

# Identification of Setavyā, the Ancient City of Kosala with Siswania and its Terracotta Art

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Siswania, lat. 26° 45'N and long. 82° 46'E is the name of a site having a series of mounds on the left bank of Kuwano or Kuwana river, a tributary of river Sarayu, in the Basti district of Uttar Pradesh. The site extends from Pachisa (Tādijot-Pachisā) village towards its north upto Deoraon village towards north-west and the Śiva temple of Bhadesarnath (Bhadreśvaranātha) is also situated closeby where the Kuwano river takes a northerly course. The distance of Siswania from the District Court of Basti is about 6 kilometres in the south-easterly direction and the site is located close to the Basti-Mahuli road towards its south-west. From village Dharmupur near this road or from Sonupar a little ahead on the road the site situated within one kilometre can be approached through and amidst country joining groves and fields.

The site was explored by Durgavati Tripathi and C. Mani in 1944. In course of explorations nearly two thousand ancient coins comprising punch marked, uninscribed copper cast, local and Ayodhya varieties, Indo-Greek and Kushan issues were collected. A large number of semi-precious stone beads, copper objects, glass beads and bangles, terracotta human and animal figurines, terracotta toy-carts, pestles, stamps and other objects were found. The discovery of a multi-socket terracotta coin-mould made the explorer C. Mani believe that the site represented a Maurya-Śunga wharf town.

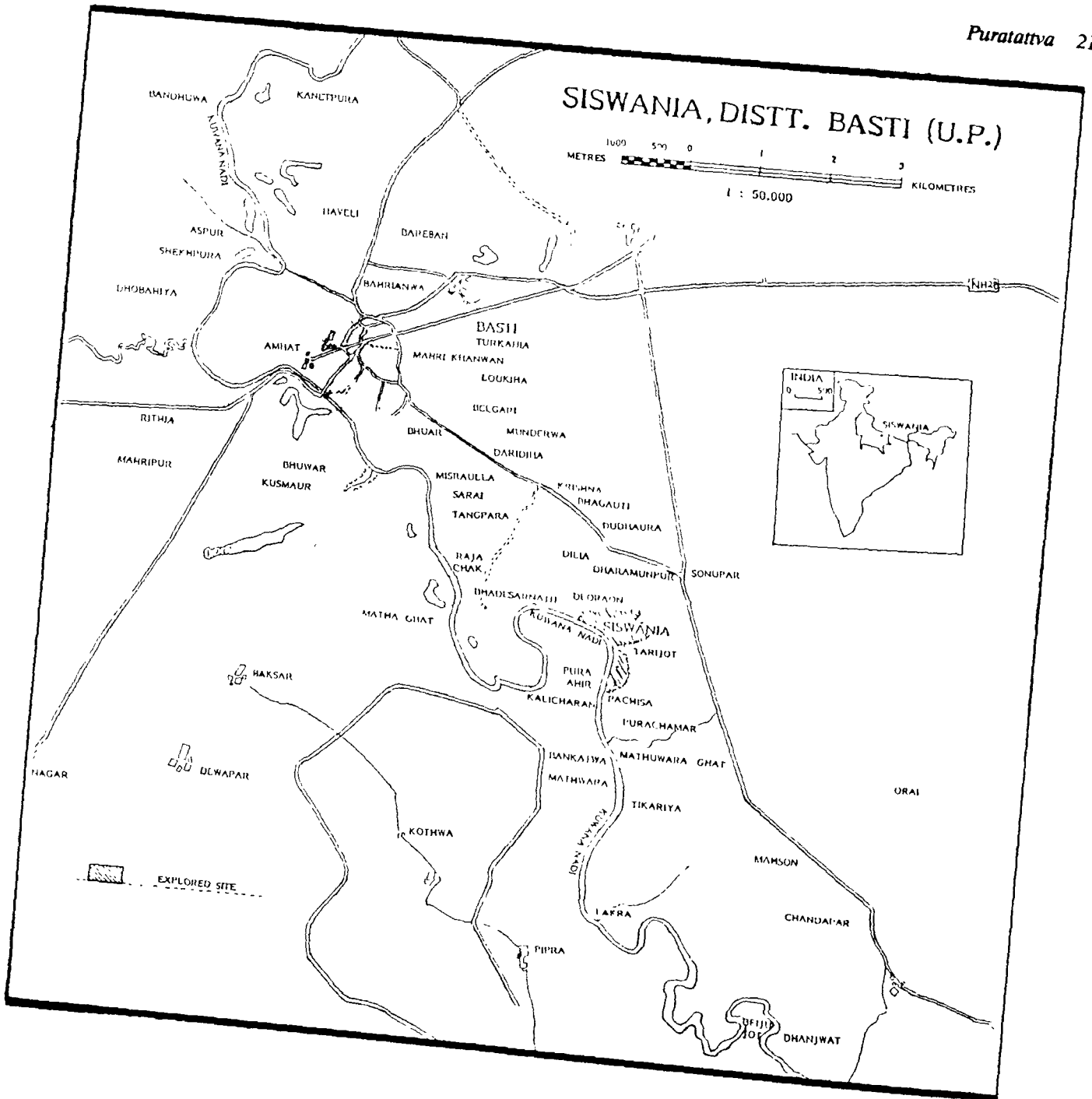
In 1950, Mrs Tripathi presented a fine Śunga terracotta female plaque to the State Museum, Lucknow (Tripathi 1967). Mrs Tripathi wrote articles in 'Dharmadūta' (Mahabodhi Society, Sarnath) and 'Madhyama Mārga' (Buddha Vihara, Lucknow) identifying the Nagaraka nigama, Sundarikā river and Sundarika Bhāradwāja's hermitage on it referred to in the Pali Buddhist texts. She has identified the Sundarikā with the modern Kuwano (Tripathi 1966).

The site extending between Deoraon and Siswania and Dharmupur and Deoraon-Siswania was revisited by the author during 1975 and 1978. It was observed that the main site has an average height of above 20 metres. But as a whole the Deoraon-Siswania-Pachisa area makes a single archaeological complex alongwith the mounds on the river. The antiquarian remains in forms of Northern Black polished Ware and other associated ceramics were noticed at Dharmupur, but perhaps the site there might have been levelled earlier for cultivation.

Two clay sealings of C. 3rd-2nd century B.C. with legends 'Dhamalatasā' (Dharmalātasya) and 'Idadevasā' (Indradevasya), the former stamped with swastika symbol and the latter having ujjain symbol on it have been published by the author (1982).

There is no doubt that the site represents a large city of the pre-Christian era. As compared to Saheth-Maheth or Śrāvasti, the capital of Kosala in Buddha's time, representing the city site of Maheth and the monastic site of Jetavana as Saheth, the present complex has also two parts. the larger Siswania-Pachisa representing the city-site and the smaller Deoraon representing the monastic establishment. This is evident also from the etymological derivation of the

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name from Devārāma. The river Kuwano also played an important role in the urban development of the city-site, particularly, in transportation of merchandise and till recently mercantile barges were of common sight on this river.

The cultivation on the site has resulted in large scale levelling of the area. During the explorations of 1975 and 1978, ashy pits adjoining some burnt portions of earth looking like furnaces and large green patinated sheets of copper were noticed at the northern slope of the main mound where Rāma-Jānakī temple is in existence on the top of it. The vertical natural section towards the river showed a number of cultural assemblage and also evidence of large scale burning in one of the upper layers. The river too has cut a portion of the mound during floods in the past. The approximate maximum length of the site is about 1500 meters in north-west to south-east direction and about 600 metres width at the maximum.

A variety of shapes of pottery common in the area has been found at site; it comprised of grey ware, fine red ware, red slipped ware, chocolate slipped ware, black and red ware, black slipped ware, coarse red ware, Northern Black Polished Ware with sprinklers and other shapes in red polished ware.

#### Identification of Setavyā

The Nagaraka nigama of the Buddha's time was very positively across the river beside Chando tal at the place called Nagara. The village Pokhanni (Pushkarīṇī) is located near Chando and was the seat of royal power till the Revolt of 1857. According to the *Sundarikabhāradvājasutta* the Buddha is said to have stayed among the people of Kosala on the bank of the river Sundarikā and had discussions with the Brāhmaṇa Sundarika-Bhāradvāja who resided there. The place seems to be Mahason or Mahāśrama on the left bank of kuwano and about 4 kilometres from Siswania on Basti-Mahuli road. Opposite Mahason and on the other side of the road is village Orai from where some excellent Kushan terracottas were found in the past by the explorer.

The famous *Pāyāsīsutta* of the *Dighanikāya* tells about the discourse by Kumāra Kassapa to Pāyāsi, the Brāhmaṇa chieftain of Setavyā on rebirth and Karma. In the introductory paragraph it has been said that Kumāra Kassapa who was once touring on foot in Kosala together with 500 monks stayed at Setavyā which was a city under Kosala. And there the venerable Kumāra Kassapa dwelt to the north of Setavyā town in *Simsapavana* or the grove of *Śimsapā* tree (*Dalbergia sisu*).

The word *Pāyāsi* seems to have left its trail in village Pachisā where Pāyāsi resided in the southern part of the city and since his palace was located there the village which flourished was named after it. Siswania can be identified with *Simsapavana* which is still located towards north of Pachisa. Perhaps the place in the *Simsapavana* where Kumāra Kassapa stayed and preached *Pāyāsīsutta* is represented by Deoraon (Devārāma) where in the following years monastery (ārāma) was established. Setavyā has been described as a place teeming with life, with much grassland and wood-land and with water and corn. King Pasenadi (Prasenajit) of Kosala had granted to Pāyāsi the domain as a royal gift with power to rule over it as if he was the king.

The Sutta adds: 'Then the Brahmins and householders of Setavyā, coming out from the town in companies and bands from each district so that they could be counted, went by the north gate, to the Simsapā-tree Grove'. They wanted to discuss and exchange views with Kumāra Kassapa and Pāyāsi has been described to have wondered about people going towards *simsapavana* when he observed them from the upper terrace of his house. After having been informed about the news by his doorkeeper, he sent words to them to wait for him for paying a visit to the wandering lord. Later he discussed with him in the company of brāhmaṇas and house holders.

In a passage in the *Ariguttara-Nikāya* it is told that on a certain occasion when Buddha, 'the Exalted One was journeying along the highroad between Ukkatṭhā and Setabbya', the Brāhmaṇa Doṇa (Droṇa) who was also journeying along the highroad (*addhānamagga*) approached him and discussed. The highroad between Ukkatṭhā and Setavyā seems to be quite different from the highroad connecting setavyā with Śrāvastī on one hand and Kapilavastu or Kuśinagara on the other. The exact identification of Ukkatṭhā is not yet certain, but under the circumstances it might appear south-east of Siswania along-with the road leading to Mahuli. Ukkatṭhā has also been described in a Jātaka story to be connected with Vesālī and the Pali texts also refer to it in the vicinity of Ichānarigala-vanasaṇḍa and Subhagavana, constructed within an auspicious time with torches (*ukkā*) having been used at night. It had been donated as *brahmadeyya* by the king of Kosala to Pokkharasāti (Sarao 1990).

The *Vatthugāthā* of the *Pārāyanavagga* of *Sutta-Nipāta* gives the important clue about the location of Setavyā in the context of the story of Bāvārī when he despatched a group of sixteen brāhmaṇas to get answers to some metaphysical questions from Buddha. They went from a place near Assaka beside Godavari

river in the Deccan to Śrāvastī and thence to Rājagṛha to meet Buddha. They went from Śrāvastī (Sāvattihī) to Setavyā and Kapilavastu (Kapilavatthu) and then passed through Kuśinagara (Kusinārā) town and Pāvā towards Vaiśālī (Vesālī) and to the capital of Magadha-

“Bāvaram abhivādetvā Katvā Ca nam padakkhiṇam jāṭajīnadharā sabbe pakkāmuṃ uttarāmukhā, Muḷakassa Patitṭhānam purimam Māhissatim tadā Ujjeniṃ Cāpi Gonaddham Veḷisaṃ Vanasavhayaṃ, Kosambim Cāpi Sāketam Sāvattihī Ca Puruttamam Setavyam Kapilavatthum Kusinārāṃ ca mandiram. Pāvā ca bhoganagaraṃ Vesālīm Māgadham puram Pāsāṇakāṇi cetiyā ca ramaṇiyam manoramam” (1010 to 1014).

This shows that Setavyā was located on one of the then most important highways which was frequented by the Buddha himself. This again confirms that Setavyā cannot be located towards west of Śrāvastī and it must be Siswania, the place having been mentioned as *Simsapavana* in the context of Setavyā in the *Dighanikāya*.

W. Vost while identifying setavyā with *To-wai* of the Chinese travellers Fa-hian and Yuan Chwang Says ‘The Chinese pilgrims tell us that a *Stūpa* was erected over the “relics of the entire body” of Kāśyapa Buddha at a place which Fa-hian names To-Wai, and located 50 *li* to the west or according to Yuan Chwang, who does not name the town, at a distance of 16 *li* (the *Life* gives 60 *li*) to the north-west, of Śrāvastī city. Both pilgrims, therefore, agree in placing the *Stūpa* of Kāśyapa Buddha to the westward of Śrāvastī city’ (Vost 1903).

The statement of two Chinese travellers regarding distance of the place from Śrāvastī are thus quite contrary. Vost further writes - ‘To-Wai is, without a doubt, Setavyānagara, as the circumstance of the enshrining of an unbroken skeleton is “not related concerning any other Buddha” (Hardy, Manual, p. 88) except Kāśyapa. (The correct spelling should probably be kaśyapa, with the first a short.) The *Buddhavaṃśa* affirms that the Kaśyapa stūpa was located in the Sētavyāno garden in Sētavyānagaram (J.A.S. Bengal, Vol. VII, 1838, p. 797), and adds that the bones of this saint did not become disjointed even after cremation. It is remarkable that the identification of *To-Wai* with Setavyā has eluded the notice of the various translators of the itineraries of the pilgrims, and of scholars who have sifted the pilgrim’s accounts for the rich store of geographical information available. For the reasons given I disagree with Mr. Vincent Smith’s suggestion (*Remains near Kasia*, p. 4, note 3) that Setavyā will probably prove to be Sāhet Māhet.’

Vost’s all arguments in favour of Setavyā as To-Wai are flimsy. Still believing To-Wai as Setavyā,

on one hand but contrary to the Chinese accounts, he places Setavyā towards east of Śrāvastī on the basis of Pali suttas. His identification of Setavyā with Bāsedilā (about 27° 24’ N and 82° 20’ E), a site six miles east from Balrampur and seventeen miles from Saheth Maheth is based on no cogent ground. His observation that the site is a large one and has yielded plain and moulded bricks, Kushan copper coins, a few terracotta objects and is surrounded by a number of tanks except in the north does not prove that the site is Setavyā. Moreover, on hearsay, he has tried to put that Burmese travellers visit the place and that he was informed that at Palṭipur, about six miles to the south of Balrampur, some workmen chanced to encounter in an underground brick chamber a skeleton of a very tall man, which crumbled to dust on exposure to air. These seem to be mere concocted stories with no worth. The distance of Bāsedilā from Śrāvastī seems to be very less in comparison with other cities mentioned in the context of Bāvāri in Sutta Nipāta and Siswania seems to be the better choice with a location at sufficient distance from Śrāvastī, Kapilavastu and Kuśinagara on the main highway of the time.

#### Terracotta Art

Altogether there are 108 unpublished terracotta objects available at present for study. They are akin to the terracottas found from most of the contemporary Gangetic Valley sites.

They can be grouped as under:

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|--------------------------|----|
| (a) Human figurines      | 83 |
| (b) Animal figurines     | 14 |
| (c) Toy-Carts and rattle | 3  |
| (d) Utilitarian objects  | 8  |

Total

108

From the consensus of the terracottas from other sites of Ganḡā Valley the human terracotta figurines of Siswania can be grouped into two broad chronological compartments. It is not possible to date them with accuracy in the absence of excavation. The first group is represented by archaic handmade figurines datable from about 6th Century B.C. to about 2nd Century A.D. and the moulded plaques mostly depicting female figures and belonging to Maurya-Śuṅga period (3rd Century B.C. to 1st Century B.C.). The second group is represented by handmade as well as moulded human heads some of which have foreign ethnic features and ritualistic figurines and heads with tenons below.

Among the archaic crude terracottas (Pl. XV), eight types continued from Pre-Maurya times to the first two centuries of the Christian era. Among these there are three handmade flat figurines, three distinct female figurines and a head. They have extended arms and pinched bird-like face and one of the female figurines and the head appear with fan shaped headgear with a hole in the centre, meant for hanging.

The female figurines have round and pointed breasts. There are two handmade figurines with pointed headress in the style of warrior figures dated to the beginning of the christian era with goat-like faces and slit mouths. They have necklace decorated in circles in bold relief. One of them with missing arms has broken legs and two incised circles that mark its breasts to be like the musician figurines as already reported from Piprahwa-Ganwaria and other sites. The other figurine, a bust of a male, holds two objects in its hands and splashes of red slip are still seen on it. The fourth type comprises four crudely finished and moulded female figurines (one represented only by a head) with broken arms and round breasts. They wear circular ear ornaments and a figurine of a baby is seen with these at the waist. The figurines possibly represent mother goddess. In a separate moulded type plaque the female figure is shown as in the previous type alongwith a baby but in this case the arms rest at the front side of the waist. The next type is represented by a hollow cylindrical headless torso of a female figure with a baby stuck near the left breast and two more crude figures below the baby, probably depicting two animals. In the next type there are two crudely made heads, with tenons below, one with bulging eyes wearing circular ear ornaments and the eyes made out of applique method and the other with slit mouth and pointed nose with two holes. The last type is represented by a handmade female figurine with pointed breast and extended arms. It is modelled in a sitting posture.

The profusely ornamented pieces are 3rd-2nd century B.C. terracotta plaques prepared with the help of a mould; they number 17. Among these the most interesting type is one represented by three female figurines with missing heads. They are shown wearing Sāri and ornaments like girdle, necklace and bracelets. The upper half of their bodies is bare and they are seen feeding some bird, possibly a parrot, with left hand holding some fruit below the breast and the right on the waist. Folds of the sārī are shown in the most beautiful and artistic fashion. Other broken plaques mostly represent female figures with head-dress of the time. The body proportions are quite realistic. Among these, the two broken terracotta

plaques - the larger one found around 1950 and the smaller one by the author in 1975 with intact head portions are so similar that they seem to have been prepared by the same mould (Pl. XVI). The oval face with ear ornaments and well prepared hair style has the typical Śūnga feature. They possibly hold a bundle of grass on their head. There are two plaques in which only the leg portions are extant and the figures are shown wearing anklets.

There is a small male bust wearing a round hat with knob on the top. The figure is slim but the hand and other parts of the body are missing. Similar terracottas have also been reported from Purana Qila excavations, New Delhi and are on display in the Purana-Qila site- museum, but are later in date. One more broken piece resembles it in style, colour and texture but wears a round cap.

An interesting handmade head with prominent incised eyes, eye-brows, pointed nose and slit mouth with prominent cheek having a third eye on the forehead, depicted vertically may be identified with Siva.

The remaining terracotta heads datable to the first two centuries of the Christian era can be classified into eleven sub-types as under-

1. Eleven comparatively larger terracotta heads, both moulded and handmade were executed in the sculptural style of the Kushan period. Interesting among them are: one with tenon below, and depicted with open mouth, circular ear ornament and horizontal hair locks (Pl. XVII); one female head with hair gathered and dressed in circular bun-style in front the common feature of Mathura art (Pl. XXI); three female crowned heads having an ornament stuck with forehead with a jewel in the middle giving a look of side-lock (Pls XXII-XXIV); a male head with moustaches shown with incised lines and bindi on the forehead with a tenon at the back side with incised circles showing the arrangement of hair (Pl. XVIII); a male head with moustaches and crown with circular jewel ornamentation (Pl XIX); a female head with crown giving a Hellenistic look and a male head with turban (Pl. XX).

2. Nine smaller terracotta heads with thick lips and large open eyes wearing fan shaped crowns, four of them wearing a jewel ornament on forehead, one of them having dotted ornamentation below the crown.

3. One flat handmade head with vertical incised lines showing the crown and pointed eyes, nose and lips.

4. Two female terracotta heads with fan shaped crown, open eyes and auspicious mark (bindi) on forehead.

5. Two male terracotta heads, one with moustaches and other with long lips having foreign ethnic features.

6. Six moulded and handmade terracotta heads with tenons below; one of them has an auspicious mark (bindi) on forehead.

7. Three moulded female terracotta heads wearing circular ear ornaments and headdress arranged along with crown, pointed nose with nostrils and dotted decoration on forehead along with eyebrows; tenons below.

8. One male terracotta head with typical Scytho-Kushan ethnic features executed in a refined manner with tenon below and wearing the ornament stuck on forehead and front sides looking like side-locks.

9. One female terracotta head with fan shaped crown and necklace, with round face, pointed nose, open mouth and round eyes.

10. Five terracotta heads, three moulded and two handmade. One of the moulded heads has a circular ornament on forehead.

11. One female handmade head with open mouth, large eyes, pointed nose having auspicious mark (bindi) on forehead and fanshaped crown with slanting bands.

There are two crudely modelled busts of female figurines - one with pointed breasts and wearing necklace and hair arranged in the shape of bun and the other with round breasts and wearing a peculiar elongated ear ornament. Both have auspicious mark (bindi) on their foreheads.

The most interesting Kushan female bust is a 16.5 cm. high terracotta figurine modelled from all the sides with prominent eyes, lips, pointed nose and pointed breasts. It wears a fan like headgear with incised marks, circular flower shaped ear ornaments, double necklace and an ornament on the upper part of the arm in the shape of *bhujabandha*. The hair is arranged in the back side in a single tress formation.

There are altogether fourteen animal figurines - two elephants, four horses and seven bulls besides one plaque showing a seated figure looking like a monkey with folded hands holding some indistinct object. The elephants are profusely decorated with incised lines and circular ornamentation. Three of the four horses are similarly decorated and applique bands are attached for ornamentation. Among the bulls, one has a vertical hole in the centre and horizontal hole in the back. Another bull has two types of stamped decoration - one with a circle divided into four compartments and each having a dot in relief and the other with herring-bone pattern.

Among the three toy carts and rattle, one is in standard shape with holes in front and back for fixing axle for wheels. One wheel of a toy cart has also been found. The third is a broken piece of rattle with holes passing from the front to the back and through the body for the axle for fixing two wheels. This is a bird-shaped piece with swollen body having stamped decorations of sun and dots on the upper surface of its body.

Among the utilitarian objects there is a mould with oval socket in the centre, three pestles, one rectangular skin rubber with straight lines, two stamps with circular design with radiating lines and an oblong piece with three holes in a line, whose functional purpose is not clear.

It has been shown in the first section that on the basis of Pali Buddhist texts and other facts now available the modern Siswania can be identified as the ancient Setavyā. Until the site is fully excavated, archaeologists have to remain satisfied with this identification.

Analysis and evolution of the terracottas in the context of social surroundings, clay and symbolic content along with ceramic production can be possible when the site is excavated and artifacts (*vas sacra and in other forms*) are considered in the light of associated finds of stratified deposits\*.

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\* The inspiration for writing this article, I owe to my father, Shri C. Mani who has originally explored this site as far back as in 1944 with my grandmother Shrimati Durgavati Tripathi and uncle shri

C.D. Tripathi, I.A.S. I am grateful to all the above savants of archaeology for bringing this site on the archaeological map of India.

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