

BUDDHIST STŪPA AT SATDHARA IN MADHYA PRADESH OF INDIA

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Introduction

Satdhara, which is an important Buddhist site, is located on a hill on the banks of the Halali River at Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh of India covering an area of 28 hectares. "The word *Satdhara* is defined as 'seven streams'. A short distance from Sanchi, the *Satdhara* Buddhist Complex is composed of a large main Stūpa, 29 smaller Stūpas and two monasteries. Most of them are dated back to the period of *Ashoka* in the 3rd century BC. There are also several monasteries and temples from later periods, proving that the site was in use for at least 10 centuries. Alexander Cunningham the pioneer archaeologist who excavated the site has reported the relics of Stūpas No.01, 02 and 07. Excavations of the main Stūpa revealed that despite a thick outer stone layer, probably from the 1st century BC, the Stūpa was initially constructed in the 3rd century BC. The main Stūpa of the site is similar to that of Sanchi having remains of railings. Cunningham had reported that the main Stūpa at Satdhara was as big as that of Stūpa No. 1 at Sanchi. This research paper will be discussed about the Buddhist Stūpa at *Satdhara* and its nature. It will be emphasized the relic caskets which were discovered from Stūpa No.01, 02 and 07 and its relevance to understand the past.

Material and Methods

This study based on both Historical and Archaeological sources. Site visit observations were used to understand the present condition of the site and internet was searched to prepare maps and some photographs.

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Results

This study was paid a special attention to relic caskets that found from Stūpa No.01, 02 and 07. Circle of the Survey of Archaeological Survey of India, under the direction of A.K.Sinha, assisted by Manual Joseph, Nitin Shrivastava, K.K. Rai, C.R. Bhanarkar, took up excavation at Satdhara in 1995-1996. Stūpa No. 01 or the main Stūpa was built over a huge platform depending upon the slope of the hill. Excavations of the main Stūpa revealed that despite a thick outer stone layer, probably from the 1st century BC, the Stūpa was initially constructed in the 3rd century BC. The main Stūpa of the site is similar to that of Sanchi having remains of railings. It is 13.65 m high excluding platform with diameter of 32.80 m. Recent excavations have revealed brick *pradakshinapatha* and stair case of the Stūpa. Other remains are of monastery and apsidal temples. The relic casket of Stūpa no. 02 inscribed inside the lids, the one with *Sariputasa* "(Relics) of *Sariputra*", and the other with *Maha-Mogalanasa* "(Relics) of *MahāMogalana*". In fact these relics showed the Buddhist expansion at *Satdhara* under the royal patronage of *Mauryanand Sunga* period.

Among the important artifacts which iron objects, coins and fragmentary inscriptions bearing Brahmi letters have been discovered. Apart from these, fragments of two beautiful elephant figures made of Chunar red stone with brilliant Mauryan polish were found. While the one figure was found from the Northern side, the other was found from the Southern quadrant. Further on excavating the layers contemporary to the stone *Medhi* up to the bed-rock, the constructional history of the Stūpa came to light in 1996-97. The excavation at Stūpas No. 04, 06 and 07 indicated that these were built on a platform by arranging boulders one above the other to maintain a level. They have *Medhi* and *Pradhakshinapatha* around.

Discussion and Conclusion

The archaeological excavations conducted at *Satdhara* revealed that the main Stūpa was probably constructed in the third century BC, during the *Ashoka* period, with large-sized bricks and then covered with stone layers

some four hundred years later. Archaeological finds also include fragments of northern black polished pottery possibly from 500-200 BC and two sets of Buddhist rock paintings from the 4th and 7th Centuries AD. According to the Archaeological evidences this site plays an important role to understand the evolution of the Stūpa in India. Especially it gives many ideas about Art and Architecture of *Mauryan and Sunga* period. Buddhist monuments at *Sanchi* and *Satdhara* have been conserved and preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in collaboration with UNESCO and the Japanese Trust Fund in 1994-2003.

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