



Dhavalesvara Siva Temple at Mohangiri, Kalahandi District

Sasanka Sekhar Panda

Mohangiri is a small village, situated in the Madanpur Rampur *Panchayat Samiti* area of Kalahandi district close to the border of Kandhamal district, at a distance of around eighty-five kms to the northeast of the district headquarters, Bhawanipatna. A mountainous stream called Kali Ganga is flowing nearby, on the bank of which stands a dilapidated Siva temple. Ruins of a collapsed Siva temple are scattered on a hillock. Local folklore records that around 1940, one assistant sub-inspector of police, who was posted in this remote area, came to know through dream that one Siva temple is lying buried underneath. His dream came true when he dug out the hillock with the help of the local villagers and discovered the ruins as well as eleven pillars of the *Jagamohana* hall still in standing position.

A big Siva Linga of black chlorite stone was also discovered for the worship of which he constructed a small hut. The present temple is a modern structure in which stone-blocks of the collapsed old temple have been used. Still one can see innumerable huge cut stone-blocks of the old temple lying in the courtyard of the present temple, from the size which one can guess that in its original state this old temple can be studied from the sculptures which are found fitted to the new temple, and also from the decorative carvings on the stone-blocks of the original temple lying around. The present temple is standing on a mound

in the side of a pond. The Jagamohana pillars of the original temple are still preserved. Here we find eight pillars and four pilasters as well as the beams that once rested above them.

The lower half of the column is a plain square, while the upper portion is embellished with a large *ghata* with leaves over-flowing in its four corners and with several round as well as many-sided mouldings below this. Internationally reputed Art Historian Vidya Dehija is of the opinion that the interior pillars of Odishan temples are treated in a utilitarian manner. The shafts are plain squares that occasionally become octagonal in the centre, and capitals consist of square abacus with a roll below it. Very rarely as at Mohangiri the pillar is treated in a decorative manner starting out as a square and then becoming a *ghata* with large leafy scrolls overflowing at four corners. There follow several decorative mouldings, below which the remaining half of the shaft is again a plain square. These pillars are taken to be of an early period in design than such temple pillars at Gandharadi, Ranipur Jharial, Narsinghnath, Belkhandi, Baidyanath, Patnagarh and Charda, as these are devoid of much ornamentations. The most remarkable features of this Jagamohana hall is that one short inscription as well as four tantrik Yantra diagrams are found to be inscribed on its floor. The learned scholar Dr. Satya Narayan Rajaguru reads this inscription as *Gruha*

Bhairava. Dr. Rajguru is said to have found another inscription on the temple floor as early as 1948, during his visit to this place. He has deciphered this second inscription as *Mudgalakulasya (Sri) Citracanda*. Dr. Rajguru thinks it to be the oldest of the short inscriptions of the Mudgala kings who were ruling around 6th – 7th century A.D. Mudgalas were Brahmin kings of Uttara Tosali and were in all probability feudatory of the Guptas as seen from the use of Gupta era by one of the Mudgala king Mahārāja Sambhuyasa. It is extremely difficult to guess as to how an inscription of the Mudgala king is found in a temple not situated in Uttara Tosali region but far from it.

In Padmashree Paramananda Acharya's opinion Mohangiri was situated on a salt-route in the remote past, through which salt and other commodities were transported from Kalinga to Daksina Kosala (the upper Mahanadi valley). Mohangiri is situated in one extreme end of a mountain range, which is spreading from Bhanjanagar in Ganjam district to M. Rampur in Kalahandi district. While preparing a paddy field, one villager named Janak Sahu unearthed a brick structure underneath the field only at a distance of one furlong from this temple site. Therefore, it is possible that Dhavalesvara Siva temple at Mohangiri was built for the travellers and caravan traders to worship the Lord and the said structure was used as a rest house and defence tower simultaneously.

Besides the inscription, four peculiar diagrams are carved on the floor of the Jagamohana. These diagrams were certainly associated with the Yantras of Bhairava cult, having an esoteric nature. Dr. Satyanarayan Rajaguru has informed this scholar that similar diagrams are illustrated in the Oriya version of the Linga Purana. The names such as 'Mulacanda' and 'Sricanda' found in the short

inscriptions of Amath and Belkhandi respectively have something to do with the name "Citracanda" or "Sphitacanda" of Mohangiri inscription.

The entrance-door pillars to the present inner sanctum are plain. Pillars of both sides like the Jagamohana pillars come out of a *puranaghata*. In the places of two dvarapalas, standing four-armed figures resembling Siva are there. Figure in the right side depicts a dancing figure with *Jata mukuta* adorning his head and necklace in the neck. *Yajnopavita* is around his body, while a short tiger-skin is covering the thigh-portion below waist. Due to heavy lime plastering, weapons in his arms are not clear. Similarly, there is a standing figure in the *sambhanga* posture in the left side of the entrance which is also four-armed holding a long *trisula* (trident) in his right upper arm. This type of *dvarapalas* are not observed by this scholar in any other ancient temple or temple-ruins of the upper Mahanadi valley in Odisha except at Narsinghnath, but in a very exquisitely ornate form in the later case. Above these dvarapala figures, a plain leaf design occurs.

Some carved reliefs of the collapsed temple are fitted to the walls of the present inner sanctum. In the southern wall a lady-face and her right arm holding a lotus-stem and flying *vidyadhara* couple with garland in arms are depicted. Similarly in the western wall stone-blocks with the depiction of four swans moving in a row is found. Swan-panels are found in another place called Bhulia-Sikuan village near Khariar, where a panel of three swans in a row is depicted on the pedestal-portion of a standing Saivite divine couple. Mohangiri sculptures, which belongs to the inner sanctum are demon king Ravana trying to shake Kailasa Mountain, the heavenly abode of Lord Siva; a seated Ganesa, four-armed Saivite seated figure in *yogasana*, upper arms seen to be folded in obeisance and both lower palms placed on the

knees; scene of the churning of sea (Samudra Manthan) and the forest-wandering scene of Rāma, Laksmāna and Sitā. In the lower-portion of this western wall a crouching bull with long horns raised up, big hump on his back and bell hanging from the neck is depicted. Such depiction of Nandi is found on a loose sculpture of the Pātālesvara Siva temple at Budhikomna also.

In the temple-precinct, where the steps descend to the pond, two stone-blocks of the collapsed temple are kept, one depicting a lady waist-up, her right arm seen to be in *abhaya-mudra* placed in between her both breasts and another, that of a seated male in *yogasana* with *jatabhara* on his head and a staff placed in a suspended position in between his arms, which are folded in obeisance. This figure can be taken as that of Lakulisa, a great religious teacher and the founder of the Pasupata sect of Saivism in the first quarter of the 2nd century A.D. It is believed that Lakulisa-Pāsupata cult was brought to Kosala and Kalinga in the 4th century A.D. in the train of the military campaign of the Gupta monarch Samudragupta. Lakulisa images with *lakuta* (club) in arm, seated in *yogasana* posture and *Dharma Cakra Pravartana Mudra* (of Buddha) are found in the Parasuramesvara and Bharatesvara temples at Bhubaneswar, which were built in the 7th century A.D. and the last temple bearing the Lakulisa image in coastal Odisha is the Muktesvara temple at Bhubaneswar, which is believed to be architecturally marked by parting of ways between the Bhaumakara and Somavamsi periods. Muktesvara temple is dated to the second-half of the 10th century A.D.

The Lakulisa motif of Mohangiri can be taken as the earliest of its kind so far found in the upper Mahānadi valley of Odisha. Another Lakulisa figure seen to be seated in a Yogic posture called *utkutikasana* is depicted on one of the Jagamohana hall pillars of the Kosalesvara temple at Patnagarh in the district of Balangir, which can

be placed in the first half of the 9th century A.D. Lakulisa, a great religious teacher of the Pasupata sect of Saivism is depicted on the temple-wall of the brick temples of the upper Mahanadi valley at Budhikomna and Ranipur Jharial also.

In the Lakulisa panel of the Mohangiri Siva temple, Lakulisa is seen to be seated in his usual sitting-posture, and to his left the profiled seated figure of a bearded *yogi* with folded-arms in obeisance to Lakulisa as well as the figure of one bird seated and staring back are carved. This bearded *yogi* can be none-else but one of the first four disciples of Lakulisa. This panel of Lakulisa, his disciple and the bird are carved separately in between miniature pilaster-designs. Besides this depiction, other figures like the unknown Devi in *abhaya mudra*, seated *gana* on the northern outer wall of the temple and couchant bull (Nandi) on the wall of the inner sanctum are carved in between two miniature pilaster designs. This sort of carvings of figures in between two pilasters are found in the panels in Kosalesvara temple at Baidyanath fitted to the northern and western inner walls of the sanctum sanctorum and Patnagarh (Jagamohana entrance-door panel) also.

Two *gana* figures on panels are unique. These figures are carved on stone-blocks, which are apparently loose pieces of the original temple, but now fitted to the northern outer wall of the present Jagamohana during reconstruction. In one depiction, the *gana* or atlantes dwarf (lower-portion of the body below chest missing) is seen to be seated under a semi-circular floral design motif, wearing a beaded necklace and holding a *cauri* in his raised right arm, and in another depiction, a pot-bellied *gana* is seen to be seated in *kukkutasana* by putting his palms on both raised knees. Such *ganas* are carved on the jagamohana-pillar abacus of the Kapilesvara temple at Charda, but in a more developed form. Another stone piece of the temple ruins of

Mohangiri has been taken away and now preserved in the M.Rampur College Building. It depicts the figure of a lady (Nayika) up-breast portion existing, seen to be wearing a broad necklace.

The most significant sculptures of Mohangiri temple are the *parsva-devata* figures; Ganesa in the southern, Karttikeya in the western and Parvati-Kārttikeya in the northern niches respectively.

The two-armed Ganesa figure of the southern *parsva-devata* niche is of very crude workmanship and is seen to be seated in *ardhaparyankasana*, with the right leg folded and the left one raised with the heel on the seat, left arm resting on the knee, while keeping the right arm in *abhaya mudra*. He has flat elephant ears and no *mukuta* on head. The proboscis is turned towards left side and the tusk is seen in the left. *Yajnopavita* is seen on his body. Like the Ganesa figure of Amath, this figure can be also taken as an early representation of Ganesa.

Similarly frontally-looking two-armed Kārttikeya is seen to be seated in *bhadrasana* on the back of his front ally looking *vahana* peacock, both his legs spread in both sides and putting both arms on his knees, but in his right arm is seen a long object, probably a *sakti* or *dhvaja* (flag). Instead of *mukuta*, *jatabhara* is seen on his head and one necklace is hanging from his neck on the chest.

In the northern *parsva-devata* niche is housed the standing figure of a heavy-breasted female wearing a flat *mukuta* on her head, *makarakundalas* in both ears and a broad necklace. This lady figure is calm and while her right arm is in *abhaya mudra*, the left arm is put around the shoulder of a youth whose mouth is near her breast. This youth is holding a big knife in his left arm. The lady figure is wearing long cloth hanging from waist below upto her feet while the

youth is wearing cloth from waist upto knee-portion and *uttariya* hanging from their shoulders in both cases. It seems to be the 'Mother-Son' figure of Parvati and Karttikeya.

Besides the images in the *pārsva-devata* niches, two more images are kept in two separate rooms, constructed in front of the temple and worshipped as Durga and Chandi respectively. One is that of a standing four-armed goddess, of the height of around three feet and a half. Three of her arms are broken and in the lower right arm she is holding a vase. Here Devi is standing in the *samabhanga* posture. The other one is also that of an eight-armed goddess figure, locally known as Durga, seated with the left leg resting on the pedestal while the right leg is hanging below. Devi is seated in *lalitasana* on a *padmapitha* (lotus-pedestal). She is wearing a *kirita-mukuta* on her head and *patrakundalas* in both ears. Objects in her arms are small trisūla (right-lower-upper), *khadga* (right-upper-second), *cakra* (right-upper-second) and *sankha* (right-lower-fourth) as well as *khetaka* (left-upper), *dhanu* (left-lower third) and left-lower-fourth arm in *varada mudra* respectively, while the left-upper arm is broken. In the extreme right portion of the pedestal is a male seated figure in *yogasana* with folded arms with obeisance near chest and to his right a seated female devotee in profile also in folded arms as well as that of a third devotee in the extreme left side are depicted. The head of her mount, a roaring lion is seen in the left side of the pedestal, Devi's right foot being put on its back. It seems to be the figure of goddess Vana Durga, while the standing one described above, that of Ksemañkari, another form of goddess Durga who bestows good health to her devotees.

Two more figures are found in the Mohangiri Siva temple precinct. One is that of a seated headless male figure in *yogasana* with both arms folded in obeisance. Now this sculpture is lying underneath a tree in front of the temple. Inside

the Jagamohana, another figure in *yogasana* and with both arms folded in obeisance is kept. This figure has a *kirita mukuta* on his head and *makara kundalas* in both ears. The first figure underneath the tree seems to be that of the Saivacarya and the second one, which is inside the Jagamohana that of the royal personage who might have been associated with the construction of this temple on the ancient route between Daksina Kosala and Kalinga.

The worship of Vana Durgā and Ksemankari, both being two of the important aspects of goddess Durga as well as that of Bhairava as testified by the existence of the inscription and tantric *yantras* found on the Jagamohana floor takes this temple to the hoary past, to around 7th-8th century A.D. The sculptures of Mohangiri Siva temple seem to be of an early period as those are devoid of much ornamentation. It is more appropriate to say that the kings of the Parvatadvāraka dynasty who were ruling from their capital Parvatadvāra during the time of king Nandaraja and Sobhanadeva, and later from Tārabhramāraka during the time of king Tustikara might have been responsible for the spread of Bhairava cult in this region. Copper plate inscriptions of this dynasty, two in number found from Narla and Teresingha respectively speak of these kings as great devotees of goddess Stambhesvari (*Stambhesvari padabhakta*). Tarabhramaraka is identified with the village Talbhainra near the bank of river Tel, while that of Parvatadvāra with Asurgarh near Narla both in the district of Kalahandi. Excavations at Asurgarh by Prof. N.K.Sahu in 1973 unearthed existence of a town, which existed there from the 2nd century B.C. till the 5th century A.D. Similarly excavation in 1946 unearthed a temple-complex at Belkhandi on the river Tel not far from Talbhainra village.

The collapsed temple site of Mohangiri is extensive. Here we find huge stone-blocks scattered all around. Miniature *caitya* medallion motifs in repeated courses as well as foliage creeper, floral and *puṇnaghata* designs are seen carved on these stone-blocks. Similarly, huge round *amalakas* and square *bhumi amalakas* are lying in the temple- ruins, which make us to believe that there existed more than one temple at Mohangiri. The original temple was might be of the *tri-ratha* order. On one of the stone-blocks, now fitted in the floor of the *pradaksina patha* near the northern *parśva-devata* niche are carved two tortoises. More research can throw light on the association of these 'Tortoises' with the esoteric art, which was practised in the Mohangiri temple in the remote past.

Recent observations of these researches of some temple pillars of Dhavalesvara temple ruins at Mohangiri fortify the belief that, this temple belonged to the early period, 7th-8th century A.D.

Beautiful intertwined *lata* scroll, *kirttimukha* head, crouching lions with horns in their heads and *puṇnaghata* motifs are carved out in line drawings. In some temple pillars of Mohangiri taken away in the past and at present kept in the M. Rampur College and M. Rampur Upper Primary School, a *nayika*, one lover couple as well as monkeys in playful mood are carved. Very recently in the Mohangiri temple ruins, broken pieces of one temple pillar containing the frontal portion of an elephant was unearthed by the local villagers. All these carved pillars depict the art form of the formative period of the temple art of the post-Gupta era.

Sasanka Sekhar Panda, VR-23, Unit-6, Bhubaneswar.