

Archaeological Remains of the Dang Valley

-Dilli Raj Sharma

I. Introduction

The picturesque valley of Dang is located on 85.2 - 82.54 east longitude and 27.37 - 28.21 the north latitude. It is between the Churiya range on the south and the Mahabharat on the north in the inner terai region of West Nepal. Though Dang and Deukhuri are two separate districts both are often jointly called Dang - Deukhuri. The Churiya range divides the two valleys from north to south. The southern valley is Deukhuri surrounded by another Churiya hill, the Duduwa on the south.

The Churiya range is considered very ancient particularly as the home of our early ancestors. It is argued that the Ramapithecus, a link between man and ape, apparently live here. This range provided him with a suitable climatic condition. In 1982 the geologists came to the conclusion that the early hominid group preferred to live in and around the Siwalik range of Nepal.¹ Thus the Siwalik range has been considered as the home of the early man probably from the early stage of human evolution. The Siwalik (Churiya) belt of Dang is the same belt, where the fossilized

form of the early human ancestors, the Ramapithecus was found at the Butwal Siwalik range.

The geological study of Dang Valley was first undertaken by Robert M. West from the American Museum and the Department of Mines of HMG, Nepal in 1976.² The team conducted its study in seventeen localities of Dang. At that time they discovered many fossilized forms of the vertebrate animals; such as fish, crocodiles, snakes, tortoises and reptiles from different localities. Similarly, after six years (e. g. in 1982)³ another expedition was also conducted by the same team in the southern fringe of the Dang Valley. They succeeded to discover the fossil of a horse. This undoubtedly the first horse fossil that was ever found in Nepal. All these fossils are now preserved at the Swayambhu Natural History Museum.

II. Tools of the Pre-historic Man

Pre-history covers the phase of history before the beginning of written records, When we come to study the pre-historic man, it is his artefacts or stone implements that give us information about his culture and so his way

of life. These tool quality and technique also reveal the cultural advancement of the stone age industry. In the Dang Valley, many stone tools of Paleolithic and Neolithic have been unearthed from different localities. From this evidence it is suggested that the people made their abode in this Valley from the Paleolithic period.

When Gudrun Corvinus from the University of Germany took geological and paleolithic environmental study of Dang in 1984,⁴ she collected numerous paleolithic tools from Dang and Deukhuri along the Churiya hills. The artefacts that she has collected are of quartzite, silica and tuffaceous materials. These are flake, core and corescraper of the paleolithic and Mesolithic times. Some of these tools are like microlithic in nature. Thus the stone tools of the three phases represents its important from Paleolithic to Neolithic period. The observation of the caves of Mulkot and Chillikot, located on the Mahabharat slope also support the paleolithic settlement. The cave of Mulkot 11 km. north of Praseni at Ghorahi-Tulsipur road, is a very big one. This writer had explored it himself but due to the limited time and sources could not find any artefact or sign of early human settlement. Though it has one narrow gate, it is 60 feet high with vast expansion in its interior. So, it must be an important particularly for the stone age man. If an excavation is carried out more things would be exposed here.

The first pre-historic study of Dang was carried out by Prof. Ram Niwas Pandey of Tribhuvan University in 1966.⁵ He found a neolithic tool at Katuki Sewar, 2 km. south of Narayanpur, on the pebble bed of a small stream. It is a long neolithic axe measuring 19 cm. in length, 7.3 cm. in cutting edge and 4 cm at the butt. The axe is made of whittish grey phillite with a green core. Similarly, in

1968 Janak Lal Sharma⁶ from the Dept. of Archaeology, H. M. G. found another neolithic axe from Gwarkhola, about a half a mile east of Tarigaun Airport. It was made of gneissic granite. It is 8.8 cm. long and the cutting edge is about 7 cm. diameter. Besides these two neolithic axes this writer also found a neolithic celt at Bijauri during the field work for the M. A. dissertation in 1981.⁷ It was found at the time of the construction of Ghorahi-Tulsipur road, which was dug approximately 10 feet deep from the surface. This is the celt made in dark greenish chalcedony celica (plate 1 A). Its length and surface are 7 cm. and 5.3 cm. respectively. However the butt end is broken, it must have been round/narrow so that it can be used by fitting into the hole of a wooden stick. Thus, from the occurrence of different type and size of neolithic tools, the scholar has concluded that the Dang is actually a proper meeting place of two cultures, one expanding from Assam and Sikkim and the other north Indian. The Garo and Naga hills of Assam⁸ have produced square-size axes with rounded butt end, while the tools of rest are rectangular with flatten butt. The axe which I have found resembles the tools of east Indian type and is apparently different from the Katuki Sewar's. Gudrun Corvinus has come to the conclusion that the tools of the Katuki Sewar was virtually taken from Tibet.⁹ Whether this tool was migrated or an indigenous even Dang Valley shows same influences of nearby neolithic culture.

Besides pre-historic importance, Dang also possesses historical importance, too. Since the ancient time Dang Valley has been the home of the Tharus. But the origin and migration of the Tharu is still a problem. Therefore it is quite difficult to trace the whole history of this valley, due to lack of

reliable sources. It is certain that when the Khasa Kingdom was in existence in Western Nepal, Dang was virtually under their political domination. One of the documents of Purna Malla mentions that the valley was awarded to Jayakar Pundit as a *virta* in V. S. 1393 (A. D. 1336).¹⁰ So far culturally it was under the Khasa influence. Some of the monumental and stone carving style narrate their artistic influences. In the following I have tried to describe briefly the historical and archaeological places of Dang Valley.

III. Monumental Art of Dang

Sukaura:

The Garh Sukaura is known as a fort as it is situated on high elevation (plate 1B). The Sukaura mound is almost 150 feet in length from east to west, where many artefacts are now lying on the ground in neglected condition. The so-called palace of King Dangisaran could not be reliably proved on the basis of our archaeological findings, however numerous fragments suggests of its good architectural design. Now, we can find only the limited fragments of stone and bricks exposed above and around the mound. The bricks are 11" X 9" X 2" in size and are baked to red brown colour. These bricks were found in the ground plan constructed in a square. Many artefacts and bricks were taken away by the villagers, so it is quite difficult to ascertain its construction. A four feet long stone column seems to be a supportive pillar of a building. Likewise the discoid stone, which is on the eastern corner of the mound, also reminds of the *umbala* of a Sikhara Style Temple at Sukaura. It is 2 feet 8 inches diameter and flattish in 5 inches.

According to the legend, Sukaura was no more than a palace of the King Dangisaran. It is also believed that the name Dang was given after Dangisaran and he was considered

at the time of Mahabharat. But it is apparently far from the historical fact and in Mahabharat also there is no description of war holding between Krishna and Bhim, about what our legend describe. If there was a King called Dangisaran he might have come from the medieval period. The fragment and its artistic design also support its medieval characters.

Amrai Temple:

The Temple of Amraidada is also important for our archaeological study. However the temple is in dilapidation, it has revealed the substantial features of the then architectural design (plate 2A). It is a Sikhara Style with the *Sivalinga* its interim. The *linga* portion is now broken; only the *pithica* is left to suggest that it is a Siva temple. The temple has been built with bricks in a square plan. The doorframe, are of stone with nice decoration and ornamental design. Numerous stone fragments of this temple have been scattered in and outsides. The outstanding numbers are three stone columns which witnessing the master pieces of the then period. They are 4 feet long and 1'6" width, suggesting their use as the pillars of the temple (plate 2B). At the top of the temple there must have been a pinnacle, but it has already been fragmented. The whole architectural feature of this temple resembles the style of Latikeeli temple of Surkhet.¹¹ Therefore it is built simultaneously in the Sikhara Style, which was commonly popular in Western Nepal during a long span of time.

IV. Sculptures of Dang

It has already been mentioned that small and large stone fragments are scattered around the monument of Sukaura and Amrai. Mostly they are like a monumental remains. The carving design and other artistic features in stone also present a nice example of

architecture as well as its stone carving. Besides these, many Sivalingas and other sculptures have displayed a high standard of art.

Sivalinga:

The Sivalinga either in the Temple or lying open on the ground are, in good examples of the sculptural art of Dang. Among them the outstanding one is the Sivalinga of Dharpani, which is existed at the edge of the southern Churiya hill (plate 3A). It is a monolithic, carved in a big stone of which the upper surface has been exposed. The *pithica* is circled with 1.5 inches rounded line in order to drain the water of the *pujabhaga*. The spout of the *pithica* is turned towards north. The *lingabhaga* measures 7 inches in height and 10.5 inches in diameter. Here the *linga* is attached to the middle of a *pithica* in an usual order. It is an unique type so far found in Nepal, that being carved in a single stone without *bramhabhaga* and *Rudrabhaga* as our religious text prescribe. Similarly another features of this Sivalinga is the symbol of *Padukasthana* (foot-prints) which is also carved on the either sides of Sivalinga in a same stone. Both *Paduka* are 7 inch long in an equal position. It shows that this is no more than the influence of *Gorakha Panthi*, which is particularly known as *Padukasthana* of Gorakha Nath. One of the religious texts¹² composed by Manasingh, the King of Jodhapur, also mentions about many sacred places (or pithas) of *Nath Yogis* that mostly existed at the mountain edge or sea-shore. The Dharapani Sivalinga, installed at the edge of the Churiya hill, near Babai river proves this fact. If so, the Valley was influenced by Nath Panthi since the extensity stage of Shaivism. The temple of Ratnanath and its legend also justify our point to some extent. Numerous Sivalingas scattered in and around the

different temples also reveal that the Shaivism was introduced in this Valley at the time when different Shaivite Sects were actually on their higher stage.

Shakta Images:

By the time when Shaktism was flourished in Nepal, many images were also introduced to the Dang. Hence, many Shakti images such as Mahismardini, Kali, Chamunda and Bhairab were popular in this area. It is important to mention that all these images are being carved in equal size stone in a black colour. Similarly the height of these images are not more than 1 feet and width around 6 inches. The only difference in the image is the posture of the deities and its style. But the Jwalavali and other design on the images are relatively same. The Kali from Chillikot, the Chamunda from Bijauri and Bhairab from Masina Village are our outstanding examples. The Kali from Chillikot is seen with one leg on lion and other square paddle with almost 11 inches in height. She has eight hands holding Khadga, Parasu, Pasa, etc. and remaining two hands in *bindu* pose carrying a *kapala* (plate 3B). The Goddess is decorated with the garland of *Mundamala* which is hanging down to the lower limbs. Here, she has been decorated with the crown on her head and anklet and bracelet on her leg and hand respectively. Another image of Mahismardini and Chamunda from Bijauri is also carved in the same style. The Mahismardini has shown in action killing the buffalo demon and the Chamunda is also visualized as a destroyer of evil power. The Chamunda is with four hands and possesses a terrible facial expression. Her two hands have *Khatabanga* and *Kapala* and remaining two are holding her intestine in a swallowing posture. The Mahankal of Masina, has worn a garland, holy thread and earnings of serpents. It is

only 7" long, a miniature type and typically resemble, the Mahankal images of Kathmandu Valley.

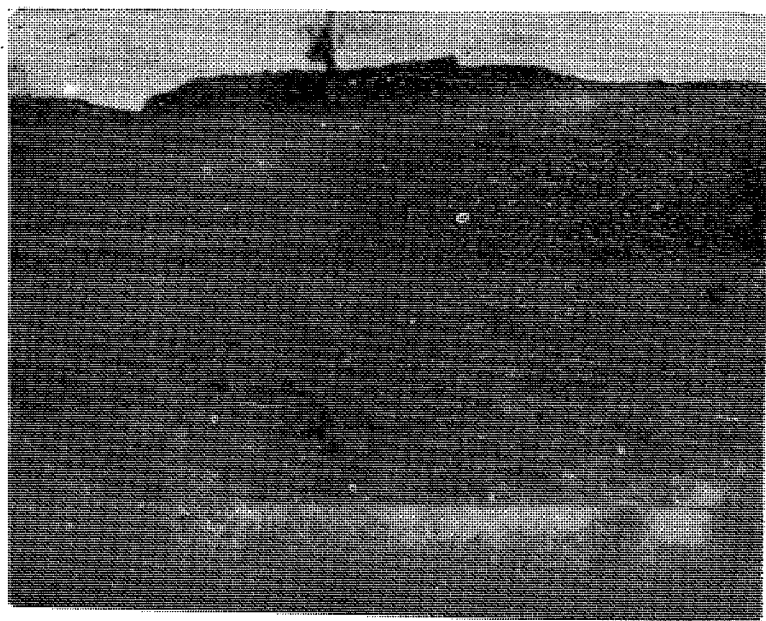
Thus, the carving design and *jwalavali* depicted on stone slab and other features, altogether bring us to the conclusion that the images do not date before the Malla period. On the contrary, the Sivalingas which have been already mentioned above, are different from other images. From this, it can also be concluded that the different tradition of sculptural art influences Dang, in the different time especially early from medieval period.

Foot Notes

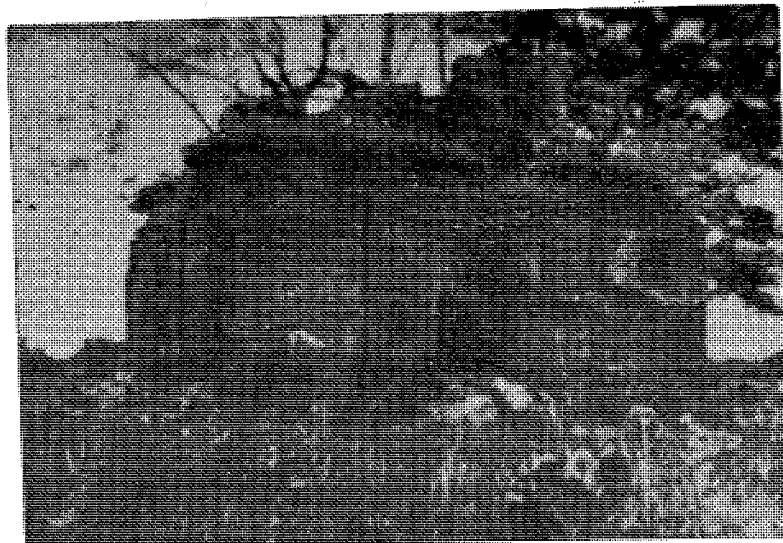
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2. Robert M. West and Other- "Vertebrate Fauna from Neogene Siwalik group Dang Valley Western Nepal" *Journal of the Paleontology*, V. 52 No. 5 (1978) p. 1015-1022.
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7. Dilli Raj Sharma- "Dang Upatyakama Prapta Navapasankalin Aujar" (Neolithic tool found in Dang Valley) *Gorkhapatra*, Bhadra 19, 2039 V. S.
8. H.D. Sankalia- *Pre-history and Proto-history in India and Pakistan* (India : University of Bombay 1962), pp. 233-235.
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11. Prayag Raj Sharma- *Preliminary Study of the Art and Architecture of the Karnali Basin, West Nepal*, (Paris RCP 1972) Pl. VI. C.
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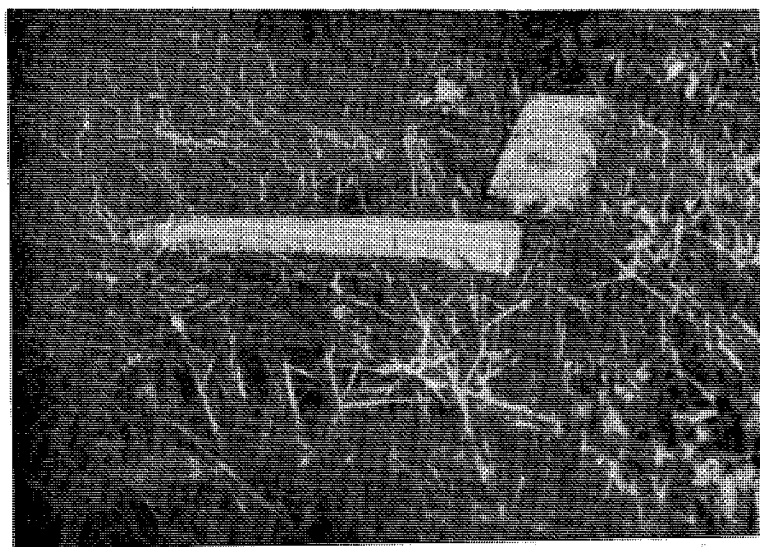
A. Neolithic axe from Bijauri, Dang



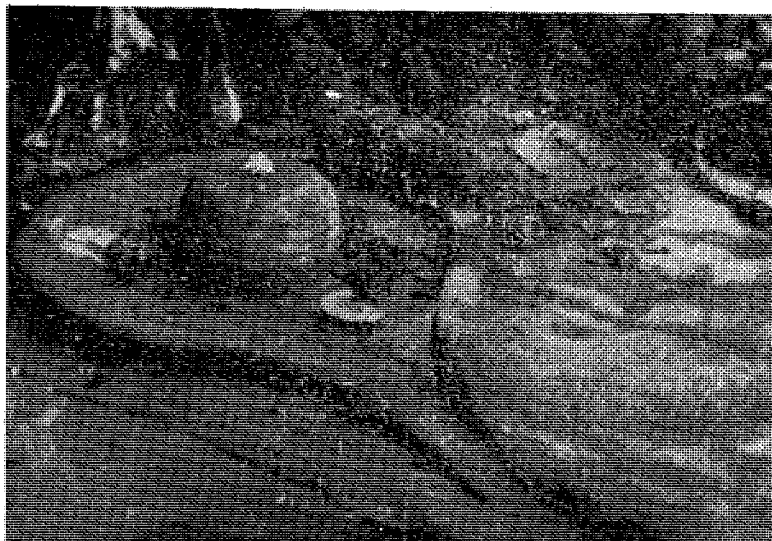
B. The ruin mound of Sukaura



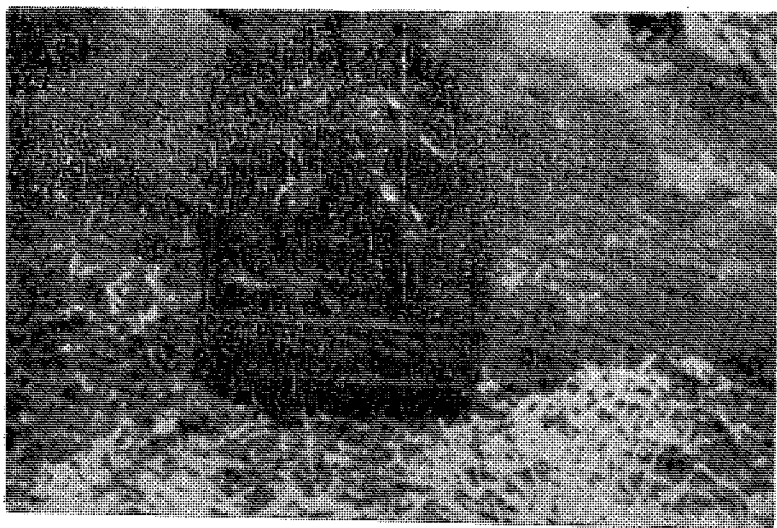
A. A dilapidated temple of Amrai



B. Stone pillar of the Amrai Temple



A. The Shiva Linga of Dharpani



B. Kali goddess of Chillikot