

## **Elements of Buddhism in Early Historic Sites of Rajasthan, India**

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Early Historic period was one of the most flourishing phases in the Indian history. This is distinguished by wide spread occurrence of Early historic sites all over India, along with the several other sources of information about Early Historic phase like texts/written history, coins, inscriptions and monuments etc. Early Historic phase in India is bracketed between 6<sup>th</sup> BCE and 6th century CE broadly the time of Gautama Buddha to the end of Gupta period.

Only few excavated early historic sites have the evidences of elements of Buddhist faith among roughly 200 known early historic sites from Rajasthan. These evidences are in the form of structure or antiquity and other artifact and findings from the site.

Aim of this paper is to identify the Buddhist elements presented in the excavated early historic archaeological sites of Rajasthan and role of Buddhism in shaping these archaeological sites.

### **Bairat Monastery**

Rai Bahadur and Daya Ram Sahni, Director of Archaeology and Historical Research of former Jaipur state, conducted excavations at Bairat sometime in the thirties of the last century. From his report, which unfortunately lacks publication date, we know that so called Bhabru Rock Edict found by Captain Burt in 1840 must have come from Bijak ki Pahari because this place alone has provided evidence of Mauryan period and also another Ashokan edict. This edict is the only known edict of Ashoka, which is inscribed on a stone slab (Shila phalaka) as distinguished from stone pillar (Shila Stambha) or rock. It also provides definite proofs of Ashoka's faith in Buddhism and his consequent exhortation to monks and nuns and to laymen and laywomen to listen and study seven selected passages from Buddhist scriptures. The small site covering an area of not more than 400 ft - 190 ft, has yielded an unexpectedly rich harvest of archaeological remains of the Mauryan Period and those immediately succeeding it. The principle monuments which brought to light are numerous remnants of two Ashoka pillars, a temple of an entirely new type and a monastery both of which latter monuments must have been erected by Ashoka himself.

An interesting feature of this excavation is the total absence among the finds of anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha in any form or material, which is in full accord with the view that the Buddha image was not evolved until about 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Sahni n.d.).

The excavations at Bairat Monastery revealed the ruins of the 3rd Century Buddhist Chaitya, utensils, silver counts, pottery and two Asokan rock-edicts.

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Fig.1 Remains of the circular Buddhist structure at Bairat

## Noh

Archaeological site Noh is situated about 6.43 km. west of Bharatpur district of Rajasthan. The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Rajasthan, under Shri R.C. Agrawala, in collaboration with the Art Department, University of California, under Professor J. Le. Roy Davidson undertook excavation at Noh. The cultural sequence at Noh begins with OCP (Period I), followed by unpainted Black and Red Ware with the earliest evidence of the use of iron (Period II) and PGW (Period III), the early historic phase (Period IV) is marked by the emergence of NBP ware and its associated ceramics, period V was characterized by terracotta female figurines showing an elaborate coiffure, jewelry and pottery, both typical of the Sunga and Kushana periods. Common pottery shapes were bowls, lids and lipped bowls with small spouted channels. One of the bowls was inscribed with Brahmi characters; sherds with *Triratna*, *Swastika* and fish symbols were also obtained.

## Jodhpura

The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Rajasthan, undertook excavation at Jodhpura located about 98 km from Jaipur on Jaipur-Delhi highway. The excavation work was directed by Shri Vijai Kumar under the general supervision of Shri R. C. Agrawala. Sunga Kushana phase has the pottery with the common shapes are bowl, lid cum bowl and lipped bowl with small spouted channels. Some sherds of pot are stamped with *triratna* and *Swastika* symbols.

## Sambhara

The site of Sambhar or Sakambhari was the first capital of the Chauhan kings of North India but excavations by D.R. Sahni have revealed that the history of site goes back to at least 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Col. T.H. Hendley had carried out a trial excavation at site in 1884 (Hendley 1884). Terracotta seal with seven impressions, the largest facet of the seal displays a yupa or sacrificial pillar and a legend Brahmi character of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC which reads *Indasamasa*, 'of Indrasraman'. Col. Hendley thought the antiquities indicated that the site represented a Buddhist town.

## **Nagar or Karkota Nagar**

Nagara is the name of small fortified town and also of very extensive *khera* or mound, representing an ancient city, adjoining the former and embracing an area of nearly 6 square km. The town and mound were originally located in the Jaipur state but are now a part of the Tonk district. Carlleyle obtained over 6,000 ancient coins at Nagar, from the site of the ancient city but only 2296 of them were identifiable. The most ancient specimens of coinage found at legends in Ashokan Brahmi and revealed the names of no less than nearly 40 different kings. The Buddhist symbols of the *Bodhi* tree, the Buddhist railing, and the *chakra* or wheel symbol were found on the majority of these coins. On the most ancient coins, the Bodhi tree is represented in an erect position, with the Buddhist *railing*; whereas on other coins of later date, it appears in a horizontal position between the two lines of the legend, but still with the Buddhist railing; while on two other types of the coins, the sacred tree is found on and in another variety has that appeared to be roots radiating from its bottom. From these symbols Carlleyle inferred that Nagar was Buddhist city and from the predominance of the coins with the legend Malavana jaya, he inferred that Nagar was ruled by the Malava dynasty or tribe.

## **Rairah**

The site of Rairh is located 24km south-east of Newai Railway station on the Jaipur-Sawai Madhopur railway line.

The site was excavated by Rai Bahadur, Daya Ram Sahani, Director of Archaeology and Historical Research, Jaipur state, during 1938-39 and by his successor K.N. Puri during 1939 – 40. Pottery found at Rairh covers nearly 5 centuries from about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to about the close of the second half of the second century AD and shows that uniformity of forms and fabric.

Designs over the pottery consist of stamped patterns, plain incised lines done on the wheel, the rope or the chain pattern done with the finger nails and the pot marks, comprising *swastika* and *Triratna* symbol, the Brahmi *ma* or the wheel are the raised characters.

## **Conclusion**

There are several evidences indicate the fact that during the Early Historic phase, Rajasthan was affected by the wave of Buddhism. Bairat site has the evidence of monastery which revealed the ruins of a 3rd Century Buddhist Chaitya, utensils, silver coins, pottery and two Asokan rock-edicts. Bhabru Rock Edict which is only known edict of Ashoka, which is inscribed on a stone slab. It provides definite proofs of Ashoka's faith in Buddhist religion (Sahni n.d.). From the excavations of Nagara majority of coins are found with the Buddhist symbols of the *Bodhi* tree, the Buddhist railing and the *chakra* or wheel symbol (Carlleyle 1978).

Excavations at archaeological sites of Noh, Jodhpura and Rairah have evidences of pot sherds stamped with *triratna*, *Swastika* and fish symbols in the Sunga and Kushana periods. From archaeological site Sambhara, terracotta seal which displays a yupa or sacrificial pillar and a legend Brahmi character of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. These evidences indicate that the site represented a Buddhist town.

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