

Archaeological Heritage of Matigaon, District: Chandauli, Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract: The site of Matigaon (originally known as Pharshand Mohanpur) is around 40 kms east of Varanasi in Chandauli district of Uttar Pradesh. Although the area of Chandauli was first explored by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1875-76, but proper attention towards the importance of the site of Matigaon was paid by the department of AIHC & Archaeology, BHU and U.P State Archaeology department jointly in 1999-2000. The present site has been excavated by the authors. The work was started in early March in 2020 but because of lockdown due to COVID 19 pandemic, the excavation work was closed. Again the work was resumed on 9th June. The limited period excavation has yielded the evidence of many religious structures and some important sculptures. On stylistic ground they may be ascribed to Gupta period. In excavation we have found a temple structure remains which seems to be *panchratha* on plan. The *garbhagriha* has an *argha* but *shivlinga* is missing. There is a *pranala* or *jaladhari* also in northern direction. The temple structure is built of burnt bricks of 36 x 21x 5 cm dimension. The north facing *Jaladhari* is seen and so is the *pranal Kapili* walls foundation is seen at the entrance and the structure appears *panchrarha*. The present excavation will add a new chapter in the evolution of north Indian temple architecture and more particularly Gupta temple architecture. Hence in present paper an attempt has been made to highlight the main findings of the excavation of two seasons.

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THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

The archaeological mound at Matigaon (Lat. 25°18'23" N Long. 83°14'7" E), is situated about 8 km north-west to Chandauli ditrict in Uttar Pradesh and about 2 km south-east to Kuchman railway station (**Fig. 1**). Chandauli district comprises Chandauli, Sakaldiha and Chakia *tehsils* which comes under two meso-regions, the Middle Ganga Plain and the Vindhyanchal Baghelkhand region (Singh, 1971: 246, 645). At micro level the former is represented by a part of the Chakia-Chunar Plain and the latter by a part of the Mirzapur Plateau. The 300 ft (91.44 mts.) contour lines approximately form the boundary between the two. Chandauli district creates the transitional zone between the Ganga plain in the north and the peninsular upland in the south and provides a fair representation of different geographical condition. About 63% of the district is covered by the unconsolidated alluvial deposits of lower-

Pleistocene to Recent age and the remaining (under the Mirzapur plateau) by the pre-Cambrian rocks of the Vindhyan system. The above mentioned conditions are highly favorable from the agricultural point of view. The plain has evolved with filling up of the Indo-Gangetic trough by sediments brought down by the Himalayan Rivers from the north. The east-west continuity of the hill ranges is partly broken by the courses of Chandraprabha, Karamnasa and the Khojra streams in the western, central and the south-eastern parts respectively. The major areas of the district is drained by the river Ganga and its tributaries of different orders, *i.e.* , Karamnasa, Chandraprabha and Garai. The study of the oldest habitation is found in Chandauli district in Vindhyan Plateau Region at Naugarh from where epi-Paleolithic tools have been recovered by U.P State Archaeology Department. It seems that with increase in population; inhabitants began to utilize rock shelters for occupancy and additional actions.

Though the main stream *i.e.* Ganga is the only perennial river in this area and its tributaries are seasonal in nature which are often reduced to almost to trickle during dry season and assuming gigantic proportion when in flood during the rainy seasons.

As per the official records, the original name of Matigaon village is Pharsand Mohanpur. The present village is situated on an ancient mound which is about 1sq km in area and about 18 mts high from the surrounding landscape. There are water bodies all around the main mound. To the west of the village is the premise of an old Siva temple known as Bhandeshwar Mahadev (**Plate 1**) temple facing east located on roughly circular shaped mound measuring approximately 4500 sq mts. having heights of 6 m from the surrounding landscape. This mound is also surrounded by water bodies all around. The *garbhagriha* of the main temple contains a big *sivalinga* broken from front and backside. The third mound is located in the west of the Bhandeshwar Mahadev temple complex which is now completely converted into agricultural field. The name of the village Matigaon is because of the soil used from this mound. In the nearby villages it is believed that the children who consume soil during their childhood stop eating the soil after the soil from this mound is used as a totem. Because of this the name of this village has been derived as Matigaon.



Pl. 1: Bhandeshwar Mahadev Siva Temple, General View

LEGENDS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SITE

There are many local myths and folk tales associated with this temple. As per the local tradition once in Mughal reign, Aurangzeb attempted to demolish this *sivlinga* but when he attacked over *sivlinga*, there was a leakage of blood and Aurangzeb got scared and ran away from there. The strikes on *sivlinga* also exist today on the *sivalinga*. As per another local tradition this *sivalinga* is growing in size every year and because of this it is one of the biggest *sivalinga* in whole *Poorvanchal* (**Plate 2**). As per another folk tradition the *sivalinga* of this temple is *swyambhu* (self born). People believe that in hoary past there used to be a fort of a king at this place and inside this fort the *sivalinga* originated. The king of the fort tried to re-establish the *sivalinga* at another place and he tried to dig it but he was not successful. From that time only people are worshipping this *sivalinga* at its present location.

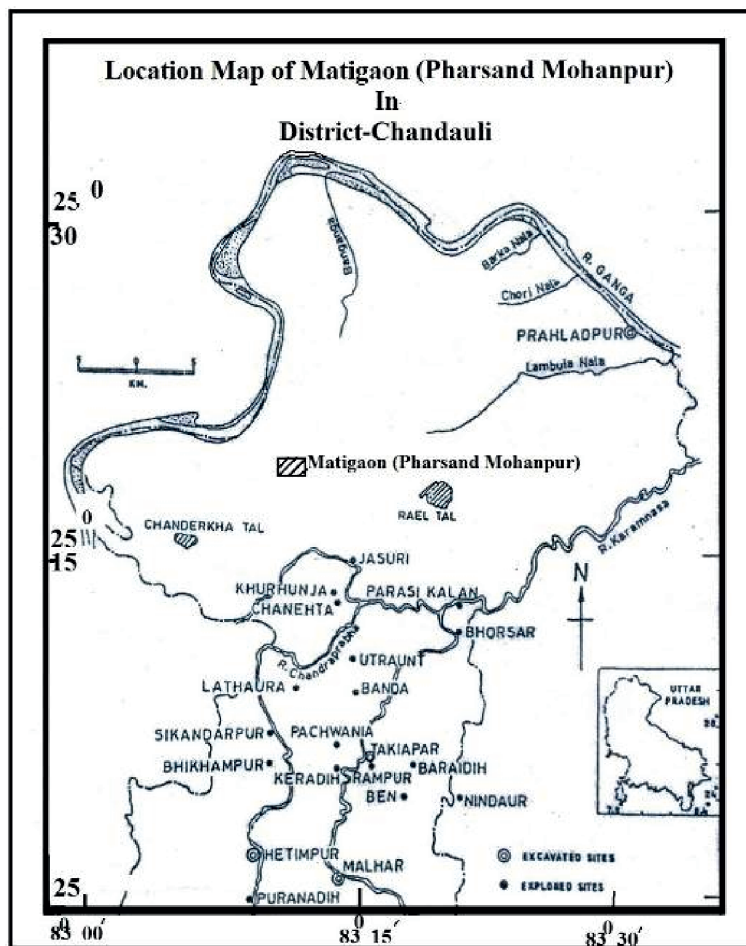


Fig. 1: Location Map of Matigaon

Numerous historical potsherds, sculptural fragments, architectural members, brick bats and bricks are scattered in the premises of the temple (**Plate 3**). Some of the notable sculptural fragments/ pieces included the broken image of Harihara, lord Vishnu (**Plate 4**), goddess *Mahisasurmardini*, goddess Laxmi, Lord Ganesha, Surya, Bhairava, Siva, Uma maheshwar, *navgraha* panel, *Krishna-lila stambha* (**Plate 5**). Besides the ancient Bhandeshwar Mahadev temple some other ancient temple are Durga temple, Kot Mai temple, Jogi *sthana* and Kali *mandir*. These temples also house the ancient sculptures belonging to post-Gupta period.



Pl. 2: *Sivalinga* inside the Bhandeshwar Mahadev Siva Temple



Pl. 3: Scattered sculptures inside the temple complex



Pl. 4: Image of Vishnu



Pl. 5: *Krishna lila stambha*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS WORK OF THE AREA

Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1875-76 had explored the area of Chandauli district (Cunningham, 1880) and reported some sites of archaeological importance. Subsequently the area was extensively surveyed and explored by A.C.L. Carlleyle in 1877-78 (Carlleyle, 1885). After him, A. Fuhrer reported some more sites and published his findings in 1891 (Fuhrer, 1891). All the above explorations were carried out to list the antiquity, monuments, forts and ceramic evidences in the area. In 1960-61 a well planned and systematic work in the area was carried out by Allahabad University and the Banaras Hindu University. These two institutions excavated the sites of Hetimpur, Takiapar, Kakoria and Prahaladpur. No one at that time noticed the importance of the site of Matigaon and it was only in 1999-2000 that the team of U.P State Archaeology Department and Banaras Hindu University reported the ancient settlement of Matigaon. They also reported numerous sculptural fragments, architectural members, brick-bats, bricks and other antiquities from the site. The team opined that the settlement site seems to be a major Saivism centre at least for a thousand years. Keeping in view the importance of the site, the present site was chosen for excavation work with the following main objectives:

1. To trace the plan and architectural components of the ancient temple and to document the art, culture and tradition of the region.
2. To address the nature of the occupation of the area of study.
3. To develop a predictive model of ancient settlement patterns for the Chandauli district based on ethnographic data, material remains as well as on known site distribution in the immediate area and in similar areas in neighboring region.
4. To find, study and document the historical settlements and findings, viz-temple, sculptures, ceramics etc. in proposed area.
5. To impart training to the students of the Department of A.I.H.C. and Archaeology as the partial fulfillment of their academic curriculum.

The excavation team of the Department of AIHC & Archaeology, BHU, Varanasi comprised of Shri A.K. Pandey (Draughtsman), Shri Barun Kumar Sinha (Photographer), Shri Shiv Shankar Prajapati (Surveyor) and research scholar namely Shri Paramdeep Patel.

RESULTS OF EXCAVATION

For the field season 2019-20, the department of AIHC & Archaeology, BHU got the license of excavation of the site after approval by the Standing Committee of the Archaeological Survey of India, Govt. of India following the NOC from the Uttar Pradesh State Archaeology department. The work was started in early March of 2020. The area chose for excavation was in the northern side of the main temple at the depth of about 7 ft below the *chabutra* of the main temple. Soon after the excavation was started, because of lockdown due to COVID 19 pandemic, the excavation work was stopped. Again the work was resumed on 9th June after ease in lockdown. Within a brief span of time, excavation up to the depth of 115cm was done and on the basis of findings, the tentative cultural sequence of excavation is as follows:

Period I: Gupta Period (80 cms thick)

Period II: Post-Gupta (20 cms thick)

Period III: Early Medieval (15 cms thick)

STRUCTURAL REMAINS AND ANTIQUITIES

The excavation of this season yielded the evidence of many religious structures which comprises of a circular temple (**Plate 6**), *panchratha* temple (**Plate 7 and 8**) and some other important sculptures. The entrance of the *panchratha* temple is located in the east direction which is about 80 cm in length. Two steps have also been made to enter the temple, the length of the first staircase is 71 cm and the width is 140 cm and the height is about 20 cm from the general ground floor and the length of the second staircase is 80 cm, width 150 cm and height is about 24 cm, on which the safety-chosen a crescent made of plaster has been obtained, whose thickness is 5-6 cm. Lime and *Surkhi* plaster has also been done on the top of the stairs. The door frame used in the entrance of the temple has been constructed from stone, which is decorated with geometric and *latta vallari* (**Plate 9**), baked bricks have been used in the base of the temple. From the maximum 114 cm excavation done so far, we have got four level configurations, during which different types of pottery, in which pots are the main ones, apart from this various types of ornate bricks have also been found. The garbhagriha, which is almost square and measures 102×102 cm, has an argha which measures 33 cm but shivlinga is missing. There is a pranala or jaladhari in northern direction, which is 12 cm long and its maximum height from the floor is 9 cm. The floor of the garbhagriha is plastered with lime-surkhi. The temple structure is built of burnt bricks of $36 \times 21 \times 5$ cm dimension. The dimension of the bricks used belongs to Kushana period but the other antiquities recovered seem to be of Gupta period, which make us believe to the inference that these bricks might have been reused during the Gupta period. Apart from this, a Shikhar Kalash has also been found which is made up of baked clay. During the excavation of Trench 3, an amalaka made of bricks has also been found. On stylistic ground they may be ascribed to Gupta period. Dimension of these bricks found in excavation are $30 \times 21 \times 6.5$ cm, $28.5 \times 19 \times 5.5$ cm, $20 \times 20 \times 6.5$ cm, $21 \times 14 \times 5.5$ cm, $20.5 \times 18.5 \times 5$ cm, $22.5 \times 17.5 \times 4$ cm and $27.5 \times 20 \times 5$ cm. Based on the above evidences, it can be said that Matigaon has been a center of religious faith since ancient times.



Pl. 6: View of Excavated remains of the circular temple



Pl. 7: View of Excavated remains of the temple



Pl. 8: A Close up of excavated temple



Pl. 9: Close up of excavated entrance of temple remains

During the excavation, another temple form with a circular sanctum/ *garbhagriha* was also found (**Plate 10 and Plate 11**). The outer diameter of this circular temple is about 160 cm and the inner diameter is about 80 cm and the thickness of the wall is about 36 cm. To enter the sanctum, there is an entrance about 56 cm wide in the east direction, which is probably closed by brick wall. In front of the sanctum is a square rectangular (110×40 cm) platform adjoining the entrance, whose floor is made of lime surkhi and is also surrounded by bricks on two sides. A 56 cm wide wall attached to the circular sanctum is also obtained from Trench-1. Further excavations at the site will add a new chapter in the evolution of north Indian temple architecture and more particularly Gupta temple architecture.

A beautiful sculpture of Vishnu has also been found in the excavation (**Plate 12**). Besides this the other antiquities recovered are conch (**Plate 13**), cowries, pieces of cooked earthenware, snails, burnt bones, objects of religious importance *etc.*



Pl. 10: View of excavated circular temple with *Shivlinga*



Pl. 11: Close up of excavated circular temple



Pl. 12: Vishnu Image recovered from excavation



Pl. 13: Conch found in excavation, Trench 1

THE POTTERY

This field season excavation brought to light the evidence of pottery assemblage from Gupta Period to Early Medieval period. A good quantity of plain red ware of medium to thick fabrics which are mostly unslipped have been found. The description of these potteries are as follows:

POTTERY OF PD.I (GUPTA PERIOD)

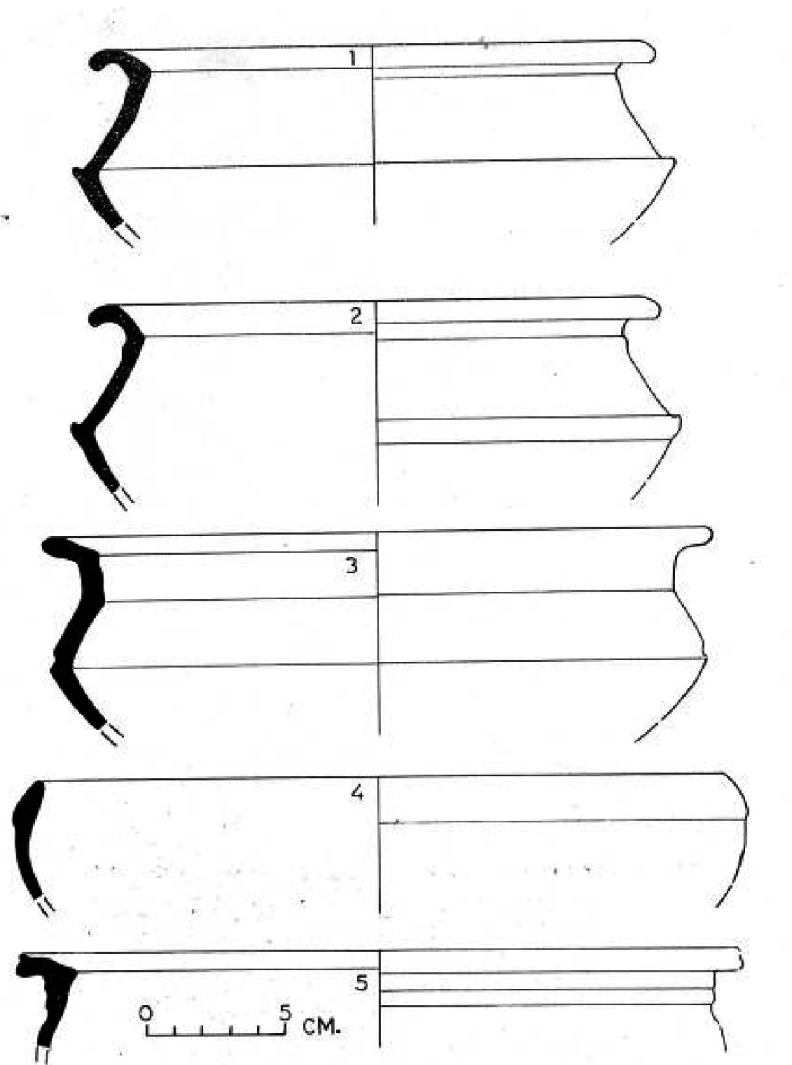


Fig.2: Pottery of Pd.I (Gupta Period)

Red ware. Medium fabric. Unslipped. Out-curved rim. Dia-20cm. carinated cooking *handi* type. Deep saggered based. One wheel mark at the junction of the neck and rim. Medium based. Athari type. Rajghat period IV & Bhitari BTR-2type.

Red ware. Medium in fabric. Red Slipped. Outwardly projected curved rim. Diameter 20.5 cm. The pot is similar to the above-mentioned deep saggered based. One prominent wheel mark at the junction of neck and rim. Medium fabric. Carinated cooking *handi*. Athari type. Bhitari BTR-2 type.

Red ware. Medium fabric. Unslipped. Outwardly projected rim. Diameter 24cm. Small neck. One prominent grooving at the junction of neck and body. Saggered based. A grooving also appears below the carination. Medium based. Athari type. Rajghat period IV type.

Red ware. Medium fabric. Unslipped. Diameter 24.5 cm. Fragment of large bowl. Clubbed rim. Inward Convex sides. Plan in fabric. Deep saggared base. Externally slightly collared rim. Sides progressively thickened towards the rim. *Katora* type. Bhitari BTR-4 & Rajghat period-IV type.

Red ware. Medium in fabric. Unslipped. Outwardly curved rim. Diameter 26 cm. Two wheel mark at the neck and a prominent grooving at the rim. Large and deep saggared based.

POTTERY OF PD.II (POST GUPTA)

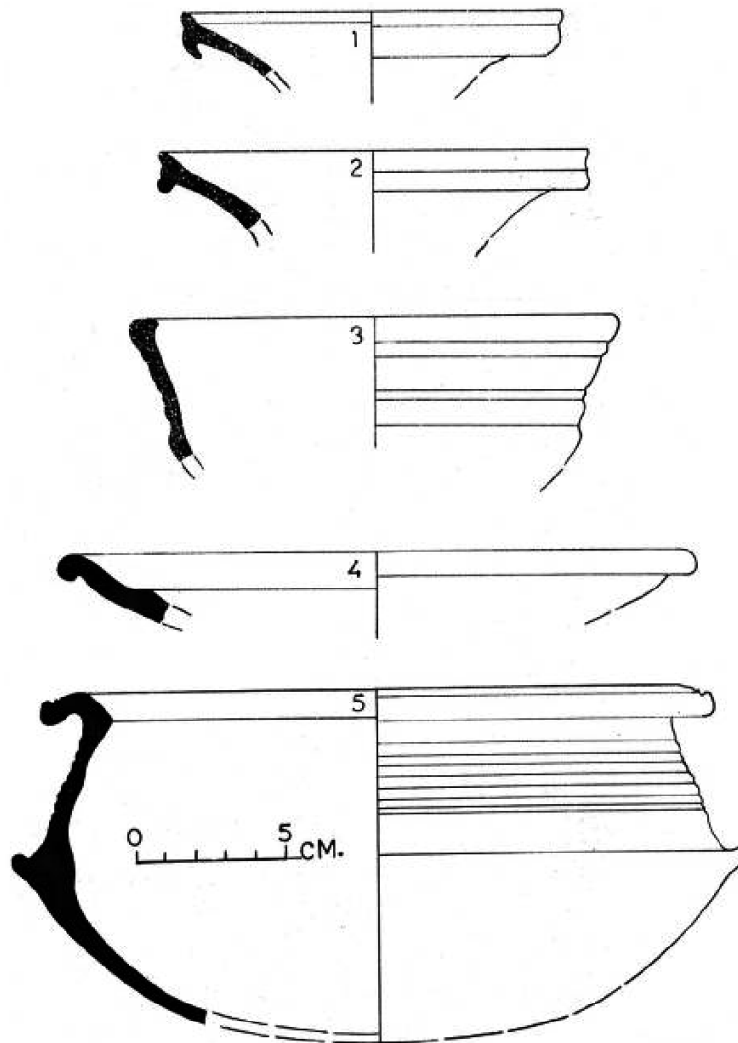


Fig. 3: Pottery of Pd.II (Post Gupta)

Red ware, medium fabric, Unslipped. Fragment of bowl cum lid. Concave curved body toward rim. Flanged hanging collared rim. Diameter 12.5 cm. A prominent wheel mark appears at external side of rim. Flat based, *Dhakkan*/lid type.

Red ware, medium fabric, Unslipped. Fragment of a bowl cum lid. Concave curved body toward rim portion. Flanged hanging collared rim. Diameter 14.5 cm. A prominent wheel mark appears at the centre at external side of rim. Flat based *Dhakkan*/lid type.

Red ware, medium fabric, Red slipped. Fragment of a carinated bowl. Clubbed and slightly incurved rim like finger head. Diameter 16.5 cm. Deep saggared based. Multi-grooving at exterior side of pot. very likely globular base. Medium sized bowl or *Katora* type.

Red ware, medium fabric, unslipped. Fragment of a plate. Outwardly projected convex chamfered rim. Diameter 21.2 cm. slightly curved at the rim portion inside the plate. Shallow based. *Parai* type.

Red ware. Medium fabric. Fragment of carinated cooking handi. Out curved flanged rim with two prominent grooving upside at the rim. Diameter 23 cm. Multi-grooving appears at the exterior side of neck. The pottery is thicker at the point of carination. Deep saggared based. *Athari* type.

POTTERY OF PD. III (EARLY MEDIEVAL)

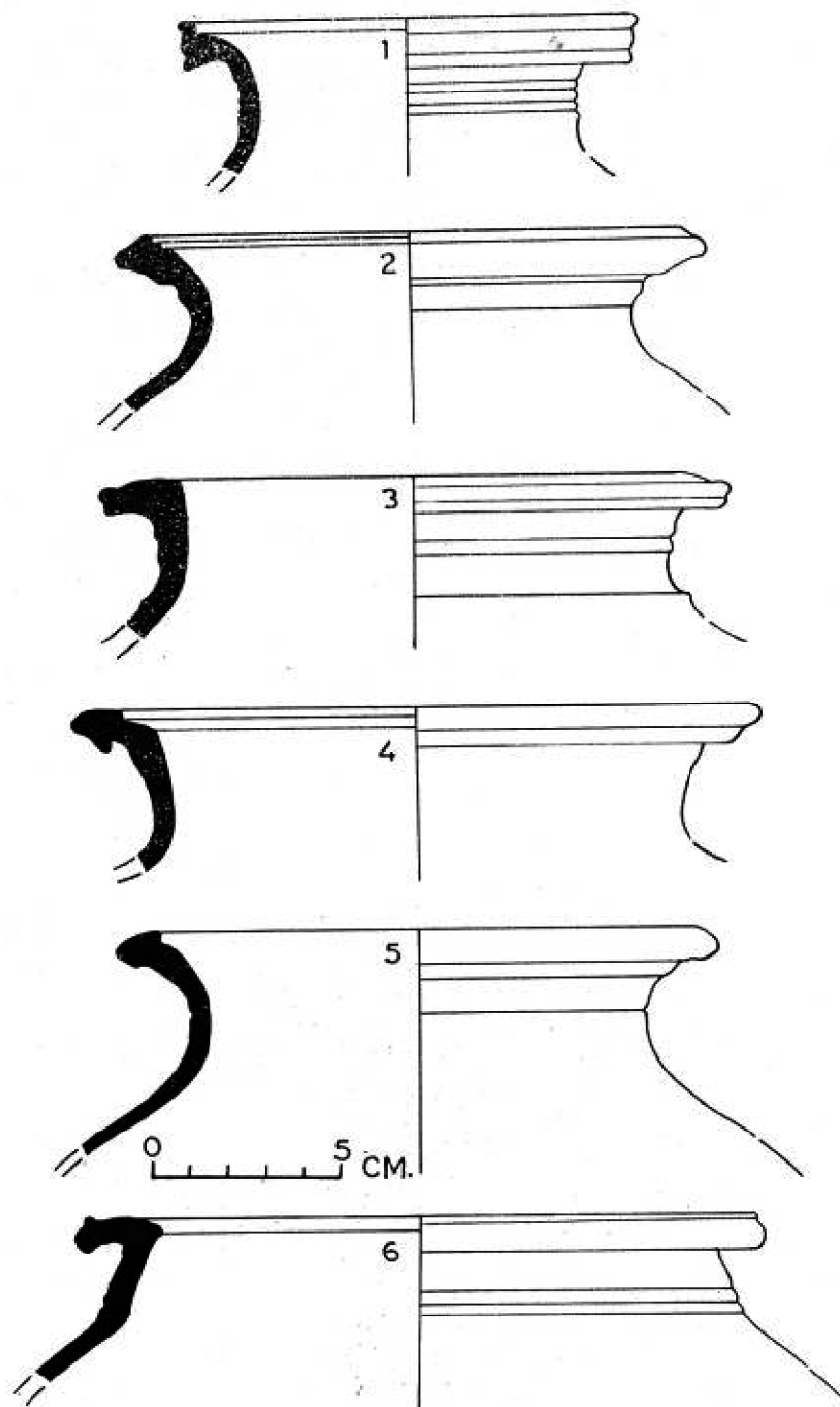


Fig. 4: Pottery of Pd. III (Early Medieval)

Red ware. Medium fabric. Dropping splayed out clubbed rim. Diameter 12.2cm. Due to a series of deep wheel marks, the collared rim has a number of horizontal bands and projection. Narrow concave neck. Many wheel marks appear at the neck. Medium sized vase. *Ghara* type.

Red ware, Medium fabric. Unslipped. Splayed out clubbed rim. Dia-15.7cm . The end of the rim looks horizontally sharpen. Small concave neck. Three deep wheel marks appears at exterior surface of the neck. The rim portion is thicker than body, *Handi* type.

Red ware. Medium fabric. Horizontally splayed out clubbed rim. Diameter 16.5cm. Horizontally collar of the rim is divisible into two bands by two prominent wheel marks. Concave neck. Two prominent wheel marks appears at the exterior surface of the neck, another wheel mark also appears at the joint of neck and body portion. *Ghara* type.

Red ware. Medium fabric. Unslipped. Horizontally splayed out clubbed rim. Dia-18.3cm. The hanging collared rim is divisible into two bands by a prominent wheel mark. Plain curved neck. The rim portion is thicker than the neck and body portion. *Ghara* type.

Red ware. Medium fabric. Unslipped. Splayed out clubbed rim. Dia-16cm. Concave neck. A prominent grooving appears at the edge of the rim. Two prominent wheel marks appears at the exterior surface of the neck. The body of the vase is thicker than neck and rim portion. *Ghara* type.

Red ware. Medium fabric. Horizontally splayed out clubbed rim. Dia-18.3cm Slightly curved convex neck. A deep grooving appears at the upside of the rim portion, another wheel mark also appears at the joint of rim and the neck. Two another wheel marks appears at the exterior surface of the neck. *Lavani* type.

DISCUSSIONS

From the excavations done so far at Matigaon which is a temple and settlement site also seems to be a major Saivism centre from time immemorial which is attested by the findings of circular and *panchratha* Siva temple and also by the findings of numerous scattered fragments of sculptural pieces belonging to Saivite faith in the temple complex and in the village, which was unnoticed by the archaeologists and the art historians located so near to Varanasi earlier.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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