

# Rakhigarhi - Excavations & New Findings

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## Abstract

*Rakhigarhi is the largest site of Harappan civilization in South-East Asia. . The Rakhigarhi is one of the major centers of Harappan Culture in Indian sub-continent. Seven mounds spread in a huge area form the Rakhigarhi's unique site. The increasing importance of Rakhigarhi is attracting researchers from France, United States of America, Japan, Belgium and South Korea. Some new information has come out recently related to our famous site of Rakhigarhi. These findings have established that Rakhigarhi is bigger than Mohenjo-Daro in size. Excavations conducted in last few years and findings came out during these prove this site as a great Harappan site of Haryana as well as world civilization. Due to its increasing importance in the history of world civilization and culture the Government of Haryana is going to establish a world class museum in Rakhigarhi village very soon. It will be a proper regard to this unique site of Haryana's rich cultural heritage.*

## 1. Introduction

The archaeological importance of Rakhigarhi is increasing day- by- day due to some new researches in last few years. Rakhigarhi is the largest site of Harappan civilization in South-East Asia. The most important site of Rakhigarhi is in Narnaund tehsil of Hisar District in Haryana. The site is situated in two villages of Rakhikhas and Rakhishahpur. This site belongs to 2600 B.C. to 1800 B.C. The site of Rakhigarhi was first time come into light in 1963 when it was reported in 'Indian Archaeology

1963-64 - A Review'. The Rakhigarhi is one of the major centers of Harappan Culture in Indian sub-continent. Seven mounds spread in a huge area form the Rakhigarhi's unique site. The site lies in the alluvial plains of now dried up Drishadvati(Chitang), a tributary of ancient Sarasvati.

This site was excavated by Sh. Amarendra Nath of A.S.I. in 1998, 1999 and 2000. The archaeological findings revealed a mature Harappan phase characterized by planned township having mud-brick as well as burnt brick houses with proper drainage system. "Fertile and well watered local soils were doubtlessly crucial factors in the settlement of Saraswati-Drishadvati valley and the eventual urbanization of the region during the Harappan period. The economy of the pre-formative phase at the site was primarily agro-pastoral in character with modicum of craft activity."

The increasing importance of Rakhigarhi is attracting researchers from France, United States of America, Japan, Belgium and South Korea. Some new and interesting findings have come out in 2014 and 2015 excavations conducted by the Haryana Archaeological Department, Deccan Post-Graduate College, Pune and Seoul National University, South Korea jointly.

## 2. Objectives Of The Research

On the basis of above mentioned brief introduction, it is pertinent to note that many scholars have studied the various aspects of archeological explorations and excavations in Rakhigarhi. But some aspects of this cultural heritage site have been left out. Therefore to bridge this gap, the following objectives have been taken into account. These are:

- I. To explain in detail the excavations carried out chronologically at Rakhigarhi
- II. To explain the increasing importance of Rakhigarhi
- III. To focus on new findings came into light in recent times.
- IV. To elaborate the cultural heritage of Haryana's most important archaeological site.

## 3. Excavations at Rakhigarhi

### I. From 1997 to 1998

The Institute of Archaeology along with the Chandigarh Circle of the A.S.I., under the direction of Amarendra Nath and P. K. Misra, assisted by Alok Tripathi, M. P. Jain, R. S. Rana, L. S. Mamani, R. K. Dalal, Ramji Chaudhary, Umesh Kumar, N. K. Kharab, R. K. Manik, P. S. Rawat, Manbir Singh, Madan Lal, Piyush Bhatt, Rahul Bhonsle, Jasmer Singh and Vinod Dhingra took up excavations at this Harappan site. With a view to ascertain the stratigraphical positions of early, mature and late Harappan periods as reported earlier in the course of exploration, and lay bare sizeable portions of the settlement of each period besides correlating the nature of settlement with other excavated sites of the region. During this field season, the excavations, without reaching the natural soil, revealed the deposits of mature Harappan period.

There were five notified mounds out of which RGR-1, RGR-2 and RGR-3 were relatively free from encroachment while RGR-4 and RGR-5 were thickly inhabited by the twin villages of Rakhikhas and Rakhishahpur. The pottery recovered mainly falls in two groups namely red ware and grey ware, besides non-glazed reserve slipped ware, cut ware, cream-slipped ware and 'barbotine' ware in limited frequency. Important types in red ware included perforated jars, goblets, dish-on-stand, vases, jars ledged rim vessels, fluted vessels, ribbed vessels, dishes, basins, troughs etc. The important painted motifs in red ware were *pipal* leaf, *palm* leaf, triangles, loops, intersecting circles, birds and scales etc.

## **II. From 1998 to 1999**

In Continuation of 1997-98 season work, the Institute of Archaeology of the Survey, under the direction of Amarendra Nath assisted by Alok Tripathi, M. P. Jain, R. S. Rana, L. S. Mamani, R. K. Dalal, Ram ji Chaudhary, Umesh Kumar, R. K. Manik, P. S. Rawat, A. K. Jain, Manbir Singh and Madan Lal resumed excavation work at Rakhigarhi. The excavation work at the site was taken up with a view to ascertain the stratigraphical positions of Early, Mature and Late Harappan periods as reported earlier in the course of exploration. However, the field season of 1997-98 could only reveal the cultural horizon of Mature Harappans. The other objectives were to lay bare more areas of the Harappan settlements in RGR-1 and RGR-2 and continue investigation of the fortification around the settlement.

There were three structural phases out of which phase-2 could be studied in greater detail. It revealed the beginning of planned settlement showing north-south running public drainage system with a slope towards south and a house drain joining it besides houses aligning on either side of the former. The pottery types were essentially wheel-made with a few exceptions of hand-made specimens. It was relatively light and thin in fabric, red to pinkish in colour and painted in black, combined at times with white, over a self-slipped dull surface. The combination of black and white considerably increased the design-effect. The potters chose to paint the neck and shoulders. The design elements were essentially geometric. The simplest among them included horizontal bands, row of dots, latticed triangles, fish-scales, etc. Motifs used as filler were radiating lines ending in solid disks, four petalled flowers, *peepal* leaf and circle with radiating arches. Important shapes include jar with an out-turned rim, basin and dish-on-stand. The Early Harappan graffiti marks include auspicious signs like Swastika, unending knots and abstract signs, some are akin to Harappan characters arranged in a row, indicating beginning of writing. On the contrary, a few uninscribed terracotta seals have also been reported.

Period - II confirmed the cultural components of Mature Harappan period reported during the previous year's cuttings in RGR-1 and RGR-2 (Citadel mound). A mud-brick podium with a porch in front oriented east-west was noticed in the central part of Citadel mound. The podium consisted of a couple of in-built rectangular pits and segmented fire-altars with four chambers, one of them had a stump of brick in the centre. The inbuilt pits contained fresh bones of bovine animals, ash, bits of charcoal and dish fragments. Thus these evidences indicate fire and animal-sacrifice, rituals performed over the podium. The podium had streets on all the four sides while the north-western corner had a brick well complimenting the function of the former.

A couple of fire-altars of distinct type were also noticed from RGR-1. In K-5, a fire-altar of human form (chitti type) with extended arms was noticed with a stump-like projection in the belly portion. In H-5, fire-altar of yonipitha a type with a stump-like projection in the centre was noticed. The evidence of public drainage system and household drains invariably show use of burnt-bricks, its bases are largely unpaved with some exception. Some house drains were terminating in the street, while a few in the soakage-jar. A potter's kiln was noticed in RGR-1, N-5. It was conch-shaped on plan oriented in east-west direction. The belly portion had couple of inbuilt shafts for supporting the pots and regulating fire. The interior wall of the kiln was plastered with clay and rice husks.

## **III. From 1999 to 2000**

During third field-season, the excavations at Rakhigarhi were resumed with five principal objectives. Three were related to the objectives based on the findings obtained during the preceding

field seasons while two remain outstanding since the project was initiated. The sequence of culture as noted during the last field season reconfirmed. Besides RGR-1, the occupation of Early Harappan period was noticed in the northern half of citadel mound (RGR-2). Period-1 (Early Harappan) was further sub-divided into two broad sub-periods, namely, Period-1(a) Pre-Formative Urbanism and Period-1(b) Formative Urbanism.

#### **Period I**

Period-I (a) of pre-formative urbanism at RGR-6 reported circular structure with an entrance towards south, was made out of wedged shaped sun dried mud bricks. Contemporary to the circular structure was noticed, a rectangular structure made of sun-dried mud bricks. Both the structures had mud floors. At RGR-I also a circular structure with an entrance towards east was noticed. The inner floor of the structure was of mud while the courtyard was paved with burnt brickbats. Period 1(b) of formative urbanism was characterized by planned settlement and emergence of other cultural traits namely un-inscribed seals, inscribed pottery, terracotta bull figurines, chert blades and weights etc. The cuttings at RGR-I and RGR-6 had revealed these evidences.

The early Harappan ceramic industry included all the six Kalibangan fabrics, besides a few examples of hand-made pottery. Important antiquities reported were terracotta rattles and bull figurines, segmented bangles, stone bead polisher and sling balls, graffiti marked potsherds, hopscotch, wheel and toy cart frame, bone point, quern and Muller, a set of stacked hopscotch found *in-situ* takes back the antiquity to the Early Harappan period of playing the game of *pitto* of modern times. This could be one of the earliest survivals of the game of its kind, found in an open area behind the structural complex.

#### **Period II**

This period reconfirmed the cultural traits of Mature Harappan period reported during the last two field seasons. At RGR-I, important structure was found aligned along the main street running north-south to which another street was joining from the western side. The lapidary workshop was identified in the cuttings of J-6 (RGR-I). Roughly three thousand unfinished beads and rough outs in various stages of manufacturing, together with finished ones mostly in carnelian, chalcedony, agate and jasper, along with bead polishers for grinding and hearth for heating the stones at different stages of chipping were reported from the floor levels of this complex. In the western cuttings (A16, B13 & B14) of RGR-2, an enclosure wall to citadel mound was exposed with an entrance towards south-western slope. It had 15 to 18 mud bricks courses in tapering order; the wall is internally plastered while externally the bricks are arranged in recessed order. The entrance had burnt brick construction with steps externally while the pathway attached to it was 1.10 m. wide.

### **4. Cemetery Area**

The cuttings at RGR-7 identified the mound as cemetery area of the Mature Harappan period. It was situated 200 meters north of RGR-1, RGR-2 and RGR-3. Eleven extended burials of primary inhumation type were found buried individually in oblong pits with head kept towards north, slightly raised and tilted towards east (with a few exception of westward tilt). There were disturbance due to contemporary later burial pit activities, denoting three phases of burials. In majority of cases, grave goods generally consisting of pots and pans were kept behind the head of the deceased. Three female skeletons were exposed showing the evidence of shell bangles in left wrists. A miniature gold armband was also found near the elbow of a female skeleton. Apart from this, steatite beads were also noticed around the skull, worn as necklace. The antiquities reported were of usual variety in terracotta, metal and stone. The pottery types were of similar nature what had been



reported during the last two field seasons. It is proposed to continue further excavations of the site in order to understand the nature of beginning of settlement and various phases. "It is unfortunate that such a large Harappan site (probably the largest on the Indian side) could not be given full justice due to encroachments."

### **5. New Findings on Rakhigarhi**

Some new information has come out recently related to our famous site of Rakhigarhi. These findings have established that Rakhigarhi is bigger than Mohenjo-daro in size. It has been claimed by Dr. Vasant Shinde, who had been associated with the excavations carried out by the Deccan Post- Graduate College, Pune at the Harappan sites of Farmana, Girawad and Mitathal situated in Haryana. This year Deccan Post-Graduate College's team visited most important site of Rakhigarhi and carried out extensive excavation work under the direction of Dr. Vasant Sinde.

The discovery of two new mounds in January, 2014 at the Rakhigarhi has led to archaeologists establishing it as the biggest Harappan civilization site. Until now, specialists in the Harappan civilization had argued that Mohenjo-daro in Pakistan was the largest among the 2,000 Harappan sites known to exist in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The famous site of Mohenjo-daro extends around in 300 hectares. Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and Ganweriwala (Pakistan) and Rakhigarhi and Dholavira (India) are ranked as the first to the fifth biggest Harappan sites. These new findings related to Rakhigarhi have been published in the leading national newspaper, 'The Hindu' in daily issue of March 28, 2014.

"With the discovery of two additional mounds, the total area of the Rakhigarhi site will be 350 hectares," asserted Professor Vasant Shinde, Director, Deccan Post-Graduate College, Pune, a deemed-to-be university in Pune. The two mounds are in addition to the seven mounds already discovered at Rakhigarhi, about 160 km from New Delhi. The eighth and ninth mounds, spread over 25 hectares each, are situated to the east and west of the main site. Villagers have destroyed much of these two mounds for cultivation. A team of archaeology teachers and students of the Deccan College discovered them when they surveyed the site in January. Dr. Shinde, a specialist in Harappan civilization and Director of the current excavation at Rakhigarhi, called it "an important discovery." He said: "Our discovery makes Rakhigarhi the biggest Harappan site, bigger than Mohenjo-daro. The two new mounds show that the Rakhigarhi site was quite extensive. They have the same material as the main site. So they are part of the main site. On the surface of mound nine, we noticed some burnt clay clots and circular furnaces, indicating this was the industrial area of the Harappan site of Rakhigarhi." (T.S. The Hindu) On the surface of mound eight were found terracotta bangles, cakes, and pottery pieces, typical of the Harappan civilization, said Nilesh P. Jadhav, Research Assistant, Department of Archaeology, Deccan College.

### **6. Artifacts Found**

From January 10, the Deccan College team has excavated five trenches on the slope of the mound four and another trench in the burial mound numbered seven. The excavation in mound four has yielded a cornucopia of artifacts, including a seal and a potsherd, both inscribed with the Harappan script; potsherds painted with concentric circles, fish-net designs, wavy patterns, floral designs and geometric designs; terracotta animal figurines, cakes, hop scotches and shell bangles, all belonging to the Mature Harappan phase of the civilization. The five trenches have revealed residential rooms, a bathroom with a soak jar, drainages, a hearth, a platform etc. The residential

rooms were built with mud bricks. The complex revealed different structural phases, said Kanti Pawar, assistant professor, Department of Archaeology, Deccan College.

A large area of Harappan site at Rakhigarhi is buried under the present-day village, with several hundreds of houses built on the archaeological site. This encroachment is proving a hurdle in carrying out excavation work smoothly.

The villagers' main occupation is cultivation of wheat and mustard, and rearing of buffaloes. Making cow dung cakes is a flourishing industry. There is rampant encroachment on all the mounds despite the Archaeological Survey of India fencing them. Amarendra Nath of the ASI had excavated the Rakhigarhi site from 1997 to 2000.

An important problem about the Harappan civilization is the origin of its culture, Dr. Shinde said. The Harappan civilization had three phases: the early Harappan from circa 3,500 BCE to circa 2,600 BCE, the mature Harappan which lasted from circa 2,600 BCE to circa 2000 BCE, and the late Harappan from circa 2000 BCE to 1600 BCE.

Dr. Shinde said: "It was earlier thought that the origin of the early Harappan phase took place in Sind, in present-day Pakistan, because many sites had not been discovered then. In the last ten years, we have discovered many sites in this part of Haryana and there are at least five Harappan sites such as Kunal, Bhirrana, Farmana, Girawad and Mitathal, which are producing early dates and where the early Harappan phase could go back to 5000 BCE. We want to confirm it. Rakhigarhi is an ideal candidate to believe that the beginning of the Harappan civilisation took place in the Ghaggar basin in Haryana and it gradually grew from here. If we get the confirmation, it will be interesting because the origin would have taken place in the Ghaggar basin in India and slowly moved to the Indus valley. That is one of the important aims of our current excavation at Rakhigarhi."

Four human skeletons dating back to the 5000-year-old Harappan era have been recovered from a cemetery located at Rakhigarhi village in Hisar. Enthused at the recovery of well-preserved skeletons, archaeologists hope forensic scientists will reconstruct the DNA extracted from bones to help decipher the history and origin of the human settlement, which is part of the Indus Valley civilisation. Pune's Deccan College in collaboration with the Haryana Archaeology Department and Seoul National University, South Korea, have been carrying out excavation at the site since January 23. A forensic team from Seoul led by Professor Dong Hoon Shin will arrive in July to process the sampling of the skeletons for obtaining the DNA. Prof Nilesh Jadhav, co-director of the project, along with his team of research scholars — Yogesh Yadav, Malavika Chatterjee and Shalmali Mali — recovered the skeletons at mound No. 7 in Rakhigarhi.

The Haryana Government will set up a Rs 30 crore museum of international standards at Panchkula to display significant archaeological findings. Besides, a Rs 5 crore state-level museum would be set up at Rakhigarhi village in Hisar district, over a piece of land measuring five acres donated by the village panchayat, to display various items excavated at Rakhigarhi

## 7. Conclusion

Rakhigarhi has attracted many scholars and archaeologists from India as well as from foreign countries. The present findings established that this site is larger than Mohenjo-Daro in size. Findings proved that it was a great cultural site not only of Haryana but also at world level. The increasing importance of Rakhigarhi in world archaeology has been considered by the state government and trying to preserve it as a archaeological treasure of world civilization. In nutshell, it

can be said that the present archaeological site under study is sufficient to establish that Rakhigarhi is the largest site of Harappan civilization.

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