

## Exploration of Buddhist Remains in Shivpuri: A Review

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**Abstract:** Exploring archaeological remains of religious antiques is a cumbersome process, particularly in far-flung areas. Shivpuri is in recent times had been national cognizance over the exploration of new archaeological remains from the last two decades. The place is said to be in having abundance of past remains of human habitation, religious symbols, sculptures, inscriptions, coins etc. In the recent studies, many historical and archaeological remains have been discovered by ASI, ASI (M.P.), and Cunningham etc. However enough exploration had not taken in this place despite having rich heritage. In the present study, a review of recent finding is discussed as well as past in order to enlighten archaeological remains in Shivpuri particularly of Buddhist remains. The study will highlight significance further explorations.

**Keywords:** Buddhist sites, Shivpuri, Stupas, Trade.

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## INTRODUCTION

Shivpuri was earlier known as Sipri, the earlier reference to this town is dated to 1564 CE, when the Mughal army halted at this place, then a small village under the Narwar province. Though it is very much possible that some time earlier there may have been a Shiva temple here and the site came to be known as Shivpuri, but with passage of time it became corrupted to Sipri. During the Scindia rule the name Shivpuri came into vogue and continues even to the present times. The importance of these regions is that it rhymed in unison with other regions in all directions across time and religious affinities. The Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist sites within the geographical boundaries of the districts show the possibility multiple short span networks of different religions connecting with larger routes linking of the regions. Evidently, through this region numerous traders, ascetics, pilgrims, soldiers traversed on the trade routes branching into smaller paths to reach their destinations. Shivpuri region also bore the brunt of military attacks and the turbulent passages of invading forces.

Pertinently, in spite of well-known sites in the district, the absence of prominent archaeological sites that can evoke national cognizance, leaves a question in the light of the fact that the area marked at the geographical extent of the district was, actually, in a sort of central area between the triangular area of routes between Mathura to Kaushambi, Kaushambi to Ujjain and Ujjain to Mathura. Besides this the route passing from Mathura to vidisha, surely, must have passed through the circumscribed area. The stretch of land between Pawaya and Tumain should have had few comparable sites within

the Shivpuri district; unless the entire area remained prohibited for reasons presently not known. This restriction, if any is all the more, strange as movement of Bhagwata folks through this region is dated around 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. There may have been feeder routes crisscrossing the land connecting the aforesaid routes. The present work endeavors to bring about information on some recently noticed sites and type of finds, in the backdrop of earlier known sites and remains, across affiliations eventually, an intense search could be made. This would reveal more information on the peoples, religious groups, sectarian networks and trade routes.

Madhya Pradesh has to its credit some of the most significant Buddhist remains of India in the form of monuments and sculptures. The centers of Buddhism since ancient times were approachable from all major directions. The present study tries to trace the ancient Buddhist sites and Buddhist routes around the Shivpuri district which was once important Buddhist center. It is known fact that there were two major routes i.e. Uttarā-path and Dakshinā-path in ancient times. The Dakshina-path passed through Madhya Pradesh due to its geographical location. Recent researches have shown the presence of sub-routes which have not been mentioned in the Buddhist texts. Archaeological explorations have also revealed the existence of sub-routes. The Uttara-path was started from Rajgriha and extended to Taxila via Patliputra, Vaishali, Varanasi, Prayag, Kanyakubja (Kannauj), Sankisha, Soron, Mathura, Indraprastha (Delhi), Sakal and Taxila onwards. Whereas, the Dakshina-path under this study, was extended from Shravasti to Pratisthan via Saket, Kaushambi, Vidisha, Gonard (Guna), Ujjaini, Mahishmati. The sub-routes which linked Dakshina-path with parts of western and southern India. Mention may be made of a route which linked Uttara-path and Dakshina-path via a diversion from Mathura and other routes also joined the Dakshina-path from place to place. Likewise, other sub-routes coming from Prayag via Bhita, Deur-Kothar, and Bharhut seem to be join Dakshina-path Vidisha via Gyarashpur.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objective of this study is to highlight the Buddhist places discovered in the district of Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh. The other objective of this study is to explore the historic Buddhist routes in the Shivpuri district. Further, the study delineates why there is a need for archaeological excavations in the region. Another goal of this research is to discover the reasons for the Buddhist site's location in the district's interiors.

## KNOWN BUDDHIST PLACES IN SHIVPURI

The Rajapur Stupa (GPS Lat 25° 05' 848 N; Long 077° 58' 722 E) was described way back in the 19th century by Cunningham (1969 reprint P.178, 179) is constructed entirely of stone, with a square base 60 feet and 9 inches side over which lies base of succession of two cylindrical drums, surmounted by the elongate dome 22 feet high. The Stupa is constructed in the 9th- 10th century CE (Patil, 1952: 114). Even in present times, the towering stone built Stupa stands at the site in a fairly intact state of preservation. Obviously, the site in its prime period did definitely had many other edifices, including monasteries, and the Stupa being a landmark, by virtue of its height and fluttering flags placed near the Chhatra, served as a navigational beacon for the informed monks or pilgrim who took to the correct tributary. Significantly, the site is located just by the side of a small stream Mahuar which drains into the river Sind that leads to the Yamuna River. During the rainy season at least when the forest are sequestered the river may have been navigable and rather than traveling by cognition of the landmark landscapes, river transport may have been significantly or skilful used. Rajapur has drinking water even though near small streams even in scorching heat as understood by archival Google Earth

imagery even when in modern times the surface runoff due to deforestation is higher and water is heavily consumed for agriculture. This tributary to Sind was less traversed, not being the highway of aquatic transportation.

An image of Buddha (Dwivedi 1997:601) collected from Kota, in Shivpuri District, is presently depicted in the Gujari Mahal Museum, Gwalior. The portrayal is dated to the 5th century CE although mentioned as being reclaimed from Kota does not specify from which Kota within Shivpuri, it was found. In all probability it was found from Kota (GPS Lat 25°

14' 930 N; Long 77° 52' 001 E) that is located south-east of Shivpuri town rather than the Kota (GPS Lat 25° 25' 500 N; Long 77° 44' 436 E) east and nearer to Shivpuri town.

The Kota village in the southern part of the district is located near the small river Orr which drains into Betwa that leads up to Yamuna, is having large number of archaeological remains lying among ruins that can be dated to on the basis of the surveyed archaeological remains available at site, at least as early as 8th century CE. There is another archaeological rich site known as Pali on the other side of the river Orr with large remains of temples, of the Pratihara period. Another village Kundanpur (GPS Lat 25° 17' 289 N; Long 77° 51' 381E) about 5 kms away from the two villages has also yielded evidence of many small Brahmanical temples comparable with those of Bateshwar in Morena District. This sacred site overlooks the Orr river which flows about 1.5 km towards east of the place. At this site there are broken -down structures of large ashlar masonry and with Saiva Sadhus displayed at the site the buildings had to be credited to Shaiva monasticism, similar to the many already known from the region.

The two Kuberas on the Uttaranga panel, which is attached to the wall of the contemporary temple in Kundanpur, are comparable in appearance to the Jambhalas on the Temple No. 45 in Sanchi. While no claim of a Buddhist site existing in this area is made based solely on similarities in the depictions of the God of Wealth, which may also be due to influences of art travelling widely across religions, the fact that there are three sites within a few km show that this was a significant area in the past with a high likelihood of Buddhist establishments being located here before other communities established themselves. It should be emphasised, though, that there aren't many early archaeological remains in the Kota neighborhood of Shivpuri. Because the three sites were conveniently connected by the Orr River and therefore attracted the attention of competing denominations, there are similarities in how the God of Wealth is represented throughout time and geography, demonstrating how shared artistic influences spread to various religious organisations. Later, as it became evident that clashes in the area would continue to be a persistent feature, the Buddhist searched for and established in hinterlands rather than on notable landscapes or along larger torrents or rivers.

Gudar (GPS Lat 24° 58' 247 N; Long 78° 05' 031 E) is farther south than Rajapur and located in a valley surrounded by hills on all sides. A drainage system made up of small nalas that empty into an old water body collects the overland flow. Relevantly, this water feature might have served as the entrenched settlement's water source. Currently, a brick mound measuring roughly 23 m in diameter marks the location of the site, which is covered in dense vegetation and was previously mentioned by (Yadav 2010:79). The bricks' dimensions, which range from 31 to 32 x 20 to 20.5 x 5.5 to 6 cm, are comparable to those of an uncovered Silanagar brick. Without an escort, this place is quite well concealed within the valley.

Another site Dhamna (Lat 25°30' 870 N; Long 78° 12' 912 E) is accessible from Karohta village of Karera tehsil located about 62 kilometers from the district head quarters. The archaeological remains can be reached from Shivpuri by a detour to the left of about 7km towards Bilhari-Khurd, for Karera after 55 km on the Shivpuri-Jhansi Road. The archaeological remains here are several brick structures and platforms besides enclaves of orthostats, albeit in a square or rectangular manner

unlike the circular disposition of the megalithic structures. Since the brick mounds here have a largely circular outline of many courses of bricks, keeping aside the effects of depredations by man and nature, these are assumed to be extant remains of stupas (Tenwar & Manuel 2014: 57-61). The sizes of bricks that could be measured were 40 x 22 x 6 cm and 35 x 20 x 5 to 6 cm. Interestingly, no Buddhist images were discovered at this location but Brahmanical sculptures including of Vishnu were found. The possibility of the remains as extant portion of the brick temples like in Uttar Pradesh and Kherat in Bhind District of Madhya Pradesh was also kept in mind and carved bricks or design in bricks were searched without any positive result. Reverting back to the main theme of the endeavor it should be mentioned that the site is neither located on landmark landscape nor near significant tributary or river, but by the side of a small tributary Mahuar leading into Sind that drains itself into Yamuna. Although no positive identification of the brick structures could be made on the basis of brick size due to the absence of any Buddhist sculptures but the very fact that hinterland area was selected hints towards the possibility that the site was established after 8th century CE.

The chance discovery of a Buddhist site known as Silanagar (Lat 25° 28' 750, Long 78°; 01' 167) also in Karera *Tehsil* of the district with distinct Buddhist sculpture corroborating the brick mounds as stupa has added up to the quantum of knowledge on the matter and hints to the possibility of yet more sites in the region. The site Silanagar reported herein is hardly 20 km from Dhamna and in a way corroborate each other as Buddhist sites forming the large network of settlements that sustained the religion in this region. The most important find in conjunction with the brick mounds is the image of Jambhala-Vasudhara, which was lying at the foot of the Mound no. 3, half buried and the image has been now brought to ASI Museum at Shivpuri. On iconographic considerations the image would be placed in the 9th century

CE. This brick mound enumerated as number 3 is the largest of the several seen here and clear courses of many bricks could be seen The brick size of a loose brick was measured as 31 cm x 20.5 cm x 5.5 cm. Pertinently this site lies neither on the north east south west trending sparse granitic hill nor near any tributary. The nearest tributary Barua Nala draining into Sind is about 4 kms to the west. The water requirements were apparently fulfilled by an ancient water body now levelled up as low lying fields, which according to the villagers occasionally yield images on being tilled. This site is again in hinterlands without any landmark features except for the linear hill about a km to the east but the site itself was established in the plains below with rocky outcrops and vegetation on all sides and those without prior knowledge of the site could hardly search it out unless he treads up the rocky hill and surveys the plains below. But then for the half informed there are several similar rock masses in the region parallel to the hill near Silanagar, to get confused and lost.

## **AN ENUMERATION OF BUDDHIST NETWORK AROUND SHIVPURI DISTRICT OF M.P**

In the North-East of Shivpuri, "Gujjara" in the contiguous district of Datia, a famous trade route and home to religious preachers, prompted the officials of Ashoka to inscribe the message on rocks. Interestingly, the spot of the inscription is known as the "Sidhon-Ki-Toriya".

At Chhoti Badauni three Buddhist Stupas having radius of 16 m were reported (IAR 1972-72: 27) in the neighboring district Datia. In each site, a baked seal of two sizes, having same inscriptions and displaying miniature Stupa were also found (IAR 1971-72:27). Moreover, in Badauni a typical Gupta pottery and a few pieces of Roman pottery were also reported (IAR, 1971).

Dwivedi reported that a Buddhist image stuck within a tree was noticed nearly sixty years at Chhoti Badauni. Further he claimed that around 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Buddhism flourished in the region of

Badauni. Manuel (2011) in recent times collected Buddhist sealings and displayed them in museums at Gwalior and Shivpuri.

In Pawaya, a stone sculpture of Buddha in Dharmachakara-Pravartana Mudra of the Gupta period was noticed (IAR 1973-74). Sharma(1999) claimed that excavations had hinted the fact that Pawaya located on the grand trade route, was a center of Buddhism also.

The presence of railings and the broken miniature Stupa indicate that Kutwar also had Buddhism in vogue during the early historic period. Bateshwar in district Morena, one miniature shrine which happens to be one of the earliest of the conglomeration of small temples dated to 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century CE has a Buddha image on the lintel.

Not far away from Bateshwar, another lintel image is seen in the nearby isolated and dilapidated small shrine, just by the side of the main temple in the citadel at Padavali datable to 9<sup>th</sup> century CE reported by (Manuel & Tenwar 2016).

Another Buddhist image namely Kubera re-identified as Jambhala datable to 10<sup>th</sup> century CE from Padavali, now in ASI Museum in Gwalior (Manuel and Pandey 2013). From Bhind North-East neighboring district of Gwalior, a Muchalinda Buddha was found which is in now at district Museum (Willis *et al* 2010).

## **SOUTH OF SHIVPURI**

An evidence of Buddhist remains particularly of Mauryan Period other than well-known ones at Sanchi, Satdhara and Murekhurd, etc in district, Raisen and Dhekinath Stupa in Gyaraspur in district Vidisha. The three stupas of Mauryan period at Tumain are of definite interest.

One reported by Bajapai & Pandey 12 m high and 63 m circumference of Mauryan bricks.

It is known that routes led from Mathura to Vidisha passed through Tumbavana Rajgarh to Vidisha passed through Tumbavana Rajgarh southwest of Shivpuri across the contiguous district Guna. There are other two sites Narsingharh and Kotra vihar showing engraving of different types of Stupas (Tripathi 1997).

At Kotra vihar shelter No. IF-8A there is an eighteen lined inscription which mentions about the donation of land to the Mahavihara (Tripathi, 1997). In addition, Kotra vihar & Narsingharh rock shelters also had inscriptions of different rulers of the late-Gupta period.

These sites indicate that Shivpuri was center of Buddhist pilgrimage. Elongated structures of shrines in Kotra-vihar resembles with the depictions of Ladakh (Mani 2000-2001). This depicts monks of this region visited to the Ladakh and vice-versa.

Also in Kotra-Vihar few roundels painted on the ceiling of the rock-shelters which is quite similar to the painting in Ajanta Cave No. 10. There is a site known as Itbardi, having eleven Stupas, about 5 km south of Kasrawad, across the Narmada, not very far from Maheshwar, an important town linked to Ujjain (Diskalkar 2006).

At this site, the inscribed material has shown that pilgrims used to traverse from as far as Taxila and Sri-Lanka. Routes were in vogue about three centuries before Christian era in this sprawling region. Inscriptions of Ashoka at Panguraria in district Sehore, to the south of districts Rajgarh and Bhopal.

## **EAST - WEST OF SHIVPURI**

Number of Buddhist remains belonging to different periods are found. Towards the Southeast is the famous site of Dasavatara temple at Deogarh in the neighboring district Lalitpur which also yielded Buddhist rock cut caves (Joshi 2017- 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century).

Farther East, there are several sites of different periods among which two famous sites are in Unnao district of U.P, Katra and Umargarh in the vicinity of Musanagar at the crossing of Yamuna (chakravarti;2005). Towards South six Mahoba six sculptures and inscriptions of Buddhism datable to about 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century CE reported (Dikshit 1998).

Khajuraho has yielded a large Buddhist sculpture with inscriptions datable in 10<sup>th</sup> century (Deva and Nayal 1980). Another sculpture of Buddha now displayed in the Purattava Sangrahalaya at Damoh assignable to 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century CE is associated with Vajrayana sect of Buddhism.

## WEST SIDE OF SHIVPURI

The Buddhist sites, Krishnavalis (Bilasarh) in Tehsil Shahabad and Shergarh in Tehsil Atru of district Baran Rajasthan have also yielded Buddhist inscriptions. Krishnavalis situated at river Bilas had reported 138 rock shelters painted in monochrome. Among them noteworthy is the single lined Brahmin inscription, which records the name of 'Ripsen' who seems to be the Buddhist monk assignable to circa of second century BCE (Kumar1981).

## DISCUSSION

In reviewing the literature on Buddhism in northern Madhya Pradesh, it was revealed that Buddhism had much presence in the region compared to other parts of central India. The archaeological remains in the area attest to Buddhism's strong presence in North Madhya Pradesh. However, the focus of the study was to review the literature on the Shivpuri district of the region in order to further explore the district. Buddhist influences had been discovered in many areas of the district. The presence of religious antiquities and religious sites hints that

Buddhism flourished in the district from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. There are many archaeological remains of Buddhism, which support the fact that Buddhist monks had strong routes and networks in the district. Buddhist networks and routes supported the fact that Shivpuri used to be the epicentre of Buddhism in the Gwalior region of Madhya Pradesh. It was also discovered during a deep dive into the existing literature that excavations had not been done in recent times. However, the fact is that there is a need for further exploration and excavation in the region. There is potential for new exploration, with the hope of discovering new evidence and Buddhist antiquities. During the study, it was found that Brahmanical and Sermanical religions had hostilities, which resulted in the construction of major Buddhist sites in the hinterlands or interiors of the district.

## CONCLUSION

The existence of lonely Buddha sculptures and those of Jambhala, besides miniature shrines with Buddhist figures and brick mounds indicating towards Stupas found from many locations in northern Madhya Pradesh depicts that Buddhism did survive, if not thrive in the region till about the end of first millennium. The Buddhist sites not only have sculptures but also have Stupas, temples and monasteries, finding of one or more of these hints the existence of a complete Buddhist complex. Another scenario is that the sculpture could sometimes be of extraneous origin. But that leads to complex question, from where did it come. Why the location has not been located as yet. However, if the sculpture is of the particular site, then where are the associated Buddhist remains? Curiously, even the small shrines with lalatbimba showing Buddha are not known as to be of Buddhist affiliation. Similarly another sacred structure namely the stupas with its amorphous shapes, ravaged as they are by man and nature, these remains a brick mound with no possibility of it being a stupa ever being searched. It is not always that such extant remains of stupa are found with other corroborating evidence like sealings as Chotti

Badauni (Distt. Datia) or for that matter Jambhala-Vasudhara as at Silanagar (Distt. Shivpuri). The fact that these are sometimes found show that the amorphous brick mounds are actually the extant remains of Stupas. The general inertia in noticing and mentioning Buddhist sculptures, small shrines, and Stupas remains a curious phenomenon which has adverse impact in the holistic stock taking of the society by archaeological means.

A few decades ago, the only Buddhist sites in the Shivpuri district were Rajapur and Kota. However, recent research in Gudar, Dhamna, Silanagar, and to some extent, Kudanpur, also suggests that Buddhism is present at various sites throughout the district, vibrating in unison with sites in neighboring districts and beyond. In fact, the brick sizes revealed from the Gudar and Silanagar are quite close to the brick sizes reported from a mound on the southern edge of the village of Sakarua, Block Noorsarai, district Nalanda. Buddhist sculptures dating to the ninth and tenth centuries C.E. have also been discovered at the Sakarua site. The site Sakarua has also yielded some Buddhist sculptures dated to circa 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> century C.E. While correlating brick sizes across states to fix the temporal aspects would not be very prudent but the fact that both at Silanagar and Sakarua the brick sizes are and that both have yielded Buddhist sculptures of 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> century C.E is also of much more importance than mere coincidence. There would be many more sites that would be discovered, even the amorphous brick structures are carefully investigated not only with regard to its general profile but the associated sculptures finds rather than leave them after reporting as brick mound.

Constructs of harmony and peace apart there have been several instances of hostilities between Brahmanical and Sermanical religions as echoed by many researchers and instances from archaeological remains understood from the brief notes on excavations of Buddhist sites reported in Indian Archaeology Reviews. The dispute is not only reflected in the architecture of the Buddhist site but also influenced the very choice of site in locating them conspicuously away from urban centers with no tangible evidence of its existence discernible from far, unlike earlier. The only later Buddhist site that has been located on the hill top is Chhoti Badauni in Datia district. This apparent deviation from strategically thought out planning to establish sites from about 8<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards, in hinterlands, away from urban centers, not on hillocks, not on confluence of rivers, not even on large tributaries could be due to the fact that the site was in existence before such need was felt. Another possibility being that the neighborhood had significant population of followers that could withstand even any orchestrated hostilities by segments of the society against the Buddhist community. The study of Buddhist sites in Shivpuri District shows that settlements of later period were done in remote localities, not easily accessible by visibility or easy transport but the navigation to these could have only been possible on the basis of good for knowledge of the relevant creeks and outcrops of rocks to reach the Buddhist enclaves.

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