

Human Skeletal Remains from Rakhigarhi Transferred to Anthropological Survey of India for Advanced Scientific Research

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Human skeletal remains excavated from the archaeological site of Rakhigarhi in Haryana recently have been formally handed over by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI), a national research institute of repute under Ministry of Culture, Government of India, for detailed scientific investigation. Prof. BV Sharma, Director of AnSI said that the transfer, carried out under a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two institutions, is expected to significantly advance multidisciplinary research into one of the most important urban centres of the Indus-Saraswati Civilization.

Rakhigarhi, spread across approximately 550 hectares in Haryana, is widely recognized as the largest known settlement of the Indus-Saraswati Civilization. Archaeological excavations have revealed evidence of continuous habitation from the Early Harappan to the Mature Harappan periods, including planned settlements, drainage systems, craft production centres, trade networks, and burial grounds. During excavations conducted by ASI's Excavation Branch-II, Greater Noida, in the 2025–26 field season, archaeologists uncovered eight burials at Mound No. 7, an area previously identified as a cemetery. Three complete human skeletons, along with skeletal fragments recovered from other burials, have now been transferred to AnSI's ancient human skeletal repository and laboratory in Kolkata for detailed examination. The remaining skeletal materials obtained at these sites are also expected to be transferred in few days.



Excavation at Rakhigarhi in Haryana during 2025-2026

Several scholars in the fields of Skeletal Biology, archaeology, and Genetics welcomed the initiatives of Anthropological Survey of India in regard to the research on Indus-Saraswati Civilization. Professor Vijay Prakash, former faculty member of Andhra University, described the transfer of skeletal materials as an important step toward ensuring that biological heritage recovered through archaeological excavations is scientifically analyzed and preserved by national institutions for the benefit of future generations. Professor Udai Pratap Singh of Lucknow University similarly said the transfer marks an important milestone in strengthening India's palaeoanthropological research tradition. He noted that AnSI's expertise in human biology and osteology places it in a strong position to reconstruct aspects of population history, health, lifestyle, and cultural adaptation in the Indus Saraswati Civilization.

Researchers believe the remains present a rare opportunity to apply modern scientific techniques, including ancient DNA (aDNA) analysis, stable isotope studies, osteological assessments, palaeopathological investigations, and environmental reconstruction. These approaches are expected to provide valuable insights into ancestry, migration patterns, diet, disease prevalence, adaptation strategies, and human-environment interactions during the Harappan period. According to AnSI, the research will be conducted in collaboration with leading scientific institutions, including the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow, University College London (UCL), and a team of scholars from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) specializing in ancient DNA research. Welcoming the initiative, Padma Shri awardee Dr. Kumaraswamy Thangaraj, Senior Scientist at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, said that applying ancient DNA technology to the Rakhigarhi remains could reveal critical information about their genetic history and help scientists understand how human genomes evolved, adapted, and underwent natural selection since around 3000 BCE. Professor Gyaneshwer Chaubey of Banaras Hindu University, similarly described the collaboration as a major step forward in reconstructing the genomic history of the Harappan Civilization. He noted that integrating ancient DNA research with osteological and isotopic studies would provide important evidence regarding ancestry, health, mobility, and lifestyles of the Indus Valley population, while also helping train a new generation of Indian scientists in palaeogenomics.

Officials noted that while AnSI has maintained a long tradition of osteological research on remains recovered from Indus-Saraswati sites since its establishment in 1945, activities in this field had diminished over the years due to various challenges. In recent years, however, the institution has undertaken efforts to revive palaeoanthropological research through the formation of dedicated research teams and specialized training programmes for scientific personnel.



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AnSI has recently completed palaeopathological studies on skeletal remains from several Indus-Saraswati sites and is preparing scientific publications based on its findings. The transfer of the Rakhigarhi remains is expected to further strengthen research capabilities, particularly in the field of ancient DNA analysis. The institution also plans to expand collaborations with organizations such as the Zoological Survey of India, Botanical Survey of India, Geological Survey of India, and research groups working on palaeoclimate.

Anthropologist Professor Subhash Walimbe, formerly of Deccan College, Pune, emphasized the importance of intensive anthropological examination of the remains to understand how urbanization influenced human biological and pathological responses. He added that ongoing genetic studies may contribute to longstanding debates concerning the origins and population history of the Harappan Civilization. Former National Monument Authority Chairman Professor Kishore K. Basa welcomed the revival of skeletal biological research within AnSI, noting that such studies have relevance not only for anthropology but also for history, archaeology, population studies, nutrition, disease history, and genetics.

Officials said the collaboration between ASI and AnSI represents a significant effort to integrate archaeology, anthropology, genetics, and environmental sciences in the study of India's ancient past. The findings from the Rakhigarhi remains are expected to contribute substantially to understanding the origins, health, mobility, and biological history of one of the world's earliest urban civilizations.

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