



## The Bhairavi of Mantridi

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Orissa is famous for its Sakti cult. *Kalika Purana*, a treatise on Saktism, mentions Odra (Orissa) as of foremost importance amongst the major four 'Saktipithas', the other three being 'Jala Sailakam', (now Jullundur in Punjab), "Purnapitha" or "Srimukhalingam" in Andhra Pradesh, and Kamarup of Assam. Thus "Sakti" or "Durga" in its varied forms is the most worshipped deity at the various pithas and temples of Orissa, famous among which are the "Chandi" of Cuttack, the "Viraja" of Jajpur, "Bimala" of Puri, "Samaleswari" of Sambalpur, "Narayani", "Taratarini" and the "Siddha Bhairavi", of Ganjam. Legend says that when Goddess "Sati" Devi went uninvited to her father's place to witness the great "Dakshayagna", she got insulted so much so that she could not bear it and got herself burnt in the sacrificial fire. Enraged at her beloved's self sacrifice, Lord Siva in his "Roudrakara" went on with the destructive dance "Pralayatandava", with body of the Sati in his hands. Fearing the total annihilation of the

"Srusti", the "Devatas" ran to Lord Vishnu to stop "Rudra". Lord Vishnu used his "Sudarsan Chakra" and cut the body of the Sati into several pieces which were strewn all over. Some of those places where these pieces fell, developed in later times as Pithas or centres of worship of Devi Durga.



*Bhairavi Temple, Mantridi*

Mantridi, located at a distance of 5 kms from Golantra on the National Highway No.5, and 15 kms from Berhampur is the abode of the Siddhi Bhairavi. It is said that the deity bestows "Siddhi" to its "Bhaktas" - hence the name. Located at a calm, quiet, and serene place, a sort

of awe comes into the body when one enters the main-gate of the temple complex, which is spread over about 20 acres. The frontage of this place has a beautiful garden with coconut, Ketaki and Champa trees. A walk of about 250 feet leads to the main entrance of the temple. Here is the first modern arch type gate with the Durga in its "Mahishasura Mardini" style. This is perhaps a later addition by the temple committee. Further going, we enter into the sanctum sanctorum about



3 to 4 feet down the surface level, and the deity is embedded there. The idol is carved from a single granite, "Pashanarupa" stone. It has a clear plough injury mark. It is in the standing form facing the west with one foot and four hands. That is why this is called "Ekapada Bhairavi". There is "Ganga" in the heart from which water sprinkles all along, and will never dry up. The Bhairavi is holding the Trident and the Sword in her two upper left and right hands. The lower left hand is placed on the navel and the lower right hand is pointing the ground. Thus the devi is in her "Roudra" mood. This awe inspiring idol and the presence of a burial-ground nearby is suggestive that this "Pitha" is more of Tantrism than Saktism.

The exact origin of the deity is obscure. But legend as narrated by the oldest archaka, Hari Rana, says that more than 200 years ago, the place was a forest of the village Hurudungo. When the ancestors of the Reddy family wanted to reclaim the land and began ploughing, the plough was stuck up. To find out the reason, they dug the place and found the present idol, with a mark of injury from the plough. They then installed the idol in the present place, and later a temple was built.

The Bhairavi takes precedence over other Saktipithas, it is said, as Parasuram who did his meditation on the Mehendragiri hill was worshipping Bhairavi. This probability is perhaps

due to the nearness of the two places. If this is correct the age of the deity must be put to many hundreds of years before what was told by the Archaka. But no attempt to determine the age either by the stylistic method or historic method appears to have been done. This is because the place did attract any archeologists or historians due to the absence of any other original idols in the surrounding. This is also a deviation from the other pithas, where there are many parsvadevatas besides the main deity.

During "Dasara" the "Bhairavi" goes in a procession from the temple to the basti of Mantridi and stays there for nine days, receiving "Bhog" (daily rituals). Thousand of pilgrims throng during these days, though the daily average attendance during normal days is about 20 to 30 only. On every "Masanta Sankranti" day, however the visitors number about 500 to 1,000. On the last Tuesday of "Chaitra" a "Jatra" is held when thousands of visitors visit the temple. The people of Mantridi come in a procession with the beating of the drums and sounds of "sankhas" (conches), and offer "pona" (sweet drink) to the deity said to be left there by her. The people firmly believe that only after this ritual, there will be the first rains.

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