



Unlocking Sivli, Unknown Site of Bhalessa in District Doda

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ABSTRACT

Sivli, an unexplored site in Doda District, offers a unique opportunity for research into its historical, cultural, and geographical significance. This study aims to uncover Sivli's untapped potential, examining its archaeological, ecological, and socio-economic aspects. By investigating its local heritage and the impact of modernization, the research will contribute to a broader understanding of the region's development and preservation, as well as its role in the context of Doda District's overall landscape. This exploration is essential for future conservation and sustainable development initiatives.

1. Introduction

Doda District, located in the Jammu division of Jammu and Kashmir, remains one of the most unexplored and understudied regions in the Indian subcontinent. Despite its rich cultural heritage, diverse ecosystems, and strategic geographical importance, much of the district has yet to receive the attention it deserves in academic and developmental research. The rugged terrain, coupled with its relative inaccessibility, has hindered thorough exploration, leaving many aspects of its history, biodiversity, and socio-economic structure largely unknown. This research aims to shed light on the hidden potential of Doda District, with a particular focus on its unexplored sites, local communities, and sustainable development prospects. By examining these underexplored dimensions, this study hopes to provide valuable insights for conservation, heritage preservation, and regional development strategies.

2. Geographical and Historical Background of Bhalessa

Bhalessa, a region located in the Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, is a historically significant and culturally rich area that has been shaped by its geography, political history, and the diverse communities



that inhabit it. Here's a more detailed exploration of Bhalessa's history and significance. Bhalessa is situated in the hilly and mountainous terrain of the Chenab Valley, bordered by the Himalayas, which makes it an isolated yet strategically important area. The region's geography consists of deep valleys, rugged hills, and dense forests, with a few connecting roads and trails. Its remote location made it difficult to access, especially during earlier times, but it also made it a natural stronghold in military history. Historically, the area that now forms Bhalessa was sparsely populated, with its residents mostly relying on agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade. The valley and surrounding areas were important trade routes connecting Jammu with the rest of northern India, as well as routes leading into Kashmir and Tibet. The folk people of Bhalessa were called Bhalls in the past which makes one to believe that queen Bhala of Raja Nagpal from Bhaderwah. There are variety of opinions from different people regarding the origin of its name "Bhalessa" some talk it as Land of "Bhaley Manus" (Bhaley Lougun Ka Desh) which is meant the decent people with distinct identity. Dr. P K Koul who conducted a research on Bhaderwah, Chamba, Kangra and Bhalessa in early nineties opine that the Bhalessa area derived its name from Queen Bhalla-The Queen of Nagpal.

The history of Bhalessa is ancient one. Bhalessa as it is told was a pargana of Bhaderwah and a part of Bhaderwah jagir. The earliest mention of the place is traced from Rajatarangni of Kalhana, which indirectly states the importance this place holds. Fredrick Drew had also mentions Bhalessa in his research. Sivli, which is located at a height of 10,200 ft above sea level and 80 kms from district headquarter. This sites, which is unknown to archaeological world, offers unique and astonishing stone sculptures. No doubt this site was accidently discovered during the construction of a tank. While digging, some unique stone sculptures caught their attention. After that these voiceless stone sculptures were preserved. In this research paper an attempt will be made to understand them archaeologically and historically.





The deity is demonstrated with folded hands, which is identified at multiple sites in India. These are common motifs, symbolizing reverence and devotion and are frequently seen in depictions of figures like Vishna, Brahma and Garuda. In Indian history and culture, folded hands often depicted in sculptures as a gesture known as Anjali Mudra, which carry deep symbolic meaning. This gesture, where the palms are pressed together at chest level with fingers pointing upward, is a common motif in Indian art, sculpture, and religious iconography, particularly in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions.

3. Representation in Sculptures:

Respect and Greeting: The folded hands symbolize namaste, a traditional Indian gesture of greeting, respect, and gratitude. In sculptures, it is frequently seen in depictions of deities, devotees, or attendants as a sign of reverence toward a higher power or a revered figure.

4. Prayer and Devotion:

In religious sculptures, such as those of gods like Vishnu, Shiva, or goddesses like Lakshmi, or in Buddhist statues of bodhisattvas and the Buddha himself, the Anjali Mudra represents devotion, prayer, and submission to divine will. It signifies a connection between the individual soul and the universal consciousness.

5. Balance and Unity:

The joining of the left and right hands is often interpreted as a union of opposites—such as masculine and feminine, material and spiritual, or human and divine. This reflects the philosophical concept of harmony central to Indian thought.

6. Historical Context in Art:

In ancient Indian sculptures, such as those at Khajuraho, Ajanta, or Ellora, the Anjali Mudra appears in scenes of worship or adoration, often carved into stone reliefs or standalone figures. Mauryan and Gupta-era sculptures (circa 3rd century BCE to 6th century CE) show this gesture in early Buddhist art, like the Sanchi Stupa, where devotees are depicted offering salutations to the Buddha or stupas. In South Indian temple architecture (e.g., Chola bronzes of dancing Shiva or Nataraja), attendant figures or saints might be shown with folded hands as a mark of humility and service.

7. Depiction of Plough in Indian Art



In Indian history, the depiction of a plough in sculptures, art, and iconography carries rich symbolic and practical significance, reflecting the centrality of agriculture in Indian civilization. As one of the world's earliest agrarian societies, India's cultural and historical narratives often intertwine with farming, and the plough emerges as a key motif in various contexts.

8. Symbol of Agriculture and Prosperity:

The plough represents the foundation of sustenance and economic stability in ancient India, where agriculture was the backbone of society. It is often associated with fertility, abundance, and the nurturing of the land. In Vedic texts (circa 1500–500 BCE), the plough is mentioned as an essential tool, with hymns in the Rigveda praising the earth and agricultural labor. Sculptures from later periods sometimes echo this reverence.

9. Mythological Depictions:

The plough is prominently linked to Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna in Hindu mythology. Balarama is often depicted holding a plough (hala) as one of his attributes, symbolizing his role as a protector of farmers and a deity of strength and agriculture. Sculptures of Balarama, especially from the Gupta period (4th–6th century CE) onward, show him with a plough over his shoulder, emphasizing his agrarian significance. In some regional traditions, the plough also connects to Krishna's pastoral and farming upbringing in Vrindavan, though he is more associated with the flute.

10. Historical Art and Sculptures:

Mauryan and Post-Mauryan Periods (3rd–1st century BCE): Early Buddhist art, such as reliefs on the Sanchi Stupa, occasionally depicts rural life with ploughs, showcasing agricultural scenes alongside urban motifs. These carvings highlight the importance of farming in the economy of the time. **Gupta and Medieval Sculptures (4th–13th century CE):** Temples and sculptures from this era, especially in rural deity worship (e.g., folk gods or village guardians), sometimes include the plough as a symbol of the common people's livelihood. **South Indian Temple Art:** In Chola-era bronzes or carvings (9th–13th century CE), agricultural tools like the plough appear in depictions of daily life or as attributes of deities tied to the earth.

11. Political and Social Symbolism:



The plough also symbolized the ruler's duty to ensure prosperity. In ancient texts like the Arthashastra by Kautilya (circa 4th century BCE), kings were urged to support agriculture, and this idea occasionally found its way into royal iconography or seals. In folk art and regional sculptures, the plough represents the labor and resilience of the peasantry, a recurring theme in India's agrarian history.

12. Practical and Ritual Use:

Beyond art, the plough featured in rituals like the Sita ceremony in Vedic times, where a symbolic ploughing of the field marked the start of the agricultural season. This practical importance influenced its artistic portrayal as a sacred object.

13. Cultural Significance:

The plough in Indian history is more than a tool—it embodies the relationship between humanity and the earth, a theme resonant in India's philosophy of living in harmony with nature. Its depiction in sculptures underscores the reverence for the land and the divine forces believed to sustain it.

14. Conclusion

Bhalesa remains an important part of the history of Jammu and Kashmir, with its rich cultural heritage, historical significance, and resilient communities. Its isolation has preserved much of its traditional way of life, but it also continues to face challenges in terms of development and political stability. As Jammu and Kashmir evolves, Bhalesa's unique position within this larger context offers a glimpse into the region's complex history and its potential for future growth.

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