

**Religious and Auspicious Symbols Depicted on
Artifacts of Wari-Bateshwar**

Submitted by

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Abstract

Symbols play a significant role to assume the religious beliefs. In this article we have discussed some of the artifacts of Wari-Bateshwar, which bear certain kinds of symbols. We assume that these symbols are quite significant in terms of socio-religious aspect of this site. The artifacts from the site that bear symbols are an amulet, punch-marked coins, querns, knobbed wares and a ring stone. The amulet is a very significant ritual object with the image of a tribal war-god (?) placed on the mouth of a pitcher and two votaries depicted on it. The religious belief that is reflected by the amulet is the idea of *Bhakti* to a personal god with offerings. The presence of solar symbol and six-armed symbol on the punch-marked coins represent the Sun God—Surya. And the mountain symbol with a crescent above on the punch-marked coins may typify the aniconic representation of Siva. The quern with *svastika* and *nandipadas* depicted on it might have religious values. If we are to make any inference about the religious beliefs of the Wari-Bateshwar people from those symbols depicted on this quern, then it indicates the prevalence of ‘Hinduism’. The ring stone has also some religious connotations, and then another aspect of their (or some of them) religious belief system may be provided by the ring stone. From the present study we do not find out the presence of Buddhism in Wari-Bateshwar culture.

Introduction

Wari-Bateshwar (twin villages) situated in the Belabo Thana of Narsingdi District, has recently come to prominence as one of the most important archaeological sites of Bangladesh. The typical cultural assemblage of Wari-Bateshwar are punch-marked silver coins, beads of semi-precious stones and glass, iron implements, bronze objects, stone tools, querns, amulet, ring stone, varieties of potteries (Black Slipped Ware, NBPW, knobbed ware etc.) and other objects of daily life. The assemblage of artifacts very clearly indicates its Early Historic cultural association.

The outlines of this culture are gradually emerging in the light, thanks to several studies and excavations made by scholars. However its many aspects still remain undefined—the question of their religious beliefs is one such. The present article is concerned to answer the question to the extent it is possible in the present state of our knowledge. We have focused here on some artifacts for the symbols depicted on them to scrutinise if they reveal the nature of the religious belief/s and also aspects of social life of the people of Wari-Bateshwar. Symbolic representation of deities is a common phenomenon in the religions of the sub-continent. Symbols play a significant role to understand the religious beliefs of the various people. Earlier Pathan (1989: 24, 32, 34) examined some artifacts and assumed that those were influenced by ‘Hinduism’. Whereas, Rahman and others

(Rahman *et. al.* 2003: 49-55) tried to interpret some symbols as Buddhist by nature. Prof. Imam (2004, 2005) studied these artifacts and found no signs of Buddhism. The artifacts from the site that bear symbols are an amulet, punch-marked coins, querns, knobbed wares and a ring stone. In this connexion collection may be drawn to a very exceptional and very significant ritual object—an amulet with the image of a tribal war-god (?) placed on the mouth of a pitcher and two votaries depicted on it. This object is more informative than the other ritual objects and symbols. It also raises a host of questions regarding its origin, the god's votaries and the cult's belief-context and its disappearance in later day Bengali culture except for the continuing tradition of iconic objects mounted on *ghatas*. These have been discussed below in the relevant section.

Stone Plaque Amulet

One of the most important antiquities from Wari-Bateshwar is a small (52X22 mm) and thin stone plaque (Plate 1) that Pathan (1989: 32) refers to as having been found at Wari. It does not fit with the known art traditions of ancient Bengal. Moreover, this could be only artifact of its kind so far known in Bengal and as far as our knowledge goes, in the Indian sub-continent. Such uniqueness certainly demands explanation of its origin. But at the present state of our understanding of the culture it is not possible to offer.

Besides the artistic importance, the tablet is also significant in many religious and social aspects. There should not be any doubt about its having some ritual significance. When the first author first saw (in 1989) it, it was intact. However, from recent photographs it appears that a wedge-shaped thin strip has flaked off fortunately without damaging the main scene depicted on it.

The plaque is made of a kind of grey soft stone. Within this small space, even a smaller oval or rather eye-shaped field has been prepared roughly in the centre for depicting in relief with much deftness and skill a scene where two devotees (Plate 1c, 1e) are offering obeisance and worship to a deity (Plate 1d) - what is interesting - with some definite iconographic attributes i.e. a shield in his left hand and a sword in the right. The two holes on the two corners of the upper side of the plaque most certainly indicate its being used as an amulet. In this scene of worship, the attempt is to present some kind of vegetation; a palm-like tree (Plate 1b) engraved just behind the right hand devotee is interesting and lends beauty to the composition. Incorporated in this scene of ritual character, this tree has also perhaps some similar significance or is it just the result of *horror vacui* of the artist? Or is the palm-like tree there to emphasise that the scene was taking place in the open air? Indeed special note should be taken of the fact that the deity is placed in the open air, the worship is taking place in the open air, there is no temple, nor any enclosure as is usually seen around *bodhi* trees and pillars in early Buddhist art. The two devotees flank the god (it is not a goddess—*ghatadevi* as suggested by Chakrabarti 1996: 77-80) on two sides sitting on some kind of seat, both with folded hands that may hold some offerings. The devotees are presented in profiles and the one on the left of the god has bowed head but the devotee on the right is looking at the god's face. Chakrabarti (1992: 60) thinks the devotee figures 'have their hair tied in buns.' However, to the first author it seems the right (right of the viewer) devotee is bare headed and the left (left of the viewer) one is wearing a turban. The right one is bare bodied but

the left one has some kind of upper garment. From the waist downward, they are wearing *dhoti*-like cloth, the folds of which have been beautifully delineated by the engraver. From their comparative aspect and dress, perhaps the right (right of the viewer) devotee is of a humbler status. The god's dress is interesting: the upper portion of his body, the only portion that can be seen, is clad in some kind of a breast-plate or armour on the chest portion. He has large earrings dangling from his ears and wears a conical but squattish headdress. The figures in the scene give us an idea of the dress worn at the time. In the field of the whole composition are strewn some auspicious symbols: quite clearly one *taurine* (also Khatun 1991: 101)/*nandipada* (Plate 1g) and one *triskeles* (Plate 1f) (Ahmed 2001a: 80) and two rosettes (Plate 1a, 1h). Now what is important is the use of *taurine/nandipada* (see, below the section of coins for details) as an auspicious symbol or symbol of protection by the people who used this amulet.

It is a *ghata* (pitcher) mounted god holding two objects in his two hands—a sword in the right and a shield in the left. His eye-copy of the scene on the tablet has apparently misled Chakrabarti (1996: 78, fig. 1) into believing that the object in his right hand is a fish. Earlier he described it as 'an indeterminate object' (Chakrabarti 1992: 60). What is also interesting is that the god is neither sitting nor standing but is in the form of a torso mounted on the *ghata*, the mouth of which is covered with something that may be intended to be a lotus. Chakrabarti very aptly pointed out the example of *ghatapuja*, albeit of a different kind and of a much later date, as practised in Bengal (Chakrabarti 1996: 78-79). This shows the continuity of a tradition of *ghata* mounted gods in Bengal right from the Wari-Bateshwar times. This tablet also offers the first concrete example of image worship in Bengal. Similar images of the *ghata*-mounted god of the Wari-Bateshwar people must surely have been sculpted and worshipped although no other example has yet been found from the site.

A whole theory of the iconography of a rudimentary tribal Vishnu being contributed to the total pool of the syncretistic development of the late day full-fledged Vishnu was elaborated by the first author in his articles (Imam 2004, 2005) on the perception that the god was holding a wheel in his left hand. However, keen observations through photographs and drawings it appears to the first author that it could be a shield which also makes a sensible combination of sword. This perhaps makes the god a tribal war-god. After the realisation that this is a shield and not a wheel the issue of a rudimentary tribal Vishnu in Bangladesh need not arise at all and therefore is being withdrawn by the first author himself with regrets.

As regards its date in consideration of sculptural development in the Kushana period and the full-fledged sculptural development of the Gupta period the art of the amulet cannot be contemporary with either of them and logic demands that it should be placed in an earlier period, although how early-Mauryan or even pre-Mauryan we—cannot say at the present state of our research. Dilip K. Chakrabarti (1996: 78) somewhat unconvincingly suggests its being of Mauryan date on artistic ground. It is our contention that it was an indigenous god of the autochthones besides other considerations of the central deity are to be taken note of. And this relief, although representing only tribal art throws significant light on the history of sculptures in Bangladesh. This lone example represents

the first sculpture of Bangladesh. So far only ‘three pieces of stone sculptures have been found from the Pre-Gupta Bengal, all with definite Kushana affiliation: one from Chandraketurgh, one from the outskirts of Mahasthangarh and the other from Patharghata in Jaipurhat district (greater Bogra). And all three of these are likely to have been imports (for the discussion see, Haque 2001: 388 ff).

We do not have any sculpture from later times showing the survival of the cult depicted on the tablet except for the tradition in Bengal of representing gods mounted on *ghatas*. It would be an interesting research to find out if the practice of placing gods on *ghatas* was a practice typical in Bengal or was also prevalent in other parts, particularly in Eastern India.

We may also notice among the many sides of the sculpture’s importance the fact that in the absence of any other sculpture found in the site, the tablet for the first time, and so far the only time, provides human faces to the Wari-Bateshwar culture. It offers a glimpse of at least three faces of the kind of people who formed the population, lived and worked in this remote corner of Bangladesh in its dawn of culture and civilization. Their bulbous noses are to be taken note of. The religious belief that is reflected in the relief, the incipient idea of *Bhakti* to a personal god, so clearly discerned in however rudimentary iconic representation, and the attempt to please the god (a tribal war-god?) with offerings and the belief that the mere representation of this act on the plaque along with the auspicious symbols, worn as an amulet, will have the efficacy of protecting the wearer. The *dhoti*-like lower garment of the two devotees, the tunic like upper garment and the turban on the head of the devotees on the right side (of the god), the tunic-like upper garment with the armoured chest portion of the deity, his conical headdress and his ornaments- all throwing light on the society and the everyday life of the culture.

The deity’s sword and shield throws valuable light on the kind of weapons they used; this is an addition to the spears and sling balls that we know as actual finds from the site. And the *ghata* on which he is mounted has features that cannot be otherwise known because of the absence of the find of any vessel of this kind, in fact either from surface or in excavation. It is also to be emphasized that besides being a piece of sculpture—a specimen of artistic excellence achieved at the time—in it we encounter for the first time some kind of a rudimentary but definite iconography of a deity. We have here the first ideas of iconography that grew in Bengal.

Punch-marked Coins

The punch-marked coins are the earliest known currency of the sub-continent. Wari-Bateshwar yielded a large number of silver punch-marked coins (Plate 2). No other site of Bengal yielded such a large number of punch-marked coins, not even Mahasthangarh—a Mauryan provincial capital or Bangarh—a Mauryan district capital or Tamralipta and Chandraketurgh—the famous ports or Mongolkot (Imam 2004). Besides Wari-Bateshwar many other villages like Marjal, Joymangol, Chandipara, Patuli, Chula, Harishangan, Gotashia, Kounda, Jossor, Kunderpara, Rayangertek and others have

yielded these coins (Pathan 1989: 21-23, Karim 1399: 5 and 1991: 52-56, Ahmed 2001a: 50, Ahmed 2001b: 367-379, Imam 2004).

Punch-marked coins are no doubt a great storehouse of symbols; over 550 groupings of symbols can be seen on these coins in the Indian sub-continent (Vanaja 1983: 5). Scholars have given different opinions about the interpretation of the symbols of punch-marked coins. Some scholars gave secular explanation of these symbols, while others gave a definite religious significance. Allan (1936: 1xxii) interpreted the symbol as the mark or signet of an official. Kosambi (1992: 4-5, 26-28, 109-113, 122) described the symbols of punch-marked coins as official marks without any religious significance. On the other hand, Spooner (1905-6; cited in Chattopadhyay 1977: 24-25) suggested that many of these symbols were Buddhist in character. Later on, Spooner (1915, cited in Chattopadhyay 1977: 25) revised his opinion and put forward the suggestion that many of these symbols were Zoroastrians in nature. Bhandarkar (1913-14: 211) suggested that many of these symbols could be explained in various ways of representation of the seven jewels such as *chakra* (wheel), *hasti* (elephant), *asva* (horse), *mani* (jewel), *stri* (woman), *grihapati* (treasurer) and *parinayaka* (prime minister). Durgaprasad (1934, cited in Chattopadhyay 1977: 25) commented that the symbols of punch-marked coins were *tantric* in character. Banerjea (1956: 108-157) emphasized upon the Brahmanical character of the symbols found on the punch-marked coinage. However, most of the scholars are inclined to explain the symbols from religious point of view. Coomaraswamy suggested that the punch-marked symbols show 'a definite stage of the development of Indian Iconography' (cited in Chattopadhyay 1977: 9). In spite of the controversy among the scholars, it is generally accepted that irrespective of the issuing authorities, official or private, the coin-type used to be chosen from a religious motivation as a solemn affirmation of the genuineness of the medium of exchange. In this background, we have attempted to explain some symbols of punch-marked coins from Wari-Bateshwar

Unfortunately, no researcher so far has scrutinized the symbols of Wari-Bateshwar punch-marked coins on religious point of view. We came to know about these symbols from the work of Pathan (1989: 23-24), Karim (1399: 6-7; 1991: 52-56), Mukherjee (2000: 89-91) and Ahmed (2001a: 50-60, 2001b: 367-379). Pathan (1989: 23-24) described 21 symbols (sun, elephant, arrow, cow, tree, flower, deer, owl, lobster, boat, wheel, '*tri-shul*', 'tools', etc.) but published only one photograph of four coins and one drawing of 6 symbols (*tri-chakra* and arrow, three-leafed tree, *tri-murti*, *tri-shul* and two unidentified symbols). Karim (1399: 6-7, 1991) mentioned only the names of the symbols (solar symbol, six-armed device, bird, boat, elephant, fish, fish connected with a fishhook, whirlpool (?), mace). Mukherjee (2000: 89) mentioned only the symbol's name as described by Karim. Ahmed (2001a: 50-60, 2001b: 367-379) studied 19 coins and described 16 symbols with their specific photographs and drawings. According to Ahmed (2001a: 50-60, 2001b: 367-379 and some corrections later done by Ahmed himself) the symbols of Wari-Bateshwar punch-marked coins are: solar symbol, six-armed symbol consisting of three arrows and three *taurine* figures attached alternating to the outer side of a circle, six-armed symbol consisting of three arrows and three dumb-bell figures within oval attached alternating to the outer side of a circle, three arches/mountain

symbol, three arches/mountain surmounted by a crescent, a row of three circles either side of a slanting linear, boat, four-legged animal, tortoise, flower bud (?), two *taurines* in both side of a stick with a crescent at each end, *taurine*, cross within a square, single fish in pond, double fish in pond, petal(?), plough (?) and two human figures doing boxing (?) (Plate 2). The following analysis is based on the photographs and drawings of 19 coins, discussed by Ahmed (2001a: 50-60, 2001b: 367-379).

Solar symbol: Sun is the most common symbol on punch-marked coins (Plate 2, coin nos. 1-6, 8-18). Allan (1936: lxxii) suggested that the solar symbols appearing on punch-marked coins would represent the highest official perhaps, the king himself. Kosambi (1992: 4) described that 'if it (sun symbol) not votive, it might be a symbol of the metal itself'. However, Banerjea (1956: 109), Chattopadhyay (1977: 28-32) and Chakraborty (1986: 106-125) commented that the sun depicted on the punch-marked coins represented the Sun God—Surya.

Six-armed symbol: Six-armed symbol is found in various forms on early Indian punch-marked coins. Allan (1936: xxiii) has found out 14 types of six-armed symbols on punch-marked coins. Wari-Batehswar yielded two types of six-armed symbols of Allan's list (Plate 2, coin nos. 1-3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 16 and 19). Six-armed symbol also is regarded to be the representative of the Sun God—Surya (Banerjea 1956: 109, Chattopadhyay 1977: 29 and Chakraborty 1986: 113). The relationship of six-armed symbol with the sun is based on a passage written in the *Vishnu Purana* which describes the sun's wheel having six spokes to symbolise the six seasons (Chakraborty 1986: 113) of a year.

Mountain symbol: From Wari-Batehswar we have found some coins (Plate 2, coin nos. 1-4, 6, 12 and 18) bearing the symbol of mountain and mountain surmounted by crescent. Siva is closely associated with mountain which according to *Rig-Veda* is his second home (Chakraborty 1986: 45). Banerjea (1956: 109) has suggested that the symbol of a mountain with a crescent above it may typify the aniconic representation of Siva (he is sometimes described as *Trisringa Parvata*) with a crescent on his crest (*Sasankasekhara*).

Animal motifs: Animal motifs were also depicted on the punch-marked coins (Plate 2, coin nos. 1, 3, 5 and 14) found at Wari-Batehswar. The depicted motifs are a small fish in a rectangular pond, two fishes in a rectangular pond, a tortoise and an unidentified four-legged animal. The depiction of animal motifs on punch-marked coins is a common phenomenon. According to Chattopadhyay (1977: 47), the water borne animals depicted on punch-marked coins are to be connected with gods and goddesses of fertility and love. Fish is the symbol of water or more specifically the essence of water, the principle of life (Chakraborty 1986: 350). On the other hand, tortoise was one of Vishnu's incarnations (Chakraborty 1986: 90).

Geometrical figures: Two types of geometrical figure are found at Wari-Bateshwar punch-marked coins. These are a row of three circles either side of a slanting linear (Plate 2, coin nos. 1, 2, 5 and 14) and cross within a square (Plate 2, coin nos. 10 and 18). In coin no. 10, the cross within a square symbol is found with sun symbol. Coin no. 18 shows cross within a square, solar symbol and mountain surmounted by a crescent. The

grouping of this symbol—cross within a square with these religious symbols may have some religious significance. Chattopadhyay (1977: 61-63) suggested that the cross symbolizes the phallic emblem combining the two principles of male (Siva) and female (Mahadevi) deities (Chattopadhyay 1977: 65). These are the hypothetical explanations of geometrical figures. Based on the hypothetical explanations, it is difficult to ascertain the actual significance of the geometrical figures depicted on the punch-marked coins from Wari-Bateshwar.

Taurine/Nandipada: *Taurine* symbol goes back to the Indus Valley times in the sub continent. In Indus civilisation it was used as a script in the seals (Marshall 1931: seal no. 259). Early Historic ring stones often bear this symbol (Gupta 1980: 56-57, 63, 65, 72). The extensive use of *taurine* is found on punch-marked coins in different combinations. A few *taurine* depicted punch-marked coins have been collected from Wari-Bateshwar (Plate 2, coin nos. 1-4, 6, 8, 12, 13 and 19). The *taurine* symbol seems to represent the head of the bull with two horns or the combination of sun and moon (Chattopadhyay 1977: 57). The purpose of depiction of this symbol is not clear at all. Chakraborty (1986: 107) commented that *taurine* symbols are usually taken to represent the Sun God. However, *taurine* is seen with sun symbol (Allan 1936: 37, coin no. 50-55) and *svastika* (an auspicious symbol, see the querns section below for details) (Allan 1936: xci, 141-143) in punch-marked coins and it is present with mother goddess in ring stone (Gupta 1980: Plate 19a). These appearances indicate that it might be depicted as an auspicious symbol. Chattopadhyay (1977: 58) suggested that the *taurine* symbol gradually led to the emergence of *tri-sula*—a special attribute of Siva or the *nandipada*—the vehicle of Siva or the *tri-ratna* symbol of the Buddhists pantheon.

Querns

Querns are a common artifact, which can be found in most of the archaeological sites right from the Neolithic period. Three sub-types are available—saddle querns, legged querns and rotary querns. Legged querns were found at Wari-Bateshwar (Pathan 1989: 13, Ahmed 2001a: 81-82, Rahman *et. al.* 2003: 49-55, Imam 2004). Among some broken specimens of querns of Wari-Bateshwar two of them are more or less intact. Rahman and others (Rahman *et. al.* 2003: 49-55) brought to light a four-legged stone quern, found at Wari-Bateshwar, which depicted three symbols. According to Rahman (2002) and others (Rahman *et. al.* 2003: 51) these three symbols are: one right-handed *svastika* and two *tri-ratnas*- one each on either side (Plate 3). They (Rahman *et. al.* 2003: 51) further added that ‘in the absence of direct ritual-artifact from Wari-Bateshwar, the depiction of *Swastika* and *Tri-ratna* symbol on stone slab is highly significant. The symbols indicate the existence of Buddhism in Wari-Bateshwar region during the Early Historic Period.’ As the first author (Imam 2004) has pointed out these symbols are *svastika* and clearly *nandipadas*, not *tri-ratnas* (see for drawing and photograph of *tri-ratna*; Agrawala 1965: Plates xxii, xxvii; Tomory 1989: 173, 177; Bachhofer 1983: figs. 48-51, Ray 1996: 50) as the above authors have mistakenly identified and have wrongly brought in a Buddhist connotation.

Svastika and *nandipada* have auspicious as well as religious values. The symbol of hooked cross is originally a sun symbol. But in India it has been named '*svastika*'—a symbol of 'well-being'. The symbol stands for the movement and the power of the sun. The sun is the dispeller of darkness. It brings joy, light and life for humankind. *Svastika* symbol is found in almost every ancient and primitive cult all over the world from Harappa (Mahadevan 1977: 33, sign 148, Atre 1987: 3-37, 98, 204) to Persia and Mesopotamia (Chatterjee 1996: 38-40). *Svastika* symbol appears not only as a popular symbol on punch-marked coins but also in Maurya, Sunga and Kushana art. This symbol is recognized as one of the *Astamangalas* or eight auspicious marks, making their early appearances on votive tablets discovered at Mathura (Smith 1901; cited in Chattopadhyay 1977: 55). Generally, the Hindu community practice the symbol for various purposes. The symbol is also considered as lucky by the Buddhists as well as the Jain (Deo 2000, cited in Rahman 2003: 51). According to Chatterjee (1996: 39-40) the various uses of the symbol—*svastika*, by the Hindus are mentioned below—

'... Hindus use the Swastika on auspicious occasions like Marriage, *Mundan* or *Anna-prashan*, Lakshmi-pujan, etc. The Hindus worship Swastika as symbol of Ganesha. It marked along with the symbols of the *Navagrahas*. In the ancient scriptures the right-handed Swastika is associated with the Sun, and hence an emblem of the Vedic Solar Vishnu...The left-handed Swastika, which moves anti-clockwise, represent the Sun during the Autumn and Winter, and is regarded as a female and inauspicious. ...the right-handed Swastika symbolises Ganesha and the left one personifies goddess Kali...'

The traditional use of *svastika* symbol by different religious communities may be traced in folk art of different parts in all over the sub-continent. The symbol does not stand for any particular religious faith.

Early Indian artifacts—particularly ring stones (Gupta 1980: 14, 65) and punch-marked coins (Allan 1936: 148, 152, 159-67, 267-72, Dasgupta 1974: 46, 52, 60) exhibit the *nandipada* symbol. The practice of using this symbol has continued from the remote past to present time. This symbol seems to indicate its *Saivita* character, although it is hardly distinguishable from the much earlier *taurine* symbol which also has association with bull.

There is no source of stone at Wari-Bateshwar region or near and this quern was no doubt imported from outside. Therefore, the question arises as to whether the quern along with the symbol was directly imported from somewhere else or the symbol was depicted locally on an imported stone slab. We do not know the exact answer. But the same combination of *nandipadas* on the sides with a *svastika* in the centre has been noticed by the present authors in the *Pamcanekame* coins of Taxila origin (Allan 1936: 216) (of ca. 3rd century BC).

Knobbed ware

Wari has yielded knobbed wares made of high-tin bronze (Jahan 1995: 66-67, Basa and Rahman 1998: 291-298, Ahmed 2001a: 44-45) (Plate 4) and ceramic (Haque *et. al.* 2000:

302-303) (Plate 5). Ahmed (2001a: 96-98, 133) has noticed another kind of knobbed ware of ceramic collected as a surface find from Wari but it is questionable whether it is a knobbed ware at all or not. Salles (2004: 187-188) questioned the identification of a ceramic knobbed ware (Plate 5) revealed in the excavation in the year 2000 conducted by Haque and others (Haque *et. al.* 2000: 291, Plate 23.13). According to Salles 'the nipple visible in the centre and the incised circles on the flat base and on the lower part of the walls are impressions of the potter's hands while he was finishing the vessel on the turning wheel. The interior of the base is flattened with a comb-like tool (incised) and the extra clay is rounded up into a small nipple, generally cut away in the case of open shape, most often left behind in the case of deep, closed shape vessels. There is very little chance that the fragment from Wari-Bateshwar belongs to the true category known as Knobbed Ware.' It is difficult to agree with Salles about his explanation of the origin of the incised marks and the nipple. But at the same time it may be right as Salles says that there is very little chance of it belonging to the true category of knobbed ware.

Whatever it is, some scholars (Basa and Rahman 1998: 291-298, Haque *et. al.* 2000: 283-315, Ahmed 2001a: 44-45) have accepted those types of wares from Wari as knobbed wares. Knobbed wares have been found in a wide range of distribution; from South Asia to South-east Asian region (Ray 1994: 96, Glover 1996a: 133, Basa and Rahman 1998: 291-298). The function of knobbed wares is not very clear. Glover (1996a: 143, 1996b: 79) has interpreted that the base-knob and concentric circles should be seen as commonly understood *mandala*, a schematic cosmological symbol representing perhaps Mt. Meru and the surrounding oceans. Rahman and others (Rahman *et. al.* 2003: 50) have explained 'the cosmological symbol—*mandala* as Buddhist cosmology and accepted the knobbed wares of Wari as an evidence of existence of Buddhist practices in the region.' This argument has been presented without any strong logical ground. Because, mythologically Mt. Meru is associated not only with the Buddhists but also with the Hindus. According to Hindu mythology (Dowson 1992: 208) 'Meru—a fabulous mountain in the navel or centre of the earth, on which is situated Swarga, the heaven of Indra and the habitation of celestial spirits. The Olympus of the Hindus.' In Buddhist philosophy Mount. Meru symbolizes the *stupa* axis (Harvey 1991: 95). Therefore, it is not wise to explain the knobbed wares by relating them exclusively with Buddhism.

To understand the possible function of knobbed wares, the archaeological context of these wares can be examined. However, we get the information of archaeological context of those wares rarely. The knobbed ware of Nilgiri (Leshnik 1974: 255-267 cited in Ray 1994: 96) comes from the megalithic grave (certainly with no Buddhist connexion). The knobbed wares of Ban Don Ta Phet, Thailand (Glover 1996a: 138-143, 1996b: 69-79) were also collected from a cemetery complex. The knobbed ware of Taxila was found in the centre of a ruined masonry building. This was a foundation deposit for a *stupa*,—again, as it strikes us, in a context of ritual formalities after death (Errington 1987: 177-178 cited in Glover 1996a: 143). Based on those archaeological contexts Glover (1996b: 143) suggested that the knobbed wares did not serve as everyday cooking, serving or food vessels, but were used for some special purpose like rituals and funerals. At present state of our knowledge about knobbed wares, we cannot assert any particular religious belief associated with them.

Ring Stone

Ring stone is one of the most significant stone artifact so far found at Wari-Bateshwar. The second author identified the ring stone in Pathan's collection (Ahmed 2001a: 81). It is very small and broken. There is no hole in the middle as generally found in the ring stones. The obverse carving designs or figures were very badly damaged and therefore, could not be identified properly. But the marks of carving still exist. Ahmed (2001a: 81) could identify only the band decoration in the outer circle and lotus in the centre (Plate 6). The reverse is flat and without decoration. As is usually held the prevalence of ring stone is limited from *ca.* 3rd. century BC to 2nd century BC (Gupta 1980: 53). This gives a clue to the chronology of one phase of the culture (Imam 2004).

The purpose and use of these ring stones are not very clear. The ring stones, according to Banerjea (1956: 171) 'can justifiably be regarded as cult objects...' Agrawala (1965: 77) described these ring stones as the specimens of early tradition of worship of the mother Goddess. S. P. Gupta (1980: 72) thinks that 'the ring stones and disc stones are magico-religious in origin...they appear to represent the full circle of death and rebirth.' In this light the Wari-Bateshwar specimen may be taken to give clues to the religious beliefs of the people or some people of Wari-Bateshwar at one phase at least (Imam 2004).

Concluding Remarks

1. There should not be any doubt that the amulet has some kind of ritual significance.
2. Punch-marked coins of Wari-Bateshwar bear some symbols, which are significant from religious point of view. Solar symbol and six-armed symbol may represent the Sun God—Surya. The mountain symbol with a crescent above may typify the aniconic representation of Siva (*Trisringa Parvata*) with a crescent on his crest (*Sasankasekhara*).
3. The quern with *svastika* and *nandipadas* depicted on it might have auspicious as well as religious values. If we are to make any inference about the religious beliefs of the Wari-Bateshwar people from those symbols depicted on this quern, then it indicates the prevalence of 'Hinduism'.
4. Knobbed wares might have served some special purpose for ritual and funerary use. At the present state of our knowledge about knobbed wares, we cannot assert their presence as the proof of the prevalence exclusively either of Hinduism or Buddhism at Wari-Bateshwar. Indeed both could have existed side by side. However, nothing much so far indicates the presence of the votaries of Buddhism.
5. Scholars generally accept that ring stones have some sort of religious significance. The Wari-Bateshwar specimen then throws light on the religious beliefs of the people or some people of Wari-Bateshwar.
6. The people or a group of people of Wari-Bateshwar regarded the *svastika* and *taurine* symbols as sacred or auspicious.

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