

Jeypore - A Historical Perspective

Indrajeet Mohanty

Jeypore- the city of Victory - is located in the modern District of Koraput in South West Odisha, with an area of about 10,000 square miles. Coming to this now, bustling city one is not only confronted with pristine nature, the mountains, rivulets, forests etc but also a rich brocaded curtain as historical backdrop and cultural extravaganza. Though known as a Jungle territory, nestled in the mountainous region of the Eastern Ghats, this place has a history going back to the hoary past and evinces a smooth conglomeration of the Hindu, Heterodox and Tribal cults- a magnificent carpet spread out for culture enthusiasts.

Neolithic sites are found on the banks of the river Kolab and the Machhakund, which surround Jeypore. It was known as the Atavika Rajya in the 3rd century B.C. during the time of Asoka. In the 4th century AD the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta calls this place Mahakantara with a King called Vyaghraraja. Mythologically the Ramayana seems to place the Dandakaranya forests in this locality. In the 6th and 7th Centuries it was under the Sailodhavas and Silavamshis both meaning "rock dynasties" i.e. of forest origin. In Legends the seat of Vikramaditya is found in this place. From archaeological sources it is evident that Jeypore came under the hegemony of the Satavahanas,

the Ikshakus, the Vakatakas, the Nalas, the Matharas, the Eastern Gangas, the Somavamsis the latter Gangas, the Kalachuris, the Chandika Nagas and the Matsya dynasties.

The history of Jeypore enters a new phase and becomes more conspicuous with the advent of the Silavamsis in 1353 A.D. under the ruler Ganga-Raja. These rulers emulated the glory of Vikramaditya of Ujjain. Since then it maintains its continuity till the abolition of the Estate in 1953.

All the above dynasties carried on administration from Nandapur, which was the first capital of the Jeypore Kingdom. The Silavamsis were the masters of this city and ruled till 1443 when Vinayak Deo married princess Lilavati, daughter of Pratapa Ganga Raja, the Last Silavamsa ruler- Vinayak Deo started ruling from 1443 as a Suryavamsi ruler, claiming his descent from an ancient Rajput prince. This Suryavamsi rule remained for five turbulent centuries till the princely state was annexed to the state of Odisha in 1950.

Vinayak Deo had himself installed on the throne of the 32 steps in Nandapur, known as Vikramarka which is still in existence as a memorial. He succeeded in making a number of little Kings tributary to him as far as the Guntur

District of Andhra Pradesh. In 1476 he was succeeded by his son Vijaya Chandra who consolidated his father's achievements. The Kanchi Kaveri episode of Lord Jagannath and Gajapati Purusottama Dev is connected with him in an antagonistic way. It is in legend that when Purushottama Dev was returning after his victory over Kanchi, he was robbed of an Elephant and a goddess, near the forest of Nandapur by Vijaya Chandra. This goddess was installed with ceremony in Nandapur - The origin of the presiding deity Kanak Durga. Vijaya Chandra's son Bhairava ruled till 1527 and was a witness to the collapse of the Gajapati power. He was one of Prataprudra Dev's comrades in arms. His son Viswanath Deo 1527-1571 transferred his capital from Nandapur to Rayagada for better economic prospects in trade and agriculture. It was during the reign of this king that Shri Chaitanya migrated southwards. Now the kings of Nandapur called themselves "Nauna Gajapati's". In 1565 the Shah of Golkunda succeeded in forcing Vishwanath's son and successor Balaram Deo to pay tribute and got the title of Maharaja.

Jeypore was made the new capital of the Suryavamsis' during the reign of Vir Vikram Deo in 1758. Historically this was done strategically to protect the capital from the Muslims, but legend has it that a curse of Kali fell on the royal family at Nandapur. Puranagada near Naktidangar hill was the New Capital which was destroyed by Capt. Mathews in 1781. In 1895 a new fort, Surya Mahal was built to the South. The Jagannath Sagar was dug by Ramachandra Deo and Kanaka Durga remained their titular goddess. Ramchandra Deo Co-operated with the colonial rule and built the new palace. The British had taken over the direct administration of Jeypore in 1863. The Jeypore Zamindary Estate was the largest one of the Madras Presidency. In the

"Permanent Settlement" of 1803, Jeypore tribute was set at 16,000 rupees.

Jeypore's contribution to the cultural heritage of Odisha is singular and remarkable. It shows a splendid blending of the tribal, Brahmanical, Jaina and Buddhist ideas, an exquisite amalgamation. Because of its remote location, the area remained relatively autonomous, shaping and sizing its own culture. The population of this Jungle Kingdom contained a high proportion of tribal groups who had their own religious and social outlooks. Their obsessions with harvest and fertility together with their fear of natural calamities and epidemics, created and sustained their religious beliefs. Their gods and goddesses were in the representations of pillars, stones etc. and human sacrifice initiated these deities. The Aryanisation and Hinduisation of these were voluntarily made, both by the rulers and religious preachers. The rulers purposely set up a tribal system, to please the population but brought Brahmans, merchants, soldiers etc. to Hinduize them so as to integrate them into a politico-religious and economic system shaped by Hindu values. However, prior to this, attempts were made by various sects and religious leaders to Aryanise these areas of which we have ample evidences.

Odisha has the distinction of possessing three celebrated Stupas containing Buddha's remains. The Keshastupa, containing the hair of the Enlightened one is identified with Kesaribeda near Jeypore. The Jaina scriptures suggest that the Jaina preachers preferred to preach among the hill tribes inhabiting the forest tracts from Manbhumi in Bihar to Vizagapatnam. Nandapur has numerous Jaina antiquities and the Suai village, nearby, has Jaina monuments belonging to the 7th Century A.D. Kachela was a centre of Jaina faith. Bhairavasinghpur, Charmula, Kumba, Yamunda, Kotpad, Boriguma-all have a large number of

Jaina relics. Jeypore contains images of Jaina Tirthankaras. The museum here also preserves a large number of Jaina icons.

Saivism became a popular religious trend during the rule of the Sailodbhavas in the 6th and 7th Centuries A.D. The Sarveswara Siva temple and the Vatisimhasana indicate the importance of Nandapur in this aspect. Barigama has the famous Bhairava temple. Gupteswar has a nature-cut Sivalinga and the forest in which He resides, in a cave, is called Dandakaranya. With Saivism flourished the cult of Mother Goddess, Saktism. Durga in the Bhairava temple at Boriguma, Kanak-Durga and Kalika in Jeypore show evidence to this fact. Parvati images are found at Boriguma and at Nandapur.

The advent of Chaitanya during the time of Bhairava Deo had far reaching influence and a number of Vaisnavite temples were constructed in the Nagavali Valley. One of the few rare Krishna-Vishnu images is found at Jeypore. The temple of Jagannath was built in the 17th Century at Jeypore.

A special feature of Jeypore is that, all these religious cults have acted and interacted on

one another creating a catholic spirit which the people here cherish. Temple oriented ritual policy were mingled with the tribal, Tantrik and Sakta elements. Till today a temple dedicated to a tribal goddess in the old fortress is the centre of rituals. The Brahmanical shrines of Jeypore contain images of Jaina pantheon. Bhagavati is a sixteen armed Chakreswari. A number of Jaina Tirthankaras are seen in the niches of the temple. In the Kali temple is an image of Risabhanatha along with Brahmanical Gods. Many images worshipped as Hindu Gods around Jeypore are in actuality Jaina Tirthankaras and their Sasana Devis. Boriguma exhibits a series of images of Saivite, Vaisnavite and Jaina icons.

All the above is a bird's eye view of the rich cultural heritage of Jeypore on the background of a strong history and it can be a haven for historians and academicians to do their research.

Indrajeet Mohanty, Reader in History, V.D. (Auto) College, Jeypore, Koraput.