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REMAINS OF KUSHANA STUPA AT THANESAR, KURUKSHETRA (HARYANA)

Manoj Kumar

Research Scholar, Department of AIH, K.U. Kurukshetra.

Abstract:

Present paper is based on the remains of Kushan stupa, exposed during the scientific clearance work at mound near Brahma-sarovar Thanesar, Kurukshetra. This archaeological work was done by Department of Archaeology & Museums Haryana Government. The relics of stupa shows that it would have been similar to Assandh and Damekh stupa. Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chuang also referred a Monastery and stupa near Aujas-ghat of Brahma-sarovar. It may be part of that settlement.

KEY WORDS:

archaeological work , Kushana Stupa , Thanesar, Kurukshetra (Haryana).

INTRODUCTION:

Thanesar is a small town in Kurukshetra District of Haryana. The name of Thanesar was originally *Sthanvisvara*. Chinese traveler Yuan Chuang mentioned this city as *Sa-ta-ni-shi-fa-lo* in his work and Greek Geographer Ptolmy mentioned this city as *Batan-Kaisera* (Karnal District). The name *Sthanvisvara* is derived from *Sthana* (abode) of Iswara (or Mahadeva) or from the junction of his name *Sthaanu and Iswara* or from *Sthanu* and *Sar*, a lake. Thanesar is a holy and historical town, where millions of people have been coming from time immemorial spurred by a religious motive and a burning faith in the sacredness of its soil. Thanesar is a holy city situated on the banks of the Vedic river Sarasvati. This place is the witness of the battle of Mahabharata and the birth place of Bhagwad Geeta. In the Vedic literature this place is said to be like heaven. During the period of the rise of 16 Mahajanapada, Thanesar was part of major mahajanapada which was called Kuru Janapada in Jambudvipa. The Buddhist work *Yoginitantra* makes several references of Kurukshetra. According to Buddhist literature the city of Kurukshetra was visited by Gautam Buddha. According to the *Dipvansa*, Buddha came to Thanesar, and he received his alms on the *Anotattlake* (*Ajusaghat*). Literature explains the place *Thullakohita* which was visited by the Buddha. D.C. Ahir identified this place as Thanesar. Buddha delivered some of his wisest discourses to the Kurus who embraced Buddhism. In the Mauryan time Thanesar was the part of Magadha state. King Ashoka built a stupa in Thanesar in the memory of Buddha's journey. The Chinese traveler Yuan Chuang refer to an Ashokan stupa which lies 4-5 li of *Sa-ta-ni-shi-fa-lo* i.e. *Sthanvisvara* (Thanesar) which is about 300 feet high and made of yellowish red colour bricks but at present in this direction no stupa exists, probably removed in recent past. Alexander Cunningham reported a stupa near *Aujas* ghat of Bharama Sarovara but at present no stupa exists. An another stupa and a monastery was reported from Thanesar which were destroyed for constructing Government Hospital. Present stupa remains were reported on the north-west

REMAINS OF KUSHANA STUPA AT THANESAR, KURUKSHETRA (HARYANA)

bank of Bharmsrovra, near government hospital, this may be part of that settlement (Monastery) which was reported by Xuan Zang . This stupa's remains were located within the boundary of Kurukshetra University, and now declared protected by the Department of Archaeology & Museums, Government of Haryana.

Department of Archaeology and Museums(Haryana), did scientific clearance work at this mound, at Thanesar. Under the supervision of author and overall direction of Dr. Ranvir Singh, Deputy Director, Department of Archaeology & Museums Government of Haryana in the year 2012-13. The Chief purpose of scientific clearance at mound was to find remains of Buddhist monastery which was mentioned by the Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chuang in his journey report. According to him a Buddhist monastery had existed between *Sannihita* Tank and Kurukshetra-Kaithal railway Track, and to discover such kind of Buddhist remains which were reported in 1972. To find out the history of mound by creating a correlation between Karan ka Qila and Harsh ka Tila and matching their culture sequences to reconstruct history of area.

During the archaeological scientific clearance work at site in the Warea some courses remains of round shape bricks structure came into light. In Scholars opinion, these are the remains of stupa, and unearthed structure is in very bad condition because it was destroyed by mud digger.

EXPLANATION TO RECOVERED ROUND STRUCTURE REMAINS

The remains of round shaped Stupa were yielded from north-east of the mound. It was recovered by excavators during the Archaeological digging. A few courses of foundation of stupa were unearthed. Only six courses were reported on south-western side of round structure. It is having bricks course in decreasing order from south-western side to north-eastern side. In north and east sides of stupa the bricks butts were found, but no complete bricks were recovered in these sides. The bricks size which was used in stupa is 35x22x5.5cm in north-eastern side. Reported stupa has 9m. diameter without any outer projection which are usually found in Buddhist stupas like Chanetti (Yamunanagar). Any evidence of *pardikhnapath* (Periphery Path) were not unearthed, it appears that stupa was devoid to periphery path; it is also possible that stupa had a muddy periphery path which might have been destroyed during the time course. Clay mortar was used in masonry of bricks.

Stupa was constructed on mud platform directly. Recovered Remains of stupa shows a circular drum shaped structure of bricks. It appears like Damekh stupa, Sarnath and Khushansa stupa Assandh, Haryana .It is also possible that it was also furnished with an elongated dome. Present stupa might not have been as high as likes of Damekh and Assandh stupa because its diameter is smaller than Assandh stupa and Damekh stupa. It may have been used by Many Bodh Monk who resided here, they did meditation in this area because their monastery existed here . Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang also mentioned in C-U-Kee that Three Buddhist monasteries and 700 monks lived in Thanesar .

PERIOD

On the basis of relative dating and cross dating method, Stupa remains belongs to the Kushana period. To find the time period of the Stupa, excavators used two type of physical remains as first is Bricks size and second is Pottery remains. Stupa was constructed with the baked bricks of size 35x22x5.5cm. These similar sized bricks were used in Kushana stupa Assandh and other Kushana period building remains of Agroha and Harsha ka Tila Thanesar. Recovered pottery remains, which were found at this level resemble to Kushana ceramics, like incurved rim bowl with deepness and tapering profile in red colour without any wash and slip. Besides this is typical shape of Kushana Bowl, Spouted pots are red in colour and some others are with red slip and wash. Stamped pottery and sprinkler etc. were recovered from the Stupa site.

CONCLUSION

Now one can say that the unearthed bricks structure belong to Kushana period stupa. Present remains prove that in the Kushana period Buddhism was spread in this region. Kushan King Kanishk was a Buddhist and he gave his full support to spread Buddhism. This stupa belongs to that monastery which was described by Xuan Zang in his travel memoirs near the sannihit tank. Buddhist monks lived here to study and to perform meditation. These archaeological remains certifies the literature work of Xuan Zang about Thanesar. Hence this mound which is situated at a distance of 2 km to the south of the town must have been a religious and holy place.

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