



HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES OF JAMMU REGION: A CASE STUDY OF AMBARAN

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Abstract: Archeology is an important discipline highlighting the characteristics features of ancient civilizations through the excavation of the sites and analysis of material remains (artefacts) found. Artefacts, when studied extensively and cautiously, it tells about the living conditions of ancient people, their subsistence activities including pastoralism, art, craft production and even the trade and commercial activities if these were taking place. Basically, archeology deals with extracting the true nature of the past civilizations by carefully discovering and analyzing the excavated material and then finding parallels with the existing historical data. As far as Jammu region is concerned, there are numerous archeological sites found throughout the length and breadth of the region. It forms the northern extent of Harappa civilization on the bank of river Chenab. The most eye-catching site of Jammu is the ancient Buddhist settlement, *Ambaran* situated on the right bank of river Chenab which gained prominence as soon as it was excavated. Therefore, the present paper seeks to comprehend the excavated archeological site *Ambaran* in historical retrospect.

Index Terms

Ambaran, Civilization, Archeology, Artefacts, Buddhism.

INTRODUCTION

As the society progress, the wheel of time “*Kala Chakkar*” leaves behind remains of human’s activity either in portable or non-portable objects; or written or unwritten memories or on the surface of several objects which

were the part of their daily life. All such remains ranging from small artifacts such as arrowheads, small stone tools (microliths) to large buildings such as monuments, forts, palaces, ancient settlements, or anything that ancient people created or modified in their lifetime are categorized as archeological records which in turn help to reconstruct the past. This signifies archeology as an inventive process, which involves detailed study of the artefacts of particular area having some possibility of ancient settlements and laid the foundation of historical construct to become aware of the past cultural development of these sites. Moreover, on the basis of the documentation of archeological records, historical records can be constructed with authentication. This indicates a close relationship between archeology and history. Archeology deals with the study of artefacts where as history is the study of written sources and both are equally important to reconstruct human culture. In absence of archeological records the long and eventful history of any region lies obscure.

As far as Jammu region is concerned, it is an important expanse rich in archeological remains. When we turn the pages of history, there are very few references of Jammu region. In all probability, some type of account of historical events may have been compiled, but none is available before the middle of nineteenth century. On the other hand, the references hidden in the forms of archeological sources are valuable sources to construct history but these either remains out of reach or not in proper conditions. Therefore, to know about the history and culture of Jammu along with the characteristics features of the people inhabiting this mountainous country in ancient period, the study of archeological sites which have remains of material culture intact need to be investigated thoroughly.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Archaeology is the most imperative discipline which brings into light the ancient civilizations and ways of life associated with it on the basis of vestiges that were left by those who were living on this earth million-thousands of years ago. The leftover when studied comprehensively and carefully indicates about the ancient society. It presents before the present generation about the past by carefully discovering and analyzing the excavated material and then draws relationship between the written history and the archeological material culture. These archeological evidences ranged from small artefacts used during past in their daily life including pottery, tools, small settlements to large structures, etc. all the things created or modified over a period of time. All these things constitute archeological records. Material evidence is a key to understand human behavior. It helps us to understand not only where and when people lived on the earth, but why and how they lived, examining the changes and causes of changes that have occurred in human culture and behaviour over time in response to the environment. Unlike history, which relies primarily upon written records and documents to interpret great lives and events, archeology allows us to go far back into the time before written languages existed and to glimpse the daily lives of people through analysis of things they made and left behind.

In case of Jammu region, there are numerous archeological sites situated at different locations indicating about the ancient cultural patterns of ancient society. However, to maximum extent the archeological wealth of Jammu has not revealed or emphasized in the texts in details. Very few remarks are found telling about the past human culture of Jammu. Hence, through this paper, an attempt is made to highlight the archeological

significance of Jammu and its ancient historical detail through the reference of *Ambaran*, the Buddhist archeological site.

I.Jammu: Historical and Archeological Perspective

Jammu presently forming the union territory of India has rich sources of archeological material culture but unfortunately, it remains out of reach of scholars, owing to its geographical conditions or lack of interest, nothing can be stated with certainty. On the basis of available information, it is known that historically, during ancient times, Jammu consisted of twenty-two principalities which were the seats of political dominance for a long time having cordial as well as conflicting relationship with each other. Many of these principalities got vanished or got changed with the passage of time and few had remains in the form of ruins. In absence of detailed historical records, archeological excavations and explorations signifies the ancient character of Jammu region. It highlights the ancient character of political system, primitive nature of people who have left behind evidences of their existence in the form of stone tools and other vestiges.

In ancient texts, like Rig Vedas, Mahabharata, Puranas; archeological records in the form of inscriptions, etc. many references available which indicates the existence of Jammu region since remote past as Madardesh. Ancient archeological sites in Jammu region belonging to different time period like Prehistoric, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Kushans, late historic, medieval, late medieval sites, gave reflection of different ages of historical development of Jammu. Culturally, it is contemporaneous with the Harappan civilization and a large bulk of shreds of Harappan pottery has been unearthed at Manda and the adjoining regions. The height of cultural attainment of this land of the Dogras can be measured by the fact that finely artistic terracotta human heads, resembling in naturalness and expression to the Gandhars figurines, have been unearthed at *Ambaran* (Akhnoor) which is one of its own significance. The sites of Krimchi, Balore, Babor, etc. are also playing an important role in the historical construction of Jammu.

Even the term Jammu has a historical significance. The region which gradually acquired the name Jammu, famous as a 'city of temples' is named after *Jambu Lochan*, a local powerful chief of ninth century who was impressed with the scene of drinking water of deer and tiger from the same bank of Tawi river. Overwhelmed with such incident he laid the foundation of a city *Jambupura* during the Middle Ages which later known as *Jamboo* and finally Jammu. However, the historical details of Jammu are lagging behind because of the limited initiatives of scholars to explore the in depth historical background of the region. Therefore, despite the rich source of archeological remains, the history of Jammu still remains mystery.

This paper seeks to substantiate the historic significance of Jammu region with the help of one of the remarkable archeological site which has great historical significance. It is the ancient Buddhist settlement namely *Ambaran* situated in Akhnoor which pre-dates the existence of Jammu region past to Kushans period. Though there are very limited written sources regarding *Ambaran*, but scanty information in historical records does not means that the region is not as important as other Buddhist settlement having large number of written documents about them. On the other hand, *Ambaran* site was well flourished centre of Buddhism; but why such

region did not catch the attention of scholars for long is a matter of concern. It is only after the visit of Dalai Lama in 2011, the region become popularized and prominent in news and led to the beginning of its historical development.

II. *AMBARAN* : The Earliest Buddhist Settlement

The village *Ambaran* situated near *Akhnoor* on the outskirts of Jammu has been in limelight because of the visit of Tibetan Spiritual Guru Dalai Lama who visited this famous archeological site on November 9, 2011. This is a treasure trove of the ancient Buddhist settlement. It is locally known as “*Pambarwan*” (Lat. 30°54’ and Long. 74°46’), located near *Akhnoor* about 30kms north-west of Jammu on the right bank of river *Chenab* (ancient name *Asikni* or *Chanderbhaga*). The site is spread in an area of about 500 m in east-west direction on the right bank of the terraces of river *Chenab* in between two rivulets which came down the hill and join the river and from north to south, it is about 100m in width. On either side of the river, there are middle Pleistocene boulder conglomerate deposits over which there are loose boulders and pebbles mixed with sand, silt and clay belonging to the late Pleistocene period which is the natural soil below the cultural deposits indicating that the site has been flooded many times and led to its destruction.

In term of history, Buddhist establishment at *Ambaran* come up during the reign of Kushans during 1st-3rd century A.D. It is situated on the trade route of Buddhist period from *Pataliputra* to *Taxila*. As the width of river *Chenab* is not much wide, therefore, it plays an important role in the propagation of Buddhist faith in the adjoining areas and the entire Jammu region as well. The site *Ambaran* also becomes significant during the rise of another important faith of *Shudra* dynasty of *Chamar* community who were the followers of *Ravidas* culture. During Kushans period, if there is any other important circuit of Buddhist faith within India and outside Patan in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, it is the *Ambaran* site located across the river *Chenab* bridge.

III. Beginning of Scientific Exploration of *Ambaran*

The historical study of *Ambaran* began in 1930's when Charles Fabri, the English art historian and the then curator of the Lahore Museum (now in Pakistan) noticed this site. He found a basket lying in a corner of the museum with no clue to its origin. In it were lying terracotta figurines, Buddha's head, female torsos, draperies of life-size terracotta Buddha figures or monks. Then he decided to locate the origin of these terracottas. After painstaking investigations, including trips to various places like *Baramulla* in *Srinagar*, *Harawa* in *Kashmir* and *Akhnoor* in *Jammu*, Fabri finally traced the place from where these finds originated. This place was *Pambarwan* hamlet under the village *Ambaran*, situated at the point where the river *Chenab* emerges onto the plains. He called these collected relics as “*Akhnoor Terracotta*” and explored rest of the area and found fragments and parts of statues of Lord Buddha and female figures, draperies, jewellery, one beautiful and nearly complete head of a woman. Similar style of heads found in the Lahore Museum as well. All these relics and their parts later kept in different national as well as international museums. In *Jammu*, these are placed in *Dogra Art Gallery*.

After few decades of Fabri's initiatives, further boost-up was given resulting in the beginning of the scientific investigation and exploration of *Ambaran* (*Pambarwan*). It was conducted to find out the parallels

between the nature and sequence of cultural deposits and the link between early historical and Kushans culture. Consequently, a great deal of material culture was excavated belonging to different periods- fourth, fifth and eighth centuries showing resemblance of Akhnoor Terracotta with Gandhar art and Gupta art of Madhyadesa. But after investigation still some confusion left related to the time period of the Akhnoor Terracotta and its other aspects. The scientific exploration again started during 1973-74 by the Srinagar Circle of Archeological Survey of India at small scale level revealing the presence of ceramic industry represented by the red ware of medium to fine fabric represented by bowls, lid, spouts and vases. Later large scale excavation was carried for two seasons; firstly from 1999-2000 to 2000-2001 and secondly from 2008-2010. The main objectives of the exploration are:

- To know the association and stratigraphic position of the famous *Akhnoor* terracotta heads with Buddhist Monastic establishment at *Ambaran*
- To study the layout and planning of the site.

In the year 2000 and 2001, under the direction of the then Superintending Archeologist, B.R.Mani, the site was successful unearthed revealing the evidences of the existence of a rambling Buddhist Complex at *Ambaran* along with the reliquary from the base of stupa which was dated by him between third to fourth century A.D. According to Ranjana Mishra, *Ambaran* is one of the eighth places in the world where Buddhist relics have been found in the stupas which has taken back the site to the Guptas period. To make *Ambaran*, the earliest Buddhist historic site ready for visit of tourists and general public, the ASI decided to commence scientific clearance of the site during the current season. The clearance project started in 2008 and completed in 2010, and to their surprise the clearance team found an eight-spoke stupa base made up of fire baked bricks which is discovered for the first time in erstwhile state Jammu and Kashmir.

The findings of the clearance project of 2008 gave a new picture to the history of Jammu region. After thorough analysis, it has been interpreted by many archeologists and historians that Buddhism firstly reached in Jammu and then it spread to Kashmir and finally Central Asia. The details of the excavation of 2008-2010 are discussed below:

1. Buddhist Votive Stupa

According to archeologists, these votive stupas were constructed during Kushans and late-Kushans period. The chance find of a stupa belonging to Kushans period at *Ambaran* has not only taken back the date of the site to 2000 years back from today, but also made it as the earliest recorded Buddhist centre in the entire state. The stupa has been coupled with the Buddhist religious architecture developed by Kushans between first to second centuries A.D. It exposed for the first time remains of Buddhist stupa and vihara which are considered to be the first known of its kind in Jammu region. The exposed bricks structure shows parallel to famous excavated stupa of Nagarjunakonda in Southern Indian and Sanghol in *Punjab*. This find of votive stupas has confirmed that it could be location of one of the largest Buddhist monastic complexes in *Jammu* and *Kashmir* which comprised of stupas, chaityas (Buddhist temples), viharas (living quarters for monks) and also spaces for votive stupas which are erected to memorialize the corporeal remains of monks. These chaityas, generally recognized as

meditation corners and viharas, called as discipline quarters, are believed to be fully functional from second century A.D. to mid-sixth century A.D attracting devotees from far and wide. It is believed that this monastic complex has been on the route of Buddhist monks and traders going from *Patliputra* (currently known as Patna in Bihar) to *Taxila* (in Pakistan these days).

2. Ceramics

Most of the ceramic products are in red ware with and without slip. Few pieces of grey ware bowls having thick and curved inwards edges are also found belonging to Period- I. The pottery of period- II to period- IV does not show much variation except the edges of the bowl which became sharp at the last phase of the period. Other shapes includes basins, splinters, vases, lids, lamps, handled cups, stamped storage jars, spouts in which one is shaped beautifully like animal head especially the lion's head.

3. Terracotta Products

There are many terracotta items found in *Ambaran* including the princely shaped head, broken terracotta mould showing the bust of the female adorned with beaded hair ornaments, pendants, earrings, amulets, two small grotesque head, iron nails, hooks, rings, terracotta moulds of leaves, ornaments, impressions of pendants, fruits, leaves, birds, squatting monkey.

4. Other Findings

Not only the Buddhist Complex has been excavated from this site, there are many other important and exciting set of discoveries conducted by the archeologists here when they further unearthed the reliquary from the base of stupa. They found a silver casket, gold and silver leaves, pearls, corals and three copper coins, which was dated between third to fourth centuries A.D., thus, taking the period of the site to Gupta period. Other artefacts found at the site were basins, beads, copper coins, bowls, lamps, pots with handles and spouts, small sculptures made of stone, terracotta human figures and vases, etc. Today these sculptures, labeled as Akhnoor terracotta, are the star attraction of classical art of India and are housed in various national and international museums including Dogra Art Museum, Jammu.

IV. Classification of Periods

After thorough analysis of the sites and the artefacts found, the historical details of *Ambaran-Pambarwan* is summed up in following heads:

- a) **Period I:** Pre-Kushan Period (circa second to first century B.C) suggests a small hamlet during second-first century B.C. when people used Grey Ware potteries.
- b) **Period II:** Kushan Period (circa first to third century A.D.) being the most productive period highlights the building activity of Kushan when the stupa & vihara were constructed.
- c) **Period III:** Post-Kushan (Gupta) Period (circa fourth to fifth century A.D.) representing Gupta age when the structures were strengthened & embroidered at certain places with terracotta figures & decorations.

d) Period IV: Post Gupta Period (circa sixth to seventh century A.D.) symbolize the reliquary casket found in the square stupa containing copper casket within round silver casket within a gold casket along with bones, ashes, semi-precious stones, pearl beads, silver and gold foils, copper coins, etc.

Thus, the above historical information concluded after the survey states that the site *Ambaran* is a Buddhist monastery which remained active for about 900 years from second century B.C. to seventh century A.D., a period persistent to Pre-Kushan to Gupta eras. It also underwent repeated repairs due to the devastation brought by periodic flash floods of the Chenab River. This gave an important impetus to the successive scholars to carry forward the result of such scientific study and fill the gaps that are existing in the chronological sequence of historical development of Jammu.

V. Significance of *Ambaran*

The site *Ambaran* is unique due to the fact that the edifice speak of the uninterrupted subsistence of the monastic complex through different stages of history and is considered as third of its kind in India with one found at Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh and the second at Sanghol in Punjab. Monastic complex of *Ambaran* has established Jammu as one of the places of the introduction of Buddhism and its wholehearted adoption by the hill and highland communities during the early phases of Buddhism. The other significant aspect is the possibility that Buddhism was introduced in Jammu region much before it was carried on to the Kashmir valley by Majjhantika during king Ashoka's reign. The great historic importance of outer Himalayan ranges and especially of Jammu find support in many references in ancient Buddhist Pali literature that some of the prominent disciples of the Buddha like—Mahakappina, Khema and Bhadda Kapilani hailed from Madradesha, the capital of which was modern day Sialkot and an area contiguous to Jammu.

The Akhnoor Terracotta School is unique in style and free from Greeco-Buddhist influence. The finest scores of terracotta pieces is the “Great Buddha of Akhnoor”. These pieces of art tell about a highly cultured society which inhabited this land before Harshavardhana's rule. These figures of burnt clay state about the long history of their own. Some figures show Gandhar influence and some are out of their impact but such figures are excellent pieces of modeling and earliest example of such artistic culture of the region.

VI. Present Status of *Ambaran*

The site seems to have been discarded sometimes around seventh century A.D. due to flash floods in the river leading to the decline of Buddhism in the area. Unfortunately, the present condition of the site seems disgraceful because of the improper road and other facilities necessary for the visitors such as drinking, place to relax and enjoy the area, toilet, etc. Just entering the site in the Tourism map is not sufficient to attract visitors. Proper facilities to accomplish the needs who wish to visit are necessary requirement. Their maintenance from time to time, acquaints the region with transport and communication facilities, arrangement of some resting halls etc. are the fore most requirements which are lacking here. So, in such situation it is very difficult to attract visitors/scholars to such important sites. The coming of the visitors not only required expenditure of the

economy, it will also generate income for those who are living there and also the development of the locality help in improving the standard of living of the populace.

Keeping in mind the above concerning issues, The Archeological Survey of India (ASI), under the Ministry of Culture, the premier organization for the archeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation, take the responsibility for the maintenance of ancient monuments and archeological sites and remains of national importance. As per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (amendment and validation in 2010) it is instructed to ASI to regulate all archeological activities in the country. It also regulates Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972. These Acts were enacted for better preservation and maintenance of monuments and also to prevent illegal trafficking of antiquities and art treasures. In addition, periodical amendments and regulations were added to cope with the changing scenario and to protect the monuments. One such action is the declaration of Prohibited area, 100m from protected limits and further 200m as Regulated Area from the prohibited limits, to prevent encroachments and unregulated constructions near protected monuments. The Treasure Trove Act, 1878 and the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 are also in vogue in addition to the above mentioned legislations. Despite such significant institution ASI, the state's heritage is shambling in ruins or left unnoticed losing their significance as the time passed. Therefore, it is important to take care of such historic settlements timely.

CONCLUSION

Archeological sites are the real embodiment of ancient culture and tradition. These sites remind the future generation about the socio-economic conditions, political system and the cultural phase of the society in which these were constructed. During visit to such sites, it is felt that one is living in an ancient period and one can imagine the real reflection of the past society. These are the index to peep into the past. There are many archaeological sites and other cultural heritages in Jammu and its adjoining areas, having vast and rich resources for the historians and the scholars to know about the present society, reconstruct the past tradition and help to understand the future. On the basis of the archeological details of *Ambaran*, it has dated the Jammu region back to the pre-Kushan age and show resemblance with the Kushan art, even the Gandhar art as well as Gupta's art. Its material culture is an important component to fill the gaps existing in the historical construction as well as enrich the cultural development of the region. As Jammu has already exposed its cultural potential in the form of palaces, forts, pilgrimage sites like Vaishno Devi, Bawe Wali Mata, Shiv Khori etc; but the wealth of Jammu region in the form of numerous archeological sites stretching from Paleolithic period to the late medieval period up to Dogra rule is not fully explored yet. As a result, major portion of the historical account of Jammu region since ancient time is lacking in detailed explanation of various concepts related to ancient history. Thus, it is important to explore and preserve such archeological wealth of all societies which have remains of ancient civilization. It is not only the duty of concerning institutions to look after them, but the existing populace is equally responsible.

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