

Archaeological Exploration of Sirohi District, Rajasthan

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Abstract:

Background: The research paper based on archaeological exploration in oldest Aravalli mountain range especially Mount Abu Region of Sirohi District, Here we explored ruins of art and architecture of ancient temples, cave temples, even shreds of evidence of defence structure was found such as massive fortress, watch-towers and fortification, large structural complexes, moreover massive stretched strong rampart (defensive-wall), defensive-cave structures and stone tools.

Technology/Application method (research methodology): For data, we use other application of archaeology including GIS application/aerial view (remote-sensing method) and photographic view of the landscape of mountains which naturally protected site of the fortress. And even surveyed too many areas here to understand its geomorphology related to stones which were part of building these structures. Powerful technological applications, like tracing the geo-coordinate location of structures and ruins. Other techniques like plain table survey method include contour of the area to know its higher-point, elevation and even height of the area above sea-level.

Conclusion: Life starts here from the beginning of stone age but we have seen that kingdom of Sirohi in Parmar dynasty and Guhil dynasty time had rich economic prosperity in trade, defence and in fortress structure and even had socio-religious unity as we found group of structure of Jain temple of Tirthankara with Saraswati and Parvati worship, Hindu temples of Sivanism, Shakti temple of Mahishasur Mardini, Vaishnavism, Surya, Brahma temple and local tribal totem of Virbavji (Donation of horse with warrior sitting on Terracotta). So it left no doubt here king was collecting huge taxes for development for his area and even for construction of temples. This area remains the centre for merchant class who constructed a temple here made their donations. Traveller traders especially Shresthi/Seth (Rich Merchant) also use to refuge in temples while trade roaming. Moreover, we also found names of Archarya and even Upadhaya in temple Inscriptions which tells temple running Gurukul or education ashram. The ancient centre like Vasantgarh, Chandravati, Bamanwarji, Sarneshwar, Achalghar, Delwara and many other centres had beautiful architecture which seems too constructed under rich patronage of traders in Parmar rule. We all know that in ancient time temple had played an important role in the function of banking and accommodation for traders and travellers. That is why in this area we find colossal defence structure and even temple has been designed like fortress building and seems to protect by strongly fortified with massive walls.

Keyword: Aravalli Range, Archaeology, Exploration, stone tool, temple, fort

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rajasthan (land of Kings) is the largest state of India which could be divided into nine cultural regions; Ajmer-Merwara, Hadaoti, Dhundhar, Gogar, Shekhawati, Mewar, Marwar, Vagad and Mewat which has rich heritage related to archaeological antiquities and history of Kings, art and architecture of temple and large Maru-Durga (Desert forts) which speak about defences structures in old time. Sirohi lies between latitude 24 degree 22' and 25 degree 16' N., and between longitude 72 degree 22' and 78 degree 18' E. The area size of 1964 square miles. Sirohi is bounded on the north by Marwar; on the east by Meywar; on the south by Palanpur, Edar, and Danta; and on the west by Marwar (Adams, 1899). Sirohi district of Rajasthan, has on the whole, a dry climate with the hot season somewhat milder than in the adjoining districts to the north and north-west (Dhoundiyal, 1967). This is followed by the hot season which lasts till about the middle of June. The cold season is from December to February. This is followed by the hot season which last till about the middle of June. The month from mid-June to mid-September is the south-west monsoon season and mid-September to the end of November constitutes the post-monsoon season (Dhoundiyal, 1967).

Drainage of West-Banas: The only important river in Sirohi is the Western Banas, which start its journey from Saimar in the Arravallis, and pursuing its course over the western declivities of range, flows by Pindwara and along the eastern base of Abu, in a south-westerly direction (Adams, 1899). After flowing to the

south-east for some distance, it resumes its south-westerly course, and then, passing the site of the once-celebrated city of Chandravati, it finally passes the cantonment of Deesa and loses itself in the sand at the head of the Little Rann.

II. ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

Bandhiyagarh: (24.424644, 72.794832) Massive fortification was discovered in Bandhiyagarh village, This site was identified by searching go-paths, the most important point is that there is no direct route towards fort, and the large fortification covered with some couple of peaks in that range, that all surrounded by high mountains and number of river streams. There are several number of part-contemporary sites of Parmar such as Kumbharia and Ambji about 18 Kilometre east of Chandravati, Bandiyagarh about 10 Kilometre towards east, Rishikesh about 9 kilometre towards north-west and so on (Kharakwal, 2016). Few structural complexes are located on high and lofty mountains that it is difficult to reach that area; even fort seems too located on the top steep ascent hill. The area seems too surrounded by a strong thick fortified rampart. The rampart makes it a shielded and hideout area. The people here are local Garasia and Bhil tribes which still have strong powerful knowledge of weapons, which may be used in ancient time also like swords, dragger, most of the people holding an axe and small kids know about making a catapult. Three temples were identified in ruins with the beautiful stone idol of Hindu god Shiva, Vishnu (doubtful) and Ganesha and one metal icon of Jain Thirthankar Parshvnath. one of the temple ruin contain a large marble stone inscription was found over the highest elevation plateau inside the fortress, mentioned Hindu hymn and 1195 A.D, with this evidence we like to conclude that since 10th to 14th A.D. this area was under Parmar dynasty its means theses forts build according to strategic location which made hostile enemy difficult to capture. Analysing its construction we notice that Fort builds through the block of stones fitted and fixed in a different position without cement material (mortar). We also find large manufacturing activity of bricks also notice lots of places where cutting of rock are left unfinished, which means they are mining stones from the inside fortress for building these structures. We even found evidence related to the interlocking, large stone slab which has an engraving of hand and foot-prints, a man who is seated on fish, was hunting a snake. They are using granite, limestone and other local stones. There is a total of four water-bodies explore from two of them man-made embankment and one was step-well which is buried by local tribes and the fourth one was a natural pond with waterfall supported by a couple of streams. Which tells during Parmar dynasty technology was so developed that mason and craftsman or sculptor knew the art of cutting rock for building temples and even give shape to rock into a sacred idol which represents Indian aestheticism and exquisite beauty. They also know defence structure, hydraulic engineering, and metallurgy.

Bhaja: (24.561752, 72.884442) Explored fort which is seems developed in three cultural stages in the early stage of the fort were made up of large block stone which is fixed without mortar. In second stages we notice the fortress architecture period of Maharana Kumbha of Guhil dynasty. In third stages, we notice settlements of modern people which were later on shifted to another place. We also notice large material of stone which was part of the fort. Floral paintings painted on room walls and ceiling of forts with natural colours like Hematite and Indigo. One secret passage was also found in this fort and entrance door of the fort was made up of wood, one large log of wood also lying there, step-well which was filled by villagers. Here shrine of goddess Durga near the gate was designed over the wall.

Kyari: (24.487666, 72.887799) Kyari is a tribal village of Garasia and Bhils, the area is located in a remote location and has no contacts with modern-society. The village Kyari, surrounded by lofty mountains, thick dense forest of extensively long trees in comparison to other nearby area and was located on the bank of small river Battisa/Battisanala. Two watch-towers like defence structure are located on the mid flat land over a small hill, one of them is collapsed, the structure was surrounded by steep mountains and a small stream of a river. Few structures we notice here like a mound, fortified wall and a sacred spot of totem VirBabaji/Virbavji which have the offering of terracotta warrior sitting on the horse. Villagers referred Virbavji as Bheruji, the appearance of Shiva. Near this sacred spot notice fortified walls developed without mortar and even found other evidence related defence-structure like structural complex, extensively used of large stone but it is difficult to date this area. Inside the structural complex, we found bricks of Parmar and Deora Chauhan phase, possibly this place was used by both dynasties.

Nichlakhejara: (24.478359, 72.891899) the area was hidden from lofty mountains and surrounded by forest. This dangerous tribal zone is few kilometres away from village Kyari, here we notice few structures, Structural complex with dressed stones, Even notice long-running walls of defence structure over the hills and blocking walls to obstruct easy mountain climbing. Here a few places of Virbavji sacred were identified.

Nichlagarh (24.470990, 72.886364) Nichlagarh, is also surrounded by steep and lofty mountains, on the stream of river Battisa, This site has many settlement ruins of ancient time, seems to be very populated and developed in ancient time, we notice here large strong embankment of the wall with dressed Stones to defend flood. One ancient stepwell, several ruins of the structural complex made of bricks. After the analysis of brick size it seems belongs to Parmar Dynasty. According to village people, when they dig land for the foundation of buildings, they get lots of dressed stones, temple parts, antiquities, bricks and terracotta potteries. We also found some ruins of strong fortification small mounts with few meter distance from the stream. This site needs to be exploring in detail.

Markundeshwar Temple, Nichlagarh: (24.476429, 72.873472) Another important defence's structure found in Nichlagarh natural limestone cave where we found ancient idols of Vishnu, Ambalika Yakshni, Ganesha, Shivlinga, Mahesassur Mardini, a sage in standing posture, 1204 A.D., dated stone inscription and a Warrior on horse (Battle Scene) memorial stone,. Same type of Identical Memorial stone of Chandravati kept in Mount Abu museum, this stone has war scene and inscription which is dated to 1236 A.D., (Kumar, 2016). Here flowing sacred gravity spring sourced from limestone hill, according to the priest the aquifer of this spring never dried in past which they called as Akhand Ganga from Gomukh. According to ancient folklore, this is a sacred spot is an enlightened place of famous sage Rishi Markandye.

Uplagarh: (24.442429, 72.872231) This area is also hidden by mountains, surrounded by forest and belongs to dangerous tribal zone; here we found the special tribal temple, with lots of beautiful large multi colour painted terracotta idols and hero stones.

Nichalibor: (24.445604, 72.886828) This also belongs to dangerous tribal zone There is a ruin of temple near the bank of river Battisa, ruins have ancient icons, one broken Shivlinga with Nandi outside cave and one beautiful ancient Vishnu idol inside cave.

Special Note: Kyari, Meerachapar, Nichlagarh, Uplagarh, Nichlibor, Uplibor, Nichlakhejra and Uplakhejra all villages are hilly villages near river Battisa, they all belong to dangerous tribal zone, there is no direct route to explore this area; we had noticed with GIS applications that these all villages have kilometres long fort wall and settlements over hills to obstruct easy mountain climbing but unfortunately it is very difficult to explore this area because tribes don't like alien culture people, sometimes they attacked with axe and stones without notification.

Deldar: (24.519153, 72.867926) This village is populated on the mount of an ancient settlement. Some of the ancient temples are survived here because in ancient time temples were built on the higher area with providing additional height to the building. One Jain fortified temple was found, which is protected by a strong wall like a fortress. The temple seems to be 1044 A.D, as a dated inscription found here. The temple dedicated to Jain Tirthankara Adinath. Due to non-maintenance, community people shifted all ancient idols other than heavy Adinath idol to Sabarmati temple in the state of Gujarat. Temple is now under renovation. There were two other ancient temples, one Shiv temple outside the village and one Chamunda temple near village dwar(Gate), all ancient idols of these temples belong to 10 to 14 century AD.

Derna: (24.512495, 72.835761) In old-time tribal village Derna was also known as Delna. This village is also populated on the mount of an ancient settlement, Here we notice ancient temples are renovated by villagers.

One of them is very old Jain temple of Shambhavanath of Sevetambhara Jain Cult in its original form, the temple has an appearance like a fortress and even surrounded by strong fortification of the wall. In this temple we notice goddess Saraswati and even notice an anthro-morphic form of Garuda in the Porch area of the temple, here one Jain temple which contains beautiful decoration on Torana-Dwara, the main temple contains an idol of Kala Bhairav in Mukha Mandapa and Shambhavanath in Garbhagriha. Mandapa was beautifully decorated with Padma-mandala, Bhairav was holding a sword, Damru, skull and his dog below as its Vahan. Moreover, Bhairav had the crown of Sesh-Nag. Here we find four inscriptions as a dated material, three inscriptions are located in Antrala of the temple seems to be dated 1074 A.D. and 1216 A.D. which also tells us two idols of Paraswanath installed there (which is now absent) but we could see Padmavati as his Yaksni. Other Yakshni were Ambika and Yaksha Somarman. Fourth inscription dated 1604 A.D located in the mid chamber of mandapa.

Ore: (24.505536, 72.823521) The village of Ore located on the bank of river West-Banas, here we notice large mound, a large stone which was surely part of defence-structure, also noticed burning activity by observing soil of the site. Here we notice fortified Hindu temple of Vithal and Jain temple of Adinath. These temples are renovated by villagers. Vithal temple consists of twelve small temples and one large temple with three Garbhagriha where the main deity installed Vithal the centre, Siva (right side of Vithal) and on the left side new

idol of Vishnu, small Shiva-linga and one old idol of Vishnu was kept in time it was built protected by strong fortified wall, It is sure the worshipers of Vithal here settled latter in 1761 A.D. as temple donation inscription mentions this, one more inscription mention 1532 a renovation by Deora Chuhan, seems that the temple originally was too old with the combined cult of Hinduism and Jainism, we notice that main Torana of temple's lintel contains sculpture of Jain- Tirthankara and down it has Ganesha on jamb of lintel. This shows that it was the Jain temple in ancient time. Even idol of Vithal seems installed later. On Triayatana style, moreover, it is built-in Tri-Ratha, surrounded by a total of twelve small sub-shrines of Vishnu and Shiva. In the mandapa of Vithala, one Garuda idol is located, Garuda idol was in anthro-morphic form and his both hand in Anjali mudra. From the outside temple was guarded by Brahma, than Natraja and one Jain deity holding citron and danda.

One more ancient Jain temple of Adinath in centre Ore village, outside Garbha-griha of Adinath, two Parshvanatha idols (right and left) installed which contain dated inscription- 1185 A.D. The Temple was also renovated by community people and it's surrounded by a strong fortified wall.

Survey analysis of Ore village

After covering the whole area, our final observation: We notice large mounds located few miles away from the river.

We observed locus of soil was different which clearly shows burning activity. Near temple area also surveyed another religious temple like Gupteshwar Mahadev natural cave temple but it is difficult to say when it became part of religious worship.

Bamanwadji temple: (24.833317, 72.994698) According to the inscription its ancient name was Bhraman-Vatak. Bamanwadji adores to Mahavira here group of an ancient temple of Jain and one Shiva shrine which consist of an ancient idol of the deity which is protected by strong walls. The most of temple seems too renovated by community people. When the temple was first erected is difficult to say but from an inscription, we find two important dates the first date is 764 A.D the temple found to be built by Raja Samprati, Another date is 1192 A.D, this inscription found contemporary to King Dharavarsh of Parmar dynasty was found in Shiva's shrine.

Gohili Parasvanath temple: (24.899693, 72.830956) It is an ancient fortified temple devoted to Parasvanath. In ancient time this area was known Gohvali. Here oldest dated Deva-nagiri inscription of 1188 A.D. The inscriptions tell us there was some donation by Thakur of the village. It shows the temple must be much older than Inscription.

Nandiya temple: (24.791546, 72.959909) It is a fortified ancient temple built in village Nandiya. The temple devoted to Vardhman Mahaveer Tirthankara. The Size of Idol is around 210 C.M. with devotee ring. In ancient time this area was also known as Nandigram, Nandivardhan-pur, Nandipur and Nandiyak Chaitya. This temple has several dated Deva-nagiri inscriptions especially dated to 1073 to 1153 A.D. Most important that inscription also tell that this renovated in 1201 A.D., and one stepwell donation in 1073 A.D., seems that the temple existence is much older than dates. There is a folklore that this village was established by King Nandivardhan on his name, the elder brother of Vardhman Mahaveer.

Dhanari temple: (24.687252, 72.928599) Dhanari fortified temple devoted Shantinath Tirthankara. In ancient time this temple devoted to Adinath but latter on an idol of Shantinath Tirthankara was installed according to the inscription of 1291 A.D.

Nitora fortified temple: (24.690204, 72.895552) Nitora temple dedicated to Chintamani Paraswanath. In the ancient time here Neminath uses to worship is it when the temple was renovated installed idol of Paraswanath. The temple dated inscription of 1143 A.D., and other inscription 1434 A.D. shows that the icon of Yaksha Babeshwar is Installed. This temple nearby one Kadernath Shiva temple.

Sivera fortified temple: (24.860100, 73.046416) Sivera temple situated near Swarup Sagar dam, this temple in ancient time was called Siperak according to the inscription found here dated in 1052 A.D. The inscription also tell us it was an important centre of sage-professor Shatyacharya.

Kivarli: (24.534053, 72.833312) Kivarli fortified temple dedicated to Paraswanath here two inscriptions of 1075A.D.

Lotana Fortified temple: (24.764144, 72.911991) It is a fortified temple devoted to Adinath. According to the inscription in ancient time village was also known as lotanak and lotipurpatan. Her we notice two ancient idols of Paraswanath dated to 1073 and 1087 A.D.

Vatera fortified temple: (24.598340, 72.934986) Vatera temple devoted Shantinath but ancient time here Mahaveer Vardhman use to worship. Temple seems to very old but an oldest dated inscription found 1114 A.D.

Ajari temple: (24.760689, 73.043843) It is an ancient Jain temple devoted to Saraswati. Here we found an ancient inscription on metal idols from 11th to 13th century A.D., all base icons belong to king Samprati of Parmar Dynasty. One inscription found at stepwell of 1145 A.D., of king Yashodhaval of Paramara dynasty.

Virvada or Virpali fortress temple: (24.840305, 72.976505) In ancient time this temple Virpali was built by Sresthi (rich merchant) in ancient area Kotara. The group of the ancient temple here belong to 1151 A.D. Temple has been designed like a fortress. This was an ancient city of the merchant, traders and rich people as per information from the inscription. It was spot religious pilgrimage Tirthmala couplet composed by Ganvir Sri Megh in 1442 A.D. this area remains part pilgrimage till 1745 Vikram era another Tirthmala couplet which was composed by Sri Gnanvimalsurji.

Mundsthal temple: (24.489708, 72.719467) Mundsthal temple is an ancient fortified temple dedicated to Vardhman Mahaveer. Here the ancient idol of Mahaveer found which is standing straight in Kayotsarga posture. The size of the idol was 1.07 metre. From here ample of the ancient inscription found and the earliest inscription dated to 1085 A.D. 1159 A.D., and later date 1332 A.D. In 1085 A.D. from the inscription we could say that king kanhar dev donated land and step well. In 1444 A.D., Laxmi Upadhaya was head Acharya of Jain temple. 1665 A.D. inscription tells us 144 idols installed hereafter that temple remain in bad condition.

Kolargarh temple: (24.953204, 72.890628) This is a fortified ancient temple here white idol of Adinath is located in Garbhagriha. Community people found this temple and renovate in 1664 A.D. mentioned in the inscription.

Raadbar temple: (25.024985, 72.996629) This is fortified Jain temple located on a foothill, dedicated to Vardaman Mahaveer. This temple represents ancient temple architecture and believed to be of 11th century A.D. but no dated inscription found.

Uthman temple: (25.025224, 72.967631) It is a large fortified temple which is dedicated to Paraswanath. An earliest dated inscription found in Rang Mandapa 1194 A.D. and on step-well inscription dated of 1186 A.D., seems that temple is much older than Rang Mandapa Inscription.

Sanderav temple: (25.303747, 73.174306) The fortified Jain temple dedicated to Shantinath. But Paraswanath idol here installed by Raja Gandharsena. From here several dates of renovation found but the earliest date was 912 A.D.

Sirohi Jain Tirth temple: (24.885462, 72.865624) This temple is located in Derasar colony in Sirohi city. Temple was built by rich merchant Shresthi in 1266 to 1282 A.D., and later on developed pilgrimage for the traveller.

Jhadoli temple (25.160205, 72.838039) Temple is the ancient fortified temple, from here several inscriptions of renovation dated to Parmar time. In ancient time this temple was used to be called as Jaroval or Jahauli. It was the centre of rich traders and merchant. Near temple inscription tell us step-well donated by main queen Shringaar Devi (wife of Dharavarsha) of Nadola in 1198 A.D., Other earlier inscription date found here 1176 and 1177 A.D. In 1195 A.D. mandapa was renovated by King Dharavarsha and watch-tower built near temple.

Laj temple: (24.724391, 72.972022) This temple is the ancient fortified temple devoted to Adinath. From here we could say temple had been renovated many times but the earliest date is 1187 A.D. seems that this temple was much older than inscription.

Nana temple: (24.923270, 73.134846) Fortified Jain temple devoted to Vardhman Mahaveer. According to inscription Temple has been renovated is 960 A.D. seems temple must be much older than inscription.

Kacholi temple: (24.642115, 72.885333) The temple is dedicated to Paraswanath, idol installed in the lotus posture. In ancient time this temple was called by name Kacholika. In 1286 A.D. earliest date found from the inscription of Mulnayak idol.

Kojra temple: (24.749736, 72.997192) it is fortified Jain temple devoted to Shambhavanath. Temple seems to be very ancient and earliest renovated by Rao Rana date 1167 A.D. mentioned on inscription.

Kashindra : (24.578728, 72.846652) There is one fortified Jain temple in Kashindra, inscription tells that in ancient time was called by Kashurd. This belongs to an ancient kingdom Kashrhurd. In the temple small room which has dated inscription of 1034 A.D., The room seems to the donation of Shresthi Sri Vaman Porwad. Near this temple an ancient Shiva temple of Kashi Vishwanath is located, this Hindu temple had ruins of an ancient sculptures of Vishnu and Ganesh and Chamunda and Nandi. One more ruins of Shiv temple found near river, which have only survived sculptures of Shivlinga, Suryanarayan and Nandi, also found mesolithic stone tools on West-Banas river tarace, made of green local chert stone i.e. fluted cores, blades and debries.

Sadarava Jain temple: (24.578806, 72.846625) It is fortified Jain temple devoted to Shantinath. It is a very ancient temple and earliest inscription of renovation belongs to 912 A.D. Here Paraswanath idol was installed by Gandharvasena.

Jain Temple designed in Fortress

Not only forts were fortified we also found that temple designed like a fortress and even protected by strongly fortified walls like Bamanwarji temple, Mirpur temple and Virvada temple. All the dates are taken from Dev-Nagiri Inscriptions are in Vikram Era, we converted it to Common Era.

III. CONCLUSION

We have seen that kingdom of Sirohi in Parmara dynasty and Guhil dynasty time had rich economic prosperity in trade, defence and in fortress structure and even had socio-religious unity as we found group of structure of Jain temple of Tirthankara and Saraswati and Parvati worship, with Hindu temples of Sivanism, Shakti temple of Maeshaassur Mardini, Vaishnavism and Surya and Brahma temple of later period. So it left no doubt here king was collecting taxes for development for his area and even for some-time construction of temples. It is no doubt this area remain centres of the merchant class who constructed the temple here and made their donation and also remain a refuge for a group of traders, especially for Shresthi. Moreover, we also have names of Archarya and even Upadhaya which tells temple running Gurukul or education ashram. The ancient centre like Vasantgarh, Chandravati, Bamanwarji, Sarneshwar and many other centres had beautiful architecture which seems too constructed under rich patronage of traders and in Paramara rule. We all know that in ancient time temple had played an important role in the function of banking and accommodation for traders and travellers. That is why in this area we find colossal defence structure and even temples has been designed like fortress building and seems to protect by strongly fortified with massive walls.

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