

PROSPECTS OF 'ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURISM' IN BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY OF WARI-BATESHWAR

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Abstract

Tourism is defined as a composite of activities, services, and industries that delivers a travel experience to individuals and groups traveling from their homes for purposes of pleasure. Archaeological sites and historic places are major tourist attractions worldwide. The popularity of archaeological sites as tourist attractions means that they are valuable sources of revenue. Bangladesh comes into view as a popular tourist destination for natural and cultural heritages. These valuable heritages are the major parts of our tourism industry. The cultural heritage of Bangladesh is actually composed of our nation's physical artifacts and attributed that are inherited from its past generations. Archaeological sites fall under tangible heritages such as Wari-Bateshwar, Mahasthangarh, Paharpur Buddhist Bihara, Bagerhat Sixty Dome Mosque, Mainamati etc. The archaeological sites are visible symbols of our identity and give us a strong sense of bonding. The sites also reflect other important symbolic meaning that promote social inclusion, tolerance and respect for diversity. In this paper, a case study of Wari-Bateshwar was carried out to discuss the prospects of 'Archaeological Tourism' in Bangladesh as the issue is very significant part for us to earn revenue from the tourists.

Key Words: *Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Archaeology, Wari-Bateshwar*

Introduction

Archaeological tourism is a form of cultural tourism, which aims to promote public interest in archaeology and the conservation of historical sites. Archaeology, simply stated, is the study of human antiquities. An Archaeological site is a place where the remains of an old civilization exist, sometimes visibly but mostly under the cover of the earth. It needs a lot of careful digging and sifting which in archaeological terms is called 'excavation'. After the excavation the site reveals the existence of human settlement with houses, streets, temples, potteries, tools and other implements, sculpture, painting, writing etc. This ancient human settlement unearthed during the modern times is called archaeological heritage. The passion by the past is something inherent to the human being.

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On the other hand, 'Archaeological Tourism' focuses on visiting and experiencing ancient sites and historical places. As well as it emerges as one of the most lucrative business worldwide. Bangladesh has tremendous opportunity to develop 'Archaeological Tourism' as one of the emerging diversion of larger tourism industry. So, it will not be very difficult to attract more tourist and creating new sources of livelihood for local communities. so it requires more attention to provide visitor facilities, archaeological site conservation in a proper way, develop road communication networks as well as to ensure good facilities for food and accommodation.

The Wari-Bateshwar region in Narsingdi, Bangladesh is an ancient fort city dating back to 450 BCE. This archaeological site was discovered in the 1933 by a local school teacher, Hanif Pathan. However, formal excavation started only recently in 2000. So far it has been discovered as the first oldest city in Bangladesh. The main objective of this study is to identify the scope of archaeological tourism of Wa.ri-Bateshwar.

Research Methodology

This article is based on secondary data and basically it is a descriptive research. The qualitative and quantitative data has been collected from various sources like newspapers, journals, online publications, published thesis, books and websites etc. This research is also emphasized on expert opinion to ensure the reliability of the study. Further studies need to be conducted to find out the impact of the archaeological and historical tourism on the Bangladeshi tourism sector.

Literature Review

Archaeology is the study of the ancient and recent human past through material remains. Archaeology offers a unique perspective on human history and culture that has contributed greatly to our understanding of both the ancient and the recent past. An archaeological site is any place where physical remains of past human activities exist. Archaeological site may contain a wealth of important information. Artifacts are objects made or used by people that are analyzed by archaeologists to obtain information about the peoples who made and used them. Non-portable artifacts called features are also important sources of information on archaeological sites. Features include things like soil stains that indicate where storage pits, garbage dumps, structures, or fences once existed. Eco-facts found on archaeological sites are natural remains such as plant and animal remains that can help archaeologists understand diet and subsistence patterns.

Knowledge about archaeology and archaeological sites adds to the expertise of those tourism professionals who package tours or work as a guide and escorts. There has been an increased interest in cultural and heritage tourism. In some countries like Egypt, Mexico, Italy, Peru, Cambodia, India etc, tour operators package archaeological sites and monuments as tourism products and offer archaeological tours as special interest tours. India virtually has repository of Archaeological Sites and Monuments which serves the

backbone of Indian Tourism development. The development of Indian Society was revealed, only when in 1921 Harappan Civilization brought to limelight through archaeological excavation which covered areas as wide 1.8 million square kilometers (Chakrabarty 1996: 65).

Bangladesh is a country considerably rich in archaeological wealth and historical values especially from the Early Historical Period to Muslim Period. Most of the archaeological sites are still unexplored. Moreover, around 2,500 years old fortified city named War-Bateshwar has been discovered in Bangladesh. As a second oldest city, Mahasthangarh has been discovered in Bangladesh. On the other hand, we have two World Cultural Heritage Sites i.e. Paharpur Buddhist Bihara and Sixty Dome Mosque in our country. Conversely, numerous numbers of significant archaeological sites are already identified in our country.

Archaeological tourism refers to the process whereby people travel to historical and archeological places of interest. The reason why it is called archaeological tourism is due to the fact that it is often aimed at arranging visits to archeological sites where places and artifacts dating back to antiquity have been discovered, such as Wari-Bateshwar. Archeological tourism may be a means for the tourists to satisfy their curiosity regarding the ancient sites or it may be for the purpose of educating the tourists who may be students and scholars.

According to the World Tourism Organization, 'Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purpose not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited' (World Tourism Organization/WTO). Simultaneously Mathienson and Wall described it as 'The temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs' (Mathienson and Wall 1982: 87). It was also described that 'The sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors' (Machintosh and Goeldner 1986: 45). They also wrote that 'Heritage is not simply the past but the modern-day use of elements of the past' ((Machintosh and Goeldner 1986: 50).

Most times, it is the government of the region where the antiquities are located to promote archaeological tourism as a means of educating people about their rich cultural heritage, or simply as a means to make some money from the tourists who visit. Tourism is such a big business that some economies are mainly dependent on it for their survival. For this reason, some governments might promote their culture and encourage archeological tourism as a means to generate more funds. Tourists spend money on airfare, transportation, food, accommodation, services and the purchase of artifacts. The government also gains from the taxes imposed on the expenditure by such tourists.

On a national and international level archaeological sites have great social, cultural, and economic value. Archaeological sites are integral parts of regional histories, heritages, and identities. They are also often major tourist attractions. The economic potential has increased the pressure on archaeological sites to accommodate greater influxes of tourists and on the authorities in charge to open up more sites to tourism. Tourism expands local opportunities and brings in revenue but it can also have serious impacts on sites. Archaeo-tourism must be considered carefully and entered cautiously. Steps must be taken to maintain the integrity of the site as both a cultural resource and as a subject for research and scholarship. If negotiated properly, many future possibilities lie in the cooperation between cultural managers and tourism experts. In this session we will explore the possibilities and best practices of presenting archaeological research and communicating the importance of archaeological heritage to an interested public as well as share innovative approaches to archaeo-tourism involving local communities, technology, and more.

Wari-Bateshwar: Possibilities of ‘Archaeological Tourism’

Wari-Bateshwar is very important archaeological site of Bangladesh located at Belabo, Narsinghdi district in Bangladesh. The two thousand five hundred year old fort-city stands by the bank of the river Brahmaputra. In recent research, it is assumed that Wari-Bateshwar was the ancient trade centre Sounagara as mentioned by the Greek geographer Ptolemy (Rahman 2001: 209). In 1930s, local schoolteacher Hanif Pathan and afterward his son Habibulla Pathan started collecting those artifacts and later carried out research with a curious mind. But for a long time, this potentially important archaeological site had failed to attract the attention of professional archaeologists in Bangladesh. After waiting for 60 years, archaeological exploration started in 1989 resulting regular excavation from 2000 (Rahman 2001: 219).

So far 50 archaeological sites have been discovered in and around Wari-Bateshwar fort-city located by the bank of the river old Brahmaputra. It is evident from the pattern of the archaeological sites that the ancient people established their settlements in flood-free zone. This is also the evidence of the knowledge of developed town planning and intellectual height of the ancient settlers. In the vicinity of Wari-Bateshwar, nearly 50 archaeological sites have been discovered. It is assumed that they used to live by agriculture and their surplus food productions were used to fulfill the necessity of the businessmen, priest and royal officials - those who lived in the city.

In Bangladesh, archaeologists seem to agree that Wari-Bateshwar was inhabited, in some way, by the beginning of the fourth century B.C. and abandoned by the third century A.D. Those dates are arrived at by comparing artifacts found at Wari-Bateshwar to similar ones found around the subcontinent. Hundreds of silver punch-marked coins have been found at Wari-Bateshwar, beginning with those discovered by the construction workers who attracted Hanif Pathan's attention 80 years ago. The circular and square coins bear multiple impressions of shapes such as the sun, fish, and boats. The silver

coins are very light, with nearly 15 of them needed to make up an ounce. These items link Wari-Bateshwar with the Mauryan Empire, which used punch-marked coins as its national currency. The Mauryans ruled from the late fourth century to the early second century B.C. and was the largest empire in South Asia, reaching as far west as southeastern Iran, with a population of more than 50 million people. The empire developed extensive trade networks to both the west, with the Greeks and Romans, and east into Southeast Asia. If Wari-Bateshwar were actually part of the Mauryan Empire, it may have had the clout to be Ptolemy's trading hub, Sounagoura.

Cultural Materials of Wari-Bateshwar

Artifacts obtained so far from chance excavations, archaeological explorations and excavations in and around the site of Wari-Bateshwar are some stone implements, a grey soft stone amulet, a quern with a pestle, a four-legged sandstone quern bearing three auspicious symbols in relief, a ring stone, celts of fossil wood, a large number of triangular-shaped iron implements similar to prehistoric stone hand-axes, iron arrowheads, iron spearheads, iron nails, some lumps of iron ore, copper bangles, a bronze armband, fragments of high-tin bronze knobbed vessels, terracotta beads and balls, numerous potsherds of red ware (both course and fine), grey ware (both course and fine), red slipped ware, black slipped ware, Northern Black Polished ware, Rouletted ware, earthen knobbed ware, glass beads (both translucent and opaque), finished as well as unfinished semi-precious stone beads and a large number of silver punch-marked coins.

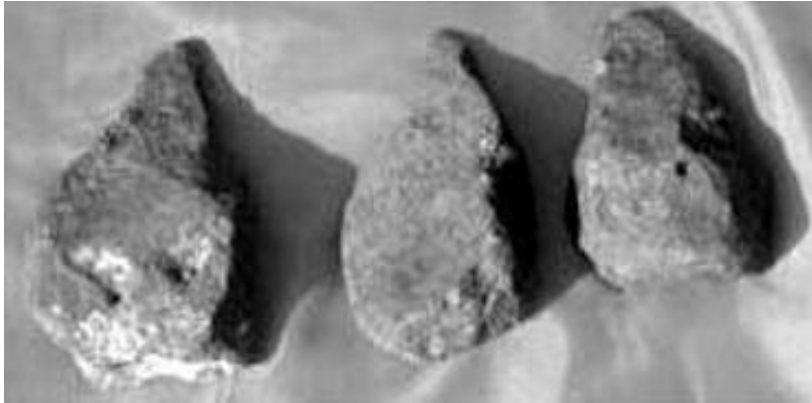


Fig. 1: Triangular-shaped iron tools from Bateshwar (Source: Jahan 2010)



Fig. 2: Iron spearheads, Wari-Bateshwar (Source: Jahan 2010)

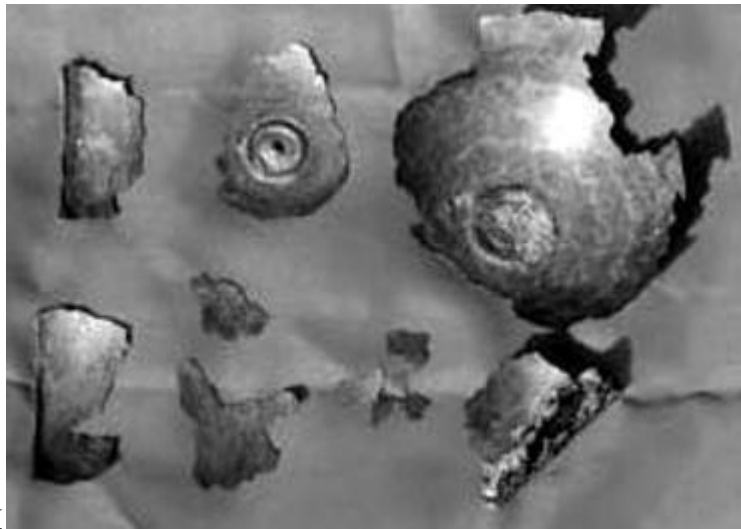


Fig. 3: Fragments of high-tin bronze knobbed vessels from Wari-Bateshwar (Source: Jahan 2010)

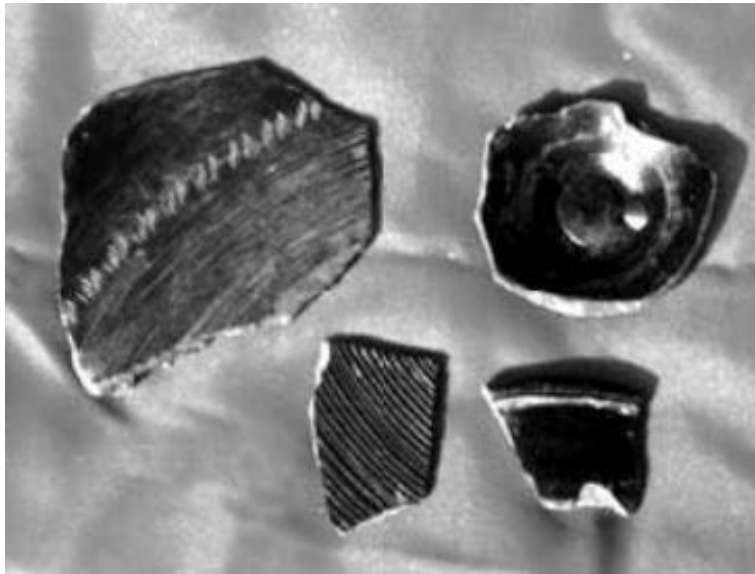


Fig. 4: Rouletted ware from Wari-Bateshwar (Source: Jahan 2010)



Fig. 5: Semi-precious stone beads from Wari-Bateshwar (Source: Jahan 2010)



Fig. 6: Silver punch-marked coins from Wari-Bateshwar (Source: Jahan 2010)

Among the stone antiquities mentioned above, the most interesting finding from Wari is a grey soft-stone plaque. The motifs depict a scene where two devotees are offering obeisance to a deity. The deity is placed on the mouth of a pitcher and holds a sword in the right hand and a shield in the left. The deity has been identified as goddess. It has been dated to the Mauryan period (Chakrabarti 1996: 78).

A large number of semi-precious stone beads have been discovered from Wari-Bateshwar. A close scrutiny of the beads revealed that they are mostly made of carnelian (including the etched variety), agate, quartz, amethyst, crystal, chalcedony, chert and jasper. The holes have been bored with remarkable skill, except in the cases of carnelian and agate, where the bores (made from both ends) fail to meet in a straight line. Along with these beads, a large quantity of core material, flakes, chips, beads without perforation and broken pieces of beads have also been discovered from the site. Discovery of etched beads, a special type of agate and carnelian beads with a white design etched on their polished surfaces, is an important indicator of trade between South and Southeast Asia during the Early Historic Period (Jahan, 2002: 133).

A sherd of coarse grey knobbed ware was found at Wari from the excavation in 2000 (Haque et al. 2000: 297). Sherds of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) and Rouletted Ware have been recovered from excavations at Wari. NBPW is usually made of superfine clay of the Ganga Plain. It is well fired, thin sectioned, and has a strikingly lustrous surface. It was a precious deluxe ware. Rouletted Ware is also found from Wari-Bateshwar which is also a luxury ware. It is usually wheel-thrown, grey in color and slipped, with an unusually smooth surface, well fired with a metallic sound.

A large number of silver punch-marked coins found at Wari, Bateshwar and in neighbouring villages such as Kandua, Marjal, Joshor, Kundarpara, Jaimangal, Candipara, Patuli, Chula, Harisangan and Govasia serve as corroborative evidence to substantiate WariBateshwar's claim as a maritime port frequented by merchants. The claim is all the more valid because the number is far greater than that obtained from other areas in Bangladesh which have also yielded similar coins (i.e., Bogra, Rajshahi and Mymensingh) (Karim, 1991: 5). It is also significant that most of these coins (found from 1933 to 2006) were discovered in earthen containers, at six spots at Wari, all of which are located on the margins of marshlands. The coins are mostly circular, oval, rectangular and square in shape but a few are irregular. Various symbols such as sun, elephant, arrow, cow, tree, flower, deer, owl, lobster, boat, wheel, 'trishul', six armed devices, mountain, mountain surmounted by a crescent, tortoise, fish, bird etc. Among these boat, fish and lobster seen on some of these coins, cannot escape attention because they signify maritime connection.

Why do we need Archaeological Tourism?

Interest:

Archaeological tourism combines a passion for the past with a sense of adventure and discovery. People are fascinated with ancient and historical remains. Archaeological tourism lets visitors experience the past and allows them to share in the thrill of discovery. The sometimes inaccessible nature of archaeological sites often adds the sense of adventure.

Revenue:

Of the numerous benefits of archaeological tourism, revenue is one of the most significant and the easiest to quantify. Archaeological tourism is a lucrative business and a thriving industry. Tour operators, national and local governments, and local communities share the revenue derived from tourism, including entrance cost and other related fees and taxes. Tourism also supports the local retail business (hotels, restaurants, local crafts, and souvenir stores) and provides numerous job opportunities, including the recruiting and training of guides and interpreters.

Awareness:

Archaeological tourism also creates less quantifiable benefits such as increasing awareness of an area that may otherwise have been under-appreciated as a travel destination. Increased attention can translate into income as more travelers visit the area. National and international exposure of a site can also lead to greater investment in its upkeep and maintenance by local and national governments.