware vessels feature everted rims and prominent profiles.

Commercial excavation has increased the depth of the northern portion of this sector to about 5 meters (Fig. 6). The southern excavated margin is 9 meters wide and is now covered with Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) trees. A massive wall, approximately 100 cm thick, and embedded potsherds are visible here (Fig. 7). The brickwork on the western side of the wall shows a gradual downward stepping pattern.



Fig. 4: potter's dabber



Fig. 5: Red Ware



Fig. 6: The northern portion of this sector

Structures and Burials

The exposed eastern wall is approximately 20.5 meters long, with its southern section being particularly rich in ceramics. The wall is constructed using bricks of 46×23×5 cm, a size characteristic of Period III at Rajghat.⁴ Within this wall structure, three human burials are visible (Fig. 8), oriented in a North-South direction. Notably, the three skeletons are situated at different stratigraphic elevations. Local informants suggested that several skeletal remains were unearthed during commercial digging; it is probable that more remains are preserved in situ. Beneath the wall, pitcher-shaped potsherds (Fig. 9) and five broken ring well were found (Fig. 10). Each ring



Fig. 7: The southern excavated area

measures 30 cm in height. While their exact function remains unclear, similar ring well have been documented in Period IV at Agiabir.⁵

Opposite this, the western wall measures approximately 72 meters in length, though an 8meter segment has been obliterated as it became part of a regular pathway. The southern section features 46×23×5 cm bricks, with embedded ceramics and ring well located 10 meters away from the previous ring alignment. The northern section is damaged, but the northernmost edge revealed a structure made of 51×48×7 cm bricks and Red Ware fragments (Fig. 11).

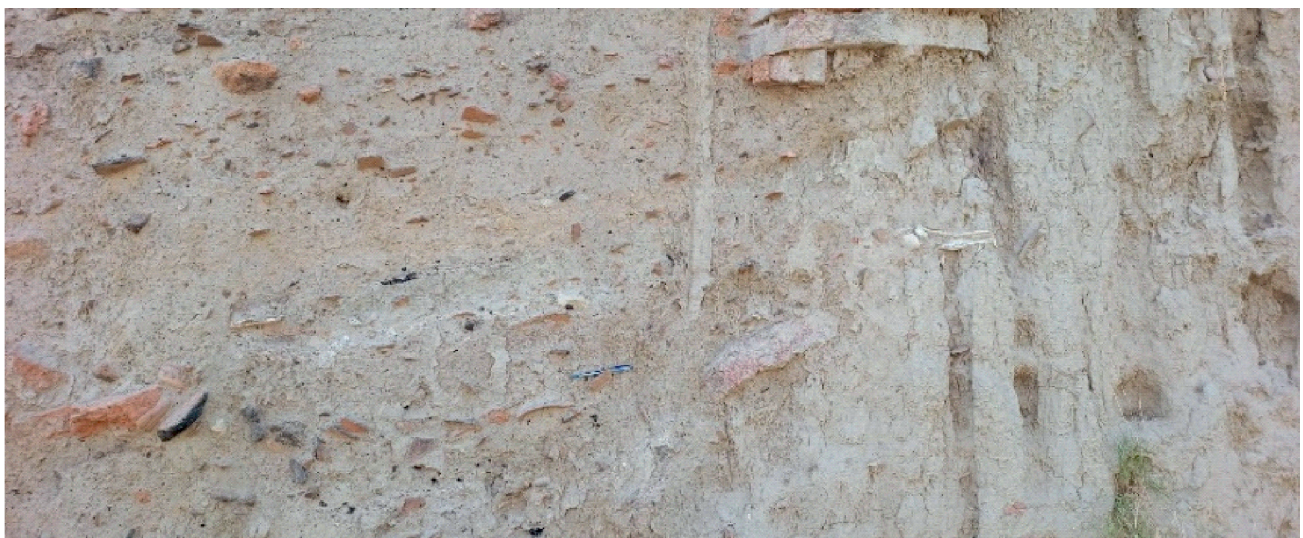


Fig. 8: Human Burials



Fig. 9: Potsherds



Fig. 10: Ringwell



Fig. 11: Bricks and Red Ware fragments

THE NORTHERN AND BOUNDARY ZONES

In the northern 25 meter-wide expanse, no wall evidence was traced. However, the surface exhibits various ceramic types, including small fragments of Black-and-Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware, Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) and Red Ware, along with a red pitcher (Fig. 12), with an everted rim and an elongated body of plain texture.

The 44 meter-long eastern wall also lacks structural traces in its northern portion. This area yielded BRW, BSW, NBPW, miniature vessels, Grey Ware sherds and ring well (Fig. 13). Further along, the wall structure resumes, possibly extending in an East-West orientation. This 25 meter-long brick alignment overlies diverse potsherds (Fig. 14). Such ceramics have been reported in the research of Dr. Ravi Shankar from sites like Rajghat⁶, Babhniav⁷, Agiabir⁸, Ramnagar⁹ and Jhusi¹⁰. Another wall structure was identified to the south.

The westernmost part of the site (80×60 meters) contains brick remains, terracotta lids, and potsherds (Fig. 15). To the north lies a 29×49meter modern boundary wall erected over ancient brick foundations. The bricks here measure 59×11×6 cm. The wall forms a semi-circular structure as it progresses northward. The northern part shows a clear brick alignment (Fig. 16) with evidence of two

25meter-long parallel walls oriented North-South (Fig. 17). Remains of two storage jars were also discovered, one of which is semi-intact (Fig. 18).

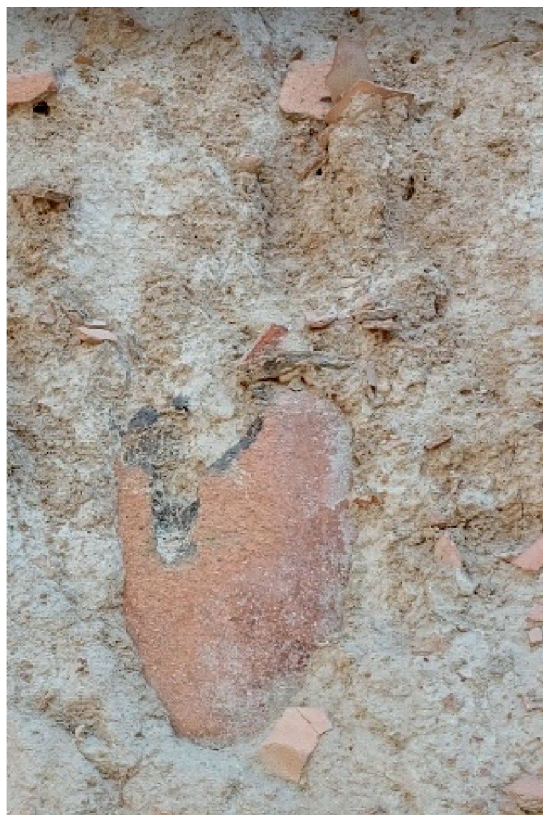


Fig. 12: Red Ware and small fragments



Fig.13: Ware sherds, and ring well



Fig. 14: Potsherds



Fig. 15: Brick remains, Terracotta lids, and Potsherds

Fig. 16: Brick alignment



Fig. 17: Walls oriented North-South



Fig. 18: Remains of storage jar

Dr. Ravishankar reported the existence of a 10th-century temple within the village of Shivsevak Patti. In this temple, the four-faced form of Lord Shiva is worshipped in the guise of Lord Ganesha. The villagers have constructed a new temple on the site of the ancient shrine. An octagonal Shivling is also enshrined in the vicinity of this temple.

PRESENT CONDITION AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AT TIKRI

The archaeological site at Tikri, originally encompassing an expansive area of approximately 1 kilometer, has suffered extensive structural degradation due to localized activities by the village populace (Fig. 19). During interview, local inhabitants recounted the erstwhile existence of an ancient pathway, approximately 5 feet in width, that once traversed the settlement¹¹. They further reported the unearthing of five distinct wells within an agricultural field; the ancient bricks systematically extracted from these features have since been repurposed by the villagers for the construction of animal enclosures (Fig. 20).

Field explorations conducted on an extant mound in the eastern sector of the site yielded significant surface scatters, primarily comprising Black Slipped Ware (BSW) and Red Ware, alongside fragments of animal bones (Fig. 21). The southern periphery of the settlement revealed terracotta beads and a ceramic handle, which morphologically appears to belong to a jug or a similar pouring vessel. Also situated in the southern sector are the structural remnants of an ancient wall constructed with bricks measuring 42×23×5 cm. Unfortunately, the integrity of this in situ structure has been compromised by the locals, who have laid a thick modern conduit pipe directly over it.

It is pertinent to note that preceding archaeological surveys conducted at this specific locality had successfully recovered a rich and diverse inventory of antiquities. These earlier findings included terracotta figurines, terracotta discs/rings, beads, toys and iron slag, found in association with a comprehensive ceramic spectrum featuring Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), Black-and-Red Ware (BRW), Black Slipped Ware (BSW), and Red Ware.¹²



Fig. 19: General view of Tikri site



Fig. 20: Ancient bricks used for the construction of animal enclosures



Fig. 21: Mound

DISCUSSION

The explorations at Shivsevak Patti and Tikri have yielded a robust assemblage of material culture that provides profound insights into the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of the Middle Ganga Valley. The diverse ceramic repertoire—ranging from Black-and-Red Ware (BRW) and Black Slipped Ware (BSW) to Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) and Red Ware—exhibits striking typological affinities with the established stratigraphic sequences of prominent regional sites such as Rajghat, Agiabir and Jhusi. The presence of large storage jars, pitcher fragments and cooking vessels with husk impressions and soot marks indicates a well-established, sedentary agrarian community with a complex domestic economy.

Furthermore, the recovery of iron slag from these sites is of immense archaeological significance. It strongly suggests that the inhabitants were not merely passive consumers but were actively engaged in localized metallurgical activities and iron smelting, pointing toward localized industrial production. Structurally, the massive brick alignments (with dimensions corresponding to the Shunga, Kushan, and Gupta periods), terracotta dabbers (thapi) and ring well (analogous to Period IV at Agiabir) suggest a sophisticated level of architectural planning and craft specialization. At Shivsevak Patti, the discovery of three in situ human burials at varying stratigraphic elevations within the wall structure further corroborates a prolonged and continuous habitation over multiple generations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploratory study of Tikri and Shivsevak Patti firmly establishes their historical magnitude on the archaeological map of the Sant Ravidas Nagar (Bhadohi) district. The material

evidence successfully bridges a vast chronological expanse, indicating uninterrupted human occupation from the Pre-NBPW phase down to the Post-Gupta period. Nestled strategically between the ancient urban centers of Varanasi and Kaushambi, these riverine settlements likely functioned as vital nodes in the broader trade and cultural networks of ancient India.

However, the present condition of these sites is highly alarming. Unregulated commercial earth extraction, agricultural expansion, and localized human interventions have caused severe structural degradation. Therefore, it is imperative to implement immediate conservation measures to safeguard these vanishing mounds. Future systematic and scientific excavations are urgently required to establish a precise absolute chronology, expose the underlying stratigraphy, and fully reconstruct the urban characteristics and historical grandeur of these ancient settlements before they are irrevocably lost.

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