

Haryana misses the Buddha moment

The state governments of Bihar and Gujarat have accelerated efforts to develop the Buddhist- tourism circuit to attract Buddhist tourists to India, Haryana, where the Buddha delivered some of his most important sermons, is not waking up to the significance of its rich Buddhist sites.

Sidharth Gauri

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140818/edit.htm#6>

THE 33rd Kalchakra ceremony attracted lakhs of Buddhists to Ladakh in July this summer. But, they were not attracted to the ancient Buddhist sites in Haryana, which continue to be in a state of neglect. The Haryana State Archaeology Department, Panchkula, and the Archaeological Survey of India, Chandigarh circle, two premier bodies for heritage conservation and preservation in the state have failed to highlight the significance of the sites to the global Buddhist community. According to The Buddhist Forum, a watchdog organisation concerning the Ancient Buddhist sites in India and Asia, there are 22 ancient sites in Haryana which have potential to be listed in the category of protected heritage monuments of the state or the Centre.



Land of sojourns and sermons

Around 2500 years ago, the Buddha started delivering his sermons from Sarnath, now in Uttar Pradesh, and gave one of the most important sermons of his lifetime Maha Sati Patthana Sutta in what is now Haryana. Strangely, since its creation in 1966, Haryana did not recognise the importance and potential of this site to promote it under pilgrimage tourism, whereas it created tourist places of repute at places with almost no historical background, especially on the National Highway. Almost every year, close to 5,000 people from different parts of India and the world come to participate in the Vipassana course in Haryana, to honour the fact that the Buddha delivered his important sermons on this land, a fact that has been overlooked by the government.

Buddha and Ananda, his disciple, travelled through Haryana several times via the ancient trade route of Mathura-Taxila and went up to Gandhara. Several Buddhist scholars say that Haryana Government should identify the places where Buddha gave the sermons and promote these places under the Buddhist pilgrimage in the same manner as Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh are doing. Buddhism is presently the fastest-growing religion in the world, for its quest to bring

Ancient Buddhist sites in Haryana

Location	District	Under Jurisdiction
Village Chaneti	Yamunanagar	H.S.A.D
Village Topra	Yamunanagar	None
Village Adi Badri	Yamaunagar	A.S.I
Village Sugh	Yamunanagar	H.S.A.D
Village Sandhay	Yamunanagar	None
Village Kokarakot	Rothak	None
Village Sanghi	Rothak	None
Village Brahmanwas	Rohtak	None
Village Lalpura	Rohtak	None
Village Asandh	Karnal	A.S.I
Village Travadi	Karnal	None
Kurukshetra University	Kurukshetra	H.S.A.D
Village Amin	Kurukshetra	A.S.I
Village Bhuna	Hissar	None
Village Fathehabad	Hissar	None
Village Agroha	Hissar	A.S.I
Hansi	Hissar	None
Village Aherwan	Faridabad	None
Village Hathin	Palwal	None
Village Bhadas	Mehwat	None
Sirsa	Sirsa	None
Village Mahmudpur	Sonepat	None

about peace and harmony in the universe. The discourses delivered by the Buddha in Haryana are of great significance to the followers of Buddhism, apart from Maha Sati Patthana Sutta, Magandkiya Sutta, Ananjsapay Sutta and Mahanidan Sutta were delivered here.

After the death of Buddha, different ruling dynasties also patronised Buddhism in Haryana, from Emperor Asoka to emperor Harshvardhana in the 7th century A.D. According to Madhav Acharya, former Director, Haryana State Archaeology Department, "The present village Sugh in district Yamunanagar is one of the sites which finds mention in the ancient Buddhist chronicles about the visit of Buddha and the archaeological evidence also supports the fact".

The confluence of rivers

"A monastic complex", according to Dr Sanjay Kumar Manjul, Archaeologist, the Archaeological Survey of India, "The excavations in Adi Badari in district Yamunanagar has revealed remains of many Buddhist stupas and monasteries spread along an area of one km. It is on the confluence of rivers Som and Saraswati. The stupas found here date back between 1,500 and 1,800 years while the monasteries are of a later period, between 800 and 1,000 years old. A set of 13 teeth and a few pieces of bones, found buried under this stupa, tell us that this was an ancient and rare sharirika stupa. A group of British monks was shocked on visiting this monastery. To them, a rare ancient monastery like the one at Adi Badri, with a beautiful idol of Buddha and a few cells, big enough to accommodate a single person, were probably meant for meditation. While the monks visiting the sites from other countries feel committed to promote this monastery internationally, there is little support shown by the state. Devender Handa, one of the senior Indologists and an archaeologist from the region, who had discovered two ancient stupas in the state; at village Chaneti and Asandh, says, "Chaneti stupa is one of oldest stupas in north India and was built initially by Emperor Asoka. This stupa is around 8 metres high and has a diameter of 20 metres." The present form of the stupa was renovated around 2,000 years ago by a Kushana ruler. Last year, a group of Tibetan pilgrims installed holy flags all around the stupa and performed the traditional Tibetan order of rituals and rites. The locals from the village Chaneti participated and supported the pilgrims, hoping, visits to stupa will change the fate of the village. Even a private body like INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) that looks after selected heritage sites in the country is of the view that little effort is being made for the promotion of this rare ancient stupa by the state government.

Handa says, the stupa was built around 2,000 years ago. The vastness of this stupa can be calculated from the fact that after such wear and tear, it is still more than 25 metres high. When you climb atop, it offers a panoramic view of the entire village. It is built of hard bricks and is perhaps the only stupa that resembles the Dhamek stupa of Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh.

The Buddha in Kurukshetra

Kurukshetra does not claim association with Lord Krishna alone, inside the premises of Kurukshetra University the presence of an ancient Buddhist stupa and a monastery makes it a city relevant to the Buddhists. Located on a huge mound, near Brahmsarovar, the stupa was built around the 7th Century AD during emperor Harshvardhana's reign. Under this monastery, one can clearly see another ancient brick structure which is believed to be built during the rule of Kushanas. If excavated, this mound can provide significant information related to Buddhism in the region.

Kurukshetra, the holy city where the Bhagavadgita was written, can add additional value to its spiritual past of the location where the Maha Sati Patthana Sutta was written

can be ascertained, the Sutta is as significant for the Buddhists as the Bhagavadgita is for the Hindus.

Ancient trade route

In the village of Agroha, Hisar, an ancient Buddhist monastery and stupa have been discovered during excavations. These Buddhist monuments found here were built 1,500 years back. The magnificent stupa here has a rectangular base, while the upper portion has been given a dome-like shape. From the top of the stupa, a deep pit was created to keep Buddha's relics, which is clearly visible. There is a pathway around it for circumambulation, a monastery constructed of hard bricks has also been excavated in this place. Historians believe, this monastery was demolished and modified many times over.



The majority of the Buddhist sites in Haryana have not been listed under the protected monuments of national importance by the state or Central archaeological preservation and protection agencies. They are waiting for a saviour. In the past, several Buddhist monasteries and stupas flourished in almost all the ancient cities on the old trade-routes that passed through Haryana like Topra Kalan, Adi Badri, Sugh, Kurukshetra, Asandh, Agroha and Kokarakot. Buddhism continued to exist in Haryana till the 7th Century as a major religion. But due to changed political and socio-economic conditions, it collapsed and with it came the fall of Buddhist monuments. The remains found at several ancient sites have been losing their historical value and are on the verge of extinction in the state due to culpable neglect on the part of all concerned.

Jayanta Sanyal, INTACH Convener, Haryana, says, growing illegal encroachment is posing grave danger to the ancient sites and the lack of proper security and awareness about the sites among the local masses make them more vulnerable to encroachment. Migrant labourers, looking for some kind of shelter often turn these sites of great historical relevance into their abode. The isolated sites offer a hide out for unscrupulous elements.

The Buddhist Forum, an NGO, working for the protection of these sites filed RTI, seeking information on how different government departments have been working to look after the Buddhist heritage sites in the last 21 years. The information received was very disturbing. The state departments have failed miserably in taking care of these sites.

Haryana state department invested Rs 81,60,249 on the upkeep of these sites and ASI, Chandigarh, stated that no specific records of Buddhist sites/monuments were available in their office records. The ASI does not have exhaustive and specific information in a

single consolidated form in their office records on Buddhist sites. Little effort has been made to promote tourism, conferences, provide drinking water, toilets and lighting on the ancient sites by the Central and State Archaeological Departments. The future of the ancient Buddhist sites now lies in the hands of common people, who should come forward to preserve them for future generations.

The writer is a Buddhist researcher and a member of Buddhist Forum

Buddha is smiling

- To harness 500 million adherents of Buddhism, Bihar has developed world class infrastructure for its Bodh Gaya-Rajgir-Nalanda circuit.
- About 6.5 lakh foreign tourists visit Bihar every year, private money changers in the state estimate the transactions are not less than Rs.100 crore every season.
- Bihar has leaped ahead of Goa and Himachal Pradesh to the eighth position among states for attracting foreign tourist arrivals.
- A series of archaeological excavations in Vadnagar promises to make Gujarat a permanent fixture on the Buddhist circuit. The Gujarat government is adding nearly a dozen other Buddhist sites to Vadnagar to woo tourists from Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and the Far East, especially Japan.
- Nepal, with its limited resources, attracts roughly 43,000 foreign tourists every year to Lumbini, the place where queen Mayadevi gave birth to Siddharth.

Source: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140818/edit.htm#6>