

# THE PRACTICE OF SIVA WORSHIP INSIDE THE TEMPLE PREMISES OF GODDESS VIRAJA OF JAJPUR

*Manas Kumar Das*

Saivism, one of the major and oldest forms of religion in India, dates back to the Indus civilization. The worship of Siva both in the Phalic and anthropomorphic forms is a manifestation of it.<sup>1</sup> In Orissa the worship of Siva seems to have existed in phalic form from very early times. The archaeological monuments traced it back to 5th Century A.D. The Virajaksetra *i.e.* Modern Jajpur, an important part of Orissa, had not remained un-influenced by Saivism. It has been one of the chief religion of Jajpur from ancient times.<sup>2</sup> The geographical configuration of Virajaksetra or modern Jajpur is situated in between 20°50'45" North Latitude and 86°22'56" East Longitude on the bank of Sacred river Vaitarani and occupies a prominent place in the religious history of Orissa. There are long puranic stories about the history of Siva worship which attribute to the development of saivism in this region. It is said by the priests and local people that this region is a place of Annakoti (one less to become a crore) Siva Lingas and the priests are of the view that wherever you will dig, you will find a Siva Linga in this region. Among the Dharmapuranas, the Brahmapurana provides a detailed account of the Siva Worship in Virajaksetra. Saivism and Saktism became the chief cult during the Gupta Period. The presence of Linga, Yoni, Serpent, Ganapati and the moon in the crown of Goddess Viraja shows the existence of Siva cult during this Gupta period. In this paper emphasis has been given only on the Siva shrines and Siva lingas located inside the temple compound.

There are a number of Siva shrines and Siva lingas in and around the Viraja temple.<sup>3</sup> Lord Isaneswar, another name of Lord Siva, is worshipped inside the temple premises of Goddess Viraja. According to Virajaksetra Mahatmya, Isaneswar was the first Saiva shrine to come into existence in this Ksetra. It is situated close to the temple of Viraja. In the Brahma Purana<sup>4</sup> mention has been made about Lord Isaneswar as :

*“Parthayamas viswatma Nityabasaya Tatra sa,  
Sthanam Divnam Parityaza Sambhoo! Tripuranasana,  
Abimuktadisu Ksetreswabasah Kriyate Bhubi,  
Asmin Madiya Ksetre tu Twaya Stheyam Maheswar.”*

It has been described in the Brahma purana that Lord Brahma prayed Maheswar to live in his Abimukta Ksetra (another name of Virajaksetra) with Goddess Viraja. Being satisfied with the prayer of Brahma. Siva gave his consent to keep his words and from that day Siva lives with goddess Viraja left to the Viraja temple, famous in the name of Lord Isaneswar.

Besides Isaneswar other Siva lingas are also found in the temple premises. In the eastern side of the Viraja temple and in front of the Navigaya, the Shrine of Vaidyanath is found and adjacent to the Vaidyanath, the temple of Gangeswar is situated. Inside the Chandimandapa and in front of the Jagmohan the Siva temple of Rudhireswar is found. Other Siva lingas like Apasaeswar and Markateswar are found in the right side of the Viraja temple. Another Siva linga is found near the southern compound wall. An interesting aspect of Saiva cult in the temple premises of Goddess Viraja is Rudramela, the congregation of Siva Lingas.

This Rudramela is situated near the northern compound wall. It has already been stated that this Ksetra is a place of Annakoti Siva lingas. The Sivalingas lies scattered in the every nook and corner of the Viraja Ksetra. Recently some scattered Sivalingas have been placed in two large rooms made by an engineer of P.W. Department In one of the room there are forty two lingas and in the other room there fifty four lingas. The lingas in these two rooms are combinedly known as "Rudramela". All these Siva lingas have been given their names. These Siva lingas are of different shape and size. Many Sahashra lingas are also found in the Rudramela. The depiction of peculiar miniature Shrines are found in some of the Siva lingas in the Rudra Mela on the top of which beautiful Siva Lingas are found. In the North-East and North-West and in the South-East and South-West, there are four miniature temples. In the North-East corner of Rudramela a linga is over a miniature temple which is an interesting one. In the centre of the North-Western side of Rudramela, there is another miniature temple. There are many more miniature temples lies scattered in the Virajaksetra. Some miniature temples are found in the Trilochaneswar and Siddheswar temple premises (these two are famous saiva shrines). The miniature temples are said to be of Bhaumakara period. Most of the miniature temples are in the pattern of Rekha Deula and in the North-Eastern corner we found a pidha structure. This miniature shrines indicates that the architect made earlier attempts prior to the construction of big temples.

Virajaksetra though popular as a Sakti Pitha in Eastern India, it equally has gained importance as a place of Saiva worship from ancient times. That is why the Virajaksetra Mahatmya<sup>5</sup> has rightly depicted this place as a place of Annakoti Sivalingas. The most interesting aspects of Saiva Sahashra lingas and the lingas of miniature shrines, found in the temple premises of Goddess Viraja. These lingas have been assigned to the 7th and 8th Century A.D.

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Research Scholar  
P.G. Department of History  
Utkal University, Vani Vihar  
Bhubaneswar.