

## **From Vihara to World-View: Buddhism, Settlement Pattern and the Sacred Landscape of Sirpur (Sripura) In Dakṣiṇa Kosala**

**Hrishabh Kumar Sahu<sup>1</sup>, Venu Puvvadi<sup>2</sup>**

### **Introduction**

Sirpur, a village on the right bank of the Mahanadi in Mahasamund district of Chhattisgarh state in India, preserves the remains of Sripura, the capital of Dakṣiṇa Kosala, under the Sarabhapuriya and Paṇḍuvamai reign, roughly the 5<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. When the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang passed through Kosala around 639 CE, he described a fertile, densely peopled country whose kṣatriya king “*greatly honours the law of Buddha*”, with about 100 sangharamas and nearly 10,000 monks, all students of the Mahayana, living beside some 70 deva temples and an old monastery with an Asokan stupa to the south of the city. The site has yielded a palace complex, numerous Hindu and Jaina establishments as well as a chain of brick viharas including the Anandaprabha, Svastika and Teevardev monasteries.

The most recent addition to this corpus is the stylistic study of the Harshagupta Vihara by Khamari and Upadhyay, which reads the monastery’s architecture and sculpture as products of the same post-Gupta idiom that served the city’s Brahmanical shrines. The monuments of Sirpur are still not yet discussed with the monument by monument properly.

### **Objectives**

The present research paper mainly aims to reconstruct the Mahayana categories, prāṭītyasamutpāda (dependent arising), *karuṇā* (compassion) and *dāna* (giving) furnished the inhabitants of Sripura with a harmonious, relational world-view. To examine the concept of this world-view, registered in the settlement pattern, particularly in the placement of viharas. Finally, to assess the relationship between the sangha and the Paṇḍuvamsi court, for which the very name of the Harshagupta Vihara is a datum.

### **Methodology**

The present research paper is applied with qualitative methodology

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1 Ph.D. Research Scholar, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. hrisha57\_ssb@jnu.ac.in

2 Assistant Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi - 110067, India. venupuvvadi@mail.jnu.ac.in

and it connecting to the archaeology and philosophy. The present paper is comprehensively focusing on landscape and settlement archaeology of Sirpur of Dakshin Kosala. Another step on epigraphical analysis, the records of the Sirpur monastic inscriptions in Epigraphia Indica are treated as primary records of Great Buddhist scholars or monks.

## Results

The settlement pattern of the viharas of Sripura were not cloistered retreats but urban institutions. Unlike typical early historic South Asian monasteries defined by physical isolation, Sripura's viharas are fully integrated into the civic core. Situated on the river terrace directly adjacent to the palace and residential zones, they distinctly reject the traditional spatial grammar of monastic separation. They stand strung along the river to the south and south-east of the palace boundaries, granaries and residential quarters, precisely the zone where Xuanzang located the "*old Sangharama*" south of the city.

The recovery of a hoard of seventy-nine bronzes from the monastic sites of goldsmith's tools within a monastic cell, demonstrates that image-casting was carried out inside the monastery itself. The vihara functioned as an active production centre. Excavated goldsmithing tools and unfinished castings reveal that sacred images were manufactured exactly where they were worshipped. By managing precious metals and overseeing their assay, the monastery integrated deeply into the local economy. This direct control over metallurgy perfectly illustrates the concept of embedded monasticism, caught at the moment of manufacture. The sangha, in other words, was a producing and consuming node of the urban economy, exactly the socially embedded monasticism that has documented archaeologically for central India.

The Harshagupta Vihara, analysed by the great scholars like Khamari and Upadhyay, exhibits a brick-built monastic plan and a sculptural programme executed in the Gupta style as the city's architecture. Style here is not a mere art-historical curiosity; it's a shared craft vocabulary that is the material signature of shared social networks, and the vihara's very name. This recalls the Paṇḍuvamsi king Harṣagupta and embeds the dynasty in the monastic map of the city. The epigraphic record makes this embedding explicit that patronage across sectarian lines. Harṣagupta's widow Vasatā, daughter of Suryavarman of Magadha, raised the Vaiṣṇava-Lakṣmaṇa temple as regent for her minor son. That son, Mahasivagupta Balarjuna, though a self-declared paramamahesvara, granted the village of Sarkaralaka to the Buddhist acharya Buddhaghōṣa.

The religious harmony noted by Xuanzang wasn't just a polite exaggeration. It was built directly into the city's physical layout. Monasteries, markets, temples,

and the palace seamlessly overlapped with one another. The traditional practice of using physical distance to keep different religious communities apart was completely abandoned here. Religious coexistence at this site was a matter of shared institutions, not just tolerant attitudes.

The Buddhist remaking of the riverine landscape remains visible on the surface. The mounded skyline of the monastic quarter, the exposed brick viharas with their bhumisparsa Buddhas, and the tanks that anchored the settlement's water regime. The bronze pantheon, Tārā, Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, recovered from these mounds, attests a compassion-centred Mahayana, shading into early Vajrayana, in the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

According to Xuanzang, at Kosala was not an accident of tolerance but the spatial expression of a philosophy. A community habituated to pratityasamutpada, the teaching that all entities arise in mutual dependence, possessed a relational ontology in which monastery and palace could interpenetrate without threat. The bodhisattva ethic of *karuṇa* and the economy of *dana* gave that ontology institutional form in the sattrā. While Anandaprabha purchased property to establish a permanent endowment providing daily meals for Buddhist monks, teachers and their students. Dāna was therefore transacted, not merely felt, as was the Mallar grant to monks of the four quarters, whose viharika, a laywoman, Alaka, had built. The Anandaprabha inscription, whose benedictory verse to the Sugata's lotus-feet was composed by the poet Sumangala, shows Buddhist piety speaking the common literary language of the city.

## Conclusion

As it is visible, religious harmony at Sripura was structural. Temples, markets, and monasteries physically overlapped. Buddhism offers a profound vision for world peace, making Sripura a perfect model of this ideal. The core value of compassion perfectly explains this integration. Still, this prominent Buddhist site remains fragile. Without swift conservation, its physical legacy risks fading to the elements. Preserving it secures a vital model of early religious coexistence.

The Harshagupta Vihara still awaits exhaustive exploration and the excavation required through a systematic geo-spatial survey of the unexcavated mounds. Though, Sirpur, the location, already offers the special identity, surface-legible case in which a Buddhist world-view.

**Keywords** - Archaeology, Buddhism, Chhattisgarh, Dakṣiṇa Kosala, Sirpur

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