



Khichakeswari at Khiching : Tourism Prospects

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In this paper an attempt has been made to focus on historiography of Saktism and the Sakti Centres at Khiching in Mayurbhanj district which is constituted as the ecotourism spot. Northern Orissa has occupied an important position in the history of Orissa since the time immemorial. Its cultural treasure, the infrastructure of eco-tourism and the trade and commerce once upon a time had glorified its place, history and identity. The district like Mayurbhanj which constitutes the tribal majority, is specially famous for its ancient Saktipitha like Maa Khichakeswari at Khiching, the ancient fort of Khijinga Kotta. The copper plates of the Bhanjas indicate that the royal family flourished here in the 8th -12th century A.D. and Adibhanja of the Bhanja dynasty established the capital here. Khiching has brought to light the antiquarian remains of Buddhists, Jainas and Brahminical religion.¹



Goddess Khichakeswari Temple, Khiching

Saktism in Indian context has been traced back to pre-Vedic times on the basis of nature worship, started by the aboriginals from the tree

worship. At present Khichakeswari, known as thakurani represents an image of eight-armed Chamunda, which has been set-up on the altar of the Siva temple. It became true when the excavation was conducted by an eminent archaeologist R. P. Chand in 1922-23 under the patronage of Mayurbhanja Maharaja, who exposed the foundation of the present Khichakeswari temple on the old Shiva temple, which was evidently collapsed and buried under the earth according to the geographer Prof. S. N. Tripathy. The ruins of the temple exposed a large number of sculptures along with the image of the presiding Goddess Khichakeswari and minutely carved architecture pieces.

The image of Khichakeswari is as old as the big temple of Shiva of the 9th century A.D. Saktism flourished along with the cult of Shiva as important images of the gods and goddesses recovered from the excavated site include the most majestic figure of Shiva, originally



installed in the old temple. The figures of Saptamatrikas, Nagas and Naginis, Ardhanariswara, Mahisha Mardini, which are particularly characterised faces in smiling poses having the touch of real creative power and relative freedom for the conventionality.³ Here it can be noted that the past glory of the illustrious Bhanjas and their contribution to the patronisation of religion, culture, art and architecture can be equaled to those of Somavamsis and the imperial Gangas. In present day Khichakeswari the presiding Pitha Devi of Khiching, that of Viraja in Jajpur, Sarala in Jhankad, Mangala in Kakatpur, Charchika in Banki, Samalei in Sambalpur, Bhattarika in Baramba, Maa Pragala in Narasinghpur, Katakachandi in Cuttack, Chhinamasta Durga in Jharakhanda, Taratarini in Ganjam, Vimala in Puri, Maa Ugratara in Bhusandapur, Mahakali in Kharuda are drawing the attention of a large number of devotees from outland and inland. The deity is worshipped according to Sakta tantric rites which bears the testimony of the integral part of the Sakti worship in Orissa.⁴

For attracting tourists and the merrymaking of the local community in Orissa each and every Saktipithas arrange the grand old festivals like the Durgapuja or the Dussehara festival with much pomp and grandeur. Now-a-days the day-to-day worship is managed by the devotees and from the production of the land granted by the Rajas and the Management is intrusted to a local trust Board Khiching, having all the historical treasure considered as one of the international tourists Destination. At the global level the earnings from tourism have made it one of the worlds largest industry and the fastest growing sectors of global trade accounting 10.7 percent of Global Gross Domestic product (GDP), 12.8 percent of global exports, 8.2 percent of global employment and 9.4 percent of global per capita investment. The

following table shows the contribution of travel and tourism to GDP and employment along with the percentage share and its position at national level.⁵

TABLE -1

Contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP and Employment

| | India Agv. In Percent | Orissa in Percent | Rank in India |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Contribution of Tourism and Travel economy to GDP | 5.3 | 1.20 | 4 |
| Contribution of Tourism & Travel Industry to GDP | 2.5 | 0.75 | 2 |
| Contribution of Tourism & Travel Economy to Employment | 5.6 | 1.86 | 10 |
| Contribution of Tourism & Travel Industry to Employment | 2.9 | 0.95 | 15 |

Sources: Govt. of Orissa, Dept. of Tourism & Culture, Bhubaneswar.

In the Tenth Five Year plan, various factors are responsible for the inadequate growth of religious tourism sector, i.e., barriers related to approach, barriers that discourage private investment, absence of legislative support needs to be removed.⁶ An effective new tourism policy is highly required for the speedy growth of tourism. For this purpose, the Government of Orissa has already declared Khiching as a tourism heritage centre with the objective of the reviving its ancient socio-religious importance. For this purpose the following key areas may be taken care on priority basis.

(a) For publicity through internet in order to make effective use of the resources for overseas



publicity, the application of information technology has to be promoted in this sector as it is very economic and fastest mode of tourism promotion.

(b) The communication gap between the public and the tourists due to lack of knowledge in spoken English.

(c) Priority- tourism sector in twentyfirst century, having a major role in the employment generation and socio-economic development in the state as well as in the country. Realising the significance of tourism the Government needs to focus its attention on exploring its existing tourism potential on the priority agenda of state government.

(d) Lack of governing measures and inadequate policies for promoting religious tourism, hampers the flow of the tourists. Therefore tourism management must properly be looked after.

(e) Lack of national level facilities distract the tourists. Hence access to market should be made available.

(f) Absence of the tourist's office is felt here. Therefore, one such office may be opened without delay.

(g) The proper treatment by the priests to tourists should be taken care of.

(h) Sustainable development- In the implementation of present tourism policy, special measures have to be taken to develop tourism in accordance with environmental impact carrying capacity, instrument of special and land use planning strategy for preparing the local community to safeguards its cultural identity and awareness programmes for local participation.

(i) Facilitation Services - The facilitation services in Orissa are quite miserable. The poor airport facilities are the major constraint in the development of tourism. The airport infrastructure services need to be improved and modernised.⁸

Further enlarging the horizon of Saktism as well as the Sakti centres, religious tourism has

played an important role for community requirement and thus felt quite essential. Apart from social, political and cultural impacts, it has vast economic possibilities in all its forms. If the religious tourism project which has been taken by the Orissa Tourism Development Corporation include Khiching, then certainly Khiching in Mayurbhanj will come up in the National Travel Circuit in a big way. Religious Tourism in this sense encompasses all the activities that cater to national and international tourists through facilities that are owned, managed and serviced by the members of the rural community and run essentially as community based initiative. Along with government effort private sector participation; administrative improvement; travel and tourism research; adoption of integrated and co-ordinated tourism development programmes and mass participation, Tourism in Orissa can be developed along the lines of the other states.

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