

are in the surrounding Arab countries. Again, so much said for apartheid in Israel. I have just finished reading an extraordinary epic of about 1000 pages, written by a French couple, **Sonia and Alexandre Poussin**, entitled **AFRICA TREK** (2 large volumes), in which they recount their 3-year journey, just with their clothes on and a backpack each, walking from Cape Town, at the southern tip of the Black Continent, to Tiberias, in the north of Israel. This is not only the story of their encounters with hundreds of individuals of all religions and colors, but it is also a fantastic anthropological study of the peoples they met, of their traditional customs and of their way of life today, in the age of Internet, cell phones, tablets and computers.

The last chapter of their book deals with the land itself, its very long history, dating back thousands of years, its geography (so very small compared to all the surrounding nations, except for Lebanon and the Palestinian territories), its nature, and with the individuals they met in **Israel**: Jews, Arabs and people hailing from the four corners of the world. Apart from the fact that their experience in Israel and the West Bank coincides with almost everything I wrote above, I have learned, thanks to some of their African-American hosts, the so-called **Black Hebrews**, that the latter started settling in Israel 40 years ago, and that they feel more welcome and appreciated there than in their former homeland, the USA. They benefit from a special status which allows them to be Israeli citizens, enjoying free health care and free education. Even though they constitute a small minority, compared to the Ethiopian population, they are admired by Jews of every stripe, for their strong faith, their resilience against all odds – the (ultra) religious authorities, for which I don't have much admiration myself, being, I repeat, an agnostic, still have to recognize them as real Jews –, as well as for their success in the fields of finance, medicine, high-tech and science, in general. They don't wish to go back to their birthplace in America, save maybe for a visit, for they claim that Israel is their ancestral land, and that they are much less discriminated against and happier here.

Ah, a last remark I hear from 'closet' antisemites - you know the ones who have Jewish friends but are always prompt to point out the latter's 'bad' sides: «Some of your own Israeli journalists call Israel an apartheid country.» Yes, indeed, you hear that too. I, for one think these journalists talk bunk, but like Voltaire, and this is true in Israel, I say:

«I don't agree with you one bit, but you have all the right in the world to voice your opinion.»

Read more: Let there be peace for goodness sake | Albert Russo | The Blogs | The Times of Israel <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/let-there-be-peace-for-goodness-sake/#ixzz3QygPINJ7>

Follow us: @timesofisrael on Twitter | timesofisrael on Facebook

Sri Surya Pahar - The Attractive Tourist Destination Site of Assam

- Azizur Rahman Sarkar

Introduction: *Sri Surjya Pahar* is famous archeological spot in the lower Brahmaputra valley and is one of the pivotal chief heritages of the ancient remains of Goalpara district of Assam. It is located on the eastern slope of *Surjya Pahar* within a charming lush green backdrop. *Surjya Hill* altitude is 26°6' N and longitude is 90°42' E. It is positioned about 12 kilometers south-east of Goalpara town and 130 kms. North-west of Guwahati connected by the National Highway 37 up to Dudhnoi. It is important that *Sri Surjya Pahar* of Goalpara district is the significant religious spot and it attracts people of all beliefs of the country mainly during *Maghi Purnima* (January-February). It is a union of three religions i.e. *Hindusm*, *Janism* and *Buddhism*, as obvious from the several relics. It may be transformed to heritage site and a tourist purpose in the outline of Ellora with its methodical developments.

Review of Literature: Great Historians namely Sir Edward Gait, Banerjee and Singh highlight to the accounts of Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang and the unearthed relics claim that *Sri Surjya Pahar* and its margin have pivotal significance and is the definite Pragjyotishpur, the capital of the kingdom of Bhaskar Barman.

Archaeological Representations of Sun: The occurrence of Sun worshipping is supported by a variety of revealed archaeological symbols of Sun in the beautiful region of Sri Surjya Pahar. The *KalikaPurana*, a work on the subject of 10th century A.D. composed in ancient *Kamarupa* talk about Sri Surya Mountain as the eternal abode of the God Sun. The Text cited, in *Chitrasaila*, the nine planets were devoted. The Surya Mountain of *KalikaPurana* is obviously *Surya Pahar* of Goalpara District and *Chitrasaila* has been recognized with Arvak hill near Guwahati.

Excavations by Archaeological Department, Government of Assam, 1993: The Archaeological Department, Government of Assam, in the year 1993 highlighted the proposed excavation in the well-known tourist destination of Goalpara, Sri Surya Pahar and a lot of relics were exposed from this spot. Here, mention may be made of *PanchaRatna* Basement of an ancient temple along with a ceiling stone slab *Surya Chakra* curved in spherical form with picture of twelve *Aditya* and in the middle part there is a figure of lord *Ganesha*.

On the other hand, in the north western way of *Surya Chakra*, at the foothills of *Sri Surya Pahar*, a variety of specifics created and hence one twelve armed deity with seven hooded canopy over its head locates well-known.

The divinity wearing a necklace, *Kundals*, armlets, *hramukta* and long garland stands on *sampada* on a lotus with a crude agent of a tree on either side. The attributes in its hands are not very hygienic.

The understanding of the left group of hands is alike arts that of right group and is a syncretism, incorporating attributes of more than one god, its counter parts and prototypes are established in different parts of Bengal like Ghiasabed (Murshidabad), Garal (Bardawan), Sonaranag (Dacca), Deulibira (Bankura) and Mukteswar.

Excavations by Archaeological Department, Government of Assam, 1993-98: From 1993-98, excavation period, Archaeological Department, Government of Assam, a lot of Buddhist *Stupas*, Monasteries or *Viharas* are excavated from the eastern hill slope of Surya Pahar. As per some intellectuals of ASI, all these belonging are from 8th and 9th century A.D.

South-Western side of the Surya Chakra: It is mention may be made that on the South-Western side of the *Surya Chakra*, there is a innate cavern. Within the cave, two rock-cut images have been exposed. One has a bull marked on pedestal and the other an effigy of Chakra.

The texts recommend these two figures are to be highlighted as *Rishabhanath (Adinath)*. The descriptions appear to be belonging to the 9th century and specify the survival of a few followers of Jainism in this region.

More than a few rock-cut sculptures, descriptions of Vishnu, Ganesha, Buddha, *Sivalingas* have been found. It is thought that 99,999 *Siva Lingas* are there and it is believed that *Vyasdeva* made these *Lingas* for the reason that he wanted to make it second *Kashi*. It is thought that thirty three crore gods and goddesses of Hindu faith are vaulted on the rocks in the hills here. Hence, enormous tools have been exposed from this site and kept in a museum at *Surya Pahar* site.

Sri Surya Pahar- The Cultural Significance and Historical Value:

It is highly noted that *Sri Surya Pahar* is the cultural significance and historical value of western Assam in North-East India. A huge number of travelers and pilgrims visit this spot each year, particularly in the month of *Magh* (January/February). The beautiful hill is a treasure house of countless historic remains belonging to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Because of its comparable attachment with Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist remains, it could be named as the Ellora of the North-East India.

Some Pivotal Tourist Resources of Sri Surya Pahar: The highlighting tourist resources of Sri Surja Pahar are as follows:

1. Remains of Buddhism:

It is remarkable that there are twenty five votive stupors of diverse shapes and sizes cut out of granite builders are on a vast area right from the extreme east corner on a higher altitude and are three giant stupas carved in one row facing the east.