

**TERRACOTTAS FROM MATHURA AND AHICCHATRĀ: AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY (400 B.C-7<sup>TH</sup> 8<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES A.D)**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in  
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the  
Degree of Master of Philosophy

**Shivani Agarwal**

Centre For Historical Studies  
School Of Social Sciences  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067  
2004



### DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled, "Terracottas From Mathura And Ahicchatra: An Archaeological Study (400 B.C-7<sup>th</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries A.D)" submitted by Shivani Agarwal, is in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Philosophy of this university. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this university and is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Dr. Himanshu Prabha Ray

Supervisor

**Centre for Historical Studies**  
School of Social Sciences  
**Jawaharlal Nehru University**  
New Delhi-110067

Dr. Mridula Mukherjee

Chairperson

**Chairperson**  
**Centre for Historical Studies**  
School of Social Sciences  
**Jawaharlal Nehru University**  
New Delhi-110067

CHS Office Phone : Ext. 2456 at (011) 6107676 or (011) 6167557  
Fax : 91-11-6165886 E-mail : chsjnu@yahoo.com

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank all the people who have, in this course of these two years, helped me immensely with my dissertation. First and foremost my supervisor, Dr.Himanshu Prabha Ray, who has shown extreme patience with all the drafts of chapters and reading material I piled upon her and for providing the much needed direction and supervision to this dissertation. I thank her wholeheartedly for all her valuable suggestions and support.

I would like to thank the staff of the Archaeological Survey of India library, the National Museum library, the ICHR library, the JNU Central library, and the CHS DSA library for being cooperative and helpful. A special thanks to the American Institute of American Studies for letting me use their library and photo-archives.

Lastly, special thanks to all my friends at JNU who have helped and encouraged me throughout.

Shivani Agarwal



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## INTRODUCTION

Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines have always been in use in the Indian subcontinent, right from the Neolithic sites in Baluchistan and the ancient Indus Valley Civilization to the present day. The present study uses this corpus of terracottas from the sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā, from 400 B.C to 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D, to explore the role and functions that these objects fulfilled in their respective societies. Both Mathura and Ahicchatra have been extensively explored and excavated and are well-documented sites. My attempt is to study this archaeological record according to the context of the objects found, viz., the association of terracotta figurines within their groups and in relation to other artefacts and to the structural remains.

There has been an overwhelming amount of scholarship, interpreting these figurines from the two sites. Some of the earliest and outstanding works are by Stella Kramisch<sup>1</sup>, A.Coomaraswamy<sup>2</sup>, V.S.Agrawala<sup>3</sup> etc. The common thread that runs in all these works is the over emphasis on the religious nature and function of the female terracotta figurines from various sites. Most of the scholars analysing these figurines have taken them to be manifestations of the female divinity and characterized them as Mother Goddesses. Their perception needs to be viewed in the larger context of the studies on ancient Indian religion and the role that archaeology has played in these.

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, B.S(ed): 1983; *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*; University of Pennsylvania Press; Philadelphia;

<sup>2</sup> Coomaraswamy, Ananda : 1977 " From the River Banks and the Sacred Places: Ancient Indian Terracottas"; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, also "Intellectual Opertation in Indian Art"; Journal of The Indian Society of Oriental Art (henceforth JISOA), Vol 3; No.1; 1935

Religious history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was constructed largely from the literary texts. The translation of the Sanskrit texts by Indologists in this period provided scholars with all the material they needed to study ancient Indian religion. The *Vedas* were considered to be the most ancient sacred documents, followed by the *Upaniṣads* and *Dharmasāstras* and finally the *Purāṇic* literature. On the basis of these texts scholars were able to outline a trajectory of the genesis and development of religion in ancient India. The worship of the goddess became evident from the *Purāṇic* sources and was believed to have originated in close alliance to the development of Śaivism, later assuming the form of an independent cult of its own. The initial studies on religion were therefore all based on literary sources and archaeology had a minimal role in this.

It was due to the pioneering efforts of Alexander Cunningham in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Sir John Marshall at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that archaeological data first entered the realm of religious studies. Marshall's discovery of the Indus valley Civilization and more importantly his excavations at the site of Mohenjodaro had manifold consequences for the study of ancient Indian history<sup>4</sup>. Not only did it push back the dates of ancient Indian civilization to as early as the third millennium B.C; his interpretation of the archaeological data from the Indus valley, particularly the female terracotta figurines in the light of later Hindu beliefs and practices, helped

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<sup>3</sup>Agrawala, V.S: 1948“ Terracotta Figurines of Ahicchatra, District Bareilly, U.P.” *Ancient India* No. 4; pp 104-179; 1984 ; *Mathura Terracottas*; Prithvi Prakashan; Varanasi;

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, John: 1931; *Mohenjodaro and The Indus Civilization*; London; Stephen Austin & Sons

scholars to trace back the genesis of Hindu religion to the Indus valley civilization. The female terracotta figurines were taken to represent a religious function and Marshall drew cross-cultural parallels with similar figurines unearthed from sites in West Asia and Europe. Moreover taking into cognisance the popularity of the goddess cult in Hinduism, he perceived these figurines as precursors to the later goddesses of the Hindu pantheon as mentioned in the texts.

Marshall's methodology was readily adopted by subsequent scholars working on the cult of the goddess and a general trend was to trace the origin of the goddess cult from prehistoric levels onwards. Many theories came up explaining the development of the goddess cult. Cross-cultural comparisons of the female terracotta figurines from the Indian subcontinent with the Venus figurines of Europe, that were characterized by pendulous breasts, broad hips, rotund buttocks and excessive corpulency, is not confined only to the Indus figurines. V.S.Agrawala has interpreted the simple archaic figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatra in a similar fashion and has suggested that they represented the aspects of fertility like the figurines from Europe and West Asia<sup>5</sup>. The evidence provided by Marshall was taken to prove the antiquity of Goddess worship in ancient India and archaeological data was in some way used to corroborate later information provided by the *Purāṇas* with regard to the cult of the goddess. Therefore many of the simple terracotta figurines unearthed from numerous sites in the Ganga Valley were identified as manifestations of a Proto-Lakṣmī or a Proto-Durgā.

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<sup>5</sup> Agrawala, V.S: *Mathura Terracottas*; pp-19-23



According to another theory, the worship of the goddess is believed to have originated in prehistoric societies and over time adapted into Hindu religion by the process of Brahmanization or Sanskritization and remained an important component of the religion up to the present times. D.D.Kosambi<sup>6</sup> was the first scholar who articulated this integration theory, and opined that many local religious cult practices, like the worship of Śakti stones or the local and tribal deities, were over a period of time accommodated and assimilated into the larger Brahmanical cult of the goddess and inducted into the Hindu pantheon. Many subsequent scholars have worked within this framework and perceived the goddess cult as all encompassing, integrating within its fold numerous local and folk cultic practices. To give an example, the ideology of Śaktism stressing upon the benevolent as well as the malevolent aspects of the goddess created space for both the docile consort goddesses like Lakṣmi and Pārvati and the horrific demon killing Kālī and Durgā to be integrated into a larger cult. Therefore the connection between worship of the female divinity, believed to be represented by the archaic female figurines and the cult of the goddess as mentioned in the later religious texts is neatly worked.

Another associated issue relates to the distinction often made between the use of clay in contrast to the use of stone in the production of religious or secular sculptures. It is generally believed by certain scholars that clay as a medium of artistic expression was confined to the local and folk cults whereas stone sculptures represented the refined mainstream Brahmanical deities. The dichotomy between the sophisticated court art in stone and the crude regional

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<sup>6</sup> Kosambi, D.D: 1962; *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of the Indian Culture*.

and local sculptures in clay is also emphasized<sup>7</sup>. The terracotta figurines therefore are seen as representations of the local and tribal deities, those are incorporated into the mainstream religion later and are depicted as Brahmanical goddesses in stone sculptures.

Therefore a close connection between the study of ancient Indian religion, with particular reference to the goddess cult, and the anthropomorphic terracotta figurines is quite evident. In the subsequent sections of this chapter I undertake a survey of the writings on the goddess cult in India and the perspectives on the terracotta art in the Indian subcontinent and attempt to bring out the relationship between the two.

The core issue of my present study is not only to question the religious nature and function attributed to these anthropomorphic terracotta figurines, but also to study the archaeological data from the sites in the Mathura city and in the present district of Mathura and Ahicchatrā more carefully, and interpret the significance of these figurines in their respective regional contexts. In the second chapter I give brief outline of the geography and cultural heritage of the two regions and discuss in detail the way in which archaeological data is retrieved from the various sites in Mathura and Ahicchatrā. I also trace the developments in the discipline of archaeology as a whole and the role it played in the reconstruction of history. It can be argued that these developments have defined the way in which archaeological data has been used and interpreted in the study of the past. With specific reference to the region of my study, the initial efforts in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were motivated

by the lure of recovering valuable and exotic antiquities for personal collections and museums. From the 1940's and more so from the 1960's excavations were conducted at sites in the two regions and a chronological and cultural sequence was worked out on the basis of cultural material largely pottery, coins and inscriptions. The history of the region was however based on the ancient texts, archaeological material was largely used as corroborative evidence. For my present study I have made use of the excavation reports of the two regions and restudied them addressing different issues. For Mathura and Ahicchatra the earliest reports are by Cunningham who has explored the region and recorded its finds<sup>8</sup>. In the 1940's excavation was conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (henceforth ASI), at Ahicchatra and the reports are published in the volumes of *Ancient India*<sup>9</sup>. A second excavation was conducted in the 1960's by the A.S.I and a detailed report is provided by N.R.Banerji<sup>10</sup>.

In Mathura the second phase of excavations were conducted between 1966-77, the details of which are furnished in the A.S.I annual reports of the period<sup>11</sup>. The latest excavation at the district of Mathura took place at the site of Sonkh by a team of archaeologists headed by H.Härtel and the detailed report of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ray, Niharranjan : 1965; *Maurya and Sunga Art*; India Studies in Past and Present; Calcutta

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Cunningham Archaeological Survey of India Reports (henceforth ACASIR), Vol 1, 1862-65; pp 255-265; A.C.A.S.I.R; Vol 8; pp 13-46 ; Vol 20; 1882-83; pp 30-55

<sup>9</sup> *Ancient India*, No 1, 1946; *Ancient India*, No 4, 1947-48; *Ancient India*, No 8, 1952

<sup>10</sup> Banerji, N.R: July 1970 "Ahicchatra: An Account of Recent Explorations"; *Indian Museum Bulletin*; Vol V; pp 12-26

<sup>11</sup> The details of the excavations are provided in the volumes of the Indian Archaeology- A Review (henceforth IAR); 1966-67, 1969-70 pp 42-43, 1970-71 pp 39-40, 1972-1973 pp 33-34, 1973-1974 pp 31-32, 1974-1975 pp 48-50, 1975-1976 pp 53-55, 1976-1977 pp 54-56

excavation is published by him in 1993<sup>12</sup>. I have accorded a lot of importance to this report as it is a highly systematic recording of the excavation and furnishes a lot of details that are important to my study.

In the following third and fourth chapters I undertake an analyses of the terracotta figurines from the two regions keeping in mind a number of issues. The very first is the identification of the female terracotta figurines as Mother Goddesses. In most cases these figurines are isolated from their chronological and regional contexts and listed under an undifferentiated category of Mother Goddess. They are then compared and identified with goddesses mentioned in the religious texts of the period. These so-called 'archaic' figurines are generally treated as a uniform group, with absolutely no regard given to technical and stylistic changes over time. In the third chapter I categorize the terracotta figurines on the basis of the changes in style, technique employed in production, ornamentation and decorative motifs employed etc. I also argue that even these simple archaic figurines exhibit immense variations in style and technique and are not confined to a particular period. Also these figurines cannot be seen as precursors to the Brahmanical goddesses as these simple figurines occur in contexts parallel with the latter. Even if it is to be conceded that these figurines fulfilled a religious function, the nature of worship and rituals and the religious meanings attached to them can be gauged only if these are studied with respect to their surroundings, i.e. to have some idea of the find spots at the site from which they are unearthed.

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<sup>12</sup> Härtel.H: 1993; *Excavations at Sonkh: 2500 Years of a Town in Mathura District*; Berlin; Dietrich Reimer Verlag

The present archaeological study further involves looking at the larger picture to study not only the terracotta figurines, but also other archaeological finds from the region. Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines are studied in association with other terracotta objects like ring stones, votive tanks and in context of the structural remains at Mathura and Ahicchatrā. The fourth chapter discusses these associated terracotta objects and the structures, mostly temples from the two sites. The association of the terracotta figurines with other objects and structures throw light on their possible ideological meanings and functions that they fulfilled. Both Mathura and Ahicchatrā are extremely multi-religious in nature, as can be gathered from the diverse archaeological finds. In the ancient period both the cities were centres to many religious faiths- Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism- and probably many other local; and regional religious cults. The numerous finds of Brahmanical deities, Buddhist statues as well as Nāgā and Yakṣā images, grotesque dwarfs and votive tanks with different motifs are all a witness to the existence of different religious traditions.

The attempt therefore in the present study is at a proper contextualization of the archaeological data from the two regions. The dynamics and diversity of cultural conditions have to be accounted for. The interplay of social and religious factors and the diversity of traditions have to be kept in mind before we characterize the role and function of the terracotta figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatrā.

## **The Cult Of The Goddess: A Historiographical Review**

The worship of the divine feminine principle has been considered by scholars as the ancient religious expression in India. The worship of the goddess is believed to have originated in prehistoric societies and has since then remained an important component of Hindu religion up to present times. It is not surprising then, that the study of the goddess cult in ancient Indian society has received much attention from scholars. The subject of my present study concerns the anthropomorphic terracotta figurines from the site of Mathura and Ahicchatrā; most of the female figurines from the two sites are regarded as manifestations of the Mother Goddess. It is therefore imperative to outline the various theories and perspectives of scholars studying the cult of the goddess in Indian history over a period of time. Terracotta art of ancient India has also been studied extensively by scholars. Moreover there is a close connection between the studies on the cult of the Goddess and those on the terracotta figurines of the ancient period, as would be subsequently revealed in this chapter. The attempt here is to review the writings on these subjects and to discuss the sources used and the methodology applied by scholars in their study.

The study of ancient Indian religion started as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century when scholars translated the literary texts and inscriptions of the ancient period. The material for the reconstruction of the political and religious history of ancient India was supplied principally from three sources- the literature of Brahmans, Jainas and the Buddhists; the inscriptions on stone or copper plate and coins and seals; the accounts of foreign writers, chiefly in Greek, Latin and

Chinese.<sup>13</sup> With regard to religious history the *Vedas* were considered to be the most ancient literary religious documents and therefore the basis for the Indian religious thought. Therefore most studies on religion regarded the *Vedic* literature as the starting point to the study of ancient Indian religion. Maurice Bloomfield attempted a discussion exclusively on the *Vedic* religion in his work *The Religion of The Vedas*, and considers the *Vedas* to mark the beginning of Hindu religion. Monier Williams, studying Hinduism and its sources, begins with the *Vedic* literature and proceeds to the *Upaniṣads* and the *Dharmaśāstras* and *Purāṇic* literature. In most of these studies on religion, the cult of Goddess worship formed a part of the larger Hindu religion as was evident from the *Purāṇic* sources. Therefore the development of the goddess cult was studied in close alliance to the development of Śaivism, the former considered the offshoot of the latter. Thus Monier Williams states “ just as the male god Shiva gathered under his own personality the attributes and function of all gods and became the Great God- that is the most lofty and severe God of the Hindu pantheon- so his female counterpart became the one Great Goddess, who required more propitiation than any other goddess and to an extent represented all other female manifestations of the Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) and absorbed all their functions.”<sup>14</sup> Another notable work on the study of religion was by R.G.Bhandarkar<sup>15</sup> who traced the development of the

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<sup>13</sup> Bloomfield, Maurice: 1972; 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1907; *The Religion of the Vedas: The Ancient Religion of India*; Delhi; Indological Book House

<sup>14</sup> Monier William: Indian ed. reprint 1993; *Hinduism, Hinduism and its Sources*; Chaman Offset Printers; pp 123-124

<sup>15</sup> Bhandarkar, R.G: 1965; 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1913; *Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor religious Systems*; Varanasi; Indological Book House

Vaiṣṇava and Śāiva cult from the ancient period to the seventeenth century using literary sources. Theorizing about the worship of the Goddess Bhandarkar too studies it in the context of Saivism and traces the history of the cult of the Devi through the history of the consort of Rudra-Śiva and feels that an aboriginal element made its contribution in the form of the goddess of forests and mountains worshiped by wild tribes and demanding animal and human sacrifice that later was represented by the main stream Hindu goddesses like Durgā and Kālī.

Ancient Indian history therefore, started with the *Vedic* period beginning not earlier than 1600 B.C. The scenario changed with the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization by Sir John Marshall in 1921-22. Marshall on the basis of his excavations at the site of Mohenjodaro pushed back the dates of Indian history to the third millennium B.C and placed the Indus Civilization contemporaneous with civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Of particular importance, with regard to the study of goddess worship, is Marshall's theories regarding the Indus religion. The term Mother Goddess came to be used during the time of the initial excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro. On the basis of the material remains from the two sites of the Indus valley, Sir John Marshall propounded a well-articulated theory of the cult of the Mother Goddess in India. Marshall, to validate his theories on the Mother Goddess cult, had before him a corpus of writing on Hindu religion as well as his previous experience on working on large-scale excavations in Greece, Southern Turkey and Crete and the archaeological material similar to the Indus valley from these contemporaneous sites in West Asia and Europe. The



discoveries of the Indus valley culture and Marshall's reconstruction of its religious life have formed the basis of theories on the origin and development of the cult of the Goddess subsequently. The discoveries of the Indus Civilization provided scholars with hard evidence to trace back the antiquity of goddess worship in ancient India to the Indus valley. Most of the subsequent works on the goddess cult, using archaeological sources or literary data, refer back to the Indus Valley as the beginnings of goddess worship in India. A brief discussion of Marshall's findings and conclusions therefore becomes necessary.

The most important of the material remains that commanded Marshall's attention were the large number of terracotta figurines, especially the female ones, from the two sites of the Indus Valley, Harappa and Mohenjodaro. By the time of his excavations at the site of Mohenjodaro i.e. 1920's and 30's, such figurines had already been unearthed in abundance at various places around Europe and West Asia, and with the Indus script un-deciphered and providing no information regarding the religion of the people, Marshall sought to make a direct connection between the Indus figurines and the ones found at other sites around the world. He opined that " female statues akin to these from the Indus valley and Baluchistan have been found in large numbers and over a wide range of countries between Persia and the Aegean, notably in Elam, Mesopotamia, Transcaspia, Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine, Cyprus, Crete, the Cyclades, the Balkans and Egypt. The correspondence between these figurines and those found on the banks of the Indus is such that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the latter also represented a Mother or

Nature Goddess and served the same purpose as their counterparts in the West, viz. either as votive offerings or, less probably, as cult images for household shrines, and this conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the range of these figurines now extends practically without a break from the Indus to the Nile, over tracts that are not geographically continuous but which in Chalcolithic Age were united by common bonds of culture".<sup>16</sup> Therefore the great majority of the terracotta figurines of the 'nude female, wearing a band or girdle about her loins with elaborate head dress and a collar, and occasionally with ornamental cheek cones and a long necklace were regarded as goddesses by Marshall.<sup>17</sup>

To further validate his interpretation of terracotta figurines as Goddesses, Marshall drew parallels with the veneration of the Goddess in present day Hindu practices. He pointed out to the deep rooted and ubiquitous worship of the Divine Mother in India, who is considered as the prototype of the power or Śakti personified as various Goddesses in the Hindu pantheon and the other numerous local village deities.<sup>18</sup> In his view the numerous sealing and ring stones unearthed at the sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro also provided evidence for the cult of the Mother Goddess. Marshall interprets a certain scene depicted on a seal as evidence of human sacrifice that is connected with the Earth Mother, and in another case, depiction of a nude female figure upside down with legs apart and a plant issuing from her womb is taken as a

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<sup>16</sup> Marshall, John: *Mohenjodaro and The Indus Civilization*, pp 49-50

<sup>17</sup> Marshall, John: *Mohenjodaro and The Indus Civilization*; p-49

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, John: *Mohenjodaro and The Indus Civilization*; p-51

portrayal of the Mother Goddess herself.<sup>19</sup> Apart from the Mother Goddess, Marshall also identifies a male God who is regarded by him as the prototype of the historic Śiva. The famous seal from Mohenjodaro that depicts a horned deity seated in a yogic posture and flanked by beasts is interpreted by Marshall as being *Paśupati* or the Lord of beasts and since this epithet was identified with the *Vedic* God Rudra whose cult was amalgamated with that of Śiva, the horned deity is seen as a prototype of the latter God.

The identification of a proto Śiva also served another purpose. Since the cult of the Mother Goddess in later Hindu practice came to be closely connected with the cult of Siva, a similar interpretation became possible for Marshall in the Indus Valley context. This seems particularly evident in his identification of ring stones and amulets as the yoni or vulva and the linga or the phallus, the two being inseparably linked with the cult of Śiva and Śakti in present day Hindu practices. Another component of the Goddess worship in the Indus Valley, as put forward by Marshall, was with the connection with tree worship. The evidence once again was provided by the depiction of trees, identified by Marshall as the Pipal tree sacred to the Hindus, on the seals from the two sites. The female deities horned or otherwise were interpreted as tree

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, the practice of human sacrifice is conjectured by Marshall on the basis of a seal that depicts a woman kneeling in front of a figure who is carrying a weapon, most likely a sickle. However it can be said that it is not clear if the man is carrying a weapon at all. It is presumed to be sickle by Marshall but it may not be a weapon at all. It is also suggested that the woman kneeling, may not indicate any violent act like a sacrifice but merely a gesture of veneration on her part to the standing figure. The evidence for human sacrifice remains inconclusive.

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goddesses in consonance with the present Hindu belief in tree spirits or Yakṣīs.<sup>20</sup>

Marshall's interpretation of the Indus religion was an amalgamation of belief systems spread over a large geographical and chronological frame. An important point that comes through after reading Marshall's views is his belief that the goddess worship in India is a pre-Aryan phenomenon that receives a setback with the coming of the Aryans, but is eventually absorbed in later Hinduism both at a local village level and at a more philosophical level in the Hindu Pantheon connected with Siva. The Indus valley religion in some ways, for Marshall, was a manifestation of this pre-Aryan belief system and therefore many basic features of later Hinduism were traceable to it and vice versa. Not only does Marshall make numerous cross-cultural comparisons but also a sense of timelessness is projected in his theories. He traces the religious beliefs and practices of the Indus religion with the ones prevalent in societies in Europe, West Asia and Egypt, regions that are not only geographically separated but also have a completely different cultural makeup. It is also intriguing that Marshall while formulating his theories moves back and forth in time with considerable ease. Thus the present day Hindu practices are very conveniently used to interpret the material remains of the Indus valley and provide insights to the religious system of the latter.

Archaeologists and scholars working with Marshall or subsequent to him accepted his line of thinking and came up with identical or similar interpretation for the terracotta figurines from the Indus Valley. E.J.H. Mackay

<sup>20</sup> Marshall, John: *Mohenjodaro and The Indus Civilization*; pp 63-66

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who excavated the site with Marshall functioned within the broad framework provided by the latter. Therefore for him too these figurines with “ jewellery, and the curious fan shaped headdress, with a cup like object on either side represented Mother Goddesses who were worshipped so widely in the Middle and Near East in the ancient times and whose cult is almost universal amongst the lower class people in modern India”.<sup>21</sup> Mackay endorsed most of Marshall theory regarding the proto-Siva, the human sacrifice, the phallic stones and the antiquity of the Goddess cult in India, which persisted down to the present times. He agreed with Marshall that these female figurines together with other animal figurines were also used as votive offerings at shrines to obtain favour of the Gods.<sup>22</sup>

Other scholars like M.S.Vats, H.D.Sankalia,<sup>23</sup> R.S.Bisht<sup>24</sup> etc. all blindly adhered to the Mother Goddess theory. Most of these figurines therefore indicated some sort of a worship of the Goddess in household shrines or were a part of a greater fertility cult. The Allchins validated Marshall’s view that the “great number of terracotta figurines were popular representations of the Great Mother Goddess” and agreed with the parallels he drew between this evidence and the ubiquitous cult of the Goddess, particularly that of Pārvati, the spouse of Siva, both throughout modern India and in Indian literature<sup>25</sup>. The notion of fertility as believed to be represented by these figurines has been adopted by

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<sup>21</sup> Mackay, Ernest: 1948; *Early Indus Civilizations*; London; Luzac & Company; pp 53-54

<sup>22</sup> Mackay, Ernest: *Early Indus Civilizations*; p-58

<sup>23</sup> Sankalia, H.D: 1977; *Prehistory and Protohistory of India and Pakistan*, Deccan College, Pune

<sup>24</sup> Bisht, R.S: 1978; “ Banawali; A New Harappan Site in Haryana”, *Man and Environment II*

Shubhangana Atre and Dhavalikar in their work, where they seek to throw light on the rituals associated with the female figurines.<sup>26</sup> They have criticized Marshall for interpreting the Harappan religion in the light of present day Hindu practices and other folk cults. On the contrary they claims that a systematic study of the architectural features and the seal motifs would help to interpret Harappan symbolism and ritual organization more reliably. The female terracotta figurines are interpreted by them as representations of the vestal virgins serving a great Mother Goddess- “the presence of terracotta figurines of the vestal virgins suggest that there might have been a great Mother who controlled the world of both wild and domestic fertility”.<sup>27</sup> This cult of the vestal virgins and the great goddess was believed to be similar to one of the Roman goddess Diana, and the whole cultic practice revolved around the domestic fire and religious symbol of the unicorn, the evidence for both being present in the Indus Valley.

Recent methodological approaches have questioned Marshall’s and other subsequent works on the theories and formulations of the Indus Valley religion, and the identification of the terracotta female figurines as Mother Goddesses. There has been a shift in nomenclature, from the Mother Goddess

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<sup>25</sup> Allchin, B & R. Allchin: 1982; *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press

<sup>26</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K & Shubhangana Atre: “ The Fire Cult and Virgin Sacrifice: Some Harappan Rituals” in J.M.Kenoyer (ed): 1989; *Old Problems and New Perspectives in The Archaeology of South Asia*; Wisconsin Archaeological reports; Vol-2; Madison; University of Wisconsin; pp 193-205

<sup>27</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K & Shubhangana Atre: “ The Fire Cult...”; p-198 , The seal from Mohenjodaro depicting a horned deity flanked by beasts, that Marshall identifies as the ‘Lord

title to the more neutral female figurines. Moreover these figurines are no longer considered as a homogenous lot and stuffed into the Mother Goddess category but are now referred to as female/anthropomorphic figurines and are carefully classified on the basis of chronology, style, technique etc. Representative works in this category are those of Catherine Jarrige,<sup>28</sup> Sharri Clark<sup>29</sup> and Ardeleanu- Jansen<sup>30</sup> etc. Not only are the figurines classified on the basis of more objective standards by these scholars; there is also an attempt to contextualize them. As Jansen believes that the “ archaeological record can provide more information if the evidence (terracotta figurines) is analysed according to the context of the objects found, viz. the association of the terracotta figurines within their group and in relation to other artefacts and to the structural remains”.<sup>31</sup> Therefore Jansen has used alternative source materials like field inventories and photographic evidence rather than simply relying on Marshall’s report. She concludes that most of the female figurines were unearthed from the sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, while they are not found from sites of Kalibangan and Lothal. To talk about a pan -Indus Mother

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of the Beasts’ is interpreted by Atre and Dhavalikar as a female deity sitting in a yogic posture and is associated with vegetation.

<sup>28</sup> Jarrige, Catherine: 1984 “ Terracotta human Figurines from Nindowari”, in Bridget Allchin (ed): *South Asian Archaeology* 1981, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; pp 129-134

<sup>29</sup> Clark, Sharri: 2003; “ Representing the Indus Body: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality, and the Anthropomorphic Terracotta Figurines from Harappa”; *Asian Perspectives*, Vol 42, No. 2; pp 304-328

<sup>30</sup> Jansen, A.A: “ The Terracotta Figurines from Mohenjodaro: Considerations on Tradition, Craft and Ideology on the Harappan Civilization (c.2400-1800 B.C); in Settar & Ravi Korisetar (ed):2002; *Protohistory: Archaeology of the Harappan Civilization: Archaeology in Retrospect*; Vol 2; ICHR, Manohar; pp207-220

<sup>31</sup> Jansen, A.A: “ The Terracotta Figurines From Mohenjodaro...”; p-206

Goddess cult would, therefore, be erroneous. Moreover she feels that iconographic diversity of the female figurines and the range of other human and animal terracotta figurines associated with them, have to be accounted for and taken together as these factors ‘ indicate an ideological sophistication that goes beyond the familiar fertility and maternity complex’.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand the corpus of terracotta figurines from Harappa are used by Sharri Clark to explore the Indus conceptions of sex, gender and sexuality, as expressed in the representations of the body. Contrary to the earlier held belief that the nude female figurines with exaggerated hips and prominent breasts symbolized fertility and therefore were representations of a fertility goddess, Clark observes that the above mentioned features usually associated with fertility are not typical of the majority of the Indus figurines. Also nudity in itself does not necessarily signify eroticism and fertility, and the Harappan figurines may not have been nude at all. They may have been adorned with perishables such as cloth or the depiction of belts or girdles may indicate codes of modesty in the female dress in the Indus civilization. In fact the covered lower body of the female representation may de-emphasize or imply control of sexuality and fertility.<sup>33</sup>

Cross cultural comparisons have also been questioned by David Kinsley, who feels that comparing the Indus terracotta figurines with those of Europe and West Asia is problematic. It may be true that the cult of the Goddess in Neolithic societies around the world represent aspects of fertility and

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<sup>32</sup> Jansen, A.A: “ The Terracotta Figurines From Mohenjodaro...”p- 219

<sup>33</sup> Clark, Sharri: “ Representing The Indus Body...” p -321



procreation, but to compare the Indus figurines with these, and to suggest that they performed a similar function is erroneous. A close scrutiny of the Indus figurines has revealed that there are considerable differences in the physical features of the two figurines. David Kinsley has pointed out that very few of the Indus figurines have accentuated breasts, hips or genital areas; on the contrary they are on the slim side and often small breasted. The attention in the Harappan figurines is given to the head, which is elaborately dressed. Trade contacts with the west or the existence of some form of a fertility cult is no evidence to suggest cultural similarities between the two civilizations.<sup>34</sup>

As mentioned earlier most of the writings on the origin and development of the Goddess cult in India revolved around Marshall's formulations of the Indus religion. This is true for studies based on archaeological data, as well as those that use textual sources for studying the Goddess cult in ancient India. V.S.Agrawala has extensively worked on the terracotta figurines from the sites, such as Mathura and Ahicchatrā, in the Ganga valley dated 5-6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C to 7-8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Drawing inspiration from Marshall he too has interpreted the female terracotta figurines as representations of the Goddess and made a direct comparison of these figurines with the ones found at the pre-Harappan sites in Baluchistan as well as with the Harappan figurines. The parallels with the Mother Goddess worship in distant parts of Asia and Europe are also taken as evidence, to further strengthen his identification of these figurines as Goddesses. To validate his point further, Agrawala also points out to the ample material provided by the *Vedas* and the

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<sup>34</sup> Kinsley, David: 1987; *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu*

*Purāṇas* regarding the origin and prevalence of a belief in the Mother cult in India.<sup>35</sup>

The notion of fertility that comes forth in Marshall's views as being an important component in the cult of the Goddess in the Indus religion; as it was in the societies of the west, has been subsequently worked out by scholars like E.O.James<sup>36</sup>, N.N.Bhattacharya<sup>37</sup> and M.C.P.Srivastava<sup>38</sup> to explain origin of the cult of Mother Goddess in India and in the west. The antecedents to the goddess cult are traced back to the age of promiscuity where women freely mated with males to produce children and had the responsibility of bringing them up. This sociological set up in the primitive societies represents a priority of mother right in such societies-, which were considered to be matriarchal.<sup>39</sup>The importance of a woman was then due to her procreative capacities. The association of women and fertility then is a very strong component highlighted by scholars in her exalted position of a goddess. As N.N. Bhattacharyya in *The Indian Mother Goddess* states-

*"The women were not only the symbol of generation but also the actual producers of life. Her organs and attributes were thought to be endowed with generative powers and so they were life-giving symbols. In the earliest phase*

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*religious Tradition*; Delhi; Archive Publishers, pp 212-220

<sup>35</sup> Agrawala, V.S: 1984; *Mathura Terracottas*; pp 13-17

<sup>36</sup> James, E.O: 1959; *The Cult of the Mother Goddess: An Archaeological and Documentary Study*, London, Thames and Hudson

<sup>37</sup> Bhattacharyya, N.N: 1977; 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1970; *The Indian Mother Goddess*; Delhi; Manohar

<sup>38</sup> Srivastava, M.C.P: 1979; *Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature*; Delhi; Agam Kala Prakashan

<sup>39</sup> Srivastava, M.C.P: *Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature*; pp 1-2

*of social evolution it was this maternity that held the field, the life producing mother being the central figure of religion... ”.*<sup>40</sup>

The genesis of mother worship is also further kinked to the subsistence pattern of societies in history. The material mode of the life of the people then provided the rationale for the form of worship.<sup>41</sup> Therefore in all prehistoric societies with the transition from a food gathering Palaeolithic to a food producing Neolithic society, the importance of the fertility of the mother enhanced. This feature was common to all Neolithic societies and many cross-cultural studies have been attempted to study the goddess cults in these societies. E.O.James explains that the “maternal principle, in due course of time personified as the mother goddess continued to assume the leading role in the cultus, especially in western Asia, Crete and the Aegean, where the male God was subordinated to the goddess”.<sup>42</sup> The Venus figurines found throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, with pendulous breasts, broad hips, rotund buttocks and excessive corpulence suggestive of pregnancy, manifested the virtue of fertility and were worshipped as goddesses.

In the Indian context, it was assumed that the Indus Valley Civilization with its very predominant agrarian base would have practiced Mother Goddess worship. Therefore the terracotta figurines as well as the female figures depicted on the seals of the Indus Civilizations were perceived as bountiful Mother bestowing fertility and hence revered and worshipped by the people.

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<sup>40</sup> Bhattacharyya, N.N: *The Indian Mother Goddess*; pp 1-2

<sup>41</sup> Srivastava, M.C.P: *Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature*; pp 2-3

<sup>42</sup> James E.O: *The Cult of The Mother Goddess: An Archaeological and Documentary Study*; pp 22-23

In this context the work of Shubhangana Atre has already been discussed earlier. These Mother Goddesses were also seen as antecedents to later female divinities mentioned in the texts. Thus N.N.Bhattacharyya interprets a seal unearthed in Harappa showing on the obverse a nude female figure, head downwards and legs stretched upwards with a plant issuing out of her womb as the prototype of the aforesaid earth mother *Śākambarī* in the *Markandeya Purāṇa*.<sup>43</sup>

D.K Chakrabarti and M.K.Dhavalikar have also endorsed Marshall's work and have provided further evidence of female figurines from other Chalcolithic sites in the India. Dhavalikar has pointed out that clay figurines have been unearthed from the site of Inamgaon. These figurines belonged to the early Jorwe culture dated to around 1300 B.C, and were found buried under the floor in a clay receptacle. Dhavalikar observes that the female figure inside the receptacle had large pendant breasts, betoken of the connection with fertility. The other figurine is without a head, and is characterized by a flattish body and short curved arms and the portion below the waist does not seem to be complete. Dhavalikar further states that “ this goddess without a head is not much different from the nude torsos of the historical period representing goddess *Śākambarī*, goddess of vegetative fertility. Nude torsos have also been identified as representations of *Lajjāgaurī*, who even in the present is worshipped by barren women for producing an offspring.”<sup>44</sup> Dhavalikar feels that like the sites of Navdatoli and Inamgaon in the Deccan other prehistoric

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<sup>43</sup> Bhattacharyya, N.N: *The Indian Mother Goddess*; pp 19-20

<sup>44</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K: 1988; *The First Farmers of The Deccan*; Pune; Ravish Publishers; pp-55-57

sites in South India can also throw light on the beginnings of Goddess worship in the region.<sup>45</sup>

The scenario changes with the shift in focus from archaeological data to literary sources for the study of history from 1500 B.C onwards. It is generally agreed by most scholars that in the Vedic texts there is a decline in the importance of the Mother Goddess. E.O.James compares India and West Asia, “in both regions the firmly established cultus in which the Mother Goddess played an important part was overlaid by an influx of Indo European divinities mostly male, when the Aryans intruded these regions”.<sup>46</sup> The absence of agriculture in, what is termed as the early *Vedic* period undermined the importance of the fertility function and therefore, the worship of the goddess also declined. Male deities, who were worshipped to provide success in the constant raids and warfare, dominated the *Vedic* pantheon. The revival of the Goddess worship is resumed from the post-*Vedic* period onwards when the mode of subsistence changes back again to an agrarian economy. Then onwards it is believed that the worship of the Goddess has constantly expanded and integrated into the elite Brahmanical tradition and has finally developed into a complex cult that persists to the present times.

The ancient texts, particularly *Purāṇic* literature, provide a well-articulated account of the various goddesses of the Brahmanical pantheon and the myths and legends associated with them. Little wonder, that a large number of

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<sup>45</sup> Chakrabarti, D.K : “ The Archaeology of Hinduism” in Timothy Insoll (ed): 2001; *Archaeology and World Religion*; London; Routledge

<sup>46</sup> James, E.O: *The Cult of the Mother Goddess: An Archaeological and Documentary Study*; p-99

studies on the Goddess cult in India use these literary sources. What is intriguing is that most of these works too, trace the beginnings of the Goddess worship from the Indus Valley Civilization as mentioned in Marshall's account. The theory of the pre-Aryan origin of the Goddess cult, and its later amalgamation in the main stream Brahmanical religion as professed by Marshall, was extensively worked out by D.D.Kosambi in his work *Myth and Reality*.<sup>47</sup> Kosambi has used a combination of sources, archaeological, literary and ethnographic, and opined that the process of Sanskritization that began after the coming of the *Vedic* Aryans, resulted in the integration and assimilation of many of the folk and tribal religious cults into the mainstream Brahmanical religion. Implicit in Kosambi's formulation is the dichotomy between the Little and the Great traditions, and the former eventually gets subsumed into the latter. Kosambi himself traces the Mahiśāsūrmardīnī form of Durgā to a pastoral deity Mhasoba, who may be identified with a Proto Śiva, after killing whom Parvati gained the title of Mahiśāsūrmardīnī. Kosambi feels that primitive elements in form of rituals and legends in the present day Hindu beliefs are clearly visible and their observance at a lower local level shows the order in which they were enrolled into the greater belief systems.<sup>48</sup>

This theory has formed the basis for many later studies on the evolution of the Goddess cult in India. J.N.Tiwari, writing about the development of the Goddess cult in India in the first seven centuries of the Christian era, opines

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<sup>47</sup> Kosambi, D.D: 1962; *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of the Indian Culture*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan

<sup>48</sup> Kosambi, D.D: *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of the Indian Culture*; pp 2-3

that “ the fully evolved concept of the Great Goddess is highly syncretic in nature and that the many so-called names and forms of the Great Goddess actually refer to the individual goddess concepts which were utilized or merged”.<sup>49</sup> This he feels is particularly true of the goddess Kālī and Durgā, both projected as malevolent forms of Pārvati in the *Puranas*. Tiwari feels that Kali, the dark skinned goddess originally can be traced to some dark skinned aboriginal deity while the name Durgā is suggestive of a goddess of the mountains and forests. He agrees with the pre-Aryan origin of the Goddess cult, and the presence of the numerous local and regional deities evident from sculptural remains and inscriptional evidence, but feels that the concept of a Great Goddess emerged only by the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Scholars using textual evidence have taken the increasing number of goddesses in the religious literature from the *Vedas* to the *Purāṇas* as evidence of assimilation and integration. It is argued that the goddess pantheon over time expanded and became more complex. Goddesses in the pantheon came to be divided with regard to their physical characteristics and functions. The docile consorts like Lakṣmī, Pārvati, etc stood in sharp contrast to the horrific and demon killing Kālī and Durgā. The process of integration finally culminated into the development of Śaktism, an offshoot of the Śaiva cult that epitomizes the various goddesses stressing on their beneficial and malevolent aspects. The crystallization of the concept of the Great Goddess is well represented in the *Devī Māhātmya*, a 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D text, that completes the synthesizing process in the development of the cult of the goddess. It

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<sup>49</sup> Tiwari, J.N: 1985; *Goddess Cults in Ancient India: With Special Reference to the 1<sup>st</sup> Seven*

embodies the process of the Sanskritization of the indigenous religious forms and the text is extensively used, or referred to by almost all scholars writing about the Goddess using literary data.<sup>50</sup>

A recent study on Goddess worship by Kathleen Erndl provides an interesting perspective on the development of Goddess cult in present day society. She has used a combination of literary and ethnographic data to trace the representation of the Goddess in the ancient texts, and the form in which she is worshipped in the present day shrine of Vaishno Devi.<sup>51</sup> Erndl complies with the theory of assimilation of various local cults that form a part of the mainstream Goddess cult, a process embodied in the *Purāṇic* literature. However with regard to her study of the shrine of Vaishno Devi she feels, that the present day shrine embodies the Goddess Durga as a benevolent deity, an image entirely different from the one portrayed in the *Purāṇas* where she is associated with destructive powers. Therefore there is a certain local and regional dynamics in the evolution of the Goddess cult that may not always be accounted for in the texts.

As is evident from the above survey, there has been an extensive corpus of secondary literature on the origin and evolution of the Goddess cult in India. The foundations, however, were laid down by Marshall with his discoveries in the Indus Valley. Most of the works reflect Marshall's theories and perspectives, in varying degrees though, while studying the Goddess cult in

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*Centuries A.D.*; Delhi, Sundeep Prakashan, pp-40-43

<sup>50</sup> Coburn, Thomas. B: 1977; *Crystallization of the Worship of the Goddess: The Sources and the Context of the DevīMāhātmya*; Harvard University; PhD Thesis

<sup>51</sup> Erndl, Kathleen: 1993; *Victory to the Mother : The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual and Symbol*, Oxford University Press



India. The reason why I have laid so much stress on Marshall's work is also due to the fact that most of the data that I would be using in my present study has been interpreted by scholars using Marshall theories. Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines abound at sites in the Ganga Valley from the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C and continue as late as 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. But keeping in line with Marshall's views most female figurines are considered to be representations of goddesses. The simple archaic figurines are seen as manifestations of the local or tribal goddesses that were later incorporated into the Brahmanical pantheon and represented with full iconographic details. Therefore many are identified as Proto-Lakṣmī or Proto-Durgā etc.<sup>52</sup>

While the Indus Valley terracotta figurines, have recently been subjected to careful scrutiny and reassessment and most of the earlier formulations have been questioned, such a study is lacking with respect to the Ganga valley figurines. With regard to the Indus figurines the works of Jarrige, Jansen and Clark have criticized most of Marshall's theories and made clear the complexity of the issues regarding these figurines and that the need to refocus and to look beyond simplistic explanation and tags has become important. Vidula Jayaswal has attempted a study of the terracottas used in the local religious practices of the present day region of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, using ethnographic data. She has also attempted a possible explanation on the nature and function of the ancient terracotta figurines of the region on the basis of the use of terracottas in present day rituals. Although her study provides important insights into the current production and usage of terracottas

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<sup>52</sup> Agrawala, V.S: *Mathura Terracottas*.

in the seasonal rituals of the local people, to project these conclusions to the ancient society is debatable. I would discuss her work in more detail in the subsequent section on terracotta art.

Therefore newer approaches and methodologies have been lacking in the study of the terracottas from the Ganga Valley. In this context, I would also like to undertake a discussion on the various approaches and perspectives applied to the study of terracotta art of the ancient period. The study of terracottas of the ancient period follows a certain trajectory, the initial works concern themselves with studying the terracotta sculptures in conjunction with the literary texts and identifying themes from the latter source being represented in the terracotta art of the period. Subsequently the trend changes and the terracottas are studied and classified on the basis of their stylistic and technical peculiarities that developed over a period of time. I attempt to review the various works on the subject and highlight these trends.

### **Various Approaches To The Study Of Terracotta Art**

Terracottas are considered to be the most popular medium of artistic expression of the people from the earliest times. They are also seen as an important source material for the study of social and religious practices of people in ancient societies. The studies on terracottas, therefore explore the various dimensions that are represented by this enormous corpus of data. At one level the terracotta art is classified by scholars on the basis of technical and stylistic peculiarities that vary over a considerable time span. The refinement in the production of terracottas over a period of time, reflects the progressive development in technology that was applied to the making of

these clay figurines. The stylistic peculiarities on the other hand indicate the development of certain local and regional styles that developed in the ancient times and have continued to the present day. Terracotta sculptures are also perceived by scholars as representing the religious beliefs of the people; the anthropomorphic and animal figurines are seen as representations of popular Gods and Goddesses. Terracottas have also provided invaluable information on the social and cultural life of the people. The themes depicted by terracotta sculptures are taken by scholars as a reflection of this. Also implicit in most of the studies on terracottas is the belief that it was a popular or a folk art and therefore reflected themes from the everyday beliefs and practices of the people.

The first in depth study of clay sculptures was made by Ananda Coomaraswamy, as early as the 1920's. Starting with the Indus Valley terracottas, he did an extensive survey of the terracotta figurines up to the mediaeval period and catalogued them in chronological sequence on the basis of their physical characteristics. Therefore the Indus figurines are followed by the pre-Mauryan and Mauryan types unearthed at sites in the Ganga plains, followed by the Śunga, Kuṣāṇa and Gupta period terracottas.<sup>53</sup> The simple female figurines of the Indus valley, according to Coomaraswamy, represented the Great Mother Goddesses as were known from West Asia. Therefore for him the " Indian Nude Goddess was the goddess of fertility, that she was a popular and perhaps a household goddess, that she was one of the many non-Aryan feminine divinities who later on were gradually and only with difficulty

merged into the Brahmanical and Buddhist pantheon as śāktis...<sup>54</sup>. Coomaraswamy while interpreting the terracotta figurines made extensive use of the literary data, both Brahmanical and Buddhist sources. The *Vedic* and *Purāṇic* literature of the period provided, identification for the later figurines that were also seen as forms of Goddesses like Aditī, Lakṣmī, Umā etc. The popular element of terracotta art, is also emphasized by Coomaraswamy as being represented by the numerous Yakṣā and Nāga images that become common from the Sunga period onwards from sites in the Ganga valley. These are perceived by him as local/folk deities comprising an important element of the popular beliefs of the people. Coomaraswamy also traces a stylistic and cultural sequence with regard to the terracotta sculptures, the earliest terracottas representing the archaic and popular modes of thought while, by the Sunga and Kusana period, as a result of certain cultural developments, a more powerful and expressive phase of Indian art is evident.

The next important work on terracottas is by Stella Kramrisch writing in the 1930's.<sup>55</sup> She too has undertaken an extensive survey of terracottas of the ancient period and makes a broad division between the simple archaic figurines, which she terms as the 'timeless types' as against the timed variations. The principal distinction between the two is, that while the timed variations show considerable changes and local adaptations over a period of time, the 'timeless' types remain unchanged and occur side by side with the

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<sup>53</sup> Coomaraswamy, Ananda: 1977; "From the River Banks and the Sacred Places: Ancient Indian Terracottas"; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, pp 6 24

<sup>54</sup> Coomaraswamy, Ananda: "From the River Banks and the Sacred Places: Ancient Indian Terracottas"; p-21

<sup>55</sup> Miller, B.S(ed): 1983; *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*

other figurines throughout. Also, in terms of technology, the 'timeless' types are hand modelled while the timed variations are as a rule mould made. Kramrisch therefore discusses in great detail the changes in the technique that occur in the production of terracottas over a period of time. She also makes a distinction between the tribal and folk art and the figurines unearthed from urban centres like Mathura, Patliputra, Kausāmbi etc. While discussing the usages to which these figurines could be put to, Kramrisch feels that the function of the 'timeless' types is not in itself determined and is determined by the person who uses it. Therefore she opines " the multiple uses to which to which the ageless types lend themselves offer permanent opportunities for as many applications as there are epochs, localities, and persons trained according to their craft".<sup>56</sup>The timed variations, on the other hand in most cases, exhibit details that allow one to determine their usage. They either portray sculptures of goddesses of the Brahmanical pantheon or depict secular scenes. The rural and tribal terracotta art of ancient India is manifested in the various types of simple figurines used as votive offerings to local tree spirits or shrines or to the local deities like the Yakṣā images. Kramrisch, emphasizes the excavated remains from the Nilgiri Hills in South India as examples of the ancient tribal art of India, and feels that many of the ancient practices remain relatively intact with the tribes of the present day.

By the 1930's and 1940's many of the sites in the Ganga plains were excavated and the terracottas unearthed were catalogued by archaeologists and

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<sup>56</sup> Miller, B.S(ed): *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*; p-71

historians in the excavation reports. Major sites were those of Ahicchatrā,<sup>57</sup> Hastināpur,<sup>58</sup> Kaushambi,<sup>59</sup> Rājghāt<sup>60</sup> etc. One of the major works that deserves mention is that by V.S.Agrawala, who catalogued and analysed the extensive terracottas from Ahicchatrā and later Mathura.<sup>61</sup> He categorized the terracottas chronologically as well as on the basis of the themes depicted by the sculptures. Therefore the figures and plaques depicting various Gods and Goddesses were discussed separately to the sculptures and plaques depicting secular subjects. The simple archaic female figurines however are considered to be Mother Goddesses by Agrawala too. He borrows heavily from the works of Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch, opining that most of these ageless type of figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatrā comprise common physical features i.e. a bird or animal like face, prominent breasts, broad hips, triple rosetted head dress, collar, necklace and a conspicuous girdle and, it is irresistible to conclude that they represent a type of a Mother Goddess.<sup>62</sup> Agrawala feels that such figurines have their counterparts in other civilizations of West Asia and Europe and that in the Indian context they preserve the earlier tradition of an undifferentiated Mother Goddess and were the predecessors to the later goddesses of the Brahmanical pantheon.

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<sup>57</sup> Agrawala, V.S: “ Terracotta Figurines of Ahicchatrā; District Bareilly, U.P.”; pp 104-179

<sup>58</sup> Lal, B.B: 1955; “ Excavations at Hastinapur, 1950-52”; *Ancient India* no: 10&11; pp 5-151

<sup>59</sup> Sharma, G.R: 1969 “ Excavations at Kaushambi, 1949-50; *Memoirs of Archaeological Survey of India* (henceforth MASI), No: 74, Delhi

<sup>60</sup> Agrawala, V.S: 1941; “Rajghat Terracottas”; *Journal of United Province Historical Society* (henceforth JUPHS), Vol: XIII

<sup>61</sup> Agrawala, V.S: Mathura Terracottas;

<sup>62</sup> Agrawala, V.S: “ Terracotta Figurines of Ahicchatrā; District Bareilly, U.P; p 107

Together with the excavation reports that catalogue the terracotta finds, are the museum catalogues that give a descriptive account of the clay sculptures in the various museums across India. One of the earliest account (1910) is provided by Vogel in his *Catalogue of The Archaeological Museum at Mathura*. Vogel describes the various antiquities housed at the Mathura Museum, which include stone as well as terracotta sculptures collected from different sites in the Mathura district. This catalogue was updated by V.S.Agrawala<sup>63</sup> in 1950 and later by R.C.Sharma<sup>64</sup> in 1993. The Terracottas from Kaushambi housed in the Allahbad Museum, were discussed by S.C.Kala<sup>65</sup> in 1950 and Dhavalikar<sup>66</sup> presented an account of the Mathura terracottas in the Baroda Museum. These Museum catalogues provide a detailed account of the terracotta sculptures from various sites, but obviously do not offer any analysis on the general development of terracotta art in a particular region.

A change in the trend of studies on terracotta art is noticed after the 1950's, when greater attention was paid to the classification of terracotta sculptures on the basis of the techniques employed in their production. Although Kramrisch undertook a discussion on the technical aspect of terracotta sculptures as early as the 1930's, it was not followed up by scholars subsequent to her. A comprehensive analysis, with regard to the origin and development to

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<sup>63</sup> Agrawala, V.S: 1950; " Catalogue of the Mathura Museum", JUPHS , Vol: XXIII

<sup>64</sup> Sharma, R.C: 1994; *The Splendour of Mathura: Art and Museum*; Delhi; D.K.Printworld

<sup>65</sup> Kala, S.C: 1961; *Terracottas from Kaushambi*; Allahbad Museum

<sup>66</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K: 1971; *Mathura Art in the Baroda Museum*; Deptt of Museums; Gujarat State; Baroda

terracotta sculptures, was attempted by C.C.Dasgupta.<sup>67</sup> His work takes into account terracottas from the prehistoric levels in South India and extends to the mediaeval figurines unearthed from sites in Bengal, Bihar and Kashmir. In this enormous time span he has further discussed the clay figurines on the basis of their sculptural techniques, the sites from which they are unearthed and their physical characteristics and has reached at certain conclusion regarding each of these. Concerning the sculptural nature of these clay figurines, Dasgupta concludes that the prehistoric terracottas from South India are mainly statuaries made on the vase lids, whereas figurines in the round are found from the Indus Valley, pre-Maurya, Maurya, Śunga and the Kuṣāṇa ages only. In the Gupta age, figurines in round as well as terracotta plaques, the latter belonged to the frieze of the brick temples and after which in the mediaeval period only plaques remain.<sup>68</sup> The analysis of find spots of the terracottas have revealed that majority of the find spots are located in Northern India as compared to South India. And also that most of the Northern India terracottas are found in the greatest number in the provinces of Sind, Punjab, Bengal and Bihar.

The importance of Dasgupta's work lies in the fact that it is; perhaps, the first study that undertakes analysis of the development of terracotta art spread over such a vast spatial and chronological span. His work may not be specialized, or provide an in depth analysis of the terracotta art of a particular region or a time period, but it does reveal certain broad observations and trends in the

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<sup>67</sup> Dasgupta, C.C: 1961; *Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture*; University of Calcutta; Calcutta

<sup>68</sup> Dasgupta, C.C: *Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture* ; pp- 250-251



evolution of clay sculptures in the India. P.L.Gupta<sup>69</sup> has attempted a similar study, concentrating on the sites in the Ganga Valley. He has discussed the different techniques employed in the production of the Ganga valley terracottas as well as the stylistic variations that occur over a period of time. He has criticized Agrawala as interpreting the simple archaic figurines from the Ganga Valley sites as representations of Mother Goddesses similar to the ones in West Asia and the Indus Valley. Gupta believes that these figurines should be explored from the point of view of certain folk cults that existed in the region and is represented by innumerable Yakṣā and Nāga images.<sup>70</sup>

In most of the works discussed above, there is a strong assumption that the terracotta art was a folk art and that clay as a medium was used to express the social and religious life of the masses. There is therefore a dichotomy between the refined court art, the splendour of which is evident from the elaborate stone sculptures and the cruder terracottas, represented the artistic expression of the local people. Niharranjan Ray in his studies on the Mauryan art claims that the royal art of the Mauryas was a direct result of their contact with the Greeks and other Western Asian cultures. This court art was completely aloof from the indigenous art forms that existed side by side, he states that “this court art does not seem to have taken cognisance of another tradition of art, a more primitive, perhaps folk tradition of presumably some ethnic significance, that was hardly conscious of the third dimension and fully rounded form. The Mauryan palaces and the Pillared Hall brought into existence directly by the

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<sup>69</sup> Gupta, P.L.: 1972; *Gangetic Valley Terracotta Art*; Prithvi Prakashan; Varanasi

<sup>70</sup> Gupta, P.L.: *Gangetic Valley Terracotta Art*; pp-75-76

impetus and inspiration of the Achaemenian architectural form and ideal do not seem to have captured the imagination of the Indian builders and architects, and there is no evidence in the later Indian art to show that such plans and designs were ever adopted".<sup>71</sup> Therefore according to Ray, the Mauryan art belonged to a comparatively higher aesthetic level, but by ignoring the popular art of the period it failed to leave an impression. The succeeding Sunga art on the other hand reflects a period when art of the folk and the tribal origin and affiliations came to be recognized and incorporated into the manifold artistic tradition. This is evident from the reliefs of Bhārut and Bodhgayā where " Gods of civilized conception as Surya, Lakṣmi and Indra mingling freely with the tribal deities as the yakshas and yakshinis and apsaras of popular imagination".<sup>72</sup> Implicit in Ray's theory is therefore a very strong opposition between, what he terms as primitive or folk cult, and the superior and civilized court art, that is reconciled in the Sunga period when there is a fusion of the former into the latter. The medium of artistic expression also, according to Ray, is different for the two art forms. The primitive art employed the use of clay while the Mauryan court art was entirely in stone. In fact Ray opines that the only impact that the Mauryan art had on indigenous forms was that it introduced the use of a permanent material i.e. stone, which came to be used on a large scale later, as is evident from the sculptures from Bhārut and Sanchī.

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<sup>71</sup> Ray, Niharranjan: 1965; *Maurya and Sunga Art*; India Studies in Past and Present; Calcutta ; pp-47-48

<sup>72</sup> Ray, Niharranjan: *Maurya and Sunga Art*; India Studies in Past and Present; pp-67-68

The theory that terracotta as a medium was confined only to tribal or popular art has come under severe criticism by scholars lately. Firstly terracotta sculptures throughout the ancient period have exhibited extremely skilled workmanship and quality. The terracotta art comprises of sculptures, not only of the so-called local or tribal deities like the Yakṣās or crude figurines of Mother Goddesses, but also Gods and Goddesses of the Brahmanical pantheon are represented in clay, and the workmanship of these sculptures rival those in stone. Dhavalikar in his work *Masterpieces of Indian Terracottas*<sup>73</sup> opined that the terracotta art of ancient India caters to all groups of people be it the king or the common man. An example is stated from the *Harṣacharita*, when king Harsavardhana ordered the potters to decorate the palace with terracotta panels of various animals, on the occasion of the marriage of his sister Rajyashri.<sup>74</sup> S.K.Srivastava<sup>75</sup> in his recent study concerning terracotta art in Northern India has taken a combination of literary texts and terracotta sculptures to study the variations in the technique of production of terracottas. Srivastava has revealed that there are many references in the *Purāṇic* and Buddhist *Jātakā* literature, to the preparation and the modelling of clay for the production of sculptures. Srivastava therefore states, “ A modeller was not only liked by the common people but also had acquired a place in the king’s sabha. The popularity and importance of this art can be easily comprehended from innumerable references in the ancient texts”.<sup>76</sup> Terracotta therefore did

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<sup>73</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K: 1977; *Masterpieces of Indian Terracottas*; Bombay; Taraporevala

<sup>74</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K: *Masterpieces of Indian Terracottas*; pp 1-3

<sup>75</sup> Srivastava, S.K: 1996; *Terracotta Art in Northern India*; Delhi; Parimal Publications

<sup>76</sup> Srivastava, S.K: *Terracotta Art in Northern India*; pp-12-13

not represent the artistic tradition of the folk or tribal sections of the population only, but was patronized by the kings and wealthy classes of the society also.

Another issue that demands attention is the chronological sequence in which the terracotta art is placed in the ancient period. As is evident from the above works, most of them use dynastic labels to demarcate the various stages in the development of this artistic tradition. This demarcation is however based on certain stylistic peculiarities and changes in technique that took place overtime and not strictly, on the basis of dynastic succession. The dynastic affiliation was probably used for the sake of convenience as each of these labels indicated a particular time span. However some scholars like Dhavalikar have made a direct connection between the evolution and spread of terracotta art with the rise and fall of political dynasties. “Therefore the consolidation of the Mauryan Empire under a unified rule marked a sudden spurt in artistic activity, as against the succeeding Kuṣāṇa period when the concentration was on stone and terracotta art received a setback. The artistic activity seems to have revived in the Gupta period and the terracotta art seems to have travelled with political power and even beyond, and the Gupta terracottas are found over a large part of the sub-continent”.<sup>77</sup> The fate of the terracotta sculptures did not fluctuate with the rise and fall of political powers as is opined by Dhavalikar. The Kuṣāṇa period did not witness a decline in the clay art although there was an increase in the production of stone sculptures. It is however possible to notice certain stylistic changes that take place in the

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<sup>77</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K: *Mathura Art in the Baroda Museum*; pp-4;7

period these political powers. Although most of the above mentioned works undertake a discussion on these changes a notable work is that of Amy Poster<sup>78</sup> who discusses development of the terracotta styles from the Indus Civilization up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Poster starts with the Indus Civilization terracottas, that she considers to be simple hand modelled ones and moves on to the Post Harappan Transition Phase (320-200 B.C). She observes that the Mauryan capital Patliputra has in this period yielded some of the finest terracottas that represent significant technical and stylistic changes and an increased number of types. The diversity is seen in the Bulandibāgh figurines and those unearthed at Mathura, the two contrasting each other sharply. The narrative plaques make their presence in the Sunga period, which is also marked by a proliferation of regional styles and techniques. Under the Kuṣāṇa phase the contact with the Mediterranean world led to the development of a classically influenced Buddhist art. Both Mathura and Gandhara region produced terracottas that represent a synthesis of indigenous traditions and Greek, Roman, Scythian, Iranian and Central Asian prototypes.<sup>79</sup> Terracotta panels decorating the monumental brick temples and free standing figures of deities are characteristics of the Gupta art. The two principle Gupta period artistic schools in Central India provided inspiration for the terracotta artists- the style of the Mathura School of stone sculpture found its way into terracottas in Uttar Pradesh and North Central

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<sup>78</sup> Poster, Amy: 1986; *From the Indian Earth: 4000 Years of Terracotta Art*; Brooklyn Museum; New York

<sup>79</sup> Poster, Amy: *From the Indian Earth: 4000 Years of Terracotta Art*; pp 22-25

India, and the style of Sarnath School spread to sites in eastern India.<sup>80</sup> The Pālā period terracottas continued to be produced for many purposes especially brick architecture. The Muslim conquest in the North completely brought to an end the classical Hindu- Buddhist artistic tradition theme. Terracottas were rarely used in Muslim art, except in Eastern India, where geometric and foliate patterns were incorporated into the designs of brick mosques and tombs. The practice of covering Hindu temples with moulded bricks and carved terracotta tiles, however continued.<sup>81</sup>

Apart from the religious and artistic traditions terracottas also provide valuable information on the social life of the period to which they belong. Devangana Desai explores the social dimensions of the ancient Indian terracotta art and propounds that not only did the terracottas depict social themes but also they themselves were a result of a certain social milieu.<sup>82</sup> She feels that such a specialized profession, as the making of terracottas and their mass production was possible only in a stratified, well settled complex society. She further states that “ such production is undertaken when there is a demand arising from institutionalised religious cults that require the use of clay figurines as votive offerings, magical charms, or house hold deities or from a public that would buy secular figurines for the decoration of homes, for children’s’ toys or for other varied purposes. This demand is best fulfilled in urban societies, whose well organized markets are a stimulus to the expansion of industries in

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<sup>80</sup> Poster, Amy: *From the Indian Earth: 4000 Years of Terracotta Art*; p-26

<sup>81</sup> Poster, Amy: *From the Indian Earth: 4000 Years of Terracotta Art*; pp 26-28

<sup>82</sup> Desai, Devangana : “ The Social Milieu of Ancient Indian Terracottas 600 B.C to 600 A.D”; in Amy Poster: *From the Indian Earth: 4000 Years of Terracotta Art*; pp-29-42

general”.<sup>83</sup> Desai brings to attention the fact that the history of the terracottas in India is associated with the rise and flourishing of urban cultures.

Beginning with the Indus Valley, she feels that the large-scale production of terracottas occurred in the urban culture at the two cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, and appeared again in large numbers with the second urbanization in Northern India from about 600 B.C. The scale of production of terracottas therefore increased with the growth in urban culture and terracotta art was an indicator of this growth. Therefore, in the initial period around 600.B.C-320.B.C, the terracottas were neither decorative nor artistic and were not produced on a large scale as the process of urbanization was in its incipient stages. Henceforth the production of terracottas progressively increases. The terracottas also seem to manifest certain political and economic and social trends. She emphasizes that “ the monopoly of Magadha in the economic and political life of the people of the Mauryan Empire is reflected in the terracottas of the period. While the royal societies and the upper classes of Magadha commissioned special potters to produce artistic terracottas resembling Hellenistic figurines, the country outside Magadha was producing crude terracottas for cults and rituals”.<sup>84</sup> Similarly the urban sophistication is also seen in the treatment of terracotta plaques and the female goddesses who unlike the earlier crude Mother Goddess figurines later emerge in an urbanized garb. Desai feels that the increase in the representation of certain gods and

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<sup>83</sup> Desai, Devangana: “ The Social Milieu of Ancient Indian Terracottas 600 B.C to 600 A.D”; p-29

<sup>84</sup> Desai, Devangana: “ The Social Milieu of Ancient Indian Terracottas 600 B.C to 600 A.D”;p-34

goddesses by the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D like Vasundharā or Śrī Laksīmi, or the female figures with the *Pancacudā* headdress and the innumerable male deities, were all associated with festive gatherings, mostly fertility festivals, in the city gardens. Also the mithunā plaques, social gatherings, ladies decorating themselves etc depicted in terracotta panels represent a very urban taste.

Trade as a stimulus for the production of terracottas, is also highlighted by Desai. According to her, active trade with Rome and consequent commercial prosperity created a favourable situation for the manufacture of terracottas in the southern region of India during the early centuries of the Christian era. Terracottas in large numbers have been recovered from sites in Andhra and Maharashtra. The nude goddess with her legs apart, from sites of Nagarjunkonda, Nevasa, Ter etc., is considered to be of Roman-Egyptian inspiration by Desai. During the Gupta epoch, the decline of the royal power and the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a landed aristocratic class resulted in the patronage of visual and literary arts on a larger scale. The modelled miniature figurines and small plaques reflected the tastes of the urban class, while the large size figures and plaques for the decoration of temples and monasteries were patronized by the newly emerging feudal class.<sup>85</sup>

There also have been attempts to determine the exact nature and the function that the terracotta figurines fulfilled in the ancient past. A common element in most of the works regarding terracotta female figurines is that they consider them to be manifestations of goddesses. But even this religious function



operates at different levels. There are the Goddesses of the mainstream Brahmanical pantheon and the simple archaic figurines that form a part of the local cultic practices. Pratapaditya Pal<sup>86</sup> has categorized the terracotta figurine into icons of whimsy, used as either toys or decorative objects of art, and as icons of piety that were used for religious purposes. With regard to latter category of figurines of the Mauryan period, Pal remarks that while the exact identification of the Maurya female figurines cannot be determined, they are generally identified as fertility goddesses. Joachim Bautze,<sup>87</sup> has attempted an analyses of the Mauryan figurines as well, speculating on the nature of rituals in which these female figurines were used. He observes that most of the Mauryan figurines lack a base or a pedestal to stand upon and are completely un modelled and flat at the back, which implies that they could not stand on their own and need a support to make them stand. This support could have been provided by a brick placed at the back of the figurine. Bautze compares the religious rites in the Mauryan period with the practices prevalent in the present day villages of West Bengal. He states that “ it is of course impossible to prove that the religious practices of the Mauryan period were already those which we could see today on numerous occasions in various Indian villages....we would not be surprised that if the female terracotta figurines in

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<sup>85</sup> Desai, Devangana: “ The Social Milieu of Ancient Indian Terracottas 600 B.C to 600 A.D”; pp 37-41

<sup>86</sup> Pal, Pratapaditya: 1987; *Icons of Piety and Images of Whimsy*; Los Angeles County Museum; Los Angeles

<sup>87</sup> Bautze, Joachim : 1987; “ Some Observations on the Female ‘Maurya’ Terracotta Figurines”; in Maurizio Taddei & Pierfrancesco Calleri (ed): *South Asian Archaeology*; Rome: Istituto Italiano Per Il Medio Ed Estremo Oriente; 1990; pp- 610-626

and around Mathura were worshipped in the same or similar way some 2200 years ago”.<sup>88</sup>

Works belonging to a similar methodology i.e. using ethnographic and archaeological data, are those by Vidula Jayaswal<sup>89</sup> and Haku Shah.<sup>90</sup> Jayaswal’s work as has been mentioned in the previous section, basis itself in the region of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where she studies the yearly trends of production and use of terracotta figurines in seasonal rituals. She has studied the terracotta production of the region in terms of the technique employed by the potters in producing human and animal figurines, the demand for these figurines and the uses to which they were put to. She observes that “throughout eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the potter community provides for the entire need of the local society. This ranges through jars, containers, pots and tiles to the votive and ritual figurines required by seasonal ritual cycles and life cycles.”<sup>91</sup> On the basis of her observations, she has compared these contemporary terracottas with the ancient terracotta figurines of the region, both human and animal, and postulated that the most of the ancient

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<sup>88</sup> Bautze, Joachim : 1987; “ Some Observations on the Female ‘Maurya’ Terracotta Figurines”; p-625

<sup>89</sup> Jayaswal, Vidula & Krishna Kalyan : 1986; *An Ethnoarchaeological View of the Indian Terracottas ( A Comparative Study of the Present and Past terracotta traditions of the Gangetic Plains)*; Delhi; Agam Kala Prakashan

<sup>90</sup> Shah, Haku : 1985; *Living Traditions of India: Votive Terracottas of Gujarat*; New York; Mapin International. Inc

<sup>90</sup> Gupta, P.L: *Gangetic Valley Terracotta Art*; pp-75-76

<sup>91</sup> Jayaswal, Vidula & Krishna Kalyan : *An Ethnoarchaeological View of the Indian Terracottas ( A Comparative Study of the Present and Past terracotta traditions of the Gangetic Plains)*; p-141

specimens represent similarities in production technique when compared to the present figurines. These similar terracottas then, could have fulfilled similar functions in the ancient past as they did in the present society. Therefore Jayaswal states “ Thus ethnographic analogy combined with surviving literary evidence of an earlier period suggests that these primitive clay figures were used for specific household rituals, as they are today”.<sup>92</sup> Haku Shah’s study, on the other hand is purely ethnographic and deals with the terracottas produced by the tribals of Gujarat. These terracottas are mostly used in the tribal rituals or as votive offerings’ and include terracotta animal figurines as those of horses, elephants, tiger, cows and buffaloes, and some form of human figurines possibly used as deities. Insightful as these works may be, they tend to project certain present categories into the past. It is not very plausible to claim that the present day practices and symbols held a similar meaning in ancient societies as well.

From the above discussion it is evident that the terracotta art of the ancient period has been studied from varied perspectives. The rich corpus of terracottas has interested art historians immensely and many studies have been based on the subject of style and technique of this exquisite art form. The terracotta art is also utilized by historians as an important source material to study the social, economic and religious life in ancient society. Concerning the religious sphere the connection between studies on the goddess cult and those on the terracotta figurines is quite clear. Most of the studies on goddess

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<sup>92</sup> Jayaswal, Vidula & Krishna Kalyan : *An Ethnoarchaeological View of the Indian Terracottas ( A Comparative Study of the Present and Past terracotta traditions of the Gangetic Plains)*; p-139

worship have taken the female terracotta figurines as evidence of their theories and traced the antiquity and popularity of goddess worship in India. On the other hand, historians studying terracotta art take the female figurines as representations of goddesses mentioned in the literary sources, or being part of local and tribal cults. The terracotta figurines therefore provide a sort of common element to the studies on both subjects.

However in recent scholarship these simple, archaic and so-called 'timeless' female figurines that were all assumed to represent Mother Goddesses have been subjected to close scrutiny. In this respect the works of Catherine Jarrige<sup>93</sup>, A.Jansen<sup>94</sup> and Sharri Clark<sup>95</sup> have been important. Most of these figurines have been reanalysed and their nature and functions reconsidered. These studies, however take into consideration the Indus Valley terracottas and no reanalysis is done on the subsequent terracotta figurines unearthed from the Ganga valley sites. Most of the terracotta figurines from the sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā, that I wish to study in my paper, have been arbitrarily listed in the Mother Goddess category, and have been accorded a religious nature and function. My attempt would be to reanalyse the data more carefully and contextualize it with regard to associated finds and its spatial distribution at the sites. My focus would be not just confined to these anthropomorphic figurines but would also take into account the region on the

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<sup>93</sup> Jarrige, Catherine: "Terracotta human Figurines from Nindowari"; pp 129-134

<sup>94</sup> Jansen, A.A : "The Terracotta Figurines from Mohenjodaro: Considerations on Tradition, Craft and Ideology on the Harappan Civilization (c.2400-1800 B.C)"; pp 207-220

<sup>95</sup> Clark, Sharri : "Representing the Indus Body : Sex, Gender, and Sexuality, and the Anthropomorphic Terracotta Figurines from Harappa"; pp 304-328

whole. The complex interplay of social, religious and cultural factors at the two urban sites can reveal a variety of functions and meanings that can be accorded to these terracottas.

## **MATHURA AND AHICCHATRĀ: AN ACCOUNT OF EXPLORATIONS AND EXCAVATIONS**

The history of explorations at the sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā date back as early as the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both sites have since then been extensively excavated and well documented. In this chapter, I intend to trace the various phases in the exploration and excavation of the two sites. I also attempt to undertake a brief discussion on the development of archaeology as a discipline, in the Indian subcontinent and trace the theoretical issues concerning the subject. The nature of the excavation work conducted at the sites and the data available to us as a result of these efforts, can be viewed within the broad framework of the various trends that developed in the discipline of archaeology over time.

### **Geography And Cultural Heritage**

#### **Mathura**

Geographically Mathura district is located between Lat 27 14 and 27 58 N and Long 77 17 and 78 12 E and covers an approximate area of 3,800sqkm.the district lies in the basin of the Yamunā, which traverses through the central part of the district from north to south and divides the district into two parts- the eastern or the TransYamunā tract and the western or the Cis Yamuna tract. The Trans Yamunā tract comprises the tahsil of Mat and Sadabad and is a part of the Ganga Yamunā doab, abundantly irrigated from the rivers, and a canal and is carefully cultivated and the crops indicate the fertility of the soil. The Cis Yamunā tract comprises the tahsil of Chhata and Mathura. The vegetation here is rather dry and patchy with more potential for pastoralism. Historically then, one can expect that most of the sites would commonly be located at the

junction of different habitats, the integration of whose resources results in a viable economy.<sup>96</sup>

The ancient region of Mathura was known by many names (Shurasena, Mathura rajya, Mathura janapada) and in the ancient period has been the centre to the three chief religious systems- Brahmanism, Jainism, Buddhism. The chief city of Mathura was designated as a Māhāpuri and classed amongst the seven holy cities of India. There have been numerous references to the city of Mathura, as the homeland of lord Kriṣṇa in the *Māhābhārata* and the later *Purāṇic* lore. Most of these sources mention lord Kriṣṇa being born in the city of Mathura and later returning to the place to punish the tyrannical ruler of Mathura, Kaṁsa. The *Māhābhārata*, also reveals in several passages that Kriṣṇa had to flee from his homeland Mathura when Jarāsandha attacked.<sup>97</sup> Later by the medieval period Mathura developed rapidly into the main centre of the Vaisṇava sect of Kriṣṇa bhakti. Kriṣṇa who is revered and worshipped as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and is the tutelary divinity of Braj, is believed to have been born in the city of Mathura and to have passed his early life in the neighbourhood. There is hardly any place in the district, which is not associated with the Kriṣṇa legend and therefore is not sanctified. The region therefore has always been a major pilgrimage place for people of different sects, accessibility not being difficult as it is situated on a navigable river

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<sup>96</sup> Dalal, Roshan: “ The Historical Geography of the Mathura region” in D.M.Srinivasan: 1989; Mathura: *The Cultural Heritage*; New Delhi, American Institute for Indian Studies, Manohar, pp 3-4

<sup>97</sup> Van Buitenen, A.B: 1973; *The Mahabharat*; Chicago; University of Chicago Press; pp-59-60, 410; also see P.V.Kane: 1953; *History of Dharmasāstras*; Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute; Vol-IV; Poona; pp 686-692

Yamunā. Commercially too Mathura has always been well connected by trade routes running from Tamralipti in Bengal to as far as north west India and then beyond to central Asia.<sup>98</sup>

### **Ahicchatra**

The ancient site of Ahicchatrā is represented by a huge fortress situated near the village of Ramnagar, located between 79 10'E and 29 0'N, in district Bareilly. The early history of the region covered by the present district of Bareilly is not without interest. It once formed part of the ancient kingdom of Pāncāla as is mentioned in the *Mahabharat*. Later when Pancala was divided into North Pāncāla and South Pāncāla, the Bareilly district was included in the former, having Ahicchatra as its capital. Local tradition ascribe the foundation of the city, or at least the building of the grand fort and the Adi Sagar tank near it, to raja Adi, an Ahir, whose future elevation to sovereignty was foretold by Droṇa, when he had found the Ahir asleep and guarded by the snake (ahi), with an expanded hood and therefore the name Ahicchatrā.<sup>99</sup> The region also figured amongst the sixteen Māhājanapadas and came successively under the Mauryas, Kuṣāṇa and Gupta rulers, and under the latter, Ahicchatrā seems to have enjoyed a status of a provincial capital in the Gupta period. The records of the post- Gupta period reveal that the region had not faded away. Xuan Zang, the Chinese pilgrim who visited the region, talks about the three flourishing Buddhist monasteries and nine Brahmanical temples within the confines of the city. The importance of the region came to an end only in the

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<sup>98</sup> Joshi, E.B: 1968; *Mathura: Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteer*; pp 16-17

<sup>99</sup> Joshi, E.B: 1968; *Bareilly: Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteer*; pp-29-30



11<sup>th</sup> century A.D when the seat of power was shifted from Ahicchatra to Vodamayuta or modern Badayun.

Apart from Brahmanism both Mathura and Ahicchatrā have been centres to Buddhism and Jainism and also numerous other local cults. The archaeological evidence from both the sites speaks volumes about the prevalence of these faiths in the region. The life size images of Buddha from Mathura and the remains of Stupas and monasteries are found at both sites. The village of Ramnagar is still famed as a place of pilgrimage for the Jainas. It is evident from both the Jaina and Buddhist literatures that Yaksa worship was popular in Northern India and that Mathura was a notable centre of this cult. This is borne out by the numerous Yakśā images from Mathura. The same can be said about the presence of the Nāgā cult at the two sites, but the archaeological remains would be discussed in the next chapter. It is quite evident from the above discussion that both sites have been important centres to politics and religion and share a rich cultural past.

### **Early Explorations And Finds: The Early Phase of Indian Archaeology**

The beginnings of Indian archaeology were largely a European effort. In the early phase stretching from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, European interest in Indian antiquarian remains consisted of personal curiosity on part of the travellers and sailors who visited sites like the Elephanta caves, rock cut temples of Mahabalipuram and temples of Orissa spread on the western and eastern seaboard. Thomas Maurice's seven- volume work *Indian Antiquities*

published between 1812 and 1814 is the first comprehensive account of the antiquarian remains of the country.<sup>100</sup>

With the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal at Calcutta under the leadership of Sir William Jones there was an organized effort to study and collect the antiquities of India. The establishment of the Society was fostered by the Age of Enlightenment back home in Europe, that led some thinkers to regard India as the original home of civilization. Intrigued by the culture, religion, sciences and language of India, Jones laid the foundations for the Indo-European studies by viewing the Indian past as part of larger Universal history and recognized the affinities between Sanskrit, ancient Iranian and European languages like Greek and Latin. In the early part of the nineteenth century there were brilliant achievements made in the field of Indology. The decipherment of the ancient scripts by James Prinsep and the contributions to Sanskrit studies by Colebrook and Wilson were of particular importance. Archaeology did not receive much attention, apart from a few discoveries like, that of the Amravati stupa by Col. Mackenzie and an ethnographic survey of the region from Madras to Malabar by Francis Buchanan. Much work was otherwise devoted to the study of ancient scripts and inscriptions. Serious archaeological research began only from the middle of the nineteenth century- Meadows Taylor, James Fergusson, Alexander Cunningham and Robert Bruce Foote were among the major figures in the field. Taylor's major work was

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<sup>100</sup> Paddaya, K: 2002; " A Review of Theoretical Perspectives in Indian Archaeology" in Settar and Ravi Korisettar (ed): 2002; *Archaeology and Historiography: History, Theory and Method*; Indian Archaeology in Retrospect; ICHR; Manohar; pp 117-157; also see D.K.Chakrabarti: 2002; *A History of Indian Archaeology From the Beginning to 1947*; Delhi; Munshiram Manoharlal

concentrated in North Karnataka, where he served his tenure as a Political Agent of the British. He discovered a number of sites containing Iron Age graves comprising dolmens, cists and circles. He compared these Megalithic types to the Western European Megalithic types and believed that the Indian Megaliths owed their existence to the entry from outside of Druids or Druidic Scythians. He published detailed reports of his excavations, giving accurate and detailed information and site maps.<sup>101</sup>

Likewise Fergusson, concentrated his study on Indian architecture and undertook extensive survey of the country between 1829 and 1847. He classified the monuments as belonging to the Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina and the Muslim period and also recognized the existence of distinctive styles (Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Chalukyan etc.), each divided into well-defined groups with stylistic peculiarities.<sup>102</sup> Robert Bruce Foote accomplished an outstanding achievement in the field of prehistory. Influenced by the discovery of stone tools from sites in France, he started looking for similar human art in South India. He recognized the existence of three distinct phases in the prehistoric past of South India- the Palaeolithic, Neolithic and the Iron Age. His collections of stone tools, pottery and other objects were given to the Madras Government Museum.

However, the most important contribution to the field of archaeology was made by Alexander Cunningham. Cunningham was a military engineer by profession and it was due to his efforts and plea for the creation of a separate department, for the preservation of old monuments that the Archaeological

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<sup>101</sup> Padayya, K: "A Review of Theoretical Perspectives in Indian Archaeology"; pp 128-129

Survey of India came into existence in 1871. Cunningham carried out annual surveys until his retirement in 1885 and explored practically the whole of Northern India, from Kashmir to Narmada in the south and from Gujarat in the west to West Bengal in the east. Preparation of detailed site maps as well as plans and elevations for buildings, recording of local traditions about the ancient sites, use of evidence provided by coins, images and inscriptions and photographic documentation were the main field strategies adopted by Cunningham.<sup>103</sup> He was also credited with extensive explorations of the sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā, and furnished detailed reports of the finds at the two sites.

The early explorations at the sites of Ahicchatrā and Mathura also started as a part of this antiquarian interest. The explorations began as early as 1830's. In Mathura the beginnings were made, with the discovery of the so-called Silenus (a Bacchanalian group of stone sculpture) by Col. Stacy as early as 1836.<sup>104</sup> The ruins at Ahicchatrā were visited by captain Hodgson, who described the place as “ the ruins of an ancient fortress several miles in circumference, which appears to have had 34 bastions, and is known in the neighbourhood by the name of Pandu's fort”.<sup>105</sup> Regular explorations and excavations were carried out by Alexander Cunningham who later became the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India. He visited the Katrā mound in Mathura in 1853, and visited Ahichhatra in 1861 and continued his

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<sup>102</sup> Padayya, K: “ A Review of Theoretical Perspectives in Indian Archaeology”; pp 129-130

<sup>103</sup> Padayya, K: “ A Review of Theoretical Perspectives in Indian Archaeology”; pp 131-132

<sup>104</sup> Joshi, E.B: *Mathura: Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteer* ; pp 16-17

<sup>105</sup> A.C. A.S.I.R, Vol 1, 1862-65;p257

work till about 1870. His mind at this period was preoccupied with the, then recently published records of the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang, and little wonder that the single idea for him was to locate the holy places traversed by the pilgrim. As Cunningham himself seems to have admitted “ the Elder Pliny, for the sake of clearness, follows the footsteps of Alexander the Great. For the similar reason I shall follow the footsteps of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Thsang”<sup>106</sup>. The explorations yielded results and many fabulous Buddhist sculptures and life size images of Buddha were collected together with numerous stone railings and remains of possible monasteries.

Cunningham paid a second visit to Mathura in 1882-83, where he did not confine his explorations to the Katrā mound alone, but examined many other mounds around the district of Mathura. Notable amongst these sites were Parkham, Mahāwan, Mahaban, Lohban, Pāli-Khera, Morā, Anyor, Chaumuhā, Tumaula and Kamān. Apart from the exquisite Yakshā, Nāgā and Buddha images from these sites, Cunningham also managed to unearth many coins and inscriptions, which were of particular importance to him. He felt that coins were imperative indicators to the antiquity of a site and in this respect, Mathura was the most prolific field in North India; where old punch marked pieces of silver and copper, current probably as early as the time of the Buddha were found followed by the Greek series of Menander, Apollodotus, Antimachus and Straton. The copper coins of the local Hindu princes Ramadatta etc. follow the Greek series and subsequently coins of the Indo-

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<sup>106</sup> Roy, Sourindranath: 1953; “ Indian Archaeology from Jones to Marshall (1784-1902)”  
*Ancient India*; no 9; pp 4-28, 11

Scythian rulers and the Gupta kings follow.<sup>107</sup> Cunningham also identified a lot of places and religious structures in the district of Mathura that were associated with the Kṛiṣṇa cult, particularly with sites like Lohban, Gokul etc.<sup>108</sup>

Cunningham visited the site of Ahicchatrā in the 1860's, and although he relies on the chronicle of Xuan Zang for information of the site he acknowledges the site as being mentioned in the *Māhābhārata* as the capital of the kingdom of North Pāncāla. At Ahicchatrā Cunningham identified the various mounds inside the fort and discovered not less than 20 temples and the remains of a Buddhist stupa, which he dates to the Aśoka's age or 250 B.C.<sup>109</sup> Terracotta and stone sculptures of Brahmanical deities and Buddhist statues and inscribed pillars of Buddhist railings were the few antiquities discovered by Cunningham in Ahicchatrā. The site was explored no further after these efforts by Cunningham, and remained untouched till the 1940's when it was excavated by a team of archaeologists headed by N.R.Banerji.

At Mathura, however, Cunningham was joined by other scholars who also explored the region. In 1869, Mathura was visited by Bhagwanlal Indraji, who explored the Saptarishi Tila, south of the city of Mathura. He too discovered two famous sculptures, one a life size female statue and a lion capital.<sup>110</sup> The last archaeological excavations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were carried out by Dr.Fuhrer between 1887-96, his main work being on the Kanakali Tilā. He

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<sup>107</sup> A.C.A.S.I.R; Vol 20; 1882-83;pp 37-38

<sup>108</sup> A.C.A.S.I.R; Vol 20; 1882-83; pp 30-55

<sup>109</sup> A.C.A.S.I.R; Vol 1; pp-255-265

<sup>110</sup> Archaeological Survey of India Annual Reports (henceforth ASIAR); 1906-07;pp 137-160

also resumed work at Ahicchatrā in 1891-92 and excavated a few remains of temples on the site. In his work '*The Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in The North West Provinces and Oudh*' he has listed the various sites in and around Mathura that have yielded historical monuments and the various mounds from which archaeological material has been recovered. His excavations at Ahicchatra are recorded in the '*Progress Report –Epigraphical and Archaeological Branches of the N.W.Provinces and Oudh*'. Till about half a century then no work was done on the site of Ahicchatra. The excavations at Mathura continued and were carried out under the supervision of Pundit Radha Krishna at the village of Mat which is on the left bank of the river, 9 miles north east. The site called Tokri tila yielded statues of Kanishka and other Kuṣāṇa kings, together with structural remains of a possible shrine, perhaps a Devakula.<sup>111</sup> The other sites explored by Pt. R.Krishna were Mora, Ganeshra, Govardhana, Jaisinghpura and Katra.

The earlier efforts in the field of archaeology in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were, therefore, largely antiquarian. With the establishment of the Asiatic Society in 1784, there was perhaps a slight change in the perception of role of archaeology, but field work was still regarded as a means to obtain plans of old building, new art treasures, coins and epigraphic records. With the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1861, the aim of the government was to 'prevent injury and preserve archaeological remains'. The explorations and the excavations of Cunningham and the recovery of valuable antiquities, coins and inscriptions and housing them in museums was an

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<sup>111</sup> A. S. I. A. R; 1911-12; pp 120-134

important contribution to the field of archaeology. And yet most of these efforts constituted no more than a refined form of antiquarianism.

This trend is particularly evident from the way in which the two sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā were studied. Fertile though these early explorations and excavations at these sites may be, it is to be deplored that they were not carried out on more systematic lines.<sup>112</sup> Almost all mounds on both the sites were examined but none of them were completely explored or excavated. The explorers were so overawed by the enormous sculptural, numismatic and inscriptional remains and they did not care to dig deeper to prehistoric levels. Also no serious attempts were made to work out a chronology or a stratigraphy of the sites they excavated, and most of the data collected was attributed to a period purely on the basis of the inscriptions. It should be noted that excessive importance was given to inscriptions especially dated ones and that architectural or structural remains were completely neglected. The chronological and spatial contexts of the finds were also not considered important. There can be little doubt that during the excavations remains of buildings and other architectural material were found in situ, but those have not been taken into account by these explorers. The attempt made by Cunningham to identify geographical location of some sites in accordance with those mentioned by Xuan Zang were often erroneous and did not yield desired results.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> A.S.I.A.R; 1906-07; pp 137-160

<sup>113</sup> The confusion largely arose from the wrong interpretation of the directions given by the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang; e.g.- in certain cases it was not clear whether Xuan Zang mentioned a site as being east of the city or as being a certain distance east of the river. Therefore a lot of discretion has to be used by the interpreter.



And yet most of these drawbacks can be placed in the larger context of the role of archaeology as perceived at the time when these explorations took place. The foundation of Archaeological research was initially a result of the curiosity of the Europeans in the culture and past of the people of India. The development in the field of anthropology in mid-nineteenth century England, led to a growth of curiosity about the indigenous people of Asia and Africa. The emergence of evolutionary thought due to the work of Darwin and its eventual introduction into the study of human cultural phenomenon was the major overarching framework that promoted the development of scientifically oriented studies of the colonial people and their pasts. Meadows Taylor's work on prehistoric South India is a good example of such an approach.

Added to this, the other major objective of all these early excavators was to discover exotic antiquities that would grace the museums or be a part of their personal collections. More practiced in literary researches they placed a far greater reliance on literary data than material finds. Moreover with a greater emphasis and interest in literary studies and a number of literary texts and inscriptions being discovered and deciphered in the nineteenth century, archaeology was relegated by most explorers as a means for collecting exquisite sculptures. The role of archaeology in the reconstruction of the past was only marginal. In most cases archaeological evidence was used to corroborate data collected from textual sources. This is particularly evident from Cunningham's explorations, he sought to explore sites that were mentioned by Xuan Zang and find cities and monuments as mentioned by the

Chinese chronicler. Where inscriptions were unearthed, they constituted the primary means of providing information of the past.

These attempts nevertheless, were an important beginning in recovering antiquities and studying the historical development of a region. The fabulous Buddhist sculptures, stone railings revealed the artistic achievements of the Mathura school of art and the associated inscriptions helped to throw light on the history of the political dynasties that ruled the region. More importantly these efforts were an important beginning for the discipline of Archaeology. Most of these laid firm foundations for early historical archaeology in India. The drawing up of detailed site maps, preparation of drawings of various categories of objects, discovery of habitation sites etc were all, important steps in the development of field archaeology.

After Cunningham, archaeology in India fell into bad shape and field archaeology came practically to an end. But with John Marshall appointed as the director of the A.S.I in 1902, things started looking up again for Indian archaeology. Marshall dominated Indian archaeology for almost three decades and initiated an extensive programme of excavation in the country. He discovered the sites of Mohenjodaro and Harappa and conducted large-scale excavations there. Excavations were also conducted at the sites of Taxila, Nalanda, Sarnath and Rajgriha by Marshall. The discoveries by Marshall provided archaeological evidence for reconstructing history that was, till now, done only through textual data.

### **The Second Phase of Archaeology and Excavations at The Sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā (1940-1980)**

The most extensive excavation during this period was conducted at Ahicchatrā. Ahicchatrā was excavated between 1940-44, by a team of Archaeologists headed by K.N.Dikshit. The reports of these excavations have not yet been fully published, though the sequence of cultures, a cross section of ceramic traditions through the centuries<sup>114</sup>, terracottas<sup>115</sup>, and beads<sup>116</sup> found at the site have received some treatment. A more organized and planned approach to Indian archaeology was forwarded by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in his short term of office from 1944-48. Many important developments were initiated by Wheeler during this short period – establishment of a training school of field archaeology at Taxila, the establishment of the National Museum, and the publication of the Journal *Ancient India*. Wheeler himself is credited with the excavation of the sites of Arikamedu and Brahamagiri, which aimed at studying the protohistoric and Early Historic levels at the two sites. The momentum provided by Wheeler resulted in a rapid expansion of archaeological studies in the country and excavations were conducted at many sites throughout the country. A qualitative change in archaeology came about with Wheeler, when the goal was to build up the culture history of a site or a region on the basis of archaeological evidence. Researchers subsequent to Wheeler continued to work within this cultural- historical framework, the principal components included the building up of local and regional culture-sequence, use of artefact assemblages to study cultural sequences, the tendency to equate cultures so recognized with ethnic groups, the use of

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<sup>114</sup> *Ancient India*, No 1, 1946; pp 37-59

<sup>115</sup> *Ancient India*, No 4, 1947-48; pp 104-179

<sup>116</sup> *Ancient India*, No 8, 1952; pp 33-63

present day administrative/political divisions as regional units for investigating the archaeological record, unrestrained coming of new culture complexes on the basis of pottery fabrics or stone tool types and the simplistic use of diffusion/migration for explaining culture change.<sup>117</sup>

At Ahicchatrā, the excavators worked within this culture-historical framework, where the artefact assemblages were studied with the idea of constructing cultural sequences. As mentioned earlier most of the cultural material was categorized and discussed separately (beads, coins, terracottas, pottery etc). To cite an example, K.C.Panigrahi undertook a study of the ceramics unearthed at Ahicchatrā, with the view of marking the main changes in the pottery sequence. Each stratum was distinguished by individual shape of the vessels, ware and decorative designs and pertained to a certain time frame. On the basis of this classification of pottery types, a cultural sequence was drawn up and distinct phases in the history of the site ascertained.<sup>118</sup> For example the Painted Grey Ware was known as a distinctive ceramic was attributed to the Aryan-speaking settlers and therefore indicated a time period of 1500-500B.C; similarly the Northern Black polished Ware was then recognized as a ceramic creation of the Mauryan period. Therefore on the basis of pottery types coins, terracottas, structural remains<sup>119</sup>, the chronology at Ahicchatrā was divided into nine successive strata. The strata were divided chronologically as follows:

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<sup>117</sup> Paddaya, K: “ A Review of Theoretical Perspectives in Indian Archaeology”; pp 133-134

<sup>118</sup> Banerji, N.R: July 1970; “Ahicchatrā: An Account of Recent Explorations”; Indian Museums Bulletin; Vol V; pp12-26

<sup>119</sup> The structural remains at Ahicchatrā consist of two pyramidal temples (ACI and ACII) and another temple with terracotta deities of the Brahmanical order, a group of temples comprising

Stratum IX: Before 300 B.C

Stratum VIII: 300 to 200 B.C

Stratum VII: 200 to 100 B.C

Stratum VI and V: 100 B.C to A.D 100

Stratum IV: A.D 100 to A.D 350

Stratum III: A.D 350 to A.D 750

Stratum II: A.D 750 to A.D 850

Stratum I: A.D 850 to A.D 1100

These excavations at Ahicchatrā held out the potentialities of the site and revealed the pattern of cultural sequence in the region. The culture-historical method also found its best proponents in prehistoric research. In these studies the emphasis was on the formulation of regional cultural sequences based on finding of stone artefacts or pottery types in successive layers, and correlation of cultural phases on the basis of these deposits.

Although this interpretive approach was a great step forward from the earlier antiquarian interests in archaeology, it had its drawbacks. Doing field research without reference to a specific problem, and treating discoveries as self evident, obsession with classification and description as ends in themselves continued to dominate the scene. Conclusions assumed the form of pet ideas and empirical generalizations and in effect, archaeology meant no more than a loose assemblage of fact gathering and observation generating techniques and procedures. It is against such a background that there was a rise of a new

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square, oblong and apsidal temples, the base of a spoked stupa and rows of brick built monastic cells; *ibid.*

methodology in the field of archaeology, termed as New Archaeology, in the 1960's. Lewis Binford and David Clarke were the greatest exponents of this new methodology. The discipline of archaeology was now concerned with the study of culture processes, New Archaeology sought to emphasize that a truly scientific study of the past ought to aim at the identification of interaction patterns of various spectra of activities constituting human culture.<sup>120</sup> The contribution of New Archaeology lay in the fact that it rescued the discipline from the stage of blind concern with facts and brought it to a new orientation in which archaeological data was treated in terms of total cultural systems.

It was not before the 1960's and 70's that India began to witness the impact of New Archaeology. H.D.Sankalia examined the relevance of this methodology in the context of prehistoric and protohistoric sites in India.<sup>121</sup> The innovations in Indian archaeological research included the conceptions of cultures as adaptive systems rather than trait list of items, the selection of regional units for field research, the need for intensive field surveys, the need to locate primary sites, the adoption of settlement system approach to the archaeological record, the use of ethno archaeological/ actualistic models for attempting such settlement system reconstructions, and the employment of the concept of the site formation process for understanding the nature of archaeological deposits.

The study of settlement systems and site formation processes was catching up with Indian archaeologists. At Ahicchatra, the earlier work indicated the

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<sup>120</sup> Paddaya, K: " A Review of Theoretical Perspectives in Indian Archaeology"; pp 134-135

<sup>121</sup> Sankalia, H.D: 1977;*New Archaeology and its Scope and Application to India*; Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society

richness of the site and its potentialities and led to further excavations two decades later, conducted by N.R.Banerji during 1965-67.<sup>122</sup> The excavations were conducted now with the view of re-examining the lower levels and tracing the inter-relationship between the main finds of the early excavations, to obtain carbon evidence for dating and to ascertain stratigraphical position of the remains of the fort walls and the mounds, to facilitate a further horizontal excavation at the sites to furnish information about urban settlement systems in ancient India. For the purpose of excavation the entire site with all its mounds were divided into 17 separate plots. As compared with the earlier excavation where only the cultural material was collected and discussed, the emphasis was now on the structural remains as well, and the work was to reveal important information about town planning, domestic architecture, monastic establishments, system of defences etc. After this excavation Ahicchatrā has not been subjected to any more explorations by archaeologists. As for Mathura, the second phase of excavations at Mathura began only in the 1970's conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India in four seasons from 1973-1974 to 1976-77 at nearly fourteen sites located in different parts of the present town of Mathura. A clear chronological sequence emerged as a result of this stratified excavation:

Period I: from circa 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C to closing decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C

Period II: from the closing decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> B.C to circa 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C

Period III: from circa 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C to the end of 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C

Period IV: from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D to about 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D

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<sup>122</sup> Banerji, N.R: July 1970; "Ahicchatrā: An Account of Recent Explorations".

Period V: from circa 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D to close of 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D<sup>123</sup>

The major sites that were excavated included the city of Mathura, the Dhulkot mounds situated in the north-west part of the city, the Hathi Tīlā near the city, the Kanakali Tīlā and the Katrā mound, though visited earlier by explorers they were now more systematically dug down to the earliest levels, the Ambrish Tīlā which is situated towards the northern end of the city of Mathura and other mounds near Bhuteshwar. The work yielded habitational levels consisting of mud bricks and burnt brick structures together with a number of antiquities including terracotta and stone sculptures, various shapes of pots and jars, inscribed seals and coins.<sup>124</sup>

For both Mathura and Ahicchatrā, scholars relied on a combination of literary, epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological data for studying the past. Also importance was accorded to stratigraphy and a clear chronological sequence of both the sites was worked out. There is little doubt that these excavations were more systematic and extensive than the ones conducted on the two sites during the earlier phases of explorations. The change in methodology and the use of scientific methods in the excavations have yielded results. The structural and cultural material collected during these excavations was recorded in context of its stratigraphic location and chronological time frame. In the 1960's and the 70's, probably under the impact of the methodologies of New Archaeology or processual archaeology, the emphasis was now on studying the settlement

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<sup>123</sup> Joshi.M.C and Sinha.A.K: 1978-79; "Chronology of Mathura: An Assessment"; PURATTATVA, No.10 pp 39-44

<sup>124</sup> The details of the excavations are provided in the volumes of the I.A.R; 1966-67, 1969-70pp 42-43, 1970-71pp 39-40, 1972-1973pp 33-34, 1973-1974pp 31-32, 1974-1975pp 48-50, 1975-1976pp 53-55,1976-1977pp 54-56



systems and cultural patterns of a region. Excavations at Mathura and Ahicchatrā were conducted on a larger scale and the structural remains were discussed along with the other objects. The attention was concentrated on studying the settlement patterns at the site and working out a chronology on the basis pottery types and architectural styles.

Due to the larger concerns of looking at a bigger picture and revealing certain set patterns in cultural changes and settlement systems in the region over a long period of time, reports published suffered from some serious lacunae. Firstly the exact find spots of the objects were not deemed necessary and therefore were not recorded. Instead all the antiquities found from various sites in a region, but belonging to the same time period was clubbed together. There also seemed to be no clear classification of data, the records only mentioned the artefacts as 'cultural finds' but did not bother to classify them into, metal object, terracotta sculptures, stone objects etc., Nor, did they tabulate them according to their numbers and the site to which they belonged. The artefacts have also not been satisfactorily described and one has to depend on museum catalogues for details of sculptures and images. As a result many objects cannot be properly studied as not all find their way to the museums for display. The emphasis of the reports was more on the chronology and discovering the antiquity of the site and the cultural finds, as such are not documented satisfactorily and furnish incomplete information to subsequent users.

Recent concerns in archaeology have changed. Greater contextualization of archaeological data has become necessary in the study of artefacts. To study

the nature and functions of objects unearthed at sites, there is a need to place them in spatial and chronological contexts and to study them in association with other material remains. After the excavation in 1965-67 Ahicchatra has not been worked by archaeologists again but the district of Mathura received attention when in recent years excavations have been carried out by a German team headed by H.Härtel at Sonkh in the Mathura district.

### **Excavations at Sonkh**

Sonkh lies 25.7km southwest of Mathura city. The remains of an old fort, built in the time of Surajmal of Bharatpur by a Jat named Hāti Singh, are to be found in form of a mound. The excavations have been conducted very systematically and the chronology at Sonkh starts from the PGW levels up to the late Moghuls and Jats.<sup>125</sup> The excavation report is systematically arranged and furnishes details of each period and level. The structural and cultural finds are discussed separately, and the latter are well catalogued and details regarding their chronology and find spots are given wherever possible. Additional tables and photographs are provided for reference.

To briefly sum up the above discussion, the important changes in the outlook towards collection and interpretation of archaeological data, is exhibited from the changing nature of excavations conducted at the two sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā. The reports of the explorers and excavators were guided by their individual interests and in general by the approach to the discipline of archaeology at the time of their work. In the first phase most of the finds reported were results of casual or partial surface explorations. Most of the

early explorations and excavations were aimed at recovering valuable antiquities and housing them at the museums or adding on to the personal collections of the explorers. The importance was given not to structural remains but to exotic sculptures and important inscriptions. The beautiful Buddhist sculptures from Mathura represented the flourishing art of the region. The finds of stupas and remains of monasteries and temples corroborated the information provided by literary data (the account left by Xuan Zang).

Archaeology as a discipline made great progress in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and there was a persistent emphasis on the need for better scientific methodologies to be applied to obtain accurate results. Extensive excavations were being conducted at various sites with greater emphasis on stratigraphy and chronology of the site. Systematic and scientific attempts at excavations were first attempted in the 1940's, with the excavations at Ahicchatrā. But the archaeological material unearthed was considered to be a mere loose assemblage of artefacts and was described and discussed separately with no connection, whatsoever made with its spatial context at the site or the connection of one category of artefacts with the other. Archaeology was still considered to be a fact gathering enterprise and hence no theoretical frameworks are applied in the interpretation of archaeological data. Therefore coins, inscriptions, ceramics and terracottas were all discussed in separate sections and no attempt was made to draw any connection between them. Horizontal excavations were carried at many sites in the Ganga valley to obtain information about urban settlements in the

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<sup>125</sup> Härtel.H: 1993; *Excavations at Sonkh: 2500 Years of a Town in Mathura District*; Berlin;

region, and gather information with respect to town planning, architecture, coinage and ceramics. The reference of urban centres in the literary data further encouraged such excavations<sup>126</sup>. Both Mathura and Ahicchatrā are extensively mentioned in the ancient literature and therefore scholars used a combination of literary and archaeological data to establish the antiquity of the two sites. In most cases the data collected at the sites is explained in reference to the information provided by the texts.<sup>127</sup>

The other point that comes across after reviewing the excavations carried out at the two sites is, that all the data collected at the two sites over a period of time is not recorded in a uniform way throughout and therefore one has to be careful while using it. It can also be noticed that the sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā have not been worked to the same extent. The explorations at Mathura started much earlier than in Ahicchatrā, and later too Mathura continued to attract the interest of archaeologists, the latest work done in 1993. Though both the cities have played an important role as flourishing urban centres in ancient history, Mathura has continued to intrigue scholars and enormous amounts of work is done on the region. There could be many reasons to this; the very size of the region offered a larger scope for archaeologists to explore the region. The numerous mounds, in the town of Mathura and around the district, attracted the attention of archaeologists and

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Dietrich Reimer Verlag

<sup>126</sup> This is particularly true of the sites like Hastinapur, Ayodhya, Ahicchatra e.t.c that find mention in the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana

<sup>127</sup> For instance scholars studying the female terracotta figurines from the sites in the Ganga valley, in most cases, identified them with the Brahmanical goddesses mentioned in the Vedic or Puranic literature

provided them a greater area to explore. Secondly, the region of Mathura has maintained its importance as a religious cult centre throughout history. Apart from being the chief city of the ancient *Madhyadesha* as mentioned in the ancient texts, it also enjoys the reputation of being a metropolis, which served as a meeting place for foreign and indigenous culture, and an emporium of trade and commerce. The development of an important style of its own, Mathura offered much to the art historians writing on the development of art in ancient India. More importantly Mathura became the greatest centre of the cult of Kriṣṇa Bhakti and the legend of Kriṣṇa is well accounted for in the *Purāṇic* and epic literature. Considering the fact that in the initial phases of archaeological research scholars relied heavily on textual data for the identification of ancient sites, there was an interest in the city due to its connection with the Kriṣṇa cult. There was also an interest in identifying places in the region, as mentioned in the texts that were connected with some incident in the life of Kriṣṇa. These places are still sanctified and Mathura has remained an important place of pilgrimage that attracts devotees to the present day. In contrast to this Ahicchatrā has been hailed as the capital of the great Pāncāla kingdom mentioned in the *Māhābhārata*, but apart from this fact Ahicchatrā has little to its credit. Also as a site it is much smaller in size to the entire district of Mathura and the mounds are concentrated within the enclosed walls on the fort. Yet it should be pointed out that the cultural material from the region is as extensive and comparable to that found at Mathura.

Apart from the study of the history of excavations at the two sites, and the methods of collection and quantification of the data, equally important is the

way in which this data has been utilized in reconstructing the history of the two regions. In this respect I would draw attention to the two major comprehensive works, the one on Ahicchatrā by K.M.Shrimali<sup>128</sup> and the other on Mathura edited by Doris.M.Srinivasan<sup>129</sup>. Since the work of Shrimali is earlier than Srinivasan, I would start with the former. There has been in general, as absence of a comprehensive history of the region of Ahicchatra before the study by Shrimali. B.C.Law's monograph entitled *Panchalas and their Capital Ahicchatra*<sup>130</sup> was written at a time at a time when the knowledge of the archaeology of the region was almost nil. Shrimali's two-volume study, *History of Pāncālas*, is the first of its kind on the subject that uses a combination of archaeological, numismatic, literary and epigraphic material. His study involves important discussions on the geography and ethnography, political history of the region, religion and social set up as well as, an in depth study on numismatic remains from the region. The discussion on geography, ethnography, religion and society makes extensive use of literary data- the *Vedic* literature, *Upaniṣads*, and the *Epic-Purāṇic* tradition. The political history is reconstructed mainly from two sources, coins and literature. The study of coins deals with the Pāncāla coins and the all the other coins that were unearthed in the 1940-44 excavations (other than Pancala coins). Thus the numismatic study provides important information about the kings and dynasties that ruled the region. So where does archaeology come into play? According to Shrimali, archaeology reveals culture sequence. Many

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<sup>128</sup> Shrimali, K.M: 1985; *History of Pāncālas*; 2Vols; New Delhi; Munshiram Manoharlal

<sup>129</sup> Srinivasan, Doris Meth(ed): 1989; *Mathura Cultural Heritage*; Delhi; Manohar

<sup>130</sup> Law, B.C: 1942; *Pancalas and Their Capital Ahicchatra*; MASI; No: 67

explorations and excavations at a number of sites in the Ganga Yamuna Doab have revealed cultural phases that can be summarized as:

1. Harappan Cultural links
2. Ochre Coloured Pottery
3. Copper Hoards
4. Black and Red Ware
5. Painted Grey Ware, Northern Black Polished Ware and Iron technology

Archaeological material is used to substantiate discussions on religion, which otherwise is based entirely on literary data and artefacts are used as a corroborative source. The only section that uses archaeology the most is the sections art and architecture. The structural remains like the temples and fortifications and the art objects like the terracotta and stone sculpture bear witness to the flourishing artistic traditions of the Pāncāla kingdom. So although Shrimali's work provides an elaborate account of the history of Ahicchatrā, the contribution of archaeology in this reconstruction is quite limited.

Doris Srinivasan's work is a collection of articles by various scholars, with a larger focus on the major facets of life within the town of Mathura and understanding the evolution of North Indian urban life from the earliest times to third century A.D. The discussions cover a number of subjects like historical background of the region, society and economy, religion, numismatics, archaeology, literature and language, epigraphy and art and iconography. The work therefore concentrates on the region from all angles

and studies its dynamics over a period of time. The geographical location of the town of Mathura and the role-played by the river Yamuna in the settlement patterns and communication networks are explored. Also the dynamics of urban and technological advances in Northern India and Mathura's role in trans-regional and trans-continental trade is discussed. The multi-religious orientation of the site of Mathura and the development of the Krishna cult in the region also form a subject of discussion. The section on archaeology discusses habitation levels as revealed by the excavations at the site, the major pottery types of Mathura and a brief discussion on beads found at Mathura. It is argued that the excavations at Mathura have revealed a continuous habitation at the site from the protohistoric levels to the Early Historic Period (200-B.C- A.D 200). An analysis on the pottery of Sonkh brings to light the fact that the changes in pottery types at Sonkh coincides with the change in political phases of the region; and indications of trade, population shifts and general exchange comes from the analysis of the pattern of distribution of etched beads. The use of archaeological data for studying habitation patterns and pottery types representing cultural phases is common to this study as well. Although certain studies like the one on etched beads and the sections on art using the sculptural remains and studying the development of the Mathura School of Art have tried to expand the scope of archaeology.

Therefore in both the above-discussed studies the role attributed to archaeology is conventional and more or less confines itself to the culture-historical framework. Recently there has been a shift from this New Archaeology or also referred to as processual archaeology, to post processual



archaeology. This new methodology concerns itself with studying the symbolic association of artefacts. It is believed that in processual archaeology some arbitrariness is associated in symbol systems, neither the use of a particular artefact for symbolizing, say social status, nor the choice of symbol itself is fully accounted for. Post-Processual archaeology seeks to overcome this difficulty. In the Indian context, scholars have begun using certain aspects of this new approach for studying the archaeological record. Notable works are those by Miller, who studies the pottery manufactured and used in present day village of Dangwara in central India to detect distinctions of caste, family size and wealth.<sup>131</sup> Symbolic dimensions of Indian art were explored as early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Ananda Coomaraswamy. He believed that artefacts apart from their physical form, also embodied a symbolic meaning, and this is illustrated by him in his study of the Hindu temple. Coomaraswamy emphasizes that the Hindu temple is not just a building that houses the deity, but is also the representation of the cosmos. This idea was further developed by Stella Kramrisch on her work on the Hindu temple.<sup>132</sup> Such studies have not been under taken for the archaeological data collected at the sites of Mathura and Ahicchatra.

My study uses the large corpus of terracotta figurines and other terracotta objects from the sites of Mathura and Ahicchatrā. Mathura terracottas have been subjected to a lot of analysis over time, but the same cannot be said about the clay sculptures from Ahicchatrā, which were catalogued by V.S.Agrawala

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<sup>131</sup> Miller; D: 1985; *Artefacts as Categories: A Study of Ceramic Variability in Central India*; Cambridge; Cambridge University Press

<sup>132</sup> Kramrisch, Stella: 1946; *The Hindu Temple*; 2 Vols; Calcutta; Calcutta University

way back in the 1940's and no exclusive work on them. My attempt is to explore the role and function that these terracotta objects fulfilled in their respective societies. Both Mathura and Ahicchatrā are well-documented sites and my attempt is to study this archaeological record according to the contexts of the objects found, viz., the association of terracotta figurines within their groups and in relation to other artefacts and to the structural remains. The history of explorations and the recording of data at the two sites are helpful in studying the various stages in which these terracotta objects were unearthed and the way in which they were perceived by various scholars over a period of time. Härtel's report furnishes important data and is helpful in studying the terracottas in relation to their associated finds and in their spatial contexts. A reassessment of the previous data can also be done applying a different methodology keeping in mind a different set of questions.

## **TERRACOTTA FIGURINES FROM MATHURA AND AHICCHATRĀ**

The archaeological evidence from Mathura and the Ahicchatrā region with regard to terracotta figurines is very elaborate and abundant. The series of explorations and excavations carried out at sites in the two regions have been discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter the data collected as a result of these activities is classified according to its chronology, style, technique etc. and analysed in its spatial context. The main issues taken up are a classification of the terracotta figurines to emphasize the diversity of these terracotta figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatrā and to reassess the role they played in their respective societies.

As discussed previously, there has been an over emphasis on the religious nature and function of these figurines. Most scholars have taken female terracotta figurines to be manifestations of female divinity and have perceived them as Mother Goddesses. The antiquity of goddess worship in India has been traced to the Indus Valley civilization where such female terracotta figurines have been unearthed. Female divinities, in Neolithic and agricultural societies are considered to represent the aspect of fertility. As a result, cross-cultural connections are made and the female figurines from the Indian subcontinent have been, most often, compared with those found in other European countries, their purpose and function considered similar. A linear development therefore, is traced with regard to the cult of the Mother Goddess in India, which begins with these so called 'archaic' figurines and, later by the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries B.C, develops into elaborate sculptures of goddesses with full iconographic details. Somewhere the connection between this primitive

worship of the female divinity and the later cult of the goddess, as represented in the religious text, is neatly worked out, and the simple 'archaic' figurines are seen as precursors to the later sculptures of goddesses.

The archaeological material from Mathura and Ahicchatra has also then been subjected to similar interpretation. Most of the simple terracotta figurines (i.e. the ones that do not represent any iconographic details to identify them with Vedic goddesses) are considered to be representations of Mother Goddesses used in rituals. This view pervades both in the works of historians working on the goddess cult in ancient India and in the excavation reports of the two regions. There are not many texts any other evidence datable to the period under consideration that would give us precise information on the actual use of the female terracotta figurines though the *Arthaśāstra* mentions the presence of temples and regional deities that would be discussed later. What we have available however, are the *Vedic* and *Purāṇic* sources that provide us with information on the goddesses of the Brahmanical pantheon. Therefore the most common practice is to simply treat the female figurines as Mother Goddesses and later link them up to the mainstream goddesses of the Brahmanical pantheon. V.S.Agrawala in his catalogue on the Mathura Museum and that of the terracotta figurines from Ahicchatra, commenting upon the identification of these figurines as mother goddesses, draws a direct connection with the antiquity of the goddess cult from prehistoric cultures of central Asia and Europe, as well as the Indus civilization and the *Vedic* period in India. Not only does he mix up different cultures, but moves back and forth in time and space with absolutely no regard for social, cultural and

chronological contexts.<sup>133</sup> Historians writing about the development of the goddess worship in ancient India using textual sources too, traced the antecedents of goddess worship from prehistoric times, taking the numerous finds of female figurines as evidence to support their theories. The lacunae in the archaeological reports of Mathura and Ahicchatrā cannot be done away with, but I have attempted a different interpretation of the role and nature of these female figurines from the available data.

My attempt is to provide an alternative to this one sided interpretation of the terracotta figurines and study them from a different perspective. There are a number of questions that can be raised here. Firstly if we consider these figurines as fertility goddesses as is done by many scholars, who characterize them as Mother Goddesses, how do we explain their function in urban context of Mathura and Ahicchatrā? Moreover most scholars, who have clubbed these figurines as goddesses, have viewed them as an undifferentiated and a homogeneous category. This is especially true for the so-called simple 'archaic' type (i.e. the ones that do not exhibit iconographic indicators so as to be identified with Brahmanical deities). My contention is that even these 'archaic' simple figurines show considerable variation in style and the techniques employed in their production. On what basis then can we club them all as representing mother goddesses? Moreover these types of figurines continue to be contemporary to the other elaborate sculptures of the Brahmanical goddesses, and therefore would have served some purpose, the

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<sup>133</sup> Agrawala, V.S: *Mathura Terracottas*; he makes a direct connection between the Mathura female figurines with those found in Europe and the Indus Valley, and projects the latter as being the precursors to the former with regard to the general cult of the goddess.

nature of which would not be very clear, unless a close scrutiny of the archaeological data is undertaken.

The archaeological data collected from the two regions also cannot be quantified in the same way and the lacunae in the archaeological reports do provide a formidable challenge while classifying the terracotta figurines. Beginning with the surface explorations, started by Alexander Cunningham to the excavations carried out subsequently, none of these have been carried out systematically. The Katrā mound in Mathura was the first to be explored by Cunningham, and the finds mostly comprised of Buddha sculptures, stone railings and remains of possible monasteries.<sup>134</sup> Explorations on a similar basis were carried out on the mounds inside the fort in Ahicchatrā.<sup>135</sup> Later scholars explored many other sites in the Mathura district and the finds were housed in the Mathura museum. Ahicchatrā was excavated in the 1940's and the cultural material unearthed was discussed separately by scholars. Systematic excavation in the region of Ahicchatrā was first carried out by the A.S.I in 1965-67 and for Mathura the excavations were carried out in four seasons from 1973-74 to 1976-77 at nearly fourteen sites located in different parts of the present town. The latest excavation at Sonkh 25 kilometres from the present city of Mathura, were carried out by H.Härtel in 1993. The excavations have yielded a large amount of archaeological data, both with regard to structures and cultural finds. However the recording of this data suffers from serious lacunae. Barring Härtel's report the A.S.I excavation

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<sup>134</sup> A.C. A.S.I R, Vol 1, 1862-65,

<sup>135</sup> A.C.A.S.I.R, Vol 1, 1862-65

report does not provide a clear classification of data. The cultural material has also not been contextualized spatially or with regard to their associated finds. This is a major impediment to my study of the terracotta figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatrā. Since the earlier catalogue, on the terracottas from Mathura, do not furnish adequate information regarding their exact find spots; I have relied a lot on Härtel's report for such information. The terracottas from Ahicchatrā have been catalogued by V.S.Agrawala as early as the 1940's and is the only available source, so that is obviously used in my study. Agrawala's catalogue on the Mathura terracottas is also utilized for information regarding the description of the terracotta figurines from sites other than Sonkh in the Mathura district.

### **Chronology**

The chronological framework for the regions of Mathura and Ahicchatrā in general is very extensive, as the earliest habitation start from the PGW levels (around 600 B.C). As regards the terracotta figurines, they largely emerge from 400 B.C and carry on to the post Gupta period (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D). There have been different approaches to periodization undertaken by scholars while categorizing the terracottas from the two regions. The chronological sequence adopted by archaeologists on the basis of the stratified excavations undertaken, mentioned in the previous chapter, is not always used while classifying the terracottas. Terracottas maybe slotted in distinctive periods on the basis of the changes in techniques and styles that they exhibit over period of time. Such a classification however is not an easy one as there are many overlaps in style and technique that are difficult to attribute to a single period.

However this has not prevented scholars from classifying the terracottas into a time frame using different labels. V.S.Agrawala, while classifying terracottas from Ahicchatrā has divided them into groups based on the styles, physical characteristics and techniques of the terracotta objects. His classification therefore included the categories of the Mother Goddess, the Moulded Plaques, the Dwarfish Figures and so on.<sup>136</sup> With regard to Mathura, M.K.Dhavalikar links up the chronology of the production of terracotta with dynastic successions. Therefore for him the consolidation of the Mauryan Empire under a strongly unified rule ushered in a distinct cultural phase, which also resulted in a sudden spurt in artistic activity.<sup>137</sup> The Kusana period saw the blending of the Greco-roman style with its main centres being Gandhara and Mathura. And in the Gupta period, which is considered as the Golden Age by many earlier scholars, the terracotta art travelled with political power and terracotta are as a result found over a large part of the sub-continent.<sup>138</sup> Therefore for Dhavalikar the production of terracotta fluctuated with the waves of dynastic successions and decline. But apart from dynastic succession, stylistic peculiarities and the technique employed in production, are other parameters used by him to classify terracotta figurines. The following are the distinct groups used by Dhavalikar:

1. Archaic and pre-Mauryan (pre-400.B.C)
2. Late pre-Mauryan and Maurya (Circa 400 B.C to 200 B.C)

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<sup>136</sup> Agrawala, V.S: “ Terracotta Figurines of Ahicchatrā: District Bareilly UP”; pp 104-179

<sup>137</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K: 1971; *Mathura Art in The Baroda Museum*; Deptt of Museums; Baroda; p-4

<sup>138</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K: *Mathura Art in The Baroda Museum* ; pp 7-8



3. Śūṅga (Circa 200 B.C to the beginning of the Christian era)
4. Kuṣāṇa (beginning of the Christian era to 300 A.D)
5. Gupta (Circa 300 to 600 A.D)
6. Post- Gupta (Circa 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D)

Härtel, too, in his excavation report of Sonkh has attempted to classify the figurines chronologically on the basis of stylistic peculiarities and the techniques employed. His chronology is more or less similar to the one by Dhavalikar, except with the inclusion of the phase corresponding to the Mitra dynasty of Mathura (1st century B.C). However the political labels used by Härtel do not indicate any connection between the rise and fall of political dynasties and terracotta production, these labels are used for convenience as they carry an implicit time frame and the terracottas are categorized in this time frame due to the technical and stylistic peculiarities that they exhibit. In my present study I would avoid using the above mentioned labels and categorize the terracottas as belonging to Period I, Period II and so on, rather than using dynastic labels for periodization, as it is very difficult to classify figurines in airtight categories, with regard to style or technique, or make any connections with the rise and fall of political dynasties.

I am using the time frame suggested by Härtel for both Mathura and Ahicchatrā as it covers the different types of terracottas extensively and each time frame marks the important stylistic and technical changes in terracotta art. The period wise classification for Mathura and Ahicchatrā terracottas therefore is as follows:

**Period I: Pre 400 B.C**

**Period II:** 400-200 B.C

**Period III:** 200-100 B.C

**Period IV:** 100 B.C- A.D 100

**Period V:** A.D 100- A.D 300

**Period VI:** A.D 300- A.D 600

**Period VII:** 7<sup>th</sup> –8<sup>th</sup> Centuries A.D

In the following section I classify the terracotta figurines from the two regions. As far as classifying the terracotta figurines of Mathura, I have done so from Härtel's excavation reports. Agrawalas's catalogue on the Mathura terracottas is consulted but it is difficult to list information from his work as he has grouped the terracottas on the basis of style and chronology and discussed only a few typical terracottas belonging to each group. Härtel on the other hand has listed all the terracotta objects found during the course of excavation at Sonkh. Moreover on observing the Sonkh terracottas of the period under study and comparing them with those from other sites discussed by Agrawala one gauge a similarity between the two and the former can be safely taken to represent the style and trend of terracottas from other sites of Mathura.

## **Terracottas From Ahicchatrā<sup>139</sup>**

### **Period I (pre- 400 B.C)**

The terracotta figurines from Ahicchatrā start only from 300 B.C and no figurines therefore can be attributed to this period. Also V.S.Agrawala does not provide the total number of terracotta figurines unearthed from Ahicchatrā but provides a group-wise break up.

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<sup>139</sup> Agrawala, V.S: “ Terracotta Figurines of Ahicchatrā; District Bareilly, U.P”

**Period II (400-200 B.C) & III (200-100 B.C)**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number approx.</b>	<b>Technique</b>	<b>Physical characteristics</b>	<b>Identification</b>
Female figurines	9	Hand modelled	Bird or animal like appearance, triple-rosette head dress, punched girdle and a necklace (Plate I)	V.S.Agrawala has attributed them to the category of the undifferentiated Mother Goddess
Female figure	1	Partly moulded and partly hand modelled	Increased head decoration in trefoil pattern and bands of streamers falling on either side, oval face type	Identified as a female figure related to the Mother Goddess type
Mithuna Plaques	45	Moulded Plaques, $\frac{3}{4}$ specimens having suspension holes	Male and female figures standing or sitting side by side in amorous poses (Plate XIV)	Identified as couples of the Mithuna and the Husband and Wife types where the female is to the left of the male
Female figures	Not mentioned	Moulded	Elaborate drapery like dhoti and tunic and flounced skirts, trefoil and <i>Pancacudā</i> head dress, turban, ornamentation like pearl strings and tassels (Plate X)	Since the ornamentation is similar to that of the female figurines in the plaques these are allied to the Mithuna plaques
Female figures and Mother and Child plaques	Not mentioned	Moulded	Ornamentation and head dress as above, female figure in different poses; holding a child, feeding a parrot, holding a bunch of flowers etc.	Also seen as a sub type of the earlier category represented in the Mithuna plaques
Male figures	Not mentioned	Moulded	Ornamentation includes rich drapery, necklace, turban, standing in different poses	Seen as a sub type of the Mithuna category

**Period IV (100 B.C- A.D 100)**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number approx.</b>	<b>Technique</b>	<b>Physical characteristics</b>	<b>Identification</b>
Dwarfs and Grotesque figures both male and female divided into 5 sub types	100( total, including all sub-types)	Moulded	Nude bow legged dwarfish figures, standing with legs apart (Plate XIX)	Dwarfs and grotesque figures
Sub-type I	Not mentioned	Double moulded, holes in between arm pits and legs	Nude, hands placed on the breasts, and bow legged	Same as above
Sub-type II	Not mentioned	Double moulded: finer finish and small size Single moulded: cruder finish and large size	Nude, arms akimbo, facial types in the larger ones have foreign features with a flat face and pointed chin	Same as above
Sub-type III	6	Single moulded	Miniature dwarfs, all with hands on the breasts, tiny holes between the bow legs in some	Same as above
Sub-type IV	Not mentioned	Double and Single moulded, one double moulded specimen hollow from inside	Headless, squatting legs, protruding navel, pot belly	Same as above
Sub-type V	2	Double moulded, one specimen hollow from inside and sounds like a rattle	Nude, suspended legs, seated, holding a tray like object or a vessel	Same as above
Sub-type VI	Not mentioned	Double moulded, 1 crude hand	Corpulent, in some cases head with a grinning	Same as above, the crude hand made figure is seen to be

		made figure, 2 double mould pressed from the sides	mouth, long ears, frizzled hair, the crude hand made figure is in shape of a starfish	representing a child, and have been found in large numbers in one place
Dwarf Musicians	12	Hand modelled	Triangular face, diamond shaped eyes that are incised or marked by appliqué pellets, head covered with conical skullcap; instruments include bagpipe, tabla and drum etc	They are seen as representing a foreign type pointing towards Iran

Period V (A.D 100- 300), VI (A.D 300-600), & VII (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D)

Type	Number (approx)	Technique	Physical characteristics	Identification
Gods and Goddesses: Viṣṇu	Not mentioned	Moulded plaques	Iconography includes the standard symbols, four armed, cakra, mace, garland around the neck, conch and in some cases the head is crowned or haloed	Viṣṇu
Gods and Goddesses : Surya	13	Moulded circular plaques	Iconography includes the deity on the top of the plaque and an array of horses below, attendants on the chariot, female figures holding a stretched bow flanks the main deity, male attendants for the female figures	Surya
Gods and Goddesses: Agnī	Not Mentioned	Moulded	Iconography includes two armed haloed figure, aura of flames all around the body, the figure clad in a loin cloth	Agnī
Gods and Goddesses Narasimhā	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Iconography includes man-lion image having the face of a lion; angry look represented by strained muscles	Narasimhā
Gods and Goddesses: Kubera	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Torso with a purse like object in the left hand and the right hand in <i>Abhaymudra</i>	Kubera
Gods and Goddesses	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Image of the deity riding on a	Karttikeya

Karttikeya			peacock with a bell tied around the bird	
Gods and Goddesses; Nāga	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Iconography includes a canopy of snake-hoods	Nāga
Gods and Goddesses: Gaṇeśa	8	Moulded	Iconography includes, only the right tusks, a fruit in the right hand and a pot of sweets in the left and a flexed trunk reaching out to the sweets	Gaṇeśa
Gods and Goddesses: Śiva and Pārvati	Not mentioned	Moulded and Hand modelled	Śiva represented with matted locks, high topknot, with arched eyebrows, sharp nose and extended oblique eyes. Pārvati is represented with beautifully arranged hair and a third eye and a crescent mark on the forehead (PlateXXVII)	Śiva and Pārvati; also one specimen of the Ardhanārīśvara form
Gods and Goddesses: Durgā	20	Not mentioned	Iconography includes four armed goddess killing the buffalo demon;	Durgā in her Mahīśasurmardīnī form
Male and female goat headed figures	Not mentioned	Hand modelled	Face with goat like features, long dangling ears, hooked nose and the mouth is indicated by a deep slit, the projecting top knot is also pierced by two holes, arms extend obliquely and hands are indicated by spoon like depressions; ( Plate XVIII)	The male goat type can be identified with Naigameśa, another name for Skanda; the female counterpart can be identified with Śaśthī, the consort of Skanda and the guardian goddess of child birth
Buddhist	2	Moulded	In one of them	Buddha



images		plaques	Buddha seated in <i>Padmāsana</i> and in the other standing in <i>Abhaymudrā</i>	
Male and female figures	Not mentioned	Moulded plaques	Both male and female figures represent a great variety of hairstyles. The faces are charming and elegant, with sharp pointed nose, full eyes and oval face; the females are round breasted and the ornamentation is minimal	
Mother and child plaques	Not mentioned	Moulded plaques	They can be classified into three types; woman with a baby in her arms; woman with a suckling baby; and woman with a child in her left arm and a rattle or ball in the right (Plate XV)	Identified as representing the several categories of nurses that were employed to attend on royal princes
Male and female figures in different poses	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	In both male and female figures left arm is akimbo and the right hanging by the side holding a round object probably a fruit. A sub type of the male figures can be identified as foot soldiers from their dress and the staff that they are holding	Identified as worshippers.
Nude female figures	12	Single moulded	Entirely nude woman with bent body and dishevelled and disconsolate posture	Identified as the South Indian goddess Kotavi, who was said to be assimilated as one of the forms of

				Durga
Riders (elephant and horse)	26	Double moulded	Slab like body of the rider with minimum detail, conical skull cap, horses are generally light weight except in one case where the horse is modelled by hand	Foreign features evident in the skull cap and the slab like body; there is a close affinity between these and the riders from Seleucia
Figures with foreign features	50	Not mentioned for most of the specimens, a limited number of figurines have hollow cylindrical bodies with the tenon of a moulded head inserted into it	Raised eyeballs forming lenticular eyes, beard and long hair, different head dresses, in some cases goggle eyes indicated by circular appliqué pellets	Goat like eyes may represent Sasanian-Persians, the round protruding eyes with the Kedara Kusanas, and the hollow cylindrical bodies with the Hephthalite Hunas
Mithunā plaques	2	Moulded	Honeycomb style of hair on the man's head, earrings and a short striped loin cloth, woman is shown full breasted with a pearl necklace	Dampati type
Kinnara Mithunā plaques	3	Moulded	Kinnaras represented with a human face and the body of a horse, here she is accompanied by her male partner (Plate XXII)	Kinnara motif is corroborated from literary texts like the <i>Ramāyaṇa</i> and the <i>Kadambarī</i> of Banabhatta
Misc. male and female figures	Not mentioned	Mostly single moulded	Numerous representations of female heads in different hairstyles, specimens of	

			male and female busts	
Multi headed female images	38	Not mentioned	Most of them have three heads arranged frontally in a row, all figure have two arms bent at the elbow and placed on the knees, some specimens holding a child, breasts prominent with nipples depicted and signs of bodice on the bust and skirts falling to the knees	Images found in association with half a dozen Mahiśāsūrmardini images and therefore are identified as representing some goddess cult, some figures are identified as the Buddhist goddess Hārītī and the Brahmanical goddess Saśthī

### **Terracottas From Mathura**

On the whole 768 fragmentary human terracotta figurines from Sonkh have been unearthed, 363 have been taken for description in the excavation report, on the basis of which I have classified the data from Mathura.

#### **Period I (pre-400 B.C)**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number approx.</b>	<b>Technique</b>	<b>Physical characteristics</b>	<b>Identification</b>
Animal figurines	2			No human figurines unearthed

**Period II (300-200 B.C) & III ( 200-100 B.C)**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number (approx)</b>	<b>Technique</b>	<b>Physical characteristics</b>	<b>Identification</b>
Heads and torsos of female figures	75 usable fragments for the two periods (including all types)	Hand modelled and partly moulded and partly hand modelled	The earliest type of terracotta figurines is the 'beak' type of female figures with a animal like appearance; the later ones with moulded face have an elaborate headdress with streamers and rosettes that are moulded separately and applied on the face; (Plate III & IX)	Female figures
Male figures		Hand modelled; Partly moulded and partly hand modelled	Applied strands of hair and moustache, and incised beard; tight fitting collar on the neck is applied decorated with a line of punched circlets	Male figures
Female figure accompanied by a girl	1	Moulded plaque	Egg shaped face of a woman; elaborate headdress with streamers around the head; on the right ear a roundish bulge indicating a trefoil pattern, the collar consists of a single string of pearls	One can see it as a mother and daughter, but certainly not mother and child in the sense of a mother goddess

**Period IV (100 B.C- A.D 100)**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Technique</b>	<b>Physical Characteristics</b>	<b>Identification</b>
Female figures	Not determined	Moulded plaques	The figures principally show a tripartite head dress consisting of lateral bulges and a flower in between or on the top, the dress is short with side strands of folded garment reaching just below the knees, ornamentation includes spiral ear rings, necklace waistband, girdles of rows of beads, in some cases the female holds fish on a chain in the right hand, or a bunch of flowers in her left hand (Plate XI)	Female figures
Female figure with child from votive tanks	Not mentioned	Hand modelled; one specimen is partly wheel made- the trunk is hollow and wheel made all other parts are hand modelled and solid	Seated in a votive tank, child in lap, in one broken specimen four figures are seated, traces of a head band and punched or stamped necklace; in some cases the breasts are pricked (Plate XVI)	Mother Goddess from votive tanks
Seated female figures with or		Hand modelled	Face with receding cheeks, small mouth, incised eyes,	Mother Goddess

without a child			ribbon or a head band around the head, plane ear discs and a necklace	
Riders		Hand modelled body and moulded face	The body is made in the round and the moulded head is added to the body afterwards, face shows deep set eyes, and a big triangular nose, cavity between thighs indicating the spread of legs for sitting on horse back	Riders
Couples		Moulded plaques, some cases the use of double mould can be seen in the fragments of hollow figurines made from two moulds or back and front respectively	The ornamentation for the woman is similar to the ones described for the female figures of the period; the male figures wear a turban with lateral bulges, they seem to be clad in a dhoti held by a girdle; both the figures are shown in amorous poses embracing each other (Plate XIII)	Mithuna Plaques
Three legged figures, male and female		Not mentioned	The figure in made in the round with the projection of the third leg which clearly supports the figure; in case of the female figure there are traces of an applied girdle; in the male figure	Three legged figures

			the genital are depicted	
Yakṣā figure		Moulded, made in the round presumably using two moulds	Standing frontal on a pedestal, the right knee slightly bent, right hand resting on the thigh, left touching the girdle, pot bellied figure clad in a dhoti reaching down to the ankles and fastened with a girdle	Yakṣā figure
Nude Dwarfish male figures Sub type I- clenched fists near hips and groin		Double moulded from back and front	Heels joined, arms bent and curved, clenched fists near hips or groin, genitals indicated	Nude Dwarfish male figures
Nude dwarfish male figures Sub type- II clenched fists near waist		Double moulded from back and front	Bow legged, bald head with skull pointed backwards, arms bent with hand placed on the waist, genital depicted and the hip area incised with horizontal lines indicating a belt	Nude dwarfish male figures
Nude dwarfish male figures Sub type-III clenched fists		Double moulded from back and front	Bow legged, long protruding ears, arms bent clenched on the chest, paunchy abdomen and remains of genitals	Nude dwarfish male figures



on chest				
Nude dwarfish male figures		Double moulded	Bow legged, right arm bent with clenched fists on the chest, left arm lowered resting on the thigh, genitals depicted	Nude dwarfish male figures

Period V (A.D 100-300), VI (A.D 300-600) & VII (7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D)

Type	Number (approx)	Technique	Physical characteristics	Identification
Human heads male and female	87 usable fragments for Period V; 20 usable fragments for Period VI & VII (including all types)	Hand modelled	The face is characterized by thick short lips, plump cheeks, large open eyes with pupils denoted by pierced holes and deeply incised double eyelids and eyebrows, the males are depicted with a moustache, the hair decoration for both male and females is elegant and varied, ornamentation in females include rows of necklaces and earrings	Human heads
Gods and goddesses- Durga Mahiṣā surmard inī		Moulded plaques	Depiction of the six armed goddess killing the buffalo demon; large eye, eyeballs pierced, necklace winds between the breasts; the number of arms may vary between 4 and 6; (Plate XXIII)	Durga Mahiṣasurmar dinī
Seated female figure with a child in her lap		Moulded plaque	Right arm bent, hand touching the left breast, armlet and bracelet incised, legs set apart, child lies in the lap supported	Mother goddess with child in her lap

			by the left hand of the mother	
Seated male figures		Hand modelled	Pot bellied male with deeply incised eyes and pierced eyeballs, necklace indicated with incised lines, arms adorned with bracelets, the arms are bent, the right hand keeps a bowl and the left has an indistinct object presumably a mongoose purse or flask	Pot bellied male figure
Ogre		Moulded plaque	Frightful looking demon with wrinkled face, broad nose goggle eyes and wide open mouth, head dress consists of two layers of hair and a garland over it	Ogre
Gods and goddesses- Nāgarāja		Moulded plaque	Iconography consists of a cobra hood, face and body of a Nāgā, sharply carved eyes and protruding eyebrows, the hair is vertically striped, ornaments include earring, necklace, armlets and bracelets (Plate XXI)	Nāgā image
Couples		Moulded plaques	Couples depicted in amorous scenes, the hairstyles are	Couples

			artful and ornaments include earrings, necklaces, anklets,	
Boyish figures		Double moulded from back and front	Boyish figure with clenched fists on the breast, thick eyelids and protruding eyeballs, pot bellied, necklace with bell round the neck, girdle consisting of globules, genitals depicted	Although V.S.Agrawala has taken similar figures as Yaksas, Härtel feels that in spite of their pot bellies they cannot be characterized as Yaksās and therefore calls them Boyish Figures
Female figures in various poses		Moulded	The ornaments include earrings necklaces, anklets etc. the figures are clad in a long dress reaching down to the feet, women are depicted as feeding a parrot or holding a fruit	Female figures

### Technique

The terracotta figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatrā as from other Ganga valley sites exhibit the use of varied techniques over a period of time. These include figurines that are hand modelled, partly hand modelled and partly moulded, mould made and wheel thrown. As is evident most of these techniques cover a large time span and therefore cannot be divided or classified into time brackets. The material of the terracottas is clay, containing mica as the main gritty material to avoid cracking when fired. From the period

IV (100 B.C- A.D 100) onwards, in some cases the material is coarse, with a considerable admixture of chopped husk and the like. Most of the Indian terracottas are baked to the colours of red and ochre depending upon the method of baking. If the air has free access during baking, the iron contained in the clay will oxidize resulting in the red colour, if, however the combustion is imperfect, the terracotta is grey or black. Most of the terracottas of Mathura as well as Ahicchatrā prior to the Gupta are grey-black, sometimes with a black slip.<sup>140</sup>

### **Hand Modelling**

The earliest of terracotta figurines, from the period I & II (pre 400-300 B.C), are mostly hand modelled. These figurines were mostly very crude and by the end of the period they seem to have been made not only with the scrapper but in some cases decorated with incised lines, punched circlets and applied strips of clay. These were used not only to decorate the figure, but also to define certain parts of the body like navel, nipples, eyes and lips. Hand modelled figures continue to be made right throughout the period of our study despite the technical advancements in the terracotta production that can be gauged from the use of single and double moulds. Also the hand-modelled figures do not have a similar finish. The quality of hand modelling differs according to the type of figurines. Certain hand modelled figures from like the Śiva and Pārvati heads from Ahicchatrā are the finest specimens of modelling and involves intricate craftsmanship. These may be compared to the other

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<sup>140</sup> Miller, Barbara Stoler(ed): *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*; p-78

numerous terracotta figurines that have a crude appearance and the quality of modelling is not as fine as the above-discussed specimens.

### **Partly Moulded and Partly Hand Modelled**

The earliest specimens of this category occur from 300B.C at both Mathura and Ahicchatrā. Amongst these figurines the head was prepared by a mould and was fitted into the hand modelled body. . In case of an elaborate headdress, as in the female heads produced around 300 B.C, the single parts (like rosettes, streamers etc.) were moulded separately and applied later on the moulded face. The other decorations used are applied necklaces and incised vertical and horizontal lines. The head with its decoration ends in a tenon to be inserted into the hand-modelled body. The technique however goes out of practice by 100 B.C and is replaced by the use of single moulds to cast the whole figure. However V.S.Agrawala reports a specimen where the portion of the head up to the neck is made from the single shallow mould, and it has been fixed into a hand modelled body which has prominent well-shaped breasts separately applied like the earlier figurines. Agrawala places it around 300 B.C period. But it is possible that the figure initially was completely moulded and on breakage the head was fitted into a hand modelled body.

This technique resumes its importance in the first century of the Christian era and many specimens from the two regions are known. The figures of horse riders from Mathura are good examples of this technique. From the later period also, examples of partly hand made and partly moulded technique are available. This is especially seen in the life size images or idols in the big panels, in which the torso or the main portions of the body is made out of the

mould while the remaining parts of the body, are hand modelled.<sup>141</sup> The figures of Śiva, Pārvati, Camundā etc from Ahicchatrā are best examples of this technique.

### **Moulding**

The availability of completely moulded figurines in the earlier periods is extremely small in number. The technique came to be in common use only from about 100 B.C onwards. An investigation of the completely moulded figurines reveals that there were two methods used for making moulded figures.

### **Single Moulded Figurines**

Although the use of the partly moulded figurines had started in the earlier period, the predominant usage of the technique was witnessed in around 100 B.C. Majority of the plaques of the period bearing human or animal figurines have been made out of a single mould. These red brown terracotta plaques made from an open mould were as a rule always upright and the back of the plaque was flattened by the hand. After having reached perfection in this period, the art of single moulding continued to be used together with other techniques like hand modelling which was also equally popular. However in the following period (100 B.C- A.D.100) the figurines look coarser than the earlier ones due to the grit and other impurities in clay. The single shallow mould of the earlier period that resulted in flattish image was further, modified by the artists and the subsequent images exhibited roundness and depth. This modelling of complete figures of inordinately large size in the round during

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<sup>141</sup> Srivastava , S.K: *Terracotta Art in Northern India*; p-24

this phase can be taken to be the predecessor of the life size terracotta statues of the succeeding periods. The single mould is commonly used by the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries and the smaller objects are produced mechanically from moulds. The quality of terracotta sculptures greatly improved in this period, where the artists not only made the back surface smooth and unruffled but also eliminated fingerprints. No superficial decoration was added in form of floral or other motifs. Also some depth was given to the mould, the surface of the plaque and the negative relief, to create the impression of rounded plasticity, with the result that the end product was perfect and charming.

### **Double Moulded Figurines**

The use of the double mould is evident from figurines found at various sites of the Gangetic valley. The use of the double mould is evident from Mathura and Ahicchatrā from 100B.C onwards, the dwarfs and the grotesque figurines from these regions are mostly produced out of double moulds. The artists used double moulds not only on the solid core of clay but also produced hollow figurines. During this period, the double mould was usually used from the back and front. A new technique was applied in which the two moulds from two sides were pressed joining along the central line of the nose. This method became more common in the subsequent periods. More emphasis later was given to the rounded figures than to the flat ones and some hollow figurines are also noticed. Another new feature was the preparation of the figure in two halves, front and back, by two separate moulds and then joining together. Instead of peeling off the clay from the joints, the modellers applied extra fine



clay in order to conceal them. Such figurines were hollow from inside and light in weight, and have been found from both Ahicchatra and Mathura.

### **Wheel Made**

Sometimes the terracotta images were made on the potter's wheel also. The cylindrical hollow body of the figure was made on the potter's wheel and other parts, such as hands; legs and ornaments were hand modelled. Such an example is reported from Sonkh, in Mathura, where a wheel thrown female figurine is recovered. Wheel made figures are also reported from Ahicchatra in large numbers

### **Nature and Function of The Terracotta Figurines**

The nature and function of the above-discussed figurines would have to be as varied as the figurines themselves. From both Mathura and Ahicchatrā the first category of anthropomorphic figurines are the simple hand modelled female terracottas that have been characterized as Mother Goddesses by scholars due to many reasons. The very first being their simple and crude appearance, then the fact that these figurines display a nude body and that these figurines are precursors to the later Brahmanical goddess and that these were absorbed into the Brahmanical pantheon

On the basis of the above-classified data one can question these assumptions very effectively. To begin with the technique, all the figurines that are grouped under the category of Mother Goddesses cannot be termed as 'crude and simple' in appearance. This lot is not homogenous in nature but exhibit variation in technique and style. This is evident when one looks carefully at the female figures from Period I at Ahicchatrā and from Period II at Mathura.

Both these types have been classified by V.S.Agrawala as Mother Goddesses on the basis of their simple appearance and certain common elements like an animal like appearance, broad hips and prominent breasts, necklace and a conspicuous girdle and the popularity of this formula used in so many figurines of the period. However a careful examination would reveal that these figurines vary from hand made specimens to partly moulded ones in which the face is pressed out of the mould. Also the animal like appearance is limited only to the very early specimens that later give way to proper and elegant facial features.

The decoration of these figurines is another element that shows variation. This varies from simple hairstyles to elaborate coiffures of trefoil headdress decorated with rosettes and streamers. Of particular importance is the headdress in the *Pancacudā* type listed with reference to the female figures of Period II and III (300-100 B.C) from Ahicchatra. The *Pancacudā* literally meant the five crests and referred to the five sacred symbols stuck on the hair dress namely an arrowhead (bana), goad (ankusa), banner (dhvaja), trident (trisula), and a blade like device. The number of the objects could vary from five to three. Kramrisch feels that the *Pancacudā* symbolized sacred character and was usually associated with semi divine characters like the *Apsarās*<sup>142</sup>, but looking at the use of this symbol on figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatra this can be ruled out, as the headdress is a common feature for many female

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<sup>142</sup> Miller, Barbara Stoler(ed): *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*; pp 75-76

figurines depicted on Mithuna plaques that obviously were not used for religious purposes. The necklace and girdle also vary from punched circlets to elaborate applied ones and the overall ornamentation also differs in these figurines. Agrawala himself classifies 9 specimens from Period I from Ahicchatra as Mother Goddess but is not certain of 1 specimen, which exhibits greater variation in ornamentation, to which he ascribes the category of 'female figure allied to Mother Goddess type'. This variation is also discussed by Härtel in his report and he does not characterize these figurines as goddesses but sees them simply as female figures.

As far as the nudity of these specimens is concerned, Agrawala states, " that in none of the figures of this (Mother Goddess) group from Ahicchatra or from Mathura is nudity ever indicated, although any signs of drapery are also wanting"<sup>143</sup>. But despite having said that, he still persists that these female figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatra portray prominent breasts, broad hips and a conspicuous girdle that are seen as an indications of their connection with fertility rites and these are compared to other nude figurines found in Europe and west Asia, especially the Venus types from Europe. However this comparison may seem totally ahistorical especially if we consider the fact that the latter are not only separated enormously, by time and space, but also are also located in very different cultural contexts. Also the Venus figurines do not resemble the Mathura or Ahicchatrā ones in any way. The over exaggerated sexual organs of the former stand in direct contrast to these rather proportionate, slim and graceful terracottas. Moreover, nudity does not

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<sup>143</sup> Agrawala, V.S: " Terracotta Figurines of Ahicchatrā, District Bareilly, U.P"; p 107

necessarily signify eroticism or fertility. In fact it can also be conjectured that these figurines may not have been depicted nude at all. The depiction of belts and elaborate girdles may indicate the presence of a lower garment. This is particularly true of certain specimen belonging to a period of 100 B.C-A.D 100 from Mathura, both in stone as well as in clay where the lower body was covered with a diaphanous cloth, which could not hide the genitals of the sculpture, but such figurines cannot be, in any possibility, seen as fulfilling fertility function. On what basis then, have Agrawala and other scholars interpreted them as Mother Goddesses representing fertility functions?

These figurines are also considered to be precursors of the Brahmanical goddesses, whose sculptures are present in large numbers from the later period. But this assumption can also be challenged on the basis that these figurines continue to be found or run parallel to the Brahmanical goddesses. Simple hand made figures and moulded figures continue to be unearthed together with the huge moulded plaques representing sculptures of Gods and Goddesses. The hand modelled male and female goat headed figures, the single moulded nude female figures from Ahicchatrā, the nude male and female figures of dwarfs and grotesques and Yakṣā figures, the Mother and child figure from votive tanks from Mathura and Ahicchatrā are examples of such figures. As is evident, the so-called simple and archaic female figurines that are taken to be Mother Goddesses form a very small component of the entire data. The number of such figurines from Ahicchatrā is only 10, and it is not very considerable from Mathura as well. These figurines therefore cannot

be taken as conclusive evidence for the popular worship of Mother Goddess in these two regions, as is indicated by certain scholars.

Therefore how can these female figurines be perceived? What role or function can be attributed to them? Most of these simple figurines that do not represent iconographic details to identify them as Brahmanical goddesses or ascertain their secular character are interpreted as representing Mother Goddesses. But that assumption has been challenged. Certainly the secular character of these figurines cannot be overlooked. Kramrisch opines that 'there is no considerable difference between the ageless types of figurines, human or animal by suggestion, whether they are to be worshipped or played with. The function of the timeless is not in itself determined. They are toys to the child and ones consecrated, images to the worshipper'.<sup>144</sup> Also some of the female figurines with elaborate headdress and jewellery resemble the female figures depicted on Mithuna plaques that are definitely not religious in nature. Therefore in some cases the secular nature of these figurines is as evident as their religious function.

Even if one considers that these figurines fulfilled a religious function, it is quite impossible that all of them served the same purpose irrespective of their inherent differences. The nature of religious practice and cults also needs to be studied before ascribing the figurines to the category of cult objects. Religion, in itself, operates at different levels, from elaborate Brahmanical rituals to local practices at regional shrines and everyday offerings to household deities.

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<sup>144</sup> Miller, Barbara Stoler(ed): *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*; pp 75-76 Kramrisch; p- 71

The urban context of the region of Mathura and Ahicchatrā would mean a greater complexity with regard to religious practices and rituals where fertility rites, would perhaps constitute a minor element in the compound whole. In this respect it is important to have a closer look on the types of terracotta figurines available to us from the sites from where they are unearthed.

The actual use of these female figurines in local cultic practices or household rituals, one can only speculate. The find spots of most of the figurines are not mentioned in the archaeological reports and we are not informed from exactly where in the site the figurines were recovered. The A.S.I. report of the excavations of the Mathura city mention terracotta figurines being found in pits cut into the floor containing ash, fragments of animal bones, shards of N.B.P.W and full pots of fine Grey Ware. Though some scholars have refuted the ritualistic connection it cannot be completely ruled out.<sup>145</sup> Härtel mentions a similar example in the excavation report from Sonkh, where two figurines are reported from a Period II level in a residential structure. However like the earlier ones no finds of ash or shards etc. accompany them. But what is intriguing is that both resemble each other in style and decoration.<sup>146</sup> We cannot be very sure as to whether these were used in some rituals or are secular in nature. Agrawala cites a similar example from Ahicchatrā where three figurines were found in a refuse pit, which was filled with sweepings

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<sup>145</sup> Bautze, Joachim: "Some Observations on Female Maurya Terracotta Figurines"; he fails to see the ritual background to the find. According to him the description of the find situation reminds one more of a dumping ground, though he does not rule out a possible ritual connection

<sup>146</sup> Härtel, H: *Excavations At Sonkh*;

from the residential quarters of the Pāncāla period (100 B.C-A.D100).<sup>147</sup>All three were of a similar kind in terms of style and decoration. If used for religious purposes in both cases the similarity in style of the figurines may suggest that only a certain type of figurines were used in a certain ritual and not all figurines of that period were cult objects. Also found from refuse pits and in residential quarters they may indicate their use in some seasonal domestic household rituals.

But apart from these individual female figurines there are many other types of terracotta figures that may point out to many more local and regional practices. To this category may be included the nude female figures from Ahicchatrā, the Mother and Child figures, the figures of Dwarfs and Grotesque figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatrā. The single moulded nude female figures from Ahicchatra belonging to a time frame of c.A.D 450-A.D 650 has been identified as the prototype of the South Indian goddess Kotavi who was assimilated into the Brahmanical pantheon as one of the forms of the goddess Durga. It is not very plausible to make this identification as has been done by Agrawala basing himself on the literary works of *Bāṇabhatta* and *Hemachandra*. But it can be accepted that this nude female figurine, that could represent a local cultic figure would have been used as offerings to ward off evil and ill- luck. Associated to this mention can be made of the multi headed female images from Ahicchatra. These multi headed images were found in association with half a dozen Mahisāsūrmardinī figures and it is possible that

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<sup>147</sup> Agrawala, V.S: “ Terracottas Figurines of Ahicchatrā: District Bareilly UP”; p-108

these figures were also cultic local goddess figures that were worshipped at one place.

The Mother and Child figure are found from both Mathura and Ahicchatrā, though very different in character. From Sonkh many of these Mother and Child figures are hand made and are found on votive tanks from Period IV. The Mother and Child plaques from Ahicchatrā are moulded and conform to the time frame of A.D 550-650. It can be conjectured that the Mother and Child figures on the votive tanks were used as offerings to a local shrine. From sites other than Sonkh, Mother and Child plaques are recovered<sup>148</sup>. In some of the plaques the child is shown touching the breast of the woman, while the female holds a play object, like a ball or a rattle, in her hand. These figurines have been characterized as depicting the aspect of fertility and have been perceived as religious in nature. This characterization is, again, not only arbitrary but also erratic. Vogel in his catalogue to the Mathura museum interprets some of them as being goddesses while others are merely 'female with a child in her lap'.<sup>149</sup> However it can be assumed that these plaques, more often than not, depicted secular and social subjects and cannot be associated with religion. Some of the plaques have holes drilled into them and were probably used as wall hangings. The ones found at Ahicchatra display variation in poses and ornamentation. Agrawala takes these to represent various classes of nurses employed in royal households to tend children.

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<sup>148</sup> Vogel, J.Ph: 1910; *Catalogue of The Archaeological Museum at Mathura*; Allahbad; Government Press

<sup>149</sup> Vogel, J.Ph: *Catalogue of The Archaeological Museum at Mathura*;



The next types of figures that command attention are the Dwarfs and Grotesque figures both male and female. Both Mathura and Ahicchatrā have yielded these figures in large numbers and most of them are made out of a double mould. The nature and function of these figures is also speculative. They could be playthings for children as some of them sound like rattles. On the other hand judging from their facial features they could be used as magical charms to ward off evil spirits. From Ahicchatrā crude hand made figures of dwarf or a child resembling a starfish have been found. Agrawala observes that these are found in enormous numbers at one place and are intended to represent children; these were probably used as votive offerings. Whether other Dwarfish figures were used for similar purpose cannot be determined with the present state of information.

Both Ahicchatrā and Mathura have since the very beginning been a centre to Brahmanical, Buddhist as well as Jaina faith apart from the numerous local cults that may have existed. The archaeological evidence corresponds to all of them. Life size Buddhist and Jaina images are as prolific as the Brahmanical deities and simpler terracotta figurines. The presence of local and regional cults is well attested by the Yaksā and Nāga images unearthed from both regions. The predominance of the Nāga cult at Mathura is evident from the remains of an apsidal temple representing the Nāga cult that will be discussed in the following chapter. Vidula Jayaswal in her ethnographic study concentrated in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, has highlighted the fact that there is the existence of numerous *Devi thānās* and *Bābā thānās*, which are local shrines consecrating a male and female deity respectively. In one

instance she observes the use of clay cones as representing the goddess Durga and her six sisters. She feels that the local goddess here, can be seen in relation to the Sakti cult, or the high goddess of the Hindu pantheon, yet the custom originated essentially on the local magico-religious practices. This is apparent from the basic characteristic of the *thānās* and the mode of worship indicate the presence of deities. She further adds “ such practices by which the complex philosophico-religious concepts related to Brahmanical pantheon are retransformed into simple folk forms is not uncommon in adjacent regions of the Ganga plains”.<sup>150</sup> Applying this to the regions of Mathura and Ahicchatrā, one can very easily note the presence of various regional cultic practices that are represented by a variety of terracotta figures. The presence of the Nāga cult at Mathura is one such local cult that is highly organized. The multi-headed female cult images from Ahicchatra found in relation to the figure of the goddess Mahiśāsūrmardinī, may indicate the worship of the goddess in many local forms.

What emerges from the above discussion is that both Mathura and Ahicchatrā are multi religious centres and the diversity of terracotta figurines from both region attest to this fact. Therefore the terracotta female figurines from both the region cannot be isolated from their regional contexts and listed into the category of an undifferentiated Mother Goddess. Cross-cultural connections or reliance on textual data may not reveal the true nature and function of these figurines as a number of smaller cults and practices prevailed outside the

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<sup>150</sup> Jayaswal, Vidula & Krishna Kalyan: *An Ethno-archaeological View of Indian Terracottas (A Comparative Study of Present and Past Terracotta Traditions of The Gangetic Plains)*; pp 37-38

realm of Brahmanical literature. Therefore it is quite probable that these figurines circulated at a local and regional or house hold levels vis-à-vis the larger Brahmanical deities representing the greater tradition. It is possible that most of these figurines could be used as votive offerings at local shrines together with other objects like votive tanks and possibly animal figurines, which I discuss subsequently.

While some other smaller figurines have holes drilled into the head of the figure, though these holes could also be drilled into figurines to remove them from their moulds, they could also be certainly adopted by people as amulets. Or they may be used merely as toys or decorative objects. It is also plausible to question the fact as to why certain types of figurines are mould made and the others hand modelled? The difference in techniques could also due to the demand and area of circulation of the figurines. Jayaswal on the basis of her ethnographic survey reveals, that there is a close connection between the urban settlement and the prevalence of moulded terracotta techniques. The quantitative demand for a particular occasion by a large section of society is an urban characteristic. Hence the mass production of clay figurines during a comparatively short duration of time or interval in the annual cycle explains the use of moulds<sup>151</sup>. Considering the urban contexts of both Mathura and Ahicchatrā, it is plausible to talk about such festivals and occasions. The purpose for which the figurines were used would have defined its technique and production.

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<sup>151</sup> Jayaswal, Vidula & Krishna Kalyan: *An Ethno-archaeological View of Indian Terracottas (A Comparative Study of Present and Past Terracotta Traditions of The Gangetic Plains)*; pp 42-43

Whatever may be the nature of these female terracotta figurines they would have to be studied together with the rest of the terracotta objects and their significance would have to go beyond the simple Mother Goddess tag.

## STRUCTURAL REMAINS AND OTHER FINDS FROM MATHURA AND AHICCHATRĀ

The last chapter categorized the terracotta figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatrā and revealed considerable variation in style and technique. It also discussed the presence of numerous regional cults as represented by the terracotta figurines. This chapter deals with the structural remains, largely the temple complexes at the sites of Ahicchatrā and Sonkh in Mathura that further explain these regional cults and shed light on the role of terracotta objects unearthed. I also discuss the associated finds like votive tanks and animal figurines that are unearthed with the anthropomorphic terracotta figurines from the two regions. The contention is that these finds do help in understanding the nature and function of terracotta as a medium of art as well as their function in connection of these associated finds.

### **Structural Remains: Temple Complexes At Ahicchatra And Sonkh**

It is generally believed by scholars that the temple complexes enshrining main Brahmanical deities emerged only in the Gupta period (A.D 400), but all the remains of temples from Mathura and Ahicchatrā are from Pre-Gupta dates. The earliest references of temple complexes in literary sources are found in the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya. These are the *devatāgrha* ‘ a temple’; the *daivatacaitya* ‘ sanctuary of a deity’; *devatapindhanam bhumigrham* ‘ an underground room with an opening covered by the image of a deity’ and many more<sup>152</sup>. There are three temple structures at Ahicchatrā; the so-called Siva temple with a huge linga at ACI (100 B.C- A.D 300); Multi-storeyed structure

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<sup>152</sup> Kangle, R.P: 1965; *The Kautilya Arthasāstra; Part III; A Study*; Bombay; University of Bombay; p 156

at ACII (100 B.C-A.D 300), and an apsidal temple at ACIII. In the recent excavations at Sonkh by Härtel, two apsidal temples have been discovered; the second one belonging to the Kuṣāṇa (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D) period undoubtedly represents the Nāga cult.

The Śīva temple at ACI at Ahicchatrā is a structure that rises to the height of 75 feet above the surrounding plains and dominates the countryside by its imposing form and height. It is a massive five storeyed brick structure, quadrangular in plan, each terrace having on an average a ten feet wide circumambulatory path round a square body. The eastern and western sides have numerous steps, though not on all terraces. This would mean that originally the temple had entrances on both sides. Another distinguishing feature of the structure are the cross walls running against the platform on each storey on the northern and southern side, thereby creating various cells. It has been surmised that these cells were filled with clay and debris to render them strong and solid so as to serve well as foundation cells for superstructures. The northern side is further characterized by the central projections on the three lower terraces, a feature that is characteristic of the *triratha* plan. In addition to the central shrine at the top, there were projecting cells on the four corners of the lowest terrace, which were probably meant to house a shrine. If so, the whole structure would have been a *Pancayatana* complex.

The whole structure is surmounted by a colossal Śīva-linga, which dominates the skyline. It is a massive stone linga, which is not standing at the centre of

the sanctum but a little towards the northwest corner.<sup>153</sup> V.S.Agrawala classified this structure as the *ekuda* type mentioned in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāna*. He has further indicated that the narrative plaques, which were found in the area, were fixed in a frieze running around one of the upper terraces and can be stylistically dated between circa A.D 450-650. Both the identification of the structure with the *ekuda* type and the chronology provided by Agrawala has been questioned by N.R.Banerji<sup>154</sup>. Banerji argues that the *ekuda* structures as classified by Agrawala, were associated with the Buddhists and more importantly the Ahicchatra structure does not resemble the *ekuda* style at all. The *ekuda* style as mentioned in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* is supposed to have three tiers, while the temple at Ahicchatrā has five tiers. Equally significant is the absence of this form of architecture for a Siva temple anywhere else in the Gupta Empire. The nucleus of the temple, according to Banerji seems to be pre-Gupta and it can be placed between 100B.C-A.D 300. This is further evident from the size of the bricks employed in constructing the temple that are of assorted measurements.

17 "x 10" x 2 ¼ "

15 ½ " x 9 ½" x 2"

18" x 10" x 3"

16 ½" x 10" x 3 ¼"

18" x 10 ½" x 2 ½ " <sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Shimali, K.M: *History of The Pāncālas*; p-148

<sup>154</sup> Banerji, N.R: "Ahicchatrā: An Account of Recent Exploration"; pp 23-24

<sup>155</sup> Banerji N.R: " Ahichhatrā: An Account of Recent Exploration"; p 23

The average size of bricks in the Gupta and late Gupta times is much smaller- 13" x 9" x 2". K.M. Shrimali agrees with Banerji and feels that the embellishments in the form of terracotta plaques may have been added later in the Gupta period.<sup>156</sup>

The multi-storeyed structure at ACII again is a massive one with many similarities with the previous structure. This structure again has five receding quadrangular terraces and again like the ACI structure, there are ruined buttress walls, which are visible on the three sides of the platform. The cells thus formed are filled with debris. Another noticeable similarity is the central projection on each side of the lowest platform and a provision for a shrine on each of the four corners thereby, conforming to the *triratna* and *pancayatna* pattern. There is a long flight of steps to the left indicating the entrance to the shrine.

The apsidal structure at ACIII lies immediately to the east of the storeyed temple. The whole complex is remarkable for its orientation. Unlike the structure in ACI and II, which have an east-west orientation, the apsidal shrine is marked by a north-south orientation. The close end of the apse further indicated that the entrance faced the south. Towards the southeast of the enclosure, there is a circular base of a structure, probably a base of a stupa. A circular line of bricks towards the southwest indicates the position of the matching structure on the opposite to provide symmetry. There is also a monastic establishment on the northeast corner of the complex, which consists of small rooms with one door each. Apart from these structures there are some

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<sup>156</sup> Shrimali, K.M: *History of The Pāncālas*; p-149



rectangular shrines as well. Of the four three face the west and one east, and from the size of the bricks used it is probable that they can be assigned a post Gupta chronology.

At Sonkh remains of two apsidal temples have been unearthed both belonging to the Kuṣāṇa period. The Apsidal Temple No.1 is comparatively small although it was often renovated, reconstructed and also enlarged. Also the walls of this temple were only plastered and not artistically decorated, but in the filling debris of the upper Kuṣāṇa levels fragments of Kuṣāṇa stone reliefs and railings were found again and again. It was assumed that these fragments could not have been brought from far and investigation led to the discovery of the Apsidal Temple no.2. This temple experienced two main periods of religious use, in the first not a single object has been found but the second period has yielded considerable cultural material. These include architectural pieces of the southern gate with the bottom lintel depicting a Nāga court scene, the voluted end pieces showing a Makara with a Nāga as his playmate, and the cubic block with two intertwined three-headed cobras. Near to the gate was found the pillar fragment with a Nāgarāja under a seven-headed cobra hood in the medallion. In the north, west of the stairway the stump of a Nāga image stood in situ.<sup>157</sup>

The Nāga context is also indicated from the terracotta material found, that includes a Nāga hood to which a hollow face and a hand holding a flask fit in size indicating to rather large terracotta Nāga figure. Five fragments of terracotta snakes speak in addition to the frequency and popularity of Nāga

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<sup>157</sup> Härtel, H: *Excavations at Sonkh*; pp- 425

figure at the site. By the accumulation of Nāga figures it has become quite evident that the second period of the Apsidal Temple No.2 was dedicated to the Naga cult. The chronology of the temple is ascertained on the basis of a) the size of the bricks, b) stylistic features of finds and c) two especially located copper coins. All this evidence points out to a Kuṣāṇa origin of the temple. The two copper coins of Wima Kadphises and Kaniska I settle the date of Apsidal Temple No.2 to the beginning of the Kaniska era.<sup>158</sup>

### **Associated Finds**

In the category of associated finds, I have included those objects which were not only found in the same levels as the terracotta figurines, but also a probable connection can be drawn between the two. These objects could have been used for offerings at religious places or for household rituals and is especially true for the votive tanks and certain animal figurines.

### **Votive tanks**

Several specimens of votive tanks have been found at Ahicchatrā and Mathura along with other terracotta figurines. At Ahicchatrā most of them consist of wall enclosures with lamps and birds on the rim and dwarf musicians squatting inside the walls, with shallow cups placed in front of them. The time frame from which the first specimens start to emerge can be assigned as A.D 100-200. V.S.Agrawala is of the view that the votive tanks and model shrines from Ahicchatra suggest Parthian and Indo-Parthian analogues. He brings to light the fact that the Ahicchatrā types of votive tanks have been discovered at the Scytho-Parthian city of Taxila. The Indo-Parthian types consist of wall

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<sup>158</sup> Härtel, H: *Excavations at Sonkh*; p- 427

enclosures with lamp at four corners, birds perched on the walls and a figurine of Mother Goddess installed under the shrine in the enclosure. The presence of the Mother Goddess figure convinces Agrawala that the worship of the Mother Goddess was introduced by Hellenized Parthians into Gandhara and which from there spread into Northern India.<sup>159</sup>

Agrawala stresses the Indo-Parthian connection by drawing attention to the drummers found inside the votive tanks from Ahicchatrā being similar to those in the Parthian votive tanks. Although the similarity between the Parthian votive tanks from Taxila and those found at Ahicchatrā can be accepted, the Mother Goddess theory seems too far-fetched. Moreover the Ahicchatra votive tanks have no specimens of female figures seated in them. Such specimens with Mother Goddess are found at Mathura instead. The musicians inside the Ahicchatrā votive tanks resemble the dwarf musicians unearthed from the site belonging Period IV. The figures have triangular faces, pointed chin, incised lozenge eyes and a short skullcap and hold a musical instrument, usually a drum under the arm.

Mathura has yielded a number of votive tanks of different varieties. Votive tanks from Mathura cover a wide span in chronology, starting as early as the Mauryan period, but the bulk of them come from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. (from the Mitra period) many of the finds from Sonkh have been characterized by Härtel into separate categories.

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<sup>159</sup> Agrawala, V.S: "Terracotta Figurines From Ahicchatrā."; pp- 125-126

1. Round wheel-made bowl, with extended rim and an arbitrary number of lamps applied to it
2. Rectangular or square water tank with birds and lamps upon the rim and with an integrated building placed on the platform, which is supported by pillars and can be reached by a staircase. On the ground figures of snake, fish or frog is applied.
3. Single type of tank with houses built on the court.
4. Round vessel with or without lamps on the rim, with a ladder applied to the inner wall and with snake, frog or fish depicted on the ground
5. Rectangular tank with Mother Goddesses seated along the inner wall carrying a child in their arm and a bowl in their lap
6. Round, wheel made bowl with four birds on the rim and snake and frog on the ground. No ladder
7. Rectangular tank with a spout, three ladders on the inner wall and a snake applied to the ground.<sup>160</sup>

Most of these tanks were intended, to be filled with water and others have lamps that could be lit and probably were used as votive offerings at home or at a shrine. The different variety of tanks could probably indicate their uses at different occasions or at different shrines. Their exact find spots with regard to their corresponding architectural structures are not know but it is possible that some of the anthropomorphic terracotta figurines and animal figurines could accompany these tanks as votive offerings.

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<sup>160</sup> Härtel, H: *Excavations at Sonkh*; p- 195

### **Animal Figurines**

Finds of terracotta animals pervades archaeological material from Mathura and Ahicchatrā. As many as 234 terracotta animal figurines have been recorded in the collection of the Central Antiquity Section (CAS), of the Archaeological Survey of India. Out of the total of the identifiable figures 85 % are of only three animals viz. elephant bull and horse of which 61,60 and 30 specimens respectively are available. However the other specimens are very varied and are manifestations of carnivorous, aquatic and domestic animals like, lion, tiger, snake, tortoise, crocodile etc. to name a few. Most of the figurines are hand modelled, however in a particular example of an elephant figurine, the body is hollow and wheel made as the fragment indicated wheel marks. The other parts of the body like the legs, face etc. are hand modelled and stuck on later<sup>161</sup>.

The animal figurines from Mathura are also numerous. Härtel discusses the figurines unearthed from Sonkh in detail. The excavations have yielded a total of 306 animal figurines and fragments of such. Here too the figurines of the humped bull, horse and elephant are the largest in number, amounting to 91, 65 and 46 respectively. Other animals, which are found, are monkey, birds, dog, snake, camel, deer, buffalo, boar, lion and ram.<sup>162</sup> Though it is tempting to attribute religious significance to these objects, like considering the bull as the *Nandi* of Śiva or the tiger to be associated with Durgā, most of the animals were probably, used as toys by children. It is possible that some of the animal

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<sup>161</sup> Shrimali, K.M: *History of The Pāncālas*; pp 152-153

<sup>162</sup> Härtel, H: *Excavations at Sonkh*; p- 163

figurines could be used as religious offerings at shrines or included in household rituals. The religious nature of the bull is well attested from sites outside Mathura. Also a considerable number of Naga terracotta figurines have been recovered from the Apsidal temple no: 2 (Naga hoods comprising of 4-5 snake bodies, head of cobras and other snakes). Animal figurines are also used as decorative motifs, like the Makara, elephant and birds that have been portrayed on various plaques as decorative motifs in the background from Mathura and Ahicchatra.

### **Ring Stones**

Ring stones are, perhaps, considered the most important archaeological material for the study of Goddess worship. They are found in large numbers from Indus valley sites and throughout north India in subsequent periods. Patliputra and Kaushambi are known to have yielded greatest number of these objects so far. The finds from Mathura are very limited. All of them are carved with elaborate decorations comprising, trees creepers and lotuses, as well as female figures.<sup>163</sup> It is generally held by scholars that these ring stones were evidence for goddess worship and therefore the figures depicted on them are those of Mother Goddesses. It is rather difficult to comment on the above perception, as the other uses to which these were used cannot be determined, and the connection with goddess worship cannot be ruled out.

As far as the evidence regarding the place of production and distribution of the terracotta objects are concerned, there is little that can be said. Vidula

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<sup>163</sup> Agrawala, P.K: 1979;“ The Early Indian Mother Goddess Votive Discs”; *East and West*, Vol 29; No 1-4; pp 75-111

Jayaswal shows that the production centres for ritual figurines, in the present day areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar invariably continued to be located with the Kumhara-tolis- the residential areas of potter communities. These tolis are usually situated at the out skirts of large settlements.<sup>164</sup> An archaeological precedent, however, for this ethnographic situation is absent. Any single centre or workshop area of pottery production converging on the residential areas of potters, have not been recognized so far from any ancient habitation in the Ganga valley. The reasons may be that the archaeological ruins of such concentration would be represented by equipment of a very general and perishable material. Clay lumps, ash pits and potsherds from kiln remains may not form a distinctive or recognizable pattern to archaeologists. However one such pit with layers of pots and terracotta fragments have been unearthed from Ahicchatrā. Jayaswal feels that this pit represents similarities with present day potter kilns and pits from archaeological horizons. Careful analysis and minute contextual recording of actual articles and comparisons with accumulation debris in and around such pits may help one to interpret the nature of terracotta producing workshops of the ancient period<sup>165</sup>.

However the structural remains and the associated finds like votive tanks and animal figurines have shed valuable light on the role of terracotta art in Mathura and Ahicchatrā. As mentioned earlier some scholars are of the view that terracotta as a medium was employed to represent the religious beliefs of

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<sup>164</sup> Jayaswal, Vidula & Krishna Kalyan: *An Ethno-archeological View of Indian Terracottas...*; p 142

<sup>165</sup> Jayaswal, Vidula & Krishna Kalyan: *An Ethno-archeological View of Indian Terracottas...*; p 143

the folk and tribal population and the mainstream religion was always represented in stone architecture and sculptures. The terracotta figurines were therefore seen as representing folk cults and tribal practices. On the basis of the data presented in the previous and the present chapter this assumption can be challenged. Terracotta sculptures from both Mathura and Ahicchatrā have numerous representations of Brahmanical goddesses like Durgā in her Mahisāsūrmardini form and other Gods of the pantheon – Surya, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Kartikkeya etc., most of these sculptures are not crude specimens, on the other hand the quality of these sculptures represents the high degree of artistic achievements in technique and style. The workmanship is extremely fine and the quality of these sculptures are comparable to the exquisite stone sculptures. Moreover the terracotta sculptures run parallel to that of stone and in most cases the deities represented are the same, it cannot be argued that the former preceded the latter which then was an improvement on the terracotta art.

To further the argument, attention may be drawn to the finds from the remains of the temples from Mathura and Ahicchatrā. The Śiva temple at ACI at Ahicchatrā has yielded numerous terracotta plaques depicting scenes related to the mythology of lord Śiva. The plaques are of great interest for their subject matter pertaining to the life of Siva. His exploits as gathered from the surviving specimens reveal a full-fledged development of Śaivite mythology. To give a few examples the plaques depict the theme of Siva destroying the sacrifice of Dakṣa Prajāpati, his father-in-law, the holocaust wrought there by his playful *gaṇas*, his assumption of the terrific form of the *Bhairava*, his peripatetic aspect with the begging bowl in his hand, his dalliances with



Pārvati and finally his reposeful ascetic form as *Dakṣīnamurti*, the lord of Yoga and divine wisdom. Two life size images of Gangā and Yamunā have also been recovered from the temple, the plaques being installed in the niches flanking the main steps leading to the upper terrace of the Śiva temple in the site ACI. Terracotta heads of Śiva and Pārvati are also recovered from the temple in ACI. These two figures are the most charming example of terracotta specimens from Ahicchatrā.<sup>166</sup>

The terracotta remains from the apsidal temple No: 2 at Mathura are also numerous and have been discussed earlier. The presence of a strong Nāga cult in Mathura can be attributed to other evidence as well. An inscription incised at the back of a Nāga image unearthed from Chargaon in Mathura district records the donation of *Puṣkarnis* i.e. lotus tanks, and gardens for the Nāgas and that a Nāga image was set up in this tank. The numerous varieties of votive tanks unearthed from Sonkh probably were also used as offerings to such shrines.

What really emerges out of this data is the multiple levels at which terracotta art functioned at the two sites. The leading Brahmanical deities in temples have been fashioned in terracotta, along with other objects like votive tanks and animal figurines that could have been utilized for religious offerings at regional shrines. What is more important is the existence and importance of these local and regional cults that are dismissed by some scholars as mere tribal and folk cults of lesser importance when compared to the larger tradition of Brahmanical Gods and divinities. The Nāga cult is one such example. The

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<sup>166</sup> Agrawala, V.S: "Terracotta Figurines From Ahicchatrā.."pp 167-168

Naga cult was considered as a mere folk cult practiced in a mere primitive surroundings by the various tribal people, but the existence of Nāga images and temple from Mathura forces one to reconsider this. Moreover the architectural design of the temple and the quality of sculptures bring to light the significance and nature of this worship. A similar cult can probably be attributed to the Yaksās, the images of whom have been found at Mathura and Ahicchatrā. However we do not find any buildings associated with them, probably because the Yaksā images were placed in an altar under a tree that was sacred to them. Many more regional cults involving local rituals would have existed in the two regions. The literary text like the *Arthasatra* acknowledges the presence of *desādevatas* or *desādaivatas*, which refers to the tutelary deity of a region or a kingdom. Similarly there is also the reference to the *nagardevata* or the deity of the city and it is mentioned that their temples are to be located in the northern part of the city. Kautilya also acknowledges the existence of local rituals and means of worship at these temples and the fact that people stuck to the beliefs and practices that they were accustomed to<sup>167</sup>. These beliefs and rituals would have been practiced at Mathura and Ahicchatrā as well at the local shrines and temples mentioned above.

The terracotta figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatra are an important component of these local and regional cults. It is therefore not possible to tear them out of their chronological and spatial contexts and interpret their nature

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<sup>167</sup> Kangle, R.P: *The Kautilya Arthasāstra; Part III; A Study*; Bombay; University of Bombay; p 157-158

and meanings. While studying the anthropomorphic terracotta figurines from the two regions, it is not possible to ignore the other associated finds like the animal figurines, votive tanks, ring stones etc. only when these terracotta objects are studied as a whole and are placed in their proper regional contexts that their nature and function can be determined.

## CONCLUSION

What has been done in this present study is to explore the methodology through which archaeological data can be explored from different perspectives. Confining this exercise to the study of terracotta objects from the region of Mathura and Ahicchatrā, I have argued that the earlier studies regarding these objects have been one sided and therefore do not fully explain the nature and function of these figurines. This has been especially true for the female terracotta figurines from Mathura and Ahicchatrā, and from other sites of the Ganga valley as well, that have all been classified as Mother Goddesses.

What also emerges from the study is that this one sided perception is not due to the personal whims of scholars studying them but a result of the general trend in which the studies on religion and archaeology have taken place. As I argue, the beginnings of the studies in religion were largely based on the religious textual sources, and there is no dearth of such source material for studying ancient religion in India. The role of archaeology in these studies was almost negligent. In the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when archaeology entered this realm of religious studies in India, it was largely to corroborate the information that the texts provided. The archaeological data was therefore fitted into the scheme of events presented by literary sources. Studies on religion of ancient India no doubt utilized archaeological data while tracing the developments in religion but placed it subservient to and interpreted it in light of the literary sources. The female terracotta figurines from the various sites of the Ganga valley suffered this fate, and keeping in with the celebration

of the goddess cult in the *Purāṇic* literature, most of the figurines were considered to be prehistoric manifestations of divinities that later emerged as Brahmanical goddesses. The primacy given to textual data in the identification of these figurines was coupled by the cross-cultural connections. This connection between the terracotta figurines from the Indian subcontinent and those found elsewhere in Europe and Asia, was established on the basis of the supposed similar physical characteristics of the two groups of terracottas, and therefore their nature and function would be similar was only obvious.

The primacy given to the texts as opposed to archaeological data was also due to the perception of archaeology as a discipline. The basic facts of history, the historical framework, and the important questions about the past were all established by historians from the written sources. Although modest beginnings were made in the field of archaeology in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries most excavations were often focused on places mentioned in the written sources. The region of Mathura and Ahicchatrā also commanded attention due to similar reasons. Also the interests in archaeological data was motivated by antiquarian interests and the remains from both these regions were treated as nothing more than exotic antiquities. The role of archaeology in the reconstruction of the past was restricted to presentation- it provided the objects which illustrated the pages of history.

I have in my study traced the changing nature and role of archaeology in the study of history and argued that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the discipline of archaeology made progress and that archaeological data was used in studying the settlement patterns, chronological and cultural sequence of sites. The

cultural material, which included the terracotta figurines however, was used to address issues regarding religion, art and architecture and studied in association with textual data. In most of the archaeological reports of the period these objects are not reported in association of their position at the site or region, but are grouped separately and discussed in isolation. Obviously it was assumed that these objects would not be helpful in studying the history of the region per se and attention was accorded to other finds like inscriptions and in general to the layers of settlements that revealed the antiquity of the site.

The changing perception of the discipline of archaeology and as a result, the changing nature of the excavations and collection of data has been a major impediment to my study of terracotta objects from Mathura and Ahicchatra. The perception of these figurines as goddesses and their interpretation in light of textual data by historians has further made scholars neglect the regional contexts of these terracotta objects. The lack of information in the excavation reports regarding the description and find spots of the terracotta objects, that were not deemed necessary by archaeologists and historians, poses a formidable challenge in studying the terracottas in their regional context.

But despite such lacunae, I feel that the given data can be reassessed and reinterpreted and this one sided perception be questioned. I have questioned the Mother Goddess category that has been imposed on the female terracotta figurines and have sought to study these figurines in the context of their region and in association with other terracotta objects found with them. It is evident from a close scrutiny of data that the terracotta figurines from both Mathura

and Ahicchatrā are too diverse, in terms of technique and style, to be clubbed under a single category of Mother Goddess. I have highlighted this diversity that has been overlooked by scholars who characterize them as simple and archaic figurines.

The second issue that comes forth is the importance of the region, in the study of the terracottas. Most scholars have pulled these terracotta figurines out of their regional contexts and interpreted them in light of textual sources or by making cross-cultural connections. I have tried to stress in my study that the nature and function of these terracotta objects is clear only when they are studied in relation to the surroundings in which they have been unearthed. The identity of these terracottas is established by the socio-religious and cultural dynamics of a region. The differences could be discerned in the terracottas belonging to different regions. Due to limitations of time and space my study concerns itself with only the two regions, Mathura and Ahicchatrā. But I am certain that if one compares the terracotta figurines of the various sites in the Ganga valley, regional differences in style and technique would be enormous. Moreover it is evident that when the terracotta figurines are studied in association with other terracotta objects, like the animal figurines and votive tanks etc., their nature and function becomes clearer. I have tried to show in my study that there is a clear presence of very strong regional cults at both Mathura and Ahicchatrā, the structural remains and terracotta objects from the two regions are a witness to this. I suggest that it seems plausible to view the terracotta objects in association with these cults and local practices, rather than anything outside it.

What then is required is the way in which one looks at the available data. Despite the lacunae and shortcomings in the archaeological reports, much can be conclusively inferred if one approaches the issue with a different set of questions in mind. The aim of this archaeological study is not to study a limited section of the archaeological data in isolation, but to take into the consideration the whole of it and relate it to its spatial, chronological and regional context. A similar approach can result in a better understanding and interpretation of archaeological data and archaeology as a discipline can be more effectively used in reconstructing the history of a region.



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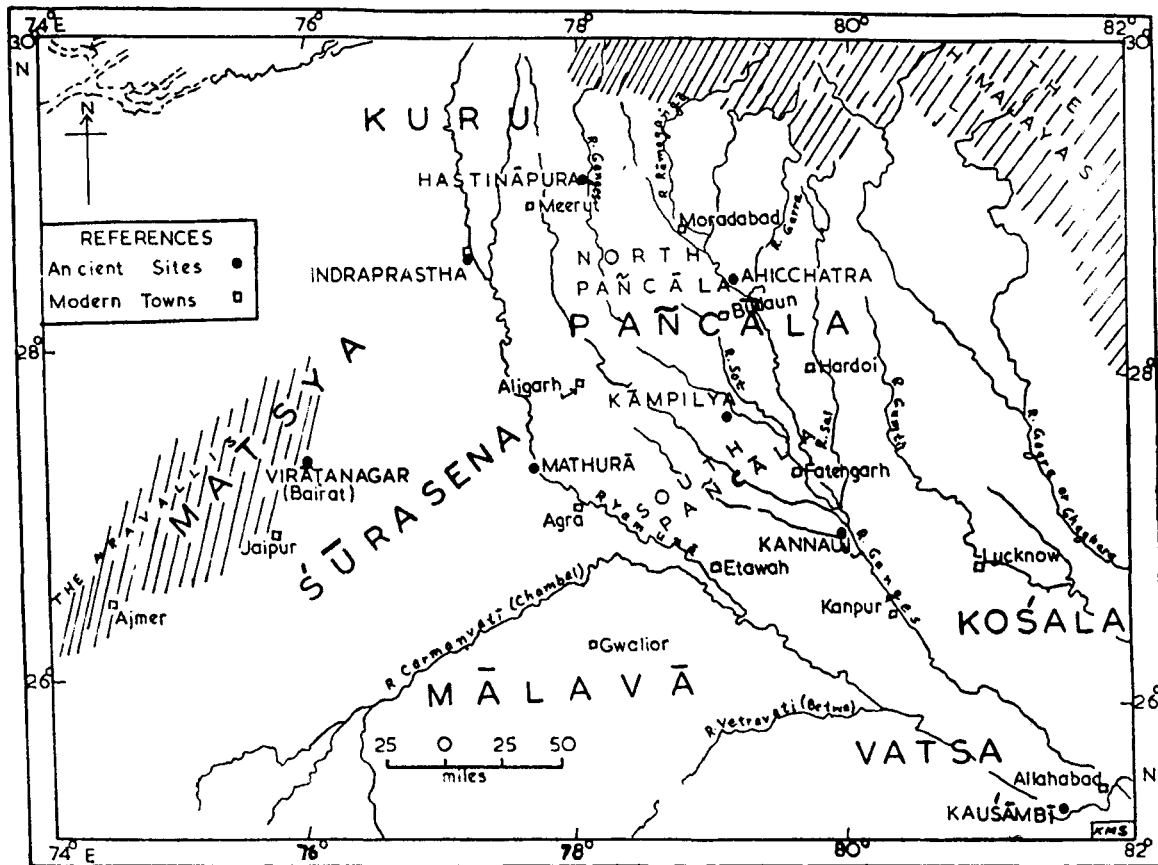
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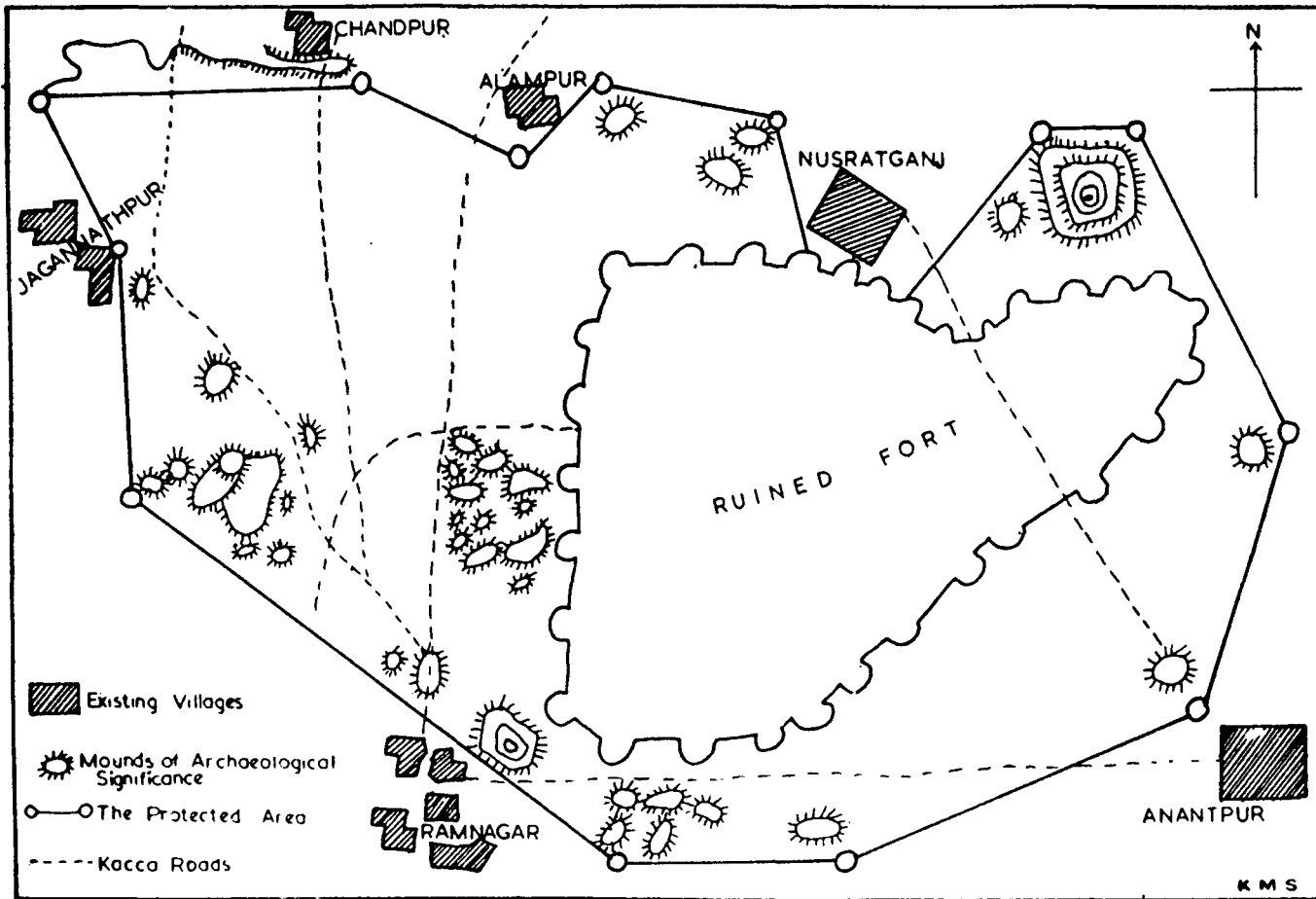
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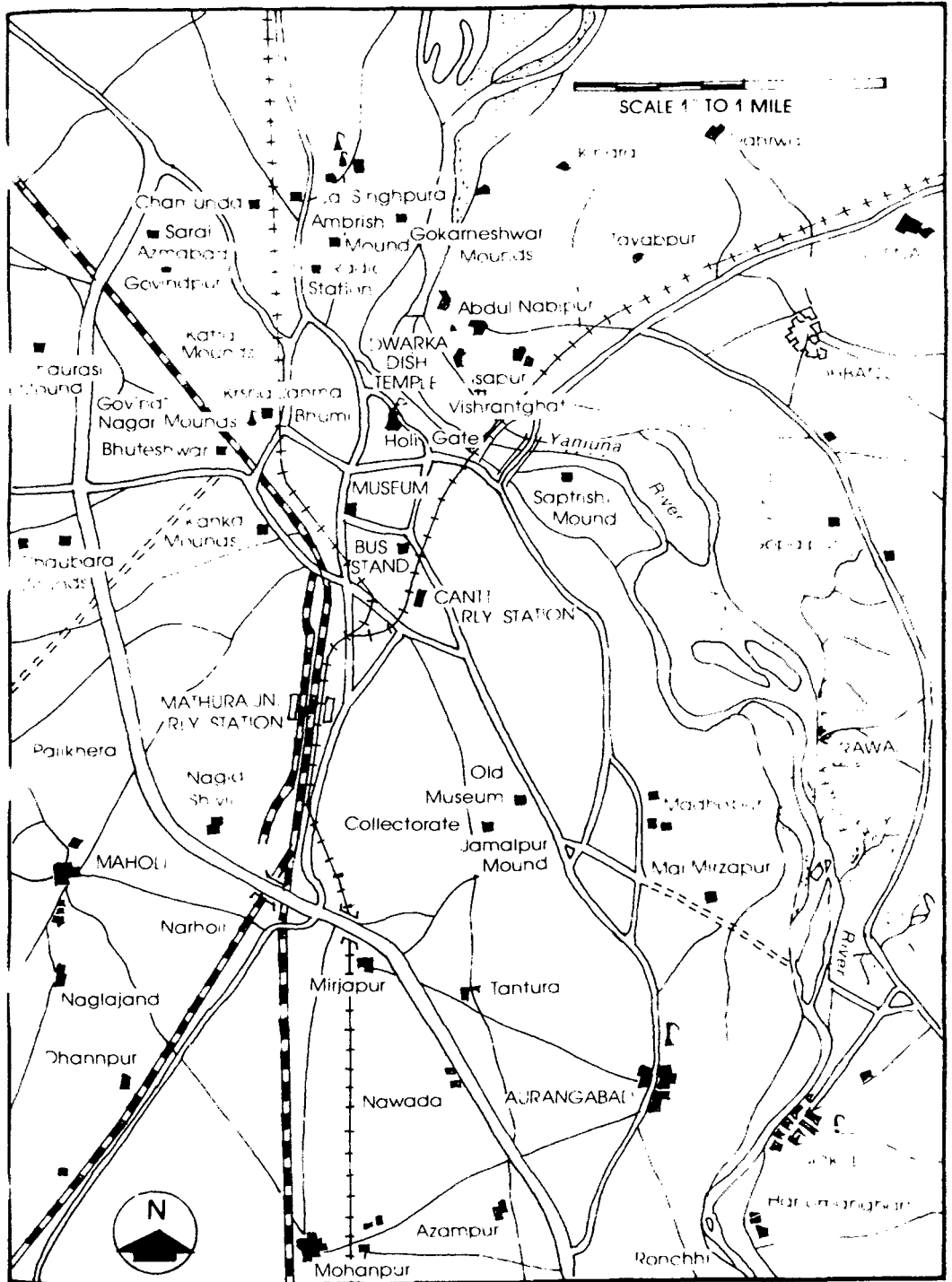
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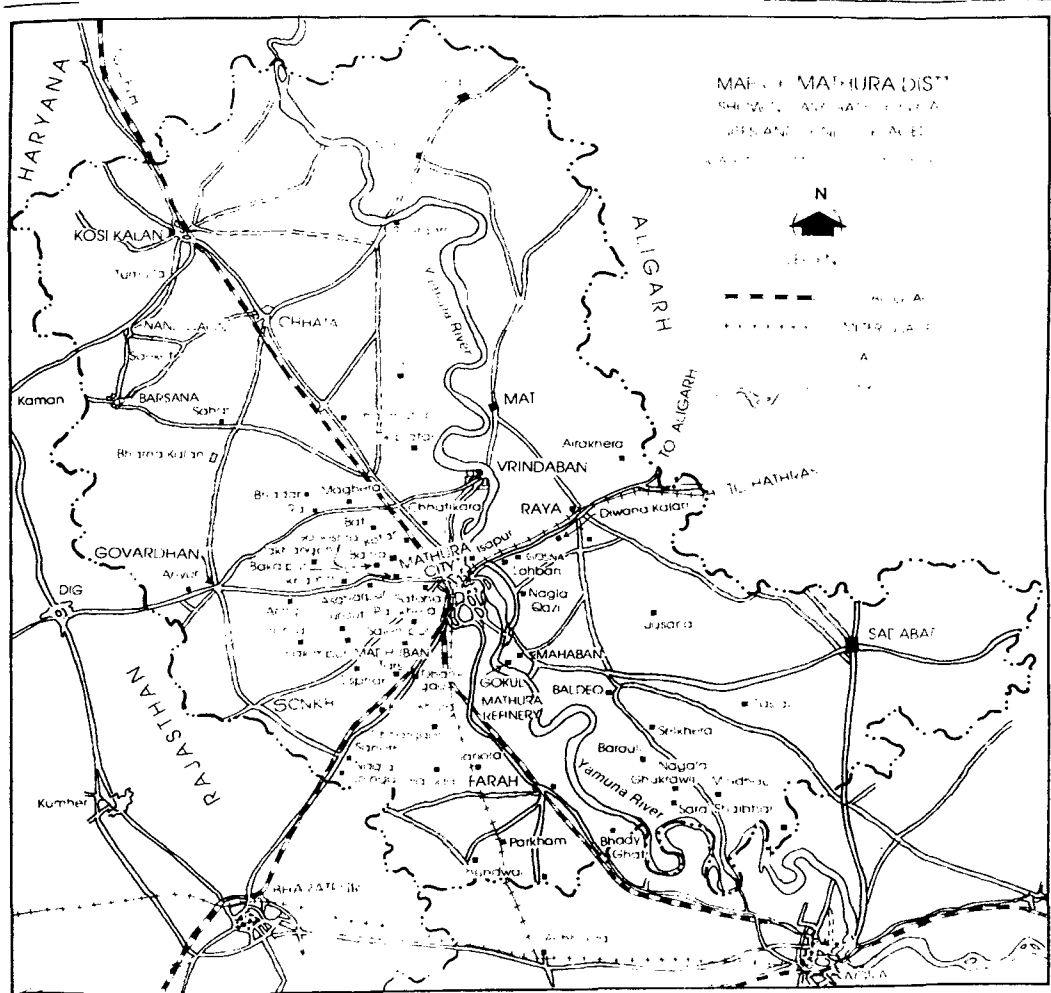
MAP 1



MAP 2



MAP 3



MAP 4





PLATE I





PLATE II





PLATE III





PLATE IV





PLATE V





PLATE VI





PLATE VII





PLATE VIII





PLATE IX





PLATE X





PLATE XI





PLATE XII





PLATE XIII





PLATE XIV



PLATE XV





PLATE XVI



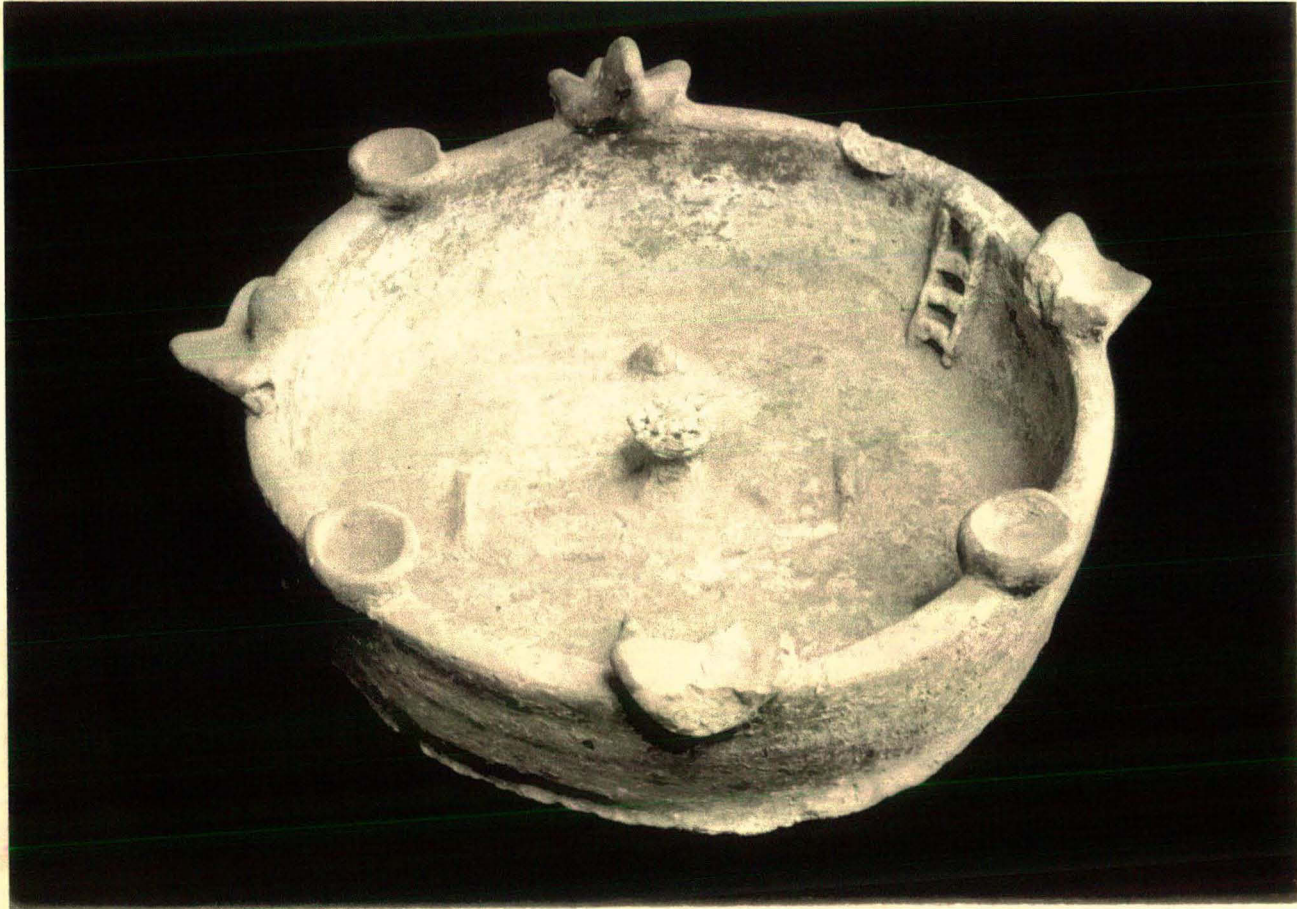


PLATE XVII





PLATE XVIII





PLATE XIX





PLATE XX





PLATE XXI





PLATE XXII





PLATE XXIII





PLATE XXIV





PLATE XXV





PLATE XXVI

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PLATE XXVII