

AN EXTANT SCULPTURE OF 'BHAIRAVA' AT PATANAGARH

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Patanagarh is a subdivisional headquarters, situated 38 kms. west of the district headquarters of Bolangir in Orissa. The piece of sculpture, which is the subject matter of this paper, has been housed in a cement-brick shrine built recently for it on the confluence of two rivulets—Mayavati and Swarnarekha that flow down for a few kilometers and meet in the river Suktel. The delta created by these rivulets has the ruins of a fortified township ascribable to a period between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries of the Christian era. Apart from these ruins, remains of potteries, beads of semi-precious stones, ring stones etc., are noticed on both the banks of the Mayavati. These antiquities could be ascribed to a much earlier date than the remnants of the fortified township. The stone panel on which the sculpture of Bhairava has been carved out was previously lying in a corn field receiving only occasional attention of devotees¹.

The sculpture of Bhairava has been carved out in high relief on a piece of fine grained sandstone of 73 cms. length (height) and 50cms. breadth. Bhairava having eight hands has been depicted as dancing on a *pretasana*. In the major right arm he holds a sword. In other right arms, from top to bottom, the attributes are a trident with a short grip, *mushala* and a *kartri* (dagger). In the major left hand he holds a *khetaka* (shield). The attributes in other left hands are 'fire in a bow', *ankusha* and a *naga* (serpent noose) respectively. The other conspicuous features are *jata mukuta* tied with a string of beads, and *patra kundala* on both the ear-lobes². Two flames are surging upward on both sides of the head. The other ornaments are beaded wrist-lets, armlets and anklets etc. The *yajnopavita* is clearly discernible. The stump nose, fleshy lips, round widely opened eyes, all add to the furious look of the sculpture. A short *dhoti* wrapped up with a skirt (skin of the elephant *gajasura*) has served the purpose of the lower garment. The folds of the *dhoti* have hung down between the widely opened legs. On both the flanks below are seven anthropomorphic depictions - five on the right and two on the left. All are female figures. These female figures possibly represent the 'seven mothers'. They have *karanda mukuta* on their heads³. Other ornaments and dresses are not clearly discernible. Conforming to the iconography each of the female figures has two hands⁴.

It seems that the idea of carving out the *matrika* icons along with Bhairava is an after-thought of the sculptor. Hence he has used the surplus space of the stone panel that

remained after the icon of Bhairava was carved out. As the space is inadequate the *matrka* images have been small and clumsy in their depiction.

Bhairava is a manifestation of Shiva worshipped by the *kapalikas* as their chief god. They hold Him responsible for the creation, protection and destruction of the universe. They believe that all the gods are subservient to Him⁵. From iconographical stand point *Bhairava* is a 'medieval image type' of Shiva representing his *ugra* form⁶. This image type can be classified under *samharamurti* group and *Vatuka Bhairava* sub-group of shaiva iconography. The multiple number of hands of Bhairava testifies to its *tamasika* character and *Bhairava* in this form is associated with the *tandava* of Shiva for cosmic absorption and regeneration. The *Pingala Nighantu* mentions *Vatukabhairava* as *kshetrapala* or the guardian deity of the place of its installation⁷. The *Shiva Purana* describes *Bhairava* as the *punarupa* of Shankara.⁸

The cult of Bhairava worship bears testimony to the fact that *Pashupata* shaivism was very popular in this region then known as *Dakshina Koshala*. This icon of Bhairava was sculptured out and, a shrine for him and his divine consorts, the Seven Mothers, was erected at the place under the influence of the *Kapalikas* - a sub-sect of the *Pashupata* School of Shaivism. This has been substantiated by a number of sculptural depiction of Shiva and shaivacharyas of Pashupata sect on the antique pillars of the Someshvara (Koshalesvara) temple standing not far away from the site where the present *Bhairava* icon was discovered⁹.

The piece of sculpture under discussion can be assigned to the early twelfth century A.D. or a little later, after the Someshvara temple was erected. Possibly, Bhairava had been installed in the north-east corner of the fortified township as the guardian deity of the locality. Later on under the influence of the Sahajia philosophy of the Buddhist *Sahaja Yana* and shaivite *Natha* cult, which emphasized on the *Pinda-Brahmanda* theory, the shrine of Bhairava became the center of *tantric sadhana*.¹⁰ By sixteenth century AD Patanagarh, the headquarters of the *Patana Dandapata* had attained celebrity as *kumari Patana*, the famous seat of *tantra sadhana*.¹¹

REFERENCES:

1. SP Khuntia, Senior Lecturer in the department of History, Jawaharlal College, Patanagarh has collected some antiquities from the site where the sculpture of Bhairava was lying uncared-for and also by exploring both the banks of the rivulet Mayavati. The local people worship the icon as '*Bhainro*'. A non-Brahmin priest designated us *dehelia* looks after the daily rituals of the deity.
2. T. A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd ed., I (1), Delhi, 1997, pl. IV, fig. 15 (facing page 11).
3. *Ibid.* p4. VIII , fig.2 (facing page 29).
4. *Ibid.* p.13.
5. *Ibid.*, II (1), p2; K. C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar*, 2nd ed., Cuttack, 1981, p. 234.

6. T. M. P. Mahadevan, 'Saivism', in R.C. Majumdar (ed), *The History and Culture of the Indian People: The Age of Imperial Kanauj*. 2nd ed., IV, Vidyabhavan, Bombay, 1964, p. 305.
7. T. A. G. Rao, op. Cit., II (2), p. 498.
8. K.C.Panigrahi,op.cit.,p.80;T.A.G.Rao.,II(1),p. 176.
9. Lakulisha sitting in cross- legged position with the *yogapatta* tied around, enigmatic figures in yogic postures have been carved out in low relief on the pillars of an extinct Shiva temple now supporting the entrance hall of the Someshvara temple renovated sometime in the 19th century AD. The brick and stone shrine dedicated to Bhairava and the 'seven mothers' was in ruins. Now the site has been totally disturbed by local brick makers. A few years back, S. P. Khuntia had recovered from this site, a full size brick measuring 37cms. in length, 27cms. in breadth and 10 cms. in thickness. This type of brick was used in this region in the early medieval period. Only one matrka icon in sitting posture, in a badly damaged condition, has been recovered from the old site and placed in the outer niche of the *Bhainro gudi*.
10. K. C. Mishra, *Odishi Vaihnava Dharma* (Oriya) 3rd ed., Bhubaneswar, 1990, p. 'ga' of the editorial note by Raicharan Das ; B. Pradhan, *Minor Religious Sects of Orissa*, in S. Pradhan (ed), *Orissan History, Culture and Archaeology*. 1st ed ., New Delhi, 1999, p. 164.
- 11 N. K. Sahu, Ch. II, History, in N. Senapati et.al. (ed). *Gazetteers of India: Orissa District Gazetteers* : Balangir, 1st ed., Cuttack, 1968, p.489.

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