



Sakta Sites and Monuments of Old Undivided Cuttack District

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The erstwhile undivided district of Cuttack has a good number of Sakta monuments. To facilitate general information a brief account of the leading ones is furnished below. This account includes a reference to the site description of the monuments and identification of the presiding deity.

Viraja and Sapta Matrukas of Jajpur

Jajpur or the Virajakshetra located on the bank of the sacred Vaitarani river is one of the oldest holy places of Orissa whose presiding deity, a two-handed Mahisamardini Durga has been assigned a date in the Gupta period by competent scholars. Jajpur was the capital of the Bhaumakaras and the Somavamsis and it also continued to be a place of great importance during the rule of the Gangas and the Suryavamsi Gajapatis.

The present Viraja temple is of a modern construction. It is located within a spacious compound surrounded by high masonry walls with battlements and main opening on the eastern side. The main shrine is built in rekha order, whereas the Jagamohana represents pidha design. Both the structures are thickly plastered in lime mortar. Within the premises are numerous miniature shrines containing detached fragments from ruined temples, votive Sivalingas, loose sculptures and hero stones.

The sanctum sanctorum preserves the presiding deity, Viraja. The image is said to have

been brought from the ruined temple at Kalasapur located in the close vicinity of Jajpur town as such it has no bearing on the present Viraja temple. Goddess Viraja, a form of Mahisamardini Durga is fashioned in the attitude of killing Mahisasura, the buffalo demon. She thrusts a long spear in the right hand and firmly held the tail of the buffalo-demon in the left hand. The demon is in complete animal form. Her mount, the lion is shown attacking the demon from the right. Two-handed Mahisasuramardini Durga images are generally regarded as the earliest form of this deity. No where in Orissa two-handed Mahisamardini Durga images are worshipped as presiding deities of temples.

Within the residential premises of the Sub-Divisional Officer of Jajpur are preserved three colossal images of Chamunda, Indrani and Varahi of the Saptamatruka group. These images in sitting posture measure around 9 feet in height and 6 feet in breadth and fashioned in hard chlorite stone.

At Dasasvamedha ghat on the right bank of the Vaitarani river one can notice another group of Saptamatrukas installed in a row within a modern masonry shrine. These images though small in dimension in comparison to the group of Saptamatrukas referred to above of the place yet larger in size to the groups found elsewhere in Orissa. The present images of Chamunda, Varahi,



Indrani, Vaishnavi, Sivaduti, Kaumari and Mahesvari are found under active worship. The order of their placement has been greatly disturbed. They are all seated in lotus pedestals with respective mounts carved in front and babies held in one of their left hands. Hands with attributes of some of these Matraka images have also been mutilated. The Sivaduti image is designed in shape of an emaciated old lady seated on the pedestal with both knees raised upwards.

Bhattarika of Baramba

Bhattarika, one of the famous Sakta pithas of Orissa is located on the right bank of the Mahanadi near village Sasanga of Baramba area. The presiding deity Bhattarika of this place is greatly revered by the religious minded devotees of the adjoining ex-garjats. In view of its picturesque set up large number of pilgrims throng to the place round the year. Their number multiply during Dashara days.

The main shrine preserving goddess Bhattarika is built in pidha order and thickly plastered with lime mortar. It has no significant architectural merit. The central niches of the side walls preserve parsvadevata images like Ganesh, Kartikeya and Mahisamardini Durga of much later finish. The presiding deity worshipped in the name of Bhattarika is seated cross legged on a lotus pedestal. She displays Varada mudra in the right hand and a full-blown lotus flower in the left hand. Her iconographic features correspond to the image of Tara of the Buddhist pantheon. Within the Jagamohana images of Surya, Kubera and Ganesh are preserved.

Churchika of Banki

Banki has become famous for its presiding deity Churchika enshrined in a much later temple on the top of the Ruchika hill. The place is associated with Parasurama of the Ramayana fame who spent a major part of his life in

propitiating Goddess Churchika. A small river, (now extinct) under the name of Renuka passes near this small hillock. The main temple, though architecturally of no attraction, its front wooden mandapa preserves remarkable specimens of Orissan art in wood carvings. The main shrine and the Jagamohana, both built in pidha design are thoroughly plastered with lime mortar.

The presiding deity has been firmly fixed to the back wall of the sanctum sanctorum. In course of time the image has been greatly weathered. To help identification a replica of the presiding deity is kept in the central niche of the outer southern wall of the main shrine. On the basis of this image the main deity which is worshipped as Churchika Thakurani can be identified with goddess Chamunda. She is carved seated on a prostrate human body. Her emaciated body is decorated with a garland of human skulls. In her four right hands she displays sword, spear, short dagger and gesture of offering boons. The three left hands on the other hand represent severed head, blood-cup and damaru. Through the small finger of the remaining one left hand she licks blood held in one of the hands of this side. Her decorative costumes and ornaments are all weathered. From iconographic and artistic point of view such images can be placed in the Bhaumakara period of Orissa history.

Sarala of Jhankada

The famous shrine of Sarala Thakurani of Jhankada is built on the ruins of an earlier temple. The original temple was destroyed by the Muslims iconoclasts during the rule of Aurangzeb. The local people indicate to the ruins of the original temple of this goddess at a place situated in the close neighbourhood. These ruins indicate to its construction in the Bhaumakara period. The present Sarala image is an image of Mahisamardini Durga to which Sarala Dasa, the author of Oriya Mahabharata greatly eulogized. In eight hands the



image represents characteristic attributes of the Bhaumakara period.

Pancha Varahi of Satabhaya

Satabhaya, situated close to the sea shore in Rajnagar area is famous for worship of Varahis (Pancha Varahi). Unfortunately one of the Varahi images has been lost and in its place a crudely fashioned deity under the name of Bata Kumari has been installed. The other four Varahi images are worshipped as Janjali, Kamalai, Bimalai and Panchuvarahi. All the images are fashioned in dark chlorite stone with uniform dimensions. They sit on plain pedestals with both legs stretched down the seat. Each one of them displays fish in the right hand and skull-cup in the left. They are marked by pot-belly and dishevelled hair arranged in twisted knots of successive tiers. None of them, however, is provided with a baby on the lap as found with the Varahi images of the Saptamatruka group in Orissa. The ex-ruler of Kanika has built a masonry-shed over these images for proper preservation and worship.

Saptamatrukas of Sathalpur

Sathalpur near Alanahat in present Jagatsinghpur district is noted for its Saptamatruka and Ekapada Bhairava shrines. Both the structures are now in ruins. The images installed in them are seen much below the surrounding ground level.

The Saptamatruka images of this place are fashioned separately but arranged in a row. They are flanked by Ganesh and Virabhadra. A lone image of Yama, too, found near these images. The Saptamatrukas include figures of Kaumari, Brahmani, Mahesvari, Varahi, Indrani, Vaishnavi and Chamunda. Except Chamunda, all the Matruka figures are seated in ardhaparyankasana. The figure of Chamunda is however, seen standing on a dead body. Again except Chamunda, the other Matrukas hold a baby each in her left lap. The Chamunda figure is eight-armed and except

the one displaying Varadamudra others are damaged and missing. A garland of human-skulls encircles her body. The other Matruka figures are represented with their mark of cognizance below respective pedestals.

The Ekapada Bhairava image in the other ruined temple is standing over a lotus pedestal below which is seen a prostrate human figure. His attendants on the sides are also envisaged in separate lotus pedestals. Of the four hands of the Ekapada Bhairava image, three are damaged and missing but the remaining one displays Varadamudra. A garland of human-skulls encircles his body. From artistic and iconographic point of view the Sakta images of this place can be assigned a date in the Somavamsi period.

Bhagavati of Suklesvar

The Bhagavati temple of Suklesvara is noticed amidst the ruins of the Manikesvara Siva and other temples of the locality. The present Bhagavati temple, much renovated in recent years is built in pidha order and thoroughly plastered. The presiding deity, a Mahisamardini Durga image is worshipped here as goddess Bhagavati. She appears to be the biggest Mahisamardini Durga image in Orissa. She is designed in the attitude of killing demon Mahisasura who emerges from the decapitated body of the buffalo lying over the lotus pedestal. The chopped off head of the buffalo too, is rolling over the pedestal. Lion the conventional mount of the goddess is engaged in attacking the demon from the left flank. Of the ten hands of the goddess, three of the left side and four of the right side are damaged and missing along with the attributes held in them. The remaining two hands of the left side represent snake and bow and one hand of the right side holds an arrow dragged from the quiver fixed to her shoulder. The image can safely be placed in the Ganga period. Two other eight-armed Mahisamardini Durga images datable to the



Bhaumakara period are also noticed within ruins of this place.

Bhagavati of Batesvar

The Bhagavati temple of Batesvara is situated on the left bank of the Chitrotpala river near Salepur. The Sankaresvara Siva temple once located near it has already fallen to the river bed. The Bhagavati temple of this place is built in pidha order and thoroughly plastered with lime mortar. Lower portion of the bada of this temple has partially been covered by earth. The niches of the outer walls are all devoid of figure sculptures. Within the sanctum sanctorum of this temple, a remarkable Mahisamardini Durga image in the name of Bhagabati is under worship. As per local tradition this image is earlier than the Bhagavati image of village Suklesvar of the same district. She has ten hands but some of them are damaged and refixed. She has been fashioned in the attitude of killing demon Mahisasura. Since the interior part of the sanctum-sanctorum is extremely dark even during day time it was not possible to closely examine the attributes held in each hand. However, as understood from the temple priest she represents all the conventional attributes of a ten-armed Mahisamardini Durga image of Orissa.

The Jagamohana of this temple is also designed in the same pidha order. It preserves three remarkable brass idols of Chandrasekhar, Parvati and Kali recovered from the river bed some years back. The Kali image of this group is worshipped as Panchamukhi Kali by the local people. She has five faces and ten arms. Four of her faces represent the four cardinal directions while the fifth one fashioned at the top represents the sky. Of her ten hands two are shown in abhaya and varada mudras. The remaining eight hands are provided with emblems like rosary, trident goad, spear, noose, manuscript, bow and skull-cup. She has a garland of human skulls, spread over the front part of the body. A dead human

figure is laying below her lotus pedestal. Her decorative ornaments, costumes and coiffure are extremely beautiful and varied in nature.

Dhakulei of Pratapanagari

The Dhakulei Thakurani shrine of village Pratapanagari is situated on the Cuttack-Bhubaneswar section of the National Highway No.-5. Besides the Sakta shrine, the place also yielded several figures of Jaina Tirthankaras and Sasanadevis and an interesting image of Lakshmi Narayana. The main shrine has already been collapsed. Its front Jagamohana too has no roof at present. A spacious masonry mandapa has been constructed in front of the shrine for use of devotees during festive occasions. The presiding deity under the name Dhakulei Thakurani is an image of Chamunda seated on a dead body in ardhaparyanka pose. A garland of human skulls encircles her body. All the eight hands including the attributes held in them are badly mutilated. The gajacharma avarana is faintly visible on the back slab. Her emaciated body, sunken-belly, gaping mouth and protruding eye-balls are awe inspiring. The figure closely resembles the Chamunda image of Dharmasala area now preserved in Orissa State Museum in workmanship. During the month of Chaitra a great festival is held here every year.

Saptamatrukas of Dharmasala Area

Dharmasala area yielded a large number of Brahmanical sculptures of which the Saptamatruka images once installed in village Chahata appear to be quite noteworthy. Of the entire group only four figures, i.e. Indrani, Vaishnavi, Varahi and Chamunda have since been shifted to the Orissa State Museum for preservation and display. Each of the figures measure roughly 2'. 6"X 1'6" in size. Their artistic elaboration of decorative ornaments including the jewelled crowns deserve special attention. All the figures except Chamunda are having babies



on their laps and lost in deep meditation. Their conventional mounts have been carved below their lotus pedestals. The Chamunda image is remarkably fashioned with display of complete human anatomy. Its skeletal body, sunken belly, protruding eyeballs, flaming hairdo and riding over dead body infested by jackals appear very awe inspiring. Another twelve-armed Mahisamardini Durga image datable to the 8th century A.D. has also been collected from this area for display in the Orissa State Museum.

Mahisamardini Durga of Durgapur

A good number of stone sculptures were recovered from the bed of Brahmani river near village Durgapur on the Cuttack-Balasore section of the National Highway and now preserved in a newly built masonry structure. The sculptures include figures from Buddhist and Brahmanical pantheons. The Sakta figures of the place represent Mahisamardini Durga and Chamunda images. Of the two Mahisamardini Durga images, the larger one is regarded as the presiding deity of the place from which the place possibly derived its name. Of her eight hands, two are damaged and missing. The rest six hands display sword, spear, disc, bow, snake and shield. Mahisasura emerging from the decapitated body of the buffalo is engaged in serious fight with the goddess. The other Durga image, though in small magnitude represents similar iconographic traits.

The Chamunda image of the place is designed seated on a prostrate human body. She displays demaru, skull-cup, khatvanga, rosary and severed head in five of her six hands. She licks the blood from the skull-cup by the small finger of her remaining sixth hand. Her skeletal body, sunken belly, bulging eye-balls, protruding teeth and garland of human-skulls are remarkably fashioned. Gajacharma is represented at her back.

Bhagavati of Parahata

Village Parahata is situated in the Balikuda Police-station area. The Bhagavati temple of this place has been built on the ruins of an earlier shrine. The presiding Bhagavati image represents the characteristic features of a ten-armed Mahisamardini Durga. Her five right hands hold Khadga, Sula, Chakra, Saras and Pasa and the five left hands on the other hand display Dhala, Ghanta, Parasu, Dhanu and Khetaka. She is designed in the attitude of fighting with demon Mahisasura who emerges from the decapitated body of the buffalo lying over the lotus pedestal. Lion, her conventional mount also appears attacking the demon from the right. Within the Jagamohana of the temple there appears another eight-armed Mahisamardini Durga image.

Chandi and Gadachandi of Cuttack town

Cuttack town has two prominent Sakta shrines, one under the name of Cuttack Chandi, is located in the Ramagarh area and the other under the name of Godachandi is situated within the historic Barabati font. Cuttack was the traditional capital of the Hindu rulers of medieval Orissa. The deities enshrined in both the temples are greatly revered by the local people. I had no occasion to examine the iconographic features of the deities since they are mostly covered by costumes all the time.

Other Important Sakta Deities

In addition to the above noted Sakta monuments a few more can be mentioned which include the Dakhinachandi of Kantol, the Durga temple of Vaidesvara, the Saptamatrukas of Simhanatha, the Gramadevati of Garama, Mahisamardini Durga of Kopala, Bhagavati of Tirthamatha, Harachandi of Kundesvara and Kuttamachandi of Pitapura.

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