
Eran: A Cultural Heritage Site of Bundelkhand, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract: Eran is an important cultural heritage site of Bundelkhand in Sagar district, Madhya Pradesh. Continuous excavations and explorations in Eran have unearthed various antiquities ranging from the Neolithic to the Late Medieval period. There are many temples and sculptures of the Gupta period found even to the present day. Eran has been the centre of development of human cultures for ages. Various archaeological remains of Palaeolithic and Chalcolithic culture have also been found in Eran village. The Eran region has been dominated by various dynasties, such as Maurya, Sunga, Satavahana, Shaka, Naga, Gupta, Huna, Kalachuris, Chandelas, and Parmaras, etc. Many domestic and foreign tourists visit here regularly.

Keywords: Eran, Heritage, Gupta Period, Archaeology, Temples, Architecture, Sculptures

Introduction

Eran is located (latitude 24° 5' to 37° 85" north and longitude 78° 10' to 21° 7" east) 75 km north-west from Sagar district headquarters. Eran village comes under the subdivision of Bina, in the Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh, and is situated 140 kilometers from the State capital, Bhopal. This place is on the border of Sagar district and Vidisha district and lies along the borders of Malwa and Bundelkhand region. Eran is about 80 km from Vidisha and Sanchi. Eran is located on the banks of river Bina (Ancient name Venva), a tributary of the river Betwa (Ancient name Vetravati) which encircles the site and provides natural protection to Eran (Figure 1). Various trees surrounded by the Bina River have provided a panoramic natural beauty to major parts of the Eran region. This region marked the meeting of the Saka-Gupta period, and it acquired a strategic position of great political significance. A panoramic view of this site can be seen from the present village by standing on an ancient high mound. Captain T.S. Bart was the first to discover some inscriptions from this site in 1838 A.D. The credit of discovering Eran for a second time and identifying the site's archaeological potential goes to the archaeological expert General Alexander Cunningham.



Figure 1: Satellite view of the village Eran with river Bina (Courtesy: Google Earth)

Objectives of Study

This research paper has been written to achieve the following objectives: (1) The main objective of the present work was to study the archaeological remains of Eran with respect to the present geographical and historical condition from the earliest times to the 18th Century C.E. (2) To bring out the artistic and architectural development in the region known from sculptures, temples and the importance of culture based on material remains. (3) To elucidate the potential of the place for tourism purposes.

Research Methodology

The use of appropriate research methodologies not only saves the time and energy of the researcher but also affects the quality of a research paper. Hence, the under mentioned methodology has been used during this process. In order to explain past lifeways, a historical method is an appropriate method of research. It is an endeavour to bring out the accurate account of the human past in chronological order on the basis of facts and evidence. This process comprises investigation, analysis of the facts, interpretation, and documentation to get an insight into the past. This method helps to understand the past, define the present and to some extent anticipate the future. In the process of research, facts were collected from primary and secondary sources and validated with the help of archaeological evidence.

Primary Sources

These sources provide reliability to any research work. An extensive archaeological survey was conducted for the collection of data from the sites. An attempt has also been made to explore the information about the area from ancient texts.

Climate

This region has winter season starting from November-December to February and March and the Summer season starting from March to June. The minimum temperature recorded in the Eran Village is 5°C in December and January. The Maximum temperature in May-June is 40 °C to 50 °C. The monsoon rain starts in the second week of June and ends in the months of September-October. The average rainfall here is about 400 cm.

How to Reach Eran

Eran Village is Connected to Four railway Station Via Bina Junction, Mandi Bamora railway Station, Khurai railway Station, and Kurwai-Kaithora railway Station. Mandi Bamora is a railway station on the Bhopal-Bina railway track. Eran is about 8 kilometers from here and lies to the eastern direction. Regular auto and taxi service is also available from Madibamora to Eran village.

Name

The ancient name for the modern site of Eran as found in inscriptions and coins is 'Erikinā' or 'Airikinā'. According to Cunningham, the derivation of the name of Eran Village is from the Sanskrit word 'Eraka', a grass species with emollient and mild qualities. Thus, the name of the city might have come from the etymology of this particular grass, named 'Erkana'. The name Airikinā was applied to both the region and its capital town. The old name of Eran as *Erikina* and *Erkanya*, is mentioned in Eran inscription of Samudragupta, and the Eran inscription of the Huna king Toramana.

Historical Background

Eran has been the centre of development of human cultures for ages. Various archaeological remains of Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures have been found in Eran village. The Eran region has been dominated by various dynasties, such as Maurya, Sunga, Satavahana, Shaka, Naga, Gupta, Huna, Kalachuris, Chandelas, Parmaras, Mughals, Marathas, etc. The details of the historical chronology of Eran are as follows:

Neolithic Period: Various tools were found from the Neolithic phase of Eran from the excavation conducted in 1964-65 and in 1987-88. In addition, some Neolithic tools were also reported from the eroded surface of the banks of the Bina River and near Hathi Darawaja. Several stone tools related to the prehistoric period have been found in the area of the river Bina in and in the areas around Eran. The tools belonging to the Lower Palaeolithic, Middle Palaeolithic, Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic period, and Neolithic period have been obtained from Eran and the adjoining areas of Bhapasonaghat and Chhaparetghat. The period of Neolithic culture in Eran is dated to about 2100 BCE.

Chalcolithic Period: The excavation work at Eran in the year 1960-61, 1961-62, 1962-63, 1963-64, 1964-65, 1986-87 and 1998 C.E., were conducted by the Department of AIHC and Archaeology of Dr. Hari Singh Gour University, Sagar. During these years several

mounds exposed Chalcolithic material of archaeological interest (Figure 2). The Eran Excavations found that the Chalcolithic culture here is characterized by the presence of microliths, painted pottery, and copper objects. Among the microliths the predominant type was the parallel-sided blade, sometimes serrated; and other types, occurring less frequently were, lunates, points, fluted cores, and flakes. The rare use of copper was attested to by the discovery of two fragmentary Celts. One Chalcolithic copper Celt was also found from the surface. This culture began in Eran from 2000 BCE and the end of this culture in Eran was dated to the seventh century BCE.

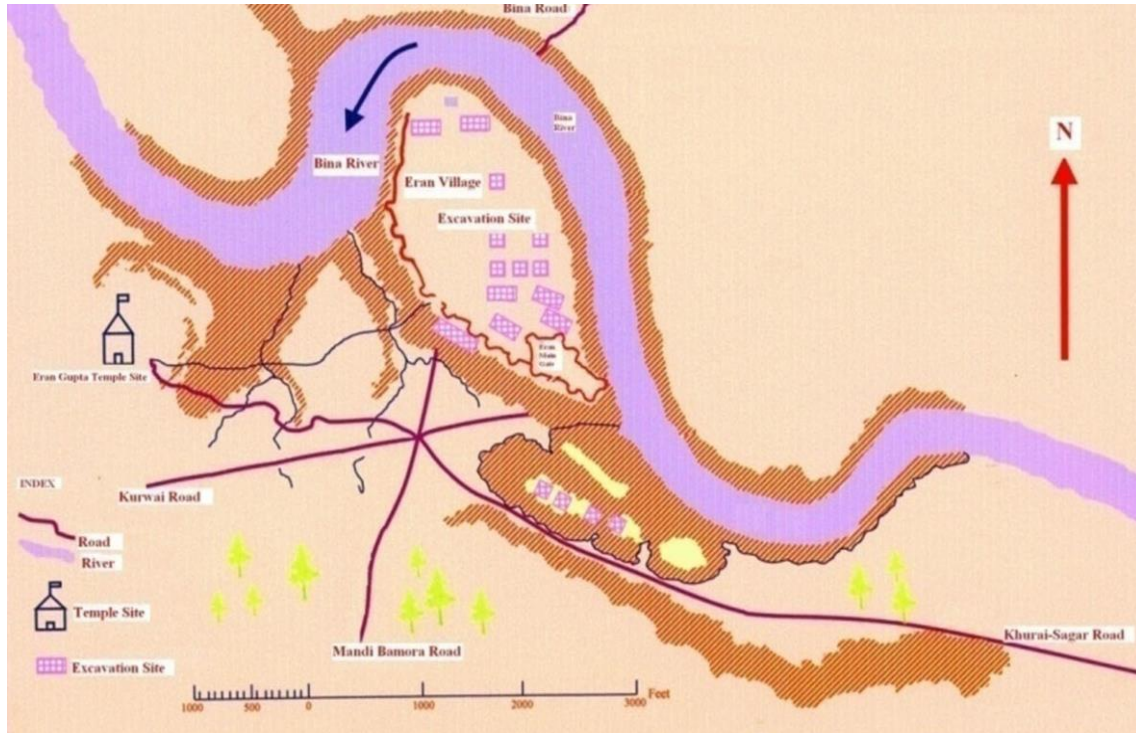


Figure 2: Eran Excavation Site, General View

Janpada Period: In the list of Janpadas, as found in Buddhist and Jain literature, along with Puranas and two epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata, includes the names of the two janpadas, Avanti and Chedi. According to various scholars, part of the Eran region was included in the Avanti Janapada.

Mauryan Period: Ashoka had control of the Eran region in the 3rd century BC. He was appointed as the Rajpal of Ujjaini. When he became a Mauryan emperor, he lived in the city of Vidisha, and married a superior girl named Mahadevi in the city. He also laid the foundation stone of the Great Stupa at Sanchi (near Vidhisa). Available archival evidence shows that the residents of Eran had a special contribution to the construction of the Sanchi Stupa. It is clear from this that Ashoka had a close relationship with this region. The archival evidence and art from Rupnath, Jabalpur, Gurjar, Datia, Panaguria (Sehore) and Sanchi (Raisen), all belonging to Ashoka's period and are evidence for his dominance in the vicinity of the Eran region. In the Mauryan period, various punch-marked coins were also recovered from the Eran excavation.

Local Kings of Eran: After the death of Ashoka, the great Mauryan Empire disintegrated. Eastern Malwa (including Vidisha region) became free from Mauryan domination in circa 200 BCE. This is evidenced by the discovery of some coins of independent rulers like 'Shivgupta' from Vidisha, copper coins of 'Dharmapala' engraved with the inscription 'Rano Dharmapala'(Raja Dharmapala) written in the Brahmi script of the Mauryan period and a lead circular dye () of 'Ran Indragupta' (Indragupta)...

Sunga-Satvahana Period: Eran and Vidisha region included in the Mauryan empire, was also included in the Sunga dominion. Agnimitra, the eldest son of Pushyamitra Sunga, is known to have ruled at Vidisha in the 2nd century BCE. The *Malvikagnimitram*, a drama by the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa, gives some detailed account of Agnimitra's rule. The famous Buddhist stupas at Sanchi near Vidisha, built during the Sunga Satavahana time, received donations from the inhabitants of Eran, besides others hailing from Vidisha, Ujjaini, and from several towns and villages. The Sunga-Satavahana age brought a congenial atmosphere for the development of fine arts. The great stupas at Sanchi were decorated tastefully during this age with sculptures indicating high aesthetic merit. The rulers of Sunga-Satavahana dynasties followed to create cave-art in this part of the country. The discovery of the Satvahana coins from Vidisha and Eran may lend support to the theory that eastern Malwa (including Eran -Vidisha region) was occupied by the Satvahanas in the middle of the 2nd century BCE.

Saka-Kshatrapa Period: During the rule of the Kushana and western Saka Kshtrapas, contacts between India and the western countries increased. The Saka-Kshatrapas continued to rule over western India and major parts of Malwa till they were finally ousted by Chandragupta Vikramaditya at the closing of the 4th century CE. A few coins of the Kushana ruler Vima Kadaphise and the coins of the western Kshatrapa rulers like Mahakshatrapa Viradamana, Rudrasena-I, Rudrasena-II and III and a few other Kshatrapa rulers are known to us from Sanchi, Vidisha and Eran region. A number of coins, seals, sealings, backed clay coin-moulds, the coins of Kshatrapa rulers are noted from Eran Excavation. In the Eran region there were Shaka-Kshatrapa rulers who governed in the first century and third century C.E. The word 'Eran' is seen clearly from the inscription of an earthen seal belonging to the rule of Shaka-Kshatrapas, which mentions Shaka Kshatrap 'Ishwaramitra' and his son 'Simhasena'. On the basis of palaeography, the date of Simhasena cannot be extended beyond 350 CE. Hewas also a contemporary of Gupta king Samudragupta.

Naga King: Vidisha and Eran region were important centres of the Naga dynasty also. A dynasty of the Naga kings ruled here after the Sunga-Satvahanas. They continued to rule over the Vidisha-Eran area until about the middle of the 4th century CE. The copper coins of the Naga rulers were recovered from the excavations and exploration undertaken at Eran Village. The population also seemed to have worshipped the Naga deities. The Idols of Nagas and Nagins, both in the human and the serpent forms have

been found at Eran village in good numbers. These can be assigned to the time period in between the 1st and the 3rd-century C.E.

Gupta Period: Eran was a major centre of power in Central India during the Gupta period. The king Samudragupta lived some time in Eran with his wife and two sons Ramgupta and Chandragupta. The Gupta rulers like Samudragupta, Ramgupta, Chandragupta, Budhgupta, and Bhanugupta built a military cantonment at Eran. Various inscriptions of the kings of the Gupta period are found here. This site has produced the largest number of stone inscriptions belonging to the Gupta period so far than from any other single site in the whole of India. As far as the architectural and sculptural art of the Gupta period is concerned, we have some outstanding examples preserved at Eran. Several pillars bearing *Purnaghata*, foliage, bell, and *Kirtimukha* motifs along with the huge Garuda pillar in front of the main temple, are the typical examples related to the Gupta age. Similarly, the main Idol of Narasimha, Gajalakshmi, Sheshasayi Vishnu, etc, are also said to have belonged to this period. A stone inscription of Samudragupta referring to his good deeds and to his virtuous queen has been found here. Eran has been referred to as a 'pleasure-town' (*Swabhoga-Nagar*) in this inscription. *Erikina*, as the name of the administrative unit under '*Pradesha*' or '*Vishaya*' is engraved in stone inscriptions found at Eran. The first is from an inscription referring to the Gupta emperor Samudragupta. The second is from the inscription in a Boar Image (in situ) of the first regnal year of the Huna King Toramana. The third inscription is of a Saka King Sridharavarma, a ruler of this region in the 3rd century C.E. It is inside a stone pillar bearing another inscription, one of Goparaja, chief of the Gupta King Bhanugupta. According to these inscriptions, Eran was named in the Gupta period as *Erikin* and *Erkanya*.

The Hunas: The Hunas become very powerful and conquered Western and Central Asia. They invaded India under their leader Tormana, who conquered Punjab, parts of Rajasthan, and Eastern Malwa. Taking advantage of the weakness of the Gupta kingdom, the Hunas occupied Eastern Malwa. In the fifth century the Hunas arriving from the northwestern passes and entered India. Initially accompanied by the local kings, the Gurjaras and other tribes they gradually occupied both their kingdoms. Hunas attacked the western region of the Gupta kingdom in the about 458 C.E. but the able Gupta king Maharajadhiraj Skandagupta repulsed their attack. Later Toramara was successful in annexing large parts of the Gupta kingdom. Two records found at Eran indicate unmistakably the transfer of sovereignty. The earlier one, dated to 165 G.E. (485 C.E.), records some pious construction by Maharaja Matravisnu, and building of a Varaha temple by Dhanyavisnu, after the death of his brother Matravisnu, in the first year of Maharajadhiraja Tormana. According to the Khura inscription (found from the Salt Range in Punjab and now Lahore), the period of Maharajadhiraja Toramana in India dates from about 495 to 500 CE. This date is during the time of Vainayagupta or Narasimhagupta's rule. The mentions in Eran Inscription of Tormana dated to the first year of the region means 495 C.E., thus, it can be said that King Toraman's first victory over the Eran region was around 495 C.E. After the rule of

Maharajadhiraja Toramara the region was ruled by his son Maharajadhiraj Mihirakula in about 500 to 530 C.E. Various archaeological evidence were found belonging to the second attack of Eran by Huna king Mihirkula in 510 C.E. Evidence of burning of the entire city has been found from this stratigraphic layer of the Excavation. About one foot of burnt ash is found within this layer and Eran inscription of Goparaja with a date of 510 C.E. Many literary sources show that Huna king Mihirkula was very ferocious and probably he may have set fire to the town in Eran.

Early Medieval Period: After the end of the Gupta-Huna rule, the history of this area is shrouded in mystery. The Hunas may have caused considerable destruction to the flourishing town of Eran and its monuments. We do not hear any more of *Airikina* neither in later literature nor in inscriptions and coins. After the Guptas, the history of the Eran village settlement can be dated to the Ninth century C.E. as Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty ruled Malwa towards the end of the 9th century. After the Ninth century, the region of Eran was included under the '*Jejakhukti*' region. From the tenth century C.E. to twelfth century C.E., the Chandela and Parmar dynasties came to dominate the Eran region.

Mughal and Maratha Period: By the end of, Thirteenth century C.E. the entire area of the present Eran region was occupied by Muslim rulers. Mostly evidences of Silver and Copper Coins of the Tughlaqs and of the Mughal rulers Akbar and Aurangzeb have been discovered during the excavations and surface Explorations in Eran.

Art and Architecture of Eran

This is certified by the contemporary literature, epigraphical and numismatic evidence. Most of the temples and Idols were built in Eran during the Gupta period. The art and architecture which can be seen in Eran village was created from the Gupta period to the Medieval period. A fort belonging to Dangi rulers has also been found in Eran. The door of this fort is still completely intact. It is a late medieval fort enclosed by the river on three sides. This fort is said to have been built by some Dangi king in between 1700 C.E. to 1800 C.E.). It is an important example of architectural design of the Modern period.

The Temples at Eran are the earliest example of structural temples Belonging to the Gupta period built during the beginning of the 4th century C.E. The flat roof, the plain square or rectangular form of plan and the stern simplicity of the walls are the characteristics of the temples. This is a basic form of temples, which led to elaborations in the course of time. The temples at Eran is tiny and unpretending shrines, consisting of nothing more than a simple square flat-roofed chamber with a pillared porch in front. Though modest in dimensions, symmetry, and proportion, appreciation for plain surfaces and restraint in ornamentation, may very well be compared with Athenian architecture. The Eran, temples of Vishnu and Varaha, though in a dilapidated condition, are rectangular in plan. Before the sanctum, there is a shallow porch with four columns supporting the architrave on which the roof rests. The inter culmination

is slightly greater in the middle than on the sides. The walls of the temple are quite plain, but there is decorative richness on the pillars and door frames. At Sanchi, there is the 'plain reeded bell' without turnovers of any kind and likewise every pillar in the temples of Eran shows a highly ornate 'bell' with elaborate turnovers below the corners of the abacus. A buttress-like projection also appears in the temple of Vishnu at Eran. The Gupta temple group is situated half a kilometer away from the village of Eran, and on the south-west bank of the Bina River. The details of the art and architecture of Eran are Given as follows.



Figure 3: Vishnu Temple Remains, Gupta Complex Eran

Vishnu Temple Remains: The Vishnu temple is the most complete temple in the Eran Gupta temple complex with an intact doorway. A snake figure (Nagabalar) is beautifully marked at the entrance of this temple. This temple is built in a rectangular form, its length is 32.5 feet and width are 13.5 feet. This pillared temple, stands in front of the Vishnu Idol, however, the walls between the pillars have not remained. The roof

of the Vishnu temple is flat and of the same style as the Tigowa and Sanchi temple. It is, however, much more massive, rising threefeet and three inches above the capitals of the portico pillars. It also has another line moulding in the frieze midway between the architraves of the pillars and the roofing slabs. This middle course is further ornamented with a line of bosses placed close together, but many of them have never been finished, and several of them are still in a rough state of square blocks. According to Cunningham, some Gupta temples were left unfinished, but it is improbable that it may have fallen down and have been re-built afterwards as we now see it. The change in the position of the figures of Yamuna and Ganga, from the top to the bottom of the door jambs, certainly denotes a later period installation. This Vishnu temple, as we see it now is just a temple with a door jamb belonging to about 6th century C.E. Cunningham found a small inscription of a name which can be read as 'Ishta-Haragrahi' in Gupta Brahmi script of the 5th century. According to Cunningham, from a few feet to the north of Vishnu temple, there was a small twin temple with two separate doorways leading two distinct shrines. The Goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna Rivers are engraved at the Vishnu temple entrance. There is a beautiful marking of mutated snakes on the upper door jambs. On the right side of the door frame is the beautiful engraving of the story of *Gajendra Moksha*. There is a wonderful carving of *Kalpavriksha* with birds in the middle of the door frame. The *Kirtimukh* is engraved on the right and left of the door frame. Vishnu is depicted in the centre of the *lalabimba*-in-door. The Lord Buddha and Brahma are engraved on the left side of the doorway. The standing Idol of Vishnu is thirteen feet and five inches in height (Figure 3).

This Idol has four hands, and the face of the Idol is broken. The lower two hands of the Idol have been made to rest on the waist and the weapons of both the upper arms have been broken. The remains of a mace are seen on the right side of the Idol, but no hand of the Idol is seen holding the bottom portions of the mace. The arms of Vishnu are depicted with *Bhujbandha* and bracelet. This Idol is decorated with a beautiful lion shaped crown. The crown plays a major element in ornamentation and its lion faced design is evidently inherited from an earlier period. The Idol is shown wearing a flower garland (*Vajantee mala*) on its neck. Idol This Idol is shown wearing a coil in the ears and a ring in its toe. Idol Vishnu is also shown wearing a '*dhoti*' like cloth. A huge halo is seen formed behind the head of the deity. The Idol is made with simplicity. The eyes of Lord Vishnu have been made to look like the eyes of a yogi. This Idol is made from a huge stone. According to Alexander Cunningham, this Idol belongs to about 4th century C.E. and was made during the time of Samudragupta because Cunningham discovered an inscription of SamudraGupta's near this temple. Most scholars agree that this Vishnu temple was built by the Gupta rulers in the 4th century C.E. This temple was built according to the temple plan described in the '*Vishnudharmottar Purana*'.

Varaha Temple Remains: The temple is dedicated to the Varaha avatar of Lord Vishnu and the door of this temple is facing east. The construction of this temple was done in the last years of the fifth century C.E. This temple is made of red sandstone and is the

best example of having an ancient Indian temple architectural plan. The temple is built on a high platform. It is situated to the south side of the Vishnu temple. This Varaha temple was erected by DhanyaVishnu, the younger brother of Matravisnu. It is about 43 feet long, 21 feet in width, and 14 feet high. The walls of this temple have fallen. The pillars are still seen near the Idol of Varaha. The Idol in the sanctum sanctorum of this temple is about 13 feet long, 5 feet wide and about 11 feet in height (Figure 4). Many Gods and Sages have been carved on the Varaha Idol. A large temple with such a huge Idol was not built anywhere in India during the Gupta period. This temple was also built according to the architectural norms described in the 'Vishnudharmottar Purana'. This temple was built during the first reign of the Huna King Toramana as evidenced by the inscription on the chest of this Idol belonging to the Huna King. This temple is found close to its original position. All the Pillars of this temple are still intact and can be reattached.



Figure 4: Varaha Temple Remains, Gupta Complex Eran

The body of the Varaha contains 1185 small images of sages and deities, arranged in twelve rows. Let us have a look at various figures found on this Varaha. An idol of Bhudevi is shown hanging from the right teeth of Varaha. The goddess Saraswati is depicted in a standing position on Varaha's tongue. The small image of Vidyadhar is carved in the ears of the Varaha Idol. In the twenty-seven circles, above the Varaha Idol figures of men and women have been carved. The male figures in four rows are seen above the neck and chest of the animal. There is a total of 95 sages holding a kamandal in one hand and the other hand either in *Abhaya-mudra* or in *vismaya-mudra*. In the first and second row from the top, an Idol of Vishnu is seen standing on a lotus. All the seven planets have been engraved except Rahu-Ketu above Varaha. The sun god is also found on Varaha's body, and foreign influences is seen in this deity. The upper part of the body of the Varaha Idol has figures of Lord Ganesha in the west, Lord Shiva in the south, Lord Brahma in the north, and Lord Vishnu in the east direction. The twelve zodiac signs are engraved on this Idol. The foot and tail of the Varaha Idol are also engraved with rows of sages and saints, six lines engraved in the front leg and three lines in the back foot. These various sages and saints in different rows on body parts of Varaha, Witness, lord Varaha freeing Bhudevi from the deepness of thesea.



Figure 5: Narasimha Temple Remains, Gupta Complex Eran

Narasimha Temple Remains: The Narasimha temple is the third temple of the Eran temple complex, which is now almost destroyed except the Idol of God Narasimha placed on a plinth. According to General Alexander Cunningham this temple was built as a room measuring about 13 feet in length and is 4 feet in width. This temple is seen built on four pillars which are ten feet long. The pillars of the temple are now scattered near the Narasimha Idol which is about 8 feet in length (Figure 5).



Figure 6: Garuda Pillar, Gupta Complex, Eran

The middle inter-Column distance, seen in Gupta temples at Madbamora, Tigowa, Devgarh, and Sanchi are also found in this temple. The inter-column distance of the Narasimha temple measures 4 ½ feet in the centre against 3 ¼ feet at the sides. This inter-column measurement is greater than those found in the other two temples in the Eran complex. Though the pillars themselves are no longer standing, their positions are clearly defined by chisel marks on the surface of the plinth. They are of the pure Gupta type. The pilasters of the doorway are of the same pattern as the pillars of the portico, and the whole temple is a highly decorated specimen of the early Gupta style of architecture. The roof is flat as usual and the chamber is covered by two slabs, each about 14 feet long and about 8 feet broad and one foot thick. These two slabs have slightly raised edges, and the junction is covered by a single narrow slab running the whole length.

Garuda Pillar: This Garuda pillar is located opposite the Vishnu temple. It is the only pillar in India, which was built during the Gupta period and its height is about forty-nine feet. This pillar is installed on a high platform. Its lower part square in shape is about 4 feet in diameter inside the platform. It is square till 21 feet and on top of that, it is octagonally shaped up to nine feet. Above this is an abacus topped with a square red sandstone block of about 4 feet height. At the top of this square is the sculpture of Garuda about 5 feet in height with a large aura (*abhamandal*) (Figure 6). Garuda is considered as the vehicle of Lord Vishnu. The Garuda here is seen holding a serpent in both of his hands, suggesting most probably the crushing defeat of the naga and Saka kings by the Gupta monarch Samudragupta (Mentioned in Prayag inscription) and Chandragupta II. The local people mistakenly consider this pillar as Bhima's smace. A few feet above the plinth of this pillar and facing the Vishnu temple is an inscription of nine lines. This inscription is dated to the Gupta Year 165 (=484 C.E.), which helps to know that this area was still included in the Gupta domain. The name of the Gupta emperor, as given in the inscription, is Budhagupta. His feudatory, Surasmichandra, was ruling over the land between the river '*Kalindi*' (Yamuna) and the river Narmada along with extensive tracts of land including Eran. The local governor at Eran was Matrividishnu as this inscription refers to the region of Budhagupta and records the erection of a 'Flag Staff' of the God Vishnu by a Maharaja named Matrividishnu and his younger brother Dhanyavidishnu.

Nra-Varah Sculpture: In the earlier period of the emergence of Vaishnavism, Varaha the Boar had been associated primarily with Varaha, the creator and Prajapati the 'Lord of Creatures'. Only later did it become established as an incarnation of Vishnu. The mythological story of Varaha originates in Vedic literature and is later retold in several Puranas. The earliest reference to the Varaha as 'Emusa' is found in the Rigveda (VIII,77,10) while the Atharvaveda informs us that the earth opens herself to the wild boar (XII, I,48). The Varaha Idols usually has two major iconographic forms i.e., the semi-human form (Nra-varaha) with a human body and a boar's head and another entirely zoomorphic form. The Most important nra-varaha Idol now preserved in the Harisingh Gour Archaeological Museum might have been originally erected in

one of the twin sanctuaries between the Vishnu and Narsimha temples of Eran during Budhagupta's reign (476-495A.D.) or sometimes between the reign of Chandragupta II and Budhagupta.



Figure 7: Nra-Varaha, Eran, Sagar University Museum (Courtesy: Nagesh Dubey)

There is a figure of a boar's head, 6 feet in height and 2 feet 7 inches broad having been brought from the ruins, near the pillar of Budhagupta, as told by Cunningham (Figure 7). It is heavy in nature but the well-formed limbs, together with the simple rendering, expresses primal power while the pose suggests invulnerability and victory. Varaha is two-armed and stands in the alidhā posture with his left leg kept firmly on a vertical pillar, probably indicative of a rock. His right hand is held akimbo. The image has a square nose and a straight-lined mouth of a boar. He is lifting Prithvi Devi (the earth) from the ocean by his left arm. Half hidden behind the right leg of Varaha is a small female figure standing on a high pedestal. She holds, as if like a rope the stem of a lotus, the flower of which covers the top of Varaha's head like a small-cap. Varaha wears a broad necklace and garland of flowers (Vanamala). His lower garment is wrapped around his waist with a big knot in front and with its heavy folds falls between his legs. The pedestal of the Idol has a short inscription of two lines in Gupta Brahmi, which describes the names *Śri Mashesvarādattāsya* and *Varahādattāsya*, two donors of the Idol, who could be either father and son or two brothers. According to Cunningham's report, inside the village of Eran, in the house of a Brahman near the Hānumanā temple a boar's Idol was found. This Idol was brought from the ruins near the pillar of BudhaGupta according to the Brahman's recollection. Cunningham believes that it probably belonged to the two Varahā temples in the Gupta complex.



Figure 8: Main Gate of Modern Fort, Eran (Hathi Darwaja)

Modern Fort and Main Gate of Eran: The fort of Eran built in the Mughal period dates back to 1600 BC. The fort built by the Dangi king is found carrying a fortification wall sloping east to west towards the Bina River. The fort has two main gates, "*Hathi Darwaja*" meaning "Elephant Gate", and "*Bhimgaja Darwaja*". There are three important main river ghats that provide an opening to the banks of the Bina River, which have archaeological and historical significance. The river piers are called Nahe Ghat, the Baba ghat, and the Reta Ghat. The Baba ghat was found embellished with Gupta sculpture (i.e., Sakatamochan vadha) and also acted as a Dagi fort Security checkpoint.

In Nahe Ghat also, there has been discoveries of about a dozen sculpture of various deities and shiva lingas. There has been a discovery of more than fifteen stone tools in Reta ghat. The lingas and various sculptures found in this area can be collectively dated between 4th century C.E. to 18th century C.E. (Figure 8).

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study illuminate the religious, cultural, social, economic, and political significance of the area as reflected from material remains. Eran has provided a large number of evidence belonging to various time periods to study the nature of art and its gradual development. From the earliest phase belonging to the prehistoric period to the later phase dated to the 18th century C.E., different forms of art were created and found to flourish here. Their identification has been done on the basis of the iconographic features and architectural remains found in Eran. Temple architecture mentioned here have been discussed with regards to styles and motifs. Most of the regions of Eran have been explored from the archaeological perspective during this work. An awareness regarding the history and archaeology of the remains procured here has also been created among the natives and steps have been taken for their preservation with the help of the local people. The People here were also sensitized about the ancient temples found on the banks of the Bina River for protection of sculptures and other architectural remains. Eran has unique examples of Gupta art, as the Idols of Vishnu, boar (Varsha) and the Garuda pillar have come to hold their own special place in Indian art. The site of Eran still requires further development. Domestic and foreign tourists come to see the erstwhile art of Eran even in the presence of inconveniences. The antiquities related to Vaishnavism derived from Eran prove the prevalence of Vaishnavism in the culture of this region. It is clear that the Vaishnava sect dominated the society in this area. It is made clear from the various scenes related to Krishna, engraved on the Gupta inscriptions from Eran showing that the Bhagwat sect was prevalent in the Eran region. The beauty of the art is reflected in the secret carpet art of Eran with Shri Krishna, Balarama along with other excellent scenes. The Government of Madhya Pradesh and the state and central Tourism Department can make this place convenient and attractive for tourists by laying a paved road for tourists who come to visit Eran and by providing facilities for sailing in the endless waters of Bina River.

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