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Survey Report 2008-2009

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The survey and documentation team of Jñāna-Pravāha, comprising Dr. Niraj Pandey, Sri Chandraneel Sharma and Sri Samrat Chakraborty, visited several sites during the session 2008-2009 in search of new materials and informations for further research. The brief account of the same is given below:

Ghurahupur

On the basis of vague information about the existence of an Aśokan inscription in the Kaimur range extending in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the team visited the site in the month of January 2009. About sixty kilometers from Varanasi via Mughalsarai Pass and Chakia, is located a village named Ghurahupur within Uttar Pradesh (on the border of Bihar). A vehicle can go up to the Primary School of the village and then one has to walk on foot up the hill. The new Minor Rock Edict of Aśoka was traced by the team in the vicinity of Ratanpurwa, a village in the Bhabhua district of Bihar. Inscribed on the outer wall of a cave, this newly discovered 18th Minor Rock Edict is subject wise almost identical to that of the Sasaram Edict in the same Kaimur range, but it is in better state of preservation. There are about fifty natural caves in this area, some of which are even double-storeyed. The importance of the site lies in the fact that the occupancy of these caves can be traced back right from the pre-historic times to the Gupta period. In some of these caves, one encounters a variety of paintings, from primitive rock paintings depicting human figures, animals, hunting scenes, symbols, etc. to those showing Buddhist and other themes like folk deities, mysterious map on the ceiling and others. This at once reminds us of the world famous Bhimbetka cave paintings in Madhya Pradesh. A stone sculpture of the Buddha in *Dharmacakrapravarttanamudrā* (similar to the famous Sarnath image) and the Aśokan inscription bespeak

the occupancy of these caves by the Buddhist monks for long. However, these caves seem to have been used for dwelling since pre-historic times. The existence of post-holes, steps, niches, etc. reveal that certain modifications were also made in these caves by the occupants as per requirement.

Mughalsarai

In the month of March 2009, the team visited certain sites for survey in the proximity of Mughalsarai, about fifteen kilometers to the east of Varanasi. On reaching the village called Chhittampur, it was observed that the whole area is extremely rich so far as archaeological remains are concerned but at the same time highly disturbed due to the construction of a huge railway yard. This observation was further strengthened by visit to another village named Dharana presenting the same picture. A noticeable aspect of this region is the existence of a large number of wells, starting from the Kuṣāṇa period (c. 1st century C.E.). This is probably because the habitation in this area is located at quite a distance from the nearest river, i.e. Gaṅgā. Many of these wells were in prolonged use, right up to the medieval period and a few are in use even today. Glazed potsherds are spread all over the region. Interestingly, a solid chemical like black-coloured substance was found in one of the pieces, which was probably used for glazing the pottery during the process of manufacturing. Stray Kuṣāṇa period sculptures, miniature temples, etc. were also noticed during the survey.

Kapasethi

A pot containing Kuṣāṇa copper coins was unearthed in May 2009 from Kuru village, about five kilometers from the Kapasethi railway station and thirty-five kilometers from Varanasi. After the news was being published in local newspapers, the team of Jñāna-Pravāha, along with Dr. Savita Sharma, a renowned numismatist and Member of Academic Committee of Jñāna-Pravāha, visited the site and found 137 copper coins of the Kuṣāṇa kings (discussed in previous pages). The Northern Black Polished Ware, Black & Red Ware potsherds spread all over the place and well made of Kuṣāṇa period bricks confirmed the antiquity of this place. Notably, the village contains a large number of broken and intact sculptures of deities, most of which are still under worship. Some are lying uncared under the open sky and require immediate attention for preservation. A large number of

Daśāvatāra panels indicates that it was a Vaiṣṇava temple site. Fragments of door jambs corroborate this point. No doubt, these sculptures of about 9th-10th century CE are important from iconographic point of view. Interestingly, a large number of heavy stone *kolhūs* (oil-mills) spread all over the place forms a subject of deeper probing. These *kolhūs* of medieval period are carved with various designs, auspicious symbols and decorative motifs. However, these are not in use any more.

Chunar

Prof. Vidula Jayaswal of Banaras Hindu University guided the team of Jñāna-Pravāha to Chunar, the site of limestone quarries yielding material for the making of famous Aśokan columns. Numerous extracted stone blocks for making pillars are still lying around. None of the unfinished pillars exceed 10 feet in length. Keeping this fact in view, Prof. Jayaswal doubts the belief of high Aśokan columns being monolithic. Some inscribed letters of both Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭī scripts are observed on some of these blocks. Straight lines inscribed in rows on separate blocks of stones make an interesting viewing. Prof. Jayaswal informed that probably these were done to keep track of the number of blocks extracted from the hill.

Ramnagar

Ramnagar, an ancient site on the right bank of river Gaṅgā in Varanasi, was excavated in joint collaboration with Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology, Banaras Hindu University and Jñāna-Pravāha under the supervision of Prof. Vidula Jayaswal. The survey this year yielded terracotta figures of mother and child (4th-3rd century BCE), plate, bowl with stampage (Mauryan period), etc. An interesting male stone sculpture was found from Kamalapur Khajur village, about three kilometers towards Mughalsarai from Ramnagar Chowk. This sculpture was unearthed from a field, the lower half of which is still buried under the ground. It appears to be a Jain sculpture and needs deeper study.

Shivala, Varanasi

The survey brought to light an inscribed pillar standing on the right side of Pashupatinath Temple on the Shivala Ghat, Varanasi. The pillar, about 10 feet

in height, appears to be of late Medieval period and contains an inscription in Nāgarī script, which is still to be read. According to local people, the inscription contains the information about the fares, taxes, etc. of the transportaiton done in the past through boats from the Ghat.

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