



## Saktism at Bhubaneswar Through Ages

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The Puranic *Ekamra Kshetra* or the modern Bhubaneswar is famous as a *Saiva Kshetra* in the religious history of India. Innumerable *Saiva* shrines have been erected here at different times by numerous rulers of Orissa. Side by side many Sakta shrines also raised their heads in this temple city as Saivism and Saktism are inseparable from each other from time immemorial. There are many Sakta shrines like Vaital temple, Gouri temple, Mohini temple, Bhubaneswari temple, etc. having Sakta goddesses as presiding deities.

Besides the images of numerous Sakta goddesses are also carved on the walls of almost all the shrines of Bhubaneswar.

The history of Sakta religion at Bhubaneswar can be traced back to first or second century B.C. on the basis of archaeological evidences. There are depictions of Yaksha-Yakshini or Naga-Nagini on the walls of the ancient monuments of Buddhism, Jainism

and Brahminism. Even in the modern age some crude-formed Yakshinis and Naginis are worshipped at nearby places of Bhubaneswar. The earliest form of Sakti worship in Orissa in the form of Stambhesvari is also visible at

Bhubaneswar in the Bhuasuni temple.<sup>1</sup> Due to the popularity of Saktism in 7th-8th century A.D. number of Sakta monuments had been constructed under the patronage of the Bhaumakaras at Bhubaneswar. Even some important Sakta shrines have been built by them in the vicinity of the temple city. With the spread



*Vaital Temple, Bhubaneswar*

of Sakta religion different manifestations of Sakti such as Mahisamardini, Sapta-Matrukas, Parvati, Gauri, Chamunda, Bhubaneswari, Savitri, 64-Yoginis, Katyayanis, Ardhanarisvara, Uma-Mahesvara, etc. appeared either as presiding deities or Parsva-devatas in the temples of Bhubaneswar. It will be more systematic if we discuss the development of Saktism at Bhubaneswar through ages. Parasuramesvar



groups are regarded the earliest group of temples at Bhubaneswar. K.C. Panigrahi assigned C.A.D. 650 as the date of these temples and these shrines were erected by the Sailodbhavas<sup>2</sup> who were devout worshippers of Lord Siva. Though Parasurameswar is a Saiva shrine, yet it contains the images of numerous Sakta deities as Parsvadevatas on its walls. For the first time the depiction of Sapta-Matrka images is found here. The images of Chamunda, Varahi, Indrani, Vaisnavi, Kaumari, Sivani and Brahmi with their two associates Ganesa in the beginning and Virabhadra at the end are beautifully carved out from the south-west corner of the northern wall up to the middle. Except Ganesa all other eight deities are associated with their respective vahanas. A six armed Mahisamardini Durga (four-armed according to K.C. Panigrahi) and eight-armed dancing Ardhanarisvara, an image of Siva-Parvati and the images of Ganga and Yamuna are also seen on the wall of this temple. Thus the Sailodbhavas who worshipped Lord Siva as their family deity had also respected the Sakta elements of different gods.

The reign of the Bhaumakaras ushered in a new era in the religious as well as architectural history of Bhubaneswar. It is during the Bhauma period that Saktism first made its appearance in Bhubaneswar.<sup>3</sup> During this time an amalgamation was made in Saivism, Saktism and Tantric Buddhism in the religious life of Bhubaneswar. Hence Tantric Saktism appeared in the religion of this place. Mainly the Bhauma queens patronized this new religion and for its widespread popularity constructed number of shrines of this cult in and around Bhubaneswar. Among those shrines the Vaital temple (C.A.D. 775) is the most important and popular. This shrine is otherwise known as Kapalini temple. Probably this temple was constructed by the Bhauma queen Tribhuvana Mahadevi who is otherwise known

as Katyayini She, in order to worship Katyayini or Durga, had constructed that shrine at Bhubaneswar. This monument is also known as Vaital temple. This name has been derived from the word Vetal or spirit with the help of which the Kapalikas and the Tantrikas wanted to attain their siddhis. So undoubtedly it was a tantric shrine. The presiding deity is a ferocious Chamunda with sunken eyes and the hood of a snake on her head and a corpse under her feet with a jackel dragging it. Other Sapta-Matrkas with Viresvara and Ganesa are also depicted with Chamunda with their usual attributes. Besides the images of Seven Mothers another female deity is also depicted in the middle of the western wall which has been identified with Sivaduti. Thus, for the first time the appearance of eight Matrkas is seen at Vaital. Moreover a four-armed Durga appears in the central niche in the south. It holds a japamala, a sula, a khadga and a vase in its four hands and has two attendants on either side and a pair of flying Vidyadharas above the head. In the northern central niche has been enshrined an eight-armed Mahisamardini with a sword, a trisula, vajra and sula in her right hands and khetaka with a loose handle, a bow and snake in the left. The snake forcibly draws out the tongue from the mouth of the buffalo-headed demon into whose chest the goddess thrusts the long trident held in one of the right hands. The lion bites the right elbow of the demon. An image of Ardha-narisvara is also depicted in the central niche of the western side.

The most important aspect of Saktism at Bhubaneswar during the Bhauma epoch was the rise of a mysterious cult popularly known as Yogini cult. The Yoginis were sixty-four in numbers worshipped by the Tantric Acharyas in order to attain their siddhis. All Yoginis are terrific in nature and were worshipped in open and circular temples. Under the patronage of a Bhauma queen Hira Mahadevi such a temple was constructed in



the village Hirapur at a distance of ten kilometers from Bhubaneswar. Perhaps in order to worship the Yoginis in a calm atmosphere this temple was constructed not at proper Bhubaneswar which was populous and noisy, but at a calm, quite and lovely place like Hirapur. This sixty-four Yogini temple of Hirapur is a landmark not only in the field of Saktism, but also in the spheres of sculpture and architecture during the Bhumra age. The sculptural representation of the Yoginis are very elegant and balanced made of black granite. All yoginis are in dancing position, with all their attributes and vahanas. Among them the presiding deity is Mahamaya big in size and ferocious in appearance. Besides the yogini images Bhairavas have also been represented in different forms, as they are associated with the yogini cult—a cult in Saktism—became very popular at Bhubaneswar under the Bhauma epoch. During this period four other Sakta shrines were also constructed on the four sides of Vindu Sarovara. Among these the Mohini temple is situated on its southern bank. This temple is of Parsurameswar type and was built by Mohini Devi, the queen of the Bhauma ruler Sivakaradeva II.<sup>4</sup> This shrine is called Mohini temple after her name. The presiding deity in the temple is a ten armed dancing Chamunda. This temple was constructed in about A.D. 687.<sup>5</sup> The next Sakta shrine situated on the north bank of Vindu Sarovara is the Uttaresvara temple. Chamunda, terrific in appearance, as in Mohini temple is also its presiding deity. The other two Sakta shrines on the eastern and the western banks contain two images of Mahisamardini. This fact is narrated in the Svarnadri Mahodaya that four Chandikas are enshrined on the four sides of the tank. Two other Chamunda images of terrific appearance are now found enshrined in the modern temples, one is called Bhuasuni temple on the bank of the river Gangua and another newly constructed small temple situated near the house

of Satyapriya Mohanty. All these Chamunda images bear the characteristics of the same age. They are depicted in tantric form with sunken bellies, emaciated body garlanded with skulls and seated on corpses with jackels by their side. None of the preceding temples contains Chamunda or any other Sakta image as presiding deities and in the succeeding groups the Sakta temples which contain Sakta images as presiding deities not in their terrific form, but in their pacific forms. Therefore it may be concluded that Saktism made its first appearance at Bhubaneswar during this period and began its existence along side the main cult Saivism.<sup>6</sup>

The most important Sakta shrine at Bhubaneswar is the Gauri temple. According to K.N. Mahapatra this was constructed by the Bhauma queen Gauri Mahadevi following the noble examples set by her predecessors Madhavi Devi and Mohini Devi around A.D. 790.<sup>7</sup> But K.C. Panigrahi is of opinion that this temple was constructed by the Somavamsi ruler Nahusa-Indraratha or Indrakesari.<sup>8</sup> It is a Khakara type temple like Vaital having Gauri as its presiding deity which is in pacified form. Sisireswar Temple, another shrine of the Bhauma epoch also contains a Mahisamardini image in the northern central niche of the vimana. Another mutilated Mahisamardini in the southern niche kills the buffalo-headed demon in the same manner as its close prototype of the Vaital temple does with same ayudhas in different hands. Thus, the Bhauma period is the most glorious phase in the establishment and spread of Saktism in Bhubaneswar and her vicinity.

Somavamsis who occupied Utkala after the Bhaumakaras originally belonged to South Kosala. They had contributed a lot for the spread of Saktism and Tantricism. The sixty-four Yogini temple at Ranipur-Jharial, the Sakta temple at



Belkhandi and stray images of Sakta deities proved their patronage to Saktism. Coming to Utkala they had not neglected in this sphere. The first monument of the Somavamsi period at Bhubaneswar is perhaps the small but elegant Muktesvara temple which was constructed by Yayati-I in C.A.D. 966 on the basis of the three Tantric temples at Baudh which was a territory of South Kosala.<sup>9</sup> This temple is univocally praised by the art historians as "the gem of Orissan architecture", "the epitome of Orissan architecture" and "a dream in sandstone". The ceiling of the jagamohana contains most beautiful sculptures of a group of Sapta-Matrkas with Virabhadra on an eight-petalled full blown lotus at the centre, each petal being occupied by a deity. The main difference of the group from the earlier ones is that all the Matrikas except Chamunda hold babies in their arms and that Virabhadra holds sword in the right hand. This is a clear proof of the Tantric propensity of the builder of the temple. Moreover other Sakta cult images like Sarasvati, Varahi or Durga are depicted on the walls of the temples. Brahmesvara temple built by Kolavati Devi, the mother of the Somavamsi king Udyota Kesari also contains number of images of Sakta deities though it is originally a Saivite shrine. On the western faced of the main temple the figure of Chamunda carved by the side of Nairiti holds a trident and stands upon a corpse with a jackel biting its head. Another figure of the same deity carved on the northern wall of the same deity carved on the northern wall of the Jagamohana wears only a loin cloth and holds a nrimunda and a khapara. A jackel licks the blood dropping from the nrimunda while another animal presumably a buffalo looks up in between the thighs of the deity. There are also some minor representations of Sakta deities like Durga and Ardhanarisvara.

The superb temple of Rajarani famous for her beautiful architecture is believed to be a

product of the epoch of the Somavamsis. Its original name was Indresvara and is a Saiva shrine yet it contains many images of Sakta deities among which the image of Nisa-Parvati is most important. In a rectangular shallow niche nearer to the jagamohana on the south occurs a beautiful image of Parvati holding in her upper left hand a club and in her lower left hand a lotus with stalk which rising from the pedestal passes through the left arm of the deity.

The greatest Saiva temple at Bhubaneswar, the temple of Lingaraja is the finest production of the Somavamsi epoch. It is the most popular Saiva shrine of Orissa, Yet it contains some Sakta deities as its cult images. Among these the image of Mahisamardini depicted in the southern faced of Jagamohana is unique in its character. The main feature to be noticed in this representation is that the victim is not a buffalo-headed demon, but a buffalo, from the decapitated trunk of which rude figure is shown as issuing forth.

Moreover, the temple of Gopalini or Bhubaneswari situated to the north of Jagamohana of the Lingaraja and the temple of Savitri in the south-west corner of the vimana of Lingaraja may be assigned to the Somavamsi epoch.<sup>9</sup>

The imperial Gangas who ruled over Utkala after the Samavamsis were very famous for their art of temple construction. The tallest temple of Jagannath at Puri and the massive temple of Lord Surya at Konark amply prove their interest and skill in the building of temples. They had also not neglected in erecting Sakta shrines in the temple city of Bhubaneswar. Among them the Chitrakarini temple is one. Standing on the main road it is a panchayatana temple having four subsidiary shrines at the four corners surrounded by a compound wall. An image of Chamunda is worshipped as its presiding deity. Perhaps this temple was constructed by the Ganga



king Narasimhadeva-I who was known as Parama-Mahesvara, Shri Durgaputra, Shri Purusottamaputra in his Kapilas temple inscription of A.D. 1246.<sup>10</sup> Another temple constructed by the same ruler having a Mahisamardini Durga as its presiding deity was called Dvaravasini Durga temple.<sup>11</sup> This may be assigned to the year 1246 A.D. Another small Sakta temple of the Ganga epoch enshrining the image of Mahisamardini Durga called Daksina-Chandi is situated near the southern gate of the compound of the Lingaraja temple. Here Durga has been mentioned as the presiding deity of the castle Kritivasa-Kataka in two Lingaraja temple inscriptions.<sup>12</sup>

Within the compound of Lingaraja temple, the temple of Parvati is a fine piece of architecture. This temple structurally and stylistically is definitely late than the Lingaraja.<sup>13</sup> This temple may be placed in the second half of the 12th century A.D, because this temple might have been constructed by Chodaganga Deva at the time when the Laksmi temple was constructed at Puri or sometime later, as the Ganga rulers gave equal importance to Laksmi and Parvati.

The Ganga ruler Anangabhima-III described himself as Routa or the representative of Lord Purusottama.<sup>14</sup> In order to glorify Lord Jagannatha he had constructed a small shrine situated to the south of Lingaraja in which Balarama, Subhadra and Krishna are enshrined. Narasimhadeva-I had constructed the temples of Laksmi-Narayana and Laksmi-Narasimha in the compound of Lingaraja. Thus the Ganga rulers who were the devout worshipers of the Vaisnavite deities like Narayana, Narasimha, Purusottama, Baladeva, etc. had worshipped their female counterparts like Laksmi and Subhadra. Thus Saktism flourished very deeply in the temple city of Bhubaneswar during the epoch of the imperial Gargas.

After the fall of the imperial Gargas, Kapilendra Deva, the founder of the Gajapati dynasty, constructed the Saiva shrine, Kapilesvara Temple at Bhubaneswar. That was the last temple constructed in the lengthy era of temple construction. The Gajapatis engaged themselves in wars and after their fall, chaotic situation prevailed in the politics of Utkala. Then successively it was ruled by Afghans, Mughals, Marathas and the British. Thus from the Gajapati period up to country's Independence no development was found relating to Saktism at Bhubaneswar.

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