



Dungi : An Early Temple Site of the Seventh Century A.D.

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Ramayana Panel of Dungi

I got the opportunity of visiting Dungi, a place situated at a distance of nearly forty-five kms from Phulbani town, the district head-quarters of the present Kandhamal District in May, 2006 and found huge stone-blocks, carved temple panels having floral motifs, Kirtimukha and other carvings, broken Amalakas, Bhumi-Amalakas, carved pillar having a jumping Yaksa or Gana etc. All the scattered stone panels and blocks denote the existence of a temple there in the remote past. Kalinga Ghat is situated at a distance of hardly fifteen kms from Dungi. The study of the temple art and sculptures of Dungi relate this site to have been built around the 7th century A.D. during the time of the Sailodbhava kings of Kangoda Mandala as their kingdom was existing geographically from present Bhubaneswar upto Paralakhemundi and also upto Bhanjanagar and beyond. Dungi might had been considered as a resting place for wandering mendicants, caravan

traders and others, being situated on a trade route running from Daksina Kosala to Kangoda. Two sculptures, one that of an image of four-handed Ardhanarisvara and the other, that of the image of four-handed Karttikeya, now fitted as Dvarapalas of the Garbhagriha of the Siva temple are quite astounding. In the Ardhanarisvara figure, in Siva's portion, Urdhvalinga of the Lord is depicted which symbolizes, celibacy (urdhvareta), the perfect blissful state of Lord Siva. In the top of the roof of the Siva temple I found one loose and heavy temple panel, depicting a scene from Ramayana, the Great Epic. In the proper left side of the panel the twenty-handed Ravana is depicted as frontally-looking, carrying weapons like Dhanu, Parasu, Khadga and Gada. Next to Ravana, the monkey-god Hanuman is seated in profile and below Hanuman, in the lower portion a Sivalinga is depicted. The central portion of the panel is having the frontally-looking seated figure



of a lady, probably Sita. In the extreme end, to the proper right, frontally-looking Rama carrying Dhanu is seated on a chariot, driven by two horses, and operated by the charioteer. Below the chariot, the figures of two warriors (one frontally-looking and other seated) are carved. Scenes from Ramayana are very rarely found in the temple art of the upper Mahanadi valley, except at another place named Mohangiri, situated in the border of Kandhamal and Kalahandi district at a distance of around thirty miles in crow's fly from Dungi.

Another important sculpture found at Dungi is the figure of a Nayika having big chignon in her head. The heaviness of her body points to the temple art of the 6th-7th century A.D, the post-Gupta period. This panel having lady is fitted to the outer wall of the Siva temple. Another attractive panel, having a seated figure of four-handed Siva holding Sula (short-trident) inside a Chaitya-window medallion is fitted in the front portion of the temple-roof while entering the Jagamohona. In the Souvenir of Kandhamal Utsav, I saw photos of some other sculptures like the Chaitya-window medallion having three-headed Mahesvara figure and another panel having the figure of the great Pasupata Saivacharya Lakulisa, worshipped by his disciples, which are missing now from this site. Lakulisa panel is found amidst temple ruins of the Dhavalesvara Siva temple at Mohangiri also.

There is a site called the Ranis Pinda, at a distance of around one furlong from Dungi, where I found some loose sculptures kept inside a thick grove of tall trees having dense foliage. One is that of a six-handed Mahisamardini Durga image and the other one having the figure of a king, flanked by his two queens. These sculptures might have been shifted from Dungi site in the remote past for worship of Goddess Durga by the local people.

I was told by the priests of the Siva temple at Dungi that few years ago an image of Ganesha has been shifted from this place to Tikabali village, a Panchayat Samiti headquarters, where it is worshipped on the top of a small hillock.

The study of the temple art of sculptures of Dungi put these to the Sailodbhava period due to its affinities and likeness to those of the Lakshmanesvara and Bharatesvara temples at Bhubaneswar.

Phulbani district, which was earlier known for explorations by archaeologists searching for stone tools of the pre-historic period, is also having early temple ruins of the 6th-7th century A.D, it is simply unbelievable. About this site and sculptures like Ardhanarisvara, the historian, sociologist and anthropologist Shri Raghunath Rath of Baliguda has mentioned in his Odia articles in the souvenirs, "Ghumusar" in 2000 and Giri Jhankar in 2004. But the discovery of Dungi sculptures of the jumping Yaksha, heavy-bodied Nayika with big chignon, seated Siva in the chaitya-medallion, Lakulisa panel, three-headed Mahesvara, four-handed standing Karttikeya and especially the long panel having scene from Ramayana along with the Mahisamardini Durga and king with his two queens by this scholar during his visit in 2006 has placed Kandhamal district in the map of temple sites of the upper Mahanadi valley, as the Dungi site is near the origin of Bruttanga river, a tributary of the mighty river Mahanadi, the life line of Orissa from the ancient time.

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