

The great Saivite traditions of Bhubaneswar with special reference to Lord Lingaraja

Umakanta Moharana

Bhubaneswar (Lat.20' 15' N.; Long. 85' 50' E.) being the capital city of the state of Odisha is well known with a cluster of magnificent temples almost constituting a complete record of Kalingan architecture from its outset to the culmination in the cultural map of India. It is situated on the Howrah- Madras main railway line as well as the National Highway-5. Its proud sculptural and architectural heritage, coupled with its sanctity as *Ekamra kshetra*, one of the five great religious centres in Odisha since early medieval days, attracts thousands of visitors from all corners of the world throughout the year¹. However, there is a complete record of stone working tradition in Bhubaneswar from the pre-historic past which found its maturity in temple building activities during the medieval historic period.

Saivite traditions and legends of Bhubaneswar

Ekamrachandrika, an orthodox text states about the geographical situation of Ekamrakshetra (Bhubaneswar) that, this Kshetra starts from Khandagiri to Kundalesvara Mahadeva and from Balahadevi to Bahirangeswara Mahadeva and formed a circle and gives auspicious result and placed different types of sacred tirthas famous as an incomparable

Saiva Kshetra in the world. The shadow of this mango tree of the Kshetra is extended up to one mile. The branches of this tree are extended from Sundaresvar (the Siva installed in modern Sundarpada village) to Meghesvar Mahadev (near Brahmesvara Patna) and formed a *Mandala* like shape.²

The name Bhubaneswar was well known from the Ganga period; although other names were also attributed to this Kshetra during that phase.³ During this period Bhubaneswar was known as *Ekamraka*, *Kirtivasa-Kshetra*, *Tribhubaneswar*, *Svarnakutagiri* and *Lingaraja-Kshetra*. There are also literary descriptions contained in the classical and regional literature, which state that, Bhubaneswar was previously known as *Ekamra Kshetra*, (Kananvana), *Svarnadri*, *Hemakuta*, *Krittivasa or Kirtivasa Kataka* and Gupta Kasi or Varanasi.⁴ Inscriptions of the Ganga period unmistakably refer to Kirtivasa as the presiding deity of the Kshetra as well as the name of the Kshetra. Also, during this period, the name *Ekamraka* the ancient most name of Bhubaneswar was well known. It is first of all necessary to know why the name Ekamraka was given to Bhubaneswar in ancient time and subsequently other names (Krittivasa,

Tribhubaneswar and Lingaraja- Bhubaneswar) were given to that sacred site.

Many eminent and renowned historians and archaeologists like; W.W. Hunter, M.M Ganguli, A. Stirling, J. Ferguson, R.L. Mitra, M.M Chakravarti, R.P Chanda, Percy Brown, A.K. Coomarswamy, P. Acharya, D.C. Sircar, K. C. Panigrahi, Debala Mitra, V. Dehija and Walter Smith and others have done their research and presented a very good trustworthy account from their stand points. There are four *Upapurans* in Odisha describing about the *Ekamrakshetra* or morden Bhubaneswar. These are *Ekamra Purana*, *Kapila Samhita*, *Swanadri Mahodaya* and *Ekamra Chandrika*. Among those '*Ekamra Chandrika*', and '*Swanadri Mahodaya*' are small in comparison to others. Though *Ekamra Purana* was published in 1928 by Ratnakara Gargabatu, it had some printing mistake. So after some years Prof. Upendranath Dhala, the former Professor of department of Sanskrit, Utkal University edited this with English preface and published it in 1986. This book was published by Nag Publication and it is praised by many Sanskrit scholars of the world. Similarly, '*Kapila Samhita*' was published by Ratnakara Gargabatu in 1928. Subsequently it was published by Chaukhamba Publication, Banaras in the name of '*Kapila Purana*'. '*Swanadri Mahodaya*' also published in 1912 by late Ratnakara Gargabatu. '*Ekamra Chandrika*' was published by Sri Radharaman Book Store, Cuttack, written by Ratnakara Gargabatu in 1931. Now it is available in some old library in Odisha. In 1995 Sri Nilamani Mishra translated '*Ekamra Chandrika*' in Odia by the patronisation of Kedarnath Gabeshana Pratisthan, Bhubaneswar.

Though regarding the naming of '*Bhubaneswar*' is not found in any archaeological evidences till now but it described as '*Ekamrakshetra*' in different *Puranas*, *Upapuranas* and inscriptions of ancient and medieval period of Odisha. There is mention of "Ekamra" in Anugul copper plate grant of Shantikaradeva, the Brahmeswar temple inscription of Somavamsi queen Kalavati Devi and Ananta Vasudeva temple inscription of Ganga princess Chandrika Devi. Subsequently Lord Kirtibasa- Lingaraja in the name Tribhubaneswar popularised this place as 'Bhubaneswar'.

The uniqueness of the city of Bhubaneswar is that it has continuous history from pre-historic period to modern present days capital of Odisha. The temple towns like Aihole, Mahabalipuram and Khajuraho can boast of possessing a number of historical monuments, but they cannot boast of possessing a history as varied and wide as that of Bhubaneswar. Such places of culture as Pataliputra (Patna) and Baranasi (Banaras) can claim to have a long and varied history, but they cannot boast of possessing such a remarkable series of ancient monuments as Bhubaneswar⁵ can do.

Traditionally it is believed that, in the *Treatayayuga* Siva wishing to retire from the hubbub and sin of overcrowded Banaras sought the advice of Narada and at the suggestion of that sage took up this quiet, secluded, delightful retreat for his abode.⁶

Lord Lingaraja or Tribhubanesvara or Krittivasa;

The Lingaraja temple (circa. A.D 11th century) occupies the central position and is also the centre of all social and religious activities of

the place. This temple was enclosed by vast compound wall (520 feet X 465 feet) comprising the area of 4.595 acres of land. The height of its main tower (*Deula*) is 45.11 mts while the succeeding hall of pyramidal type (*jagamohana*) is 28.96mts high.⁷ Of these other two structures like, *Natamandira* and *Bhogamandapa*, all four are in the same axial alignment appear to have been added at a subsequent date. The present Lingaraja temple consisting of the *Deula* and *jagamohan* possibly belong to the Somavamsi King Uddyota Kesari.⁸ Inside the vast compound, there stand more than 100 temples of small and big size apart from other structures, viz, platforms, wells and kitchen which were added throughout the past centuries.

The Lingaraja temple began during the period of the Gauda king Sasanka. The *Ekamra Purana* clearly refers to Sasanka's temple building activity in the Ekamra Kshetra and this appears to contribute to the fame of the sacred centre as Saiva Pitha.⁹ Sasanka made Lord Tribhubaneswar, the presiding deity of the place. We accept the view of K.C. Panigrahi in this context which states that the Saiva temples existed at Bhubaneswar before the 7th century A.D and that from the period of Sasanka the shrine of *Tribhubaneswar* became the supreme structure.¹⁰ The period of Sasanka in Bhubaneswar witnessed an extra-ordinary popularity of Saivism in Ekamra Kshetra.

The name *Kirttivasa* attributed to the Lord of *Ekamraka* as the presiding deity needs a close study in this respect. Ekamraka became celebrated Saiva centre, the seat of Tribhubaneswar atleast from 7th century A.D. the place was then also known as Kirttivasa-Ksetra. All records from the 7th century A.D. to 14th

century A.D. either refer to Ekamraka or to Kirttivasa-Ksetra. The *Sukla Yajurveda* refers to the meaning of Kirttivasa¹¹. According to the text Kirttivasa is a compound word *krtti* (hide) and *Vasa* (clothing) one who is clad in hide. This name of Siva reminds us of the story about the slaughter of a demon named Gajasura by Siva who dressed himself with the former's skin at his request at the time of his death¹². Even if this interpretation is well known the traditional accounts in Orissa do not seem to accept it. Our traditional accounts provide another reason for the attribution of the name Kirttivasa to Siva in the Ksetra of Ekamraka. The composers of the accounts (*Ekamra Purana* and *Svarnadri Mahodaya*) must have been aware of this tradition on the name of Kirttivasa. But they had a question about its attribution to Siva of the Ekamraka Kshetra. They might have wanted to know the real secret of the name Kirttivasa, the presiding deity of Ekamraka, not of Kasi. Out of this eager investigation a new legend emerged. The *Ekamra Purana* gives another interpretation of the name of Kirttivasa;

There was a king of the demons named Matanga and his son was Drmila. Drmila had one hundred sons of whom Pruthuloma or Pruthula was the eldest and *Krtti* and *Vasa* were the strongest. The king Dramila propitiated the Brahmins and so they conferred on him a boon that his two sons *Krtti* and *Vasa* would never be killed by any male. *Krtti* and *Vasa* grew with brutal and planned the destruction of his brothers. One day *Krtti* took brothers to the forests on the cause of hunting wild animals, but when they grew tired, hungry and thirsty, he killed ten of them. On second occasion he took the remaining brothers to the forest and killed ten of them. This process was repeated by him. When his broken-hearted

mother asked him about the whereabouts of rest his brothers, he gave her an evasive reply. King Drmila suspected Krtti of having killed his sons and so he ordered his army generals to kill him. But his two generals-Ugrasharma and Kuvula fought bravely against him and they were killed. When king Drmila found his generals killed he and his eldest son Pruthula followed Krtti and Vasa with an army and left them at a great distance from their kingdom. Kirtti and Vasa wondered here and there and at last they came to Ekamra. At the time they came to Ekamra Kshetra Parvati according to the desire of Siva, was living in the guise of Gopalini (milkmaid) and was regularly worshipping the *lingam* of the Gosahasresvara shrine. The two brothers accidentally met Gopalini and being attracted with her beauty wanted to make her their wife. Gopalini at once informed Siva of the evil intention of the demon brothers. Siva told her that according to the boon obtained by their father they would not be killed by any male member and so he should render a great service to the gods if she could kill them. He instructed her to request the brothers to carry her on their shoulders and while being carried by them to press them to death. Siva's instruction was carried into effect and both the demons died being pressed under the feet of Gopalini. Water sprang up where they died and that spot is now represented by the Devipada-Hara tank¹³. K.C. Panigrahi who is inclined to find the real historical secret form this traditional account has stated.

Another tradition says that, many of the names given in the story like those of the Chalukya kings. The original names have either been corrupted or purposely distorted to suit the exigencies of a mythological story. We can hardly expect from a mythological story of the order or chronological sequence in which the Chalukya

kings appear in their inscriptions but those corrupted names indicate that their activities at Ekamra, when they occupied or attempted to occupy Odisha, descended to posterity as distant echoes which have formed the basis of the mythological story.¹⁴

This analysis of a traditional account on the name of Krttivasa as recorded in the Ekamra Purana does not help us in the attribution of the name Kirttivasa to Siva (as according to the account Siva was called as Kirttivasa for cleverly manipulating the death of Krtti and Vasa) at Ekamraka. Even if we accept the view of K.C. Panigrahi that, the author of the *Ekamra Purana* was conscious of a historical event in Bhubaneswar in 7th century A.D. We definitely like to differ from him on this ground that his analysis does not discover the real secret of the name Kirttivasa. While analysing this legend from a historical point of view, Panigrahi was not conscious of the name Kirttivasa given to the presiding deity of the Kshetra of the Ekamraka. His conclusion has been divorced from the solution of the real problem attribution of the name Kirttivasa to supreme deity of Ekamraka. The analysis also does not give us any clue regarding the necessity of the attribution of the name Kirttivasa to the Lord of Ekamraka. One should not underestimate this aspect. The main aim of the legendary account is not to present the triangular conflict (Chalukyas and others) in Bhubaneswar in the 7th century A.D. It aims to present the real cause behind such an attribution of the name Kirttivasa to the Lord of Ekamraka. Moreover, the name Krttivasa was overwhelming popular for centuries as the supreme deity of Ekamraka. Hence there is necessity to study the legendary account more carefully to arrive at the door of the truth.

The legendary account might have presented symbolically the phase when the site of Ekamraka was acquired for Saiva worship and the manner in which a particular famous zone inside Ekamraka was acquired for making it a centre of the supreme deity. The legendary account refers to conflict between Parvati (in the guise of Gopalini and Krittivasa the two demon brothers). Probably Ekamraka became a celebrated centre of Siva partly due to a conflict between the Buddhist-Shakta cult and the non-Vedic tribal cults. Saivism got the benefit of acquiring the zone easily due to the conflict of the two groups. The legendary account refers to the fact that Siva himself was not a party to conflict; but when the Shakta cult won over the non-Vedic tribal cults, the Saivites got it easily and the non-Vedic zone (the area of Krittivasa) became the main centre of the Saivites. The area was probably original under a tribal group and it may be contended that within that tribal zone there was the natural stone which the Saivites accepted as *Svayambhu Lingam*; but the tribal group had full control over it from the beginning. Efforts were undertaken by the different religious groups (mainly Buddhists and the Shaktas) to occupy this zone in ancient time. The Saivites might have been conscious of the existence of the natural stone (which was rare in that zone) and they might have been eagerly waiting to capture the zone for converting the natural stone (*Svayambhu Lingam*) the object of worship. They got the opportunity of acquiring the zone when there was a conflict between the tribal cult and the Shakta-Buddhist cult. The Saivites were clever and the outcome of the conflict was their success in establishing full control over the zone. This is an interesting example of Ksatraization in ancient India. Probably this earlier conflict in Ekamraka and silent effort of the Saivites to control the zone

continued in popular memory and the legendary account was formed when Siva was well worshipped there after the conflicting phase of the Chalukya king, Gauda king and the Kamarupa king in the beginning of the 7th century A.D. Later on the story of the slaughter of the demon Gajasura by Siva was symbolically used in the traditional account. Even if Tribhubaneswar was the name of the deity of the Kshetra during the time of Sasanka, the name Krittivasa became very popular and prominent.

The *linga* is a natural stone, Saivites accepted it as Svayambhu Lingam and declared it as Krittivasa. The name became more popular after 7th century A.D. when the place was completely under the Saivas. It may also be contended that the place was called Krittivasa for the growth of the Kritti trees and there was the natural stone an object of worship of the tribals¹⁴. Hence the Saivites got a point for the attribution of the name Krttivasa to the name of the deity of the zone after it was acquired by them easily. In course of time the shadow of the defeat of the demon Gajasura by Siva and the conflict of the religious groups in Ekamraka led to the formation of a legendary account on Krittivasa which was incorporated in Ekamra Purana. The Ekamra Purana refers to a tribal priest in the Lingaraja temple called *Badu* (born from Sabara mother and Saiva father)¹⁶. It refers to the unmistakable indication of the tribal domination of the area originally for which even after the Ksetra came under the Saivites they were bound to accept a set of the original worshippers of the natural stone (Saivite *Svayambhu lingam*) in their system of worship. The attribution of the name Krittivasa to the presiding deity of Ekamraka and the right of the Badus in the daily worship of the deity clearly indicate that once worshipped by the

Sabarasa the Kritti-clad natural stone at Ekamraka became famous as the *Krttivasa-Tribhubaneswara*. The Ekamra Purana contains the shadow of that interesting part of the deity. Krittivasa was the chief centre of worship at Ekamraka and the deity Krittivasa became well known as Krttivasa Bhattaraka/ Krttivasesvara. During the reign of the imperial Ganga king after A.D. 1278 this Ekamraka Saiva Kshetra became famous as Bhubaneswar by that time Saiva Pithas were erected in the whole area of the Ekamraka Bhubana.¹⁷ The Ganga-Gajapati inscriptions, Ekamra Purana and Sarala Mahabharata refer to this Bhubaneswar.¹⁸

The story of Lord Lingaraja-its Shape and Size:

The temple dedicated to Lord Lingaraja at Bhubaneswar dominates the landscape for miles together. Built in about the middle of the 11th century A.D. it rightly denoted as the best representation of Kalingan type of Architecture. It consists of a high curvilinear tower (Vimana), an assembly hall (Jagamohana), a dancing hall (Natamandapa) and hall of offerings (Bhogamandapa). Each structure increasing in the height to its predecessor. It has several smaller shrines gathering around.

The Linga of Lord Lingaraja is not like the common vertical column but a huge piece of granite having a ridge at centre. Its diameter is 8 feet. The line at the top separates the black colour of Vishnu and the white colour of Siva. The dust colour represents the presence of holy rivers Ganga and Yamuna. A popular legend as regards to the formation and present shape of the *Linga* is narrated by the temple priests. It runs like this;

Originally there used to be a *sphatika Linga*¹⁹ with inherent power to turn all metal objects into gold or costly jewels. This caused immense scramble for possession among the priests. When the matter was brought to the notice of the king, he arranged a stone covering over this linga. This not only preserved the efficacy of the linga for a pretty long time but also prevented the greedy Pujakas (priests) from putting everything metal over it to turn in to gold. What we find at present is nothing but the stone covering over it. It is believed that, when Kalapahada invaded Odisha and destroyed Hindu monuments in the entire coastal tract, the priest with a view to save the deity from the hands of this religious bigot covered the linga with a large quantity of straw so that Kalapahada would think that there is nothing except a huge quantity of paddy stored therein. The trick produced desired results. Kalapahada entered the temple, saw the heavy stock of straw and turned his attention from the Garbhagriha to the minor deities and Parsvadevatas placed around the main shrine. The infuriated mind of the religious bigot thus caused immense damage to the priceless image of Ganesh, Kartikeya and Parvati. The minor shrines within the premises and the large number of *alaskanyas* on the outer faces of the main shrine were not spared. But the main deity could survive his destructive hands which worked with a feat of vengeance. Thus, Kalapahada left the place leaving the Sivalinga covered huge quantity of straw.

Therefore, it is clear that, Bhubaneswar had been a place of cultural continuation from pre historic to modern day capital. It has rich heritage with its valued legends and tradition match with archaeological evidences. The Saivite religious tradition which is general in Ekamra Kshetra or

Bhubaneswar and made a culmination in Lord Tribhubaneswar or Lingaraja.

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Umakanta Moharana, Lecturer in History, Vesaja Patel College, Hemgiri, Duduka, Dist: Sundargarh.