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**HIDDEN HERITAGE IN THE VILLAGES OF
NORTH-WEST DISTRICT: DELHI A MACRO-
STUDY**

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Hidden Heritage in the Villages of North-West District: Delhi A Macro-Study

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Abstract – The purpose of this paper is to search for the archaeological relics which has not been documented before, and are preserved in some or the other manner in the villages of north-west district of Delhi. Primarily the work intends to focus at the present perceptions of the villagers towards these relics. This is based on the field study of several villages which unveiled several historical remnants. The revelation of these remnants, especially the sculptures, is the most significant element in this paper and thus, is examined in detail.

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NARELA

Narela is famous for the temple of *Mansa Devi* who holds great significance among the villagers of the district. Besides the temple of *Mansa Devi*, who is a popular goddess among the neighbouring villages, there is another small temple, where the idol of the goddess, besides *Navratras*, is kept for the rest of the part of the year. This subsidiary shrine is located amidst the habitation of Jats and turned to be more momentous in terms of the traditions abided by the villagers and also challenges scriptural injunctions that proscribe deifying derelict images. Texts like *Pratimanalakshanam* specially warned worshippers that 'the image of a deity, if it be burnt, worn out, broken or split up, after its establishment or at the time of its enshrinement, will always be harmful. A burnt image brings forth drought, a worn-out one causes loss of wealth, a broken image forebodes death in the family, while one that is split, war' [Banerjea 1956:615]. However, in this temple, besides the idol of Goddess *Mansa* and *Kali Mata*, there is one more mutilated image that has been assigned the status equivalent to the other Brahmanical gods and goddesses.

This distorted image has been conceived and invoked as *Bhairon Baba* by some villagers and as *Devi Mata* by the rest. It was indicated that the image appeared from the same *kund* from which the image of goddess *Mansa* emanated. However, more intriguing is the manner in which '*Bhairon Baba*' is embellished. Perfectly clad in a red veil with vermillion sprinkled all over, it is remarkably similar to the way goddesses are represented in the temples and the impression it conveys to its viewers is of a female deity. Nevertheless, the dilapidated sculpture perhaps exemplifies a *Gandharva* commonly associated with musicians in ancient times. The two figures on the

sculptures seem to be in a dancing pose while playing a musical instrument [Fig 1].



Fig 1: Broken sculpture worshipped as *Bhairon Baba*

Similarly, in the other temple of the same village, alongside the idol of *Hanuman*, there is a stone with a flower carved on it which seems to be a residue of a broken sculpture. Dipped in the colour orange that is usually associated with *Hanuman* it is well placed on the wall and is presumed to be the throne of the lord [Fig 2]. The priest of the temple acknowledged the claim by advocating the reason that the stone was discovered in the agricultural fields on the same day when the idol of the lord was established in the temple.



Fig 2: Throne of Lord Hanuman

BANKNER

Bankner perhaps was a site which was occupied in ancient times. Besides frequent occurrences of pottery which indicates that the village belongs to much earlier period, it is evident from the fact that from the mound of the village two broken sculptures were discovered by the villagers and were later given to the *Arya Samaj Gurukul Museum* in Jhajjar. Made of sandstone, the first sculpture is of Lord Shiva and Parvati [Fig 3]. The figure depicts Shiva embracing Parvati while they both are riding Nandi, the bull. In the left hand Shiva is holding his *Trishul*, whereas with the left forehand, he is holding Parvati who is sitting on his lap. There is a crescent moon on his lock of hair and a hooded snake is shadowing them from right side. Both Shiva and Parvati are wearing *Kundalas*. The bull, Nandi is attached to a *chakra* which generally is associated with lord Vishnu.



Fig 3: Sculpture showing Shiva and Parvati

BHORGARH

The Sculpture of Lord Krishna Uplifting Mount Govardhana: This dilapidated sculpture of *Krishna* holding mount *Govardhana* was found by a resident of the village called Tilak Raj and since then his descendents are the custodians of it. Presently, placed on their rooftop this sculpture will soon be repositioned to a *Shiva* temple which is still under construction on the main road along with another tiny sculpture which will be mentioned later. Made of sandstone, this sculpture has been painted over several times in the last few years.

The legend of Lord *Krishna* saving the people of Mathura from the wrath of *Indra* is widely known. The sculpture depicts the same story of Lord *Krishna*.



Fig4 Krishna uplifting Mount Govardhana

He is standing in a *tribhanga* posture which is used in the iconographic art of ancient and medieval India especially in the representation of the Goddesses and other attendants of the principal deities. He is holding the stepped *Govardhan parvat* with his left hand instead of a finger and is wearing a jeweled crown. Behind his head is *shiraschakra*, a halo in a shape of lotus flower in full blossom. The half open drooling eyes and subtle smile accentuates the serenity of the sculpture. In his right hand Krishna is holding a stick which appears to be a mace, an attribute of Lord *Vishnu*. On the bottom can be seen two figures flanking *Krishna*. The one at the left side is a male attendant holding a *Chakra*, a discus, known as *Chakrapurusha* and on the right is a female figure perhaps holding a lotus called *Gadadevi*. Both of them are the personification of Lord *Vishnu*'s attributes. The

iconography of the sculpture indicates that it belongs to post-Gupta period, perhaps 8th or 9th century A.D.

(c) Lord Ishana on Chakra: This small fragment from a larger sculpture was found by the villagers while cultivating their fields. Assuming it to possess divine power they installed it in a small shrine within the fields itself and began worshipping it as *Pitr Devta*, the ancestors.

This broken sculpture appears to be of Lord *Ishana*, a directional divinity and a manifestation of Lord *Shiva*. *Ishana*, or the ruler, is a name of *Shiva* and from him he received his name and attributes. Like *Shiva*, he has a fair complexion and a third eye in the centre of the forehead. He holds an axe (*Parashu*), a trident (*trishula*) and bowl (*Kamandal*) and has an antelope standing beside him. Like, *Shiva* he also rides a white bull. Made of sandstone, this particular sculpture seems to be the left corner fragment of a larger sculpture of *Vishnu* or a syncretic *Vishnu* divinity due to its position atop the *Chakra* of *Vishnu*.



Fig 5: Lord Ishana on a Chakra

He is in sitting posture and is holding a trident in right hand and a bowl in the left forearm. The right portion of his face is broken but the calm expressions on the face are visible. Attached to the *Chakra* seems to be a bull raising its head [fig 5].

MADANPUR

(d) The Idol of Durga Mahishasuramardini: This specific idol of *Mahishasuramardini* was found beneath the floor of the house of a resident. Since then, they have preserved it by placing it in the temple at their house and it is exclusively worshipped by the members of their own family. This small image is made of black sandstone and has been painted in red colour by its present possessor. *Durga* killing the buffalo demon *Mahisha* has been a popular subject in Hindu sculpture from early centuries A.D. [fig 6]



Fig 6: The idol of Mahishasuramardini

However, the image discovered in this village is stylistically very different from the one referred above. This slender idol of the Goddess having ten arms is wearing a jewelled crown, she has fuller breasts and her body is adorned with ornaments. Her lithe body is calm and balanced and the carving strikingly displays the goddess's femininity. Her expressions are smooth and serene as she holds the demon between her hands which is in contrast to the usual representation of *Mahishasura Mardini* in a warrior form. The lion on her right side with his one paw raised is simply a silent onlooker. The Goddess has placed one hand on the body of the buffalo beast and the other hand under his head slightly raising it. The impression one seems to have while looking at the idol is that the goddess is caressing the animal, which is due to absence of any vengeful demeanour. Not all attributes that she is carrying can be identified but the visible ones are sword, shield, lotus and conch shell. Under the demon's lifted foreleg is an obscure thing, perhaps an alligator which is commonly associated with the goddess [Banerjea 1956: 172]. Stylistically, the idol does not appear to belong to ancient or early medieval period and is more likely to be an image of the late Medieval period.

MANGASHPUR

Mangashpur, a small village is located precisely on the border of Delhi and Haryana.

(a) **Suchi worshipped as Dada Saangla:** The only divine being in which the villagers have utmost faith is the village deity known as Dada Saangla. Though, there are two *Shiva* temples in the village, the *Gram Devta* holds the most significant place in the religious order. Among all the other temples of the village, the one dedicated to *Dada Saangla* is the largest. As far as the iconography of this deity is concerned, there is no idol or any sort of human representation of him installed in the temple. Instead of it, there is a *suchi* made of sandstone, around two feet high which is revered as *Dada Saangla*. *Suchis* are the horizontal cross-bars of temple complexes of ancient and early medieval period and are usually carved from three sides. The *suchi* mentioned above is vertically embedded on the surface of the floor and was discovered at this same spot where it now is. The visible portion of the *suchi* exhibits the carving from three sides. Facing the entrance is the side which has a lotus flower in full blossom with human features engraved on it in the centre. On the left side, are engraved human figures holding a water jar and bent over what it appears to be a *Shiva linga*. On the third side, are few human figures in standing posture and the fourth side does not depict anything. It seems to be a probability that the *suchi* is an architectural remnant of a *Shiva* temple that existed in this region [fig 7].



Fig 7: Human Figures carved on the *Suchi*

CONCLUSION

There are several mutilated images and architectural fragments which are the residue of destroyed temples/religious complexes of early antiquity. These fragments are perfectly preserved, usually kept in the

shrines and are often even worshipped. Moreover, their worship at the local level speaks volumes for the ground reality and relevance of scriptural sanctions that strictly forbid any worship of broken images. The ignorance of villagers towards the proscriptions of urban tradition is a boon for such sculptural reliefs. What made this concept singularly interesting were the beliefs and socio-religious association that people perceive towards these 'miraculous' sculptural relics where sometimes they are worshipped as manifestations of some divine power even if they bear no resemblance to their original iconic form. Likewise, the discovery of artefactual and structural remains also enabled to illuminate the settlement history of the region and it proved to be crucial to reconstruct the history.

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