GAMBHIRPUR ROCK PAINTINGS

Ravi G. Hajarnis

The village Gambhirpur (latitude N.P. 23°5' east longitude 73°3') is about three kms. to the north of Īdār in the Gujarat State. The erstwhile Īdār State, now merged in the Sābarkāṇthā District, is rich in antiquities. The territory of the former Īdār State lay mostly to the east of River Sābarmatī and north of the River Mahi, between 23°6' and 24°30' north latitude and 72°49' and 73°43' longitude. The State had an area of 1,669 square miles.

The Arvallī hills lay on the southern borders of the State. These granite hills almost surround Īdār, and some isolated hills occur as far as Himatnagar. The main river system in this territory is formed by the Sābarmatī and its tributaries—the sāi, Harṇāv, Hathimatī, Meśvo, Vātrak and Mājum which flow through the plains of the western and southern parts of the former State.

History

U. P. Shah traces some connection of Pratihāra King Veṅivatsarāja (c. A. D. 783-808) with Īdār hills on the basis of folk-lore. According to a legend, the king’s mother, consort of the king of Śrīnagara (i.e. Teherī Ghaḍhvāl District of the Himalayan region), was brought to the Īdār hills by a monster-bird during her pregnancy.

The Chinese pilgrim Hūen T’sang (c. A. D. 640) mentions a place which he calls “O-chā-li”, or Vaḍārī. Cunningham identifies this place with Īdār (also Rāsmālā, 235). The Bombay Gazetteer Vol. V, however, identifies Vaḍārī with Vaḍālī (23°56' N. 73°3' E) to the north of Īdār.

According to Shah, Vaḍālī, which is referred to in Hūen T’sang’s accounts, was under the Maitraka rule, with Ānandapura to its west, Mālva or Mālavaka to the east, and Kheṭaka to its south. He further guesses his route of travel to be from Daśapura (Mandasor), or Ujjain area, to Br̥gukaccha via Duṅgarpur through Bhiloḍā, Śāmalāji, Harṣapura (Harsol) to Kārpaṭavāṇijya (Kapaḍvanj), Kaṭhlāl, and Naḍīād in Kheṭakamāṇḍala.

Devnimori, about 45 kms. to the south of Īdār was one of the great Buddhist settlement during the late Kṣatrapa period. The cultural and artistic activities of this region, however, go back to a period anterior to Kṣatrapa times. The present author, during the course of his explorations discovered rock paintings from Sapāvāda, Lāloḍā and Īdār which has cast fresh light on the art history of this region from stone age to historical periods.
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The Śāmaḷaji evidence proves the association of this area with Buddhism. The author recently has brought to light one other series of rock paintings showing signatory association with religious, cultural and art-activities of the Buddhist period. In all, there are seven stūpas depictions painted on the inner vertical surface of the rock shelters at Gambhirpur (Idar). These are for the first time discussed in English here.

Description of the paintings:

Shelter 14

This shelter faces full front; the figure of a stūpa is visible even from the road side. The stūpa-figure is painted with thick red lines of geru (Indian red) colour. It is flanked by chatra-yaṣṭi. Chatra is shown with (a sort of) perspectivity in view. The platform of the stūpa cannot properly be discerned. The patākā (flag) is drawn by red lines with no block-filling. Although the proportions are not perfect, the figure is useful as an idea representation of the contemporary stūpa shape. The pigment used here is geru and a white colour as a fillar (Fig. 1.).

Shelter 15

The paintings in shelter 15 are not well preserved. Two stūpa figures, however, can be clearly recognised; their configuration is delineated in red, the inner area rendered in white (Fig. 2).

The first figure from the left is larger than the second. The stūpa’s outline has somewhat suffered due to weathering. The shape of the chatra-yaṣṭi and of the platform etc. cannot therefore be fully discerned.

The configurative lines of second stūpa figure are also damaged. These two stūpa figures illustrate the more developed form compared to the figures of shelter 16 to be discussed below, being the work arguably of a superior artist. The space distribution and the force of line are remarkable. The chatra-yaṣṭi and the hermikā are carefully drawn. The chatra is drawn after moon-shape.

Shelter 16

Three stūpa-figures are met with here.

The first stūpa figure from the left side is not drawn with perfect symmetry. The lines too are uneven in thickness and reflect irregularity in proportions. The uneven rock-surface may have contributed to this ‘mishappen’ appearance.

The second, which is the middle, stūpa figure is in better condition than the first stūpa figure, drawn carefully as it is. The lines are fine and more accurate compared to the preceding instance. However, the rendering of the chatra-yaṣṭi and the hanging patākā is not very accurate.

The third stūpa figure in this shelter is by far the superior of the three. The method in drawing adopted here is slightly different. Because of the uneven
Fig. 1

Painted stupa in shelter 14

Fig. 2 (A)

Painted stupas in shelter 15
Fig. 3

_Painted stupa in shelter 16_
Gambhirpur Rock Paintings

rock-surface, the entire figure is directly drawn by the artist. The chatra portion is semi-rectangular. But its top part is not clearly visible (Fig. 3).

Shelter 18

It is located on the way leading to ‘Iḍario Gaḍh’, Iḍar, near the place locally called Ruṭhi Rāṇi-no Mahel. There, on the inner wall of shelter a superimposed painting is discernible. Although superimposed, the semi-circular shape of the stūpa and some Brāhmi letters above it can be discerned. The entire writing is not preserved or clearly legible. (A few letters may be read as “Rajas”.) Palaeographically, the characters are assignable to the 4th and the 5th cent. A.D. All these painted stūpa configurations may, therefore, be assigned to the bracket 4th-5th cent. A.D.

Such painted configurations of the stūpa inside rock-shelters are not reported from any other part of the country. The paintings prove the prevalence in this area of Buddhism in the early Gupta period.

Notes and References


2. Ibid.


4. Ibid.

5. Shah, Sculptures., p. 5.

6. Ibid.


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