

## **ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN BHADARWAH REGION OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

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**Rajat Kumar \* Dr. Tirtharaj Bhoi \* \***

### **Introduction**

The art and architecture of the Bhadarwah region has been included in historical sources having the narratives of scholars, the epigraphist's sources and land charters that reflect the ideas about the culture of the region. We have taken the pilot study and fieldwork and referred to the historical sources. The region is present with the uniqueness in its culture. We have taken some photographs and tried to understand the culture of the region which without the help of archaeology is impossible. Archaeology also provides the push to identify and study those gaps. The ancient baoli at Bhadarwah having the idols of Brahma, a combined image of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, and a female goddess and a combined image of Vishnu with Narshima and Varaha and the Gandhara style of art and architecture might have influenced at a time in the history-defining links with the rulers glorifying this type of art and architecture. The picture might have been influenced by the Naga culture which for a large period remained dominant over the whole region. The stonework of the region is the focus of attention as similar kinds of stone are found in many adjoining areas. The black-colored granite stone is used in every monument and the structure is also included in the baoli and the idols. The photos of the monuments and structures understand us with the art and architecture of the region and culture at large.

### **Methodology**

The study involves the field survey as an important method in the collection of data including the detailing of the sites. This also includes asking the local people about the culture defining the links with the study. Photo documentation is the process of recording all types of structural activities as well as the monuments serves as an important tool in defining the features that are not covered in the text. It visualizes the art and architecture of the region with the verve of the culture.

### **Historical Context**

Bhadarwah is the North-Eastern part of Jammu situated in the Middle Mountains

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\* (UGC NET-JRF), Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of History, University of Jammu

\* \* Sr. Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Jammu

comprising the Valleys of Bhadarwah, Kishtwar and Padar. Bhadarwah is known in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* as Bhadaravakasha meaning Happy Region. The lush green valley of Bhadarwah is described as a flat-bottomed valley situated in the Bhadardesh of Dughar Pradesh that lies between the Iravati (Ravi) and the Chanderbhaga (Chenab) rivers. Bhadarwah and Kashmir have similar kinds of moraine deposits and karewa formations. The culture of Bhadarwah is somehow similar to Chamba as cultural links are shared and geographically close to each other. The ancient capital was at Dughanagar which now stood in Village Satingal. The name is believed to have been derived from Bhadarkali, the presiding deity of the region before Nagas arrived there. It might also have been named as such due to the abundance of Deodar trees called Bhadrakashth in Sanskrit. Bhadarwah is geographically bounded on the north by Kishtwar, on the east by Chamba, on the west by Chennani and on the south by Balor or Basholi.

The history of Bhadarwah is present in the document- *Vamsavalis* (the genealogical records of the ancient rulers composed by the Rajgurus or the royal preceptor) of which the earlier portion is mythical. The oldest authentic reference to the Hill States is the record of the Chinese pilgrim Hieun-Tsang. The Bhadarwah region is bound to the Hindu religion and there is also the assimilation and acculturation of the Naga culture. Nagraj Vasuki (King of Nagas) came to Bhadarwah from Kashmir through Kishtwar. The region of Bhadarwah is called 'NagBhoomi' or the land of Nagas. The impact of Naga Culture is quite profound in Bhadarwah as every water spring is called a Nag and many idols can be seen.

Bhadarwah lies in the North-east of Jammu the language of which is Bhadarwahi- a form of Pahari (Pathik & Sharma, 1980, p. 7), the people are the devotees of Nag Devtas (1980, p. 9). At present Naga worship is very popular in Bhadrawah where Vasuki Nag is regarded as the chief deity of the area (Jamwal, 2006, p. 163). Kishtwar, Bhadarwah and Dacchin areas form the Eastern Hills section of the Jammu region. This region has allowed little interaction with the outside world resulting in little Brahmanical penetration (Atrey, 2008, p. 7). Local deities are largely confined to a particular region or a locality usually aboriginal in character and do not figure in Puranic and Brahmanic literature unless Sanskritized and integrated into the Brahmanical pantheon of Gods (Atrey, 2021, p. 130). Brahmanical (Hindu pantheon) Gods are placed second in importance to the local deities during the family rituals (Ibid, p. 131). Thakkars (Thakkur) and Meghs mostly have Nag-devatas (Serpant-deities) as their Kul deity due to the reason of their aborigines of the land (Ibid, p. 146). Many Megh families living in Bhadarwah seem to be Naagvamsi (Ibid, p. 147). "Badarwar means the stronghold of Baddha; it is also called Budar by the natives of the hills and Budrikar by the Kashmiris [sic]" (Bates, 2005, p. 132).

### Art and Architecture of the Region

The manner of hay preserving seems to be very peculiar to this region: a double row of poles (called *tayee* in Bhadarwah) is fixed in the ground under the protection of the trees and the hay is built up into a wall about 20 feet high and differs from that practiced in Kashmir (Bates, 2005, p. 130). The manufacture of shawls in Badarwar is of a course description of art. Vigne states that the town is celebrated for the manufacture of very prettily carved combs, cut from the wood of the *byr-apple* or *jujube* (Ibid, p. 131). W.G Archer enumerated that there had been schools of painting in Bhadarwah and Kishtwar (Pathik & Sharma, 1980, p. 84). The art of making a large rick is present nowhere in India or the Himalayas but is present in Bhadarwah (Drew, 1875, p. 104). Mala, a long necklace made of small bells (see fig 1) is typically used in Hindu temples and is the most important article for the ritual (Sharma, 2021, p. 228). The rick art of hay in bundles (*ghaas-e-ri-fakki*) is also stored in a conical shape as *Ghaa-dhaanorKundure* resembling the *vimana* of the temple so that the snow and rainfall easily from this which saves it for cattle in the winters.

**Fig 1.** Mala (necklace) is worn by Chela (Shaman) around his neck and Mala is hung on the Trident. In most of the Naga temples, the mala, trident and musical instruments are kept on the right side of the *garbagriha*.



There is an ancient temple of Vasuki Nag on the Kaplas (Pathik & Sharma, 1980, p. 9).

Ancient temples of Vasuki Naag are at Gatha, Bhadarwah proper and Nalthi (see fig 2) village (Sharma, 2021, p. 226). The entire Hindu population of Bhadarwah believes in Naag worship and regards them as the tutelary deity and people of Bhadarwah celebrate Naag festivals and rituals irrespective of caste or creed (Ibid, p, 226). There are several temples of Basak Naag built in vernacular style in and around Bhadarwah, the sanctum sanctorum of the temple are human size idols of Basak Naag and Jimootvahan made of black granite

(Ibid, p. 227). This oldest temple of VasukiNag at Village Gatha(Gaashtha)has the idols of Maharaja Jimootvahan and Nagraj and there is an inscription at the base of the idol. There is an ancient SheshNaag temple for whom inhabitants of this village and adjoining areas observe the Jaatra ritual and worship the Naag deity (Ibid, p. 227). On the day of MakaraSankranti in all the temples of Vasuki Nag, the idols are thickly covered with ghee and thick cotton cloth which remain covered till Baisakhi thus protected from the harsh winters. This is a ritual called Ghaaldenu.

**Fig 2.** Vasuki NagtempleatNalthiVillage.A type of Shikhara temple of architecture It has idols of Maharaja Jimootvahan (lesser in height) and Vasuki Nag.



Annual Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey,Punjab(1904) gave reference to the three temples dedicated to Baski(Vasuki) Nag and Santhan Nag. The two are in the villages of Upper Bheja and Nalthi. The third one in the village of Saringal belongs to SanthanNag.These Naga shrines are of a very simple construction which consists of a square chamber built of layers of stones alternating with wooden beams surrounded by a verandah and covered with a conical wooden roof. This style, which is peculiar to Devi temples also, must be very ancient, as Devi and Naga worship represents the primitive cult of the Panjab hills. TheShikara temples of stone connected with Shiva or Vishnu worship are introduced from the plains. The names of the Rajas represent the Naga Culture (Hutchison & Vogel, 1999, p. 617).The architectural style in the hilly regions is Shikhara style built in wood or concrete, depending upon the raw material available, these are usually found situated near some natural resources like water streams, small tanks and ponds or in deep forests, on top of the hills etc. (Atrey, 2021, p. 138).

The house and the temples are built with some plan of work "There is a curious plan

of building up pillars for the corners, and sometimes for the middle supports, of the houses and the temples. Square slabs of wood a few inches thick are placed upright in pairs, one pair being surmounted by another at right angles, and so on alternately" (Drew, 1875, p. 104). The houses are single-storied buildings of mud and timber, a large stone with a hole in it, or a ghurra (a type of flat round stone) fixed on the flat roof, supplying the place of a chimney (Bates, 2005, p. 130).

The temple of Vasuki Nag in Gatha (Gaashtha) where women are particularly not allowed to enter, is the only temple in the region with such restrictions. On asking the priest informed us that the women have a mensural cycle which can impure its sacredness. How old this practice is followed is not known! In mythical portions, there are stories of women who can become pregnant entering such a temple which proves its credulity and might also be the reason for this.

#### **Baoli Art and Architecture**

The bowli or baoli (tank or pond) art and architecture represent the ancient practice in Bhadarwah region (Kumar & Bhoi, 2022, pp. 36-39). The ancient unique Crocodile-mouth heritage Nag is a part of Mata Hadimba Devi Temple in Village Sungli (the temple in only two regions- one in Bhadarwah and the other in Manali, Himachal Pradesh) (see fig 3). The baolis are seen in the whole region of Bhadarwah with its unique architecture and the use of black stone to build these structures.

**Fig 3. Shil and idols in Mata Hadimba Devi Temple in Sungli, Bhadarwah**



There is a natural water spring (called Nag) in Village Sungli, Bhadarwah and a baoli with a beautiful black stone carving of crocodile nose (see fig 4) in Gandharan style. The

stone used in the platform and the walls are very flat and there are niches for holding sculptures- the idols of Brahma, a combined idol of Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu with a female goddess and combined idol of Vishnu, Narshima and Varaha incarnations in the Gandharan style situated at the elevated portion of the baoli in the wall. Unfortunately, this crocodile hose had been made unapproachable by erecting the hay stacks (Ghaa-dhaan or Kundu) by the encroachers. It was used for sharpening the iron axes which had disfigured it to a very large extent. The huge flat slabs of stone were accustomed to the harsh winters and hot summers. The natural springs were treated with great reverence and believed to be the abodes of Nagas. Temples were built near big springs and stone idols were installed around the spring to provide sanctity so that they are not polluted. The stonework (see fig 5) is either a mark of veneration to a deity or a depiction of the ruler's authority. The springs provide warm water during the winter and cold water during the summer. The largest baoli called Sonbain (Suvarnavapi or the golden tank) glacier always covered by snow throughout the year and is situated on the top hill of Bhadarwah, the Ashapati Mountain at an elevation of 7000-8000 ft., this is a chief baoli (Kumar & Bhoi, 2022, pp. 36-39). This glacier is sourced to Niru, a tributary of River Chenab. The reference to the mountain is present in Mahabharata as AshavPati from where Pandavas procured a Panchkalyan horse for Rajasuya Yajna.

**Fig 4.** Baolis present in Village Sungli, Bhadarwah It has flat stone slabs. There are the niches for the idols. The crocodile moustachioed hose in the Gandhara style



**Fig 5.** Stonework either marks the authority of the ruler or the veneration of a deity.



The place seems to have a great affinity with the Aryan Culture and adopted it with time. The Kud or Kodd dance locally called Dhekku is a nocturnal dance performed on the festival in September called Mela Patt (see fig 6) or Patte-ru-kodd in the worship of Vasuki Nag for three days. The lots of embroidered silken cloth were bound together in a temple-shaped pillar with golden urns on the top and called Patt. A devotee carried the Patt on his head and swirled it in the temple courtyard (dramman) and the royal place called Khakhal to display the gifted items (silken cloth). In the night the traditional Dhekku or Kodd dance is performed which is very unique to Bhadarwah and is performed nowhere else in this style.

**Fig 6.** Festival of Mela Patt (Patt ready for the Mela to be performed in the left picture and Patt ready to be swirled in the right picture)



### **Inscriptions**

The tradition in the region narrates the Balastal cave inscription of Kastwar (Kishtwar). It is the story of Kunti's marriage. Balastal cave of Dacchan (2nd to 4th Century A.D.) and the Gupta Ganga cave inscription of Bhadarwah (3rd to 4th Century A.D.) and the Brahmi characters found inside these have much in common (Kaul, 2001, p. 56).

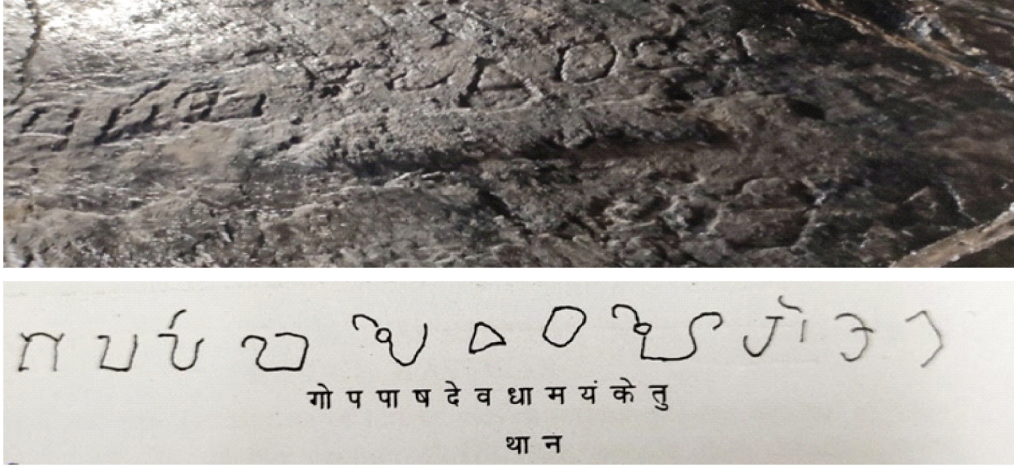
#### **Gupta Ganga Cave Temple Inscription**

Carved on the roof rock of a small cave identified as that of Brahmi belonging to the 3rd to 5th Century A.D. The shrine is an ancient one and seems to have undergone many structural transformations, the cave has been associated with Pandavas, Buddhists, Saivites, and Puranic Hinduism (Kaul, 2001, p. 57). It has a sweet water spring coming out of the slate rock, a carved cistern, a carved foot impression, eleven letters of Brahmi script in two lines, a carved monolithic miniature temple structure and various statues adjusted in the shrine at various times of history. The miniature cave temple possessing a black slate statue of Kunti stands stolen. The other statue is that of Bodhisattva in a grief-stricken posture with a halo around its head and with an inscription in Sharda characters is also missing from this cave temple (Ibid, p. 57). The cave temple inscription from Bhadarwah presently contains eleven characters (see fig 6) and is perhaps the longest one found in the region and the second oldest Brahmi inscription from the Himalayan Valleys of Chenab region. The last one or two letters have been partially damaged, due to erosion or frost. The inscription has been deciphered having the first word 'GopPaash' the name of the inscriber. The second word 'DevDham/Than'isa place adorned by Gods, and the third word 'Yam-Ketu' points to God Yama and indicates the place used as a crematory right from ancient times.

Gupta Ganga image inscription of Bhadarwah stands inscribed around the Halo of Bodhisattva statue. The statue of Bodhisattva seems to have been donated to the cave temple by some nobility as the site does not provide any evidence of its being an ancient Buddhist site. There is also an inscription at Vasak Dehra stone fragments inscription Bhadarwah which consists of Sharda Characters of the 11th Century, this is a part of some statue that somehow got broken and was thrown away or withered at the site (Kaul, 2001, p. 77). This indicates that the statue was established in the temple on a full moon-lit night of the month of Kartika.

**Fig 6.** The Gupta Ganga cave temple inscription from Bhadarwah contains 11 characters. [Bottom image picture is taken from Kaul, P. K., "Antiquities of the Chenab Valley in Jammu: Inscriptions-copper Plates, Sanads, Grants, Firmans & Letters in Brahmi-Sharda-Tibetan-Persian and Devanagari Scripts," (2001): 58.]





### Concluding Remarks

The baolis of Badarwah have an architecture depicting the authority, similar kind of it elsewhere who patronized the art that resides in the heart of it. The local artisans sculpted the idols of deities and rulers. The availability of black granite in the local area of Mushdev rivulet near Bhadrot village in Atkhaar area of Bhadarwah provides the sculptor with stone at the nearest place. The temples having the idols of Maharaja Jimootvahan and Vasuki Nag represent the rulers being given equal importance as he was also installed in the sanctum sanctorum (garbhagriha) of the temple. In the temple we found tridents and musical wind instruments like narsinghas and dallab representing the Naga culture. The idols are adorned with jewelry and embellished with carved ornaments symbolizing their status as Kings. The Shiv Linga is also kept beside Vasuki and Jimootvahan and patronized along with the Naga cult worship.

The belief that covering the idols during the winter with cotton quilts or cloth proves that the people have bonded with the ruler as well as with the Nagas, the latter hibernated during this time. The tradition that springs give warm water in winter might be with this process of covering the idols. The existence of the Brahmi inscriptions reveals that Kushanas, Sakas and Khaks probably came and settled in the inner valleys of Chandrabhaga (the ancient name of River Chenab) at various times in history which has influenced the culture of Bhadarwah. The making of rick and haystacks is still followed in the region which represents their culture.

The Bodhisattva statue which is missing from the Gupta Ganga cave inscription can talk about the presence of Buddhism although this is the only reference to Buddhism in the region. The inscription also narrates about the temples and architecture which are present in fragments only. The wooden temple architecture and the stone art and sculpture are

supported by the harsh winters but these impacted its resistance where the old temples are not present now and the inscriptions are damaged. The cultural similarity with other areas in the region is present in the Hill states which are found in common in many things.

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