

Historical Analysis of the Archaeological Remains Discovered in the Reevagarh Region of Chhattisgarh

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Abstract:

In recent years, continuous excavation activities have been carried out in the Reevagarh (Arang) region of Chhattisgarh, resulting in the discovery of significant archaeological evidence related to ancient history. Various coins belonging to different dynasties, pottery fragments, remains of architectural structures, stupas, and ring wells have been unearthed from the site, all of which testify to the region's rich historical heritage. This research assumes particular importance as it contributes substantially to the authentic reconstruction of the ancient history of Chhattisgarh while simultaneously highlighting the cultural pride of the region. The study critically examines the commercial and economic activities of the area, along with its prevailing religious conditions. On the basis of the excavated remains, light has also been shed on the construction practices and production-related activities that once flourished here. Furthermore, the research explores the historical and cultural connections of Reevagarh with other prominent archaeological sites of Chhattisgarh. As part of the study, continuous observations of the excavation site were conducted from 2019 to 2026. In addition, research journals published by the Department of Archaeology, Chhattisgarh, were thoroughly examined. To ensure the authenticity and reliability of the study, local legends and folk traditions prevalent among the people were carefully analyzed, and interviews were conducted with local residents and senior members of the community. Thus, the present research makes a significant contribution toward the reconstruction and deeper understanding of the ancient history of Chhattisgarh.

Keywords: Chhattisgarh, Reevagarh, Excavation, Archaeology, History, Ancient Period, Arang

Introduction:

The ancient name of Chhattisgarh was *Dakshina Kosala*, whose capital was Siripur (Sirpur). During the Mauryan period, Dakshina Kosala formed a part of the Mauryan Empire. Evidence of this is found in the inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka, engraved in Brahmi script (Dhamma script) in the Sitabengra cave of Surguja, as well as the depiction of Jataka tales in the Jogimara–Sitabenga caves. In central Chhattisgarh, discoveries of punch-marked coins, stupas, and Buddhist monasteries further attest to the region's ancient cultural heritage. Likewise, the presence of the Bhongapal Chaitya Griha in the Bastar region reflects glimpses of ancient Indian history and the spread of Buddhist civilization even into remote forested areas. During the Gupta period, Samudragupta invaded Dakshina Kosala and defeated its ruler Mahendra.

Thereafter, several local dynasties, including the Meghavanshis, the unidentified Rajarshitulya lineage, the Sharabhapuriyas, and the Panduvamshis, ruled the region. The reign of the Panduvamshi king Mahashivagupta Balarjuna is regarded as the Golden Age of Dakshina Kosala for the remarkable advancement of culture and civilization. During this period, the Mahayana branch of Buddhism exerted significant influence in the region. It was during the reign of Mahashivagupta Balarjuna that the Chinese traveler Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) visited Sirpur in 639 CE. In his travel account *Si-Yu-Ki*, he described Siripur as the political center of the kingdom of Kiyassalo (Dakshina Kosala). He recorded that the region contained hundreds of Buddhist monasteries inhabited by thousands of monks, and that the king himself was a devoted follower of Buddhism. Xuanzang further noted that all the surrounding regions of Sirpur were important Buddhist centers. He also mentioned the tradition that Gautama Buddha himself had visited Sirpur and spent four months there during the rainy retreat (*Varsavasa*). The areas surrounding Sirpur, including Turturiya, Arang, Mahasamund, and Reevagarh, were important centers of Buddhism, traces of which still survive today. Arang, which in ancient times was known by names such as Bhanddeval and Gauragarh, held an important position after Sirpur and Malhar. Although present-day Arang has transformed into a modern settlement, the excavation site of Reevagarh continues to testify to the grandeur of this region. The excavations at Reevagarh have revealed evidence associated with the Indus Valley Civilization, the Mahajanapada period, the Mauryan and post-Mauryan eras, the Gupta period, and various local dynasties. These findings have firmly established the antiquity and historical significance of Chhattisgarh.

Geographical Location of Reevagarh

Chhattisgarh is situated in the central-eastern part of India. The state was formally established on 1 November 2000 after being separated from Madhya Pradesh. It lies between 17°46' to 24°05' North latitude and 80°15' to 84°20' East longitude, covering an area of approximately 137,798 square kilometers. Reevagarh is located in the plains region of Chhattisgarh, to the east of the state capital Raipur, on the Raipur–Sambalpur route. It is situated about 25 kilometers from Raipur and nearly 12 kilometers from Arang, in the north-western direction. The site can be reached through the village of Lakholi. The term “Reeva” is believed to have originated from the *Reeva* tree. According to local villagers, the abundance of Reeva trees in the area may have led to the naming of the site as Reevagarh. Another local interpretation suggests that the word *Reeva* means “near,” and since the ancient settlement was situated close to the Kolhan stream (*Kolhan Nala*), the region came to be known as Reevagarh. Apart from Reeva trees, the area is also rich in mango, peepal, banyan, banyan fig (*bar*), and semal trees. A large reservoir known as Bandha Talab is situated here, near which stands the Chandika Panchsheel Temple. Adjacent to this temple lies the archaeological site, where nearly forty-two mounds indicate the possibility of extensive ancient remains. Excavation work at the site is still in progress. At a distance of about one kilometer from Reevagarh, near Gujra Phatak, there is an earthen stupa connected to the main road. This structure further highlights the archaeological and historical significance of the region.

Reevagarh in History

Reevagarh has now emerged as one of the prominent archaeological sites of Chhattisgarh. In the reports of the Archaeological Survey, Alexander Cunningham referred to the mythological traditions associated with the Arang region and the dynasties that ruled there for a long period of time. Arang has been described

as the city of *Moradhvaj*, a term that appears to symbolize the peacock (*mor*), the totem of the Mauryan dynasty, and the peacock emblem depicted upon royal banners. This association gains further significance due to the presence of Mauryan-period stupas and monasteries in the region. J. D. Beglar also mentioned Arang, noting that to the north-east of the town there existed the foundations of ancient brick structures, which had gradually turned into brick quarries. Bricks extracted from these ruins were later reused in the construction of houses and buildings within the town. It is possible that Beglar may also have visited Reevagarh, since the site lies in the north-eastern part of Arang. The same condition is visible even today in the earthen stupa situated along the main road, where local farmers removed bricks from the structure and utilized them for making field embankments and agricultural plots. This reflects the fact that contemporary society at that time possessed little awareness regarding the preservation of heritage, while practical necessities assumed greater importance. Inscriptions discovered in Brahmi script from local dynasties mention the names of kings and their chronological order, though they do not clearly identify the dynasty itself. Consequently, some historians assigned the name *Rajarshitulya Kula* to this otherwise unidentified lineage, although this designation may not be historically authentic. According to another interpretation, the first ruler of this lineage was Sura; therefore, the dynasty may originally have been known as the *Suravanshi* lineage, which gradually evolved into the *Suryavanshi* tradition. Their royal emblem or totem was believed to be the lion or tiger. One branch of these rulers is thought to have established itself at Sirpur, also known as Surpur, where according to Puranic traditions, the rule of Banasura (identified with Balarjuna) prevailed. Sirpur subsequently developed into the capital of Dakshina Kosala.

Epigraphic evidence also mentions a mountain or elevated region known as *Bhringar*. Since no major hills or mountainous remains are found in present-day Arang, it is possible that the term referred instead to the large mounds of Reevagarh. Some historians even identify *Bhringar* as the ancient name of Arang itself. Historians and archaeologists continue to remain deeply curious about Reevagarh. Chhattisgarh's folk traditions preserve the famous love story of Chanda, the daughter of King Mahar, and the young hero Lorik. Even before the excavations, this legend survived vividly in the collective memory of the local people. A folk song, traditionally sung during Holi celebrations or the *Danda* dance, proclaims:

*“Reevagarh tore nahin toote re,
Reevagarh tore nahin toote re”*
(“The fortress of Reevagarh cannot be broken.”)

This song glorifies the impregnability and strength of the fortifications of Reevagarh. It perhaps preserves the memory of fierce invasions and prolonged warfare that once devastated the site. The association of the song with the *Danda* dance may symbolize the arduous struggle undertaken by enemies to conquer the fortress. Thus, the fame of Reevagarh has remained widespread throughout Chhattisgarh for centuries. The mention of King Mahar in local traditions, together with the discovery of coins associated with the *Magha* or *Megha* dynasty, suggests that names such as *Magha*, *Maghar*, *Magar*, and *Mahar* may represent linguistic transformations that occurred over time. In the *Prayag Prashasti* of Samudragupta, the ruler of Dakshina Kosala is referred to as Mahendra, who may possibly be identified with Maharendra or King Mahar of local tradition. Furthermore, the Indus region site of Mehrgarh has yielded some of the earliest

evidence of agriculture in South Asia. It is possible that migrating communities from that region contributed to the spread of agricultural practices into this part of central India as well.

Following the excavations, the political, social, economic, and cultural significance of Reevagarh has been brought to light. These discoveries have contributed substantially to the reconstruction of the political and cultural history of Chhattisgarh. Archaeological evidence from the site reveals connections with the Indus Valley Civilization, the Mauryan period, the Satavahana period, the Kushan period, the local Megha rulers, and the Kalachuri dynasty, demonstrating extensive political, economic, and cultural interactions. The discovery of a large number of stupas and the wide extent of the site place Reevagarh alongside major historical centers such as Sirpur and Malhar, both of which were prominent urban and religious centers of Dakshina Kosala.

The Indus Valley Civilization is regarded as one of the world's earliest advanced civilizations, renowned for its sophisticated urban planning and drainage systems. Similar to the ring wells discovered at various Harappan sites, a ring well has also been unearthed at Reevagarh. Its water source appears to have been connected to a nearby reservoir, supplying the inhabitants with clean and potable water. These ring wells were constructed using terracotta rings placed one above another, reflecting the advanced water management system of Reevagarh. Comparable ring wells have also been discovered at Barnawa on the banks of the Hindon River, as well as in regions such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Delhi. This suggests that the techniques and training of ancient construction artisans may have been remarkably uniform across India.

The excavated remains from Reevagarh, including coins and pottery, establish connections with several ancient Indian dynasties. Among India's earliest known metallic currencies were the silver punch-marked coins, also known as *Ahat* coins, which often depicted symbols inspired by nature. Similar Mauryan-period coins have been discovered at several places in Chhattisgarh, including Akaltara, Thathari, Bar, Bilaspur, Tarapur, Udela, and Arang. These findings indicate that the region may once have formed part of the Mauryan Empire. The punch-marked coins discovered at Reevagarh bear five symbolic motifs, including the sun, tree, wheel, river, and fort. One side of the coin carries these symbols, while the reverse remains completely blank. Nearly two hundred copper and silver coins, mostly rectangular in shape, have been discovered at the site. Some coins are broken and depict mountains and marching elephants, while others display multiple symbols simultaneously. Certain coins also contain inscriptions in Brahmi script (Dhamma script).

During the post-Mauryan period, the Kushan dynasty established its authority in India. Under the reign of Kanishka, gold coinage became widespread, and coins modeled after the Greco-Bactrian tradition were introduced, bearing portraits of rulers. Kushan-period coins of Kanishka and Huvishka have been excavated at Reevagarh. Fifty-two circular coins of Kanishka were found stored inside a vessel. At the same time that the Kushan Empire flourished in northern India, Chhattisgarh was ruled by the local Megha dynasty. Coins of the Megha rulers have been found in large numbers in the Malhar region, and similarly, Meghavanshi coins have also been recovered from the excavations at Reevagarh. These are primarily of the elephant type. Coins of Sarikramaditya, a ruler of the Sharabhapuriya dynasty, have likewise been discovered here. Among the Kalachuri rulers, gold coins of Ratnadeva and copper coins of Jajalladeva have also been unearthed.

These discoveries suggest that after the Mauryan rulers, local Megha kings exercised political authority in the region. Reevagarh appears to have maintained active commercial and cultural relations with several

contemporary dynasties. The recovery of coins ranging from the Mauryan period to the Kalachuri period significantly enhances the historical importance of the site. The continuity of settlement and political activity over such a long duration indicates that the region was economically prosperous and politically strong, while the Megha and Sharabhapuriya dynasties may have exercised prolonged rule here. Therefore, Reevagarh can be regarded as one of the most ancient and historically significant sites of Chhattisgarh, and its discoveries are reshaping the understanding of the state's early history.

| S. No. | Name of Dynasty | Name/Symbol of the Ruler | Chronology |
|--------|------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| 1. | Maurya Dynasty | Nature motifs depicted on punch-marked coins – approximately 200 specimens with five symbols | 322 BCE – 185 BCE |
| 2. | Megha Dynasty | Elephant-type coins | 2nd to 4th Century CE |
| 3. | Kushan Dynasty | Coins of Kanishka and Huvishka – 52 specimens | 127 CE – 190 CE |
| 4. | Sharabhapuriya Dynasty | Sarikramaditya | 4th – 5th Century CE |
| 5. | Kalachuri Dynasty | Ratnadeva III and Jajalladeva I – 2 specimens | 1090 CE – 1145 C |

Reevagarh is situated near the Kolhan stream, between the Kharun River and the Mahanadi River. The Kolhan stream ultimately merges into the Kharun River near Simga, while the Kharun itself is a tributary of the Shivnath River. In ancient times, these rivers likely served as important routes of transportation and communication. Since Sirpur was the ancient capital of Dakshina Kosala and Reevagarh lies at a comparatively short distance from it, trade and commercial activities may have flourished through waterways connected with the Mahanadi and Shivnath river systems, particularly through the Kharun River and the Kolhan stream. The discovery of a large quantity of coins strongly indicates that Reevagarh functioned as an important commercial center. Various goods were probably exported from this region in substantial quantities, generating wealth and currency circulation within the settlement. During the post-Mauryan period, India maintained active trade relations with the Roman Empire, and it is possible that merchants of Reevagarh purchased agricultural products from local farmers for export purposes. At the same time, local rulers may have encouraged agricultural production to sustain such trade networks.

Several stone fragments resembling oil-pressing structures have also been discovered at the site, suggesting that oil extraction and production were practiced locally. Even today, the Teli community, traditionally associated with oil production, forms a significant section of the local population. Reevagarh also appears to have been a center of bead-making and bangle production, as large numbers of beads of varying shapes and sizes have been excavated. These beads, black and red in color, include round forms as well as shapes resembling betel nuts. Their abundance suggests that the inhabitants possessed a strong inclination toward ornamentation and personal adornment. Terracotta figurines recovered from the site depict women adorned with necklaces resembling strings of pearls. Clay bangles coated with lime polish have also been unearthed, which are associated with the Satavahana period and resemble artifacts

recovered from the excavations at Terighat. In addition, objects associated with entertainment and childhood recreation, including toys and wheels of bullock carts, have been discovered. These findings indicate that the people of Reevagarh valued skill, creativity, and the intellectual development of children through various forms of play and craftsmanship.

Reevagarh was not only a major commercial center but also an important religious site. The region appears to have experienced repeated invasions over time, possibly due to its religious significance. Archaeological evidence reveals the presence of hundreds of stupas. Out of the forty-two identified mounds, only two or three have been excavated so far, yet nearly ten to twelve stupas have already been discovered. It is highly likely that future excavations will uncover many more stupas, indicating that Reevagarh once served as a major center of Buddhism. During periods of reaction against Buddhism, the site may have suffered destruction through invasions. Local traditions suggest that the fortifications and structures of the settlement were demolished and subsequently buried beneath layers of earth. The Panchsheel Chandika Temple in the vicinity also reflects Buddhist associations, since the concept of Panchsheel represents the five ethical principles of Buddhism. Emperor Ashoka himself was once referred to as Chand Ashoka before embracing Buddhism, and thus the temple may symbolize the continuing reverence for Buddhist ideals in the region. The worship of Buddha images by local people further supports the interpretation of Reevagarh as an important Buddhist center.

At a short distance from the site, near Gujra Phatak, an earthen stupa has been discovered which may be compared in significance with the stupas of Nalanda and Vaishali. The bricks used in its construction appear to belong to the pre-Mauryan or Mauryan period, possibly dating to the time of Emperor Ashoka. Although evidence of grand palaces and royal buildings is comparatively limited, the abundance of religious remains suggests that while Arang may have functioned as the administrative center, Reevagarh perhaps developed primarily as a center of religion and learning. The foundations of structures discovered at the site may once have served as residences for monks, students, and devotees. The stupas and residential remains recovered through excavation evoke comparisons with ancient centers of learning such as Takshashila. It is possible that a large number of students pursued education here, supported through grants of villages and wealth donated by rulers for the maintenance of monasteries and educational institutions. Reevagarh occupies an important place in the folk traditions of Chhattisgarh. Folk songs sung during the Danda dance frequently mention Reevagarh, while the famous Lorik-Chanda ballad refers to Chanda, the daughter of King Meher of Gauragarh. Even today, Reevagarh is sometimes known locally as Lorikgarh Reeva. These traditions suggest that local Meher rulers may once have governed the regions of Arang and Reeva. Nearby areas such as Khallari, Mahasamund, Arang, Sirpur, and other parts of central Chhattisgarh continue to show a strong presence of the Meher and Mochi communities. In Khallari, inscriptions and traditions associated with Narayanpal Mochi provide evidence of temple construction activities. Similarly, the city of Jagdalpur in southern Chhattisgarh is believed to derive its name from Jagtu Meher. Various monuments across the region also display symbols associated with these communities. The term “Mahar” itself appears concealed within the name Malhar, and it is possible that the Megha dynasty gradually evolved linguistically into the Meher identity over time. Thus, the widespread presence of the Meher community across Chhattisgarh may preserve echoes of ancient historical traditions. Folk narratives do not survive in popular memory without foundation; rather, they often preserve fragments of local history within their poetic and oral traditions.

CONCLUSION

The archaeological excavations conducted at Reevagarh (Arang) clearly demonstrate that the region once served as an important cultural, economic, and religious center in ancient times. Coins of various dynasties, pottery, architectural remains, stupas, and ring wells collectively testify to the existence of an advanced urban life, vibrant trade activities, and religious diversity in the area. The study further indicates that Reevagarh maintained deep historical and cultural connections with other contemporary centers, making it part of a broader regional network. The remains associated with construction and production activities suggest the presence of organized economic systems and considerable technical expertise. Therefore, the excavations at Reevagarh play a highly significant role in reconstructing the ancient history of Chhattisgarh. At the same time, the site calls for more extensive and systematic future research so that the historical heritage of the region may emerge with even greater clarity and scholarly understanding.

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