



Mahisamardini Durga Temple of Kusang

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After this author joined as the District Information and Public Relations Officer in the month of July 1984, he got an information from the *Sarpanch* of Kusang Gram Panchayat, Sri Gangadhar Behera that there is a temple at Kusang, which is believed to have been made by divine architect Viswakarma overnight. To his utter amazement, when this scholar reached Kusang, the temple with its Gajalaksmi symbol on the door-lintel of the inner sanctum, the panel of Anantasayee Visnu, Nabagrahas, sculpture of Mandira Charini, Ganesa, Jatadhari Siva and Bhairava turned out to be a *Pancharatha* style of temple in the prototype of the gigantic structure of Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar. The temple is very thickly covered with lime plaster. This village can be reached via Loisingha by travelling thirty-five kms. to the north-west of Balangir town. There is a site near the temple where arrowheads, potteries and bricks are found. This site may be taken as that of a settlement of the pre-mediaeval period, situated on the Suktel river valley, a tributary of river Tel.

The Suktel takes its origin from the slopes of the Gandhamardan range and flows through the subdivisions of Patnagarh, Balangir in the district of Balangir and Sonepur district till it meets the Tel a few kms. south of its confluence with Mahanadi.¹

The temple of Kusangai is *Pancharatha* in plan, *Rathas* having multi-faceted projections.

The entire structure is divided into three parts namely the *Bada*, *Gandi* and *Mastaka*. This temple was repaired some fifty years ago by the then ruler of the erstwhile Patna-state Maharaja R.N. Singhdeo. Now it is standing on a stone platform of the height of about four feet from the ground and the *Pabhaga* is covered as a result of which nothing can be said about its design. The *Pabhaga* looks like a broad moulding. In the *Tala-Jangha* portion the *Kanika* and *Anuratha* are decorated by *Pidha-mundi* motifs. The Raha section in all three sides-east, west and south are converted into *Parsva-devata* niches.

The main *Parsva-devata* niches measure two feet and a half in height and two feet in breadth approximately. At present the *Parsva-devata* niches are occupied by Kartikeya, Ganesh and Hanuman which seems to be of recent origin. Most probably the original *Parsva-devatas* are now kept as detached sculptures in the *Jagamohana* of the temple. Images of four-handed Ganesa, seated in *Ardhaparyankasana*, his proboscis turned towards left eating something (Laddu ?) from the *Modaka-patra* held in his left upper-hand; a standing figure of four-handed Siva with *Jatabhara* on head and wearing a tiger-skin as well as that of a four-handed standing Bhairava both upper hands raised up, holding a *Khadga* (sword) in his upper right hand are placed in the niches of the present *Jagamohana*, which was constructed fifty years back during repair.



The *Bandhana* portion consists of two mouldings of *Khura* and *Pata* which occur in between lower and upper *Jangha*. In the upper *Jangha* portion again the *Pidha-mundi* motifs occur. Above the *Parsva-devata* niches in all three sides three moulding courses occur in the *Raha* portion, surmounted by small niches which are vacant now. Above the upper *Jangha* portion a broad band and five moulding courses make the *Baranda*, above which the *Gandi* of the temple stands in a curvilinear spire design. It has five *bhumi* stages, each stage consisting of six *Bhumi-barandikas*, crowned by a *Bhumi-amalaka*. In the *Raha* and *Anuratha* sections, just above the design of five *Bhumi-barandika*, *Angasikharas* adorn the *Gandi*. Above this *Angasikhara* design, in the *Raha* portion, *Vyala* figures are placed in all three-sides-east, west and south on projected platform. In the front portion of the temple a big *Anga-sikhara* surmounted by a *Gaja-kranta* figure on a project platform is depicted. Like the *Kanikas*, the *Raha* and *Anuratha* portions are also serrated, but have no *Bhumi* divisions. The *Gandi* is surmounted by a *Pancharatha Bisama*, consisting of the *Beki*, a huge *Amalaka*, a *Khapuri* and one *Kalasa*. In the *beki* portion crouching *Mandira-Charini* figures in the centre and sleeping *Vyala* figures are placed in all four corners. Another such *Mandira Charini* figure is now placed in a niche of the *Jagamohana*. These *Mandira Charini* as well as the *Vyala* figures very commonly occur in the *Beki* portion of the Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar as well as other smaller temples constructed in the Lingaraj temple complex.

In the northern outer wall of the *Jagamohana* is fitted a panel depicting the *Bhoga sayana Murti* of Visnu. Here the Lord is seen used his right hand as pillow, by placing it below his head touching the *Kirita Mukuta* and the left hand placed parallel to the body, touching the thigh. Near his head, goddess Lakshmi, His consort is seen to be seated touching his shoulder and Bhumidevi is seen to be seated near his feet,

touching his left foot. Demons Madhu and Kaitabha are also depicted near his feet. This panel is very badly eroded and also plastered by lime to such an extent that details are lost.

Another important panel fitted to the eastern outer wall of the *Jagamohana* is that of the *Navagrahas*. Except in the cases of Surya (1st), Rahu (8th) and Ketu (9th), four *Grahas* are seated in *Ardhaparyanakasana*. Surya is seated in *Padmasana* and *Ketu* on the coiled snake-seat his own body being of a snake below waist. Surya is seen holding lotus in both hands, but in the cases of Chandra, Mangala, Budha, Brihaspati, Sukra and Sani, they are seen to be carrying vase in their left hands. *Kirita Mukuta* is adorning their heads. This scholar was told by the old persons of the village that this panel was originally fitted above the Gajalakshmi panel, in the centre of the door-lintel of the inner sanctum of the shrine. Bricks of very big sizes, measuring mostly one foot by eighteen inches are lying scattered all around in the temple precinct.

Such *Navagraha* panels are found in the lintel portion of the Baud group of temples, numbering three, namely Bhubanesvara, Kapilesvara and Siddhesvara temples, which are believed to have been constructed around the 10th century A.D. Such *Navagraha* panels are found in the Dasmati Ghat of Sonapur, on a stone-panel now fitted to the stone-slabs used to construct stone-embankment of the river Mahanadi; at Deulgudi and Sauntpur temple ruins and in the door-lintel of the Siva temple at Bausuni. At Baud and Bausuni, it is fitted above the Gajalakshmi panel of the door lintel of the inner sanctum.

In both these places *Dvarapalas* are also seen on the base of both sides of the doorway of the inner sanctum. Goddess Kusangai is called Ugaratara by the local people. A big stone-slab on which eight-petalled lotus design is depicted is now fixed in front of the Goddess on the floor. This stone-slab might have been fitted in its original state as the roof of the inner sanctum as occurs in



almost all ancient temples of the Upper Mahanadi valley.

This writer was told by Shri Jugal Kishore Panda, an old man of the village Kusang aged about sixty-five years that the temple was repaired by the erstwhile ruler of Patna-state by engaging one Shri Bhagirathi Maharana, a sculptor in around 1937-38 and at that time one three-plated copperplate grant inscription was also found to be kept inside this temple which was taken away to Balangir and preserved in the Durbar Office.

In the same temple-precinct there is another temple called Kosalesvara Siva temple which is a modern construction. But three sculptures kept inside the temple deserve attention. There is a standing figure of two feet height, which is that of Bhairava. In the upper right hand he holds a *Gada* (club) and in the left hand a *Damaru*. Similarly in the lower right hand he holds an *Ankusa* while in lower left hand a *Khetaka* (shield). Other sculptures are those of a six-headed Kartikeya, a seated Ganesa and a four-handed Parvati. Parvati figure is so much eroded that it is beyond recognition.

In design Kusangai temple is a proto-type of the Narasimhanath temple at Paikmal and has got much similarity also with the Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar. Thirteen number of gold coins of the Kalachuri king Gangeyadeva of Tripuri have been discovered from Padampur, which is very near to Narasimhanath. From the Amoda Plates of Prithvideva-I it is known that his vassal king of Utkala on behalf of his master Gangeyadeva. In all probability, after his successful expedition to the Narasimhanath region of the Somavamsi empire, Gangeyadeva circulated his coins for a few years till the Kalachuris were driven out by Yayati-II as stated in the Brahmesvara temple inscription.² We know from the annals of temple records, *Madalapanji*, that the construction of Lingaraj temple was commissioned by Yayati Kesari, who has been generally identified by scholars as the Somavamsi King Yayati-II,

Chandihara (C.A.D 1025-40).³ Prof. Thomas E. Donaldson has rightly suggested that both the door-jambs having the Gajalakshmi motifs in the centre of the *Dvaralalatabimba* and the exquisitely carved three bands of scrollwork of *Kutula*, *Gelaba* and *Jalapatra* motifs, now fitted to the entrance of the *Jagamohana* hall of the Narasimhanath temple are stylistically datable to the late 10th century or early 11th century A.D.⁴ The present *Jagamohana* of Narasimhanath temple is a late construction, where the materials of the original temple were used. This writer agrees with Charles Fabri that the inscription of the Chauhan king Vijjala-II dated to 1413 A.D. has been incised in the wall of the *Jagamohana*,⁵ which might have been reconstructed by him by using the beautiful door-jambs and the pillars of the dilapidated *Jagamohana*. Nowhere the Chauhans are known to have constructed a temple of the same architectural pattern of Narasimhanath in the 15th century A.D. Famous historian D.R. Bhandarkar was also of the opinion that Vijjaladeva "stuck into" the wall of the *Jagamohana* which was repaired and rebuilt by him.⁶

From architectural point of view the Narasimhanath temple can be taken as a proto-type of Lingaraj. During digging of plinth of a room, some rare sculptures of Visnu as well as the head of a queen was discovered from underneath the earth just near the Narasimhanath temple. These sculptures as well as the antiquities of the four pillars now fitted to the *Jagamohana* hall make us to believe that from the time of queen Vasata, mother of the great Sirpur King Mahasivagupta Balarjuna of the Panduvamsi lineage, Narasimhanath flourished as a famous centre of Vaisnavism. Queen Vasata, who was a devout worshipper of Lord Purusottama-Narasimha might have built the first temple at Narasimhanath in the 8th century A.D. The four pillars of the *Jagamohana* can be taken to be of the original temple. The two door-jambs as well as the *Navagraha* panel, Lakshmi-Narayan in *Alingana mudra* as well as the present temple



can be assigned to the early part of the 11th century A.D. to the time of the Somavamsi king Yayati-II Chandihara who was ruling from Suvarnapur, the capital city. His name Chandihara, which we get in the Brahmesvara temple inscription suggests that he was a devout worshipper of Chandi (Durga) and Hara (Siva). The Goddess Bhagabati Panchambari Bhadrabika was his *Ishtadevi*, whose seat of worship was Patana Suvarnapura, situated in the confluence of rivers Mahanadi and Tel, as known from his Jatesinga and Dungri plates.⁷

An image of ten-handed Durga is worshipped at Kusangai by the people in the Kusang Temple. It is of a height of about five feet. The buffalo is seen lying on the ground in the right side of the pedestal, its head being cut-off and Mahisasura, staring back while running away is seen fighting with the Goddess by carrying a sword in his right hand and a shield in the left. Lion's head with a front gaze is seen to be in the right hand side of the pedestal. The Devi holds *Khadga* (sword), *Chakra* (wheel) and *Gada* (club) in her right hands from upper to lower portion, in the first, second and third hands respectively. Object in Her fourth right hand is not clear. Similarly *Padma* (Lotus), *Khetaka* (Shield), *Sakti* and *Sarpa* (Snake) are in Her left first, second, fourth and fifth left hands respectively. Here Goddess Durga is seen to be piercing the long *Trishula* (Trident) on the body of Mahisasura by holding it in Her right hand and third left hand.

Behind Devi's head a beautiful semi-circular shaped *Prabhavali* is carved, depicting lotus-petalled motifs encircled by lined designs with dots in between. In the top portion, flying *Vidyadhara* couples holding garland in hands are depicted in both sides. The colour of the image has turned light black due to heavy application of oil and vermilion etc. From time to time, but on close observation it will be seen that the actual colour of the image is light red. Therefore, there is every likelihood that like other sculptures of the Somavamsi period, the image of Kusangai was also sculptured with a finishing in stucco, a

phenomenon commonly followed in plastic art. Other significant sculptures attached to the Kusangai temple are the Gajalakshmi motif in the centre of the door-lintel of the inner sanctum, Anantasayee Visnu panel, *Navagraha* panel and the figures of Mandira Charini. In the *Beki* portion just below the *Amalaka*, there are lions in resting pose in all four corners, near the *Amalaka* of the smaller temples which are built inside the Lingaraj temple complex. This art of *Mandira Charini* belongs to the 11th century A.D. Kusangai temple can be placed in the last part of the rule of mighty Somavamsi rulers of Dakshina Kosala and can safely be assigned to the early part of the 11th century A.D.

There is every probability that the existing temples of Narasimhanath and Kusang were erected by the Somavamsi king Yayati-II Chandihara Mahasivagupta-III in the first half of the 11th century A.D.

References :

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