



Goddesses Manikesvari and Lankesvari

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Tel and Indravati basin covering Kalahandi district is a land of Sakti worship since time immemorial. The earliest form of sakti worship was discovered in the shape of Stambeswari which has been mentioned in the Teresingha Copper plate of Raja Tustikara during fourth century A.D. Tribal Kondhs worship wooden posts which has been taken the shape of Stambeswari it is believed. Kalahandi district is mostly inhabited by tribals who are nature and mother deities worshippers. Besides, to get rid from drought like situation Sakambari, during war period to get strength Raktambari, Lankeswari, Dakeswari (Dukri) and Manikeswari deities are worshipped in Kalahandi. Here there is an attempt to present different aspects of Manikeswari and Lankeswari, two important deities of Kalahandi region.

Manikeswari

Deity Manikeswari is the tutelary goddess of Kalahandi. The name of the deity is significant as it is believed that the name of the deity Manikeswari has been derived from the word Manikya (Ruby). The Kalahandi region is famous for various types of gemstones including that of Ruby, Sapphire, Emerald, Topaz, Iogite and many other varieties of gemstones. Kalahandi was known as "Karund" and till 18th century the Naga kings of Kalahandi were known as

Karundadhipati. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Page 478, Vol. 6 the name *Corundum* (base metal of Ruby) is derived from its place where it is collected. Incidentally the Sanskrit name of *Corundum* is Korund or Kurundum. It is believed from *Kurundum* the old name of Kalahandi i.e. *Karund* was derived and from it the word *Corundum* was derived.

The Chindakanaga kings of 12th and 13th century A.D. were worshippers of Goddess Manikya Devi alias Manikeswari which is known from Jatanpal, Dantewara and Bhairamgarh inscriptions. Later she became tutelary deity of Ganga and present Naga kings of Kalahandi. The medieval period between 10th to 13th century was a period of political disturbance in Trikalanga and South Kosala region due to continuing warfare between Somavamsi, Kalachuri, Chhindakanaga, Ganga dynasties and Kalahandi virtually turned in to marching route of army and witnessed many battles. Availability of large numbers of Sati and Hero stones from different parts of the district is indicating long warfare. There was virtual competition among different powers to adorn the title of *Trikalingadhipati*. During this period the Chindaka Nagas suffered due to their friendship with Gangas against Kalachuries. In order to terrorise and to give lesson to Gangas, Kalachuries crushed Chakrakota Nagar of Chhindak Nagas.



Kalachuri king Ratna Deva-II of Ratanpur also defeated Jateswar alias Kamarnava the son of Chodaganga Deva, the Ganga king of Utkala. This lost glory was at last recovered only by Anianka Bhima alias Anangabhima Deva, the great grand son of Chodaganga Deva, defeating Kalachuri ruler Pratapa malla. The tradition says that the Gangas adopted Manikya devi the tutelary deity of their friend Chindaknagas. During this chastic period of power struggle, this region turned in to a vassal state of Gangas with no importance and when the Ganga rulers were weakened, local powers like

Chauhans in Bolangir region and Nagas in Kalahandi raised their heads. The Darbar Records of Naga rulers say that after the death of the 6th king of Naga dynasty his widow queen along with her minor son Ramachandra Deo took shelter in her maternal house at Gadapur who

belong to Ganga family. Later the Kondh *Umras* and important citizens brought the queen and son from Gadapur. While returning back home Ramachandra Deo brought Manikyadevi from his maternal uncle's home. Manikyadevi was established at Jugsai Patna in the form of Manikeswari and the ruins of the old temple there is still visible. Later Ramachandra Deo installed Manikeswari at Bhandesir garh (present Bhawanipatna) and ruled from Jenabali Patna or present Junagarh.

However during the rule of the 27th king of Naga dynasty Fatenarayan Deo, there was out

break of epidemic in the capital and even the 2nd son of the king was also the victim of the epidemic and the eldest son Udit Pratap Deo was in serious condition. He was believed to be cured after the prayer of the king before deity Manikeswari and in the year 1850 the king shifted his capital to Bhandesir Patna or present Bhawani Patna.

The temple of Manikeswari was constructed by King Fatenarayan Deo in the year 1852 but a new temple of gigantic order in the present form was constructed in the year 1935 by king Brajamohan Deo. The present temple is located adjacent to the palace, which is 56 feet tall and in the form of *Rekha deula*.

The Manikeswari Temple at Bhawanipatna is 56 ft. tall and consists of *Mandapa* and Sanctum. The temple architecture is of *Rekhadeula* style. The Pillared *Mandapa* is linked with the main temple

and once it was decorated with mural paintings of Dasamahavidya and natural sceneries, which is at present not seen due to erosion. The *Mandapa* is having columns of six rows and six columns in each row. The temple of Budharaja has been installed as a *Parsvadevata* in the northern entry of the temple. There are three other small Rekha shrine temples of Vaishavi in the North of the temple, Narasimhi in the West and Varahi in the South. Combiningly the temple complex has a gigantic look. Manikeswari though having conception of Chhinnamasta from its iconography it is worshipped in the *Ekakhyra mantra* of Kali.



Chhatra Yatra & Manikeswari Temple



Apart from Bhawanipatna Manikeswari is worshipped also in Sankhemundi, Paralakhemundi, Sonepur, Kashipur and also in Thuamul Rampur and Jugsaipatna of Kalahandi district.

The main Temple of Manikeswari is situated in the campus of the Palace of Naga kings of Kalahandi at Bhawanipatna. Manikeswari deity is a happy blending between Tribal and Non-Tribal culture. There is close resemblance between the iconography of Stambeswari or pillar worship and the present Manikeswari deity. Significantly the Manikeswari deity of Bhawanipatna is headless. And the body is only a cylindrical structure and over it a clay head has been fixed and the body is covered by cloths and ornaments. Like *Navakalebara* of Jagannath each year on *Mulastami* day a clay head of the deity is placed engraved with gems after replacing the old head, which is immersed in the midnight in the Purusottam Sagar adjacent to the temple amidst secret ritual.

Besides this tradition several other traditions and rituals are also linked with deity Manikeswari. Similarly another interesting ritual is observed before deity Budharaja (Bhairaba) located in a small temple in the northern side of the Manikeswari temple. It is only once in a year on the occasion of *Mahastami* this temple is opened and offerings offered. After offering before Budharaja, the *Chhatar* of Manikeswari is left for *Jenakhal* and makes its return journey on *Navami* early morning known as *Chhatar Yatra*. Interestingly although *Navanna* or *Nuakhai* is observed before other deities and people observing *Nuakhai* either on *Rushi Panchami* (*Bhadrava Shukla Pakshya Panchami*) or *Bhadrava Shukla Pakshya Dasami*, the new rice is offered to Budharaja only on

Mahastami i.e. the day when the temple is opened for the day. So the royal family after waiting for the occasion take *Navanna* only on next day i.e. *Mahanavami* after *Chhatar Yatra* of deity of Manikeswari. This is an unique tradition. Besides. Manikeswari Deity being a happy blending between Tribal and Non-Tribal culture. There is close resemblance between the iconography of Stambeswari or pillar worship and the present Manikeswari deity. Kondhs treat Maniksairo as the sister of the deity Dharnipenu. A narrative song of Kondh tribe says :

"Juhar Juhar Manikesari Maa Raije Maharani
Sayabani mahan Laybani mahan Dharni San Baheni"

So there is a belief that the deity Manikeswari in the present form and Kondh traditional Manikesari is interrelated and through the universalisation process the present form of *Tantra* worship of deity evolved. In the similar process there is evolution of Kondh male deity Budhapenu taking evolution of Budharaja or Bhairaba.

The *Sharadiya Utsav* of Deity Manikeswari starts from *Mulastami* and the most important function is *Astami*, *Navami* and *Dashami*. After Sandhi Puja of Mahastami the *Chhatra* of deity is taken to *Jenakhal* in the outskirts of the town. On the early hours of *Mahanavami* the Chhatra makes its return journey to the temple accompanied by *Jenabadya*, *Ghumura*, *Nishan*, *Ghanta*. The chorus creates a thrilling sensation and a sense of awe and wonder to the lakhs of devotees congregate from different parts of the State including neighbouring States. As a mark of fulfillment of wishes devotees make offerings. It is an occasion for every body irrespective of caste, creed and religion to find the Deity amidst them.



Lankeswari

Lankeswari is the presiding deity of Junagarh, the old capital of Kalahandi. Lankeswari is stated by tradition to be the protectress of mythical city Lanka ruled by Ravan referred to as Lankini or Lankadevi. Similarly Lankeswari was also the presiding deity in the Sonpur region during the reign of Chhindakanagas. After defeating the Soma rulers, Chhindakanagas installed the Telgu Chodas as local ruling chief there. Even today Lankeswari is worshipped in the form of a flat rocky islet in the bed of Mahanadi and a whirlpool of Mahanadi is known as *Lankeswari Darha*.

Junagarh is one of the key historical sites on the bank of Hati river in the Tel River Valley and ruins of Soma, Kalachuri, Chhindakanaga, Ganga and Naga dynasties are lying scattered in and around Junagarh. Till the capital was shifted to Bhawanipatna during 1850 it was the capital and nerve centre of Kalahandi as well as Trikalanga area. Junagarh was known as Koilabatipatana, and Jenabalipatana about which there are mentions in *Sarala Mahabharata* also. Evidence of past glory of Junagarh can be found with several Sakta, Saiva & Baishnavite temples dedicated to Lankeswari, Kanakadurga, Budharaja, Someswar Mahadeva and Dadhibamana and other temples. Several Bhairava images of different period from 1st century to 12th century A.D. and Sculptures are lying scattered.

Lankeswari is the presiding deity and treated with venerations by general mass. It is

an unique *Sakta* and *Tantra* centre and was the tutelary deity of different powers like Chhindakanaga, Ganga and Naga dynasties. Many legends are associated with the deity. According to one popular legend the *Banka Paikas* a warrior community brought Lankeswari from the South by the order of the King. Virtually the *Banka* soldiers defeated the enemy and brought the deity to the capital city at

Jenabalipatna, now Junagarh by beating of *Ghumura*. The legend may be related to the period when captured Soma Vansi Chhindakanagas Kingdom or may be Gangas who defeated Kalachuries. Incidentally it was considered as honour for the victorious kings to bring the deities from subjugated territories to install in their capital. The period of 11th to 13th Century A.D. was marked by great political disturbances in South Kosala and Trikalanga due to continuous warfare between Soma Vansi, Kalachuri,



Goddess Lankeswari

Chhindakanaga and Ganga dynasties and Kalahandi became battle field in the competition among different powers to become *Trikalingadhipati*. Large number of Sati and Hero stones in Junagarh is indicator of long warfare. Deity Lankeswari is treated as war goddess who not only conferring victory and success in the battle field but also participating in the war as per tradition.

Considering the iconographic style scholars assigned the date of the deity in 12th Century A.D. Deity Lankeswari is four armed. She sits in *Bajraparyanka* posture on a lotus throne. She holds *Sankha* and *Chakra* in her



upper left and right hands respectively and her lower right hand having *Varada Mudra* and left hand in *Abhaya Mudra* with spread out tongue. The image is carved in black chlorite stone measuring 32" by 16". Such iconic feature synchronizing Kali with Vishnu is unique and only of its kind in the State of Orissa. The deity is worshipped with *Vanadurga Vija Mantra*. In front of the deity there is a four handed Kali image holding sword and severed head in upper and lower right hands and skull cup and nose in upper and lower left hands respectively dancing over a corpse. As per tradition from 11th to 18th century A.D. the vanquished kings were sacrificed and there was also other forms of human sacrifice.

However those traditions are of the past.

There are many folklores and legends in the name of goddess Lankeswari. Apart from a war goddess she is very much lively as well as furious. Local people claim that very often deity use to come out from the temple in the form of a young beautiful girl and participate in *Boria* dance along with young girls of the locality. *Boria* is a traditional dance form where girls sing self composed songs and dance without musical instrument. Another folk lore says that one day when the priest reached the temple he found a glass bangle vendor waiting. He told that a young girl from inside purchased glass bangles and told him to get the payments from her father. The priest understood the mischief and paid the price. Inside the temple the priest expressed his

annoyance and soon the glass bangles fell down from the idol. It is also said that as the deity was very much furious the original idol was buried near *Deymuhan* in the confluence of *Bhatrajore* and Hati River and a new idol was installed.

The most important festival of deity Lankeswari is *Khandabasa* on the night of

Mulastami. After secret rituals the two ceremonial swords of deity is placed by the Maharaja over two heaps of rice in the both sides of the Altar. People believed that if the sword stands straight the area will be free from natural calamities and in the event of tilting to any side it indicates bad

omen. *Khandabasa* festival is the beginning of the *Saradiya Mahotsav* in Kalahandi and after which preparation for the *Mahotsav* starts.

After shifting of the Capital during 1849-50 to Bhawanipatna due to outbreak of epidemic at Junagarh, the deity Manikeswari became the presiding deity of the royal family replacing Lankeswari, who was the ancient tutelary deity of the dynasty. However she continues to be a deity of the masses, revered, adorned as well as feared by all section of people. Incidentally people hesitate to falsely swear in the name of Lankeswari even today.



Ceremonial Swords of Lankeswari in procession

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