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ABSTRACT

Sun-worship is one of the most ancient religious traditions which is still practiced by people across India. Ancient literature and archaeological evidence both indicate the strong influence of the Sūrya or sun god throughout Indian subcontinent. Kurukshetra, an ancient site in the state of Haryana, situated in northern part of India, is believed to be the place where great war of *Mahābhārata* was fought and where Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave his sermon in form of Bhāgavadgītā. The site has revealed many archaeological objects in the forms of terracottas, stone sculptures and inscription which shed light on the existence of five cults of the Brahmanical faith i.e., Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, Śakta, Gaṇapatya and Saura besides Buddhism and Jainism as well. However, the nature of the site changed with the popularity of Kṛṣṇa cult which overshadowed the other religious traditions. The intention of writing this paper is to examine the existence and influence of cult of Sūrya in religious landscape of Kurukshetra from an archaeological perspective. It will largely be based on the anthropological study of tirthas or pilgrimage sites of Sun-God which have existed since ancient times and stone sculptures recovered from the district so far.

Introduction

Kurukshetra district is located at Latitude 20°-52' to 30°-12' & Longitude 76°-26' to 77°-04' in the North-Eastern part of the state of Haryana. This district is one of the most renowned places of the state owing to its association with Lord Kṛṣṇa. The popular legend has designated this place where *Mahābhārata* was fought between Kaurvas and Pāṇḍavas and where Kṛṣṇa recited *Bhāgavadgītā*, the holiest text of Hindus. The state has further fostered this legend by promoting religious tourism in the district for the followers of Kṛṣṇa. There are several structures which have been either recently constructed or are under construction which re-impose the association of this area with the great epic. However, in this process there have been certain religious traditions of earlier antiquity which have been marginalized. One such tradition is the cult of Sūrya which is the main theme of this paper. This work will examine the ancient cult of Sūrya and its existence in Ancient Kurukshetra. This paper is broadly categorized in three parts. The first part will focus on Sūrya and the iconographical features as mentioned in ancient literature. Second part will examine the tīrtha or pilgrimage site of village Amin, dedicated to Sūrya and his mother Aditī and is believed to be his birthplace. Lastly, the work will discuss the stone sculptures and architectural fragments associated with the cult of Sūrya, found from this district.

Iconography of Sūrya in Ancient Literature

The oldest literature of India, *Ṛg Veda*, mentions several hymns dedicated to various forms of Sun-god.¹ It described the deity 'moving in a car driven by one, several or seven fleet and ruddy steeds.'² It further mentioned, 'He from their home hath yoked the seven gold coursers who dropping oil and fatness carry Surya, hath ascended'.³ The renowned Gāyatrī Mantra, dedicated to Savitr in *Ṛg Veda* also glorifies the Sun-god. In words of Sir William Jones, Gayatri Mantra expresses- 'The supremacy of that divine Sun, the godhead, who illuminates all, who recreates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we must

¹ Vedas refer to Sun-god and his various forms such as Savitr, Puśan, Bhāga, Viśāvat, Mitra, Āryaman and Viṣṇu. Sūrya was the most concrete of the solar deities and Savitr 'the stimulator of everything' denoted his abstract qualities. For more details on various aspects of Surya, see J.N.Bannerjee, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, 430-445.

² *Ṛgveda* I, 115, 3-4, trans. by Ralph T.H.Griffith. (Benares, 1896-97). It is believed to have been composed between c 1500-1000 BCE.

³ *Ṛgveda* VII, 60,3

invoke, to direct our understanding aright in our progress towards his holy seat.’⁴ In *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, it was mentioned that Brahma created the gods, then placed Sūrya in the sky, Agnī in the world and Vāyu in the atmosphere.⁵

The most famous epics of India, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, give repeated references to the sanctity of sun-god and his worship during ancient times. Lord Rāma, for instance, invokes sun-god during his battle with Rāvaṇa by reciting Āditya-hṛdaya hymn (hymn dedicated to Āditya, another name of Sūrya)

‘Having found Rāma weary with fighting and buried in deep thought, and Rāvaṇ standing before him ready to engage in battle, the holy Agastya, who had come to see the battle, approached Rāma and spoke to him thus: “O mighty Rāma, listen to the old mystery by which thou wilt conquer all thy foes in the battle. Having daily repeated the Ādityahridaya (the delighter of the mind of the Sun) the holy prayer which destroys all enemies (of him who repeats it) gives victory, removes all sins, sorrows and distress, increases life, and which is the blessing of all blessings, worship the rising and splendid sun who is respected by both the Gods and demons, who gives light to all bodies and who is the rich lord of all the worlds.”’⁶

Similarly, *Mahābhārata* gave numerous mentions of the sun-god. Kuntī, mother of Paṇḍavas invoked sun-god who then granted her an illegitimate son, Karṇa.⁷ Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest brother among the five Paṇḍavas, invoked the deity by reciting his 108 names.⁸ The epic mentioned Sūrya as Deveśvara, lord of gods and Aditīsuta, or son of Aditī.⁹ More significantly, the Vana Parva (chapter) of *Mahābhārata* gave a detailed account of tīrathas or pilgrimage sites located on and near sacred river Sarasvatī and the holy ponds and lakes of Kurukshetra including the one dedicated to Surya¹⁰. It stated

“One should next go, O king, to the asylum of *Aditya*--that illustrious god who is a mass of effulgence. Bathing in that tirtha celebrated over three worlds, and worshipping the god of light, one goeth to the region of Aditya and rescueth his own race.”.

⁴ Lord Teignmouth, *The Works of Sir William Jones with the Life of the Author*, No. 2, Vol XIII, (London: Printed by T.Davison, White friars, 1807), 367.

⁵ *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* trans. Julius Eggling, Part V, 14:1:1:1, XI, 2,3,1. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882). Eggling opines that the final, written version of the text should be around 300 BCE, but also suggested that some elements could be far older of earlier antiquity.

⁶ *Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmikī*, trans. by Ralph T.H.Griffith, London- Trubner & Co. Benaras: E.J. Lazarus & Co. 1870-1874. VI 106.29.

⁷ *Mahābhārata*, Vol III, Vanaparva, Tīrthayātra Parva, section LXXXIII. trans. K.M.Ganguly (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2012). See, Mbh III 306.7,8. Mbh III 134.19. The composition of Mahabharata is generally places between 400 BCE-400 CE, however, Hiltebeitel suggested the composition from mid 2nd century BCE to the year Zero. A.Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahabharata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press. 2001) pp 18-20.

⁸ *Mahābhārata*, 2. 50,6.

⁹ *Mahābhārata*, 3.35.

¹⁰ All tīrathas are mentioned in *Mahābhārata*- LXXXIII, Vana Parva.

As pointed out, in both these epics, Sūrya as a god, had his own independent status and was not viewed as form of Viṣṇu.¹¹ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, both texts categorized as *Mahāpurāṇa*, belonging to c 300 CE- 500 CE¹² mentioned the human personification of the sun-god. These texts are significant in a manner that both indicate the transition of the form of worship of Sūrya from symbols to anthropomorphic form even though these texts do not mention the procedure of image making.¹³ This transition, however certainly led to the tradition of image making of Sun-god. *Matsya Purāṇa*,¹⁴ for instance, gave detailed instructions regarding the construction of sun images.

“image of the sun should be made with beautiful eyes, seated in a chariot and holding a lotus. There should be seven horses and one chakra in the chariot of the sun and a coronet beaming red on his head. He should be decorated with ornaments and the two hands holding blue lotuses...” his body should be shown covered with a bodice and two pieces of cloth. The feet should be made brilliant.¹⁵

Matsya Purāṇa however, did not mention Iranian features such as northerner’s dress and boots.¹⁶ These attributes emerged in later Purāṇic records which mentioned not only these new iconographical features but also advent of Māga priests, the foreign sun-worshippers and popularization of Sun images and temples.¹⁷ *Sāmba Purāṇa*,¹⁸ one of the *Upapurāṇa* and a later Purāṇic text dedicated to solar cult gave elaborate rules and regulations for making images of sun-god and temples in his honour.¹⁹ The dress included features such as avyaṅga (girdle around the waist) and padabanda (boots) etc of the sun images.²⁰ There was also a development in his family and attendants where now the deity was depicted along with his two wives, Rajnī and Nikṣubhā, attendants Piṅgala, Daṇḍī, Aśvins, Ūṣā, Pratyūṣā among the others who were mentioned in literature.²¹ Bannerjee has pointed out that north Indian sun

¹¹ Shrivastava, V.C. *Sun worship in Ancient India*, (Delhi: Parimal Publishers, 1972, 2017) 128.

¹² Nath Vijay, *Puranas and Acculturation*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2001) pp 1-10. Nath has discussed the dates of all *Mahapurāṇas* and *Upapurāṇas* in detail which have been assigned by PV.Kane and H.C Hazare.

¹³ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*- IV, 13.11- trans. by H.H.Wilson, 1840, ed. K.L.Joshi, (New Delhi: Parimal Publications). *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* - III, 71.23 trans. by G.V.Tagare, 1992, (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas).

¹⁴ *Matsya Purāṇa* trans. Taluqdar of Oudh, 2 Vols (Allahbad, 1916-17). According to Kane *Matsya Purāṇa* was composed between c 2nd-4th CE, whereas Hazare gives the timeline from 4th -11th century CE.

¹⁵ *Matsya Purāṇa*, XCIV, 1.

¹⁶ For more details on changing iconography of sun god due to Hellenistic and Iranians traditions see. V.C. Shrivastava, *Sun Worship in Ancient India*, 174-216

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 172.

¹⁸ Hazra, R.C. *Studies of Upapurāṇa*- Vol I, (Calcutta) 57. According to him, timeline for composition of *Sāmba Purāṇa* is from 500-1050 CE and has designated separate dates of composition to chapters.

¹⁹ *Sāmba Purāṇa*, trans. V.C.Shrivastava, (Parimal publishers, Delhi, 2013) Chapters, 30-31, 36-37.

²⁰ *Sāmba Purāṇa*, 30.1-2.

²¹ *Sāmba Purāṇa*, 6.22, 6.23.

cult absorbed many foreign elements in it. The sun cult prevalent among the ancient Iranians, was mainly instrumental in re-modelling the worship of Sūrya in North India.²² These features have also influenced the Gāndhāra and Mathurā school of art during the Kuṣāṇa period and later, both schools demonstrated these features.²³ The sun images at Mathura Museum display the same iconographical details including tunic, boots, lotus buds, head dress etc. As rightly pointed out, the sun god since earlier times was represented by various symbols, such as spoked wheel, rayed disc, lotus flowers in various shapes etc. When he was represented anthropomorphically, the wheel and lotus were not left out.²⁴

During Gupta period, the sun-images were characterized with blending of Indian, (lotus stalk) Iranian (high boots and coat) and Scythian (head dress and girdle) features.²⁵ On one hand, where the north Indian sun images indicated the assimilation of several attributes, its southern counterpart possessed distinct peculiarities such as positioning of lotus stalk which were half blossomed, bare feet etc. The common feature between the two types was kīrita (crown) surrounded by a circular halo or prabhāmaṇḍala.²⁶ By early medieval period, the images were depicted with elaborate iconographical features and paraphernalia. Most of the sun images which were found in Haryana, specifically around Kurukshetra belong to early medieval times but there is evidence which indicates that the solar cult held its sway over this region since ancient times.

A terracotta figurine of Surya was found in Naurangabad-Bamla and probably belong to Kuṣāṇa-Gupta transitional phase.²⁷ Another worn put image in Kapalmochan temple, Yamunanagar has been identified as Sūrya.²⁸ From Sonapat, a terracotta figure of sun was found, however it could not be dated yet.²⁹ From the same site, a copper seal was found which called ruler Harṣavardhan of Kanauj as paramādityabhakta or most devout follower of Sūrya.³⁰ Similarly, the Kurukshetra-Varanasi copper plate inscription of year 629 CE

²² Bannerjee, J.N. 'Sūrya, Ādityas and the Navagrahas, *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*- (Vol XVI, 47-101, 1948) 58.

²³ Coomaraswamy, History of Indian and Indonesian Art, New York (Dover ed., 1927).

²⁴ Banerjea did a chronological study of solar iconography from earliest times to medieval period. He traced its origin in various symbols such as rayed disc, the lotus, the gold plate etc. found in Vedic and Puranic literature. See, Banerjea, Ibid, 53.

²⁵ V.C.Shrivastava, *Sun Worship in Ancient India*, 194.

²⁶ Gopinath Rao, T.A. *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, (Motilal Banarasidas: Madras, 1914, reprint, Delhi, 2017) Volume 1, part 2. p-311.

²⁷ Handa, Devendra, *Sculptures from Haryana*, (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 2006) 184.

²⁸ Ibid, 184.

²⁹ *District Gazetteer- Delhi*, 1883-84, (Gurgaon: Vintage Books) 209.

³⁰ *Corpus Inscription Indicarum*- J.F.Fleet Volume III , pp. 219-21.

mentioned the three rulers of Vardhan dynasty as followers of sun-god which indicates the dominance of this deity during the reign of Puśyabhūti rulers.³¹

The early medieval period is marked with development of cult-syncretism where one deity is depicted as embodiment of multiple gods. Some of the medieval sculptures which in a very characteristic manner illustrate the fusion of, or rapprochement between, two, three or even four rival cults.³² There was a close connection of Sūrya with Viṣṇu, or Viṣṇu as Nārāyaṇa and thus images of Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa hailing from different parts of India are well known.³³ Viṣṇu has also been referred to as one of the solar deities.³⁴ With the growing influence of cult of Viṣṇu evident from mention of Viṣṇu temples in inscriptions recovered from this district indicate the eventual assimilation of Sūrya cult into Viṣṇu.³⁵ This is the reason why sculptures of Viṣṇu were more than in number than Sūrya in early medieval times, but this does not negate the fact that Sūrya cult was immensely popular in ancient times and had its own independent status before it got subsumed by Viṣṇu.

The legend of Amin/ Abhimanyupura

Even though there are several ponds popularly referred as Sūrya Kuṇḍs by locals which also have been mentioned in ancient literature, one tīrtha needs an elaborate discussion owing to its designation as birthplace of lord Sūrya.

Around eight kilometres from Kurukshetra city is a small village called Amin. Its name has recently been changed into Abhimanyupura in the honour of the young and courageous son of Arjuna, one of the Pāṇḍvas.³⁶ The legend is that this village was the actual site of Mahābhārata war and it was here that a cakravyūha (battle formation) was formed by Droṇāchārya, teacher of Pāṇḍvas to trap Abhimanyu. This young warrior displayed his vigour and fought several powerful warriors simultaneously till his last breath. To honour this legend, there is a site under construction, where a statue of Abhimanyu holding the wheel of his chariot over his head to attack his foes as last resort is installed. Once completed, the site will also show the battle formation around the statue as mentioned in the epic.

³¹ Goyal, Shankar. Kurukshetra-Varansi Inscription, *East and West*, Vol. 57, No. 1/4 (December 2007), pp. 193-203

³² Bannerjea, J.N. *Development of Hindu Iconography*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1956, 2017) p.546. For details on syncretistic icons in ancient times see the same text, pp. 540- 563.

³³ Ibid. 548.

³⁴ Ibid. 385.

³⁵ *Epigraphia Indica*, Volume I: 186

³⁶ <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/kurukshetras-amin-village-is-now-abhimanyupur-56462>

The site mentioned above has been specifically chosen by the authorities for a significant reason. This location is adjacent to famous temple and pond called Sūryakund. (**Fig 1**) There is a colossal image of standing Śiva which has been recently installed next to the temple and in front of the pond. The temple besides having chamber dedicated to numerous deities also has three sacred spots which stand apart.



Fig 1: Sūrya Kund with temple in the background, Amin

As informed, two of these are *samadhīs*³⁷ or *taposthalī*³⁸ of Aditī, mother of gods and sage Kaśyapa, her husband. The third spot is dedicated to Rantuka yakṣa, dvārapāl or protector of Aditī forest. The legend of Aditī in *Brahma Purāṇa*³⁹ goes like this-

Aditī, who gave birth to devtas or gods performed severe penance and invoked sun-god who appeared in dense mass of flames. Upon her request, he changed his form and shown himself as beaming copper. Then, she said

“O lord, be pleased. The three worlds that belonged to my sons and their shares in sacrifices, have been taken away by Daityas and Danavas of superior valour and might. On the account, O lord of rays, grant me a favour. With a part of yours adopt their brotherhood, my son, and destroy their enemies.”⁴⁰

...In order to fulfil her desire, at the end of a year thereafter, the Sun god took up his residence in the womb of Aditi by means of one of his rays Susumna amongst a thousand.

³⁷ It is a place where someone performed deep meditation resulting into union with ultimate reality, or in common language, took the last breath. Samdhis are generally small structures without any images.

³⁸ Where someone performed severe penance. Generally common people are not able to make distinction between the two terms.

³⁹ Hazra places the date of composition of Brahma Purana between ninth and twelfth century CE. Hazra, *Studies of Upapurāṇa*, 156

⁴⁰ *Brahma Purāṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1955.) 30. 25-26.

With great concentration and mental purity she performed several holy rites: Candrayana, etc. O brahmins, it was with this viz. “ I shall conceive this divine foetus with great purity” that she performed those holy rites.⁴¹

Due to austerities she performed, the deity bestowed a boon to her by being born as her son and destroyed all demons. A similar narrative is also mentioned in *Vāmana Purāṇa*, only this time, Aditī gives birth to Vāmana avatar of Viṣṇu.⁴²

The modern temple is believed to be constructed at the same place where Aditī performed penance and Sun-god was born. As mentioned before, there is a big kund sarovar in front dedicate to Sūrya evident from a cakra placed on its edge of the kund. Over it, on one side the mantra of sun god is engraved and on opposite side is sun god depicted on a chariot with seven horses. Similarly, there is another kund called Aditī kund nearby but it not as well maintained as the Sūryakund.

The sanctity of this pilgrimage site and adjacent areas are also mentioned in Tīrath-yātrā parva in *Mahābhārata*.⁴³ There are two pilgrimage spots exclusively dedicated to the Sun-god in the area as mentioned in the epic. First one is already mentioned above. For the second site, it is written

Tirath called Surya and bathing there with subdued soul and worshipping the Pitris and gods, fasting all the while, one obtaineth the fruit Agnistoma sacrifice and goeth (finally) to the region of the sun.....

It is believed among locals that if women takes bath here that they give birth to an illustrious and valiant son, like Abhimanyu. Alexander Cunningham, the first Director General of Archaeological Survey of India, who travelled this part of Haryana in 1878-79, noticed many temples dedicated to Śiva and numerous tanks dedicated to the sun.⁴⁴ About village Amin, Cunningham mentioned.

Amin, or Abhimanyu-Khera, derives its name from Abhimanyu, the youthful son of Arjuna, who was killed by Jayadratha inside the Kaurava camp in front of Amin. The place is also

⁴¹ *Brahma Purāṇa*, 30. 32-34.

⁴² *Vāmana Purāṇa*, trans. Anand Swarup Gupta, (Varanasi, 1968) 50. 40-48. Both Hazra and Kane place the date of composition of Vāmana Purāṇa between 600-1000 CE. See, Vijay Nath, *Puranas and Acculturation*, 9.

⁴³ Vana Parva, Tīrtha Yātrā Parva, LXXXIII.

⁴⁴ Cunningham, Alexander. Report of the Tour in Punjab in 1878-79, Volume XIV, (Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1882, 2000) 97.

called Cakraśayi, because the Kauravas here "formed in a circle" to surround Abhimanyu. Amin is a large lofty mound, 5 miles to the south, south-east of Thanesar. It is about 2000 feet in length from north or south by 800 feet in breadth. On the top, there is a small village called Amin. The places of pilgrimage are a kund and a temple dedicated to Aditi, and a kund and temple dedicated to Surya, or the sun. Here Aditī is said to have seated herself in ascetic abstraction to obtain a son, and here accordingly she obtained her wish and gave birth to Surya. All women who wish for male children pay their devotions at the temple of Aditi on Sunday (Ādityawār), and afterwards bathe in the Suraj kund.

This tradition of women taking bath in Sūrya kund to have male children has got its legitimacy from *Vāmana Purāṇa*.⁴⁵ Besides other places of significance in and around Kurukshetra, Cunningham mentioned sites which had holy ponds or shrines dedicated to Surya. These sites mentioning ponds include, Amin, Baras, Bhor, Bursyam, Dosar, Habari, Jhind, Kaalva, Kaithal, Kuchiana, Pharal, Ramray, Sajaman, Thanesar.⁴⁶ Most of these ponds still exist. It needs to be highlighted here that all these sacred ponds lie in or around Kurukshetra. Ten years later, Chas Rodgers surveyed the village and wrote his observations.⁴⁷

I examined the three mounds at Amin, six miles south of thanesar. The first mound touches lake Surya Kund on its east side. On its west but separated from it by a road is a low mound going north and south. To the south of both is a third mound resting eastwards on the Surya kund and stretching westwards. On this last mound is a large village inhabited by many kinds of people. On the fourth mound are also some houses. There is nothing to indicate antiquity except bricks. There is a mosque belonging to Mughal period constructed from the bricks from the mound. As the mounds have not been excavated there is no knowing what they contain.

It was in year 1921 that mounds mentioned both by Cunningham and Rodgers in Amin were surveyed by D.B.Spooner.⁴⁸ During the preliminary survey, two sandstone pillars were found from one of the mounds by villagers who then kept it in a village temple. Spooner stated

Although no excavations have ever been carried out at Amin, two inscribed stone pillars have been tilled up here by the peasants and are now lying in the shrine of Thakurji on the west bank of the tank called Surajkund. They are carved on all four sides and have no sockets for cross bars. They would thus appear to have supported a platform. The inscriptions on them

⁴⁵ *Vāmana Purāṇa* says 'Bathing there and seeing Aditi, the mother of gods, one gives birth to valiant son free from all blemishes and rides on an aerial car resembling a hundred suns in splendor. 13. 12-13.

⁴⁶ Cunningham, *Report*, 97-106.

⁴⁷ Chas J.Rodgers- *Report of the Punjab Circle of the Archaeological Survey, 1888-89*. (Delhi: Sunita Publications, 1891) .14

⁴⁸ Spooner, D.B. *Archaeological Survey of India- Annual Report, 1921-22*, 22-23.

are in characters of the Kushan period but are quite short and merely supply the names of their donors.⁴⁹

These two pillars according to Spooner were of Kuṣāṇa period and were imported from Mathura. Besides these, the report also mentioned sections of stout brick wall in the mound at northern part of the village which according to Spooner was of late Gupta period. He also mentioned a smaller site close to the tank named Soma Tīrath which yielded several stone objects. Several other antiquities were also mentioned in the report which have been found during the survey of the village.⁵⁰ Nearly fifty years later, R.C Agrawala in July, 1967 scrutinized these pillars and mentioned the extensive details. Agrawala emphasized in his introductory remarks that ‘such early and beautiful sculptures have not hitherto been reported from this region. On stylistic and palaeographic grounds, he asserted the pillars to be of Sunga period and bore close affinity with contemporary material from Bharhut and Sanchi. He disagreed with Spooner according to whom pillars were ‘imported from Mathura’. Both pillars were carved from all four sides and there were no sockets for the cross bar, thus could not be railing pillars. However, both had hole on top to support some other sculptural piece. Pillar one depicted Yakṣa-Yakṣī couple standing in an amorous pose, both clasping each other by way of placing one of their hands on the shoulder of each other. The second pillar showed Padmapaṇī Yakṣa with two lotus flowers just over his turban. He holds lotus stalk in his right hand and end of the waist band in his left one.⁵¹ The discovery of these pillars throw light on influence of Buddhism in this region.

Even before R.C.Agrawala could publish his article, these two pillars which were kept in a local temple (temple of Thakurji) were reported to be stolen from the premises. The article which was published later in a leading news magazine mentioned how Narang brothers, who made fortune in dealing antiquities stole the sculptures with an intention to smuggle these out of the country. However, the local police was successfully able to trace these antiquities and few days later, these rupees forty lakh treasure was returned to its original site in Amin. Two years later, Bombay custom department seized another set of Amin pillars and it turned out that the ones which were recovered by the local police were fake. The investigations began

⁴⁹ *ASI Annual Report*, 1921-22. 47-48

⁵⁰ *ASI Report*, 1922-23. 89-90. The report also mentioned the discovery of four-armed seated figure of Ganapati with Siva and Parvati seated to his proper left from Amin. It was probably carved in the late Gupta period. It indicates the existence of a Brāhmaṇic structure in the same village.

⁵¹ Agrawala, R.C. Sunga pillars from Amin, *Lalit Kala*, N0 14, 1969, pp.50-54.

and it came to the light that Narang brothers hired sculptors to make three sets of fakes while the original ones have already been exported out of country. After nine years of search, due to combined efforts of Interpol, Scotland Yard and Central Bureau of Investigation, the originals were recovered and handed over to National Museum, Delhi.⁵²

The adventurous journey of pillars did not end in the national museum. In fact they adopted an alternate form by appearing at two different places in the country. In the newly established museum, Dharohar: National museum of Customs and GST which was inaugurated by India's Finance Minister, Smt. Nirmala Sitaraman in June 2022, these pillars made appearance.⁵³ Similarly, the fakes ones which were set up in village temple after recovery by local police have assumed a very interesting form. The one depicting the yakṣa-yakṣī couple, is being worshipped by villagers as Manu and Śatrupā. As informed by the local priest, the pillars which are now installed in temple of Mansa Devi, located at the centre of the village are of the first man on earth, Manu, son of Prajapati and Satrupa, his wife. It is believed that river Sarasvatī which once flowed here, and still flows under the ground made this place as cradle of civilization. It is for this reason that the first person on earth, Manu along with his wife Śatrupā chose to live here. It was very intriguing to see, how locals changed the original form of artefacts from Buddhist to Brāhmanic and interwoven myths around it to grant legitimacy. These pillars are an outstanding example of historical artefacts (in this case, the memento of the originals) being transformed into relic under active worship. **(Fig 2)**

⁵²

<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/society-and-the-arts/story/19790630-theft-of-old-art-works-become-an-established-source-of-easy-money-for-crooks-in-india-822170-2014-03-04>

⁵³ The museum displays the artefacts which were seized by Indian customs department besides other works performed by the Department. Visit, <https://eacpm.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Cultural-Heritage-06092022-1.pdf>.



Fig 2: Replicas of Śūnga period pillars under worship, Mansa Devi temple, Amin

Coming back to village Amin, due to sanctity associated with it as ‘birthplace of Sūrya’, there is a strong possibility that besides Buddhist structure, there might have existed a Brāhmaṇic temple dedicated to the deity in earlier times. While conducting field survey, several mounds were noticed. In fact, the Mansā Devī temple mentioned above, along with major part of the population of village is situated on a mound and it has been informed that ancient remains such as bricks, pottery, pieces of stone sculptures are still found at various places. In the north side of the village is another mound on which the Government Senior Secondary School was constructed many decades ago, evident from its elevation. While surveying the mound, it was noticed that there was a part of the mound which has been dug up revealing fragments of a brick wall visible at various sections of the mound. (Fig 3)



Fig 3: The mound revealing brick wall, Amin

This huge mound has been cut due to construction of a road and houses built on both ends of the road. It was pointed out that many bricks which are revealed while digging the mound are used by villagers to build their houses.

Besides bricks, various types of pottery was also embedded in the wall indicating continuous habitation of the mound. Besides red slip ware, black on red ware, there were few pot shards which had lustre due to presence of mica. One of the pot shard had a motif of three circle with the outermost one having marks resembling the rays of the sun. It seems to be a historical Kuśāṇa stamped ware.⁵⁴ **(Fig 4)**

⁵⁴ I am indebted to Dr. Kalyan Chakraborty for confirming my view about the pot shard.



Fig 4: Pieces of pottery from the mound, Amin

Similarly in the temple located in front of Sūrya Kuṇḍ, several pieces of bricks with impressions have been placed on a platform. These impressions indicate that the fragments were a part of larger piece which if placed together will complete a circular pattern. (Fig 5) For villagers, these bricks are reminders of the cakravyūha which was built by Kauravas camp to entrap Abhimanyu.⁵⁵

The village of Amin/Abhimanyupura is a potentially very rich archaeological site which even at surface level has yielded considerable objects of interest. It would be worth excavating these mounds since there is a possibility of finding not only the objects but even structures as well. Needless to say, that the site has been deeply disturbed due to continuous encroachment by villagers and any delay would only cause further damage to the site ending the possibility of finding any historical information.

It certainly cannot be ascertained whether any mound from this village will yield brāhmaṇical remains or structure or even if there was once a temple dedicated to Sūrya in a village but there have been several sites which indicated the simultaneous existence of religious traditions. For instance, Huan Tsang, the chinese pilgrim who travelled this region in 634 CE mentioned three buddhist stūpas with seven hundred monks alongside hundreds of brāhmaṇical temples in city of Thaneshwar.⁵⁶ It would definitely be worth excavating the site to garner further information on the religious landscape of the site.

⁵⁵ I would sincerely like to thank Mr. Yashpal Shastri for giving a well-informed guided tour of the village.

⁵⁶ *ASI- Report*, 1921-22, 47.

Archaeological findings in Kurukshetra, Pehowa and Thaneswar

The literature indicates that this region has been under continuous habitation since ancient times. However, the art remains which have been yielded from this region are primarily from early medieval period when it was under Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty.⁵⁷ Below are mentioned those stone sculptures and other architectural fragments which are either of Sūrya or associated with his cult based on the field survey conducted of the district.

Sūrya from Pehowa- Prachi Shiva temple in Pehowa has yielded a spotted red sandstone fragmentary relief measuring 34x32 cm showing the feet of Sūrya wearing high boots and the typical long colaka (dress) with sharp edges in the centre. Sūrya is accompanied by Piṅgala on his proper right and Dandī on his left. Piṅgala is badly mutilated. Both standing attendant figures are slightly turned towards their master, resting their outer hands on their respective thighs. The feet of Sūrya are in samabhaṅga (straight frontal pose). A scarf, which may have been held by him can be seen partially over the feet. On stylistically grounds, the figure may be attributed to the late Gupta period.⁵⁸ (Fig 6)



Fig 6 -Lower half of Sūrya sculpture, Pehowa

⁵⁷ Two inscriptions from Pehowa mentioned earlier indicate that this area was under Gurjara Pratihāra dynasty.

⁵⁸ For more details see, Handa, *Sculptures from Haryana*, 184.

A buff sandstone torso found from Thaneshwar, measuring around 59 cm in height in belonging to 9th century CE, is now preserved in the Kurukshetra University Museum, Darohar. Only the upper part of the sculpture has survived. Originally it was a sukanāsa (an ornamented feature placed over the entrance of a shrine) whose outer ring has foliage design. The right portion of the deity is visible which depicts him wearing a crown and earrings. He seems to be holding a lotus-stalk in his right hand which is raised and almost reaches the height touching the deity's temple. (Fig 7)



Fig 7: Sūrya in sukanāsa, Thaneshwar, Darohar museum

The same museum displays an image of headless Sūrya from Thaneshwar, showing the two-armed god holding a water pot in the left hand and a rosary in the right seated on a chariot in profile driven by Aruṇa who sits on his front holding the reigns of the seven horses. The extra arms projecting from the shoulders are missing. S.B.Singh has identified the image as that of Āditya-Sūrya.⁵⁹

Sūrya found from Harsh-ka-tila:- A broken architectural piece shows bust of Surya wearing an elaborate jeweled high kīrita-mukūṭa (crown), Karna-kundālas, (earrings), hāra, and holding blossomed lotus stock in his left hand. The outermost one of the six-layered

⁵⁹ S.B.Singh, "Āditya-Sūrya and his rare image," *Journal of Haryana Studies*, Vol XIX (1981), pp.220-25

prabhāmaṇḍala (halo) has lotus floral pattern but seems to be emitting the radiance of the sun god. On the top left side of two flying gandharva couples holding vanamālā (garland) and playing instruments. The deity is wearing armor on his chest. Even though, the face is completely mutilated, perfect arched eyebrows, half closed eyes and tilak on the forehead is still visible. Curly locks are falling over his shoulders. Even though it is difficult to ascertain due to damaged condition of the piece, it seems that the sun-God was two-handed. The original image must have been a colossal in size.

Sūrya from Pehowa- The two-armed deity is in utkuṭāsana, or seated position with raised hips. He is wearing a high conical crown, earrings, and necklaces. There is a faint hint of body armor and a long garland around his torso. The face and other iconographical features are destroyed by the lotus stalk in his right hand is visible. On his either side, shown in seated position must be his attendants, Piṅgala and Daṇḍa. (These could be Aśvins- the horse faced gods generally depicted with Sūrya. Since, facial features are destroyed hence it is difficult to ascertain). At the centre, between the feet of Sūrya, his charioteer Aruṇa, must have been there evident from the surviving marks. The chariot originally must have seven horses out of which only three are visible. **(Fig 8)**

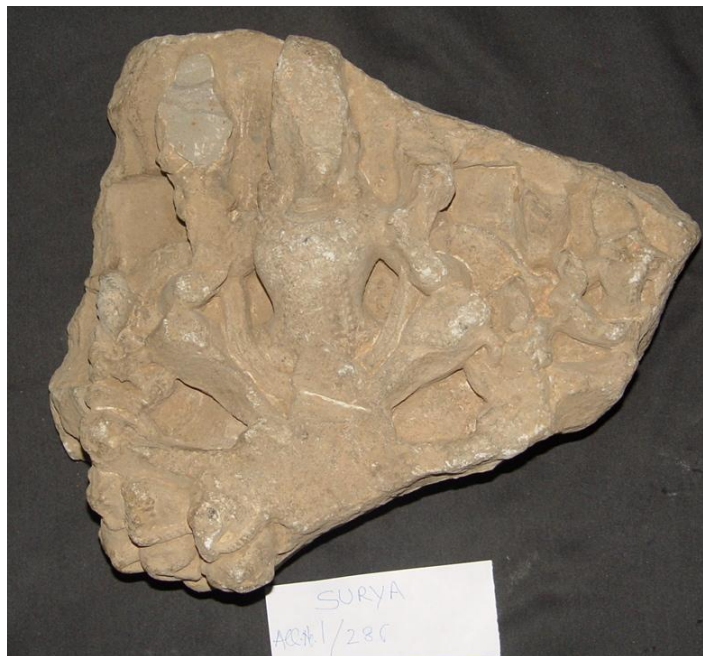


Fig 8: Sūrya in seated pose

Door jamb from Pehowa- A red sandstone doorway, showing the upper right part evident from two flat sides. Originally, it must have at least four to five levels of carvings, each tier depicting different designs and figures. The two outer surviving branches show Sūrya on both, one seated and other one standing. The inner one depicts the deity in standing in samabhaṅga holding lotus stalk in both hands. His crown is flat, shown wearing earrings, necklace, armor, waist girdle, scarf moving around his body, hanging below the knees, and resting on both his hands, long coat, and boots. On his left is a gandharva playing flute. The outer most layer shows the same god in a utkuṭāsana, seated pose, holding blossomed lotus flowers in both his hands. On his proper left are four other deities in lalitāsana, seated position where one leg is fold while touching the ground other one is slightly raised. All figures are two armed and in one hand these are holding an object and the other one is varāda mudrā or hand gesture granting blessings. In all probability, these figures represent Navgrahas or nine planetary divinities generally depicted on lintel of the ancient doorways. (Fig 9)



Fig 9: Doorway with standing Sūrya, Pehowa

Two images of Surya embedded in a wall of Gorakhnath temple complex, Pehowa. Four small architectural pieces are embedded in the wall and have been repainted several times hence, all are white in colour. In front of the wall are several small round structures which are built in the memory of local saints who once lived here and therefore, are known as *Samādhīs*. The figurines carved in a niche include one standing image of Sūryā wearing shoes and holding flowers in both his hands. On his either side are Danda and Piṅgala. The

other one is seated Sūrya in *utkūṭāsana* with two flowers in his hands. Third piece is a miniature temple with a standing with a male figure in its niche (?). By locals, these pieces are worshipped as various forms of Gorakhnātha. (Fig 10)



Fig 10: Architectural pieces embedded in a wall, Gorakhnātha Temple, Pehowa

Panel from Thaneshwar- A small 16x14cm panel shows three of the nine standing planetary divinities. It depicts Sūrya holding lotus flowers in both his hands, followed on his proper left by Soma and Maṅgala, the former with the right hand in abhay mudrā and left holding the water vessel.

Doorway at Sarasvatī tīrath- The priest of the famous Sarasvatī temple showed an elaborate doorway which was found from the mound nearby, besides twenty-two stone images and was later installed on the entrance of the door of this temple. Two years ago, after renovation of the temple, it was installed on a separate platform just outside the sanctum along with the foot impressions of the goddess called Sarasvatī pādukā. There is a seated figure at the centre on the lintel, probably of Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa as it depicts lower two hands of deity on his lap and the upper two holding a mace (?) and flower. However, these figures are worshipped as Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Sarasvatī as it is believed to be the meeting spot of three holy rivers. The spot is also famous among locals as it is believed that the sister of the famous king Harśvardhan of Puśyabhūti dynasty got married at this holy place. According to Handa, this Pratihāra period doorframe shows Saptamāṭrikā (seven mother-goddesses) on the surlintel.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Handa, *Sculptures From Haryana*, 170

Another popular temple of Pehowa is Prachi Shiva Mandir which is believed to be of ancient times. The trust taking care of the temple has renovated the entire structure and has used several architectural pieces in different parts. Within the temple itself, on the entrance of one of the sanctum is a pañca-śākhā (doorway with five jambs) installed and painted in yellow colour. The figure shows a male figure seated on a lotus seat in *yogāsana* with two hands placed gently on his lap. It is also possibly Sūrya-nārāyaṇa. His upper two hands have lotus flowers.⁶¹ The deity is depicted with a cylindrical crown and a long garland.⁶² There are two stems under his seat which has been described as lions, by Rodgers.⁶³ Navgrahas are depicted on the lintel.⁶⁴

There are two pieces in Pashupati Nath temple, Pehowa of Revānta on a horseback with an umbrella over his head, of which lower half of one of the images is broken. The first one is depicts Revānta in centre and his attendant is holding his chhatra or parasol. Beneath his feet is a trampled boar. On his right side are two figures, of which one is holding a pot and also appears to be an attendant. In his front is another figure seated on a horse but without a halo or umbrella is probably Piṅgala or Daṇḍa.⁶⁵ Another figure of Revānta sitting on a horse is placed in an adjacent niche of which the bottom portion is broken. It shows the deity holding a spike and a broken attendant figure behind him. (**Fig 11 and 12**).

⁶¹ Rodgers has identified these as lotus flowers whereas Cunningham identified it as two elephants anointing the god. See, Rodgers, *Report*, 15. Also see, Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey Reports*, XIV,103.

⁶² Handa identified it as Sūrya Nārāyaṇa, See, Handa, *Sculptures from Haryana*, 200.

⁶³ Rodgers mistaken the shape of the stem and identified it as lions.

⁶⁴ In Hindu mythology, Sūryā, Soma, Maṅgala, Budha, Bṛihaspati, Śukra, Śani, Rāhu and Ketu are collectively considered as Navgrahas, as they are nine in number.

⁶⁵ Probably this panel has also been mentioned by Handa, but it could be a different one. Its measurements have been given by Handa. This is a buff sandstone panel measuring 84 x 67 cm assignable to circa 8th-9th century CE. For details see, Handa, *Sculptures from Haryana*, 217.



Fig 11: Revanta, Pehowa



Fig 12: Revanta, Pehowa

Besides these, there are many exquisite and intact images of Sūrya which have been reported from various parts of the state such as from Hansi, Badali, Rohtak, Jadthal, Karnal, Gujjar Kheri, Khorkrakhhot, Beri, Sirsa, Pinjore, Agroha, Jind and several others places and this indicates that the all these places were associated with sun-worship.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, none of these images have found their place in any scholarly work on Sun-worship.⁶⁷ Moreover, the indigenous art traditions have hardly been explored and it largely remained overshadowed by emphasis on art traditions of Mathura. For instance, the discovery of several art pieces including, a doorway indicates the site of Pehowa as a centre of art manufacturing.⁶⁸ Hence, it is crucial to examine the religious history of this district owing to the massive sculptural wealth that this place has yielded.

Conclusion

The state of Haryana owing to its location in northern India had unfortunately witnessed series of foreign invasions since early medieval times leading to destruction of several marvellous religious structures lying in the region.⁶⁹ These incidents of mutilation of temples

⁶⁶ Ibid. 189.

⁶⁷ T.A Gopinatha Rao. J.N Bannerjee. C.Sivaramamurti has not mentioned any stone image from Haryana . In fact, V.C. Shrivastava's text recent edition, and S.L.Nagar, who both wrote on Sūrya worship in Ancient India did not mention even a single image of Sūrya from Haryana..

⁶⁸ There is a doorway fitted into the entrance of a small temple near Prachi temple. It shows, Garuḍavāhī Viṣṇu is depicted as the Lalāṭa-bimba (crest figure) on an unfinished door-surround in the Prāchī Śiva temple at Pehowa. On both sides of the bottom of doorway are depicted one male, Śaṅkha puruṣa, and two females, Bhūdevī and Gadādevī. There is another very small figure at the centre, near the feet of Śaṅkha puruṣa

⁶⁹ Mann, Aditi. Contemporary Representations of Bhima Devi Temple, Heritage and Society, (Routledge,15:1, 2022, 20-31).

as well as sculptures have been recorded by medieval historians as well, such as Abu Raihan Al Beruni.⁷⁰ Any information that one can gather on the religious history of this sacred site is based on findings of scattered sculptures. However, even the broken fragments can illuminate the history of the region such as in this case, on the cult of Sūrya. On the basis of literature and survey of this district, this paper showed the strong existence and spread of Sūrya cult in ancient times. Furthermore, on the basis of discovery of sculptures and other architectural remnants, it can be asserted that there were other religious traditions who parallelly existed in earlier times.⁷¹ It was later that the popularity of epic, *Mahābhārata* and Śrī Kṛṣṇa transformed the multi-religious character of the site into a singular one.

⁷⁰ *Al Beruni's - India*, trans. E.C.Sachau- Vol. II- (London: Truber & Co.1910), pg.103.

⁷¹ There are numerous images of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Gaṇapatī, Durgā, Ūmā- Maheśwar, Buddhist and Jaina images which have been found from Kurukshetra, Pehowa and Thaneswar.



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