

Archaeological Investigations in Baihar Tehsil of District Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract

The district Balaghat of Madhya Pradesh comprises eleven Tehsils viz; Balaghat, Baihar, Birs, Paraswada, Katangi, Waraseoni, Lalbarra, Khairlanji, Lanji, Kirnapur and Tirodi. Various sites and monuments of the Baihar Tehsil were covered during the archaeological exploration. This paper presents the results of archaeological investigations carried out in the Baihar Tehsil of Balaghat District. Variegated material has been noticed and analysed in the present study to gain insight of the past culture. Besides some known archaeological sites, exploration brought to light a series of new ancient sites. Sites, monuments and art-relics of Baihardivulge the religious, social, artistic and different customary practices of ancient period.

Keywords: Exploration, Ethnoarchaeology, Traditional Art, Monuments, Sculptures, Stone Tools, Sati Pillar.

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INTRODUCTION

Baihar has an area of 910.50 sq kilometres which lies in coordinates 22° 6' 4.4" N and 80° 32' 57.87" E. Many small rivers flow in Baihar named Banjar, Sakrahi, Tannaur, Rauni, Gedla, Kasmiri etc. Banjar is the main river which further met in Narmada in District Mandla. The district of Baihar is plateau area and touches the borders of the districts of Mandla to the northwest and north, Chhattisgarh to the east, southeast and northeast and Paraswada to the west. Baihar is so rich in flora and fauna. It partakes in two core zones of Kanha National Park in which Supkhar is one and Mukki is the other. Baihar has a huge number of Sal and Bamboo plants.¹

Numerous ancient relics were found in earlier studies. Microliths have been reported from Bamhni-Dadar, which is currently a part of Kanha National Park's core zone and comes under Banjar River valley.² Stone Age sites such as Maniteela, Dongarmedh and Lohana were also identified in the previous investigations from Baihar.³

Significant discoveries in the field of numismatics were also reported in the district, including the recovery of 47 tribal coins from Balaghat that are now on display in the Nagpur Museum.⁴ Nine silver punch mark coins were found in 1983 and are now on display in the Nagpur Museum.⁵ Six copper coins were later discovered in the area, of which 2 belonged to Menander and the other 3 were unidentified. From numerous sites, including

Hatta, Kirnapur, Baihar, Pala, Mau, Laanji, Sonsaar, Ragholi, and Balaghat, ancient temples, sculptures and copper plates have been discovered.⁶ These important discoveries have demonstrated potential for archaeological research in the area.⁷ Exploration has been conducted in the tehsil of Baihar to know more information about the sites, sculptures, monuments and other antiquities after being motivated by the availability of encouraging data from previous findings.

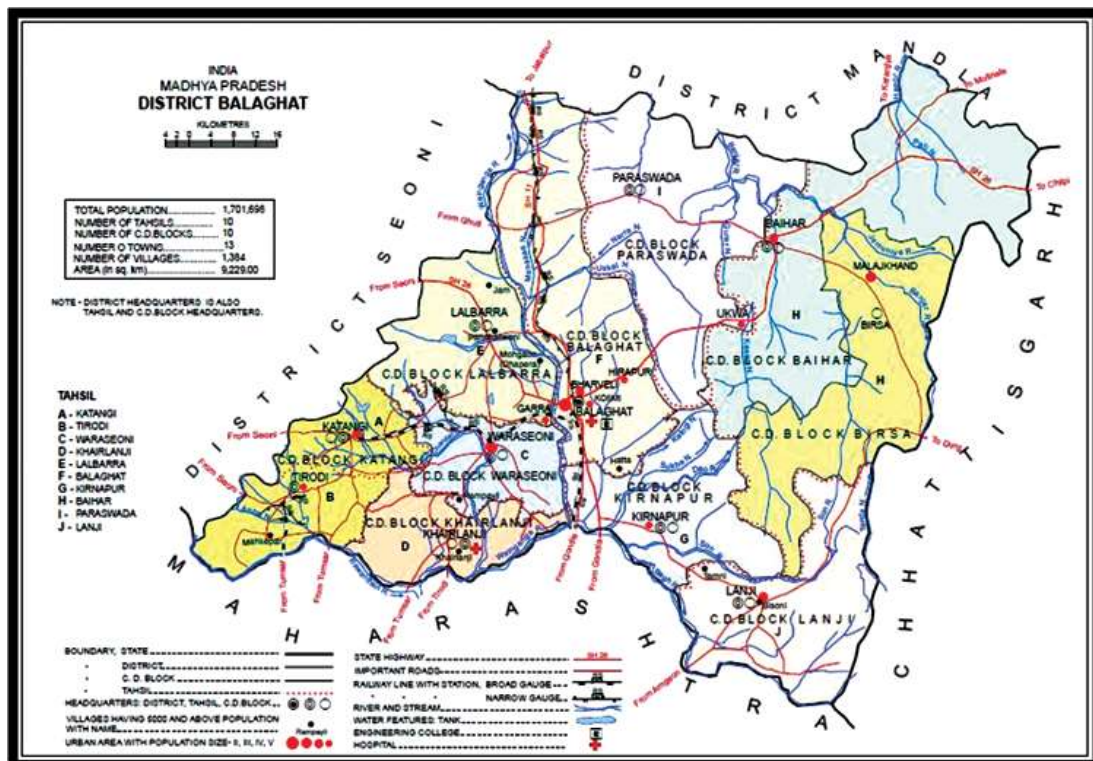
The survey in Baihar tehsil had been done in villages Mohbatta, Rajama, Singhbagh, Sinhaarpaat, Joda Mandir, Banna-Bijoura, Babamandi, Mendhki, Seetadongri, Jaldidand, Baigatola, Nevargaon, Teepagarh (Ukwa) and Modi Nagar. There were mostly sculptures and temple ruins discovered. These places were connected to one another if we analyze the region they occupy in terms of style and raw materials. Joda Mandir has already been protected under ASI Bhopal Circle. Joda Mandir is an important monument which has two temple structures facing each other and a separately built mandap is also noticeable there. Another old temple was noticed in Babamandi which has traces of modifications in later date. During the exploration a new site at Modi Nagar has recently found. The temple's ruins were exposed over a sizable region when construction was being done

in the area. This temple looks much bigger and more decorative compared to the Joda mandir.

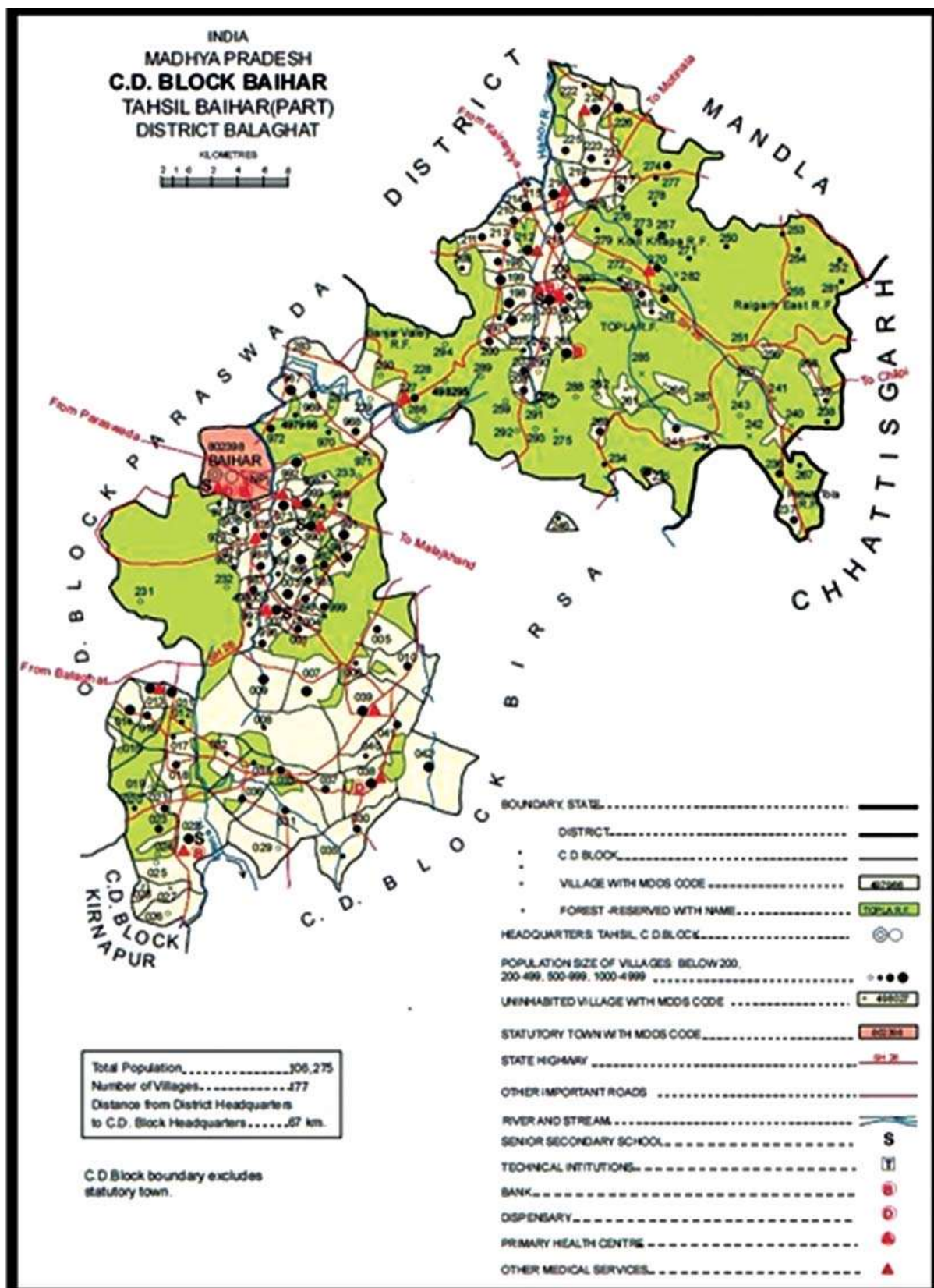
A temple ruin has been discovered in Mendhki on a mound. Here, two rectangular blocks were positioned in opposition to each other and 14 square blocks were systematically arranged. The only foundation, though, has a 16-pillared architecture plan. Huge brick debris can be seen in the nearby area. Some stone tools were also collected from the surface during the exploration in addition to the exploration, an attempt has also been made to use the ethnoarchaeological approach to correlate and test the continuity of art and tradition in the area. A large copper hoard site called Ghangharia (Earlier this site has been mentioned as Gungeria)⁸ is located in Lamta, 80 kilometres from Baihar, and is worth mentioning here that the massive copper mine Malajkhand is located only 30 kilometres away from this place. Since both locations are connected and Baihar is on its way, it comprehends an opportunity to trace the remnants of ancient routes in the research area.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EXPLORATION:

To find new archaeological sites and plot them in archaeological maps of the region. It will help



Map 1: Balaghat District



Map 2: Baihar Tehsil
(Source: DCHB 2011)

people to understand its historical importance.

- The research also focuses on the conservation of socio-cultural values of the area too.
- To make a systematic study of the region's stone tools, sculptures and architecture, which makes people aware of their heritage.
- Find the involvement and importance of ethnic groups in local history and their contribution.
- To highlight new areas with archaeological potential for further research.
- To study the ethnoarchaeology of this region.

Sites with Archaeological potential

1. **Mohbatta (220 5'8" N, 800 33'37" E)**

It is situated at approximately five km. away from Baihar. A stone block (pillar) has been found in the field which contains four equal sides. Another piece was laid down on the ground near that. The height of it is 4.5 feet above the ground. Each side was 1 foot wide and made of schist stone, which had a rough, degraded texture and was black in colour. It is evident that the block or pillar was a part of any architectural remnants that were scattered or possibly removed from their original places near by. In the locality the majority of the remaining architectural pieces were discovered, which are undoubtedly where the original location of those remains. Here few more pillars with the same design, measurement, and raw material were spread over the ground and few remains other than pillars were recognized, which must be the parts of the roof and other features. Few were carved incompletely. It's possible that the piece was incomplete or was merely a sample. Only few seemed finished with less ornamentation. In the process of examining the area close to the cultivated field, it resembles a small ascension. Although the architecture as a whole wasn't discovered, the individual architectural components were scattered here and there. There is a massive, flat square block with 4 feet 3 inches on each side, found. Maybe it was the part of the roof. Another block with a little less measurement was near to pillars incompletely carved. Perhaps the part of vitaan or aamlak was

trying to be cut from it. Postholes can also be noticed in the surface for erection of pillars. According to the local legends, the kings who were going with their processions at this place in ancient times had become grounded due to some reason.

From a little distance from these remains, a sculpture was found of Devi Varahisitting in Ardhaparyakasan, holding a staff in her hand and a buffaloes shown below her. It was made of the same raw material found in architectural pieces. Its dimensions are 2.2 feet in height and 1.5 feet in width. The same raw material was used to create a 3-foot-10-inch tall human figure that locals erected as a revered sculpture in the village. It may have undergone extensive degradation because no subtle aesthetic touches were seen. It seems like a dancing figure.

2. **Rajma (2207'57" N 80030'39" E)**

Rajma is situated about 5 km from the Baiharbus stand and opposite to Mohbatta. A female sculpture of has been seen here. The locals refer to this object as Nakti Bhawani, which is three inches long and one foot two inches wide. It is located next to the road leading to Movala in a modern shrine. Temple is of the present, but the sculpture seems early.

3. **Singbagh (2207'12 " N 800 32'46" E)**

There are approximately 8 to 9 sculptures, one of which is a lady deity (Mahishasurmardini). Shiva linga, a depiction of a hand on the stone (may be the part of sati pillar) and a few unrecognized sculptures have been noticed here. There is also a female deity inside the shrine holding a weapon and placing her leg on some object which is dilapidated. May be it is the depiction of "Mahishasurmardini". Except that there are two sculptures of a lion over an elephant (popularly called Gondwana emblem), one is a little larger than the other one. Then few more sculptures were there which have not been identified

4. **Joda Mandir (220 6'22 "N 80033'44" E)**

Joda Mandir is a Shiva temple very near and famous in Baihar as a historical monument and was conserved and protected by the ASI Bhopal circle. It was preserved and protected by the ASI Bhopal circle. Pair is what the name "JODA" signifies. There are two temples next to one another. The first is a huge temple with exquisite architectural



Fig. 1: Standing pillar, Mohbatta



Fig. 2: Pillar on ground, Mohbatta



Fig. 3: Varahi, Mohbatta



Fig.4: Dancing figure, Mohbatta

detail and ornamentation, whereas the second stands in stark contrast. The larger one's original appearance was lost when it was protected from the left side with regular bricks, but it still maintains a lovely appearance. Temple 1 consists of a sanctum on ajagati (platform). The main entrance door is plain and devoid of any decoration. The lintel has a design of a stencil creeper. The jagati consists of simple mouldings, while the jangha is decorated with a vertical lotus pattern interlaced with ghatapallava design in the centre. In its garbhagriha, there is an unknown deity that was placed improperly, which must be situated initially on its shikhara on a niche just above a height from the entrance. There is a vacant place on the niche whose dimensions seem as same as the dimensions of that sculpture. From the inside, its roof (vitaan) can be seen as beautifully carved. It is a circular design on a square block of a diagonal of 83 inches. The entrance was 4 ft 7-inch in height and 2 ft 5 inches wide. And the chamber was square and the length of each side of around 120 inches. As well inside the sanctum, we can see the carved pilasters are there. Due to the poor conservation, its left portion and back portion completely lost their original beauty

and importance, but in the front and right walls, we can see its original view.

Temple No. 2 is facing temple No. 1. It stands on a platform and consists of a sanctum with a shikhara surmounted by a huge amalaka. It also has a plain doorway at the main entrance. The temple is built of ashlar stone masonry and is dated to circa twelfth century A.D. The temple is simple as a square in shape in the janghaportion, while the Shikhar is a basic pyramidal shape with aamlakon its top. Sanctum got emptied, and unlike the temple one, no carving or decoration is there. The roof is also plain.

Except for those two temples, there is a mandapa. It is not clear whether it is of the same period or the latter one. Well, the mandapa is on four pillars above which stone blocks were placed horizontally in three-layer. But still, the middle portion of the roof is blank, in a hollow square shape.

There is another feature in both of the temples which is the water discharging system. In temple one, it is on the right side of the wall at the height of the ground, while in temple two, it is open on the ground from the left wall.

5. **Bijoura (2204'55 "N. 80031'3" E)**



Fig. 5: Temple 1, Joda Mandir



Fig. 6: Temple 2, Joda Mandir



Fig. 7: Separate Mandapa, Joda Mandir



Fig.8: Architectural remains, Joda Mandir



Fig. 5: Temple 1, Joda Mandir

More than 10 km away from Baihar is located. A sati-stambha along with another heavenly sculpture have been found here. An inscription in the "Devanagari" script has also been noticed. The pillar was supported on another rock that was a component of a building and measured 14.5 inches broad and 54 inches high above the ground where it was erected. The inscription was shown in the stambha along with the customary



Fig. 6: Temple 2, Joda Mandir

hand of Sati with the Sun and Moon. And in the centre, two human figures were depicted appearing to be in suhasanain namaskarmudra. It is difficult to identify the heavenly deity next to the pillar since his four arms are broken, and he is surrounded by two attendants on either side of him. However, it appears that he is the god Vishnu. About one kilometre ahead to this place, a mound is surrounded by agricultural fields. Where many sculptures clustered in a small area. Shivalinga and small puppet-like carvings over stone have also been found at this place. Few sculptures kept in the open are listed as follows:

(a) MAHISHASURMARDINI

Height- 56 inch

Width- 27 inch

(b) Procession



Fig.11: Mahishasurmardini

Height- 26 inch

Width- 18 inch

It's a stone block placed just next to the previous lady deity. Here so many people were shown in different actions. The block was not that clear and was broken.



Fig.12: Procession

(c) GANESH

Height- 19 inch

Width- 14 inch

Easy to recognize Ganesha due to his trunk that is in "Vaam-Mukhi".



Fig.13: Ganesha

(d) SURYA

Height-38 inch

Width- 15 inch



Fig.14: Surya

(e) VISHNU

Height- 17 inch

Width- 11 inch

The next sculpture was of Vishnu. The sculpture has four arms and one is holding a Chakra (left upside). At the same time, the left (bottom) was in the position of Abhaya Mudra.



Fig. 15: Vishnu

(f) NAGYUGAL

Height- 20 inch

Width- 10 inch

A sculpture of two snakes coiled together. Here the sculpture has an actual size 14x10 inches over that 20x10 inch block. These all were placed on the ground near each other. Some part of them was buried down in-ground.



Fig.16: Yugal Nag

(g) HANUMAN

Height- 5' 9"

Width- 1'10"

A massive man-size sculpture at a distance of around one kilometre was placed inside of the path. It was the image of God Hanuman, whose one leg was placed over Apasamara. It was of the same schist stone but was painted by the villagers, which covers its originality.



Fig. 17: Hanuman

6. **Babamandi (2200'31"N. 80033'28"E)**

At a distance of 12 kilometres from Baihar. The temple of Babamandi situated. It is called Rudreshwar Shiva Temple just near Tannour river. It is under the care of Janpad panchayat Baihar.

This temple is situated close to another temple that was built recently. The old temple, however, is unaltered. The original design can be seen in the right wall's bottom portion of the temple, but the upper portion was hastily constructed with cement and stone, compromising its originality but leaving it in good shape. There is a sanctum with a "Shiva-Linga" and a mandapa with a flat roof nearby. Sanctum is a little room. There is a Shikhar above the sanctuary that doesn't appear to be an original design, but it is made as identically as feasible. Above that pyramidal Shikhar, there is Aamlak.

The entrance to the sanctum is small. On both sides at the bottom, there are two dwarfpalas (couples) are there in each side. The Female is standing holding a Kalash while next to her male standing with a Dand-like object. On top corners on both sides, another male figure is there but not clear. In the centre or the linter portion, there is a depiction of Ganesha in the "Udarbandh" posture.

Several sati-pillars and numerous more sculptures were noticed here. The similar Gondwana logo might be seen here. At the entrance to the temple, there are two warriors carved (who may be Sankar Shah and Raghunath Shah) in standing positions. The measurements of the two warrior sculptures are 43 inches tall by 18 inches wide and 41 inches tall by 20 inches wide, respectively. The main attraction except the temple is two slabs having images. On the first slab Sati raises both hands, and another one has

an erotic scene in which animal and human intercourse depicted. In the sati pillar, two-hand were carved, with Sun and Moon. Two symbols of "Phadapen" (a symbolic form of Gond God) have also been carved on the pillar. The sati pillar has dimensions as 5.6 ft in height and 1.7 ft wide, where the arm of the Sati is made in and 7.5 inches thick. At the same time, other sculpture was 40-inch height, 18.5 inches wide and 7.5 inches thick.

Except these, five more sati-stambh found there, which were listed below-

- (a) Height- 37 inch Breadth- 18 inch Have a single arm raised. Sun and moon are there with "phadapen."
- (b) Height-33.5 inch breadth- 13 inch One arm is raised, and the left side on the top moon, right top sun is there, and left to the arm "Phadapen" is carved. Here something is written on the pillar, but due to the rough surface and decaying by the various thing, it is not clear to understand.
- (c) Height- 38 inch Breadth- 15 inch Arm raised made a right angle from the right. Top of it right side moon and left side sun are there. Here's also "Phadapen" made on the right side of the arm.
- (d) Height- 42 inch Breadth- 18 inch Here two arms were raised, and only moon and sun were carved out on top of it.
- (e) Height- 35 inch Breadth- 20 inch Here also, two arms were raised with the same style as the previous one with sun and moon.

Other sculptures from Babamandi

Few other sculptures have been noticed here. A

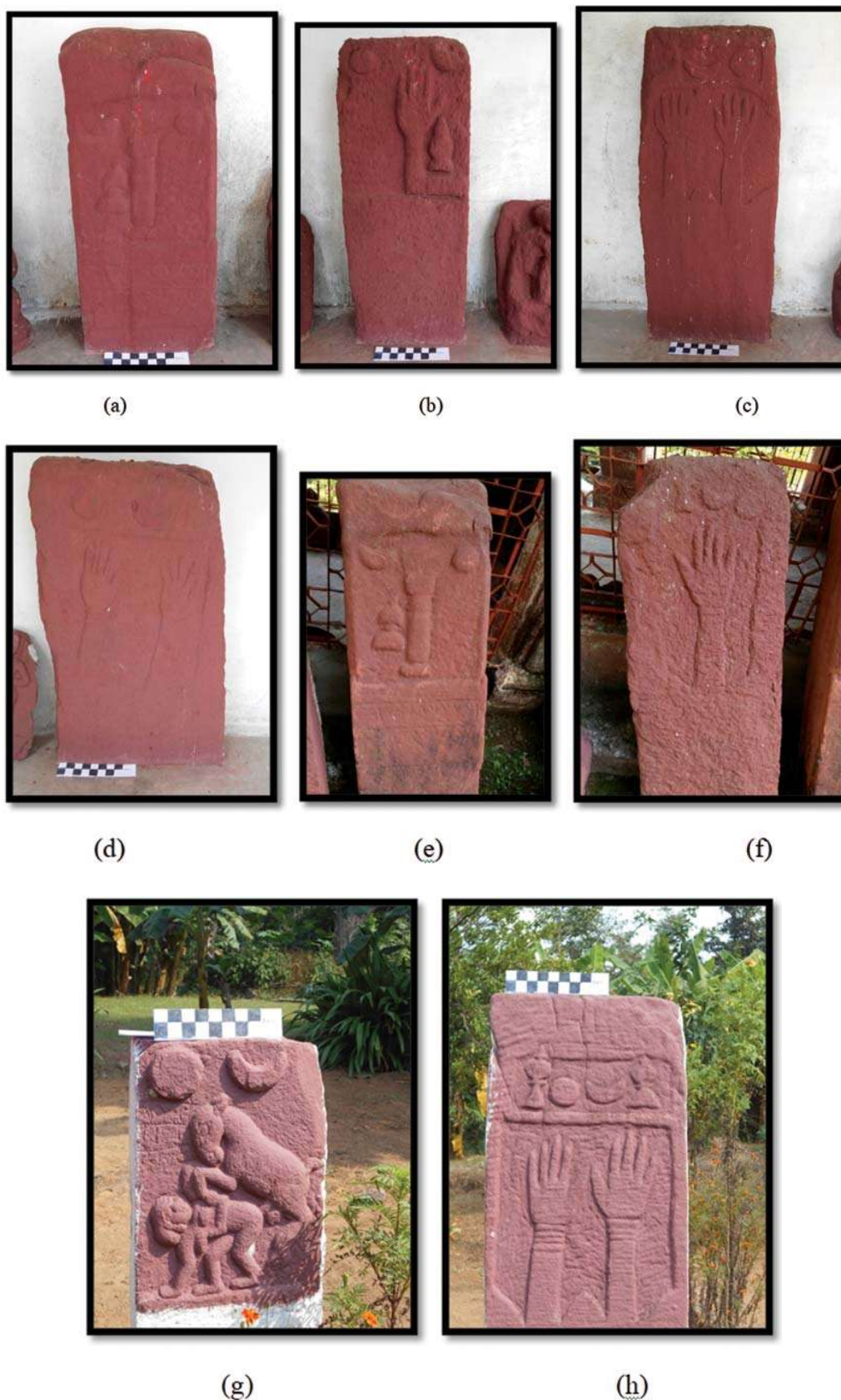


Fig.18: Sati Stambhasand Erotic figure from Babamandi

goddess image, female warrior and worshippers (upasikayen) are noteworthy. A yogi image is also there. Except for these, many other sculptures of gods, warriors, male, female and lions over elephants were seen there. Few architectural remains were also existed at site.

7. **Mendhki (200 02' N, 800 58' E)**

Temple ruinshaves been found in Mendhki. It has a floorplan with 16 pillars (foundation) and two long rectangular building blocks arranged as the entryway and a platform for the deity, respectively. In Mendhki, there is a temple ruin found. It has a floorplan having 16 pillars (base) and two long rectangular architectural blocks placed as one in the entrance and another as for platform for diety. The ruin covers an area of 20.32 meters wide and 25.4 meters long. Sixteen pillars are

placed in four-row with four pillars in each. The space between the middle two rows from the front is 230 inches, while the left and right row makes a distance of 175 inches from the middle rows. There is three types of pillar bases; one is square, the second a little 'T' shaped and the third one in all four corners has a different shape. Each block has around 40 to 60 inches wide edges.

The bricks found near has dimension as 40×25×10 inches. These are huge, but most of them were broken. No doubt, this temple has a foundation of stone, and the walls were covered by bricks.

8. **Seetadongri (2209'51 "N 80026'44" E.)**

Here we found another temple ruins on a



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig.19: (a) Shivalinga (b) sixteen pillared architecture base (c) a complete brick

mound in the deep forest. Carving of the sculptures were very well. Blocks of the walls are also huge. Many Hindu deities were carved in sculpture and some architectural

blocks were also scattered in nearby area.

9. **Teepagarh and Nevargaon**

From Nevargaon (220 1'35" N. 800 35'48" E.)



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)

Fig.20: (a)(b)(c) Brahmanical deities from the site, (d) Temple ruins, (e) attendants, (f) door fragments g) site view

some microliths majorly made in chalcedony were found on the surface from a mound. Mound situated near the village Nevargaon and surrounded by few more similar mounds. Although those microliths were not found in a bulk. Same tool types were found in the forest of Teepagarh (2200'49 "N.80028'51" E). Here we have the larger number of tools

compare to Nevargaon. Here in this forest there is a flat surface on the top and a cave (have no archaeological merit) was found. The tools found from these sites are yet to be study, though these tools have maximum length of 5 centimeters.

Ethnoarchaeology of art and tradition of area



(a)



(b)

Fig. 21: (a) tools from Teepagarh (b) tools from Nevargaon

The area has the majority of tribal population. The culture and tradition of tribes still exist in the purest form in the region. Some tribes have different rituals on various occasions. The primary Brahmanical celebrations linked it with nature and agriculture, acknowledging that these festivals were primarily agrarian in character. Apart from these celebrations, they followed an old tradition of "Godna" a kind of tribal or traditional tattoo, which have different meaningful symbols. Each symbol has a particular meaning, time and reason to be poked on body. Traditional medicinal practices are also in vogue in the life style of tribes of the area discussed. Traditions and practices of the tribes of the area were observed and analysed to gain insight of the art-relics and symbols found in this archaeological investigation.

CONCLUSION

The Balaghat district has a lot of promise for archaeological research based on intermittent investigations and prior finds. During this exploration, a substantial number of additional locations have been identified. Future research has a lot of possibilities in the locations discovered in previous and current investigations. It is evident from the sculptures that the Balaghat district is very rich in the form of many magnificent artefacts. Some locations display exquisite sculptures. But due to lack of awareness and for personal benefit, most of the sculptures and architectural blocks were damaged, and some got vanished. It can be said that this area has a significant history but was completely ignored by the local people. No doubt the local history of any place must be recognized firstly by the local people but, a lack of awareness about the heritage leads them to destruction. A thorough examination of the Baihar tehsil's sites,

monuments and artefacts has provided a affluence of knowledge about the region and a good number of possible locations for scientific excavation in future. Finding these sites and the related artefacts will not only provide insight into the past of this region, but will also open up new opportunities for investigation and excavation.

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