

Archaeological Study in Western Himalaya

A Case Study of Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The study of the past, based on objects or parts of buildings that are found in the ground is archaeology. It helps a lot to know the human activities, their likings, their cultures, their art and many other things that existed in the past. Archaeology enriched the history of any region. In this sense Mandi region of Indian state of Himachal Pradesh is also very rich. Many memorial stones have been found in Mandi which reveal the customary practice of the social evil Sati and the mansions like hill forts and temples and their unique hill architecture style tells more about the socio-religious life as well as the architecture loving rulers. The article discusses here about the archaeology of the region and how it makes the written records on the history of Mandi more authentic. Through this paper an attempt has been made to trace the connection between local archaeology and written records.

Key words:

Barsile - memorial stones which were constructed in the memory of those queens and other women who burnt themselves on the pyre of their dead husband;

Khwasi- caste of female entertainer;

Pujari- priest;

Sati - practice of a widow throwing herself onto her husband's funeral pyre/widow burning;

Ser- local measure of weight;

Siddh- saint;

Archaeology an Introduction

Archaeology is the study of human activity through the recovery and analysis of material culture. Archaeological records include artifacts, architecture, biofacts, ecofacts and cultural landscapes. Archaeology can be considered both a social science and a branch of the humanities. It is important for learning about prehistoric societies, for whom there may be no written records to study. Prehistory includes maximum part of the human past, from the Paleolithic until the advent of literacy in societies across the world. Archaeology has various goals ranging from

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understanding culture history to reconstructing past life ways to documenting and explaining changes in human societies through time.

The discipline involves surveying, excavation and eventually analysis of data collected to learn more about the past. Archaeology relies on cross-disciplinary research and it draws upon anthropology, history, art history, classics, ethnology, geography, geology, literary history, linguistics, semiology, textual criticism, physics, information sciences, chemistry, statistics, paleoecology, paleogeography, paleontology, paleozoology, and paleobotany.

Archaeology developed out of antiquarianism in Europe during the 19th century, and now has become a discipline practiced across the world. It has been used by many nation-states to create particular visions of the past. But still archaeologists face many problems, such as dealing with pseudoarchaeology, the looting of artifacts, a lack of public interest, and opposition to the excavation of human remains.

The science of archaeology grew out of an older multi-disciplinary study known as antiquarianism. Antiquarians studied history with particular attention to ancient artifacts and manuscripts, as well as historical sites. Antiquarianism focused on the empirical evidence that existed for the understanding of the past, encapsulated in the motto of the 18th century antiquary, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, "We speak from facts not theory". Tentative steps towards the systematization of archaeology as a science took place during the Enlightenment era in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The purpose of archaeology is to learn more about past societies and the development of the human race. Main sources of archaeology are archives, coins, paintings, monuments, mansions, remains and idols which can be studied to find the hidden aspect of past.

Archaeology has contributed a lot to the history of any region and its importance cannot be overemphasized. Indian archaeology is a science of recent growth but it has made wonderful progress during that brief period. The pioneer work was done by Europeans but the same is being carried on now by the Indians. The study of Indian antiquities was initiated by scholars like Sir William Jones who founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1774. A large number of ancient inscriptions were collected but those could not be deciphered on account of the ignorance of the script but that difficulty was solved by Jones Prinsep in 1838 by his discovery of the Brahmi script. After that discovery, the task of deciphering the inscriptions became an easy one and a lot of work was done by scholars. The greatest contribution was made by General Cunningham who was appointed in 1862 as the Archaeological Surveyor to the Government. He devoted about half a century to the study of ancient Indian history. By his personal investigations, he gave us a lot of information regarding the geography of ancient India. He collected a large number of Indian coins. Digging was also started at different places of the country. Lord Curzon set up a separate Department of Archaeology and appointed Dr. Marshall as the Director-General of Archaeology. After that this particular field made important contribution to know the hidden aspect of history.

One of the important aspects of archaeology is architecture which unlike ancient coins, archives, idols etc., can be easily found on a large scale globally. Architecture is both the process and the product of planning, designing, and constructing buildings or any other structures. Architectural works, in the material form of buildings, are often perceived as cultural symbols and as works of art. Historical civilizations are often identified with their surviving architectural achievements.

Architecture is a general term used to describe buildings and other physical structures. It is the art and science of designing buildings and non-building structures. The earliest surviving written work on the subject of architecture is *De architectura*, by the Roman architect Vitruvius in the early 1st century A.D. According to Vitruvius, a good building should satisfy the three principles of *firmitas*, *utilitas*, *venustas*, which in modern English mean Durability – a building should stand up robustly and remain in good condition, Utility – it should be suitable for the purposes for which it is used and Beauty – it should be aesthetically pleasing.

According to Vitruvius, the architect should strive to fulfill each of these three attributes as well as possible. Leon Battista Alberti, who elaborates on the ideas of Vitruvius in his treatise, *De Re Aedificatoria*, saw beauty primarily as a matter of proportion, although ornament also played a part. For Alberti, the rules of proportion were those that governed the idealised human figure, the Golden mean.

A Case Study of Archaeology of Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh

The present district of Mandi was formed after the merging of two princely states, Mandi and Suket, on 15th April, 1948 when Himachal Pradesh came into existence. Ever since its formation, the district boundaries have not changed. According to the *Gazetteer of Suket State*, the chiefs of Suket and Mandi are from a common ancestor of the Chandrabansi line of Rajputs of Bengal. The Suket state is said to have been founded by Bir Sen in 765 A.D. and the separation of Mandi from Suket took place in the year 1200 A.D. Up to that time, it was a single state of Suket.

As far as Mandi region of Indian state of Himachal Pradesh is concerned, this particular area is rich in both sense archaeology and architecture respectively. On one hand archaeology reveals the customary practice of *sati* through *barsile* which are found in Mandi town, Hatli and Baldwada. On the other hand architecture of studied region shows hill architecture style and the religious life in an impressive way.

The historic town Mandi is built along the Beas River which is the entrance to Kullu Valley. This place is famous for the 81 old stone temples with beautiful carvings. Architecture of Mandi can be found today in the form of forts and temples, both of them were constructed by the rulers of Suket and Mandi long times ago. These constructive works are very beautiful and center of attraction for tourists. One of the forts, the Kamlah Fort is the strongest among hill forts and Mandi town is also called '*Choti Kashi*' due to its numerous temples. Some of the archaeological sites of the studied region have been described below.

1. Salanu Rock Inscription

The oldest archaeological record in the Mandi region is the inscription on a rock at Salanu about one and a half miles from Manglaur which is ascribed to the fourth or fifth century. It simply records that a Maharaja Sri Chandesvara-hastin, who was the son of a Maharaja Ishvara-hastin, and belonged to the family of Vaisn, conquered in battle a Rajjila-bala and founded a town of which the name apparently was Snilipuri, possibly the present village of Salri situated near the site of the inscription. Those names are of no historical value as their relationship is unknown.

2. Madho Rai Inscription

Madho Rai was a successful ruler of Mandi, and he occupied the throne of Mandi because of the disability of Suraj Sen (1637 to 1664 A.D.). Suraj Sen lost his eighteen sons and did not have any successors left to rule after him. So, due to the separation of his son, he became very disappointed and unable to rule, and handed his ruling power to the powerful ruler 'Madho Rai' who ruled Mandi successfully on behalf of Suraj Sen. A silver image of Madho Rai is kept at the Raj Mahal of Mandi. This image of Madho Rai has a flute in the hand of the deity Madho Rai.

This silver image of Madho Rai is still carried in sacred procession in Mandi on festival days, and bears a Sanskrit inscription of which the following is a translation:

'Madho is a name of Vishnu, and Rai signifies heir apparent, or Tika Sahib.'

The image of Vishnu was made by the order of Raja Suraj Sen who named it Madho Rai. Bhima, a goldsmith, made the image in the month of *Magh* (mid January to mid February), *Jik Nachattar*.

Since then the rulers served the State as servants of Madho Rai and custodians of the State. Suraj Sen's successors have also held the deity in great reverence. This God is represented with precedence over all other Gods on various religious occasions. Later, Raja Ishwari Sen (1788 to 1826 A.D.) started the tradition of Shivratri fair in which he made Madho Rai as a chief deity of fair. This tradition is still carried till today.

3. *Barsile*

In 20th century archaeology became an integral part of past which reveals a lot of useful information whether it is of historical or social importance. In Mandi region Archaeological Department has founded many *barsile* from different sites of Mandi. These *barsile* throw light on the social structure of Mandi people in the past and also reveal much information on the practice of *sati* prevailing in the region.

Sati tradition was a social evil associated with the women. A few instances related with this practice are also found in the folklore of Mandi. There are many memorial stones and a few descriptions of *sati* in some books on the history of Mandi. There are mythical and religious causes behind this practice not only in Mandi but also all over India. A widow woman chooses her death willingly or by force and burns herself on the funeral pyres of her dead husband.

William Moorcraft visited Mandi in 1820. His narrative regarding the *sati* in Mandi is mentioned in the *Gazetteer of Mandi State*. Near Mandi town, on the left bank of Suketi Nala, he saw several memorial stones. These were constructed in the memory of the queens and other women, who became *sati* along with their kings. These are 6-7 feet high and are carved with figures of *rajas* and *ranis* who became *satis*. In addition to the queens, many *khwasis* and *rakhails* were also burnt with the *rajas*. For instance, with Raja Shyam Sen alone, who died in 1679 A.D., five *ranis*, two *khwasis* and 87 *rakhails* were burnt. According to the figures given by Cunningham in his archeological survey of India, from 1637 A.D. when the list of such *rajas* is shown, 252 women were burnt alive with the *rajas* of Mandi. It means this practice was accepted as the social compulsion by the ruling class that some or all of the wives and mistresses were immolated with the husband. They all were treated as the property of *Rajas* and *Ranas*. In local language, the memorial stones related to this custom are known as *Barsile*. Village Sukhar in Baldwada of Sarkaghat Tehsil of Mandi district is another place where we have few *sati* pillars or *barsile*. These *barsile* were buried under the private land of a local farmer Munshi Ram. In 2006 when he was digging the land to convert this into the proper fields, he saw some stone figures there and informed the Archeological Department of Himachal Pradesh. In earlier days this village was under the rule of *Ranas* of Hatli. There are some ruins of ancient forts nearby this village and about 22 km from this village; the famous Kamlah Fort is also situated. So, we can conclude that these stones found here most probably belonged to the ruling class and this region must have been an important political centre of the *Ranas*. These stone figures were also constructed in the memory of those women who burnt themselves with the dead bodies of their husbands.



Memorial stones or *barsile* which were constructed in memory of those queens and the other women of royal family, who became *sati* in Mandi town.



Memorial stone or *barsile* in village Sukhar. Baldwada of Sarkaghat tehsil of Mandi district.

Strong evidence in connection with *sati* in Mandi has been given by J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel in *History of the Punjab Hill States*, who described an event that was witnessed by Vigne.

‘One morning my munshi came to me, and told me that a *sati* or a widow who was going to burn herself on the funeral pile of her husband, was about to pass by the garden gate. I hastened to obtain a sight of her. She was dressed in her gayest attire; a large crowd of persons followed her, as she walked forward with a hurried and faltering step, like that of a person about to faint. A Brahman supported her on either side, and

these as well as many around, were calling loudly and almost fiercely upon the different Hindu deities, and the name which was most repeatedly and most earnestly called upon was that of Jaggannath, but I do not know whether they alluded to the great idol of Bengal, or to some local divinity. Her countenance had assumed a sickly and ghastly appearance, which was partly owing to internal agitation, and partly, so I was informed, to the effects of opium and bhang and other narcotics, with which she had been previously drugged in order to render her less awake to the misery of her situation. She was not; however, so insensible to what was passing as to be inattentive to two persons in particular, amongst several others, who were stooping before her and were evidently imploring her blessing, they were probably near relations. She was presented at intervals with a plate of moist red color, in which saffron was no doubt an ingredient, and into this she dipped the ends of her fingers, and then impressed them on the shoulders of the persons who stooped before her in order to be thus marked. In about half-an-hour, the preparations were completed. She was regularly thatched in, upon the top of the pile, whilst her husband's body yet lay outside. It was finally lifted up to her; the head, as usual, and which is the most interesting part of the ceremony, was received upon her lap; the fire was applied in different parts, and all was so quickly enveloped in a shroud of mingled flame and smoke, that I believe her sufferings to have been of very short duration, as she must almost immediately have been suffocated.'

By the account given by Vigne, we come to know that during the reign of Balbir Sen A.D. 1839, in Mandi town, a widow was going to burn herself with the dead body of her husband. She was given some opium or other intoxication so that she would remain unconscious. Hundreds of people along with the Brahman followed her. After some time all the preparations were made and she was laid down with her deceased husband on the funeral pile. Then the fire was applied quickly and her body was burnt which made her a *sati*.

Thus, these memorial stones prove what we have studied in the written records about history of Mandi, and hence prove themselves as an authentic source of local history.

4. Kamlah Fort

One of the famous and must visit places of Mandi is Kamlah Fort. Kamlah Fort is in Kamlahgarh which is named after a local saint named Kamlah Baba. This spot is delight for the trekkers as the fort stands on the dreadful and dangerous terrain. This fort stands strong on the pointed ranges of Sikandar Dhar and is 4772 feet high from the land. There are some villages around it like Chamba, Naun, Kamlah, Kathed, Shamsheerpur, Jamandhar and others. Kamlahgarh has other forts as well like Chawki, Chabara, Padampur, Shamsheerpur and Narsinghpur.

The Fort of Kamlah is one of the most interesting places in the studied region. It is situated close to the Hamirpur border on the crest of an isolated and precipitous hill, the ridge being narrow and serrated with deep ravines running down the face. The fort was founded by Raja Suraj Sen about 1625 A.D., the propitious site for it having been revealed by a miracle. A shepherd of the neighbourhood was grazing his flocks when he sat down beneath a tree on the summit of the hill now crowned by the fort. As he sat, he idly chipped the tree with his axe and to his astonishment milk gushed forth from the incisions he made. The milk fell on a spot a few feet away from the tree and as it touched the ground a *lingam* rose therefrom. This was the idol of a *Siddh*, and, speaking in the voice of the saint, it bade the peasant hasten to the Raja and tell him that if he built his citadel close to the *lingam* he would conquer the territory around. So the shepherd hurried to the Raja, who, believing his tale, at once laid the foundation of the fort, venerating as its guardian spirit the *Siddh* to whom he owed the choice of site. The *Siddh* is still worshipped there and his shrine enjoys an endowment from the State.

The fort was of great strength, its natural advantages being turned to the best account in the arrangement of the fortifications. The first part of the approach was along a steep narrow pathway rising in steps and commanded for its whole length by loop-holed bastions. Rather more than the half-way up was the gateway, capable of holding a strong guard and offering an excellent point of resistance to an enemy that succeeded in reaching so far. Almost on the top of the ridge was the citadel, provided with ample accommodation for a large garrison and with store-houses where considerable stocks of grain could be kept. The weak point was the scarcity of water, but this was surmounted to a considerable extent by the construction of reservoirs out of the solid rock and these were always kept filled in

troublesome times. The fort is now in bad repair, but still well repays a visit. A small establishment is retained there, and until the last few years distributions of grain were made from the local granary to zamindars in the times of scarcity. There is a large stock of ghee of great age and quite unfit for human consumption; but it is much valued for medicinal purposes and the natives believe it to be an infallible ointment for rheumatic and similar complaints. The collection of ancient arms and clothes is of interest.

5. Temples

The political and economic roles of temples have been widely discussed though only a few archaeological studies explicitly address these aspects. In general, there is a rich architectural and art-historical literature on temples, which also find ample mention in historical documents of various kinds. Temples were often closely associated with claims to just rule, and temple patrons included local leaders, merchant groups, and royal personages.

In Himachal Pradesh, the styles of hill temple architecture are mainly the “pent” roof - a short sloping roof with a singular surface, appended to the side of a structure; veranda - a roofed, open-air gallery or porch, attached to the outside of a building, often partly enclosed by a railing and frequently extended across the front and sides of the structure; ‘*pyramidal*’, ‘*pagoda fashion*’ – a tower-like, multistory, solid or hollow structure made of stone, brick, or wood with successive wooden roofs, one on the top of the other; a mixture of ‘*sloping and pagoda*’ type roofs; and *Sikhara* - in North Indian temple architecture, the superstructure, tower, or spire above the pillared *mandapas* (porches or halls). It is the most dominant and characteristic feature of the Hindu temples in the North, but also is found in the flat valleys of the state. Each geographical zone of the state has its own distinctive style of architecture. The low lying hills or the Shivalik hills have pent-roofed and tiered roofed (*pagoda*) temples. The high mountainous areas have again flat-roofed temples, but in a different style. In Mandi we mostly see *Sikhara* in the flat valleys and pent roof style in the hills. Some of the famous temples of Mandi are the following:

i. Bhutnath Temple:

It is situated in the midst of the town Mandi and is the most frequented shrine in Mandi. Bhut Nath is venerated as the guardian of the town and represents Shiva in his attribute of Lord of Creatures. Raja Ajber Sen (1500 to 1534 A.D.) with the construction of this temple founded the new township of Mandi, the earlier being on the right bank of the river Beas. The legend relating to the discovery of the idol is as follows:- Formerly the land on the left bank of the Beas, now occupied by the town of Mandi, was waste and there the local *zamindars* used to graze their cattle. One cow, though newly calved, failed to give milk for several days, and the owner, keeping a watch on her, discovered that she gave her milk to a stone. The news reached the Raja, Ajber Sen, and shortly afterwards Shiva in a dream ordered him to dig beneath the image. The Raja did so and the idol now worshipped in the temple of Bhut Nath was discovered. So the foundation of the present city was laid and for up to the time of Ajber Sen the capital was on the right bank of the river. This temple is of stone in the *Shikhara* style, consisting of a small porch and a cella surmounted by a spire (tower or *minar*). The *sabha-mandap* in front is apparently an addition. The porch is supported by fluted pillars with capitals carved in elephants, the arch between being trefoil. Today idols of other Hindu gods and goddesses have been kept in the temple along with Lord Shiva. Being a historical temple, this temple is maintained by a Committee.

ii. Trilok Nath:

Trilok Nath temple of Mandi town is opposite to the Panchavakra temple on the other side of Beas river. Trilok Nath, as he is represented in the Chandra-bhaga valley, has been identified with the Bodhisat Avaloketeshwara and it has been suggested that the identity of Shiva with Trilok Nath in Mandi and parts of Kangra may be due to Budhistic influence. The temple of Trilok Nath was built by Sultan Devi, the pious queen of Raja Ajber Sen, in 1520 A.D. It is a Shiva temple erected in stone and in the *Sikhara* style. The cella (inner area of temple) contains a life-

sized three-faced stone image of Shiva who is riding a bull with Parvati in his lap. There is also a second image, probably of Shiva, which, however is much worn. The porch (*dwar-mandap*) measures 7'8" by 3'6", and the lintel rests on two fluted pillars and pilasters. An attendant, or door-keeper, is shown on each of the two pilasters, and there are floral and animal carvings on the capitals of the pillars. Between the pillars is the trefoil arch characteristic of Mandi architecture. The workmanship throughout is good, but the carving has suffered much from neglect and is much worn owing to the soft monuments. The image which it enshrines is connected with the rite of Sati. It is said that during the kingship the woman whose fate it was to burn on the funeral pile was brought to the temple before she mounted the pyre, and was there shown the face at the back of the idol. This was the last rite preparatory to immolation, the sight of the face being supposed to inspire the Sati with a frenzied desire to plunge into the flames. This temple is one of the oldest temples of Mandi and now a Committee has been formed for it.

iii. Panchavaktra Temple:

This temple quite resembles to Triloknath and is situated at a very picturesque site formed by the confluence of the river Beas and the tributary Suketi in Mandi town. This temple belongs to 'Panchavaktra Shiva'. It was built sometime in the 14th century A.D. and is of Sikhara style. Lord Shiva is the chief deity, which is made of stone and has five faces and ten arms. The main porch (*dwar-mandap*) is supported on four heavy pillars, the capitals of which are carved in flower pot design and the bases in rosettes or lotuses. The main image is of some interest, since the five faces are not placed in one row but in such a way that the fourth face is on the reverse side of the slab which is otherwise quite plain and the fifth on the top of the image slab. Thus, when seen in front, only three faces are visible. Such images of five-faced Shiva are not uncommon in Mandi, and since their attributes bear a definite resemblance to those of Avaloketeshwara, it has been surmised that they owe their origin to Buddhism. There are also other idols in the temple of Lord Ganesh, Goddess Parvati, etc.

iv. Adhnari Temple

Of the more modern temples the finest from an artistic stand-point is the sanctuary of Adhnari, the stone image of which represents Shiva and his consort Parvati, right half being devoted to the former and the left to the latter. Shiva is portrayed with knotted hair, a necklace of human skulls, a serpent, a musical instrument in one hand and *damru* in the other. Parvati is shown wearing a diadem, an ear-ring and a nose-ring. To the main image is joined a slab on which the vehicles of the deities, the bull and the lion, are carved. The whole measures 4'4" high by 3'3" broad. On the right and left respectively are the images of Bhairva and Hanuman. It consists of a cella, a porch and *sabha mandap* and the carving throughout is rich and of considerable artistic beauty. Unfortunately, the shrine is in a poor state of preservation.

v. Temple of Mahadev:

The temple of Mahadev lies in Mahadev Panchayat which is 4 km from Sundernagar town. It is a stone-made temple and the *pindi* (the upper part of Shiva Ling) of Mahadev in it is made of black stone, nearly one span in height and about two feet in circumference. The *pujaris* employed in the temple belong to the Kondal *got* of the Gaur Brahmans, and are called Rawals by the Hindus, because whenever a Hindu dies his relations make him give something, such as a cow, silver, gold, grain, etc., as alms before he expires, and the gift is, on his death, appropriated by these *pujaris* who take even the shroud that covers the corpse. They aver that their forefathers came with the ancestors of the rulers of Suket from Bengal and that the temple and its *pindi* already existed there. The story about the temple's foundation as told by their forefathers was that it was built in a single night by the Pandavas during their exile period to Himalaya. The building, as it now exists, and the forms of the pillar and *pindi* of Mahadev, clearly show them to have been made in very ancient times, but the date and year of its foundation are not known. The place on which the *pindi* stands has a great natural rock under it, out of which *pindi* has been carved. The fretwork round the *pindi* is also of stone, and the floor all round it is paved with stones, while four large and

four small columns of black stone rise on this pavement. The roof supported by these columns is so built that it is divided into small separate parts furnished with stone slabs. This temple houses a *sabha-mandap* and cella. Presently, like the other temples of the region, it has also been beautified by the Panchayat and a Temple Committee has been formed for its maintenance.

vi. Jagan Nath Temple:

This temple is situated on the left bank of Ghangal Khudd at a place called Jungum Bag near the historical town of Purana Bazaar of modern Sunder Nagar. According to the Suket State official records, this temple was built by Raja Shyam Sen (1620 to 1650 A.D.). The temple is built of *pacca* masonry (stone). About the origin of temple, it is stated in the Gazetteer of Suket State that about 250 years ago, a Bairagi *faqir* came here from Jagan Nath on the coast of Orissa. He had an idol of Jagan Nath made of sandal wood and the Suket Court hearing that he wished to sell it offered him Rs. 500 for it, but he refused the offer, saying that he was taking the idol to Kullu, the Raja of which had promised him Rs. 1000. By chance the *faqir* died before he could set out for Kullu, and consequently the idol was, by the Raja's order, placed in the buildings previously used as a seraglio. He appointed *pujaris* to the temple and granted land for its maintenance, spending Rs. 500, the price of the idol, on the funeral ceremonies of the Bairagi, and built the temple at State expense. Endeavours have been made to ascertain the date of the foundation of the temple, without success. In this temple the largest idol is of Jagan Nath, which is a cubit in height. The nose, mouth, eyes and the hands are visible in it. At its right side is an idol of Balbadhar, and at its left one of Lakshmi. There are also other small idols, of Salig Ram, etc., in the temple. During kingship, its management was carried on by *pujaris* who belonged to the Kondal *got* of Brahmans and possessed only one house in the State. But at present the *pujairi* is appointed by the management committee. The *bhog* referred to Jagan Nath consists of rice, pulse, etc., *parshad* is also distributed. The cost of *bhog* is defrayed from the income accruing from the land granted by the State for the maintenance of the temple. On the second of *Asar Sudi* (the date on which the fare is held at Jagan Nath in Orissa) a fare is held here. This tradition of fare is carried out till today. This temple lacks a *sabha-mandap* and porch, and has a negligible cella, having only enough space for the idols and the priest to sit. At present, a Temple Committee has been formed and whole of its management is under this Committee. The temple has been renovated by the Committee and been beautified.

vii. The Suraj Kund Temple:

The temple known as Suraj Kund is situated near the MLS Degree College Sundernagar. The old building of this college used to be the Royal Palace. This temple is dedicated to Lord Sun. The courtyard is paved with atoms and towards the west of it is the temple building which is of stone. In front of the temple door is a masonry tank (*kund*) 25*25 feet, which adds to the beauty of the temple. The temple and tank are surrounded by houses of wood and *pacca* masonry built as rest-houses for the convenience of visitors. *Sadhus* visit it on pilgrimages to Mani-karn and other sacred places. Inside the temple there is an idol of Suraj ji weighing about 36 *pakka sers* made of eight metals. It is of human form with four heads. It is flanked by two brass horses, each one about 9 inches in height, thus giving it the appearance of a chariot. It is surrounded by several other idols of stone which represent Krishna, Radha, Ram, Balram, Hanuman, etc. It is said that the idol was made by the brass workers of Chirag village. Affixed to the wall of the temple is a large piece of stone which bears the inscription:

“In the name of the deity, Ganesh.”

“On the 28th Asar st. 1782, B. Maharaja Garur Sen (1721 to 1748 A.D.) and Siri Rani Panchamon Dei commenced to build the Suraj Kund temple in order to place the idol of the Sun there.”

“The building was completed and the idol of the Sun placed in the temple on the 23rd *Bisakh* (mid April to mid May), st. 1785 B. He did so for religious purposes.”

This temple also has a Committee for its maintenance and has been beautified like the other temples.

viii. Narsingh Temple:

In the mid of town Purana Bazaar near Govt. Sanskrit College, there is a stone-built temple dedicated to Narsingh, incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Inside the temple is an idol of *Pakhan*, like the idol of Salangramji. The idol is kept locked up in a box of which the keys are entrusted to the *pujari*. There is a narrow hole in the *murti Pakhan*, and anyone desirous of seeing the idol closes one eye and peeps through the hole with the other to see it are exposed to danger. The *pujari* who waits upon it bathes and feeds it daily, with eyes closed and face averted. As a rule no one can see Narsingh, but it is said that during the kingship, if anyone wished to do so, he had to get permission from the State. It is said that a *sadhu*, who was going to Mani-karn, getting permission from the State, saw Narsingh, and consequently died, and that once thieves made away with certain ornaments from the temple, but were struck blind at a short distance from it and were arrested.

ix. Maahun Nag:

Dev Maahun Nag is one of the most popular deities of the region whose temple is situated at the village of Bhakhari in Karsog tehsil of Mandi district. In the mountainous parts of Mandi, Dev Maahun Nag is well known. The deity is basically a Nag Deity and is known for protecting people from snakes. The people here have incorporated the worship of this deity in their daily lives. According to the local myths, the deity is associated with Karan, a great legend of Mahabharat. Before his death, Lord Krishan blessed him and said that he would be reborn as a Nag and he would be worshipped till eternity.

According to local belief, this Nag took birth at that place and was worshipped as Nag Devta for thousands of years. Now the question arises as to why this Nag deity came to be known as *Maahun* Nag. Here, too, once again only local tradition tries to provide an answer. It is said that Raja Shyam Sen (A.D 1620-1650), the ruler of Suket state was captured by the Mughals and sent to Delhi as a prisoner. Two similar thrones were put in front of him. He was told there that if he identified his throne, he would be released. According to the local tradition, Raja worshipped this Nag deity and one night the deity came in his dreams and told him that he would come next morning in the form of a *maahun* (bee) and would help him in identifying his throne. The next morning when the Raja was asked to identify his throne, he saw the bee encircling above one of the two thrones. He picked that throne and was released. The incident described above is similar to the *Gazetteer of Suket State* to an extent. According to the *Gazetteer of Suket state*:

‘An expedition had been sent into the Jammu hills to suppress a revolt by the Mughal ruler Shahjahan, and when called upon to furnish a contingent, Shyam Sen failed to do so, owing to his relationship with the Jammu chief. A complaint was lodged against him by the Nurpur Raja, and he and his brother, Naurang Singh, were summoned to Delhi and cast into prison. Man Singh of Guler had also been imprisoned on a similar complaint. During his captivity Shyam Sen is said to have prayed to Maahun Nag, who appeared to him in the form of a bee and promised an early release. Accordingly, both rajas were soon afterwards set at liberty, possibly in consequence of Jagat Singh’s rebellion in A.D. 1640-41, and returned to their respective states.’

Whatever may be the story, the local belief is that Raja Shyam Sen was released due to this Nag Deity. After returning to his state, Raja Shyam Sen gave the name Dev Maahun Nag to the deity and in his honor the Raja also named this deity as his *Kul Devta*. According to the tradition, the Raja built a wooden temple dedicated to the deity at village Bhakari. The architecture style of this temple is pent roof. This temple has three idols of Karan made of brass along with serpent statues with each of the idols. At present, idols of Hindu Gods and Goddesses have been added to this temple. It has been renovated from time to time.

x. Hurang Narayana:

Dev Hurang Narayana is an important deity of Chauhar valley of Mandi. The temple of this deity is located at village Hurang of Chauhar valley. Dev Hurang Narayana is considered the deity of water and fire. It is stated in the *Gazetteer of Mandi state* that 'having no issue, Raja Sahib Sen (1554-1574 A.D.) and his queen Rani Prakash Dei made a vow to Narayana Dev of Hurang, in Chauhar, that she would make silver images of the God out of her own ornaments if she was blessed with a son. Her prayers were soon answered and a son was born to her and Raja named his son Narayan Sen after the deity. Narayan Sen became the ruler of Mandi in 1575. Raja Sahib Sen built a new temple of Dev Hurang Narayana which is surrounded by a devdar forest. His queen, Prakash Dei, made a silver *mohra* (silver image) of her *jheer* (necklace) and dedicated it to the deity. So even today when the worship of this deity starts, the *gur* repeatedly recites the name of Rani Prakash Dei in his *mantra*. Similar to Dev Maahun Nag temple, this temple is also made of wood and is in pent roof style.

These are only some of the ancient heritages left in the region but apart from these monuments, there are numerous household shrines in Mandi region. Many of the forts like Rajgarh, Narayangarh, Chauwasigarh, Pangana, Jhetingri and many others have been ruined due to carelessness of local people as well as administration.

Conclusion

Archaeology is the study of the ancient and recent human past through material remains. It is a subfield of anthropology, the study of all human culture. Archaeology offers a unique perspective on human history and culture that has contributed greatly to our understanding of both the ancient and the recent past. In addition archaeology today can inform us about the lives of individuals, families and communities that might otherwise remain invisible.

In studied region, the Madho Rai inscriptions have an important place in the political history of Mandi and reveal that after Suraj Sen, all the rulers ruled in the name of Madho Rai. It shows the regard and faith the rulers had in this deity. Another archaeological evidence, *barsile* tell us about the beliefs of local people in the customary practice of *sati*. These *barsile* are the proof of the commitment of *sati* by hundreds of women in Mandi. Hence they prove to be useful source to know the social structure of the region. Another important strong evidence of *sati* in the region is the Trilok Nath temple in Mandi town. According to tradition, a woman who was about to commit *sati* had to be brought to this temple before. Within archaeology there is a related field of study that includes architecture. The Kamlah fort constructed by the Rulers of Mandi has been one of the strongest forts in the western Himalaya. Its strength is a surprise as it has been constructed on a hilltop, surrounded by many deep ditches. This fort has a special place in the history of the region as it has guarded the kingdom of Mandi for a long time from the invasions. One of the most comprehensive combinations of iconographic, architectural, and archaeological research is the analysis of numerous structures and images in and around the region of Mandi, who convincingly documents religious shifts in this region. About the temples, it was noticed during the study that most of the temples in Mandi town are in *Sikhara* style and most of them being dedicated to Lord Shiva show the faith of the rulers in this God. They were, thus, the followers of *Shaivism*. But later during the reign of Suraj Sen the rulers of Mandi started following *Vaishnism* due to Madho Rai, who was considered the most powerful ruler after Suraj Sen in the history of Mandi. In the mountainous areas of Mandi like Chauhar Valley a temple of Hurang Narayan is there which is pent-roofed, and made purely of timber. In Suket, modern Sundernagar, we have four temples dedicated to different Gods, the Suraj Kund temple to Lord Sun, the Jagan Nath to Lord Krishna, the Mahadev temple to Lord Shiva and the Narsingh temple to Lord Vishnu. All these are also in the *Shikhara* style and show that the Rulers of Suket had their faith in both the sects, *Shaivism* and *Vaishnism*. In the princely state of Suket, there is a historical pent-roof style temple of Dev Maahun Nag in Karsog tehsil. While studying the architecture of Mandi district a conclusion that came out is that the features of hill architecture are so because of firstly, the geographical features of the region and secondly, the availability of material. The architecture makes ample use of timber in the mountainous areas of Mandi where timber is easily available, whereas in the flat valleys of Mandi where stone, concrete, bricks etc. are more available, they can be seen used in the construction of temples.

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