Heritage of North Guwahati from Archaeological Perspective

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ABSTRACT: North Guwahati is a place with historical importance, located at 26.18° N and 91.72° E in the North bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra. Earlier it was the capital of Ahom kingdom. The area has a rich heritage with abounds of historical temples and archaeological structures viz. Dirgheswari Deavalay, Monikaraneswar Deavalay, Aswaklanta Deavalay, Rudreswar Deavalay, Dol Govinda Temple, Auniati Satra, Kanai borosibua rock etc. The present paper is an attempt to discuss the heritage of North Guwahati with special reference to Dirgheswari Deavalay, Monikaraneswar Deavalay, Aswaklanta Deavalay, Rudreswar Deavalay, Kanai borosibua rock with archaeological importance. The data for the present study were collected by visiting the temples and archaeological sites, interview with different eminent persons related to these temples and secondary materials like books, articles in different Journals etc. It is found that now a day all the temples and sites are facing different challenges regarding conservation.

Keywords: Assam, Archaeology, Deavalay, Heritage, North Guwahati.

I. Introduction:

The "archaeological heritage" is that part of the material heritage in respect of which archaeological methods provide primary information. It comprises all vestiges of human existence and consists of places relating to all manifestations of human activity, abandoned structures, and remains of all kinds (including subterranean and underwater sites), together with all the portable cultural material associated with them [1]. These are fragile and non-renewable cultural resource.

It is widely recognized that a knowledge and understanding of the origins and development of human societies is of fundamental importance to humanity in identifying its cultural and social roots. The archaeological heritage constitutes the basic record of past human activities. Its protection and proper management is therefore essential to enable archaeologists and other scholars to study and interpret it on behalf of and for the benefit of present and future generations.

North Guwahati is a place of historical importance with abounds of historical places and temples like, Dirgheswari Deavalay, Monikaraneswar Deavalay, and Kanai Borosibua rock inscriptions, Rudreswar Deavalay, Aswaklanta Deavalay and so on located on the north
bank of the mighty Brahmaputra. Earlier it was the head quarter of Ahom emperors. All these remains give an evidence of rich historical past of the land and people of the area.

II. Objectives of the Study: The main objective of the present study are-

i. To find out the archaeological remains of North Guwahati.
ii. To know the significance of archaeological structures of North Guwahati.
iii. To know the present status of the archaeological remains of North Guwahati.

III. Study Area:

The area of the North Guwahati region is about 52 square kilometer. It is situated around the coordinate of 26°12'28" North and 91°44'10" East and it is at about 168 feet high from the sea level. The whole region is uneven with a number of water bodies and hilly terrains. The climatic condition of this region is sub tropical with hot weather in summer and cold in winter. The annual average recorded temperature is 28.67°C, annual average rainfall is 159.7 cm, and annual average humidity is 81.01%. This region is situated along the river Brahmaputra and connected with the river by the drainage such as ‘Nowak halijaan’, ‘Ghorajaan’, ‘Siligurijaan’ etc. [2].

IV. Methodology:

The present study is carried out with the archaeological monuments of North Guwahati area, which is located at 26.18° N and 91.72° E [3] in the North bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra with special reference to Dirgheswari Deavalay, Monikaraneswar Deavalay, Aswaklanta Deavalay, Rudreswar Deavalay, Kanai borosibua rock with archaeological importance. The data for the present study were collected by visiting the temples and archaeological sites, interviewing different eminent persons related with these temples and secondary materials like books, articles in different journals etc. The study is also an attempt to highlight the issues and challenges related to the archaeological heritage of North Guwahati, Assam.

V. Result and Discussion:

A] Archaeological heritage of North Guwahati:

(a) Dirgheswari Devalay:

The Dirgheswary Devalaya is existed in the Braghyachal hill in Fulung area of North Guwahati since ancient and early medieval period.

The present temple was constructed by Ahom King Siva Singha reign 1714 CE- 1744 CE under the supervision of Tarun Duwrah Borphukan [4]. It was build at the top of the hill with breaks, which is filled with solid rocks. The main attraction of the temple is that so many images of many god and goddesses engraved in the rocks of hills. A big image of Ganesh is
engraved in the rock of the entrance. It is believed as the biggest image of Ganesh at Guwahati area[5]. There are also image of Hanuman, an image of candle and a circle; considered as the sun and moon found in the campus of the deavalay. Two footprints believed to be the Durgas footprint engraved near the temple.

There is also a stone structure which the local people believe as boat, used by Apsaras for water sports in the nearby water pond. The pond was also made by cutting rock on the hill. A plain area of rock is also found on the hill with some small holes. Local people believe that it was the place of Parvati, Shiva’s wife for weaving purposes. Therefore local womenfolk’s offers thread to Parvati at that place believed as she will get the blessings of Parvati and will become expert in weaving.

The garbha griha or the inner chamber of the temple is located in underground in a small cave where the idol of Goddess Durga is present. The idol of Durga is covered by a silver japi or hat was presented by Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha in 1756 CE [6]

Since ancient times, Dirgheswari Deavalay was a prominent place of worship for the followers of Sakti cult of Assam and believed as the second holiest place after Kamakhaya.

(b) The Monikaraneswar Deavalay:

The temple is situated at the top of the Manikhalya hill, on the eastern part of North Guwahati, belonged to the 10th or 11th century. It is a brick built temple, which was raised during the reign of Ahom king Rudreswar Singha (1715-1769) in 1755 AD [4]. Structure of the temple is star shaped. The temple was built by using stones from the bottom to the middle of the wall and from the middle to the top the temple was built by flat bricks. Around the boundary of the temple many sculptures and images of God and Goddess are found. There is an inner chamber in the temple, which is in a small underground cave where a shivalinga is present.

Steps and boundary walls have been constructed by the government. Gardening around the temple adds more charm to its beauty.

(c) Kanai Barashi Boa rock inscription:

It is a massive rock structure which is situated at Rajaduar area of North Guwahati. Mythology considers this massive rock as the seat of Lord Krishna for catching fish with hook in the Brahmaputra River. The footprints of Lord Krishna are also present in the rocks. Historically this area is filled with Ahom age stone inscriptions including one bearing testimonial to the victory over Bakhtiyar Khilji around 1300 A D. This is the first inscription which was translated from Sanskrit to Assamese language

There is also a Ganesh mandir besides this inscription, where an idol of Lord Ganesh was engraved in a rock.
Rudreswar Deavalay:

This Shiv Temple in the village of Rudreswar was built in 1725 by the Ahom King Pramatta Singha in the memory of his father Rudra Singha. According to some sources Rudra Singha was cremated according to Hindu customs in North Guwahati, so his second son Pramatta Singha, constructed this temple in his father’s memory and the temple was named as Rudreshwar Devalaya. A shivalinga was also established in the temple by him, known as Rudreswar shivalinga.

The temple was constructed by using both Ahom and Mughal architecture. The structure of the temple was designed with eight ridges, at the top of it there is a pot like structure called Kalasi. There is a underground chamber in the temple, which is assume that it was constructed for storing foods and other necessary items required for daily functioning of the temple. The Manikut (literally the jewel hut) or the chamber was constructed above the underground chambers. The Rudrashwar shivlinga with a bronze idol of lord Shiva and Parvati is present in the manikut of the devalaya. Drainage system along with air ventilation system can also be seen in the structure of the temple.

The entrance of the underground chamber is at the front side of the temple. At the middle of the chamber there are stairs made by stone by which one can go to the main temple. Another door of the underground chamber is in the north direction and the gate was made by stone. Drainage and air ventilation system can also be seen in the temple. The temple was surrounded by brick walls.

After the fall of Ahom kingdom and establishment of British rule in Assam, the temple lost much of its lands and privileges. The earthquakes of 1897 CE and 1950 CE also made many damages of it. There were two rock inscriptions in the temple, which are now preserved in the Assam State Museum from 1975.

Aswaklanta Deavalay:

The Aswaklanta Dewalaya was constructed by Bijay Duwarah Phukan in 1642 at the time of Ahom king Siva Singha (1714-1744). But it was devastated by the earthquake of 1897. In 1900 it was reconstructed under Monument preservation Act by Lord Karjon.

Methodologically considers when Lord Krishna elope Rukmini for marriage, his soldiers and their horses become tired and took rest in this place. So this temple was named as Aswaklanta (ashwa- horse and klanta- feeling tired).

The architecture of the deavalay shows a typical Ahom structure made by flat bricks of mud. It comprises two temples Kumar Janardana and Ananta Sajya and Lakshmi-Narayana temple.

The Janardana Temple is situated at the river side of the hill. Kurma Janardan is another form of Krishna, in which he takes the form of a tortoise.
In the upper part of the hill Ananta Sajya and Lakshmi-Narayana temple is situated. The idol of Ananta Sayana, where Lord Krishna sleeps on the Ananta nag (a snake with 5 heads) and his wife Lakshmi sitting near him is on a high platform of stone. Along it, the idol of salagram is also present. The main temple of Lakshmi-Narayan is somehow below from the main platform and there are down stairs of stone to go to that chamber. The temple was surrounded by brick walls.

The footprints of lord Krishna and horses are present on the rocks of the riverside.

The upper structure of the temple has suffered tremendous damages due to different natural causes. The government takes several steps to preserve it and reconstruct the damage portions and the boundary walls and the stairs.

B] Different challenges faced by the archaeological sites of North Guwahati:

Cultural heritage conservation helps a community not only protect economically valuable physical assets, but also preserve its practices, history and environment and a sense of continuity and identity. The heritage of North Guwahati which includes different archaeological sites and temples now a day has facing serious damages due to some environmental and non environmental factors. The conservation of these entire heritages has become a challenging task.

The climatic condition of Assam is very humid compared to the other parts of India, here rainfall is very high, which makes the climate wet. In this climate growth of vegetation becomes more. So thick jungles around these sites and lower plants like algae fungi and lichen etc grows over the stone surface of these monuments. This causes great damage to these archaeological monuments. Another natural cause of damage is earthquake. Entire North Eastern India is in earthquake zone. The great earthquakes of 1897 CE and 1950 CE crumbled down many parts of these archaeological sites.

Besides the natural and environmental causes different activities of man causes great harm to these archaeological sites. It is seen in different monuments of North Guwahati that when people come to visit these places they generally throw their wastage like plastic packets, papers and other used materials around these places and some people also used to write their names and other things on the body of these monuments and the walls of these temples. These uncivilized activities of man caused great damages to the heritage of North Guwahati.

VI. Conclusion:

The civilizations flourished in North Guwahati have deposited their signs especially in the form of temples, stone inscriptions or holy relics. These are the cultural heritage of North Guwahati which reflects its importance in history. The situation of cultural heritage has deteriorated during recent years as a result of industrialization, rapid urbanization, increase of atmospheric pollution, various climatic factors and mass tourism. To come out from this...
situation, some conservation works have to be done. It is attempted by the Archaeological Survey of India to clear the jungles and other conservation works to preserve these heritages of North Guwahati as much as possible. Gardening and beautification around these archaeological sites should be taken up simultaneously to attract more visitors. No other buildings near these monuments should be allowed to be constructed. And for all these, public awareness is very necessary for the continuity of the cultural heritage of North Guwahati.

References:


