Chapter 4

CONCLUSION
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My dissertation has been on the terracotta artifacts of the early first millennium A.D. from sites in the upper Ganga plains, most specifically from the site of Indor Khera, as well as a comparison of the Indor Khera archives with the artifacts found from other upper Ganga plains sites such as Sonkh and Hastinapura. The purpose of the present study was to view the urban situation in the upper Ganga plains with special reference to the above three sites, but also to study them from the point of a relatively common raw material used in antiquity, clay.

In this dissertation, I have studied the terracotta artifacts, from the Indor Khera archives, focusing more on the terracotta artifacts rather than on the human and animal figurines, which are all too often the prime concern of archaeologists and art historians. While figurines are significant from a stylistic point of view and are useful for setting chronologies, smaller terracotta artifacts, comprising discs, wheels, reels, tops, marbles, gamesman, pendants, pottery stamps, dabbers/anvils, miniature vessels and worked sherds, are equally important as these indicate current requirements and are their forms are primarily determined by functional reasons other than the aesthetic or ritual. While often the form of artifacts does not change over time, sometimes they too are susceptible to innovations in style.

I have divided my work into three chapters. In the first chapter that was in the nature of an introduction, I laid out the chronological and spatial ambit of my dissertation. The early centuries of the first millennium A.D. are important in that earlier developments of the beginnings of the use of iron, agricultural extension and development, architectural features, trade and commerce, developments in technical skill and the use of metallic coins led to an urban climax. Most historical and archaeological evidence point to high levels of urbanism in the first three centuries A.D. Archaeologically, the few centuries
show an excess of chaff and vegetal remains in clay. Chaff was clearly used as a tempering ingredient material at Indor Khera, giving the clay a coarse appearance. Second, we find that most of the terracotta artifacts from Period II of Indor Khera are oxidized but ill-fired, probably because the open firing method was used by the potters. This seems to indicate a large scale of production as techniques of clay levigation, as well as long duration of firing seem to have been dispensed with. At the same time, the desire to have well-decorated artifacts was absent, as can be seen from the absence of moulding as a technique for small artifacts. From Hastinapura, two wheels were found which seem to have been moulded as can be seen from the uniformity of their designs. Moulding, a technique also lending itself to large scale production, was not found from Period II at Indor Khera.

In Chapter 3, I have attempted to discuss some of the major categories of terracotta artifacts from Indor Khera. The documentation took the form of study of each artifact type and filling out details of dimensions and weights, using digital calipers and a digital weighing scale, as well as writing out notes on possible manufacturing techniques, degree of firing as well as shape. This documentation was then used to compare the Indor Khera terracotta artifacts with those from the other upper Ganga plains sites of Sonkh and Hastinapura, because it was important to be able to see the comparison as a way of assessing the material wealth of the three sites. The reason for specifically choosing these two sites in the upper Ganga plains is that both were urban, as was Indor Khera, and also because excavation reports were available for them.

Terracotta artifacts of Indor Khera like discs showed a range of thirty five designs. These designs give some indication of functions. As Hartel (1993: 201) pointed out, discs were used as gaming counters, a view endorsed by Lal (1954-55: 87) and also by Gaur (1983: 207). However, the Indor Khera designs, double S type, flower type, swastika may also indicate a ritual purpose. Toy-carts and reels were used for the playing purpose by the children.
also vary according to their sizes. Archaeologists had given an interpretation that these were used for playing purpose at Maski, from megalithic deposits, where a burial of a child was found containing a pottery disc. This particular specimen was identified as a play object belonging to the deceased. Another interpretation is that these were used for ritual purposes. At Jakhera several gathered work sherds were found near the fire altar. Another suggestion is that these were used for playing just as in modern day pitthu, because these work sherds are varied in size. These are not reported from Sonkh and Hastinapura. However, the likely explanation of the numerous worked sherds at Indor Khera rests on their probable use in pottery production, as has been suggested by Mujumdar.

The typology of terracotta artifacts at Indor Khera also seem to indicate that during the early centuries of the first millennium A.D., the raw material of clay was used to produce a rich variety of objects. It also does not appear that clay was the raw material of the masses as artifacts were used for a variety of functions from tools for crafts, such as pottery and weaving, to ornaments, and from play things to ritual. If clay was used to produce artifacts only for the poorer sections of society, then one would have found the same type of artifact in different raw materials. However, we do not find reels, or shuttles or discs or the numerous playthings, such as wheels, toy-carts and so forth, in any other material but terracotta. The only situation where we find substitutes in less common materials were ornaments such as beads and bangles. However, on the whole, one can say that the raw material, clay, being easily and commonly available, it was appropriate to use it for making a vast and varied range of artifacts for people in their daily life.

This is only a preliminary foray into a study of what are normally called ‘small finds’. It was not possible to undertake an exhaustive evaluation of all terracotta artifact categories due to shortage of time. However, for the artifact categories that I have been able to document and discuss typologically, I hope
they will allow other researchers to make comparisons with artifacts from other sites. My prime intention was to move away from terracotta human and animal figurines which are usually given far more importance than these small artifacts. I found it important to see the range of functions served by these terracotta artifacts as well as the need also to allow stylistic features in each artifact category. Thus, the stylistic range among terracotta discs must have had a meaning to people in those times. Finally, while a key element in urbanism is the access to varied raw materials from distant sources, it is also significant to note the uses that can be made of more commonly occurring and easily available raw materials like clay.