

Unveiling the *Ancient Splendor* of Tengun

Preserving Kashmir's priceless heritage for future generations

HISTORY

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The area of Tengun, located in the Bijbihara Tehsil of Anantnag, is a forgotten treasure trove that holds within its boundaries an array of fifteen ancient archaeological mounds. Part of ancient Vijayeswara, Tengun stands as a testament to the rich history and cultural legacy of Kashmir.

This captivating area, boasting historical significance and cultural wealth, is predominantly owned by the hardworking peasants of Zablipora. Located in between the picturesque landscape of Bijbihara railway station and the new national highway, Tengun finds itself at the crossroads of transportation and connectivity. The boundaries of this enchanting archaeological site are defined by the new national highway to the east, the Bijbihara-Arwani road to the south, the Nini Nad-a small irrigational canal to the west, and the metalled road connecting Tulkhan village with the national highway near Semthan, to the north. Spanning roughly 950 meters north to south and 600 meters east to west, Tengun covers an expansive area of approximately 90 hectares. The size of each individual mound, however, varies from 0.5 to 1.5 hectares.

The mounds at Tengun bear witness to a timeline spanning the illustrious Kushana period to the captivating medieval era of Kashmir's history. However, the alarming destruction of these mounds in pursuit of agricultural expansion poses an immediate threat to the preservation of this extraordinary archaeological treasure. It is cru-

cial that we recognize the irreplaceable value of Tengun and unite to safeguard this tangible heritage for the prosperity of future generations and the preservation of Kashmir's rich cultural legacy.

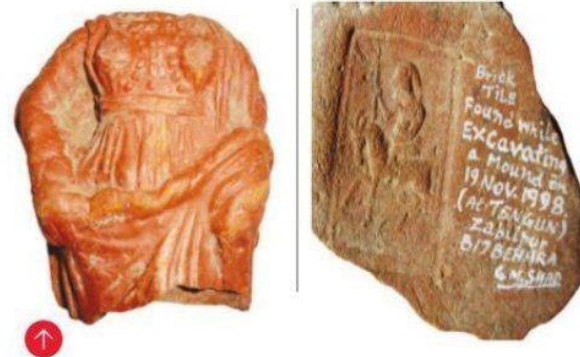
Exploration and Survey:

Upon embarking on the exploration of Tengun area, a total of fifteen archaeological mounds were noticed and documented. It is worth noting that the actual number of mounds could have been even higher, as some of them were on the verge of extinction, and perhaps a few are already leveled. Due to time and resource constraints, a comprehensive systematic survey of the area was not feasible. Nevertheless, the utilization of cutting-edge surveying tools such as GIS, GPS, and other advanced technologies allowed for a random survey, enabling the measurement, documentation, and mapping of the location, position, and archaeological potential of Tengun. Interestingly, all fifteen mounds occupy the natural soil of the area, known as the valley bed, rather than the karewas on whose top majority of the Neolithic sites of the valley are located. These mounds at Tengun lie at the same level as the current flow of the Jhelum River, suggesting their origins in the early historic period.

Archaeological Significance

Once a thriving capital city during ancient times, ancient Vijayeswara was a bustling hub that pulsated with life, inhabited by thousands of people. Today, it serves as a sanctuary for a myriad of archaeological marvels, unlocking the secrets of centuries past. The invaluable remnants buried within these mounds at different areas like at Semthan, Bijbihara, Zablipora and particularly at Tengun, offer profound insights into the vibrant cultural tapestry that shaped this region over millennia.

The mounds of Tengun are revered



A legacy we must safeguard for the good of our heritage and the prosperity of our future.

repositories of archaeological material; preserving artifacts that date back to the Kushana period and extend into the medieval times of Kashmir's history. Among the remarkable discoveries made in this hallowed ground are coins belonging to the Kushana kings, whose intricately crafted designs provide a glimpse into the monetary systems of the time. Furthermore, the unearthing of pottery fragments offers a tangible connection to the daily lives of our ancestors, while terracotta human and animal figurines grant us a glimpse into the artistic expressions that once adorned the region. The discovery of terracotta tiles further hints at the architectural grandeur that adorned the capital city of ancient Kashmir. There is abundance of material remains recovered from the surface and artificially exposed sections of the mounds. Notably, no substantial structural activities

were observed, with the exception of a few scattered grave stones, architectural members on one of the mounds locally known as Padshah Teng in addition to the burnt bricks of enormous size of the bygone eras of Kashmir history, as also the rubble bases of possible structures visible in the profile of the mounds at more than one instance. However, it is the ceramic industry that truly stands out, representing various periods and showcasing a wide array of fabrics and types. The pottery fragments serve as a testament to the craftsmanship and cultural practices of bygone eras, encapsulating the essence of the past. Undoubtedly, the majority of the archaeological wealth lies within the pottery discovered, offering valuable insights into the lives and customs of our ancestors. In the bygone years many artefacts like coins, terracotta figurines and tiles were recovered by some locals who have pre-

served them in private archives.

Preserving Heritage

Yet, with each mound that succumbs to the relentless march of progress, we stand to lose an irreplaceable piece of our collective heritage. The destruction of these archaeological sites not only eradic-ates physical evidence of our ancient civilization but also robs future generations of the opportunity to comprehend the historical tapestry that weaves through the fabric of Kashmir's past. As guardians of our cultural legacy, it is our collective duty to preserve and protect the heritage of Tengun. We must caution the residents of the area against the irreversible destruction of these mounds. Instead, we implore them to embrace their role as custodians of our ancient past and work towards the preservation of this tangible heritage.

The significance of Tengun extends far beyond its immediate geographical boundaries. Its historical and cultural importance resonates not only within the hearts of Kashmiris but also among scholars and enthusiasts worldwide. As we safeguard the heritage of Tengun, we ensure the continuity of an uninterrupted narrative, a narrative that enriches our understanding of the past and shapes the identity of future generations.

To avert the impending loss, it is imperative that we embark on a collective journey to raise awareness about the importance of preserving Tengun's archaeological treasures. Local community organizations, educational institutions, and governmental bodies should unite to initiate comprehensive awareness campaigns, workshops, and educational programs to enlighten residents about the cultural significance of these mounds. By fostering a sense of pride and ownership among the people of Bijbihara and its surrounding villages, we can instill a profound commitment to

the preservation of our shared heritage.

Moreover, we urge the authorities to enact stringent measures and regulations to protect the remaining mounds of Tengun. By designating these sites as protected areas, we can ensure their long-term preservation and prevent any further irreparable damage. The collaboration between government agencies, archaeological departments, and local communities is paramount to achieving this shared objective.

Beyond the immediate cultural and historical implications, preserving Tengun holds the promise of generating sustainable socio-economic growth. By nurturing and promoting cultural tourism in the region, we can unlock its potential as a global heritage destination, attracting scholars, tourists, and history enthusiasts alike. Tengun has the power to become a beacon of cultural exploration, a source of inspiration, and an economic asset for the entire region.

The preservation of our tangible heritage is not solely a responsibility but an invaluable gift that we bestow upon future generations. Let us stand together as proud custodians of our past, embracing the mission to protect, preserve, and celebrate the remarkable archaeological treasure that is Tengun. Only through our collective dedication can we secure a future where the legacy of our ancestors remains alive, inspiring and enlightening generations to come.

Remember, the preservation of Tengun is a testament to the resilience and pride of Kashmir, a legacy we must safeguard for the good of our heritage and the prosperity of our future.

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Glimpses of Field Visit to Tengun, Bijbihara





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