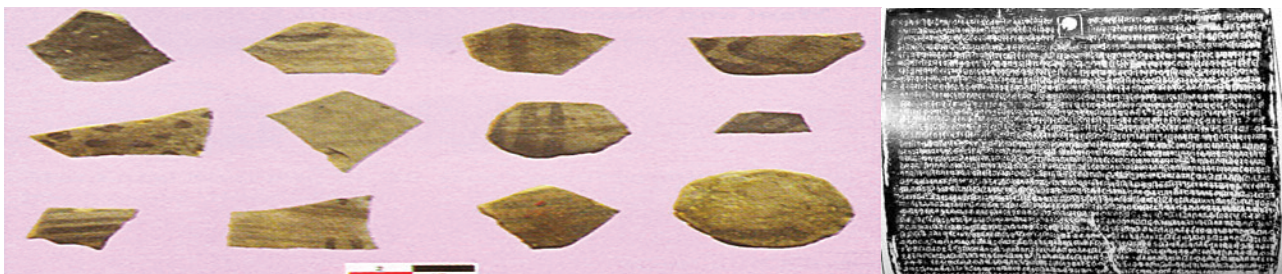


INTANGIBLE INDRAPRASTHA-II



1. Painted Grey Wares found during excavation from Purana Quila 2. Machchlishahr copper Plate Inscription kept in Lucknow

Buried Deep, Still Evident

For believers Indraprastha needs no evidence; for skeptics there are plenty of archaeological evidences like Inscriptions, found in Delhi and North India, Gazetteer of India (1912) which confirm Purana Quila is nothing but Ancient Indraprastha

■ Neera Misra

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was established in 1861. Alexander Cunningham, Surveyor General ASI 1862-65, was one of the earliest archaeologists to survey the region of Delhi. He details in the ASI's early reports 'Indraprastha, the city of Yudhishtira, was built along the bank of river Jaumna' and 'the name of Indraprastha is still preserved in that of Indrapat, a small fort which is also known by the name of Purana Quila or the old fort'. Cunningham must have concluded this after a proper study of related factors of this area. Some Mughal period books also record Purana Quila as 'Indrapat Quila.

Post Independence, decades ago, archaeologists started quest for 'Dwapar era Itihas' of Mahabharata cities and places. Most prominent is the work of Prof BB Lal, who, in 1950-52, undertook his journey of search. Digging his own trails of excavations at significant cities and places mentioned in Mahabharata he conducted excavations first at Hastinapur. The Period II findings brought Hastinapur, and his work into the limelight, because of its association

with the Mahabharata times. "Archaeologically the material culture of this Period is known as the PGW (Painted Grey Ware) culture after the very distinctive ceramic industry of the times." The PGW is the earliest common pottery that connects all the Mahabharata sites, like Hastinapura, Mathura, Kurukshetra, etc.

Indraprastha too beckoned the archaeologists, and when they dug deep down for most ancient human civilisation and culture at ancient Delhi, they got that one answer. Yudhishtira's state and capital Indraprastha was here, and remains here, as the first planned city at NCR. Have you ever been to the Purana Qila? The standing structures there are located on an ancient mound, which is several meters higher than the surrounding ground-level, say that of the Mathura Road. This ancient mound is concealed by the fortification-wall that was built on old base first by Humayun and later by Sher Shah Suri.

In 1954-55, trial excavation by Prof BB Lal here, alongside the passage leading down to Water Gate in the eastern fortification wall revealed, from the top downwards, structures ascribable respectively to the Rajput, Gupta, Kushan, Shunga and Northern

Black Polished Ware (NBPW) periods, the last one dating back to the 7th-8th century BCE. The trial trench further revealed that below the NBPW levels there lay the remains of the PGW Culture, of which, however, not much could be exposed because of the super-imposed structures. Prof BB Lal opines: "However, to the south of the Purana Qila, between it and the Humayun's Tomb, the open area brought forth a lot of the Painted Grey Ware. It was here that the earliest settlement began, going back to more than ca. 1000 BCE. From there the settlement shifted a little to the north, to the area now enclosed by Purana Qila." The PGW is characteristic pottery of the Mahabharata times.

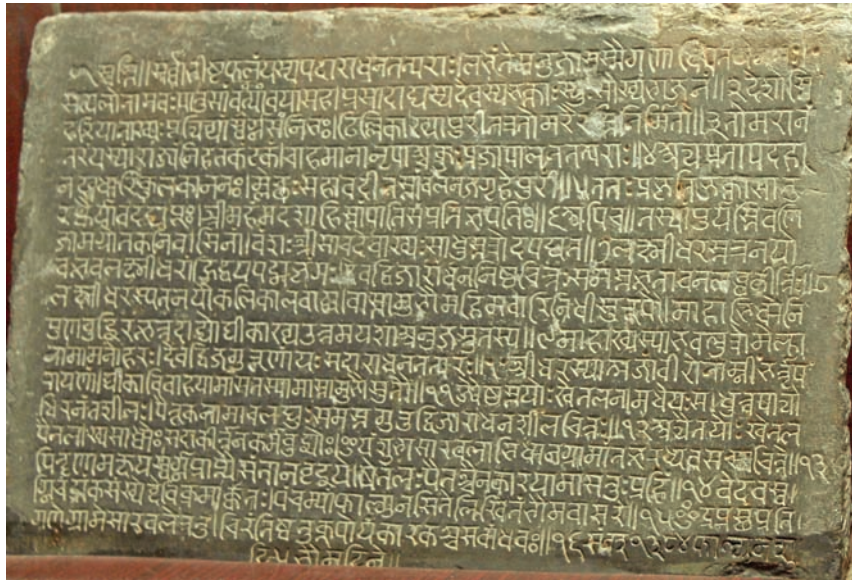
From 1969-72 the Excavation Branch of the ASI undertook a full-scale excavation at Purana Quila. During this excavations also, the archaeologists encountered evidence of material culture belonging to periods Rajput, Gupta, Kushan, Shunga, etc, similar to result of 1954-55. "This was sufficient to confirm the local traditions about the antiquity and continuity of urban settlements in Delhi, at least at the site of Purana Qila." Again during 2001-2002 scientific clearance was undertaken towards the eastern

fringe of Humayan’s Tomb, and the lowest levels yielded rolled sherds of Painted Grey Ware clearly indicating existence of PGW settlement in close vicinity. Here, two points may be noted. Humayun’s wife could not have chosen any random location for his burial place, knowing well his desire and fight to conqueror Indraprastha. Secondly, even senior archaeologists of ASI are perturbed by the digging and ‘plastered renovations’ at the very base of Humayun’s Tomb, for plans of underground interpretation centre here??? Indraprastha is getting dug deeper, with little sensitivity towards its antiquities.

Recently, in 2013-14 Purana Quila areas were further excavated, which reinforces the earlier discoveries, including that of the PGW. Archaeology confirms Purana Quila is Ancient Indraprastha. The foregoing evidence clearly establishes that the Purana Qila represents Indraprastha of the Mahabharata times. But our ‘extra intelligent liberals’ habitually brand all who promote history of ancient Bharat as radicals. Yes, there are some questions about dating of the period, but as all sciences are ever evolving study tools, this aspect too will get sorted.

Dr BR Mani had conducted excavations at several areas of ancient Delhi and established the antiquity of Mehrauli area, going back to ancient Lalkot and Yoginipura, where the Yogmaya temple survives. His book *Delhi: The Threshold of the Orient* acknowledges: “The occurrence of late Harappan pottery and Painted Grey Ware at Mandoli, Bhorgarh, Salimgarh and Dhansa including late and degenerate Siswal Ware Culture and PGW at Khera-Kalan and Badli-ki-Sarai and the discovery of late Harappan and Painted Grey Ware site of Kharkhari Nahar village near Najafgarh push back the history of Delhi to the proto-historic period.”

For believers it is obvious, but for sceptics we present hard facts. Inscriptions aptly reveal the past. Some, found in parts of Delhi and



Sarban (Raisina Hills) Nagari Inscription, 1384 (1327 AD), Vikram Samvat, Delhi

north India, give data on status of ancient Indraprastha. Gazetteer of India (1912) provides information of Indraprastha and Tilpat. “The existence of a highway is also suggested by the discovery (March 23, 1966) of a minor rock edict of Asoka in South Delhi at a site almost in alignment with other ancient sites in the vicinity stretching from Purana Quila to Tilpat. Two 13th century stone inscriptions, now kept at Site Museum Purana Quila, affirm areas and status of Indraprastha.

Line 15 of Naraina Inscription in Nagari Script states ‘In the western direction of Indraprastha there is village called Nadayana.’ Dated Samvat year 1384 (August A.D 1327), this versified inscription was found at the village of Naraina, seven miles southwest of Delhi, recording the construction of a well, on the northern side of the village Nadayana said to be situated in the portion (bhaga) of (the division) Indraprastha. Second is the Sarban Nagari Inscription (Samvat year 1384, / February A.D. 1328), documenting “In this village of Saravala in the partigana of Indraprastha, may this well and its builder with his family live for a long time. It was found in the village of Sarban, which was then five

miles South of Delhi, now in the area of Raisina Road.

Another interesting evidence of Indraprastha comes from Machchlisahar Copper-plate Inscription, now at Lucknow State Museum. This inscription informs us that Candradeva was the ‘protector of the holy places, Kasi, Kusika, and Indrasthaniyaka. Kasi is, of course Varanasi; Kasika is probably Kanyakubja or Kanauj; Uttarakosala is Ayodhya; and Indrasthaniyaka is Indraprastha or ancient Delhi. It is dated (Vikram) Samvat 1253/ Sunday, 6 January, 1197.

The widespread finding of PGW at ancient sites, the Inscriptions from far apart Naraina to Raisina Road, and continuity of ancient names like Raj Ghat, Ashram, Nigambodh, etc, all lead to the fact that Indraprastha was the name of the territory developed and controlled by Pandavas, and Purana Quila was the centre of their widespread Kingdom, that also included Tilpat, Baghpat, Sonipat and Panipat. Indraprastha was the name of their capital city state. Showcasing and preserving ancient Indraprastha is the first step towards getting its due status as ‘World Heritage City’ also.

(The writer is chairperson of Draupadi Dream Trust)