

PAHARPUR AND ITS MONUMENTS

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CHAPTER IV

GENERAL PLAN

THE mound known as Satyapīr's Bhita is situated at a distance of 300 yards from the eastern side of the monastery. The original mound was not at all high, the central point of the mound being only 6 to 7 ft. high with the gradual sloping towards the sides, especially in the northern and the southern sides.

When this mound was excavated, all the remains were exposed. The compound wall on all the three sides except the north has been found. On the north there is a structure which is situated across the compound-wall on the southern side. The whole site appears to be trapezoidal in shape; the southern boundary-wall is about 140', the eastern boundary-wall over 250' and the western boundary-wall 300' in length. The most important structure within the compound of this site is the main temple (Pl. V).

ENTRANCE-HALL

The approach to the area and to the main temple was on the south which is the narrowest side. In front of the main temple and at a distance of 130' stood a building which served the purpose of an entrance-hall in the later age.

There is another building in the south-eastern corner. It consists of a central corridor flanked by three rooms on the south and north.

MAIN TEMPLE

The main temple consists of two parts, viz., the main

shrine or sanctum in the northern portion and a pillared hall on the south around which was carried the circumambulatory passage (Pl. IV, b). About 51 circular terracotta plaques with the figure of eight-handed Tārā and the Buddhist creed inscribed on them have been found in the courtyard of the main temple. On palaeographical grounds these belong to the eleventh century A.D. In the Nalanda inscription of Vipulaśrīmitra it has been stated that Vipulaśrīmitra built a temple of Tārā with an attached court and a tank at Somapura identified with Paharpur. Since the effigies of Tārā have been found in such large numbers in Satyapīr's Bhita and at no other place in Paharpur and since there is the presence of the superstructure of a temple at this site, the irresistible conclusion is that this temple was the original temple of Tārā referred to in the above inscription. No trace of the tank has been found. The court which has been found here may be ascribed to the monk Vipulaśrīmitra

VOTIVE STŪPAS

Besides this temple a number of votive stūpas which are either square or rectangular or circular have been found in this area. They number altogether 123. The largest stūpa is the circular one which has a diameter of 25' and is situated to the north-west of the main temple, while the smallest is also the circular one which has a diameter of 2'9" and is situated to the south-west of the enclosure.

DISCOVERED ANTIQUITIES

Among the antiquities found here mention should be made of a bronze statue of Jambhala and some glazed polychrome pottery with chocolate and white floral ornament

or white and green foliated leaves on a brown background. Similar pottery has not been found on the other local sites and for the matter of that on any other site in Bengal.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE archaeological excavations at Paharpur not only brought to light one of the most magnificent monuments of ancient India but also some unique specimens of sculpture which fill up a great gap in the history of Bengal art. It seems that the evidence of the art of sculpture in Bengal dates from the Mauryan age. Some terracotta figurines have been found at several sites in Bengal, among which mention should be made of Gitagram. There is a resemblance in modelling between the specimens found at Gitagram and those found at other sites whose date has been definitely proved to be Maurya. Some other terracotta figurines found here and at Mahasthan have been ascribed to the Sunga age. Two sculptures of Sūrya, one from Kumarpur and the other from Niyamatpur, both in Rajshahi district, an image of Vishnu found at Hankrail in Malda district and a colossal head found in Dinajpur district, betray Kushana influence and it is, therefore, highly probable that they are to be ascribed to the Kushana age. Further, certain sculptures which have been found are to be ascribed to the Gupta age. These sculptures are an image of Buddha found at Biharail in Rajshahi district, an image of Sūrya found at Deora in Bogra district and an image of Mañjurśī found at Mahasthan in Bogra district.

STONE-SCULPTURE

The sculptures found on the walls of the main temple at Paharpur are mainly of two types, viz., stone-sculpture and

GĀNEŚA

Gāneśa is represented on some of the terracotta plaques.

KRISHNA LEGEND SCENES

There are many terracotta-plaques in which the Krishṇa legend is depicted.

RĀMĀYĀNA-SCENES

Besides there are some other terracotta plaques which represent scenes from the Rāmāyāna.

BUDDHA

There are certain terracotta plaques which represent Buddhist deities. On one is the representation of Buddha seated on the *vajrāsana* in the earth-touching attitude.

BUDDHIST PANTHEON

Other Buddhist deities who have been represented are Bodhisattva Padmapāni, Mañjuśrī, Jambhala and Tārā.

PANCHATANTRA-SCENES

The most important are some terracotta plaques which give us an idea of the folk art of Bengal. Stories narrated in the Pañchatantra have been depicted on some of the terracotta plaques. In one is found a monkey sitting on a beam of wood and holding the wedge in its right hand. This at once reminds one of the story of kilotpāṭī vānarah narrated in Pañchatantra. The purport of the story is that a monkey came to grief by pulling out a wedge from a split beam of wood in a saw-mill (Pl. X, 6). In another plaque is found an elephant who has been trapped and three mice who are trying to loosen the trap. In Aesop's

Fables there is the story of the lion and the mouse in which one lion who has been trapped is released from the snare by a grateful mouse. In this case the purport seems to be the same, though here are represented an elephant instead of the lion and three mice instead of one mouse (Pl. X, a).

LOWER ANIMAL

The representation of the animal kingdom is almost complete so far as the fauna of Bengal is concerned. The animals represented are mainly buffalo, antelope, elephant, horse, camel, monkey, bull, goat, lion, bear, tiger, rhinoceros and jackal.

BIRD

Birds have also been depicted. The most popular of all the birds is the duck or goose. Besides this the parrot and the peacock are also represented.

FISH

Fish has also been represented either with a chain in the mouth or in the symbolic way of two fishes crossing each other.

FLORA

In comparison with the fauna on the terracotta plaques it must be admitted that the flora is very poorly represented. Prominent among the fauna are the plantain tree, the banyan tree and the lotus.

