

Analysis of Built Heritage at Gorakhpur, District Raisen Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract:-

Gorakhpur is a small village located in the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh. This village gained prominence around 2014 when various media reports began to assert the existence of a wall purportedly measuring 80 kilometers in length. This sensational news garnered widespread attention across India, prompting several short field studies and surveys conducted by various agencies. The wall, which is considered a significant aspect of the region's heritage, has primarily been featured in newspapers with numerous exaggerations; however, no comprehensive academic paper has been published on the subject, with the exception of one authored by Dr. Jinendra Jain of IGNTU Amarkantak in 2020. Dr. Jain's paper represents the first scholarly source of information and addresses specific aspects of the built heritage. Raisen is recognized as one of the most significant districts in Madhya Pradesh and is also referred to as the rock art capital of India. The archaeological history of the district can be traced back to the Lower Paleolithic era, with excavations at Tikoda and Bhimbetka yielding some of the earliest dates in central Indian prehistory. This paper is based on a recent survey and documentation of the Gorakhpur wall and the built heritage in the surrounding regions.

Introduction

The Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh lies between the latitude 22 47' and 23 33' North and the longitude 77 21' and 78 49' East; situated almost at the heart of the modern Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, the Raisen district boasts of a rich cultural past. It came to existence on 5th May, 1950 (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2025). This particular district is surrounded by the districts of Hoshangabad and Narsinghpur in the south, Sehore in the south and south west, Bhopal in the west, Vidisha in the North and Sagar in the East (Central Ground Water Board, 2013). This district derives its name from the historic fort of Raisen, which stands atop a hill. Some legends say that it was probably a derivative from the old name of Rajavasini or

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Rajasayan (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2025). The district is amply irrigated by the major rivers of Narmada in the southern border, Betwa running in the north south direction in the western border and the Bina river in the northern region of the district. These rivers deposit alluvium and their make their valleys fertile; thus, making it possible for the district to have a good agricultural output, including crops like wheat, jowar, vegetables and rice among others. Physiographically, the district topography is rather undulating, facilitated by the presence of the extensions of the Upper Vindhyan range in the western half of the district, where we coincidentally find the famous Bhimbetka rock shelters and the Deccan traps with intertrapezoid in the eastern and central part of the district (Central Ground Water Board, 2013). The area receives moderate amount of rainfall annually and have substantial groundwater resources to sustain its population. The combination of this district's physiographic features have made this area quite suitable for adaptation and sustainability, as one can see through the thousands of years of human habitation evidences found in the district.

The District has a long history which starts from Prehistoric hunting and gathering occupation to Maurya's, Shunga's, Satvahana's, Gupta's, Later Guptas, Pratihara's and Parmara's. The built heritage of Gorakhpur is majorly related to Parmara's (Jain, 2020)

The Central Indian territory of the Indian subcontinent has witnessed the rise and fall of some of the most significant cultures and dynasties, and been the object of contention for many because of its strategic and socio-economical and politically advantageous position. After the fall of the mighty Gupta dynasty, whose influence had united a large part of the Indian subcontinent under them, the situation led to numerous powers fighting to gain the upper hand and usurping supreme power like the Guptas. The chaos and constant state of wars characterized the entire subcontinent where territorial expansion and show of power was a necessity to maintain the dynastic name. The post-Gupta period saw a shift of the power capital at Kannauj or Kanyakubja because of its strategic location. The race for occupying this site was mainly fought among the Rastrakutas, the Palas and the Gurjara-Pratiharas. However, their struggle also comprised numerous other small kingdoms and feudatory powers who changed sides circumstantially in order to rise to power (Bhatia, 1970).

The history of the Paramara dynasty also finds its roots in the Tripartite struggle of the Early Medieval period. Although sources to trace their origin and ancestors are quite scarce, some legends and evidences give us some ideas regarding the dynasty. Legend tells that the Paramara dynasty owes their origin to the Agnikula, or the famous fire sacrifice of sage

Vasishtha on Mount Abu in Rajasthan. It is said that from the sacrificial pit rose a –powerful warrior who could slay any evil and was, thus named ‘Paramara’ (Singh, 2012). The earliest source regarding the Paramaras, the text Navasahashankacharita and the Udaypur prashasti gives us this legendary evidence. However, a few other scholars tell that since the Paramaras used the epithets similar to that of the Rashtrakutas (‘maharajadhiraja paramabhataraka prithvivallabha’), it is possible that the Paramaras were from the Rashtrakuta family (Ganguly, 1933). Scholars think that the first Paramara ruler who was placed in Malava was under the Rashtrakuta king, Govinda III who overthrew the Pratiharas from Kannauj. There is considerable debate regarding the earliest rulers of the Paramara line and their chronology. The Udaypur prashasti gives the only full lineage of the Paramaras and according to that, the progenitor is named as Upendra (Bhatia, 1970). This Upendra probably ruled over the Malava region as a subordinate chief under Govinda III. There were numerous kings after him, who served as subordinates under the Rashtrakutas and the Pratiharas. Their history was encoiled with the Tripartite struggle when the less powerful rulers conveniently changed their loyalty based on circumstances. Just like Vairisimha I who lost the territories under the Pratihara attacks and changed sides in order to maintain the hold over their territory (Seth, 1978).

By the time of Siyaka II, a powerful king of the Paramara line, the Rashtrakuta capital of Manyakheta was sacked marking the end of the powerful legacy of the Rashtrakutas. The fall of the Pratiharas also led them to engage in battle with the Chalukyas of Gujarat, Chalukyas of Kalyani, the Kalachuris of Tripuri and the Chandellas in central Indian region (Seth, 1978). Sindhuraja is said to have thrown the final blow onto the Hunas and terminated their rule from the Central Indian region (Bhatia, 1970). Bhoja I, the most renowned ruler of the Paramara line, inherited a large territory from his ancestors. As a credible ruler, he never backed down from facing the enemies that threatened his territory. Most of the information regarding Bhoja is gathered from texts like Bhoja Prabandha and Tilaka Manjiri among others (Singh, 1984). There are numerous inscriptions of later Paramara kings from its different branches which eulogize the valour of Bhoja I (Singh, 1984). The rise of power of the Paramaras required almost two centuries of constant struggles in order to protect their open boundaries in the most central and resourcefully rich region of the subcontinent. It is said that the Paramaras had a huge army and they were known for their elephants. The rulers ruled by the contemporary traditions where the king was the head of administration and the territory was divided into numerous hierarchic divisions and governed by hierarchic officers. Their open borders made it harder for them to defend themselves and thus the Paramaras are also known to have built many

forts, remains of which are found still at Dhara, Ujjain, Rahatgarh, Bhilsa, Mandu and Gunapura (Singh, 1984).

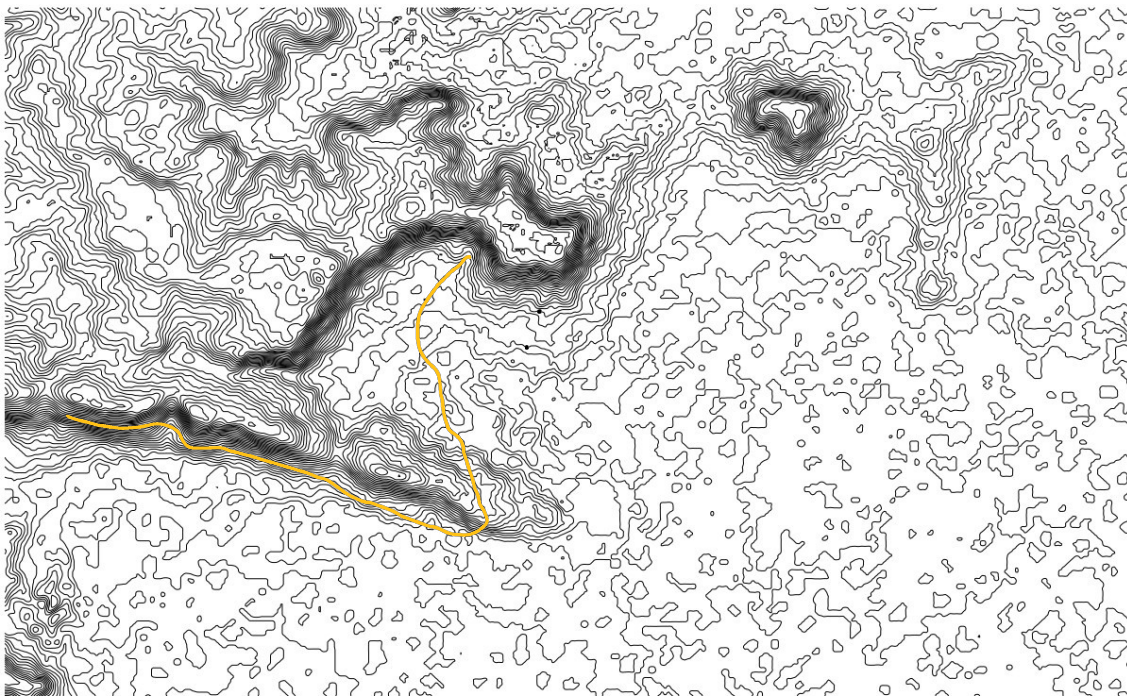
The early Medieval period in Indian subcontinent was also marked by the flourishing internal and international trade routes. The Paramaras, as a result, stood on one of the most important territories which claimed control over major river routes (including Narmada, Betwa among other) and the roads of ancient Dakshinapatha and Uttarapatha. Although we do not find a lot many coins from the Paramaras of Malava, it is known that they issued coins in gold, silver and sometimes copper. The famous 'Gadhaiya paisa' from the dynasty was a rendition following the Sassanian coins which were circulated between the 8th – 11th centuries AD in India (Kumar, n.d.); it consists of an abstract bust on the obverse while a free standing stylized fire altar adorns the reverse of these coins. Later coins of 12th century AD show the use of goddess Lakshmi on coins and legends in Devanagari. The copper coins are found punched with different symbols on one side (n.d.) (Singh, 1984).

Besides their military prowess, the Paramaras were known for their cultural and literary aesthetics which contributed largely to the cultural development of the succeeding dynasties in the Central Indian region. Among all the kings, it was Bhoja I who was hailed for his literary and military achievements in inscriptions. Ajada, who wrote a commentary titled *Padakaprakasha* on the *Sarasvati-Kanthabharana* told that Bhoja I wrote about 84 books in his lifetime (Bhatia, 1970). Although it might be an exaggeration, some of the most famous books attributed to him are the *Shringara Prakasha* and the *Samarangana Sutradhara*. In the 65th chapter of *Samarangana Sutradhara*, Bhoja I elucidates the architectural style of a *Bhumija* temple (Hajarnis & Raval, 2016); a style that was used by the Paramaras to make some majestic temples in Malava region. The kings might have made numerous temples, but some of the most famous ones stand at Bhojpur, Nemawar, Vidisha and Udaipur. Besides the Shaiva temples, the Paramaras had extended their influence over to Jainism as well, building temples in Vidisha, Dhar and Bhojpur among other places.

As a result, the Paramaras were one of the most influential dynasties of Central Indian region who ruled for a mighty period of four centuries, from the 9th to the 13th centuries CE. Their legacy of military expeditions, prowess and cultural aesthetic significantly impacted the successive dynasties who improved on the remnants of the mighty Paramaras.

Gorakhpur:-

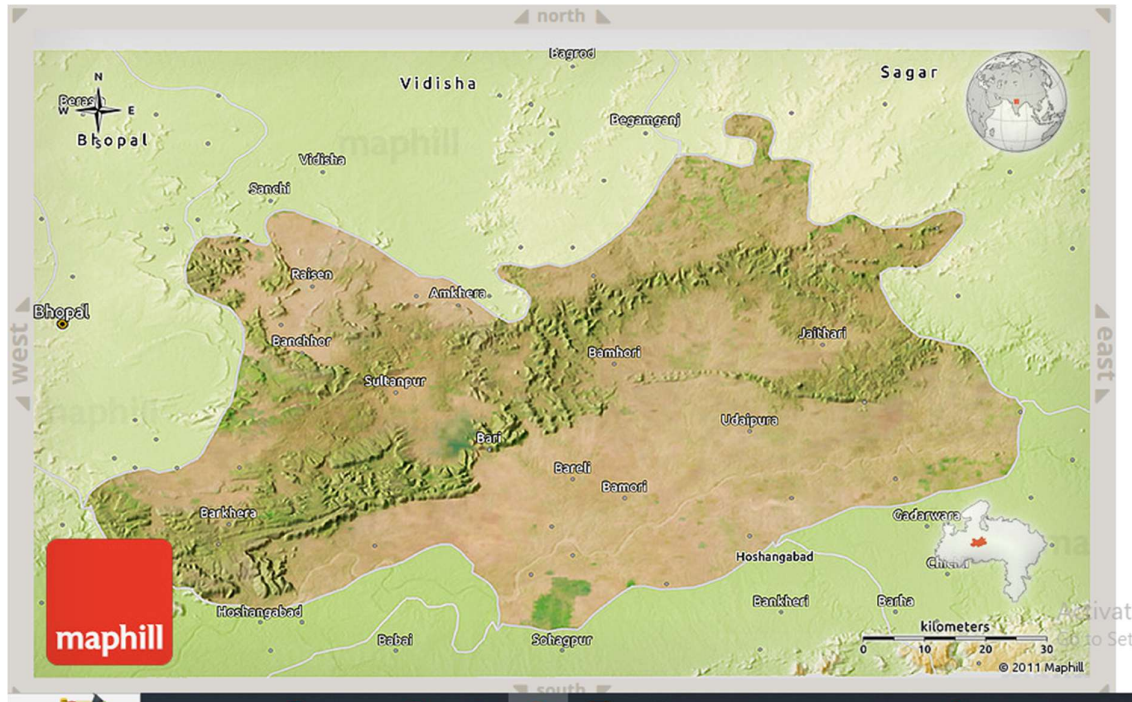
Gorakhpur, located at 23°08'11.6"N 78°42'47.3"E, is a small village in the Udayapura tahsil, near the town of Deori in Raisen District. The cultural history of this village can be traced back to the early historic period. It is recognized as the origin of one of India's largest walls (Hindustan Times, 2017). Media reports and heritage enthusiasts suggest that the wall extends for approximately 80 kilometers (Hindustan Times, 2017). However, during a survey conducted by the authors, it was determined that this claim lacks substantiation and may be an idealistic notion. The wall in Gorakhpur represents a significant historical artifact that warrants further study and discussion. It is believed to have been constructed as a defensive enclosure to prevent invasions from neighboring states, likely the Kalachuris. An analysis of the contour map of the site reveals how the Parmaras effectively utilized natural boundaries to construct this enclosure. In Gorakhpur, a segment of the wall, approximately one kilometer in length, is situated on flat terrain, while the remainder is located on ridges (Map-1).



Map-1, Contour map showing the elevation (Wall marked in Yellow)

The geographical setup of Raisen district also gives a glimpses of why the wall was created at this very point. There are certain aspects which needs to be studied 1. The main wall is around 16 kilometres and 2. From its origin till near Jamgarh a few fragment (Can be later era) and

a closed enclosure at Ganesh Pahadi is seen. For better understanding of the wall and enclosure kindly see the Map-1 and 2)



Map-2, Showing the plain and hilly areas of Raisen District

During the documentation of the wall, an additional fact emerged indicating the presence of a multi-layered enclosure, with many sections exhibiting a large rectangular shape primarily associated with military administration. The wall extends approximately 16 kilometers and encompasses significant localities that provide evidence of habitation. The ongoing mapping and documentation of the reported 80-kilometer length will be published shortly. This paper focuses on Gorakhpur village, where the major archaeological and built heritage can be categorized into specific aspects.

1. Temples
2. Waterbody
3. Sculptural site
4. Fort/habitation site

The found remains of the village are roughly dated back to 12th-13th century and related to Parmara era. No any inscriptional record have been found from the sites hence the remains are purely dated and related by relative method.

1. Temples:-

In the village there are a number of temple sites are located which are now in a ruined state. These temples are scattered in a large area covering from the modern habitation, Near a Parmara era pond and in the forest. From the primary documentation few major temple sites have come in light- 1- Bhairava temple, 2- Ruined temple near the Bhairava temple, 3- Temple on the fort/habitational area. All these temples have given an important example of Parmara era architectural reference.

A. Bhairava Temple-

The temple in question is among the largest remnants of temple architecture found in the vicinity of Gorakhpur. It is located behind the Kankali Mata Temple of Gorakhpur (Latitude: 23.142679, Longitude: 78.706567). This temple exemplifies the Bhumija style of architecture. Numerous sculptural fragments have been unearthed at this site; however, most are in a state of ruin, with only a few remaining intact. This site was previously referenced by Dr. Jain, who reported the existence of an image of Bhairava, yet no such image has been discovered in the present day, suggesting it may have been stolen (Jain, 2020). In Dr. Jain's publication, several photographs of the site are included, but the accompanying descriptions are lacking, as his primary focus was on the wall rather than the other remains. Among the ruins, panels depicting elephants have been found, which bear a striking resemblance to the temple of Siddheshwar on Mandhata Hill, Omkareshwara. Additionally, a highly decorative door jamb is visible on the temple mound, accompanied by a lintel featuring Ganesha as the central figure. A few mason's marks have also been noted at the site. Furthermore, this temple displays an image of Nandi and several fragments of Urushringas (Plates 1-7).



Plate-1, The Mound of the Bhairava temple



Plate-2, Nandi and other fragments on the site



Plate- 3, Elephant Panel



Plate- 4, Elephant Panel



Plate-5, Door Jamb



Plate-6, The masons Mark



Plate-7, Lintel part of the Temple

B&C. Scattered Temples-

There are two additional temples located near the Bhairava temple, which are currently in a state of disrepair. These temples exhibit a number of scattered temple members.

2. Waterbodies

In the village of Gorakhpur, three significant ancient water bodies are present, with Deotalab (Papitalab) being the largest among them. Additionally, a smaller water body is also located in this area. The other two water bodies exemplify the design of rectangular baolis, while the smaller water body serves as an example of a small artificial well.

A. Deotalab-

Deotalab is one of the largest ponds located in Gorakhpur village, measuring approximately 200 meters in size (Jain, 2020). This manmade pond features ancient stone stairs on all four sides. It served as a significant water source during the Parmara era. Numerous temple remnants and sculptures have been discovered along the banks of this pond, indicating its historical importance as a vital waterbody. The pond is situated within the confines of a stone wall. (Plate-8-10)



Plate-8, Deotalab



Plate-9, Architectural Member



Plate-10, Temple members and sculpture on the bank of pond

B. Water body 2 and 3-

The two waterbodies, referred to as Baoli, are situated in proximity to the Bhairava temple. Currently, both waterbodies are in a state of significant disrepair, with only remnants of their original structures visible. The walls of the waterbodies and the accompanying stairs remain discernible. Notably, one of the waterbodies features a measuring pillar adorned with several depictions. These waterbodies are strategically located near a monsoon nallah, designed to facilitate the storage of rainwater during the rainy season (Plate-11-13).



Plate-11, Waterbody (Baoli) 1



Plate-12, Measuring pillar in baoli 1



Plate- 13, Waterbody (Baoli) 2

3. Sculptural Sites-

There are a large number of sculptural sites located in Gorakhpur. Large number of sculptures/memorial pillars are scattered across the village. In the modern habitation area many sculptures are seen, at Kankali devi site a large number of sculptures which got documented during the fieldwork. On the bank of the waterbodies a large number of sculptures have been documented. Two large pillars are also came in light during the fieldwork. Few Sati stones also came in light during the fieldwork. The report of the same will be published in the upcoming book very soon. (Plate-14-18)



Plate-14, Sculptures near Kankali devi temple



Plate-15, Sculptures near Kankali devi temple



Plate-16, Pillar 1



Plate-17, Pillar 2



Plate-18, Sati Pillar

4. Fort and Habitational site-

In the early researches it was suggested that no fort or habitational site has been identified in Gorakhpur, specially inner side of the wall. There is a very important habitation site found behind the Kankali Devi temple and shows ancient style of fort/palace. In front of this structure we can see a large enclosed courtyard. Also a very large staircase is seen here which suggests it to be a habitational site. (Map-3-5) (Plate-19-21)



Map-3, Google earth image showing the wall and the habitation site in red



Map-4, Google image showing the closeup of the site



Map-5, Showing the marking of the site



Plate-19, Showing the staircase of the fort/habitation site



Plate-20, Showing the staircase of the fort/habitation site and courtyard



Plate-21, General image of the site

Conclusion-

This is one of the very important site located in Raisen district which needs to be protected by the responsible bodies. This site contains a very important chapter of parmara and Kalachuri History hence it needs to be reassessed and restudied.

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