

## Archaeological and Historical Insights from Dharmasala: A Study of Ancient and Medieval Settlements

Manas Kumar Rout

Research Scholar, FMU, Balasore, Odisha, India

### ABSTRACT

This article presents an archaeological study of the Dharmasala region in Odisha, focusing on its geographical significance, ancient settlements, and material culture spanning from the ancient to early medieval periods. The region's strategic location, with its proximity to major rivers like the Brahmani and Genguti, is explored alongside significant archaeological findings. Key sites such as Kadala (Saroi) hill and Dakshina Shasana reveal a rich history of habitation, as evidenced by surface discoveries of pottery, stone tools, and sculptures. Among the most notable finds is the joint image of Shiva and Parvati, worshipped as the village deity Duarasuni, and numerous artifacts suggesting local iron production and medieval settlement. The study highlights the continuity of human habitation in the area, from ancient times through the medieval period, providing insights into the cultural, religious, and socio-economic practices of the people. The disturbances caused by modern quarrying activities have limited further exploration, but the collected antiquities offer valuable evidence of Dharmasala's historical significance. The article concludes that the region played a crucial role as a settlement area, with its rich material culture reflecting the evolution of both religious practices and daily life across centuries.

**KEY WORD:** *Settlement site Kadala, Saroi Hill, Dakshinsasan Settlement Site, Radhanagar early historic Site.*

### INTRODUCTION

In ancient times, Jajpur district played a key role in shaping the reconstructed history of the region's social, religious, and political foundations. Archaeological studies conducted across various sites in the district have identified **Dharmasala** as a significant area, rich in archaeological findings. This area, in particular, has contributed greatly to the region's historical narrative. Over time, many important sites in the district have been known by various names. For instance, **Radhanagar**, an ancient historical site, is sometimes referred to as **Tosali**. Excavations conducted in different seasons have uncovered a wealth of archaeological artifacts, shedding light on the area's rich history.

#### Address for correspondence :

Manas Kumar Rout, Research Scholar,  
FMU Balasore, Odisha, India  
Email-manash99rout@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9556-4750>

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The district is also renowned for its Buddhist heritage. Notable Buddhist sites include **Langudi**, **Deuli**, **Tarapur**, **Kantigadia**, **Neulpur**, and **Kayem Hills**. All these locations contain Buddhist remains, reflecting the area's significance in ancient Buddhist culture.

The district also features several religious sites, such as the **Gokarneswar Temple**, **Narayani Temple** at Deoda, **Syamasundar Temple** at Mirzapur, **Jagannath Temple** at Madhupurgarh, and **Jagannath Temple** at Badabarisahi. Additionally, there are two important fortifications in the area: **Madhupur Garh** and **Baramagarh**. However, due to a lack of detailed archaeological investigation, much of their historical significance remains unexplored.

Historical texts inform us that **Xuanzang (Huen-T-Sang)** visited this region and mentioned a great stupa in his writings, *Si-yu-ki* (Xuanzang's account). This stupa, called **Pu-so-pi-kil**, is considered one of the greatest stupas in the **Odra Desa** region, and some scholars suggest it may be located in this area. Furthermore, it is believed that the stupas at **Langudi** were constructed under the supervision of the great Mauryan Emperor **Ashoka**.

At Langudi, sculptures depicting kings and queens have been found, but unfortunately, they have been damaged due to human vandalism. This paper aims to reconstruct some of the archaeological findings in and around the **Dharmasala** area, which were personally explored by the author but have not been published previously. These findings are described in detail below.

## GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Dharmasala is a separate Tahsil located between 20°30' to 31°10' North Latitude and 85°40' to 85°45' East Longitude. It is situated 65 km away from the state capital, Bhubaneswar. Two national highways pass through this area. The major rivers Brahmani and its tributary Kelua, along with the river Genguti, flow through this region.

## Archaeological Findings

### Kadala(Saroi) Hill Site

The site is located at Kadala (Saroi) hill, at coordinates 20°43' North Latitude and 86°08' East Longitude. It is situated in the middle part of the hill near Kadala and Saroi villages under the Neulpur RI circle of Dharmasala Tahsil. The site has a sloping terrain and was locally known as "Mahisi Padia" (buffalo field). The area, approximately one hectare in size, is covered with pottery fragments, primarily gray ware.

During a visit, plantation and digging activities by the forest department unearthed more pottery pieces. From the site collected several antiquities, including iron nails, iron fragments, beads, and stone materials. The site also features two water distributaries, Jhara and a lake named Kadala Huri, located below the site. A temple named Paravat Shenda (mountain bull) and a sacred Shiva Linga were unearthed at the bottom of the site. Unfortunately, local contractors have disturbed the site due to moram quarrying. As the concule of the material found from the surface it should be early medieval site where a group of people lived for a specific purpose. We can't find any structure as well as the house building evidence from the site.

## ANTIQUITIES COLLECTED SURFACE FINDINGS

- **Iron Nail:** A 7-inch-long iron nail was found during plantation digging.
- **Hard Stone Container:** A broken and polished stone container, likely used for special purposes.
- **Agate Stone:** A bead-making agate stone with two cutting marks, suggesting its use in bead production. Locally called as *khadipathar*. It has yellow, white and brown color.
- **Polished Stones:** Two polished stones possibly used for grinding.
- **Muller Stone:** A broken part of a muller, likely used for grinding objects and spices.
- **Un identified Stone Materials:** Three unidentified stone materials were found.
- **Bangle Pieces:** Black-colored bangle fragments were collected.

## DETACHED SCULPTURE OF DUARASUNI VILLAGE DEITY

Many villages have local deities worshipped under different names based on local legends and traditions. At Kadala village, the deity worshipped as "Duarasuni" is actually a joint image of Shiva and Parvati. The sculptured depicts Shiva in Lalitasanamudra with his left hand on Parvati's shoulder. Below the image, Shiva's mount (Nandi) and Parvati's mount (a calf) are present. The deity, carved from a single khondalite stone, measures 41 cm in height, 29 cm in breadth, and 13 cm in thickness. Vermilion smearing obscures Parvati's hands.

## OTHER SCULPTURES

- **Mangala (Durga):** A broken sculpture resembling Durga in a killing posture, worshipped as Mangala. It measures 23 cm in height, 33 cm in breadth, and 10 cm in thickness.
- **Un finished Sculpture:** An unfinished stone piece, possibly a column fragment, measures 69 cm in height and 37 cm in breadth. The low-quality stone prevented its completion.
- **Broken Sculpture:** A broken piece, possibly a dancer figure or part of a Navagraha, measures 12 cm in height and 6 cm in breadth.



#### EARLY MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT AT DAKSHINA SHASANA

Dakshina Shasana, situated 64 km from Bhubaneswar and 42 km from Cuttack, is another significant site under Dharmasala Tahsil. The site features gray ware pottery fragments scattered around agricultural fields near a medieval Shiva temple. The temple, reconstructed by villagers, stands on the basement of an older structure. Surface exploration revealed several antiquities:

#### COLLECTED ANTIQUITIES AND POTTERY

- **Polished Stone Muller:** A broken muller piece measuring 5cm in height, 4.4cm in breadth, and 6 cm in diameter.
- **Broken Stone Muller:** An other broken piece measuring 7cm in height, 3.4cm in breadth, and 4 cm in diameter.
- **Circular Stone (Ring Stone):** A circular stone with a diameter of 15cm.
- **Unidentified Material:** An unidentified object of unknown material and purpose.
- **Broken Bangle Piece:** A 3cm fragment of a bangle.
- **Pottery:** Grayware pottery fragments, along with a few black-colored pieces, were collected. Rim and base portions of the pottery suggest medieval origins.



#### CONCLUSION

The study of Dharmasala reveals its historical significance from ancient times to the early medieval period. Settlements near hillocks, such as Kadala, Haridaspur, Saroi, Sribantapur, and Baligari, indicate continuous habitation. Detached sculptures worshipped as village deities, like Duarasuni, are often joint images of Shiva and Parvati. The presence of gray ware pottery and iron fragments suggests local production and usage during the medieval period. However, disturbances like moram quarrying have limited further discoveries. The archaeological vestiges found from the Dharmasala area of Jajpur are very much rich and a concrete evidence from the early period to early medieval periods. The archaeological source gives much importance to add new pages of ancient history of Odisha as well as to medieval and modern history. The researcher can analyze the evidence to create a new history of the era in Odisha history. The Dakshina Shasana site, with its medieval Shiva temple and gray ware pottery, further supports the area's historical continuity. The findings underscore Dharmasala's importance as a settlement area from early historical to modern times.

#### ENDNOTE

This research is part of an ongoing study aimed at uncovering and preserving the rich archaeological heritage of the Dharmasala region. Despite the challenges posed by modern construction and quarrying activities, the continued discovery of artifacts and monuments underscores the region's importance in understanding the historical and cultural development of Odisha. Future research and conservation efforts are



essential of urtherexplore and protect these invaluable sites, ensuring that the legacy of Dharmasala is preserved for future generations. The collaboration with local communities' institutional, instrumental in advancing our understanding of this region's archaeological significance.

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The author declare no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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#### **Declarations**

#### **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Not applicable.

#### **Consent for publication**

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#### **Competing interests**

The authors declare no competing interests.

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