

Horned Deities of the Indus Valley Civilization and their Reflections in the Ethno-Archaeological Art of North East India

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ABSTRACT

In India, art is religion and religion art. Indian art conceive innermost metaphysical truth of religious life. The inner meaning conceived in Indian religion is manifested in outer visual appearance, which becomes a subject of iconography. The form, in which it is carved is often called style. Such a work of visual appearance we describe as art, architecture, or a sculpture which are intended to express the inner meaning of religious life of India.

Such ancient artistic manifestation first found manifested in India in the Indus Valley Civilization. One of such art form, we have found as the Pasupati form of Lord Siva. It seems all possible that this art form became very popular and strong tradition and the worship of the Horned animal from the Indus Valley Civilization, reached the southeast Asiatic islands, via sea route during remote years and advancing further reached the hilly region of Nagaland. The dominating presence of the Horned deity as symbol of protection and prosperity of the Indus Valley, thus reached the north east India, where the motif of Buffalo horn began to be worshipped as a propitiating deity in the community life of the people of the State of Nagaland. Worship of the Buffalo horn or the *mithun* head (bros frontalis) seem to have been worshipped as a Totemic symbol in religious belief and practice as found in the State of Nagaland since remote past.

In this paper a humble attempt has been taken up to study the influence of Horned Deity of Pasupati form of Siva projected as Lord of animals and a Decorative Hair pin of the Indus Valley Civilization, the religious influence of which have been found expression in the religious belief associated with the worship of Buffalo Horn, as Totemic symbol in the religious and cultural life in the State of Nagaland in north east India.

Key Words : *Buffalo-headed deity, Buffalo-horn, Monolithic Column Decorative Hire Pin, Ficus-tree, Y-shaped wooden fork post.*

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INTRODUCTION

Art in India is always a product of certain religious and material circumstances and transcending time and space determine its form in all periods¹. The Buffalo-headed composite square seal of the Harappa Culture excavated by E. Mackay at Mohenjodaro in 1930 is found with a three-faced God, shown ithyphallic and wearing Buffalo-horn as head dress of the figure. The God is seen in yogic posture, surrounded by animals (plate I). Wearing of animal horns as head dress of the God signify that, the Indus Valley people worshipped the Buffalo Headed Deity, attributing superior status of the divine figure, as creator and of all creations. Scholars identify this as a Pasupati form of Siva or as Lord of beasts.² Of the varied religious motifs and symbols found in the Indus Valley Civilization, the discovery of the Pasupati form of Siva worshipped as the Lord of animals forms a major evidence of the religious life of the Indus Valley people³.

Our attention has been drawn also to the discovery of a bronze Decorative Hair pin, surmounted by figures of a Stag and a Dog, (plate II) now preserved in the National Museum New Delhi. The horns of the Stag of this Hair pin are projected upwards. This make it clear that in the Indus Valley Civilization, under religious belief, the horned animals had been glorified and propitiated as creator and protector of all creations.

Considerable similarity is noticed in the practice of worship of Horned figures of God of the Indus Valley Civilization with the glorification and worship of Buffalo-horn as a Totemic symbol, by the community people, in the hilly State of Nagaland, in north eastern region of India. Buffalo-horns are propitiated as a totemic symbol of divinity and are found worshipped in community life for prosperity. Buffalo Horn Monolithic Columns⁴ are found erected at Monolithic site of the Kacharis at Dimapur. The Angamis carved Buffalo Head and propitiated at Mongnyu to bring prosperity.⁵ On the houses of the Semas, the carved planks were adorned with patterns of highly conventional *mithun* head (*bros frontalis*) and lizards⁶ Evidence of wood of worshipping of Wooden columns carved with Buffalo horn exist in community life of the people in Nagaland⁷. (plate iii) Similar religious belief of propitiating Y-shaped wooded forks posts specially for successful birth of children has been found continued in Japan (plate iv) as per tradition⁸.

These evidence of worshipping Buffalo horn deity in Indus Valley Civilization, Buffalo Horn Monolithic Column, and Wooden Y-shaped fork posts carved with buffalo horn in Nagaland and laying of the Y-shaped wooden fork posts in Japan, seem to have certain remote belief and custom of Totemic worship of the Divinity, which first emerged in the Indus Valley Civilization, as represented with Buffalo-horn deity of the Pasupati form of

Siva. Possibilities are there that, this ritual belief custom of worship of Buffalo-horn, from the Indus Valley Civilization, seem to have reached the south east Asian islands, following certain sea trade route and communication ⁹ where from it reached Nagaland.

DISCUSSIONS :

Our attention is drawn to a Decorative Hair Pin, which was discovered at Harappa and datable to BCA 2700 , and surmounted by a pair of animals viz. a Stag and a Dog carved in their playful mood and projected in the top of the pin (**plate II**). The Stag is standing calmly and the Dog holds him at its neck by its two forefeet and touches its cheek¹⁰. This Decorative Hair pin seem to have been molded with an appeal of divine symbol, representing the religious and customary belief and practices of the people of the Indus Valley. The Hair pin is made of bronze, intended for ladies hairdo. The Stag of the Hair pin is carved showing its horns in a projected manner. The Dog has been shown depicted in a manner of propitiating the Stag with his two fore feet, touching his neck with its cheek. This Decorative Hair pin thus literally glorifies the significance of the horns of the Stag, which seem to have been carrying a religious appeal similar to the 'Horned God Pasupati Siva', the Supreme power of all creations.

If we go by the figure of the Pasupati form of Siva, the depiction of the Horned animals in the art form found in Indus Valley Civilization, indicate religious affiliation. The Decorative Hair pin with two projected horns of the Stag, seem to represent similar meaning of divinity. It was with this purpose, the horns of the Stag were projected to glorify the divinity of the symbol may be as an icon of fertility or prosperity. The Decorative Hair pin, which was meant for ladies, seem to have worn under certain religious faith and belief.

Belief of wearing of such Hair pin decorated with animal horn possibly was associated with the concept of protection and prosperity or reproduction. Because, the herbivores animals like the goat in Indian art is considered associated with the male procreative power. Thus the animals horns such as Buffalo-horn or *mithun (bros frontalis)* seem to have worshipped for fertility or prosperity or as symbol of prosperity.¹¹ It seems that the belief on Buffalo-horn was in greatest height and the seals depicted with Pasupati form of Siva. The Indus Valley people were seafaring. While they travelled to distance places on trade seem to have carried such seals depicting the Pasupati-form of Siva, in vassals during their voyages for worship. Scholars have opined that, the Harappan seal-intaglios form a class, which seem to have had link with trade activities, extended as far as to the cities of Mesopotamia, and other areas in Persian gulf.¹²

Lothal was established as a gateway settlement on the south eastern border of Sindhi Harappa political domain. From this settlement the Sindhi Harappans could gain access to the raw materials of peninsular India. The indigenous hunting and gathering people exemplified at places like Langhnaj were Sindhi Harappans agents¹³ Many of the materials which are found in Gujarat and the adjacent parts of Peninsular India have been found in archaeological context at Lothal and at the other Sindhi Harappan sites, which could have come to those sites in the form of ore, or semi refined ingots, through the entrepreneurial efforts of the regional hunters and gatherers.¹⁴ This seem that the Indus people had remote connectivity with those from Peninsular India, through sea route.

Nagaland in a hilly state in the north eastern region of India. It is found that certain religious belief and practice of the people of Nagaland, found in the community life indicate their ancient association with sea voyages. As for example the Nagas in their community life play an 'Music Log drum', carved out of a long log of wood carving it cylindrically hollow, to make sound when beaten with an wooden stick. The outer girth of the log is retained in its round shape raising both of its ends upward like a boat. The Music Log drum is kept in the village community house called *murung* . The shape given to the Musical Log drum, when carved resembles a boat. The Music Log drum is played with the wooden stick in the village *murung* to produce sound, as a signal, to intimate the villagers to assemble at the *murung* Logdrum is also used to produce rhythmic sound during festivals to support dancing.

One end of the musical drum is fashioned like a head of creature, featuring certain monstrous marine mammal, resembling to some creatures of sea. This creature is worshipped by the community people during festivals as protective deity or God. The popular belief associated and the traditional carving of this musical log drum providing the figure of a Divine symbol as its mouth, indicate a remote relation of the Naga community with water and voyage. As discussed the Indus seal of Pasupati Siva bears certain relation to trade activities. It may indicate that, such seals of Pasupati form of Siva, adorned with Buffalo-horn were possibly placed at that the head of the vessels and worshipped for safety of the sea voyages undertook for trade.

This traditional belief of the Naga communities in Nagaland indicates their relation with remote water voyage in sea. It seems all possible that the cultural belief and worship of Pasupati form of Siva by the Indus Valley people, while conducting their sea voyages somehow penetrated into the life and living of the Nagas during remote past and influenced their culture. Besides, the Nagas as a custom wear sea shells or *cowries*, armlets of ivory in their arms, as ornaments and decorate their head dress with Buffalo-horns as their traditional attire¹⁵. In the light of this development be it the head dress of the Pasupati form of Siva or the Decorative

Hair pin surmounted by the Stag and the Dog, it could be affirmed that the Buffalo-horn column or the worship of Y-shaped fork posts carved with buffalo-horn or Mithun-head propitiated by the Nagas, bear remote influence of the religious belief of the Indus Valley people.

Evidence of Buffalo Horn Monolithic Columns, , found erected at the Kachari Monolithic site at Dimapur, which structurally look like horn of the Buffalo with its two bifurcated horn like structure. Such Buffalo-horn Monolithic Columns were erected commemorating some meritorious events of erecting prototypes of wooden fork posts to which *mithan* (*bros frontalis*) were tied¹⁶ Prevalence of worship of such wooden Y-shaped fork posts hung with head of buffalo among the Naga community life seem to have certain remote religious connectivity to the practice of worshipping the Horned deity like Pasupati form of Siva, of the Indus Valley Civilization. The Decorated Hair pin surmounted with the figure of Stag with its projected horns and a Dog with its fore feet shown touching the neck of the Stag, signify to the glorification of the horns of the Stag, which has been attached with certain divine appeal of creativity as in Indian art, the herbivorous animals such as goat signify to male procreative power.¹⁷ This indicate that the art of the Decorative Hair pin represents certain belief of reproduction and creativity leading to fertility symbol which in other form depicted in the Seal of Pasupati form of Siva as Supreme God. The worship of the Buffalo-head and Y-shaped fork post hung with Buffalo-head or *mithan* head as a Totemic symbol of Creativity and prosperity, leading to economic development, following the belief generated in the Indus Valley Civilization, gained ground among the community people in the State of Nagaland..

That the Naga communities had migrated to the hills of Nagaland from the south east Asiatic islands could be visualized from the house types with horn like projection of fork posts called 'Ceka' ¹⁸ shown above the roof of the rich and wealthy chieftains. This bear similar features of the houses erected by the Karen, Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Akha, Lisu tribes and other sub tribes of Burma. Of these the Lahu, Akha and Lisu tribes, who migrated from Thailand to Burma, erect their houses with fork posts projected on the roof their houses¹⁹. It seems all possible that for the protection of the house from evil sprits, besides, decorating the front of the houses, the prototype of animal horn in form of 'Ceka' fork posts were erected by the community people in Nagaland.

Besides veneration of the Ficus trees (*ficus religiosa*) as "Priest of Trees" and "Corpse Trees" by the Angami Naga in Nagaland under which the community disposed of the dead and finally covered with a flat stone²⁰ and worshipping of the Ficus tree as 'Head Tree' under which sacred stones were traditionally buried and worshipped²¹ could be pointed out as an ancient custom and belief prevailed at Nagaland in the past. Worship of the Ficus Tree and Buffalo-horn by the Naga could be traced back to the ancient religious belief practiced in the

Indus Valley Civilization. The Ficus or Pipal tree was worshipped by the Indus Valley People. The whole pipal tree motif on Mohenjodaro seal No 387 was emblematic of the Pipal God, the Supreme Deity of the Indus Valley, combining his two symbols viz. the papal tree and the unicorn. The other Indus Gods viz. the Buffalo-headed deity, were considered subordinate to the papal God²². The Pipal leaf rising from the center of the buffalo's horn on the God's head, is a symbolic representation of the Pipal God of the Indus Valley people. The Pipal tree thus played a very important functional role and considered as Solar tree in the Indus Valley. Thus both the Buffalo-horn and the Ficus tree emerged in the religious life of the Indus Valley civilization as Supreme God, form the twin figures of the religious life of the people of Nagaland.

That the motif of Dog, featured in the Decorative Hair pin, shown touching the neck of the Stag with two of its fore feet, bears certain aspects of fertility could be confirmed from the customs and belief practiced in the religious life is found considered auspicious in Japan. A Dog is venerated in Japan, during child birth for safe pregnancy and delivery. Besides, in Tsukuba in Japan, most women go to the Ambika Kannon temple in Makabe to offer sashes and seek blessings for easy child birth. Besides, each household in prayers regularly worship for the fertility, safe pregnancy, and safe birth of child, although the custom varies from community to community. During pregnancy and for safe birth of child, a fork branch of a tree is cut and taken to temple to be inscribed and then holding a traditional ceremony the fork post is set on the roadside or other place where there is a sacred stone (*sekibutsu*). In this ceremony, called 'Inukuyo', offerings are made to the spirits of the diseased dogs praying for the safe pregnancy and childbirth²³

In this belief, safe pregnancy and the situation of spreading legs during birth of a child by women are compared with certain incongruous objects which are seemingly connected through their similarities in shape such as cross-roads, dogs and fork-sticks are deeply associated and propitiated²⁴. Both the slingshot-like Zakumata sticks of Japan and the Y-Shaped columns as found in the States of Nagaland and the sacrificial Y-shaped fork post called 'Celuphon' in Mizoram in the north eastern region of India, bear similarities both structurally and thematically and as such in religious belief²⁵

CONCLUSION :

Known as a highly flourished indigenous development, the Indus Valley Civilization occupied a great position in the ancient civilizations of the world. It flourished during BCE3300- 13BCE and had reached its pick height during BCE 2600 to 1900, which could be affirmed from its material and cultural evidence. During its peak period for seven centuries, the

cultural elements of the civilization must have had reached distant societies through trade and commerce. The Indian Subcontinent is a triangular peninsula bounded on two sides by the ocean, which since remote past, had provided scope for connectivity with far distant regions of south east Asia and middle east through sea. The commercial adventure of the Indus Valley people must have carried its cultural elements far and wide. If the Indus Valley people had maintained foreign trade relationship with Mesopotemia and Sumer on the bank of Tigris and Euphrates, it is difficult to believe that these adventurous traders of the Indus Valley did not maintain trade relationship with the Indian counterparts via Lothal in Saurashtra and in Indian peninsula and Indian ocean. While undertaking voyages to distant regions in different directions, the Indus people must have carried its religious beliefs and practices. Wearing of animal horn as a libido symbol of super human, or as representative of God on earth or the worshipping of the Ficus Tree in India are some of such living tradition rooted in the valley, thus reached distant regions, including the East Indian Archipelago .

Thus the symbolic meaning of divinity, manifested in the Buffalo-horn head dress of the Pasupati form of Siva, the Decorative Hair Pin adorned in its projected horns of the Stag, worship of the Ficus Tree of the Indus Valley people, which had occupied prominent position for several centuries in religious Indian art and culture seem to have certain remote influence in life and culture of the people of Nagaland, which is manifested in the Buffalo-horn Monolithic Columns at Dimapur, in the, Y-shaped fork posts carved with *mithan* head propitiated in the community life in Nagaland. The Zakumata sling-like fork posts of Japan, seem to have had similar remote cultural link with the Indus Valley Civilization. All seem to indicate existence of certain remote human connectivity existed between the people of Indus Valley Civilization with the tribal communities of Nagaland in the north eastern region of India.

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Plates

Horned Deities of the Indus Valley Civilization and their Reflections in the Ethno-Archaeological Art of North East India



Plate I Pasupati form of Siva Wearing Buffalo-horn as Head dress



Plate II : A Decorative Hair pin surmounted with a Horned animal Stag and a Dog of the Indus Valley Civilization



Plate III Carved Buffalo Horn in a Y-shaped wooden Column propitiated by native tribes in Nagaland



Plate IV Japanese laid Y-shaped Fork post on an inscribed rock at Tsukuba, Japan