

Masarh : A Great Archaeo-Historic Site of Bihar

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ABSTRACT

MASARH is a village and an important site in the district of Bhojpur. It is situated at a distance of about 6 miles west of Arrah the head quarter of Bhojpur District in Bihar. First of all cunningham find out Masar. Masar is in fact an ancient Bhrahmanical site. From the accounts of scholars like Buchanan and Cunningham a number of tanks and mounds along with the ruins of number of Hindu temples and a large number of sculptures representing mainly Vishnu, Siva, Parvati, Kartikeya, Surya, Trimurti, Nandi, Navagrahas, Sivalingas etc. are known to have existed at this place. As such it was of great strategic importance and perhaps for this reason it developed as great centre of architectural and sculptural activities.

Keyword: *Archaeological, Bhrahmanical, Sculpture, Excavation.*

Introduction

This is a village and one of the most important sites in the district of Bhojpur, situated at a distance of about 6 miles to the west of Arrah the head quarter of Bhojpur district in Bihar. Masarh has been identified by Cunningham with Mo-ho-so-lo of the Chinese pilgrim Huen Tsang, who mentions that the place was populated only by non-Buddhists, who had no respect for the law of Buddha, a fact, which appears to be corroborated by the total absence of Buddhist remains at the place. Huen Tsang also associates the region with a wildtribe of people, who were cannibals or “demons of desert” and who feasted on human flesh or blood. It is interesting in this connection to note that, according to one local tradition quoted by Cunningham, the place in ancient times was also called as Sonitapura which in Sanskrit word means a “city of blood”. There is a third tradition that originally the place was known by the name of Padmavatipura which

was later changed to Matisara from which the present name is derived. Another derivation of the place is from Mahasara meaning a large tank, which is said to have extended over 52 bighas during the time of Banasura or Bana Raja, who resided at this place. It is also said that Masar is the crude form of Mallasanrh; ‘Malla’ meaning wrestler and ‘sanrh’ meaning bull. It is said that Banasura had constructed an akhara near the village and it has been identified by he villagers with a mound near the Karisath railway station. Some also believe that there had been two Janapads here namely Karusa and Malada. Karusa has been replaced by Karisath and Malada with Masar. It is, however, difficult to ascertain the historicity of Banasura or Bana Raja, who may have been presumably ruling as a local chief. A colossal image, which according to local tradition was described by Cunnigham as that of Banasura and daily subjected to gleeful desecration by village children, is in fact an amage of Visnu, now

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preserved in the Patna Museum Compound. Though the sculpture, carved of buff sandstone is much effected, it is undoubtedly an image of Visnu as it is accompanied by personification of the wheel and mace on the either sides. It has been dated to the 6th, 7th century A.D.

Historical Importance of Masarh

Masarh is in fact an ancient Brahmanical site. From the accounts of scholars like Buchanan and Cunningham a number of tanks and mounds along with the ruins of number of Hindu temples and a large number of sculptures representing mainly Visnu, Siva, Parvati, Kartikeya, Surya, Trimurti, Nandi, Navagrahas, Sivalingas etc., are known to have existed at this place. Of the existing ancient Hindu remains at this place at present, are some of the sculptures, which are kept in the modern Bhagwati temple and elsewhere in the village. Even more significant is a square shaft and a capital standing in the compound on either sides of the pathway leading to the sanctum. The shaft and the capital are caved with images on each of the four sides and thus it seems that the whole pillar would have been an appropriate dhvajastamha for a temple of Siva it may, however, by pointed out that the Hindu remains at this site seems to be quite contemporary to the other sites in this region such as Deo-Barunarak and Mundesvari. Also it is noticed that some of the stone slabs presently lying in the compound of the Bhagwati Mandir have figures on sides, which is quite rare.

Significantly enough, the antiquity of the site may be further pushed back to the Mauryan period on the basis of the discovery of a broken head of a lion by Mr. Pandey in 1918-19 and also a similar fragment by the students of the archaeological society of Patna College which is believed to be part of abacus containing the hind legs of a standing bull and a part of a honey suckle ornament. The lion-head which has the

typical Mauryan polish over it, is presently preserved in the Patna Museum, whereas the whereabouts of the other fragments is not known. According to D. R. Patil, "It has not been conclusively proved that these pieces of pillar are Asokan; but if they are so, the identification of Masar with Mo-ho-so-lo of Hiuen Tsang may be open to doubt as contended by Pandey, since a Buddhist or Asokan monument is not countenanced in Huen Tsang's reference to Mo-ho-so-lo". It may however, be pointed out that there seems to be some discrepancy in the location of the Asokan pillar, which according to Cunningham was noticed by Huen Tsang at Arrah. As such, it may be presumed that since the distance between Arrah and Masar is not much, the Asoka pillar noticed by Hiuen Tsang may have existed at this place and not at Arrah. Moreover, the existence of two pillars at Masar, one with lion capital and the other with a bull capital, as the fragments, more particularly the lion head is undoubtedly Mauryan. However, this presumption may also be open to doubt, as the shaft of the pillars have not been found as yet.

It is rather unfortunate that no proper excavation has been carried out here, one of the most potential sites in Bihar. Even now, on the surface, near the mounds in and around the village, broken potteries are lying all over and sometimes huge Jars or potteries are found by the villagers while ploughing their fields but are not preserved by them for fear of some evil. A few Kusana terracottas are also noticed at this site but due to lack of systematic exploration and preservation they are not found adequately. About 200 ancient gold coins were also discovered at this place as mentioned by Cunningham but could not be traced later. However, all these evidences go to prove that Masar from the very earliest period had been of much historical importance, as antiquities

belonging to different periods are known to have existed at this place.

Masar is also of great importance for the Jainas, as they believe that their twenty-third Tirthankara Parsvanatha stayed at this place for some time. To commemorate this, a Jaina temple known as the Parasnatha temple. The Jaina antiquities belonging to the ancient period are not adequately found. A much mutilated stone sculpture presently lying in the compound of the Bhagwati Mandir may, however, with great plausibility be identified as that of Parasvanatha. Further, in the latter half of the 14th century A.D., the Jaina, Rathors of Marwar migrated to this region and settled here. As such, the Jaina remains at this place mostly belong to this period. An inscription on an image of Parswanath, though a later one, is quite significant as it clearly suggests that this region was known by the name of Karusa and the ancient name of Arrah was Aramnagar.

Conclusion

The historical and archaeological importance of Masar is further proved by the fact that the old course of the Ganga ran by Masar, 9 miles south of the river's present and 6 miles west of Arrah and it was also the juncture of a route leading northward towards the Ganga. As such it was of great strategic

importance and perhaps for this reason it developed as great centre of architectural and sculptural activities.

This is a archaeologically interesting site of Shahabad region which has potential to effect the history after systematic exploration and excavation.

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