Palaeo-Activity (Cupules) Sites Discovered Near Ghusmesvara Jyotirlinga, Shiwad

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Abstract: *The paper discusses the finding of four cupules sites in the vicinity of Ghusmesvara Jyotirlinga, Shiwad. The finding near a Saivite pilgrimage adds a new dimension to the study of activities of palaelolithic men. The context and location of findings along with associated material from two of the sites add to the existing knowledge related to cupules studies.*

Keywords: Ghusmesvara Jyotirlinga, Shiwad, Shaivism, Cupules, Inscriptions, Iconography, Historical Patronage

Introduction

The Ghusmesvara Jyotirlinga holds significant religious and historical importance within the Shaiva tradition. This study examines the site through textual sources, historical records, and archaeological findings to establish its antiquity and cultural relevance. References to Ghusmesvara in the *Shiva Purana* and other texts indicate its recognition as one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, though its identification remains debated. Historical sources and inscriptions provide insights into the temple's development, patronage, and transformations over time. Archaeological surveys at Shiwad reveal cupules—circular depressions on rock surfaces—suggesting pre-Hindu ritual activities, possibly linked to early religious practices. These findings raise questions about the continuity and evolution of sacred spaces. Comparative analysis with other Jyotirlinga sites highlights variations in iconography, temple architecture, and regional adaptations of Shaiva worship. This paper aims to bridge textual and material evidence to construct a holistic narrative of Ghusmesvara Jyotirlinga's historical trajectory. The study underscores the need for further archaeological investigations to clarify the temple's origins and its role in shaping religious landscapes. By integrating multiple lines of evidence, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between mythology, history, and archaeology in India's sacred geography.

Ghusmesvara at Shiwad (Figure 1) situated in District Sawai Madhopur is one of twelve sacred *jyotirlingas*, though, the variant name of Ghusmesvara, Ghrishnesvara is located at Ellapuram (Ellora) in Maharashtra which has gained wider acceptance as the

twelfth *jyotirlinga*. As per the *Siva Purana* account mentioning twelve *jyotirlingas*, Ghusmesa at Sivalaya is the twelfth *jyotirlinga*.

Figure 1: Ghusmesvara Temple

Figure 2: Ghusmesvara Jyotirlinga

सौराष्ट्रे सोमनाथं च श्रीशैले मल्लिकार्जुनम ।	*Saurashtre somanatham cha srishaile mallikarjunam I*
उज्जयिन्यां महाकालंओंकारं ममलेश्वरम ।।	*Ujjayinyam mahakalamomkaram mamalesvaram II*
केदारं हिमवत्प्रष्ठे डाकिन्यां भीमशंकरम ।	*Kedaram himavatprashthe dakinyam bhimasankaram I*
वाराणस्यां च विश्वेशं त्रयम्बकं गोतमी तटे ।।	*Varanasyam cha visvesam tryambakam gomati tate II*
वैधनाथं चितभूमौ नागेशं दारुकावने ।	*Vaidyanatham chitabhumau nagesam darukavane I*
सेतुबन्धे च रामेशं घुश्मेशं तु शिवालये ।।	*Setubandhe cha ramesam ghusmesam tu sivalaye II*

(*Sivapurana, Kotirudra Samhita*, 32-33)

As per the story given in the *Siva Purana*, a lady named Ghusma used to worship Siva at this place and the pond in which she used to immerse votive Sivalingas was named as Sivalaya by Bhagavan Siva himself.

इदं सरस्तु लिंगानामालयं जयतां सदा।	*Idam sarastu linganamalayam jayatam sada I*
तस्माच्छिवालयं नाम प्रसिद्धं भुवनत्रये ।।	*Tasmatsivalayam nama prasiddham bhuvanatraye II*

(*Sivapurana, Kotirudra Samhita*, 33.45)

In Vikrama Samvat 1885 (1837 CE), the then ruler of Shiwad Raja Shiv Singh got this tank desilted and a good number of Sivalingas (about 2000) were recovered which were then installed in the temple compound at two different spots (Brochure: Ghusmesvara Temple Trust).

A mountain named Devagiri is located to the south of Ghusmesvara which is still known by this name.

दक्षिणस्यां दिशि श्रैष्ठो गिरिर्देवेति संज्ञकः।	*Dakshinasyam disi srestho girirdeveti samjnakah I*
महाशोभाविन्तो नित्यं राजतेऽदभुत दर्शन:।।	*Mahasobhavinto nityam rajateadbhuta darsanah II*

(*Sivapurana, Kotirudra Samhita*, 32.12)

Ghusmesvara Mahatmya of the *Skanda Purana* provides a brief description of Ghusmesvara in its 16th *sloka* where Sutaji informs Saunaka Rishi that Ghusmesvara is located at Sivalaya which is 1 *yojana* by 1 *yojana* in length and breadth. The area has four entrances of which the eastern gate is named Sarvasarpa which is guarded by Bhairava. This Sarvasarpa is at present identifiable with village Sarsop which also has a small fortress atop the hill. The northern entrance is named Bahal which is at present identifiable with Bahad, situated slightly to the north-east and also having a medieval fort. The western entrance is named Natyasala which is at present identifiable with the village Natwada. The southern entrance is named Isvara which houses a Linga named Isvaresvara. This village and the Linga are identifiable with Isvaresvara Sivalinga and Isardah village, the nearest railway station of Shiwad. River Vasishti flowed near Sivalaya which is the ancient name of Banas River which flows nearby. On the bank of this river was a Mandara vana which is at present identifiable with the village name Mandawar. It also informs of a pond in the north-west by the name of Surasara Sarovara which can be identified with Siras village (Brochure: Ghusmesvara Temple Trust).

Figure 3: Jangha of medieval temple

Figure 4: Doorjambs, Ghusmesvara Temple

All these identifications of ancient names with present villages leave no doubt in confirming that the Ghusmesvara *jyotirlinga* mentioned in the *Skanda Purana* is none other than the Ghusmesvara at Shiwad. The Sivalinga which is worshipped as the *jyotirlinga* is situated at a depth of about a meter from the entrance of *garbhagriha* and has disappeared due to long usage, only the spot of *yonipitha* is marked which is seen through a mirror (Figure 2). The present-day temple is a much renovated one but has many surviving remnants of the late medieval temple, particularly the *jangha* is still surviving, though painted (Figure 3). It is difficult to trace the early medieval temple which was destroyed by Mahmud of Ghazni but there are eight doorframe fragments along with few Sivalingas, a Ganesa sculpture and other pieces which may belong to that temple (Pls. 4-6). The eight number of doorjambs confirm the presence of at least 4 medieval shrines in the complex. Few Sati pillars were also installed there in the complex during the late medieval period (Figure 7). There are two significant ponds

located near the Ghusmesvara Temple, one of which named as Bada Talab is comparatively larger. Two of the above-mentioned sites Bahad and Mandawar also have the presence of cupules which would be described subsequently.

Figure 5: Doorjambs

Figure 6: Sivalingas and other sculptures

Figure 7: Sati Pillars

Cupules

Cupules are commonly found across Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia on the rock surfaces and can be considered the predominant examples of palaeo-art related to the palaeolithic period. The earliest cupules are believed to have been made in the Lower Palaeolithic period and it is believed that the tradition, particularly in Australia has somehow survived till the early twentieth century. In India, Hathi Kheda including

Moda Bhata sites in Ajmer are considered to be the earliest such sites where the cupules are executed on quartz rock which is comparatively a harder rock (Kumar and Bednarik 2002: 45-50). The large Morajhari cupule site (near Ajmer) and the sites Bajanibhat and Jhiri Nala (in the vicinity of Kotputli) are also of apparent Pleistocene antiquity. The confirm example of a cupule datable to the Lower Palaeolithic period was found on a quartzite boulder in an excavated trench in the Auditorium Cave, Bhimbetka which was covered by the top of upper Acheulian horizon but probably of the lower chopping tool horizon (Bednarik 2010: 5-6). The microerosional analysis on Moda Bhata and Morajhari cupules, though has provided only Holocene dates (Kumar and Bednarik 2002). This could be due to continuation of cupules for some purpose (in all probability ritualistic) till the Holocene period. For microerosion analysis, Kumar and Bednarik (2002: 45-50) write that it needs to be taken into account that the method can only consider surfaces of which remnants remain available. Therefore, the possibility cannot be excluded that this is an originally Pleistocene cupule that was deepened or enlarged in the early Holocene, and then slightly hammered in the late Holocene.

Cupules are unequivocally among the most perdurable of all non-utilitarian anthropic rock markings. Taphonomic logic decrees how very improbable it is that this was the first rock art produced, and it is highly likely that other forms of rock art were in use then, but have apparently not survived (Bednarik 2010: 5).

About 20 km distant from Ghusmesvara is the first of the newly discovered palaeo-art site which becomes more important when one considers the fact that ritualistic activity of prehistoric men is somehow surviving nearby in the form of a *Jyotirlinga* in present times. Though, a direct connect cannot be established, it can also not be ruled out that majority of pilgrimage sites in India have come up at the spots which trace back their antiquity to the prehistoric past.

The newly discovered palaeo-art site no. 1 (Figure 8) is located outside village Thuniya Hatona near Niwai in District Tonk (26.248755, 75.900062). From here a chain of Aravalli hill starts which goes on till the Banas River. The palaeo-art site is located on a low rising plateau adjacent to the hills and the nearby area is full of sandy dunes and agricultural land. In a small patch of about 50 meter length, there are four groups of cupules separated from each other. The largest group is about 2 meter in length and consists of about 25 cup marks arranged in two parallel rows (Figures 9a and 9b). The maximum depth of a cup mark is not more than 3 cm and average diameter is around 4 cm. A few of the cup marks in the group have vanished due to weathering. Three more cupules series at the site consist of comparatively smaller and shallower cup marks (Figures 10-12). During the exploration of the area, it was observed that the sandy soil was being removed from the surrounding areas. From those sandy deposits few microlithic tools and their debitas were collected (Figure 13) along with a possible grinder stone (Figure 14) and a small stone piece with some possible human touch (Figure 15). These findings indicate the survival of the palaeolithic site as late as

Mesolithic period, though a direct connection of the Mesolithic finds with the cupules neither known nor certain.

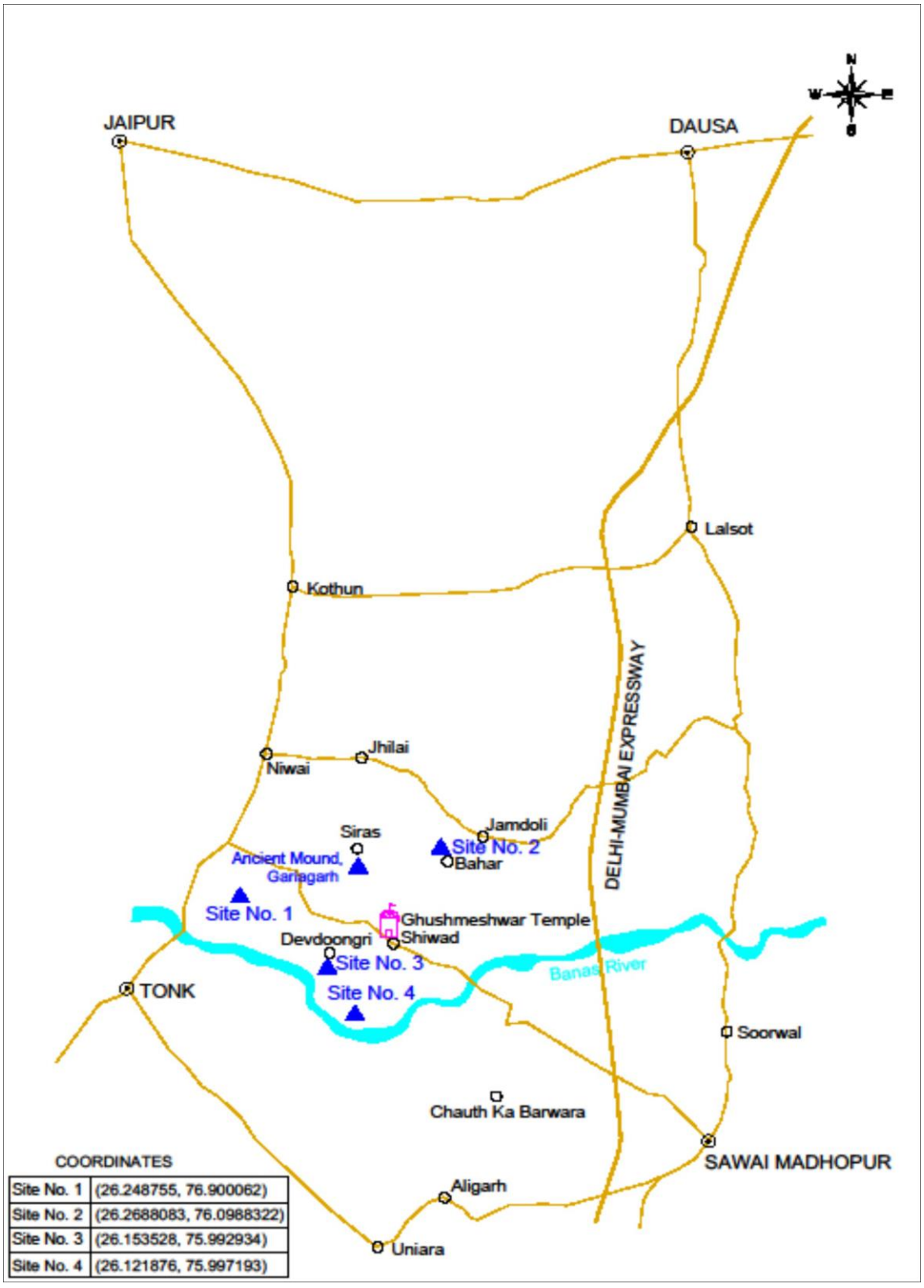

Figure 8: Location map of cupules sites near Shiwad, Rajasthan

Figure 9a: Cupule site 1, Thuniya

Figure 9b: Close up of Cupule site 1, Thuniya

Figure 10: Cupule site 2, Thuniya

Figure 11: Cupule site 3, Thuniya

Figure 12: Cupule site 4, Thuniya

Figure 13: Microliths

Figure 14: Mesolithic Pounder

Figure 15: Stone piece with probable human touch

The second group of cupules (26.2688083, 76.0988322) is situated near the Archaeological Survey of India's protected site of Bundwali Doongri (Bahar) and this was brought to the author's notice by Shri Manoj Meena, a researcher associated with excavation of Bewan (Dt. Sikar) under the author's direction and was explored with him. The archaeological mound (Figure 16) apparently belongs to the historical period and has been destroyed to a larger extent. The mound is situated on the foot of the hill and its archaeological deposit merges with the natural rocky deposit. There are two cupules sites near the mound. One has quite large cup marks carved out on a flat rock lying on the ground (Figure 17). Some small size cupules are also visible in the group which are quite shallow and small in size. The larger cup marks are so big and deep that it is difficult to ascertain their identity as manmade cup marks. In case these are confirmed as manmade cup marks, there is possibility that these were used and enlarged during the historical times by the people living on the nearby mound. The boulder which has cupules on a confirm basis is situated in between the mound and the above-mentioned cup marks site (Figure 18). These cupules are quite similar to the cupules found at other sites of Rajasthan and can be considered as belonging to the lower palaeolithic period.

There are a number of scattered temples remains, of Hindu and Jaina affiliation near the archaeological mound belonging to around ninth-tenth century CE. One of these is a multi-armed mutilated image of Maa Chamunda riding on a human corpse (Figure 19). An image is identifiable as that of *Dikpala* Indra due to the presence of an elephant, his *vahana* (Figure 20). Another *dikpala* image is identifiable holding a *kamandalu* in his natural left hand whereas attributes held in his three remaining hands as well as the *vahana* are not clear (Figure 21). One of the images is identifiable as a Jaina tirthankara image standing in *kayotsarga mudra*, though it is quite mutilated (Figure 22). Another sculpture is identifiable as that of Varaha incarnation (Figure 23). Another sculpture is that of standing Siva and Parvati holding their hands together (Figure 24). In his upper hands, Siva is holding a *pannaga* and a *trisula.* The natural left of Siva and natural right of Parvati are possibly going around the neck of each other. Three seated *devas* are

shown atop the niche. Another mutilated sculpture seems to be seated Kubera with a pot visible in the background (Figure 25). One of the fragments seems to have been left unfinished (Figure 26).

Figure 16: Bahar Mound

Figure 17: Suspected Cupules, Bahar

Figure 18: Cupules, Bahar

Figure 19: Chamunda, Bahar

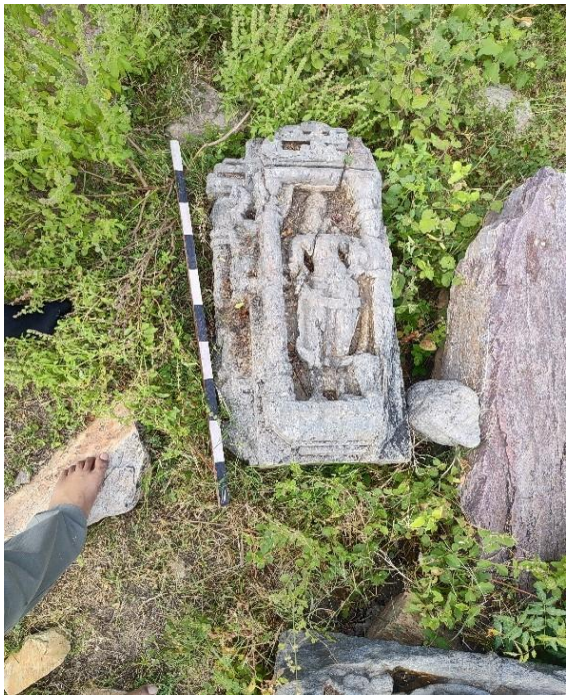

Figure 20: Indra, Bahar

Figure 21: Dikpala Image, Bahar

Figure 22: Tirthankara Image, Bahar

Figure 23: Varaha Image, Bahar

Figure 24: Siva-Parvati Image, Bahar

Figure 25: Kubera Image, Bahar

Figure 26: An Unfinished Piece, Bahar

The third cupules site earlier identified by Shri Manoj Meena at Mandawar (26.153528, 75.992934) was explored along with him. The site is situated near Mandaravana (Devdoongri), a small hillock with greenery and temple (Figure 27) inside a private field. The cupules are carved on two boulder surfaces lying on a plain sandy deposit (Figure 28). One of the boulders has about 20 cupules, one group formed by rows one above the other and the other formed as a single row from top to bottom (Figure 29). The cupules are very shallow about 1-2 cm deep and about 6-8 cm wide. The other group of cupules on an adjacent boulder has about 10 cupules in two parallel rows, of which only 4 are surviving at present (Figure 30). The cupules are shallower and only have a width of about 4-5 cm.

The fourth group of cupules at Raipura (26.121876, 75.997193) has about 4 or 5 cupules visible on a boulder lying in a sandy field (Figure 31). The depth of these cupules is only about 2 mm and width is about 5 cm as these were visible by putting sand inside them (Figure 32).

Figure 27: Devdoongri

Figure 28: Cupules Site, Devdoongri

Figure 29: Boulder 1 with Cupules, Devdoongri

Figure 30: Boulder 2 with cupules, Devdoongri

Figure 31: Cupules, Raipura

Figure 32: Cupules marked with sand filling, Raipura

As far as the meaning and purpose of making these cupules is concerned, it is very difficult to confirm, though it appears that it is related to some sort of beliefs and rituals of the prehistoric men. Since the making of cupules is quite labour intensive and time consuming, it definitely serves some special purpose. Till now, we have been

unable to consider the interdependence of lithology, technology and taphonomy of cupules. Many authors have assumed that cupules were produced through indirect percussion, grinding or polishing. The cupules of hard rock were created by direct percussion, or pounding (Bednarik 2010: 53-54). More research is required to understand the purpose, chronology and technique of cupules.

Conclusions

This study is important because it tries to connect some known information with some unknown facts. The presence of palaeo-activity sites in the vicinity of a sacred historical religious spot indicates some kind of indirect connection, though quite vague because of missing archaeological links. The presence of River Banas in the vicinity and availability of water through the river as well as ponds in a somewhat hilly terrain would have provided an ideal landscape for prehistoric settlers to survive. If we consider the cupules as belonging to the Lower palaeolithic period, somewhat continuity of prehistoric culture survives with the occurrence of microlithic tools and debitage which may belong to the Mesolithic period. From that period till the historic times, we do not come across archaeological cultures. The earliest historical deposit is visible at Gariagarh mound (Siras) which is datable to the Gupta period if not earlier. The excavated site of Rairh which dates back to the early historic period is also not much distant from Shiwad. Most of the surrounding sites of Shiwad were under habitation during the early medieval period. The presence of water would have attracted settlers during the early medieval period too. The ground water is available at only few feet depth till now, a surprising phenomenon in this part of Rajasthan. The soil is comparatively fertile and would have led to good or at least self-sufficient food production for the people living in this area. This area also formed part of ancient trade route which was surviving as late as eleventh century CE as Mahmud of Ghazni passed via this area during his campaign from Mathura to Somnath. How the sacred spot of Shiwad Jyotirlinga sprung up is not clear but there might be some kind of activity or belief of the prehistoric men associated with this spot which in historical times took the shape of a place of Saivite worship.

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