

‘Purana Quila’ Beholds Genesis of India History

The 'Old Fort' on the Yamuna in New Delhi, off Delhi-Mathura-Agra road, built by Humayun and with standing monuments built by Sher Shah, situated on a mound on which stood the village Inderpat till the beginning of this century, identified with Indraprastha, the headquarters of the Pandavas of Mahabharata fame.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has found a 12th-century Vishnu idol among several other interesting artefacts during its ongoing excavation at the Purana Quila. The 18-cm-tall stone idol dates back to the Rajput period. The idol, which has conch and a chakra (wheel) symbols associated with Lord Vishnu was found at the southeastern corner of the Purana Quila excavation site. However, former Bharat Kala Bhawan Museum Director D.P. Sharma, an expert in assessing the period of sculptures, is disputing the claim. Dr. Sharma is convinced that the idol dates to 16th Century during the Mughal emperor Akbar's reign. "By various historical records, Akbar's secular credentials have been established. The discovery of this idol at the excavation site is testament to the fact that Akbar used to patronise Hindu Gods and Goddesses,"

The ASI started excavating the site last month after almost four decades. The fort saw excavation for the first time in 1955 by famed archaeologist BB Lal. Later, the ASI had carried out excavation during 1969-73 too. The earlier excavations had brought to light artefacts from as far back as 3rd century BC.

This site has had continuous cultural deposit from the Mauryan to the Mughal period. The discoveries over the past month have reiterated the fact that there has always been habitation here during the Gupta and Kushan period.

Between 1969-70 and 1972-3 the ASI conducted large-scale excavations here revealing remains of eight. Periods, Period I, Mauryan (4th -3rd century B.C.); Period II, Sunga (2nd -1st century B.C.); Period III, Saka-Kushan (1st -3rd century AD.); Period IV, Gupta (4th -6th century); Period V, post-Gupta (7th -9th century); Period VI, Rajput (10th - 12th century); Period VII, Sultanate (13th -15th century); and Period VIII, Mughal (16th -19th century).

The current excavation has also yielded Kushan-era (1st century BC) pottery and toys along with a medieval-era copper coin, terracotta figurines of animals and humans from both the Rajput and Kushan era, said Vasant Swarnakar, ASI's Delhi circle chief.

The excavation is being carried out to verify and establish if there was a presence of PGW (painted grey ware). The Purana Quila mound contains remains of a continuous cultural habitation starting from Mauryan period (3rd century BC) to the Mughal period. This is believed to be the site of Indraprastha related to the Mahabharat.

Along with the ASI team, also working on the site are 18 students of the Institute of Archaeology, an ASI-run educational institution. Another reason why the ASI is re-digging the site is, unlike previous times, the agency also plans to leave the excavation trenches open albeit covered with sheds to turn it into an on-site museum to showcase the different cultural habitations. Considering that Delhi is vying for a space on the list of UNESCO's 'World Heritage City', the museum will be a valuable addition to Delhi's pitch for the coveted spot.