



The New Capital at Bhubaneswar

Dr. Atul Chandra Pradhan

The establishment of a new capital at Bhubaneswar, the temple town situated in 25° 15' latitude and 85° 50' longitude in the present district of Khurda after Independence is an important landmark in the history of modern Odisha for two reasons : first the opening of a new urban centre with administrative, educational and cultural institutions and industrial complexes has added a new dimension to the socio-economic and cultural life of Odisha; secondly the establishment of the new capital in the site of an old capital with extant remains of the past has resulted in the establishment of emotional link between the past and the present. Bhubaneswar, which was the provincial headquarters of emperor Ashoka and the capital of the emperor Kharavela contains the inscriptions of Ashoka, the inscriptions, caves and sculptures of Kharavela, the temples of Sailodbhava, Bhauma, Somavamsi and Ganga periods along with massive buildings and institutions of modern period.

The question of a new capital for Odisha was linked with the Odias' movement for a separate province. Though Cuttack, the headquarters of Odisha Division was the centre of all cultural and political activities, it was found to be insufficient and congested for a provincial capital because of its location between the Mahanadi and Kathjodi rivers. In 1933, the Odisha Administrative Committee recommended

the retention of the provincial capital of Cuttack. After the creation of the separate province, for various reasons, the question of an alternative capital site was raised. Cuttack-Puri rivalry reappeared. While some wanted the capital to be located at Puri, others opposed it on the ground that it was a religious town and therefore misfit to be the seat of a secular government. The people and politicians from Southern Odisha demanded the shifting of capital towards South. In 1936, a team of experts, appointed by the Central Public Works Department, which was headed by an engineer, named F T Jones suggested Rangailunda, a place near Berhampur town to be the site for the capital. In May 1937 the Government of Odisha appointed a Committee with I.R. Dain as the chairman to prepare a feasibility report on the construction of capital. The Committee limited its feasibility report to four sites - Cuttack, Barang, Chaudwar and Puri. On 24 September 1937, after much acrimonious discussion, the Legislative Assembly adopted the motion of Girija Bhusan Das for building the capital at Cuttack - Chaudwar, a suburb of the Cuttack Town, situated on the northern bank of the Mahanadi river. This decision could not be implemented for want of funds and lack of political will. In fact the Government of Odisha could not mobilise resources for building a bridge on the Mahanadi.



The post-war reconstruction committee proposed Bhubaneswar as the ideal site for capital because of its history, availability of space and geographical propinquity to Cuttack. The Public Works Department also reported in favour of Bhubaneswar on 14 April 1945 : "... expansion of Cuttack does not (appear) very promising and it appears that going to Bhubaneswar for further expansion may be the best solution." Ultimately the choice had to be made between the greater Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, and Harekrushna Mahtab who became Prime Minister as the head of the Congress Ministry after the Second World War was able to win the Legislative Assembly's approval in favour of Bhubaneswar.

Initially H.K. Mahtab thought of retaining capital at Cuttack by modernizing the town. For that purpose he consulted the town planners of the Tata Company. The planners held that the topography of Cuttack town practically made its modernization difficult and expensive. Expansion towards Chaudwar was impossible without construction of bridge on the Mahanadi. Mahtab chose Bhubaneswar as the capital site on the following grounds—all highway bridges from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar were likely to be completed before the construction of the bridge on the Mahanadi linking Cuttack and Chaudwar; in Bhubaneswar there were a number of buildings which had been constructed by the American troops during the Second World War as they were using its aerodrome; acquisition of land at Bhubaneswar was easy as there were barren lands as well as forests; Bhubaneswar had a good climate, construction of houses at Bhubaneswar was easy because of hard rocky ground and availability of stone slabs; above all Bhubaneswar was a place of historical importance.

On 30 September 1946 the Odisha Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution for the construction of Capital at

Bhubaneswar. In 1948 the Government of Odisha hired Otto Koenigsberger, a German Jew who had fled from Nazi Germany to work as the town planner for the capital construction. On 13 April 1949, the foundation stone of the new capital was laid by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India. On 10 October, 1949 the Odisha Legislative Assembly met at Bhubaneswar for the first time.

There were some hindrances to the construction of Capital at Bhubaneswar, such as want of funds, the reluctance of Cuttack-based employees to move to offices at Bhubaneswar, and opposition from some prominent Congressmen to the shifting of Capital from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar. While the Government of Odisha requested the Government of India to provide Rs.2 crores for the capital construction, Liaquat Ali Khan, the Finance Minister in interim Government gave a grant of Rs.1.32 crores. Harekrushna Mahtab's departure from Odisha for joining the central cabinet and Chief Minister Nabakrushna Chaudhury's stay at Cuttack for sometime in 1951 delayed the construction work at Bhubaneswar. By the end of 1951 nine offices - the PWD, the Secretariat, the Directorate of Health, the Inspector General of Prisons, the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, the Public Relations, the Agriculture, the Forestry and the Tribal and Rural Welfare had moved from Cuttack into temporary buildings at Bhubaneswar. During Mahtab's absence from Odisha, the opposition of political leaders like Radhanath Rath and Bishwanath Das posed hindrances to capital construction at Bhubaneswar.

While designing the capital complex, initially the following institutional structures were proposed to be raised - Gandhi Memorial, the Legislative Assembly, Governor's House the Secretariat, the State Public Library, the Museum and Accountant General's Office.



Completion of construction of bridges on Kathjodi (January 1951) and Kuakhai (August 1951) solved the problem of transport between Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. During Harekrushna Mahtab's second Chief Ministership from 1956 to 1960 the construction of the above mentioned institutional buildings was expedited. In 1960 the Secretariat building was completed. Gandhi memorial could not be constructed. The difference of opinion between Koenigsberger and Julius Vaz, the Government architect (who designed Rabindra Mandap) and want of qualified architects in Odisha created obstruction for the construction of buildings. Koenigsberger left for great Britain in 1951.

According to the Puri District Gazetteer, published in 1977, the following were the notable buildings in the New Capital.

Raj Bhavan, Secretariat, the Legislative Assembly, State Museum, multi-storied Heads of Department, Rabindra Mandap, Suchana Bhavan, Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalay, Orissa State Archives, Central Market Building, Utkal University, University of Agriculture and Technology, Office of the Accountant General, Office of the Post Master General, and the State Library and the following were the important centres of learning and research in the New Capital - Utkal University (Vani Vihar), University of Agriculture and Technology, Regional College of Education (now Regional Institute of Education), Sainik School, Regional Research Laboratory (now Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology), Institute of Physics, Institute of Industrial Management, State Institute of Education, Eastern Regional Language Institute, Regional Research Institute (Ayurveda), Tribal Research Bureau, State Forensic Laboratory, Administrative Training School, Tribal and Oriental Training Centre, Accounts Training School, Cooperative Training College, Homoeopathy

College and various kinds of schools and colleges like BJB College and Ramadevi College.

Since the publication of the above Gazetteer quite a number of new institutes with buildings have sprung up. These include East Coast Railways, Reserve Bank of India (Regional Office), State Bank of India (Regional Office), Central Excise, Customs and Service Tax (Regional Office), Ayakar Bhavan (Regional Office), Office of the Police Commissioner and DGP (Camp), IDCOL and IPICOL. There has been a mushroom growth of Engineering, Management and Computer Application Training Centres. Two Private Engineering Colleges (KIIT and SOA) have gained the status of deemed universities. Xavier Institute of Management was established in Bhubaneswar in 1987. The city has nearly twenty institutions teaching M.B.A. Course. The other important institutions, based on Science and Engineering are National Institute of Science Education and Research (NISER), Indian Institute of Technology (at Argul), Institute of Life Sciences, Institute of Mathematics and Application, and International Information Technology Centre. Bhubaneswar has a chain of elite schools of international standard like Sai International School, KIIT International School, Xaviers International School, Delhi Public School and DAV Schools which are attracting students from the whole State and outside. With six universities about a dozen of general colleges and about eighty technical institutions out of a total of 110 in the State, Bhubaneswar has become an education hub. With Infocity- I and Infocity-II, Bhubaneswar has become a preferred destination of IT engineers. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (the construction of which building is nearing completion) has started functioning at Sijua near the Capital. Three private Medical Colleges - KIIMS, SUM and High Tech have been established. There are big private hospitals like Kalinga, Apollo, Nilachal, Aditya Care, SUM, Ayus and Vivekananda along with the Government



Hospitals and dispensaries and small nursing homes. As reported in the press the following private hospitals would be operational in near future - Narayan Hrudayalaya, AMRI, Care Group, Asian Heart Institute, Global Hospital and Desun (Times of India, 3 February 2013). Mention may be made of other institutions with impressive buildings - Fortune Tower, NALCO Bhavan, Doordarshan, Pathani Samanta Planetarium, Science Centre & Natural History Museum. Bhubaneswar possesses star hotels like Hotel Kalinga Ashoka, New Marrion, May Fair, Crown, Swosti Premium etc.

The other attractive features of the Capital at Bhubaneswar are four parks - Forest Park, Indira Park, Ekamra Park which contains an artificial lake and Mahatma Gandhi Park, the Kalinga Stadium and a Studio (Kalinga) for the shooting of films.

Along with old shrines like Lingaraj, Mukteshwar, Rajarani, Brahmeshwar, Kedaragouri and others many modern temples and religious institutions have come up. The most important of modern temples are Rama Mandir, Radhakrushna temple (established by Kalpataru Seba Sangha of Kendrapada), known as Baya Math, ISKCON, Shiridi Sai temple of Tankapani Road. There are many unauthorized temples on the way side. Besides the Hindu temples, Churches, mosques and Gurudwara have been established by Christians, Muslims and Sikhs respectively. Bhubaneswar has a modern Buddha Vihar and a Jain temple. Ramakrushna Math, situated in old Bhubaneswar is an important religious institution, associated with the famous Ramakrushna Mission. There is a massive religious institution, called Satsanga Vihar, built by the followers of Anukul Thakur. In the vicinity of Bhubaneswar, near Ashokan inscription at Dhauri an imposing peace Pagoda (Shanti Stupa) has been built by the Japanese Buddhists.

The original masterplan for Bhubaneswar has been revised on the basis of the Ford Foundation Report in 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. Lack of political will and popular collaboration has posed hindrances to the implementation of masterplan and the building of a modern city. The digging of a lake which was proposed in the masterplan has not yet been implemented.

Originally the New Capital was planned to be an administrative town, supposed to have a population of forty thousands. But in course of time it has grown into the political and cultural nerve centre of Odisha. About 70 to 80 daily newspapers (Odia and English) such as Sambad, Samaj, Dharitri, Pragativadi, Samaya, Dinalipi, Times of India, Telegraph and Indian Express are being published from Bhubaneswar. The establishment of industrial estates (at Rasulgarh and Mancheswar) and service industries has increased the commercial importance of the city.

Bhubaneswar, the administrative headquarters of the State is fast becoming its culture capital with dance, and music festivals, seminars, workshops and exhibitions being organised throughout the year. On 23 December 2012 the city witnessed one of the biggest confluences of Odishi dancers, called 7th International Odissi Festival which began with an enchanting performance by the veteran danseuse Sonal Mansingh. On 15 December 2012 Toshali Craft Fair was started in the Janata Maidan of the city, which was attended by more than 300 artisans of the State. The stone sculptures carved out in imitation of the ancient and medieval sculptures by artisans among whom Raghunath Mahapatra has been awarded Padmabibhusan have attracted tourists from outside. On the whole, the capital's ancient heritage, along with its present cultural activities has made it the major tourist destination of the State. The sand sculptures of Puri (a part of the golden triangle of Bhubaneswar-Puri-Konark raised by artisans like



Sudarsan Patnaik) have also been an attraction for the tourists. Well-connected with the out-side world by rail, road and air Bhubaneswar is every year visited by lakhs of Indians and thousands of foreign tourists.

Initially the population of Bhubaneswar was growing at a slow rate. In order to encourage private housing the Government of Odisha started leasing the plots for ninety nine years. Koenigsberger did not feel the necessity of vertical planning and recommended a horizontal plan. During the last three decades the population of Bhubaneswar has increased at a faster rate. According to the Census of 2011 its population is 8.38 lakhs. To enlarge its areas and enhance its population up to 10 lakhs so as to make it a metropolitan city according to the norms of Government of India. Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation has planned to bring 21 Gram Panchayats and two villages within its jurisdiction. Bhubaneswar Development Authority has decided to develop a modern integrated township on 1200 acres of land near Jatni. Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Khurda and Jatni are merging into a single urban conglomerate. With the completion of four-laning of the highway between Bhubaneswar and Puri, the latter town will become part of the same urban complex. Like Englishmen aspiring to have a cottage in London many Odias aspire to have a house in Bhubaneswar. Every year on an average 5000 housing units are being added. As a result of expansion of housing, Bhubaneswar has expanded towards Khurda, Pipili and Cuttack and high rise apartments have come up. The slum population of Bhubaneswar now nearly three lakhs, has increased because of migration of people from rural areas in search of job and livelihood. Slums have developed in open spaces as well as on the wayside. Lack of sanitation and growth of slum population have made the urban scene in Bhubaneswar " Chaotic and ugly". Bhubaneswar offers a poor contrast to

Chandigarh which was planned simultaneously. In the words of Biju Patnaik, the former Chief Minister, " Bhubaneswar is a poor man's town. Keeping the poverty of Odisha in mind, it was not to be a grandiose town like Chandigarh. Its potential was limited by the poverty of the people and the imagination of planners." About three decades before, a Punjabi Professor told me that the difference between Bhubaneswar and Chandigarh is the difference between Odisha and Punjab. Bhubaneswar has miles to go to develop the infrastructure required for a metropolitan city a status it has acquired over the years, which the planners did not visualise. Considering the growth potentials of the cities of India Cushman and Wakefield, a leading global real estate services firm and Global Initiative for Restructuring Environment and Management (GIREM), a body on urbanisation have identified Bhubaneswar as one of the top 10 emerging cities in India. The Urban Development Department of the Government of Odisha is also planning to develop world-class urban infrastructure facilities like rapid transport system, round the clock water supply and integrated sewerage in Bhubaneswar.

References :

1. Nilamani Senapati and Durga Charan Kuanr, *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Puri, Bhubaneswar, 1977.
2. Ravi Kalia, *Bhubaneswar : from a Temple Town to a Capital City*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.
3. Harekrushna Mahtab, Sadhanar Pathe (Oriya), *Cuttack*, 1972.
4. Times of India, 17 November, 2012.

Dr. Atul Chandra Pradhan, Retired Professor of History, MIG-68, Baramunda Housing Board Colony, Bhubaneswar - 751003.