

Archaeological remains of Phuket and Bodhgaya: A cultural study of India and Thailand

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Chapter 5

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Archaeological operations in and around Taradih at Bodhgaya has been carried out time to time from the last century with the efforts of European, Japanese and Indian explorers and excavators. Most of the earlier works were not scientific. Yet, they provide adequate materials for the study of ancient Bodhgaya. However, the latest excavation at the site helped us in ascertaining the cultural sequences, chronology and the potentiality of the site (Bodhgaya). In this context we have base on the excavated site of Taradih, which revealed five successive cultural periods, extending from c. 100 B.C. to c. 1200 A.D.

The pottery in general at Taradih was wheel made and well fired but the hand made specimens were not altogether wanting¹. The ceramics, although dominated by red ware specimens, were yet considerably represented by Black-and-red ware and black ware examples. The pottery had usually fine and thick slip ranging from chocolate through crimson-red, orange to ochre in colour, on the sherds of red ware as well as on red portions of the black-and-red ware. Jars were made in two parts, the rim portion was shaped on wheel while the profile was modeled by hands, and then both the parts were carefully luted-having no slip over them².

The main pottery types included dish-on-stand, bowl with a pedestal base, bowl with globular body and out curved or featureless rim, ring based bowl, perforated bowl, spouted vessel, deep and shallow dish, small vase, small to medium size jar with sharp crination at the neck, flared out rim etc. The shoulders of a few jars of red ware showed a significant applique designs, knob patterns, post firing scratched design etc. Some pieces of Black and Red ware, red ware and black ware bore white paintings in the form of wavy lines and straight and oblique strokes and dots.

Among notable antiquities of stone, were a Neolithic celt a carnelian blade, a quern and a few pestles and a hammer like object³. The important finds of bone were represented by socketed as well as tanged arrow-heads, barbed arrow heads, points, chisels etc. the discovery of a single copper fish hook was very significant as it not only qualified the site for its chalcolithic characters but also hinted at its fishing economy during the period under review. The notable finds of Terracotta were beads and comical object. A few disc shaped beads having perforation at the center were also noteworthy.

With a view to bridging the great hiatus that stretched from the end of the Harappan chalcolithic culture to the beginning of the historic period, archaeologists made a great efforts by taking up excavations at a number of sites. Excavation at Taradih established as the main focus of the chalcolithic culture of Bodhgaya as excavations at Sonpur and Chirand indicated the efflorescence of the chalcolithic culture in Bihar⁴.

Chirand proved to be a veritable rich site of the culture in the Post-Harappa period. Sonpur in the Gaya district is another promising site. Limited excavations at Taradih in the Gaya district yielded remains of the chalcolithic period. Although the excavated remains from Chirand, Sonpur, Taradih and other sites can not stand in favourable comparison with what have been unearthed at Ahar, Gilund, Navadatoli, Jorwe etc; yet with the objects discovered, a palpably understandable picture can be drawn of the material culture of the people who resided in Bodhgaya during the chalcolithic period. Moreover, the peoples of chalcolithic period enjoyed the benefits of the same culture as at Ahar, Gilund, etc. However, the picture of the material culture of the chalcolithic Bodhgaya may also be reconstructed with the aid of what have been found at the other comparable sites⁵.

The post-Harappan chalcolithic people of Bihar appear to have resided in extremely modest structures which they erected themselves. The chalcolithic people of Bodhgaya constructed their house out of perishable materials like reed and bamboo which were probably locally available to them. The reed or bamboo were erected in a manner so as to serve as well to their houses which were finally available to them. The reed or bamboo were erected in a manner so as to serve as well to their houses which were erected in a manner so as to serve as well to their houses which were finally finished off and plastered by mud. At Ahar and Navadatoli on the west and Pandu-Rajar-Dhibi on the east, similar methods of house construction were also employed. Bricks either sun-dried or kiln-burnt do not seem to have been used at Bodhgaya during the chalcolithic period. It was Gilund only that the burnt bricks were used for the construction of the houses in the chalcolithic period.

The exact plan of the houses are afforded by the post holes marking out areas which they enclosed, and on this basis the houses on plan appear to be either circular or square or rectangular⁶. The floors of the houses were made up of clay mixed with silt and sometimes were also paved with river gravels.

It is, however, anybody's guess how the houses may have been roofed, the superstructures on account of their impermanent character having naturally disappeared in due course by the ravage of time. Thatch work tied to the bamboo or reed frame work may have efficiently been utilized for roofing the houses. Similar is the practice which the villagers still follow in the construction of their huts. The condition of the Chalcolithic people in this respect does not seem to have been much different from what is prevalent even these days.

That the roofs of the houses may have been supported on wooden or bamboo posts seem more than certain. The houses, as at Ahar, were seemingly partitioned into a number of rooms by raising wall, one of them having served the purpose of kitchen. Burnt spaces with the remains of ash at Sonpur, Chirand and Taradih may indicate the cooking points in the kitchen where hearth were provided for the cooking purpose. Hearths of different types have been found at Ahar, Gilund, Pandu-Rajar-Dhibi and any of the types might have been in vogue in Bodhgaya. Single mouthed caly hearths, as at Pandu-Rajar-Dhibi, appear to have been favoured at Taradih⁷. Different kinds of ovens, circular, semi circular, hexagonal and triangular types, have been dug-out from here belonging to trench No. TRH-III, IV, V & IX. From trench No. III & V, it appears. That the use of ovens have been started along with period I just with the start of an occupational layer. Semi circular hearth resembled the clay hearth used even these days by the villagers. Chirand has also yielded remains of multi armed hearths, but in the post Chalcolithic level.

It was distinguished by the appearance of the Northern Black polished ware. The black-and-red were still continued but in a lesser frequency. Several new shapes of red ware and black slipped ware made their appearance during this period⁸. The note worthy types included vase of out curved thickened rim and out curved beaded rim dish with sharp carination, the waist bowl with everted rim, bowl with beaded rim, lipped basin, lid cum bowl, flat based bowl, trough etc.

Among the important stone antiquities mention may be made of beads of semiprecious stones, ball, pestle, top of nose stud, etc. the worthwhile object of bone included arrow-head, pin, point, stylus, bead etc. while the terracotta objects represented by symbol learning sealing, bead, ball, earlobe, sangle etc. the note worthy objects of copper included bead bangle, needle, rod, earring etc.

The N.B.P. pottery has described as the deluxe ware of its time. The surface bears highly lustrous mirror like polish with various shades, such as steel-blue, black, silvery golden, pinkish and sometimes in bi-colour in golden and silvery. Sonpur and Bodhgaya claimed to be the only site in Bihar, from where very fine specimens of this pottery have been reported in abundance. Probable it was a trade pottery⁹.

The period also witnessed use of iron on mass scale. Tools and implements of this metal included lance, arrow among the terracotta figurines mention may be made of a dancing girl, whose skrit was flouncing, is a good example or delicate test. This period, however showed all traits of Sonpur II, rather we can say that the Bodhgaya people were materially more advanced than their counter part of Sonpur. Moreover this period can be dated between c. 600 B.C. to c. 200 B.C.

Scientific excavations and exploration conducted so far in Bodhgaya throw considerable light on the evolution and development of early history and culture of the area. The remains of the earliest peasant communities of Bodhgaya were in the Chalcolithic stage of evolution and flourished in the last of the second millennium B.C.; they have been unearthed at Sonpur and Taradih (Bodhgaya). The people lived in huts and practiced agriculture, domestication of animals hunting and fishing for their subsistence. They knew copper, but still used stone tools. In the subsequent phase, iron was introduced, which gave the people a new power and a new sense of security.

This metal was used on mass scale, which facilitated large scale agriculture and military operation. Coins was also introduced as a medium of exchange which boosted trade and commerce. Here large scale agriculture, trade and moneyed economy played a vital role in the emergence of market or cities and facilitated the rise of Magadhan imperialism in the sixth century B.C.

The pieces and fragments of pottery are frequently found in this locality, and we obtained one whole piece of China, apparently a rice bowl, 4 1/2 in diam and 2 1/4 in high, with a crude hand painted ornamentation on the outside in dull red and green, the inside decorated with an edging round the brim of a geometrical pattern 1/2 in wide in blue and the bottom with a lotus also in blue, the glaze is thick on the inside of the bowl. It is clearly not Sawankaloke ware, but my knowledge is insufficient to enable me to express any opinion as to its probable age and place of manufacture¹⁰. It is my intention, however, to submit this bowl to the examination of experts, in order to obtain definite information about it, which may throw some light on the origin of these open cast workings. The next important fact from an archaeological point of view is the widespread distribution of undoubtedly Indian remains, which are found from Muang Takuapa on the north to Muang Trang on the south.

The most important Indian remains have been found in Nuang Takuapa, and indeed the geographical situation and natural advantages of Muang Takuapa are such as to lead to the conclusion that it must undoubtedly have been a place of considerable commercial importance in the past.

๕ Takuapa harbour is the finest in the whole Monthon, being absolutely landlocked, and affording complete shelter in either monsoon. The inland water communications, afforded, before the Chinese silted up the rivers with tailings during the last 30 years, great facilities for water transport; it having been possible within the memory of men now living, for good sized boats to go right up to Pong which is situated at the foot of the mountains right in the interior.

๕ The former route for the tribute tin sent to Bangkok was via Takuapa and across the central range of the peninsula to the Bandon river and thence by boats to Bandon, and it is quite possible that this route may have been a trade route in the time of the Indian Settlements in Muang Takuapa.

๕ Takuapa, moreover, abounds in tin, both in the districts near the coast and right in the interior; which in itself, would have been sufficient inducement for the Indians to have made more or less extensive settlements in the country.

๕ The Indian remains in Muang Takuapa, are found on the islands at the mouth of the Takuapa river, also at Kou Pra Narai and at Pong, both on the Takuapa river inland, the location of these remains can be clearly seen from the map accompanying this paper. The remains at the mouth of the Takuapa river consist of the following :-

(1) An ancient fourarmed stone statue locally known as "Pra Nur" on the summit of a hill overlooking the sea at the southernmost entrance to the Takuapa river situated on a piece of land called "Kaw Larn". This place is reached by means of a small creek called "Klong Nur" which flows into the river near the Pak Koh entrance this small creek is only about 12 feet wide at its mouth and much obstructed by fallen trees; after going up the creek through a mangrove swamp for about 10 minutes, the landing is reached, close to the foot of the hill, which is roughly about 200 feet high and densely wooded. The summit of the hill is leveled off and forms a platform about 55 feet wide by 75 or 80 feet long, with a raised brick platform in the middle about 25 feet square on which stands the ancient stone figure, or rather the remains of it for it is much broken and injured.

The statue which is fourarmed, represents a man standing, clad apparently in a single garment resembling a Burmese Lungyee, with the torso bare, and wearing a high round cap resembling a Turkish fez but without a tassel. It is made of a dense compact bluish grey stone apparently somewhat similar to that of which the figures at Kou Pra Narai are made¹¹.

The figure is a little larger than life size, and is broken off just above the waist, the height from the top of the pedestal to the waist where broken off is 3 ft. 90 in. The pedestal is 8 in thick and 30 in. wide. A photograph of this figure taken by myself has been given to the Society. The workmanship and execution of the figure are excellent but without the elaborate ornamentation of Kou Pra Narai figures.

The hill has steep sides all round except on the N.E. where the slope is easier, being only from 12 to 15 degrees, and on the ridge of this slope there are the remains of an old stairway, consisting of brick steps, now entirely grown over by jungle, the level ground at the top of the hill had been cleared, but the sides of the hill are densely wooded, although few of the trees are of large size. I was unable to make more than a very cursory examination as it is only possible to ascend or descend the creek leading to the main river at or near high tide and it was therefore necessary to hurry away for fear of being left stranded and unable to get away.

A curious point with regard to this figure is that it faces N.E. and the side of the raised brick platform on which it stands is not due North and South, but bears 22 deg : east of north (Magnetic).

Phra Pon, the Governor of Takuapa, informed me that about the year 1899 A.D. some Chinese were working a mine at the base of the hill on which the figure stands, and that one of their number dreamt that there was treasure under the figure, so they moved the figure and dug up the place where it had stood, but found nothing except some old jars for their pains, so they replaced these and the figure again in their former position.

(2)๕ North of and on the opposite side of the river to this hill, and situated on the large island between the Pak Kaw and Pak Kruen inlets, is a place called "Tung Teuk" or literally "the plain of brick (or stone) houses". I was not able to visit this place myself, but was informed by the local inhabitants that there are numerous remains of ancient brick houses or temples and of tanks there. They say that the Chinese worked tin mines close to these remains, but that the "spirits" or "local genii" became angry causing many men to die, so they desisted from working there.

(3)๕ On the west coast of Kaw Pra Tawang there is a place called "Hin Kong" lit : "heap of stone" the local legend concerning this place is that formerly there was an image or "Roop" there which was of such a nature that if any one touched it he forthwith died, so the image was covered up with stones and now there is no one left living who knows where the exact position of this image.

Many years ago, when working a mine on the east side of Kaw Pra Tawng a number of small gold ornaments were found about 2 or 3 sok beneath the surface, I was unable, however, to obtain any of these ornaments, so it is not possible to have any idea as to their origin.

Kou Pra Narai is situated on the Takuapa river above 3 or 4 hours journey from Takuapa Town. The remains at Kou Phra Narai consist of three stone figures, presumably those of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva; which are now lying against two large trees on the bank of the river close to the foot of Kou Phra Narai itself.

These stone figures or "Tewaroop" are made from a dense grey stone, they are four armed and of more than life size. The stone from which they are made does not, as far as I know, occur in Monthon Puket. I consider that these figures and that at Klong Nur were in all probably brought from India, not made locally.

The figures are of beautiful workmanship with well shaped features and highly elaborate ornamentation, but are very much broken and injured owing to the trees against which they were stood having to some extent grown over them, and also broken portions off from them, as can be seen from the photograph of these figures accompanying this paper¹². The local legend with regard to them runs as follows:-

Formerly these three "Tewaroop" together with an ancient inscribed stone were all on a piece of leveled ground on the top of Kou Pra Narai, where there was also a quantity of old bricks and lime; but at the time of the Burmese invasion about 110 years ago, the Burmese brought these stone figures and the inscribed stone down from the hill to the place where the figures now are, with the intention of taking them back with them to Burma: but although it was in the dry season or N.E. monsoon, such heavy rain and floods ensued that they were unable to remove them and had to return to Burma without them.

The Stone figures were left by the Burmese leaning against two young trees near the river bank, which trees grew up to a large size and by their growth have partly buried and considerably damaged the figures. The inscribed stone was subsequently taken by the Siamese to Wat Weeang which was near to Kou Pra Narai, and from thence the inscribed stone was taken to Wat Na Muang opposite to Takuapa Town, where it was seen and measured by me. (see the drawing accompanying this paper). The top left hand corner of the stone has been broken off a little, but otherwise it is in excellent preservation. It is a piece of naturally waterworn slate without any surface dressing or working whatever, about 3 ft. high by 2 ft. 13/4 in. wide, and about 8 in. thick at its thickest part; one surface is nearly flat being only gently rounded, and on this there are six lines of inscription in a very fair state of preservation.

I made a copy of the first two lines of the inscription which is reproduced in the drawing accompanying this paper, and I also made a papier mache squeezing of the whole six lines of inscription, which has been submitted to Colonel Gerini, who is of the opinion that it probably belongs to the 3rd or 4th century of the Christian Era, Colonel Gerini has sent the squeezing to Dr. Kern of Leyden who has been unable to decipher it, Dr. Kern however is of the opinion that it is not Sanskrit, but as far as he could make out was in ancient Tamil. The squeezing has now gone to the Royal Asiatic Society in London, and when it has been deciphered, an interesting light will undoubtedly be thrown on the ancient history of Muang Takuapa.

The Indian remains in Trang are considerable interest; they consist of certain unbaked clay sacrificial tablets found in limestone caves, and of the remains of the brickwork of ancient temples.

These unbaked clay tablets, which are known locally as "Pra Pim" lit : "stamped image" are flat in shape ranging from about 3 in. to 5 in. long, from 2 in. to 3 in. wide, and about 1 in. thick. They have been stamped on one side with figures of Indian Divinities or of Buddha, and on the back in some cases with Buddhist texts in Sanscrit characters. They are found put face to face and laid in rows in great numbers in the caves at Wat Harn and "Tam Kou Sai" which caves are situated not very far from the Trang river north Kouantani. They must have lain undisturbed in those caves for a very long period of time for they all are covered up by a deposit of bat guano. It was owing to the Chinese pepper planters working these bat guano deposits in the limestone caves that the existence of these clay tablets first became known. When first taken from the cave, the tablets are quite wet and soft, but soon harden in the sun. there are four different kinds of clay tablets in the cave at Wat Harn, and over six different kinds in the cave at Tam Kou Sai. The tablets from the cave at Tam Kou Said are different to those from the cave at Wat Harn.

From the type of the Sanscrit character employed, Colonel Gerini places their approximate age at about eight hundred years or about the 11th century.

There is also a cave in Trang where there are immense quantities of the round clay balls used for shooting from a bow, but I have not visited the cave myself.

At another cave which I have also not visited, there are ancient Buddhas of Indian type, and the remains of ancient brickwork, with large sized bricks. These last two localities were visited by Mr. Steffen, who formerly resided in Trang for some time.

Mr. Steffen also informed me that in the mountains in Trang, he had come across a solitary stone pillar, with some carved representation on the top, similar to the temple pillars in Indian, but there was no inscription on it. The local superstition with regard to these clay tablets is that they are made by the "spirits" and that no matter how many tablets may be removed from the caves, the spirits make new ones to take their place.

The tin district in Trang is limited in extent, and the ancient workings not on a very large scale. I am of the opinion that there were agricultural settlements in Trang at the time of the Indians, and that the route to Patalung through Trang was probably one of the important trade routes across the peninsula. The mountain passes are not high, and local traditions are to the effect that the Indians who first settled in Trang subsequently passed over to the Patalung side, possibly on account of hostile incursions from Sumatra into Trang.

There is a limestone cave at Kou Sabab on the Trang river where there are the remains of an old Buddha, and an inscription in Siamese written in red paint on a smooth face of rock near the mouth of the cave; it describes how certain monks had gone there to exalt the religion of the Lord Buddha and how a Buddha had been made, the date given in the inscription fixes the age of the same at 1614 A.D. This is of interest as giving a definite date at which the Siamese were in occupation of Trang.

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- ๒ 2. Ibid., 1959-60
- ๒ 3. IAR, 1961-62, pp. 48 f
- ๒ 4. Dasgupta, P.C., Excavation at Pandur-Rajar- Dhibi, pp. 23 and 263
- ๒ 5. IAR, 1959-60, p. 43
- ๒ 6. Ibid, p. 49
- ๒ 7. Dasgupta, P.C. op cit., p. 16
- ๒ 8. Prasad, A.K. pp. 91-93
- ๒ 9. IAR, 1963-64 p. 6
- ๒ 10. Ibid.,
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