

More than Two Thousand Years Old and Still Living the Ancient Tank at Satauj (District Sangrur, Punjab)

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Village Satauj (also spelled as Satoj) in district Sangrur lies about 15 km southwest of Sunam as the crow flies and can be approached via Cheema on Sunam-Bhatinda road. From Cheema one has to take Lehra Gagga road to reach Satauj (Fig.1).

There are two mounds near the village representing the ancient sites. One mound rises to a height of about 6 meters and is spread over a vast

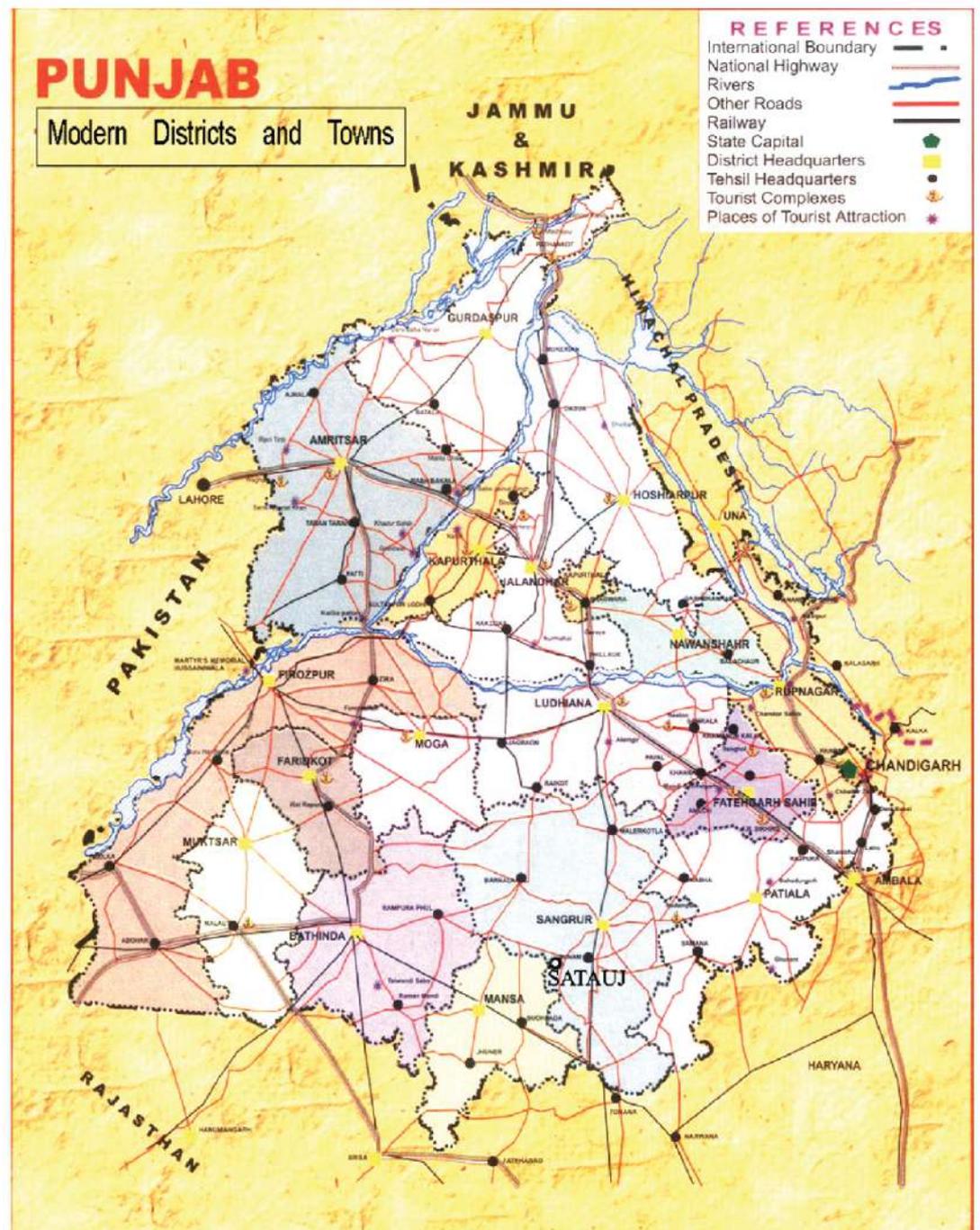


Fig.1: Map showing the location of Satauj

area of about one km square as indicated by potsherds found from the surrounding fields. The other is a small one. The larger mound is called Bir Hodla in the revenue records. Harappan pottery including pieces of fist and circular type terracotta cakes, Painted Grey Ware, black-slipped ware, early historic red including red polished ware and fragments of early medieval thin sectioned small and large sized bowls and other relics can be picked up from the former while the latter yields grey ware, black-slipped and red ware sherds with brick-bats indicating the existence of two different settlements from the latter half of the first millennium BCE onwards.¹

A ring well was also noticed at one place on the larger mound. The town may have been destroyed during the raids of the Ghaznavites and lost much of its importance though it continued to exist as indicated by a hoard of billion coins of Abdul Rashid (CE 1021 – 33), Farrukhzad (CE 1053 – 59) and Nasiruddaulah Ibrahim (CE 1059-99) obtained from the mound and examined by me with M/s Kulwant Ram Gora Lal Jewelers during one of my visits to Sunam.



Fig.2: Location of the Tank



Fig.3

Near the Dera of the Udasi sect in the present village is situated a large ancient tank measuring about 430 x 150 x 20 feet with east-west orientation (Figs.2-3). It is known locally as Shantanu-Sara as a local tradition connects it with king Śāntanu of the

Mahābhārata fame. The northern side of the tank is slightly curved and is thus larger than the opposite side. The tank has bricked *ghāṭs* interspersed with steps, with a provision of a ramp on the northern side. Smaller steps seem to



Fig.4

have been provided to give easy access and to mark the level of water which must have been varying in different months of the year.

During one of my visit to the site on April 30, 1994, I found the tank almost in a dry state (Fig.4) and the Udāsī recluses were performing *kārasevā* (voluntary service) to clean and renovate it. They believe that the performance of *kārasevā* of the tank the village is relieved of disease. One may understand the original logic of providing clean water behind it. I noted the existence of a central tank within it. This perhaps was the original tank when the village was a small one with less population. Sherds (rims) of Śuṅga and Kuṣāṇa bowls picked up from the silt in its central part when it was dry indicate that it is more than two thousand years old, built before the Śuṅga period, perhaps during the Mauryan period. Large sized baked bricks measuring 72 x 51 x 15 and 40-42 x 24-28 x 12-13 cm were used in its construction. The larger tank may have been built subsequently with the original tank forming its core when the village expanded and the population grew larger, perhaps in the Kuṣāṇa period as

indicated by a large number of baked bricks of the size of 36-38 x 25-26 x 13 cm. Some bricks bear three grooves as found on bricks from various places like Sunet and Sanghol in Punjab and Kurukshetra, Naurangabad, Asandh, Agroha, etc. in Haryana. The tank was so devised that people could draw water from

the central part when the tank became almost dry during the summer months. The exact dimensions of this central part could not be determined as the other side was filled up



Fig.5

with sand and silt. The source of water was Sirhind *coā* (drain or rivulet), an old channel of the Ghaggar or Sarasvatī river flowing about 300 m east and south of it (Fig.5). It may be noted that Ghaggar has not been a perennial river in the early historic period but is flooded during the rainy seasons. The rainy season may have provided water through a small inlet channel to this tank which was used during the year. The eastern side of the tank is elevated and it is not sure whether the water entered the tank directly or through a duct which connected it with a well or a smaller tank in which sand and silt settled down. It will not be surprising if this tank had the same mechanism of purification and storage of water as witnessed at Shringverapur near Ayodhyā.²

During its long life, this tank seems to have been repaired and renovated from time to time as indicated by bricks of various sizes used for the purpose. The following brick sizes were noted: 80 x 50 cm, 70 x 54 x 14 cm, 68 x 40 x 10

cm, 64-66 x 48-50 x 12 cm, 40 x 15 cm, 25 x 23 cm, etc. Since some of the bricks were found embedded in the *ghāṭs* and steps their thickness could not be measured. The steep eastern side indicates that the water was filled in the tank from this side.

Regular excavation may provide us the clues to the mechanism of filling it and purifying of water if there existed any. Now this tank is filled with water drawn from a tube-well and caters to the needs of the people of the village throughout the year. Being more than two thousand years old and still living, this tank is a marvelous feat of hydraulic engineering and water management of our ancestors.

References

1. *Indian Archaeology – A Review*, 1974-75, p.37; 1975-76, p.38; 1979-80, p.105.
2. B.B. Lal and K.N. Dikshit, "A 2,000-Year Old Feat of Hydraulic Engineering in India", *Archaeology*, Vol.38, Number 1 (January / February 1985), pp.49-53. (January / February 1985), pp.49-53.