

STUDY MATERIAL
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UNIT-III-HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS TOURISM RESOURCES OF ASSAM

**Topic-ARCHAEOLOGICAL RUIN SITES, REMAINS AND MONUMENTS IN
ASSAM**

Assam can be proud of her ancient and medieval archaeological remains and monuments. The first and the oldest specimen of sculpture of Assam have been found in the stone door-frame of a temple at Da-Parvatia near Tezpur town in the district of Sonitpur. This iconograph represents the Gupta-School of Art of the fifth and sixth centuries AD.

Da-Parvatia

Tezpur, like Guwahati is another town, which is archaeologically very rich. The first and the oldest specimen of sculpture or iconoplastic art of Assam have been found in the stone door frame of a temple at Da-Parvatia near Tezpur town in the district of Sonitpur. The earliest evidence of this group of ruins at Tezpur is the ruined Da Parvatia temple, belonging to 5th-6th century A.D., i.e. Gupta period. This brick built temple is in complete ruins and only the door frame is in standing position. The significance of the temple is the most beautiful door frame (dvara). Here, Ganga is depicted on the lower portion of a jamb, while Yamuna is depicted on the lower part of the other jamb. Both, the elegant figures of the river goddesses are well known amongst the art historians of country. Both, the jambs are minutely carved with miniature figures of human beings, birds, floral designs etc. Above these jambs the lintel again has enhanced the beauty of the entire gate with its minute

decoration and engravings of half bird and half animal figures-an early feature in Indian art. Da Parvatia village is at a distance of about 2 km from the Tezpur town. The site is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

An early rock inscription considered to be the work of the fifth century AD, was found near Kamakhya temple (Guwahati), and known as Umachal rock inscription. The entire state is dotted with about 260 ruin and monument sites belonging to the period from seventh century AD to the Eighteenth century AD. Among these archaeological treasures, it has 12 major ruin sites and 25 major monument sites. Some of the architectures reflect the Gupta style, while some others are of later period revealing a combination of Ahom, Mughal and indigenous traditions of art and architecture. Heavy rainfall, high humidity, a high range of annual temperature and frequent earthquakes caused immense destruction and loss to many such structures. It may be noted that except Kamakhya temple, not a single standing monument of the past belonging to the period prior to sixth century has remained intact to the present time. Most of the monuments that are found to stand on their early basements belong to the 10th to 12th centuries A.D. and were renovated by the Ahom, Koch and Kachari kings in the late medieval period.

All Hindu temples of early medieval period were made up of stone and their architecture style conforms to the *nagara* type of North India, with some minor local variations. Apart from this, the Rangamati mosque reflects a pure Saranic architectural style, which was built by Hussain Shah in the late 15th century (One of the major historical monuments of Dhubri district). The Mughal architectural style is also well adapted in the places constructed by Ahom rulers in medieval period. Temple and palaces of Ahoms, especially in Sibsagar district also reflect unique combination of Mughal, Indian Classical and local influences. Some stupa-like structures at Sri Surya Pahar and rock caves of Pancharatna near reflect the evidence of intrusion of Buddhist art and architecture into Assam. Apart from these, a tradition of bamboo and wooden architecture also emerged in the late medieval period. One can witness the remnants of such beautiful wooden structures in the Satras.

Bamuni Pahar

Bamuni Pahar ruins at a little distance from the D. C. Court of Tezpur town yields the ruins of several temples constructed during the pre-Ahom age. It appears that there must have existed in all five temples. There must have been the main temple at the centre,

while other four temples must have stood on the four corners. The entire area is full of stone blocks mostly curved with beautiful floral and geometrical designs. There is also a broken doorjamb of the main temple showing some incarnations of Vishnu. About thirty years back, when I first visited the site. I saw an image of Bhairab. But it is not in the place now.

Madan Kamdev

Madan Kamdev is an archaeological site in Baihata Chariali, Kamrup, Assam. This place dates back to the 9th and 10th century AD. Excavation and ruins here shows the prosperity and might of Pala dynasty of Kamarupa.

The ruins of Madan Kamdev are scattered widely in a secluded place, covering 500 meters. Temple of Kamdev must be reconstruction, Uma Maheshwar's embraced idols, carved on the stones of medieval temples, can be seen here. The most prominent statues are of the Sun, Ganesha, and Vidyadhara

Statues of Bhairav with six heads, a four-headed Shiva, Kalpavriksha, Sun various Apsara, Vishnu with six heads, Saraswati and various other statues of animals have been identified as being from here.

In the year 1977, when this area was protected and exploration and preservation began, the hill was surrounded by immense variety of forests, filled with snakes, scorpions, and wild animals such as deer and tigers. Birds sing and chirp in the trees. Right below the Kamdev, the River Madankuri flows in the east and towards the north. Beneath the hill is a vast stretch of swampy land; a chain of hills of Gopeshwar runs from the north to west, and Natuar nacha and Sangsari in the east. Puranic beliefs are still based on Madan Kamdev. One account says that God Shiva in a spurt of fury had burnt the god of love, Kam or Madan, to cinders. Madan was reborn at this place.

Architecture

Madan-Kamdev is the main temple, with ruins of other huge and small temples scattered around it. Representatives of the Architectural Directorate believe that excavation may reveal an additional twelve temples. Near Madan Kamdev, an old temple of lord Shiva, known here as Gopeshwar, is located in the village of Deuduar. Nearby is a large cave known as Parvati Guha (Parvati Cave), after his consort.

Archaeological Remnants of Ambari. Guwahati

The Ambari Archaeological Site (Lat. 26° 11' 8'' N; Long. 91° 45' 21'' E), situated in the heart of the Guwahati city in Kamrup District of Assam was accidentally discovered in course of digging the foundation for the building of the Reserve Bank of India in 1969. From 1970 to 2003 the site was excavated by different excavators. The occupation of Ambari has been made into two distinct cultural periods ranging from c. 7th to 12th c. AD and 13th to 17th c. AD respectively.

The excavation at Ambari Archaeological Site in 2008-09 jointly by the Guwahati Circle of ASI and the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam is important and significantly rewarding in view of the fact that no cultural findings of the Sunga-Kushana period (2nd-1st c. BC to 3rd c. AD) were ever excavated in Northeast India prior to this excavation.

The most important discovery of the excavation of Ambari Archaeological Site during the field season 2008-09 is flight of steps made of bricks leading to the tank. Besides, the excavation has revealed two floors and two hearths resting on the natural soil significantly.

The ceramic industry of the site is dominated by Kaolin ware, Red ware, Buff ware and few Grey wares, which are available in medium and coarse fabrics and occasionally applied with slip. All the pot sherds found are of wheel-turned, although a small percentage of handmade potteries are also recovered.

It is worth mentioning here that three types of foreign ceramics namely Arretine and Roulleted ware (1st -2nd C.AD.), Chinese celadon ware (10th -12th C.AD.), and Green glazed ware (16th -17th C.AD.), were also found in the excavation.

Sri Surya Pahar

Sri Surya Pahar is located 136 km west of Guwahati is a unique historical as well as archaeological site on a hillock resorting Hindu, Buddhist and Jain relics together. If one goes to Goalpara town from Sri Surya Pahar he or she can see from the road on the hill slope a few more votive stupas. Archaeological Survey of India has exposed the remains of the two temples datable to 10th century. The Sri Surya Pahar site has hundreds of ancient engraved Shiva Lingas of various sizes, a series of Buddhist stupas and sculptures associated with Jain religious beliefs. Remains of planned houses and artistic bricks at Sri Surya Pahar have confirmed the long-held belief that a civilization thrived here centuries ago.

The stupas and also the terracotta plaques with figure of Buddha found in regular excavation indicate that Buddhism flourished in lower Brahmaputra valley, especially in and around Surya Pahar during the early part of the Christian Era and continued up to the 10th Century A.D. In the 9th-century A.D. the Pala Dynasty (who were followers of the Mahayana and Tantric schools of Buddhism) stretched to a large part of India including Assam resulting in spread of Buddhism throughout the length and breadth of Brahmaputra Valley (undivided Assam). Buddhist remains found in some nearby areas like Pancharatna, Barbhita village and Bhaitbari (now in Meghalaya) in the southern Bank of the lower Brahmaputra valley also strengthen the fact.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) started excavation works in Sri Surya Pahar in 1993. But the initial works were carried out for brief periods annually which, however, exposed startling relics including heads of deities with Karanda Mukuta, Kirtimukha, vestiges of stupa, terracotta mortar-pestle and vessels used in rites, designed tiles, Apsaras, Purnaghat, etc.

Excavations carried out in 1996 and 1997 hit gold when archaeologists discovered a Buddhist stupa along with monastery (vihara) which were estimated to belong to the 8th-9th century AD (contemporary to Paharpur stupa now in Bangladesh).

Excavations carried out in later years also yielded two temple complexes one of which was a brick temple complex aligned in north-south directions. These rectangular enclosure walls enclose the remains of several brick structures including the sanctum sanctorum and porch built in three sub-structural phases.

The excavators also found a number of antiquities at the site most of which were terracotta tiles and plaques. Remarkable discoveries from the temple complex near the ancient tank include sculpture of Ganesha and Mahishasuramardini.

In the southern foothills of Sri Surya Pahar, excavators found a stone-paved water kund with revetment walls. This type of ancient kund which can control the natural flow of water has been found at many archaeological sites spread over India. This kund found at Sri Surya Pahar was probably used to take bath and to perform other daily ablutions by the devotees and monks before going to worship the Jain god which was carved in the natural cavern.

ASI founded a museum at the site to exhibit most of the antiquities unearthed from the excavation. Some of these 96 collections displayed at the site museum include stone sculptures of Gajasimha, Mahishasuramardini, decorated lion head, moulded fish, plaques of the human figure, mythical animals, kiritimukhas, amalaka fragment, decorated tiles of floral and geometric designs, etc.

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