

ETHNO-ARCHEOLOGY OF BHORE DEVELOPMENT BLOCK, GOPALGANJ, BIHAR - A MICRO STUDY

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The Bhore Development Block lies approximately between 26°20' and 26°30' north longitude and 84°2' and 84°01' east latitude, falls in the eastern segment of Gopalganj district, sharing its southern and northern border with Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh. To its West is 'Mirganj Development Block' and to the north is the 'Katelya Development Block'. The block consists of a total of 172 villages spread over in 14,760.64 hectares with 14,070 households and a population of 91,669 persons (*Census of India 1981*, Gopalganj). There is a metalled district road which connects the block with the district headquarter and an another road running north-south connects it with nearest railway station Bhatpar (10 miles south) in Uttar Pradesh. The block headquarter Bhore is situated at the crossing of these two roads and is in the middle of the block.

Although no big river flows from the block, a number of minor rivers, rivulets and streams are found, which have shaped its economic and cultural geography. There are three minor rivers in the Bhore block, Jharhi, Syahi - both tributaries of Ghagara and Nara. The river Jharhi originates in Uttar Pradesh, passes through Hussepur and forms the boundary between Bhore and Mirganj blocks. The Syahi originates from Kuchaikot, the highest point in the district (223 feet above the sea level) and flows parallel with Jharhi and meets the Ghagara at Mairawa. Another river Nara also originates at Kuchaikot and runs throughout the Bhore block. The land slope of the block is towards the south-east along the course of the above mentioned rivers. Most of these rivers are rain-fed ones but work as major source of irrigation in the block.

The soil in this block consists entirely of alluvium but can be subdivided into different types. In the low-lying areas hard clay, locally known as bangar is found. The soil in the upland is light sandy loam which is called *bhath* by the locals. Two-third of Bhore block consists of *bhath* land, but even in the *bhath* area there are *low-lying* lands called *chaurs* (marshes). Production wise, the *bhath* land is regarded suitable for wheat and vegetables, whereas the chaur land is used for rice cultivation. There is another category of land known as goer, classified with reference to its proximity to habitations. The *bhath* land is further sub-divided into *kach*, *balua*, *matiyar* and *balasumbhi* according to the sand content of the soil. In *bhath* area since most of the things of daily use can be locally produced with lesser investment and labour force, the villages are more self sufficient. The older mode of ploughing the field by wood and iron furrow is still followed showing some signs of modernisation. Nowadays, however, are evident as tractors have started replacing the older modes. But it has not proved to be uniformly useful owing to the small-size landholdings, which is a common feature in this areas.

SECTION A

In this section I have made a village wise description of the religious phenomena. Although the entire block (a total of 172 villages) is covered intensively, only those sites found mention which has certain important religious data.

BHOREY-LACCHICHAK (26°26'N - 84°E)

Bhorey is the headquarter of 'Bhorey Development Block' of Gopalganj district. This is situated 57 km east of the district headquarters on Mirganj-Bhorey-Kateya road and 12 km south of the Bhatpar Railway station (Deoria district U.P.). The total area of Bhorey in the census of 1981 was 408.82 hectares, number of occupied houses 522 (98 SC/ST) with 3,722 persons (*Census of India* 1981, Gopalganj: 242). The another adjacent village Lacchichak is situated in the northern side of Bhorey. The area of this village in the census of 1981 was 138.81 hectares, number of households 143, with the population of 911 persons (*Census of India* 1981, Gopalganj: 242). It is located on the western side of Bhore-Bhengari-Bhatpar road near B.P.S. Degree College Bhore. I have taken these two villages together because the *garh* which is called Bhorey *Garh* is actually situated in the Lachchichak village.

In the Lachchichak village there is a very large and lofty mound roughly elliptical in shape with a well defined upper edge of substantial width, due apparently, to the presence of some buried circumvallation around it, thus justifying the popular designation of the place as a *garh* or fortress. Unaware of the historical significance people have started cultivation over the mound, where one can easily notice the collection of large number of bricks. On the surface of the mound large number of Pala period pottery is found scattered. There also exist round and quadrangular shaped wells on the mound which still serve the purpose of irrigation Lahori bricks are used in all these wells on the south-eastern side of the mound, there is a temple and a tank, which was built by the king of Hathuwa estate. It is popularly called *Shivala*. There is another recent temple built by the same estate housing the statue of Rama, Lakshaman and Janaki. Inside the surrounding walls of *Shivalaya* broken idols of Vishnu and other gods and goddesses belonging to Pala period are kept, which is still worshipped by the people, despite the sanction against it in the Hindu religion.

According to the popular beliefs this *garh* said to be belonged to king Bhurishrva of the Mahabharata period. The place Bhorey is named after the same king. This story was narrated to me by the higher caste semi-educated populace of the area, who are much more aware of the *Mahabharata* story. However, for the lower caste people of the Lachchhi chak, this place is the *garh* of Bhuli Sah. The title *Sah* came into prominence only in the late ancient or early medieval period. This is amply attested by the geneological list of the Hathuwa estate which has adopted the tital *Sah* in late ancient period. This easily explains the numerous Pala potteries and Vishnu images of the same period at the site. Some writers identify this place with *Bhoganagar* mentioned in Pali texts. To quote "proceeding from Jambugama (Jamunahan) Buddha came to *Bhoganagar* and halted there with Anand Cetiya" (Pandey 1996 : 32). This was the onward journey of Buddha towards Kusinagara which is thirty km. east of this place. Here we shall, without going into the old Controversies of 'identification of places' can only say that proper excavation of the place can shed some new light on such questions.

HUSSEPUR (26°27'N - 84°10'E)

This place is 2 miles east of 'Bhore Development Block' and 15 miles west of Gopalganj district headquarter, situated on the eastern bank of Jharhi river, on the Mirganj-Bhorey-Kateya district road. According to the census of 1981, the total area of the village is 259.80 hectares, the number of households 800, with the population of 4,870 people (*Census of India* 1981, Gopalganj: 242). The village has a lower, upper, middle, high, basic and Sanskrit school, gram panchayat and a library. About Hussepur, the 1930 *District Gazetteer* mentions as follows:

"Historically this village is of some interest as it was formerly the headquarters of Maharaja of Hathuwa when they were still rulers of this part of the country. There is little, however, left beyond mounds of bricks overgrown with jungle which mark

the ruins of old forts, and of moats now almost filled up. One of the mounds of Hussepur, a bungalow, was built by the father of present Maharaja and was used by him as a country residence. The village also contains a modern temple, two large tanks and a big mango tope" (quoted in Saran District Gazetteer 1960 : 482).

Hussepur became the second capital of Hathuwa estate after Kalyanpur. It remained the headquarter of the family till Fateh Sahi became a rebel and was driven out of it by the British government. He fled to Gorakhpur (district in UP), then the independent territory of Nawab Vizier of Oudh, and took shelter in the jungles of Tamkohi or Yogini which formed part of his estate. This out Law made several unsuccessful attempts to regain Hussepur and for many years led the life of free booter making frequent raids into this area. In the course of these raids he murdered several rent collectors and also his cousin Basant Sahi, whom he beheaded at Jadopur, a village, five miles to the north of Gopalganj where a big *pipal* tree marks the scene of his death. He sent the head of the latter to his widow at Hussepur. The widow thereupon immolated herself on the funeral pyre, with thirteen of her handmaids, holding the head of her deceased husband in her lap. This is the only evidence of the Rajasthan type of sati system in this area. The other references of *sati* system is of different kind, which we will discuss elsewhere. A big banyan tree in the jungle to the east of the ruined fort at Hussepur still marks the site of her death; and there are fourteen small mounds of earth under the tree held sacred to the memory of sati. The members of Hathuwa raj still perform *puja* at this place. However for the local people instead of *sati-sthana*, this place is *Satavada sthana* where seven small mounds are worshipped. The local Congress leaders during the time of struggle against the British rule, used to hide at this place. They performed *puja* to the *Satavada* baba for their victories in political dacoity and *Satyagraha*. According to one story narrated to me by an old man (Bechu Bhagat 84 years old), one band of Congress workers went to Chauri-Chaura after performing *puja* at this place. The transformation of *Sati* mai's

place into a *Satavada* baba's *sthana* is not easy to explain. During earlier periods all the Vishnu images belonging to the area were transformed into *Sakti*. Moreover in 19th century the reverse process started working. Perhaps after the ban on *Sati* in 1829 by William Bentick and social reform movements had profound impact on Congress workers as well as on the minds of the people, consequently, it appears that public opinion turned against *Sati* worship in this area. The remaining type of *Sati*'s of this area transformed into a form of *Sakti* worship which has nothing in common with traditional *Sati* worship, though still called *Sati*.

The Pirbaba's *sthana* on the western side of the ruined rampart is a living place of worship people from all cases and religion come here to ask mangat and after their mangat is fulfilled they place chadar (cloth) at the *sthana*. Compared to the *Satavada/Sati* *sthana* this place is more popular for worship nowadays. Hardly any day passes with this place not having a kadahi chadewa (cooking puris and offering it to gods and goddesses). This mode of worship is a popular way to venerate all gods and goddesses, followed also in *Pirbaba*'s case without any differentiation. In the entire Bhore block this is the only *Pirbaba*'s place, that too near the capital of a Hindu estate It leads us to suggest the assimilative nature of sufis for which protection could also be granted by local kings and zamindars. The other places of Worship are *Vanasapti mata*'s place at the north side of the fort and *Bhavani*'s place at the north-western side of the village. Interestingly the tree under which the *bhavani*'s place is located is *pipal*.

KALYANPUR (26°28'N - 84 °11'E)

This village is three miles north of Hussepur connected to the Mirganj-Bhorey-Kateya road by an unmetalled link road. According to the 1981 census, the total area of the village is 645.46 hectares, number of households 743, with the population of 4,594 persons (*Census of India* 1981, Gopalganj : 248). It has a middle, a high school gram panchayat and a post-office. This obscure village dotted with

straggling huts was formerly the place of importance. "Kalyan Mal, who was first to receive the title of *Maharaja* from the Mughal emperor, gave his name to the village of Kalyanpur, as well as to the surrounding *paragana* which was called Kalyanpur kauri" (*Saran District Gazetteer* 1960 : 482). At Kalyanpur the ruins of fortres of Kalyan Mal is still traceable, besides large tanks and wells.

In the village tanks, wells and other sources of water are venerated. Some bathing ceremonies are also held at these places. However the main reason for worship is the material benefit derived by irrigation from these sources. To quote a lower caste tiarian from the village "Babu, when this (tank) is providing food to us, who cares for gods and goddeses, this is everything for us" (testimony of Ram Narayan 50 year old, Kanlyanpur). This does not mean that the person was agnostic, rather he was a deeply religious person. When I inquired about his worshipping other *devatas* and *devi's*, he cryptically concluded the discussion with a popular proverb uFirst himself then god". In everyday mundane life of a peasant, the objects associated with agricultural activities were personally more important than any other religious phenomena, which naturally manifest itself into sacred universe of the peasant. In other words the peasant perception about the sacred interacts locally with the objects of daily use, which ultimately transformed itself as the place of veneration.

BELWA (26°30' N - 84°23'E)

This village is situated 4 km north of Bhorey and 24km north-west of Gopalganj district headquarter. According to 1981 census the total area of village was 72.84 hectares, 45 households with the population of 330 persons (*Census of India* 1981, Gopalganj : 242). This village is extremely important from archaeological and historical point of view. It is in fact the only site which has been excavated in the block, as early as in 1918-19, by Archeological Survey of India, Patna circle, under the supervision of Mr. H. Pandey. Here is the brief summary of the "trial excavation at Beiwa' conducted from 27th March to

9th June 1919. Since this is a site that has been generally overlooked, it is worth citing in detail.

"Belwa is a small village in the Gopalganj sub-division of the Saran district situated approximately in the latitude 26° 30' north and longitude 84° 23' east, about 5½ miles to the northwest of Gopalganj. The mounds exposed are two, locally known as the *Bhairo-ka-sthana*, which yielded, large sized image of Vishnu, since transferred to the Patna museum and a large mound called the Bhar mound, which was noticed by Mr.Pandey for the first time, but which was only partly explored. The entire cost of these explorations was generously defrayed by the Maharja Bahadur of Hathuwa, who also kindly agreed to all portable finds being deposited in the Patna museum.

The remains unearthed in the *Bhairo-ka-sthana* mound are the ruins of large temple with smaller shrines attached to it, and enclosed in a compound wall. On the evidence of sculptures they are assignable to the late medieval period, but underneath these remains, the excavations brought to light a much earlier temple, which cannot be later than about 6th century A.D. These temples consist of the shrines built side by side with walls 6'to 6'in width and bricks measuring 13"x8½x2". One of these shrines was dedicated to Vishnu while the other may have belonged to the followers of rival sect of the Saivas. The minor antiquities brought to light included three bronze images which have been sent to archaeological chemist for cleansing and a stone image of Vishnu. One of the former a four faced *linga* set in a *yoni* of lotus pattern on the top of a *dharnaru* shaped pedestal. The second bronze is also a *linga* with a similar pedestal bearing a figure of Ganapati on the rim and adorned on the outside with a trident, a seated bull, and a human worshipper. The precise character of third bronze image is not yet definitely ascertainable, but it may represent Buddha at the moment of his enlightenment (*bodhi*). The destruction of the temple is attributed by Mr.Panday to Wang-hin-tse, the Chinese General, who, he thinks, ravaged the country in 647 A.D. in retaliation for the

treachery of Arjuna or Arunasva, the usurper of the throne vacated by the death of Harsha.

The later temple which rose on the remains of structure just described does not, in its present state, possess any special interest except for the large image of Vishnu now in the Patna museum which must originally have been worshipped in it. To judge from a miniature carved on the door jambs, the temple itself appears to have been one of the usual *Sikhara* type and was presumably destroyed in the 13th century if not later.

The structure disclosed in the Bhar mound comprises seven blocks of secular buildings in which five successive occupations are discernible, the earliest period being the second or first century B.C. Here Mr. Pandey found seven punch-marked coins, three copper pieces coated with silver, three copper coins of Kushana dynasty including one of the Kanishka, and eleven terracotta seals or impressions, all except two illegible objects of the latter class were unfortunately lost in transit before they could be cleaned and studied" (Hamid 1931 : 20-21)

Whatever safely reached in Patna museum have been categorised in the catalogue of Patna museum (Catalogue of Patna Musuem 1965 :65-71). These are

(A) TERRACOTTAS OF GUPTA PERIOD

- 1) "Female figures with high and small breasts, broad abstract shape for body. Indistinct object against breast (a child) large cup-shaped depression for nave'; seated on cylindrical stool. Coarse abstract type with spatulate skirt, left hand distended into a cup, right broken, round arms make curves consistent with outlines of skirt, the leg a flat and concave band, separately affixed with six slits in between seven ridges for toes. Five terracotta inside black, surface light ochre,

Height 7½" (No.2941).

- 2) Ditto, legs of female figures seated on a cylindrical stool, of (2941) with a skirt clinging to the body. Better execution. Traces of red slip.

Height. 6W (2995).

- 3) Torso in the round of a heavy male body with nipples modelled band slung across left shoulder and on back; a broken cup in the right hand held against the body. Sex parts affixed, 48broken, hollow, coarse black butt terracotta, traces of red slip

Height; 7¼ (2994)

- 4) Rectangular slab with seven figures, vestigial saptamatrikas, with slits for the mouth, toes, necklaces and high hand-weak large circle impressed for eyes, vestiges of body slightly modelled. Traces of dark red slip.

Height 3½" (2569)

- 5) Humped bull of heavy abstract type with large hump; rope affixed around neck, pellets for eyes; large sex parts small tail. Head damaged, left hand leg stump broken. Red slip and traces of black paint.

Seize: 43/4"x7¼" (30031)

- 6) Tricycle chariot, animal with head slightly turned to left, face modelled, pellets for eyes affixed, ear flaps long. Spindle- shaped body. Buff red teracotta.

Seize: 23/4" 27/8" (3019)

- 7) Head with the wig of average Gupta type black grey terracotta with mica.

Hecht 2" (2889)

- 8) Round plaque with traces of figures and birds etc. Coarsely modelled on front, irregular parallel streak on back. The rim is depressed in the middle, light ochre micaceous terracotta,

Diameter 3 1/8 (3762)

- 9) Head with flat body, eyes holed corners of mouth holed diadem, flat across a pose. Patterned black red terracotta."

Height 4" (2907)

(B) TERRACOTTAS OF EARLY MEDIEVAL INDIA FROM BELWA:

- 1) Head of female figure, wearing a flat chignon with a high crest. Nose chipped.

Height: 3¼", 11C A.D. (No. 2784)

- 2) Head of a male divinity with Karnda-Mukuta, tilak mark damaged.

Height: 23/4", 11th C.A.D

- 3) Head of an attendant divinity.

- Height 1' 5/8", 11th A.D.
(No. 3324)
- 4) Head and arm of an attendant divinity.
Height: 5", 11C. A.D.
- 5) Hand with a lotus flower on palm,
damaged.
Length: 3", 11th century (No. 2788)

(C) ARCHITECTURAL FRAGMENTS FROM BELWA:

Door-frame; with inner door jambs and portions only of outer doorjamb. Threshold with fillets and lotus. Door-jambs consist of two main sections

(1) Innermost fillet with creeper and scroll (2) lotus with creeper and scroll grouped like flames in outward direction. At the bottom and projecting over these a temple is carved with its *Sikhara* in five *bhumis*, topped by a broad *amalakha*, etc. The five *bhumis* are connected in the middle by a fourfold *gavaksha* motifs. It rests upon the crowning lotus of trefoil, supported by balustrade with the figures of Ganga on *makara*, Yamuna on tortoise, the letter upholding a water vessel (broken in Ganga's hand) separated by a races, the outer frame has superimposed trefoil niches with architectonic devices (*bhumi* and plinthlike, connected by flame shaped scroll motif) in between and eight niches on either side. There stand female figure holding chaura on flower on mirror, joining their hands above the heads; in the niche on either side a *mithuna* couple in another niche on either side, a gambling child along with figure of a women. Two niches on either side are terminated by a *sikhara*, similar to one in the inner row at the bottom. The last niche motif is carved on a separate piece of store in the inner row at the bottom. In the outward fillet of the lintel is a trefoil niche with hexagonal pilasters and on image of surya seated. The lintel on the left side projects as part of outer-door jamb. Faces of figure damaged.

Height: 6'4", 11th C.A.D.

(2) Outer door-jamb in five piece, with bearded figure squatting at bottom architectonic profiles with *gavaksha*; above: Lozenge pattern filled with lotuses, on the middle of each door-jamb square *amalakha* with foliage scroll-work above and below

Height: 5'2", 11th A.D.

(3) Fragment from a door-jamb, drummed upper part of fragment defaced.

Height : 93/4, 11th C.A.D.

IMILIYA PATTI (26°28' N - 84°11' E)

This village is just 3 km. south-west of Bhore and one km south to the Mirganj-Bhore-Bijaipur roadside. In this small village, I have found typical Eksar (in Chapra district) type of Vishnu image. The story of my noticing the famous image of Vishnu was merely a matter of luck. When I was moving around for my fieldwork asking people about any *sthana*, *dih*, *garh* and religious phenomena, nobody from the village told me anything about this place. This was at about two o'clock in the month of June. I with my local guide and teacher Mr. Vishwanath Pandey wanted to take rest anywhere. We saw a big banyan tree surrounded by a chabutara with a hand pipe where we could freshen ourself and take rest. We did the same and sitting there, I noticed a person bowing his head to a very abscurse place of worship. It was a 6'high small temple. I went there unwillingly to see that temple. I was really surprised to see a typical *Eksar* type Vishnu image in that small temple, which was so much praised by Dr. J. Pandey at Patna museum. This was found at the same place while digging. The description of the image is as follows "Vishnu (*trivikrama*), with chakra in upper left hand, lower left sankha, upper right gada, lower right *padma*. His consorts standing on his right and donors kneeling on either side of his feet. Avatars (Buddha and Kalki and devotees in the pedestal. On the painted top of the stele: Varaha, Narasimha, Kurma and Matsya issuing from *kirthmukha*. Flying *Gandharvas* on either side and leoglyphs below them. Still further down Vamana, Parsurama,

Raghva, Rama and Krishna and the attendants, one besides Lakshmi, and one beside Saraswati. The stele is cut-off around Vishnu, the halo has triangular perforations. The image was in perfectly better condition at the time of my fieldwork but not at a safe place. Typical Pala potteries were scattered on the surface of the ploughed field. This should be taken out from this place to be placed in some museum.

When I inquired about the image, people told me that this is a *Devisthana*. It is not the only piece of image found in this region. At 'Saiyadevi' in the Mirganj block, on the east bank of river Jharhi, also the same type of Vishnu image is placed in the Durga temple(see fig. no. 6). This is the most sacred *devisthana* in Bhore and Mirganj block, where a mela held in every *Navaratra*.

SABEA (26°25' N - 84°7'E)

This village is situated 6 km. north of 'Bhore Development Block connected by an unmetalled road. According to the Census Report of 1981, the total area of the village was 37.64 hectares with a very small population of only 27 presons (*Census of India* 1981, Gopalganj : 244). The entire village is on a high mound which go beyond even the boundary of the village. At one of the low-lying area, where people dig the earth for making bricks, certain potteries and burnt bricks of 13h1x10lx3u size were found. This size of bricks were also found in many of the other sites of this block at places like Bhore, Bhakashi-van and Ameya. The entire village is popularly called Sabea dih by the locals. It was the place from where late Sri Indrashan Tiwari of Tiwari Bagahawa (nearby village in the same block) found the image of *Trivikrama* Vishnu during cultivation. This image is now at the jagat (high area around wells) of a well at the village Tiwari Bagahawa without any protection. A brief description of the image is as follows:

It measures 2'8"x1'3"x9" and similar to the other images of Vishnu found in the Saran district, excepting the size of stone. [Unlike the other images which are made of black schist stone, this is white.

On the basis of style of art, the image may belong to late : Pala period. Here Vishnu has got four hands holding gada and *padma* in his right hand and in the left chakra and *sankha*. He is wearing a long 'mukuta'. It ends in a conical knob and has got the figure of Kirtimukha in the middle. Vishnu is adorned with various types of ornament, in which a necklace of three strings is very interesting. The arrangement of cloth (*dhoti*) on the person of Vishnu is quite interesting. Vishnu has got kaustabha mark in his heart. He is also wearing *vanamala*. The *Prabhavail* on the stele of the image has got a decorative scheme. On the extreme top of the stele there comes out a figure of *Kirtimukha* which vomits fish and tortoise towards the right and left side of stele, respectively. The fish and tortoise are symbolic of *matsya* and the *kurma* incarnations of lord Vishnu. Two flying *gandharvas* are then depicted below the fish and tortoise. Just below flying *gandharvas* deity on the right side of stele are the images of four handed Varaha and Rama with leoglyphs in between the two. Varaha is holding the goddess Earth in his upper left hand and Rama has got an arrow in his two hands. The figures of Varaha and Rama here are the two incarnations of lord Vishnu. Below the figure of Rama is the image of female attendant holding lotus in her left hand. On the left side of the stale, below the flying deity, are the figures of Narsimha and Parasurama with leoglyphs in between the two. Narsimha is bearing out Hiranyakasipu with his two hands and Parasurama is holding a *kuthara* in his right hand. Here the figures of Narasimha and Parasurama symbolise the other two incarnations of lord Vishnu. Then, below the figure of Parasurama is the image of a male attendant holding lotus in his right hand. Now side by side with two attendants on the two sides of the stele and near the right or left leg respectively of lord Vishnu are the images of two *Ayudh-purushas* holding *sankh* and chakra respectively. There are also two figures of devotees (one male and the other female) who are kneeling before the legs of Vishnu. On the pedestal itself there are images of Trivikrama, Buddha, Vamana and Kalki, the other four incarnations of lord Vishnu. Trivikrama is extending his left leg upward, Buddha is shown in *Bhumisparsamudra*, Rama is holding a

parasol in his one hand and Kalki the last incarnation of Vishnu is riding upon a horse. Thus we find that along with main figure of lord Vishnu, all his ten incarnations are also sculptured on the stele and pedestal. The stele is cut-off round the head so as to form his halo which is shown with triangular perforations.

Inspite of such clearcut depiction of Vishnu in the image, like all other images, this too is worshipped as Durga, even in a totally literate brahmanical settlement. It seems that the popular memory of Durga Jee is common and more recent than the avatara concept, which is slowly being overshadowed by the first, inspite of the brahmanisation of the area. Alternatively it may be conjectured that in the struggle between the two cults (Vishnu and Durga), due to the state support the first existed for some time but could not sustain itself after the collapse of the Pala state and gave way to the popular cults, since making of such beautiful images on stones (stones are not available in nearby area) could not have been possible without the active support of state.

RAQBA (26°26' N - 84°8'tE)

This village is situated 3 km. north-east of 'Bhore Development Block' and connected by an unmetalled road. According to 1981 Census Report the area of the village was 141 hectares with the population of 1,123 persons (*Census of India 1981, Gopalganj 242*). There is a government primary school (earlier a *Pathasla*) and a Madarasa. This is one of the few villages where a substantial number of Muslims reside. There is a masjid on the south-western side of the village where the whole lot of Muslim population of 'Bhore Development Block' congregates, for their Friday prayers.

At centre of the village there are two adjacent temples, one is newly built with *sivalinga* at the sanctum-sanctorium. In the other older temple two broken images, respectively of Vishnu (1'3"x10"x4") and Siva-Parvati (1'5"x....) were worshipped. The worship of broken images are not specific to this place only, it could be observed from

other places of the block also, such as Bhore *Shivalya*, Rerwaria Shukla, Bantaria Ghur, and Bhaksi-Van etc. "Their worship at local levels speaks volumes for the ground reality and relevance of scriptural sanctions that strictly forbid any worship of broken and mutilated images" (Lahiri 1996: 257) jtexts dealing with cremation and installation of images like the *pratimanalakshnan* specifically warned worshipers that "image of a deity, if it be burnt, worn out, broken or split up, after its establishment or at the time of its enshrinement, will always be harmful. A burnt image brings fourth dragnet, worn out causes loss of wealth" (Banerjea 1985 : 615). After talking to the pujari of the temple and other people, I have come to the conclusion that the textual tradition does not always work at the local level. Whatever they found which looks like a statue would be kept in the temple and worshiped. Infact temples workers as the 'local museums' of the old, broken and mutilated images. Thanks to this local tradition that some of the antiquarians remain have survived in this over populated . and over cultivated area.

SISAI (26°24' N - 84°6'E)

This village is situated towards the Northern side of 'Bhore Development Block' on Bhore-Bhengari-Bhatpar, which connects the block with nearest railway station Bhatapar. According to the 1981 Census Report the total area of the village was 655.99 hectares, with the total population of 4,855 persons (*Census of India 1981, Gopalganj : 242*). This is the biggest village of the block, both in terms of population and area, with having 22 *tolas* (sections of the village, sometimes divided on caste and functional lines). In the southern side of the village, at *Lala ka Tola*, there are two adjacent temples with tank. This is called the *niji* (personal) temple of the Srivastvas of the village. Their ancestors were the local officials of the Hathuwa estate.

In one of the temple there are figures of Rama and Janki which is called Rama-Janaki mandir and at the centre of the other temple a *lingam* is kept at sanctum-sanctorium, and on the

southwestern side a Ganesha statue is kept. This temple has strictly followed the pattern of the *Gopal Mandir* of Hathuwa, the private temple of Hathuwa estate in its miniature form. This style of temple could be found at Kalyanpur, Bankata, and certain other places of the block. Without exception all of them were either administrative centres or palaces of feudal lords. Probably these 19th century temples symbolize the ideological project of Hathuwa estate, with one or two internal variations. The statue of Ganesha is very uncommon in this area (In fact I have not noticed any others except this one) which best suits to the scribes and hence this symbolizes the real Kayasthas ideological construct. Nowadays both the temples are in a dilapidated condition, except occasional worship at the time of *Dawatpuja* and *Ramanawami* by Kayasthas. Other people were not allowed to worship at the place.

SECTION B

Looking at the microcosm of religious phenomena through my field work, the village emerges as an independent as well as culturally interacting unit. For the villagers the *Gramdevatas*, *Gramsthana*, *Varamsthana*, situated in the village premises are equally important, as its extensions like larger *sthanas* in case of *Varam Baba Hare Ram* at Mairawa and in case of Shakti the *kalisthana* at Thawe. In this section information on various rural religious phenomena are synthesised, so as to provide a broad descriptive picture relating to Gopalganj and Siwan districts as a whole. But, first, a word about the character of the villages in this area.

THE CHARACTER OF PRESENT VILLAGES

The villages of the present field area are mostly nucleated settlements - collection on brick houses (*paccagher*) and huts (*marai's*). The habitation area called *gharari* is clearly separated from the agricultural tract of land called *khet*. The occurrence of large villages or kasbas are not very common. In most of the cases we come across small villages with

100-150 households and with the average population of 500-600 people. However, the big villages are always older in origin where administrative centre or religious centres could be found where as smaller villages are comparatively recent in origin. The dominance of one caste or clan is quite evident (who may be the original colonisers) since these villages are named after the particular castes which dominates, such as Rerwaria Shukla, Tiwari Chakia, Pandey Chakiya, Bagahawa Misra. In these villages evidently Shukla, Tiwari, Misra and Pandey brahmins are in dominant position and their population in most of the cases is more than half of the all existent households. But this is not true for lower caste villages (Bantaria, Jagdishpur, Kalyanpur) except some professional caste occupied villages like Barai Bagahawa, Lala Chhapar. The caste configuration from brahmin and other dominant caste villages varies according to their needs and demands. In a brahmin dominated village, we come across one or two families of various functional groups, like carpenter, goldsmith, washerman, and other lower castes including one part (*tola*) exclusively for Harijans called chamtol. It seems that these villages are settled in planned way, and only those caste groups were settled who can serve to the dominant castes. It is interesting to note that sometimes the villages are named after particular castes which are practically non-existent. An example is Rerwaria Tiwari where not even a single Tiwari brahmin could be found. Actually they have migrated to another brahmin dominated village in the recent past (In the survey and settlement operation report, 1931, they were the legal owners of the land in the village). The villages are also sometimes, named after the most dominant person of the village, such as Chakia and Luhusi (Ramashankar Tiwari Ke Chakia and Babu Saheb Ke Luhusi). Here, the actual names of villages are synthesised with the names of local notables.

In most of these villages the commonly encountered religious phenomena relate to Shakti worship, Siva worship and Varam worship. However this does not mean that the overarching phenomena of 'high culture' dominated; instead the 'folk

'tradition' manifested itself through multiple ways in the 'high tradition' that sometimes it became very difficult to distinguish the two. Looking at these phenomena purely through the eyes of textual tradition is mere a gloss over the sacred geography of that area; a denial of actual popular religious geography. R. Redfield observed in a similar way, "in India the Great and Little traditions are in constant, various and conspicuous interaction with the life of the local communities" (Redfield 1955: 17). So, for us over here those terms like *Sakti* and *Siva* are broad descriptive terms which have little to do with the meaning traditionally assigned to it.

SAKTI WORSHIP! DURGA JEE AND OTHER FORMS

The *Sakti* is worshipped in many forms like *Vanaspati Mata*, *Jungali Bhvani*, *Kali Mai*, *Shitala Mai*, *Gari Mai* and *Sati Mai*. All the *Mai's* (literally meaning mother) does not necessarily find in each and every village; one or two forms are just sufficient; but people surpass the actual village boundary to go and worship other forms according to their needs, because one or the other *mai's* or *bhavani's* are regarded as specialist in healing/solving the day to day diseases/problems of the common village folk. Suppose if the problem is related to small pox the villager will first approach the nearest Devi but he will certainly visit the *Sitala mai* where the ultimate solution of his problem lies no matter where the *Sthana* (place of worship, lit. meaning place) is located.

One form of *Sakti* worship which is commonest in the field area is the seven *kuris* (also called *pinda*) of *Durga jee*. Basically these are seven reverse V shaped (Λ) structures of clay or sometimes of bricks, made and being worshipped. Temples or small rooms are found around these, but most of the time these figures are left open. The meaning of seven *kuris* is not explicit, which has probably got different versions. However the most common and appropriate meaning could be that they are seven sisters of *Durga Jee*, having different qualities and different purposes of worship. All of them are

worshipped together to maximise the benefits of worship. Moreover the stereotyping of mother goddess exists in textual accounts as well as in the geographic representations. In the *Mundaka Upanisad* seven types of *Agni* are mentioned, they are *Kali*, *Karali*, *Manojava*, *Sulohita*, *Serdhumravarh*, *Sbhulingini* and *Visvavarmi* (*Mundaka Upanisad* 1,2,4). The number seven is to be noted, since the number of divine mothers is usually the same -the *Sapta Matrikas* (Banerjea 1956: 491). The concept of composite goddess could be seen in its various elements such as mother, daughter and sister aspects (Banerjea 1956: 491). Every morning and evening the common folk, especially the village women, go to worship their *Durga Jee* with water, flowers, rice and sugar (*gud*), and in the evening they burn *dip* (light) in a clay pot with mustard oil. During the festival seasons of *Durga jee* (navratra) *pathas* (recital of *Durga Saptasati* by the priest) are organised by the rich people whereas the masses still do it in the above mentioned way with extra-precautioned purity,. These *temples/sthanas* are kept outside the settlement area but not exactly in the fields. In most of the villages the settlement starts or ends with the devisthana. People irrespective of their caste including untouchable-harijans go to worship at such places. It is quite surprising to note that in certain villages the Muslims have been asking *Mangat* (vow) (like Rerwaria, Rakawa, Pandatpura) at the time of distress. This phenomena has been noticed only in those villages where Muslim households are quite a few in number and they are virtually dependent upon the Hindu population for their resources and Livelihood.

Despite this general reverence of all the castes verging at one place of worship, in the village Rerwaria Shukla which can be called a brahmin village; there is a clear cut division between the two *sthana*, one situated at the western side of the village where Harijan population resides, as claimed by brahmins to be their's. Another *sthana* in the eastern side of the village near the barhamin households is supposed to be the *Durga Jee* of *Harijans*. She is popularly called *jungali bhavani*, not of seven *kuries* type, where no villager ventures to

build a temple as she does not appreciate that. Both the groups recognises each other claims over the *Durga Jee's* and worship both of them together.

The *Sati* worship is most noticeable religious practice in this area. The *Sati* is the ancestral lady of the family who died without consumating her marriage life. In my inquiry about the *Sati mai* with the villagers, most of the people told me a similar type of story that when she was returning after getting married, the tiger (*bagh*) killed her husband and herself. From the story it is not clear why the tiger is repeatedly mentioned. One probable explanation could be that tiger is the vehicle of goddess Durga. Another speculation could be provided in terms of the 'memory' of recent past, since, the entire area was covered by jungles even up to 16-17th century as the first *District Gazetteer* (1907) attest to this fact. Another fact associated with this phenomena is that *sati mai's* place would not be necessarily located in the same village in which her descendants are staying at present. It can be found in other villages also and people can go and worship their respective *sati mai* after every important function of the household such as marriages, sacred thread ceremonies etc.. These *sthanas* are the places where the *Sati* actually died. This attest the migration of population from one area to another area. This fact is being amply proved by giving the example of a place called Shukla ka tola, now a no man village from where the most of the Shukla brahmins of the block diffused to other parts of the block. During the course of my exploration of the site of the village I found typical Pala pottery. But at the same time I have no reason to suggest that they were the original inhabitants of this place, because they themselves say that we have come from Mamkhor, a place in the eastern Uttara Pradesh.

The veneration of *Bhumi Devi* (land goddess) is another popular religious practice. These *bhumi sthanas* are generally found in agricultural tract of land. They have no iconic representation as such. Basically they are small mounds of some two to five metres in diameter and nearly two to three meters in height. They are segregated places of the

village only to be remembered at the time of agricultural festival, draughts, famines and distress. However she is the only village deity where the whole community collaborates-low castes, *Harijans* and elite groups including the Muslims. These sites of worship in the village always functioned as several channels feeding into the village as a social interacting unit (Lahiri 1996 : 257). The entire agricultural community (all the residing population of the village participates in one or the other form of agricultural activity), take part in the *puja* (worship) performed at the beginning of the harvest seasons. Material benefits of the worship demanded from the goddess is good monsoons, better harvests, birth and development of their children. This worship underlines the logic of peasant anxiety about maintaining the normal, accustomed rhythm of rural life. The development of these peasant cults are visible symbols of the founding and the continued prosperity of settlements, signifiers of village production and reproduction, economic and biological' (Lahiri 1996 : 257).

GARHI MAI OR GARHI BHAWANI

Garhs are the remnants of old forts, either of the local elites, feudal lords, kings or official residence. The main *garhs* in the present field area are situated at Hussepur, Kalyanpur, Luhusi, Sisai etc.. All these *garhi mai's* are the family goddesses of the particular local elite or feudal lord or king. Since these garhs are vacated by their older inhabitants, now a days these sthana's are being worshipped by the common people. At the Hussepur garh which was the former capital of Hathuwa estate has a *garh sthana*, but there she is called *Vanasapti Mata*. Although the Hathuwa estate is at present situated some 12 miles west of Husepur and the descendants [of the state lives in Patna, they still use to come to worship.

At Luhusi *garh* which was the official residence for the employees of Hathuwa *raj* has got a very interesting story about the *Garhi Mai*. The story as told by an old man of Bairona (a nearby village) is as follows. "Babu (respectable word for any person), long time back even before the age of

my grand and great grand father, there was a *dom* family living in this area. The family was having a daughter. Unfortunately she was stunningly beautiful (being beautiful was regarded as a curse in a poor family). Babu that was the age of raj (probably talking about Hathuwa raj). Officials were masters of their own will, they put a lecherous eye on the poor girl. She was raped. Over night entire country side raised with axe, snows, stones etc. The officials of the raj ran away, but the girl committed suicide. She is the one worshipped here" (testimony of Bechu Bhagat, 60 years old). A latest story added to the glory of the mai is that government wanted to dig a canal in the area. The *sthana* was in the way to the canal. When the labourers started digging the place, they were collapsed and died on the spot. The government had to change the way of the canal. This *sthana* represents the fears, hopes, ironies, rages, despairs, the thoughts and sentiments of the common people. This place is venerated by the all sections of the society. A big mela is held in the month of May at this place.

PLANT WORSHIP

The most venerated plant in this area is Nim. This is regarded as the abode of *Durga jee* which forms the subject of some very beautiful folklores. This tree has many medicinal qualities, also proved by modern medical science. The association of this tree with Durga is so intimate that the common folk worships it without ascertaining that *sthana* is located over there. This is a place where various charms and spells are displayed by sorceress (*Sokha baba*) to remove diseases which are caused by ghost (*preta* and *bhuta*). People want to grow Nim tree at the front of their houses for fresh air, but do not like to make it a *sthana* for general worship, because they can't maintain that high purity and moral quality always. They accept that the human being is by nature corrupt. So they always maintain a proper distance from the *sthanas*.

Apart from Nim, Tulsi, Pipal and Awala are also worshipped. All these plants are associated with one or the other gods. The plant of Tulsi is regarded

as very auspicious which could be found in the courtyard of every household. In the early morning people can be found bowing before the Tulsi plant. She is regarded as *Dukhaharihi* - one who could end the miseries of people. Its leafs are used in Siva worship. These leaves are believed to be highly efficient in healing fever and cough. It is boiled in water and taken as tea (karah). This shows how a common sense medicinal plant virtually transformed into a religious phenomena.

Another tree which is venerated in this area is *Pipal* tree. This tree is regarded as the abode of various pretas and bhutas (ghost). After death some of the Sanskaras are performed over here. Village women perform rounds during an auspicious occasion. The most important significance of this tree is location of Varam *sthana* near its root. Inspite of its great religious significance people do not like to have this tree near to their house. If this tree grows up in their houses that is regarded as a bad omen. This has to be replaced from their house; not by themselves but by Muslims or other low caste people, since the destruction of tree by higher castes is regarded as a sin. Thus the same tree which is so much venerated by the people in general would suddenly be transformed into bad sign if it has grown in their own house. This can be probably explained by its association with death ceremonies, the abode of *bhuta* and *preta* and *Varama* worship, which is also a ghost worship. It can be suggested that probably the worship of this tree would have started out of fear. Here we are not suggesting that a natural phenomena directly transformed into a religious phenomena. However through the ages they crystallised in such a way at a popular level that it is difficult to separate the two in any comprehensive way.

MALE GODS

Among the male gods the most prominent place in this area is being occupied by Siva. He is venerated in its *linga* form in our area, which are of two types, (a) that is kept near the wells (b) that is established in the temples. The most commonly noticeable

phenomena are the *banalingas* which kept near the wells. These bana!ngas are fished out of a particular river-bed. They are mostly picked up from the river Reva or Narmada, one of the most sacred rivers of Hindus (Banerjea 1956 : 491). Men folks after taking bath at the well, comes out with a lota of water-washes and bows before it. This is the most informal way of worship but suitable to otherwise busy peasant life. Women worships Siva, but they have a more formal way of doing it, with leafs (*belpatta*), sugar (*gud*), rice (*acchat*), and scented candles (*Agarbatti*). At the temples *banalingas* were not found. There we notice the manmade *linga* or *manusa*. The manusa or manmade lingas were from the largest group of the *sthirlingas*, *Vihubhagas* and *Rudrabhaga*. The first is the square lowest section, the second the octagonal middle one, while the third or the top most one is generally cylindrical *Rudrabhaga* is known also by *pujabhaga*, for offerings of water, flower and other objects (Banerjea 1956: 458). There is slight difference in worship method from the Siva at well and Siva at temple, in the second the ritualistic patterns and prescribed methods are followed. Visit to the temple is a leisure time activity done with preparation, whereas in case of banalin gas a normal way of suitability exercise.

VARAM WORSHIP

The worship of *Varam* is one of the most popular practice in this area. The *Varam sthanas* could be found near the root of a *pipal* tree (*ficus religiosa*). It is a semi-circle () like structure made of clay (*plyari mati*). The *Varam sthanas* are generally located at the middle of the settlement area. If people have changed their original habitational area, still one could find the *Dihā Varam sthana*, at the same place. In the villages like Rerwaria shukia, Pandey Chakiya, Bagahawa, Mishrauli, number of bricks and potteries could be found scattered though the settlement area is far away from this place.

The village *Varam* is the patriarch of the village. He was a young brahmin (16 years old is the traditional age), died before marriage. It is not clear

from the legends that why this person is branded as the village *Varam*, whereas the other who died at the same age were left. Perhaps this has something to do with the first settlers of the village, whose progenitors are still the residents. He is not only patriarch of the living villagers but also of all other *Varams* of the village. In fact he is symbol under whom all other *Varams* lives with having heirchically lower status. He is also the master of bhutas, pretas, pisachas and other transhuman forms. He guides and controls them to do no harm to the villagers. People worship him because of this positive aspect. Most of the *Varam sthanas* are centres of charms and spells. The village charms man (*Sokha baba*) performs various miracles at this place to remove the diseases which according to him were caused by *bhutas* and *pretas*.

The method of *Varam* worship is accustomed to the suitability of peasant style of life. After returning back from normal agricultural activity at morning (around 10 to 11 a.m.), after having bath they perform *puja*, with just a *lota* of water. Although women are forbidden to perform *puja* at *Varam sthana*, I have seen them worshipping him in a similar fashion. However, they have to maintain some distance from him, as usually they maintain the distance from the senior persons of the village. During festivals, feasts and ceremonies people give chadawa (offers) at his place. People starts singing *holi* songs singing from his place (*Varam baba ke darbar*) and then moves from house to house. Although *Varam* lived like a normal human being, his status is memorialized not lower than any other gods. He has almost similar status among the cosmos of village deities. It is to be noted that the worship pattern of village deities is nearly similar, which does not go by the 'method of worship' prescribed in the texts for particular gods/goddesses, but what suits to the peasant style of life.

In case of *Varam* worship the caste divisions of the village is clearly evident. Only a brahmin can become village *Varam*. Even the *Varam sthanas* were found only in those villages where brahmins reside. In the villages where brahmins were settled

earlier like Rerwaria Tiwari, there is *Varam sthana* but in a very dilapidated condition. In the non-brahmin villages like Lala chapar, Bantariya, Jagdishpur there is no *Varam sthana*. Although all the castes were allowed to perform *puja*, the 'intensity of worship' is more among the brahmins - than others. The lower castes performs *puja* only during festivals.

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