EXCAVATIONS AT KHAPARKHERA

The excavation at Khaparkhera was carried out as part of salvage archaeological investigations in the Sardar Sarovar Dam submergence area on the river Narmada. The site was taken up for excavations with a view to ascertain the nature of cultural remains between Chalcolithic and Early Historical cultural period in the area if any and further establish its stratigraphical context. This objective was achieved in the excavations at Khaparkhera in unveiling the Iron Age, which has been established for the first time in Central Narmada Valley.

Location:

The ancient site (22° 4’ 16” N: 74° 51’ 28” E) lies near the deserted village of Khaparkhera on the right bank of river Narmada (Fig. 36 and Pl. 109 and 110).

Figure 36 : Khaparkhera – Location of the Site
Plate 109: Khaparkhera – Location of the Site (After Google earth)
Plate 110 : Khaparkhera – General View of the Site

Excavations:

The excavation (Pl. 111 and Fig. 37) was taken up at four different spots on the site.

Plate 111 : Khaparkhera – General View of the Excavations
Figure 37
Cultural Sequence:

Period I - Chalcolithic

Period II - Iron Age

Period III - Early Historical

No cultural break was noticed.

Period I:

The Chalcolithic phase is characterised by the occurrence of microliths, large size quartzite artefacts, painted pot-sherds and few copper artefacts. The microliths are made on crypto-crystalline materials mostly on chalcedony. Finished artefacts are mostly on blades comprising of both geometric and non-geometric varieties. Quartzite artefacts include simple flakes, scrapers, flake cores, etc. The characteristic variety of the ceramic industry comprises black paintings on red ware and white painted black-and-red ware.

Period II:

The Chalcolithic phase is succeeded by the Iron Age, the assemblage of which has been identified for the first time in Central Narmada Valley. This period is characterised by the occurrence of rubble structures (Pl. 112), use of iron for manufacturing implements along with copper and extensive use of microliths, mostly fabricated on siliceous materials. The quartzite artefacts continue to occur but in a lesser frequency than the preceding period.
Plate 112: Khaparkhera – Rubble Structures

The most important findings from this period are two secondary human burials (Pl. 113, 114, 115a, 115b, 116, 117), interred in an extended way, and oriented north-south. These burials, one belonging to an adult and the other to a child were arranged, the bones being kept in an articulated position. Large rubble pieces were placed on top of the bones within the burial pit, as a result of which most of the bones were found crushed due to the overload. No burial goods were found associated with these burials.
Plate 116: Khaparkhera – Burial No. 2

Plate 117: Khaparkhera – Burial No. 2
Period III:

The Iron Age is succeeded by the Early Historical period when it becomes a major settlement on Narmada. On the basis of coins and other associated antiquities the site continued to be occupied till about 4th century AD. Excavations revealed a large scale conflagration at the settlement, burning most of the houses during this period. The houses of this period were of mud bricks as well as burnt bricks and had walls made of mud (Pl. 118) and wattle and daub (Pl. 119).

Plate 118 : Khaparkhera – Mud House

Plate 119 : Khaparkhera - Wattle and Daub
Handmade tiles were used for the roofs (Pl. 120). The layout plan of the successive houses in the settlement remained same all throughout the Early Historical period. Among the noteworthy structures are the granaries (Pl. 121, 122), the elaborate drainage system (Pl. 123) wherein drains from two houses come to join as one which empties into a ring well and house complex made of mud bricks. Two more soak pits (Pl. 124) were exposed in the excavations made of terracotta rings.
Plate 122: Khaparkhera – Granary Complex

Plate 123: Khaparkhera – Elaborate Drainage System
The site has also yielded the evidence of the presence of various craft specialists during Early historical period, comprising potter, goldsmith (Pl. 127), copper smith (Pl. 125, 126), bead maker, conch shell worker, bone tool maker, etc. The assumption based on these finds that the site might have played a major role as a business centre is further substantiated by the occurrence of a good number of coins and few seals and sealings.
Coins comprise mostly uninscribed cast coins (Pl. 128) and tribal coins. A wooden seal (Pl. 130) found in the excavations datable to 1st century BC on palaeographical grounds and is probably the earliest evidence of its kind in the country. Besides, inscribed potsherds (Pl. 129) of 1st century BC Brahmi characters have also been collected from the excavation.
Plate 128: Khaparkhera – Uninscribed Cast Coins

Plate 129: Khaparkhera – Inscribed Pot-sherd

Plate 130: Khaparkhera – Wooden Seal
The various other antiquities from this period comprise copper objects (Pl. 131, 132) like bowls, bells, antimony rods, bangles, finger rings, figurines, fish hooks, etc., iron objects like axe, hoe, ladle, arrow head, nail, fish hook, etc., few gold (Pl. 133) and lead objects; beads on semi-precious stones and terracotta; objects of shell and bone like bangles (Pl. 135), bone points (Pl. 137 and 138), carved handles (Pl. 134), carved ring, etc. Various terracotta objects recovered during the excavations include skin rubber, bangle, ear stud, games man, sling balls, hop-scotches and figurines (Pl. 136). Figurines comprise horse, bull, elephant and female. Stone objects found comprised saddle querns, bead polishers, etc.
Plate 133: Khaparkhera – Gold Objects

Plate 134: Khaparkhera – Bone Handle

Plate 135: Khaparkhera – Shell Bangle

Plate 136: Khaparkhera – Terracotta Object
Plate 137: Khaparkhera – Bone Points

Plate 138: Khaparkhera – Bone Points
Excavations near Khaparkhera, District Dhar:

Excavations (Fig. 38, Pl. 139) conducted in the alluvium on the right bank of the Narmada near the ancient mound in Khaparkhera village, Dhar district have revealed the existence of an ostrich egg shell bead manufacturing site of the Upper Palaeolithic period. Besides, a number of ostrich egg shell beads in various stages of manufacture were also found (Pl. 143). The site has also yielded drills (Pl. 141 and 142) of chalcedony and carnelian used for boring the beads. The site also yielded good number of microliths (Pl. 140) and a number of hearths activity.
Plate 139: Khaparkhera – Excavated Trench in Alluvium

Plate 140: Khaparkhera - Microliths
Plate 141: Khaparkhera - Drills

Plate 142: Khaparkhera – Drills and Unfinished Beads

Plate 143: Khaparkhera – Unfinished Beads