



Haripura Gada : The Bhanja Capital in Ruins

Maitreyee Mohanty

History is a reconstruction of the glorious past by critical observation and analysis of the testimonies of the past in the form of monuments¹. The history of the famous Bhanja Kings of Mayurbhanj can not be complete without a reference to Haripura Gada, the second capital of the Bhanja rulers before the town of Baripada was founded and served as the new Capital of Bhanja kingdom. Though in ruins now, it offers ample materials for ancient history of Mayurbhanj.

According to an account Maharaja Harihara Bhanja, a powerful Bhanja King founded the city in 1322 Saka corresponding to 1400 A.D. He named the capital Hariharpur after his own name and shifted the capital from Khiching. Hariharpur finds a prominent place in the history of Bengal and Odisha of 15th and 16th Century and also in the writings of Vaishnava poets of Gaudiya School as Chaitanya Mahaprabhu passed through this place in his way to Puri².

The Capital of Bhanja Kings suffered a great deal at the hands of the iconoclast Kalapahada. All the members of the royal family were compelled to run away and took shelter in hill recesses. From that time onwards Haripur had to face the onslaught of the Muslim invaders from time to time but the Paiks of Mayurbhanj could repel them on account of the strategic

position and the heavy fortification of the palace.³ The proof of fortification of Haripur Gada was found from Akbarnama, the biography on Emperor Akbar which states that Daud Khan, the Sultan of Bengal is known to have taken refuge here when he was attacked by the powerful army of Emperor Akbar.⁴

When Mughal rule spread in Odisha, Mayurbhanja could save itself from Mughal invasion under Bhanja King Vaidyanath Bhanja. Mention is made of the prosperous condition of the Kingdom and its capital Haripur in "Rasika Mangala" written in about 1542 Saka (1620 A.D) by Gopijanavallabha, a disciple of Rasikananda. Raja Baidyanath Bhanja was the first scion of the dynasty to adopt the Vaishnava faith initiated by Rasika Ray. Raja Baidyanath Bhanja built a magnificent brick temple in honour of his tutelary God Rasika Raya inside the fort as a mark of his devotion for his *guru*. Though now in ruins this temple is still regarded as the vestige of the glorious deeds of the Bhanjas.⁵ The temple is the first example of a brick built religious monument of the period. No other example of a brick built temple with such superior craftsmanship is found in Odisha or Bengal.

Though in ruins the excavated portion of Haripur gada speaks volumes about the



contributions of early Bhanja Kings to the growth of monuments, art and architecture in Mayurbhanj. The eastern side of old Haripura Gada is 1091 feet and the western side is 1702 feet, whereas the northern and southern sides of the fort are 652 feet and 686 feet respectively.⁶ A little to the north of the courtyard of once magnificent Rasika Raya temple lies the ruins of Ranihanspur. It formed the south-western portion of the palace and consisted of apartments with adjoining bath rooms. To the eastern side of the Ranihanspur once stood the Durbar hall and the retiring chamber studded in front by the sculptured stone columns and arches of fine designs.⁷ The unearthed portion of the fort has also brought to light numerous stones with skilful works of art and remnants of ornamental plaster work from the eastern portion of the building and the middle of the Hall.

A remarkable feature of the plaster works on the floor and on the walls of this period was that they are not less than three centuries old but the combined mortar has been transformed into such a hard substance that it can be easily taken for as a superior class modern cement.⁸ To the north-west of the palace and behind the old court stands the Radha Mohan Temple. The Radha Mohan temple is in sharp contrast to the majestic Rasika Ray Temple. It is a plain rectangular block of building made of bricks and covered with chuna plaster. The sanctuary of the temple was separated from the outer hall by perpendicular wall joining the two sides. It would not be out of place to mention here that as Radhamohan temple was situated within the outer courtyard compound it was eventually meant for the male members of the household.⁹

The style of architecture found in the Rasika Raya Temple bears a striking similarity to the architecture found at Vishnupur (Mallabhuma)

in the temples erected by Raja Virattambira and his descendants. The curvilinear form of roofing in this temple is believed to be the Goudiya styles of architecture. This style of architecture was later adopted by the Delhi Emperors in all architectural designs and in course of time adopted in different parts of the civilized world.¹⁰ On the south east of the temple of Rasika Raya at a distance of 270 feet and outside the front enclosure lies the temple of Jagannath. The image of Jagannath which was formerly placed inside the temple has been brought to Pratapapura where the deity receives daily offerings. The artistic decorations of the outer walls of the temple have lost much of their beauty. But the artistic decorations of the back walls are fairly in tact, though the plaster and whitewash have crumbled down. The temple was very artistically painted in various beautiful colours and on close examination of the side walls traces of paintings are still observed.¹¹

There is also a stone image of Goddess Mahisha Mardini, known by the name of Gadachandi in the clumps of bamboos at Badapada, a place situated within the limits of Haripurgada. It was formerly enshrined on the south side of Haripura Gada (Plate No. 35). The people of the area believe that the above image of Goddess Gadachandi is the oldest to be found in the locality. Also a small image of Goddess Kota Basini at present known as Kotasini is found standing by the side of the image of Goddess Mahisamardini in the same bamboo grove of Badapadai. It is popularly believed that Kotasini is the presiding deity of Haripura Gada. On proper scrutiny the image of Goddess Kotasini appears to be much older than the images of Gadachandi. The image of Kotasini though greatly disfigured with time, still retains a striking resemblance to that of Goddess Janguli Tara (Plate No.27). It may be taken as evidence of



the influence of Tantrik Buddhism existing in Haripur.¹²

Though Haripura Gada now lies in ruins, it is a testimony of the prosperity and elegance of the Mayurbhanj Kingdom during the rule of the ancient Bhanja Kings. The analysis of fragments of the ruins of the fort reveal the acumen of the craftsmen in the field of plaster work. The splendour of the sculptured walls reveal the mastery of the sculptors of the period. Rasika Ray Temple is the one and only majestic brick built temple of the Eastern India.

The Haripura Gada in its architectural style together with the encompassing temples provide an interesting case study for a researcher on historical sites and monuments of Mayurbhanj.

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Maitreyee Mohanty, ICHR Research Scholar,
Department of History, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar.