

# HERO STONES OF JAJPUR

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Orissa has a glorious military tradition. In ancient and early mediaeval periods the Oriya soldiers fought bravely against their enemies. Many of them laid down their life while fighting in the battle field. This heroism of the past has found expression in sculptural art. In Orissa sometimes warriors are depicted on temple walls in standing pose holding a sword and a shield. In some other instances, they are shown accompanied by a female figure as in the temples of the Rajarani at Bhubaneswar and Konark<sup>1</sup>. However they are best depicted in the monolithic shafts where the hero is shown in an *alidha* pose wielding a sword in his raised right hand and a shield in his extended left hand.

The ancient city of Jajpur, known as *Virajakshetra* has its own identity in the field of art, architecture, culture and religion. In ancient and early medieval periods Jajpur was under the sway of various ruling dynasties of Orissa such as the Bhaumakaras, the Somavamsins and the Imperial Gangas. They had to fight with their enemies which marked their military power and strength. In the battles, fought in and around Jajpur many soldiers laid down their life. They are the heroes of the battle. Hero Stones, depicting the figure of the hero and lauding his deeds were set up to immortalize his name. These are commemorative Stones. Several sites in Jajpur area have been marked as places where battles were fought in the past. An important site is Gohiratikiri, about 5 km. from Jajpur town, where according to tradition Mukundadeva, the last Hindu ruler of Orissa laid down his life while fighting with the Muslim general Suleiman Karrani<sup>2</sup>. Similar tradition have not been associated with other sites and therefore this have not gained prominence.

The discovery of a number of Hero Stone in and around Jajpur town indicate the military importance of the place. The Hero Stones found at Jajpur can be divided into two categories. Such as inscribed Hero Stone and uninscribed Hero Stone. The inscribed Hero Stones are very rare in Jajpur. Only three inscribed hero stones are available in this area. Both in style and execution the Hero-Stones (inscribed and uninscribed) differ from one another.

A short account of the Hero Stones at Jajpur is given below :

## **Inscribed Hero Stone in the Viraja Temple Complex :**

A number of three sets of inscribed Hero Stones are found in and around Jajpur, out of them the inscribed one in the Viraja temple complex needs special mention. A very beautiful inscribed Hero Stone of 3'6" height and 2'5" breath is placed in the left side of the *Jagamohana* of the Viraja temple. The provenance of the stone is not known. The stone slab is conical on the top and divided into three sections. The success of the hero and his

final journey to heaven with *apsaras* are depicted in three sections. The lower section depicts a royal figure defeating the enemy and a standing attendant on the lower right corner holding a parasol over the head of the royal figure i.e. the hero. On the lower left corner an enemy soldier is attempting to protect himself from the advancing royal figure. Above him is a kneeling warrior holding a shield over his head in his left hand. In the middle section the female musicians are leading a procession carrying a figure in the palanquin. Three pairs of hand are shown holding bows in the top section of the memorial stone. In the top section a *pidha* shrine containing two figures facing each other is depicted. They are wearing crown on their head. In the background an attendant is present while in outside the other family members are shown with an elephant. In the bottom part of the stone slab two lines of writing are engraved. Though the letters are deeply incised but most of the letters are partly worn out. Each line consists of five letters. In the beginning of the first line *Siddham* is expressed by the symbol. This symbol is also adopted in a number of Orissan inscriptions such as the Bhanja and the Somavamsi inscriptions. In all the letters of this inscription bear the horizontal head mark on the top which is the usual feature of the Somavamsi inscriptions of about the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.

The text of the inscription can be read as follows<sup>3</sup> :

Line 1. *Guna Vahavo*

Line 2. *Svada bha(rjvi)naha.*

The reading of these two sentences points out that the royal figure who is depicted on the monolithic slab was not a common man. He was a man having different qualities. The second line points out that he was a man of sweet words. In spite of these qualities he was a warrior. Considering the palaeography of the inscription and architectural design this Hero Stone may be assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> –10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The heroism of the king Yayati may have been represented here.

### **Inscribed Hero Stone at Hanumaneswara Temple :**

Another inscribed Hero Stone is noticed in the Hanumaneswar temple at Mahavir square. It is attached on the western wall of this modern temple on the left side of the Mahisamardini image. Earlier the inscribed portion was not marked and therefore included in the uninscribed hero stone category<sup>4</sup>. The height of the stone slab is 37” and breath is 11”. This memorial stone slab is divided into three sections by two mouldings and the top is conical. The top section is 9” in height and this register is in the shape of a *pidha* shrine consisting of *bada*, *gandi* and *mastaka*. Two attendants are seated on both sides of the *pidha* shrine in the level of the *bada* portion. The left hand of the left attendant is pressed on earth whereas the right hand of the right side attendant is placed on earth. Close to the right attendant an elephant is standing whereas near the left attendant another man is standing holding a *chamara* on his right hand and left hand is hanging down. On the top, two pairs of

hands are shown holding bows. Similar type of two pairs of hand holding bows are also depicted on the top of the middle section. In this register palanquin is being carried out by two attendants and the palanquin is carried on their left shoulders and hands whereas right hands hang down holding a *Chamara*. In between the two carriers a small lady figure is depicted like that of the Hero Stone at Viraja temple complex. In the centre of the palanquin a hero is seated and pressing his right hand on the pedestal. The left leg is uplifted and his left hand rests on the joint section of the lower and upper *jangha*. He wears *Kundala* on his ears and looks like a prince. The hair of the hero is tied in a knot on the right side. The bottom section is decorated with a royal figure standing in *alidha* pose. He is holding a sword on his right hand and a shield in his left hand. On his back side an attendant is standing holding a *chhatra*. The height of this figure is about 6". The hair style is like that of the *Balakrishna*. All the three sections are separated by two mouldings and on the lower moulding is a single line of writing. The letters of the inscription are worn out. Only a few letters like *g.d.* and *s* are faintly visible. The palaeographic features of these letters dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

### **Inscribed Hero Stone at Mahavir Square :**

Another inscribed Hero Stone is now preserved at Mahavir square along with other antiquities. This memorial stone is somehow different in the style of presentation. It is of greater height in comparison to others found in Jajpur. It is divided into two sections. In the first section the hero is depicted holding a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left hand. The hero is in the frontal position and wears *Kundala* in his ears. In his right hand side an attendant is standing holding a *chhatra* in his left hand over the head of the hero. The existence of this *chhatra* signifies he was a royal figure. In his right hand he holds an indistinct object. The lower section depicts a fighting scene. The soldiers have been shown in fighting position and out of four soldiers one is laying down. Among them two are holding sword in their right hands and shield in their left hands. The top of the stone slab bear two lines of writing. The writings are the following.

Line 1. *Sri Ranakasya vru .....*

Line 2. *Sri Ranakasya da (dwa) raseh.*

The palaeography of this inscription dates back to 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Another important character of this inscribed hero stone is that other letters are incised on it belongs to the 6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. This suggests that the stone originally belongs to the earlier period and used later on when these two lines were engraved. Of these three inscribed hero stones of Jajpur, the one at Viraja temple complex is the best preserved specimen.

### **Uninscribed Hero Stones :**

A good number of uninscribed hero stones are found in different parts of Jajpur. Out of them some are preserved and worshipped as *gramadevati*. Although they are not inscribed,

they differ in their style and character. A brief account of the uninscribed hero stones are given below.

### **Hero Stone at Siddheswar Temple Compound :**

Of the uninscribed Hero Stones at Jajpur, the Hero Stone fixed in the eastern compound wall of the Siddheswar temple is one. It is attached to the wall in horizontal position on the inner eastern compound wall. This suggests that previously it was laying somewhere outside the temple complex. Therefore it was fixed on the compound wall at a later date and that too in improper manner. In this stone slab the hero is depicted holding a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left hand. No other special feature is noticed in this memorial stone.

### **Hero Stone at Kuamadei :**

Another Hero Stone is noticed in a small building at Kuamadei which is 2 km. east of the Viraja temple. This Hero Stone is locally worshiped as "*Routrani*" along with other matrika images. It is an uninscribed hero stone of about thirty inches in height and sixteen inches in breadth. The hero is holding a sword in his right hand and a shield on his left hand. He is facing left. The hair of the Hero is tied in a knot on the right side. The figure of the Hero is depicted in the central niche of the stone slab. The lower part of the stone is partly damaged losing its architectural beauty.

### **Hero Stone at Nandipur :**

A different form of the hero stone is attached on the northern interior wall of the Bhandeswar temple at Nandipur. The stone slab is 28" in height and 12" in breadth. The hero is standing on the pedestal and holding a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left hand. The face of the hero is damaged. In the left edge of the stone slab is decorated with beautiful female figures and *makara* on her top. The *makara* design looks like the decorative scroll work. This feature is not found in other Hero Stones of Jajpur. Probably it was originally attached on the wall of a temple. Later on it was transformed to the present temple which is a modern one.

### **Hero Stone at Mugupada :**

Another unique uninscribed hero stone is found at Mugupada. It is preserved in a small shed of the field locally known as *Akhadapadia* in the village mugupada which is 2 km. away from Mandarakhanda. This memorial stone was recovered from this field six years ago and worshiped as "Bhairavi". The stone slab is divided into two sections. The upper part of the slab is circular and has side margin. In the upper section the figure of the hero is depicted holding a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left hand. An attendant is standing to his left holding a *Chhatra* in his two hands. This suggests that it is a royal figure. The lower section is separated from the upper by a moulding and again it is divided into two vertical section by a moulding. In the right side another figure of hero is depicted holding

a sword and shield in his left and right hands respectively and is standing in *alidha* pose. Close to this figure on the left side an attendant is in praying position and he is facing left. This type of memorial stone is not found in this area. The depiction of a chhatra over the head of the hero indicates that he is a royal figure. The discovery of this hero stone in the *Akhadapadia* is significant. The Akhada generally means the gathering of the people for martial exercises. Therefore it may be presumed that a war was fought in this place in which the royal figure depicted on the stone slab took part.

From the study of both inscribed and uninscribed hero stones of Jajpur it is evident that the area was once famous as a land of brave soldiers and warriors.

**References :**

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