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### DUBBA OR BHURHA: A NEWLY INVESTIGATED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE IN SOUTH BIHAR

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Dubba or Bhurha (24°39'45"/84°44'56") is located about 50 Km from Gaya town and approximately 20 Km north of Sherghati via NH-2. It lies under the police station of Gurua in the Gaya district of south Bihar. Lying in the southern part of the district, the area in and around Dubba has a broken undulating tract with long ranges of hills. These high lands project into the alluvial plains to the north as spurs off from the Chhotanagpur plateau.

So, far as the earlier investigations/researches are concerned, it is possibly the site "Booraha" mentioned by Kittoe in 1847 where he noticed "several sites where there have been *chaityas* and a large *vihara*" (Kittoe 1847:277). But, details of the ancient relics recorded from the site have not paid any attention in his report. The major water source of the village is a natural spring, known as Bhurha Nadi (however Kittoe referred to a hot spring) nearby.

The present paper is the outcome of a recent field survey at Dubba or Bhurha as a part of the author's post-doctoral research work. These article endeavours a detail documentation of each and every sculptural/architectural remains reported from this site. The prime concern of the present article are to provide first hand report about this freshly explored site, and to give an inventory of the hitherto unreported sculptural/architectural remains documented from here along with their iconographic intricacies.

In course of our recent survey, sculptural and architectural specimens have been recorded from seven find-spots in the village of Dubba. The find-spots are- 1. Rajakiya Madhya Vidyalaya complex, 2. Bhagabati temple compound, 3. Dubba Bagicha, 4. Stray occurrence under a tree, 5. Imambara, 6. Inside the residential complex of a villager, 7. Bhurha temple complex.

Rajakiya Madhya Vidyalaya complex is situated to the north of the village. The school is built on a huge eroded mound (**Plate 8.1**), a part of which is still visible to the south of the school. Two votive *stūpas* and few architectural members are found scattered on the compound of the school. The domical votive *stūpas* are carved with four seated miniature Buddhas in various postures on its four sides. These votive *stūpas* measure 90 cm in height, 130 cm in dia and 102 cm in height, 157 cm in dia respectively.

Bhagabati temple compound lies to the south of the Rajakiya Madhya Vidyalaya. Here two standing Buddha images are recorded inside the sanctum and an image of Viṣṇu is found fixed

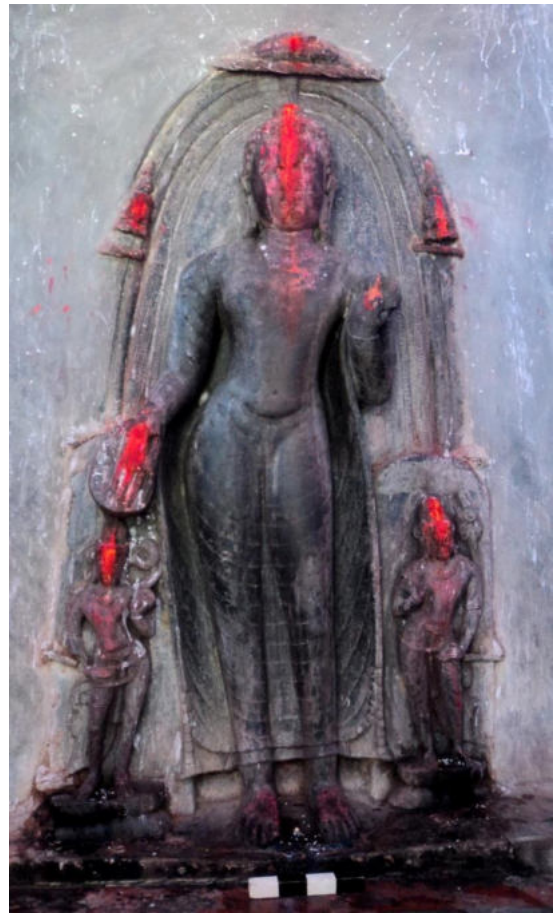
on the wall of the temple. The first Buddha figure (**Plate 8.2**), measures (135×66) cm is found in almost damaged condition. Here Buddha is standing in *Samapādashānaka* posture on a rounded pedestal. Facial part is completely abraded, only the hair arranged in shell-like curls with prominent flame like *uṣṇīṣa* is discernible. His right hand rests in *varadamudrā*, while the broken left hand possibly holds the hem of the monastic robe. He wears a long transparent cloth extended up to his feet and adorned with an elaborate necklace. Almost circular stela is topped with a broken umbrella. Buddha is accompanied with two crowned Bodhisattvas in his two lower sides. Both of them are clad in long transparent cloths and bejeweled with crowns and elaborate necklaces. The Bodhisattva to the right side holds the end of the robe in his left hand while the right hand placed in *varadamudrā*. The Bodhisattva to the left side rests his left hand akimbo and right hand is broken. Two miniatures seated Buddha figures are also visible to the two upper sides of the Buddha. The right one is seated in *bhūmisparśamudrā* on a lotus pedestal, while the left one is seated on a lotus pedestal in *vyākhyānamudrā*. Stylistically, this Buddha figure may be dated to *c.* late sixth-seventh centuries CE. The second Buddha image (**Plate 8.3**), measures (185×99) cm is standing in *tri-bhaṅga* posture. Facial feature of the figure is completely abraded, only long ear lobes and the hair arranged in shell-like curls with prominent flame like *uṣṇīṣa* are discernible. He wears a long diaphanous garment extended up to his feet. His right hand rests in *varadamudrā* framed by a lotus and the left hand holds the hem of the garment. The oval-shaped stela is decorated with three-lined beaded border and is topped with an umbrella. Here, Buddha is accompanied with two Bodhisattvas, viz. Avalokiteśvara to the right and Maitreya to the left. Both of them are standing in *tri-bhaṅga* pose on double-petalled lotus pedestals. Facial features of both the figures are mutilated. They wear transparent lower garments, the fold of which is hanging between their two legs and *upavīta*. They are ornamented with *mukuṭas*, necklaces, bangles, armlets and anklets. Avalokiteśvara holds a full-blown lotus in his upraised left hand, while the right hand is placed in the waist. Maitreya holds *nāgakeśara* in the left hand and the right hand is broken. Two miniature votive *stūpas* are visible on two upper sides of the stela. Stylistically, this figure may be assignable to *c.* late sixth-seventh centuries CE. The image of Viṣṇu (**Plate 8.4**), measuring (108×60) cm is standing in *Samapādashānaka* posture. The figure is four armed, and holds his usual attributes. The frontal right hand holds a *padma*, and frontal left hand holds a *śaṅkha*. Among the upraised back two hands, the right one holds a mace (*gadā*), while a *chakra* is placed in the left one. The image is clad in a cloth (*dhoti*) that reaches up to the feet and is tied by a girdle. The ornamented fold of the cloth is hanging between his two legs. The deity is adorned with a *kirīṭamukuṭa*, an elaborate necklace, two heavy ear rings, bracelets, armlets, a pearl *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread), and a long *vanamālā* reaching down beneath the knees and centered with a decorated floral motif. The facial features of the god are completely abraded. The curling tresses of hair of the god are falling down and resting on her shoulders. The god is accompanied with two attendants, probably *Cakrapuruṣa* on the left and *Gadādevī* on the right. Both the attendant figures are standing in relaxed *tri-bhaṅga* pose and wear lower garments and usual ornaments. *Cakrapuruṣa*



**Plate 8.1:** Huge eroded mound to the north of the village Dubba.



**Plate 8.2:** Standing figure of Buddha.

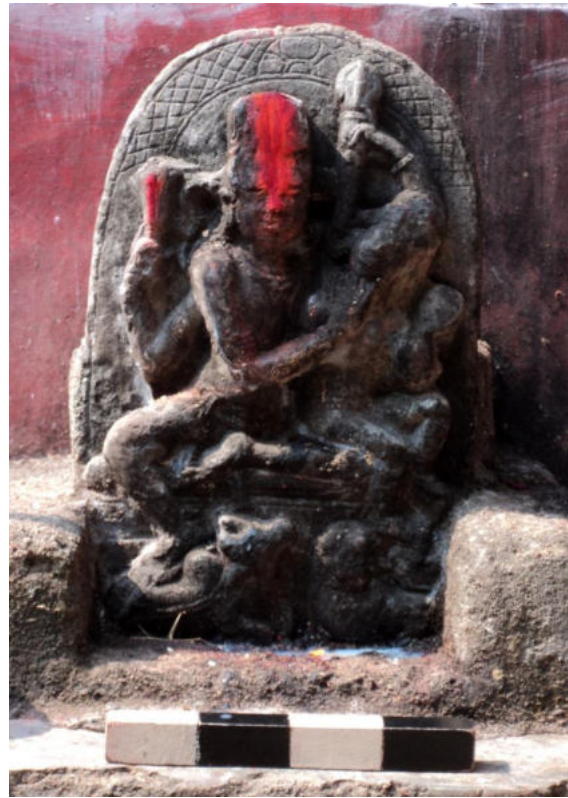


**Plate 8.3:** Standing image of Buddha.





**Plate 8.4:** Image of Viṣṇu.



**Plate 8.5:** Image of Umā-Maheśvara.



**Plate 8.6:** Small seated image of Buddha.



**Plate 8.7:** De-headed image of Buddha.



**Plate 8.8:** Cluster of votive *stūpas* and architectural members.

holds a *nīlotpala* in his raised right hand while his left hand is akimbo, and *Gadādevī* holds a lotus or a *cauri* in her raised left hand and her right hand is akimbo. The rectangular (gently oval shaped towards the top) stela is embellished with floral scrolls at the centre and with two garland bearing *vidyādharas* are at the top of the each corner of the back-slab. The image may be assignable to *c.* eighth-ninth centuries CE. Besides, a cluster of few votive *stūpas* (one votive *stūpa* measures 71 cm in height and 146 cm in diameter) and a figure of Umā-Maheśvara are found under a *neem* tree. The abraded image of Umā-Maheśvara (**Plate 8.5**), measuring (41×28×10) cm shows the figures of Umā and Maheśvara are seen embracing each other. The god is seated with the pendant right leg on the back of a bull, the mount of the god and the left leg is kept in its usual position. The bull is shown seated below the god. Maheśvara is bedecked with a transparent cloth, beaded girdle on the waist, necklace, armlets, anklets, ear-rings and a *jaṭāmukuta*, the locks of which fall on his shoulder. Umā, the consort of Śiva, is found seated on his left thigh with left leg hanging and rests on the back of a lion, the mount of the goddess and the right leg is folded. The lion is shown seated below the goddess. Umā is also attired in a diaphanous lower garment, and is bejewelled in the same fashion as the god, except a bun shaped hair style. The four handed Maheśvara touches the chin of Umā with normal right hand and her breast with the normal left hand. The other pair of hands holds a *nīlotpala*, a typical emblem of Śiva on the right and a *triśūla* or trident on the upraised left hand. Umā's right hand is placed on the right shoulder of the god and her left hand possibly holds a lotus. The rounded stela is decorated with simple etched geometric and floral designs. This figure may be ascribed to *c.* seventh-eighth centuries CE.





**Plate 8.9:** Small seated image of Buddha (damaged).

*mudrā* on a double-petalled lotus pedestal. The facial part of the image is completely broken out. The remaining right portion of the back-slab exhibits two miniature votive *stūpas* and a flying garland bearing *vidyādhara* at the top corner. This image may be dated to *c.* seventh-eighth centuries CE.

A number of sculptural and architectural specimens have been recorded from various spots of the Bhurha temple complex. A de-headed Buddha image and a votive *stūpa* have been found under a *pipal* tree. The head-less image of Buddha (**Plate 8.7**) measures (87×40×8) cm is seated in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on a plain pedestal. Here, the left hand of Buddha lies open on the lap and the right hand is rested in *bhūmiṣparśamudrā*. He wears a transparent cloth, a *saṃghāṭi*, an *upavīta* (sacred thread), drapery, the fold of which is visible on the top of the pedestal between his two crossed-legs and an elaborate necklace. The toes of his feet are marked with auspicious lotus symbols. The remaining broken parts of the back-slab to the right and left show

Dubbabagicha is located to the east of the school, where a decorated votive *stūpa* (66 cm in height and 173 cm in diameter) carved with miniature Buddhas of different poses in four sides has been noticed under a sugar-apple tree. The frontal part of the *stūpa* is decorated with two crouching lions centred with a *pūrṇaḡhaṭa*. The votive *stūpa* is crowned with one tiered *chhtrāvalī*.

A few architectural members are strewn under a *pipal* tree at Imambara area of the village. Among them one architectural member is carved with tiny Buddha image measures (40 × 40 × 40) cm.

A small seated image of Buddha (**Plate 8.6**), measures (42×29×9) cm has been documented in the house complex of Rajdeo Prasad, a local school teacher. The figure is made of slate variety of stone. Here, the abraded and partially broken image of Buddha is seated in *bhūmiṣparśa-*

representation of pillars and bow down elephants topped with standing lions. The plain pedestal is decorated with lotus and beaded patters. Stylistically, the figure may be dated to *c.* seventh-eighth centuries CE. The dome-shaped votive *stūpa* (26 cm in height and 128 cm in diameter) is carved with two miniature Buddhas in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and *vyākhyānamudrā* respectively in its two visible sides. A damaged image of Revanta, a broken image of Sūrya, three votive *stūpas*, and an architectural member are found fixed on a wall near Bhurha Nadi. The completely damaged and broken image of Revanta, measures (38×36) cm, only shows the figure of Revanta riding on a horse and an umbrella bearer seated to the back of the Revanta and holding a *chatra* on the head of the figure. The extant lower part of the Sūrya image, measures (53×42) cm exhibits that the god is standing in *Samapādashānaka* posture on a *tri-ratha* pedestal. The pedestal is well-decorated with seven horses of the sun god. The central horse is depicted frontally, and three horses on each side are galloping towards left and right respectively. The god is attired with a close fitting beautifully designed lower garment, the fold of which is hanging between his legs, a jeweled waistband or *kaṭibandha* and a pearl *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread). Above the middle horse is the damaged figure of legless charioteer *Aruṇa*. The god is also accompanied by his customary attendants standing in *tri-bhaṅga* pose. To his right stand the pot-bellied and bearded *Piṅgala*, carrying pen and inkpot in his two hands. On the left stands *Danḍī*, with his right hand exhibiting the *abhayamudrā* and the left hand rests on a staff. These attendant deities are also clad with transparent cloth, ear-rings and *mukuta*. Both the Viṣṇu and Sūrya images may be dated between *c.* ninth-tenth centuries CE. Among three votive *stūpas*, measuring (12×30) cm, (24 × 29) cm and (27 × 68) cm respectively, two are carved with the figures of miniature Buddha in *bhūmisparśamudrā*. The architectural member, measures (36 × 50) cm, is divided into three parts. The upper portion shows two crouching lions centred with a *pūrṇaghāṭa*, in the middle there is a tiny Buddha figure in *vyākhyānamudrā* carved within a triangular niche and the lower part exhibits a row of five miniature Buddhas in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and *dhyanamudrā* alternatively. An architectural member measures (41 × 37) cm, carved with *gavākṣa* like motive in the lower part and four architectural members carved with Buddha panels (miniature seated Buddhas in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and *dhyanamudrā* alternatively) measuring (38 × 33) cm each are found fixed on the wall of a small temple near Bhurha Nadi. A cluster of five votive *stūpas* and other architectural members are found beneath a *neem* tree (**Plate 8.8**). Among five votive *stūpas*, frontal part of the biggest one, measures (67 cm in height and 171 cm in diameter) is decorated with two crouching lions centred with a *pūrṇaghāṭa* in the upper part and a row of five miniature Buddhas seated in *bhūmisparśamudrā*, *vyākhyānamudrā* and *dhyanamudrā* alternatively. Another two votive *stūpas*, measure (29 × 60) cm and (31 × 70) cm respectively are carved with tiny seated Buddha figures in different poses in their four lower sides. Two damaged small figures of seated Buddha, and an architectural member carved with Buddha panel are found fixed on a wall near an eroded mound. The first small Buddha figure (**Plate 8.9**), measures (36 × 32) cm is seated in *bhūmisparśamudrā* on a full-blown double-petalled lotus pedestal. The facial part of the figure is broken out. Whatever

discernible from the image shows that the Buddha touches the mother Earth with right hand and places left hand on lap and sits cross-legged fully determined to attain enlightenment. He wears an *upavīta* (sacred thread), drapery, the fold of which is visible on the top of the pedestal between his two crossed-legs and a *saṃghāti*, which leaves the shoulder bare. The extra length of the robe is gathered over the shoulder and then disposed of a strip. The central facet of the *tri-ratha* pedestal is decorated with wavy foliated pattern and the two devotees in *añjali hasta* are represented in two corners of the pedestal. This figure may be ascribable to c. ninth-tenth centuries CE. The second almost abraded figure of Buddha, measures (29×15) cm only exhibits that Buddha is seated in *bhūmisparśamudrā* on a full-blown double-petalled lotus pedestal. He wears an *upavīta* (sacred thread), drapery, the fold of which is visible on the top of the pedestal between his two crossed-legs and a *saṃghāti*, which leaves the shoulder bare. The extra length of the robe is gathered over the shoulder and then disposed of a strip. Facial part, pedestal and other features are completely worn out. This figure may also be dated to c. ninth-tenth centuries CE. Top portion of the recorded architectural member, measures (39 × 35) cm is carved with a row of three miniature seated Buddha in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and *dhyanamudrā* alternatively. The lower part shows an abraded small figure of seated Buddha in *vyākhyānamudrā* within a triangular niche. A cluster of two votive *stūpas* and other architectural members are also visible near this mound. The domical shaped two votive *stūpas*, each measure (60 cm in height and 231 cm in diameter) are carved with tiny figures of seated Buddhas in various poses in their four lower sides.

The above empirical database provides an idea about the archaeological potentiality of this newly explored site of Dubba or Bhurhaas gleaned from the sculptural and architectural remains. However, the database collected from this site cannot claim to be sufficient in the reconstruction of the icono-plastic art tradition of the region. It is however necessary to supplement our understanding of the same with relevant archaeological and historical data and comparative analysis with other adjoining areas of the concerned region. The site was possibly developed as a religious complex or establishment, either associated with Buddhist or Brahmanical idioms. Our present survey however reveals a strong Buddhist connection of the site, as revealed from a sizeable collection of Buddhist associated sculptural and architectural specimens (Buddha in different postures, a number of votive *stūpas*, and architectural members with Buddha panel etc.) in our database. According to the local villagers, these sculptural and architectural members have been recovered from two huge eroded structural mounds still visible in the village. During our survey, bricks, brick-bats and small stone architectural members are found scattered on these mounds. These two mounds may be identified with the *chaityas* and a *vihara* earlier referred by Kittoe. The discovery of a few Brahmanical images (Viṣṇu, Umā-Maheśvara, Revanta, Sūrya) may also suggest some sort of Brahmanical affiliation of the site. Contextually, the sculptural and architectural specimens recorded from the site definitely occurred as *in situ* occurrences associated with a large religious complex. But now they have lost their *in situ* characteristics and



found as stray occurrences or kept in newly built temples. The recorded specimens could be tentatively dated between *c.* late sixth and ninth-tenth centuries CE on the basis of their stylistic minutiae. The sculptural specimens reported from here have a relationship with other contemporary religious sites/settlements of south Bihar, particularly those in the Gaya-Bodhgaya, Rajgir and Nālandā region. The standing Buddha figures reported from Dubba have resemblances with Buddha figures reported from Nālandā and Rajgir-Bodhgaya area. (Dehejia 1997; Misra 1998). Umā-Maheśvara image from Dubba with plain rounded stela is almost similar to the specimen reported from Viṣṇupad temple complex at Gaya. Discovery of a considerable number of decorated and undecorated architectural members and votive *stūpas* from the site clearly suggest extensive religious structural activities during the later Gupta and successive early medieval periods. So, it may be postulated that, Dubba or Bhurha primarily developed as an integral part of the diffusion of the early Buddhist development witnessed in the Nālandā and Rajgir-Bodhgaya region. Later, in the early medieval period, royal patronage, political stability, and the growth of institutional development of Buddhist philosophy and art centering around Nālandā and Vikramaśilā certainly played an important role in the proliferation of icono-plastic art tradition in this region as a whole. This tradition also extended up to the lower Ganga valley, north Bengal and even Bangladesh.

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