The skeletal remains were CT scanned and the data fed into a programme developed by the Korean scientists to fill them “layer by layer with blood and flesh to show as to how the Harappan people looked like”, said Dr. Shinde, explaining the forensic facial reconstruction technique. He added that the tentative results were already available. “We can, therefore, soon answer questions on physical similarities between the modern day population and the Harappan people,” he added.

While the technique in itself is not new, with forensic scientists having helped investigators probe crimes by recreating faces using this technology, it will be the first instance when it will be used in India for the ancient population. The technique has also been used to recreate faces for the inhabitants of Egyptian and the Mesopotamian civilizations, but never for the Harappan population.

Dr. Shinde also shared that the analyses of the DNA collected from the skeletal remains was at an advanced stage and the findings would be published soon. He rubbished reports that the findings were being delayed due to political pressure, contending that DNA analysis was a lengthy process. Besides, he added, the samples were very small and the signatures were very weak. “Whatever little we have in terms of DNA data, that needs to be properly authenticated, scientifically analysed and interpreted before it is made public,” contended the professor.

Rakhigarhi is one of the largest sites of the Harappan civilisation and the major objectives behind the excavation there, according to Dr. Shinde, were to trace its beginnings and to study its gradual evolution from 6000 BCE to 2500 BCE, besides protecting it from encroachment by the locals since the village is settled exactly on top of it.

“Another aim was to find out who the Harappan people were. There was a lot of debate whether they had come from West or were locals. We wanted DNA for this and started excavation at burial sites,” said Dr. Shinde.

However, the findings from excavation have now largely substantiated that the Harappans were locals, said Dr. Shinde, explaining that the excavation hinted at the gradual evolution of the Harappans proving that they were locals. “The structural activity, pottery, jewellery and other crafts seem to have evolved gradually. They did not immediately start with town and villages but started with circular structures to evolve to rectangular ones and then arranged them in a pattern in the third stage before setting up cities in the fourth stage. It substantiates the hypothesis that they were locals and did not come from outside, contrary to the view held by some scholars,” said Dr. Shinde.

He said that Harappans, credited with several present day traditions such as the folded hands greeting or namaste, chicken tandoor, use of the bindi and yoga, also seemed to have started the marriage system.