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*ARCHAEOLOGICAL
REMAINS OF EARLY DELHI*

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1. PGW level at Salimgarh

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History has witnessed Delhi as the capital city of many kingdoms and empires. Foundations of Indraprastha and establishment of power by the Pandavas that had followed upon removal of the jungles of Khandavaprastha are well recorded in the *Mahabharata*. It seems that this area was earlier inhabited by the Nagas who were pushed southward towards Mathura-Padmavati and eastward towards Panchala region. Successive waves of incursion from the west and internecine war rummaged and caused the gravity of power and urban conglomerate of Delhi shift towards resettlement on several occasions to cope with the unpredictable vicissitudes of the time and intentions of the rulers for making the city protected, resourceful and majestic.

Archaeological excavations in 1954-55 and in 1969-73 by the Archaeological Survey of India under B.B. Lal at Old Fort (Purana Qila) confirmed it to be the site of ancient Indraprastha whose nomenclature still exists in the form of 'mauza Inderpat' in the revenue records. Although the generally accepted pottery called Painted Grey Ware (PGW) was found in the excavation, its separate horizon at the site was not found. PGW settlements were found later in the excavations at Mandoli, Bhorgarh and Salimgarh Fort although the ceramic was noticed at a number of other sites also in Delhi. Salimgarh in the vicinity of Nigambodh on the right bank of Yamuna seems to represent the people or place known as Bodha or Bodhi, mentioned in *Mahabharata* and *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali as a nigama of Indraprastha.¹ The discovery of Asoka's Minor Rock Edict near East of Kailash in New Delhi provides further evidence of early historical activities in the area of Indraprastha.

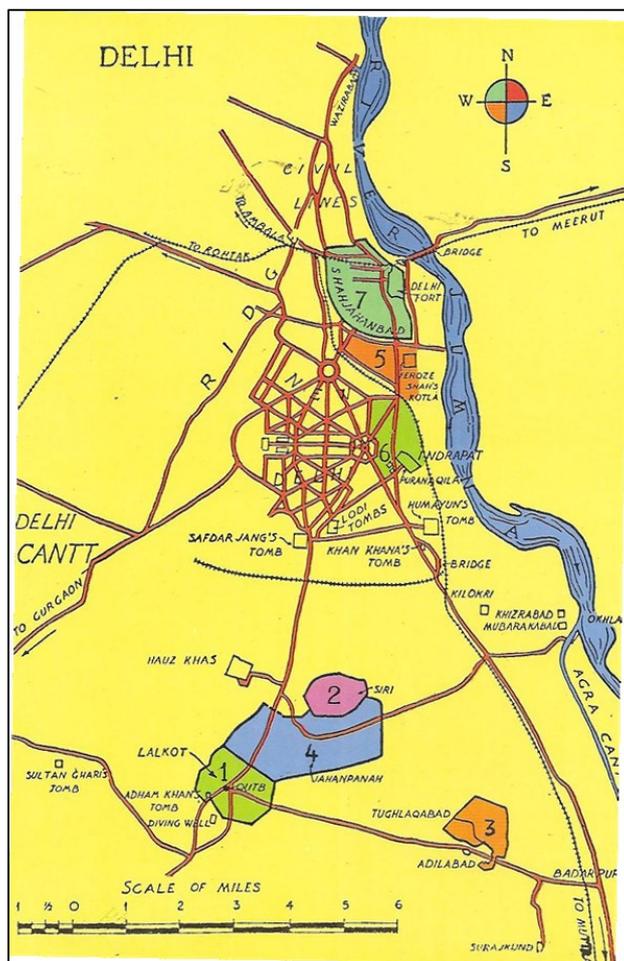


2. Asokan Rock edict at East of Kailash: provides further evidence of early historical activities in the area of Indraprastha



3. Asokan pillar at Kotla Firozshah

A continued cultural sequence of Delhi was noticed in excavations at Purana Qila from excavations at Purana Qila from Period I- Maurya (4th-3rd century BCE), Period II- Sunga (2nd-1st century BCE), Period III-Saka- Kushan (1st-3rd century CE), Period IV- Gupta (4th-6th century CE), Period V- Post-Gupta (7th-9th century CE), Period VI-Rajput (10th-12th century CE), Period VII-Sultanate (13th-15th century CE) and Period VIII-Mughal (16th-19th century CE). Typical objects used in daily life of different periods were encountered in the excavations. The later levels at Purana Qila and also the Sarban Stone Inscription of AD 1327 provide evidence of medieval Indraprastha when it had become a pratigana or paragana (sub-division) of Dhillika (Delhi). This is well represented in the foundation of the city of Delhi at Lalkot followed by shifting of it to Siri and Tughalaqabad. Since then Indraprastha has remained obscure and hidden underneath hundreds of later monuments and constructions.

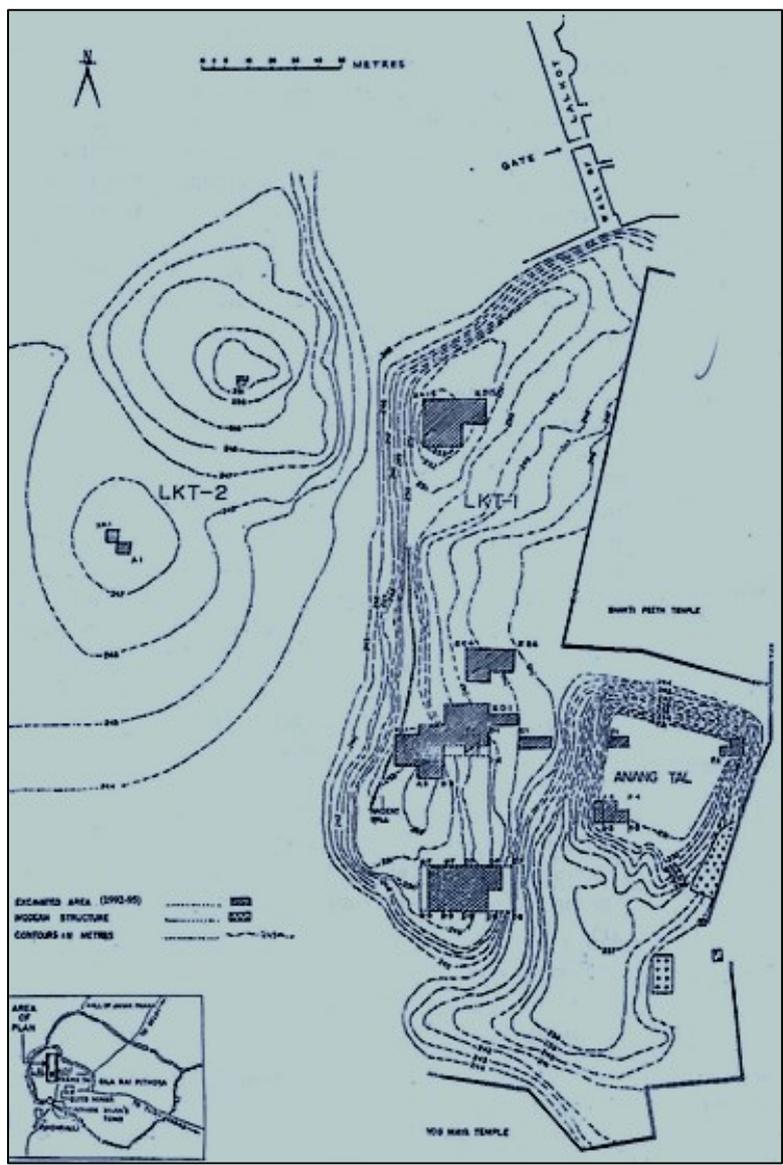


4. Cities of Delhi



5. Kushan pottery from Purana Qila Excavations

Archaeological investigations attest to early inhabitation of Delhi in the lower palaeolithic age and human activities are noticed in the following middle palaeolithic, upper palaeolithic, chalcolithic and early iron ages with the beginning of the historical period. It is quite clear that the ridges of the sloping Aravallis which end at river Yamuna with tributaries and drains and undulating land surface had contained such a flora and fauna and the area remained ideal for hunters and food gatherers of prehistoric age followed by regular settlements scattered in different parts of the area in protohistoric times. The discovery of over three dozen prehistoric sites throughout Delhi and to its south in adjoining parts of Haryana and mostly confined to the bordering hilly area containing villages and places like Kalkaji, J.N.U. Campus, Lado Sarai, Chattarpur, Anangpur, Surajkund and many sites in between and around Surajkund-Gurgaon stretch and different ridges around water reservoir of Surajkund, Anandpur dam, Badkhal Lake-Sohna road prove that the southern hilly area of Delhi bordering Haryana was environmentally better suited to prehistoric man.



6. Contour plan of Lal Kot, Mehrauli, New Delhi

For the first time lower palaeolithic tools, 4 specimens of scraper, handaxe, cleaver and disc were discovered on 8th April, 1956 by Surajit Sinha in front of the Chauburji mosque at northern ridge, who published a brief note in *Man in India* in 1958 (pp. 151-53). B.M. Pande of the Archaeological Survey of India discovered a late Acheulian handaxe in the J.N.U. Campus in 1983 which was made of quartzite flake, measuring 93 mm in length, 47 mm in width with maximum thickness of 23 mm and symmetrical in outline with “ more or less flat surface marked by shallow flake scars suggesting the use of a soft hammer wood or bone.”

In 1987, Dilip K. Chakrabarti and Nayanjot Lahiri published a brief report² on their prehistoric investigations in Delhi and Haryana which was the outcome of their fieldwork conducted in south Delhi and adjoining parts of Haryana in December-January 1985-86 as a result of which 43 prehistoric sites were located.



7. Steps of Anang Tal

In 1986, S.S. Saar of the Archaeological Survey of India picked up some tools from the heap of Badarpur sand unloaded by a truck in Malaviya Nagar in New Delhi. The quarry was searched about 1 km south of Anangpur village where a large number of tools were found in the ditches, formed by quarries and also resting over the weathered bedrock surfaces, overlain by nearly 1

m deposit of soil. In 1991 and 1992 A.K. Sharma of the Prehistory Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India in association of his team and with the help of the Excavation Branch II of the Archaeological Survey of India excavated for two seasons in the areas between palaeochannels V and IV to know further details of the prehistoric site.³

The ancient mounds at Bhorgarh (lat. 28°49' 45" N, long. 77°5' 15" E) in north Delhi near Narela were discovered about twenty-five years back and explored thoroughly by the teams of Archaeological Survey of India in 1973-75 and 1991-92. The Department of Archaeology, Government of Delhi excavated the site for two successive seasons during 1992-93 and 1993-94.⁴

Excavations at Bhorgarh have yielded a four-fold cultural sequence from Late Harappan to medieval period covering a span of about 2,500 years as proposed by the excavator –

Period	I	:	Late Harappan (second millennium B.C.)
Period	II	:	Painted Grey Ware Culture (first millennium B.C.)
Period	III	:	Kushan (second and third centuries A.D.)
Period	IV	:	Medieval (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries A.D.)

Earlier excavations at Mandoli were carried out for two consecutive seasons from 1987-88 to 1988-89 by the Department of Archaeology, Government of Delhi.⁵

The cultural sequence of the site represents following cultural periods –

Period	I	:	Late Harappan
Period	II	:	Painted Grey Ware
Period	III	:	Distinguished by a black slipped ware
Period	IV	:	Sunga-Kushana, and

Period V : Gupta times.

Delhi Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India carried out archaeological excavations at Salimgarh fort (lat. 28° 39' 40" N, long. 77° 14' 35" E) in the year 1995 under the direction of the author as Superintending Archaeologist.⁶ The objective of the excavation was to know the cultural sequence of the site which was considered to be a mound, encircled by the fort wall in the sixteenth century A.D. almost in similar fashion in which the Old Fort was constructed in the same period around the ancient mound of Indraprastha, about 6 km towards its south. The fortwall of Salimgarh was constructed in c. A.D. 1546 by Islam Shah or Salim Shah, son and successor of Sher Shah Suri.

Potsherds of red ware, grey ware and Painted Grey Ware the habitational deposit containing some animal bones was encountered which does not show signs of waterborne rolling of potsherds. The antiquity of such pottery takes back the date of the site to the early first millennium B.C. The Painted Grey ware sherds were found in late deposits also which is possible because of pit-activities and levelling of mound. Besides PGW sherds, black slipped ware, black-and-red ware, grey ware and red ware have also been found. Two copper coins of Sultanate period were found just below the rammed floor in upper deposits of which one belongs to Sultan Balban (A.D. 1265-87).

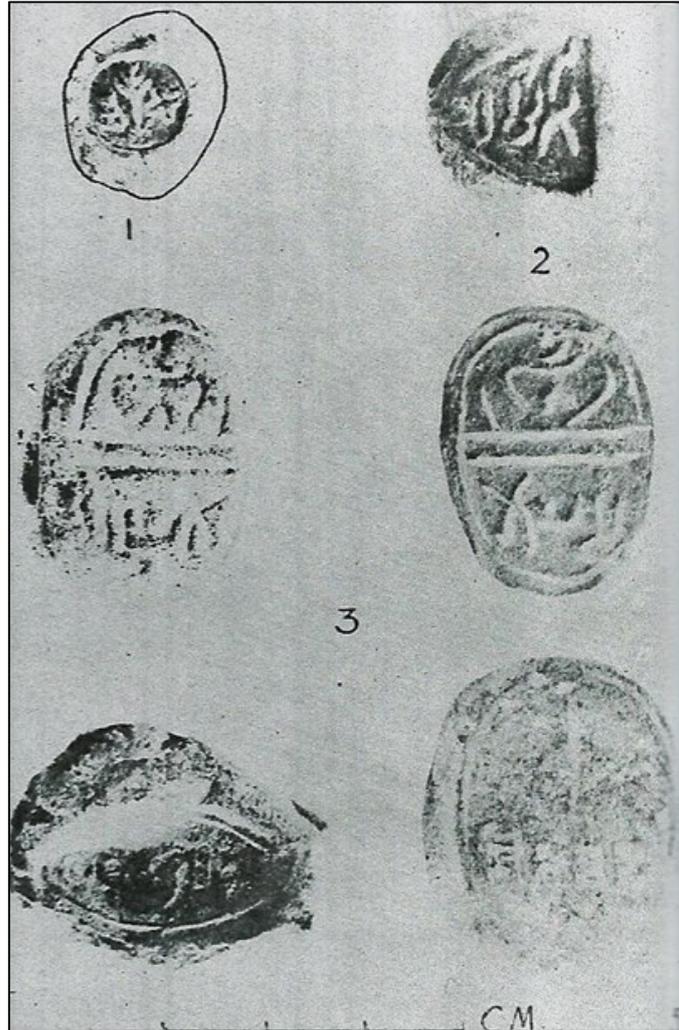
Excavations conducted by the author on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India in between 1992 to 1995 for four seasons at Lal Kot, the first city of Delhi (Dhillika) provided evidence of Rajput and early Sultanate age and have confirmed different cultural traits of respective periods with similarities and differences. The excavations have also provided index of pottery of both the periods ranging between 11th to 14th century CE.⁷



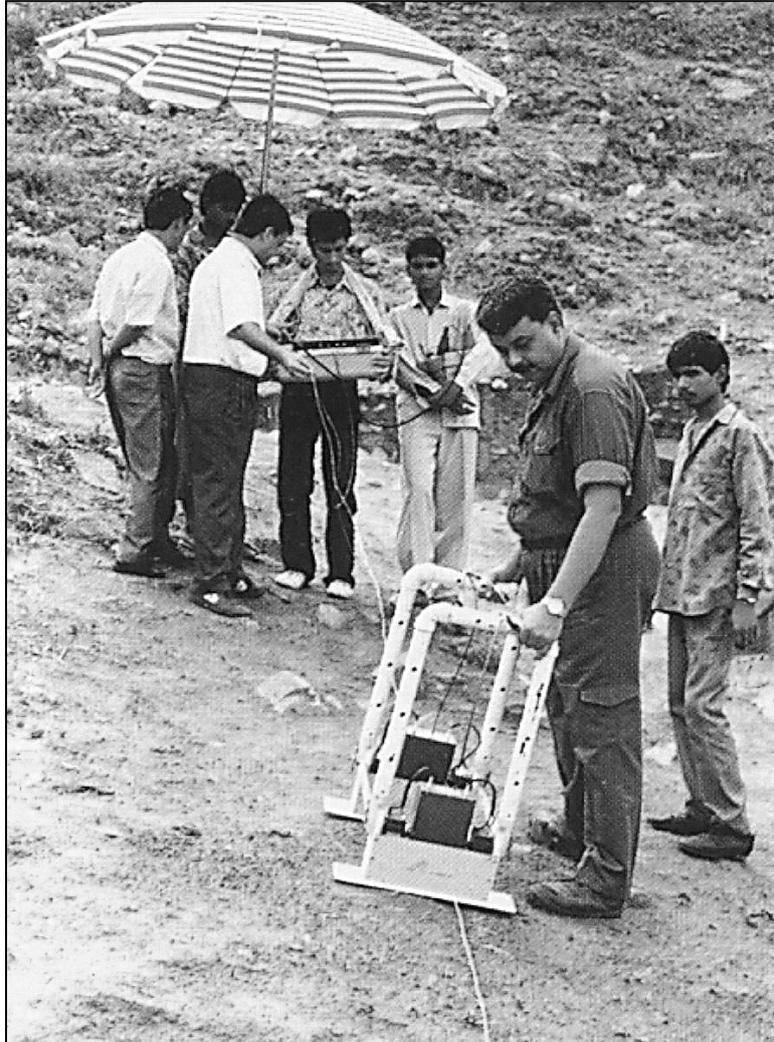
8. Nandi from Lal Kot



9. Early structures at Purana Qila



11. Ancient Sealings from Purana Qila



4. GPR survey conducted by the author at Lal Kot



10. General view of trenches at Lal Kot

During explorations conducted by the author in 1992 many pre-Islamic sites including khera kalan, Kharkhari Nahar, Mound at Gordon Highlanders column, Ioni, Bankner, Jhatikara and others were discovered which attested the extent of ancient Indraprastha in the protohistoric and early historic age.

References

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2. Chakrabarti, D.K. and N. Lahiri, ‘ A Preliminary Report on the Stone Age of the Union Territory of Delhi and Haryana’ , *Man and Environment*, Vol. XI, 1987, pp.109-16.
3. Sharma, A.K. *Prehistoric Delhi and Its Neighbourhood*, New Delhi — 1993.
4. Mani, B.R., op.cit, pp. 17-21.
5. Ibid., pp.21-25
6. Ibid., pp.25-27.
7. Ibid.