



Banapur as a Tourist Attraction

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Orissa is the treasure house of cultures and customs, religions and traditions, languages and literatures, art and architecture as well as scenic beauty and wild life which bear the essence of India. Orissa occupies an important place in preservation of the wonders of her magical land secretly from the intrusions of the cultural outside world.

For the connoisseurs, Banapur is a town holding significant place in the historical and the cultural ferments. Banapur is 8 kms from Balugaon and 104 kms from Bhubaneswar is situated in 85°10' east longitude and 19° 47' north latitude in the extreme southwest of the Khurda sub-division, one of the great religious centers of Orissa. The area of Banapur is a promising site for the discovery of archaeological remains going back to the 1st century B.C. Once it was the capital of the Sailodbhava dynasty, responsible for the construction of the early group of temples at Bhubaneswar.

Daksa Prajapati or Daksesvara Siva Temple

One of the best preserved temple of the first half of the 13th century A.D and a fine specimen of extraordinary artistic excellence of Orissan art is the Daksa Prajapati or Daksesvara Siva Temple at Banapur.

Daksa Prajapati Siva Temple belongs to the Ganga Period. During the Ganga period the evolution of the temple architecture and sculpture of Orissa reached the climax. The temple is situated in a compound surrounded by low walls facing on east-west axial alignments, the plain *Natamandira* and *Bhoga mandapa* being later additions. The *Deula* and *Jagamohana* go side by side. *Natamandira* and *Bhogamandapa* are build on a high platform whereas the *Deula* and *Jagamohana* rise directly from the ground. Within the compound there are also numerous late structures including *Pidha* temple and stepped well directly to the south.

This temple attracts the tourists due to its keen beautiful sculpture i.e., *Gaja-Vidala*, Female figures, *Parsvadevatas*, *Dikpalas* and other minor images etc. The decorative female figures depicted in the mood of lassitude are known as *Alasa Kanyas*. They are shown in various roles such as holding a child, looking into the mirror, taking out anklets, playing on musical instruments etc. On the walls of the temple can be seen the king with all his majesty, soldiers, *Siksadana* scenes, dancers, hunters etc. Royal tigers also appear on the walls of temples. Erotic sculptures from an important aspect in the decorative programme. Generally Kama is depicted standing between his two

concerts, Rati and Priti, one of whom holds a bow and the other one arrow. The animals represented on temples include elephant, horse, camel, boar, monkey etc. The scroll work called dali or lata, is extremely beautiful and varied in design. Scroll works locally known as Phulla-Lata, Patra-Lata, Vana-Lata, Phasa-Lata, Chakri-Lata, Jiva-Lata etc.

In this temple; the *Parsvadevata* in the niches are Ganesa, Kartikeya and Parvati. Outside the door, Gaja-Laxmi in *Padmasana* appears in the center of the lintel. *Naga* the eight-seated *Dikpalas* noticed on the *Khakharamundis*. The eight-seated *Dikpalas* are Indra, Agni, Yama, Varuna, Vayu, Kubera, Isana and Nriti.

The *Mastaka* is composed of the *Beki*, *Amlaka*, *Kalasa* and *Ayudha*. The huge *Amlakas* as crowning members are supported by *Dopichasimhas* and above the *Kanikas* four armed deities seated over the *Raha*.

The *Sandhithala* connects the *Deula* with *Jagamohana* decorated with images. Among them Bhairava aspect, Benign aspect, Nataraja image, Varaha image, four-armed Siva in the south and north *Sandhithala*. Like main temple, *Jagamohana* is also decorated with beautiful sculptures.

Inside the temple compound Budhima Mandir faces north, Budhalinga Mandir faces west and Mahavir Mandir faces east. These temples are added in the later period. In the right side of the temple compound the image of Hanuman is decorated with ornaments. He is holding a *Gada* in right hand and hill in left hand. The image Lokesvara which is in the compound was very likely brought from Achutarajpur village, a famous Buddhist site of the locality. There is an excavated well inside the temple premises and an image of Ganga-devi in sitting posture.

Bhagavati Temple

Bhagavati, the presiding deity of Banapur, is one of the twelve famous *Saktipithas* as mentioned by Sarala Dasa in his *Oriya Mahabharata*. The present temple and his *Jagamohana* are said to have been constructed by the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri.

The temple stands on the edge of a deep pool within a high enclose wall. Temple and *Jagamohana* are built in *Pidha* order and thickly



plastered with lime mortar, later a new-pillared *Mandapa* has been added to the front of the *Jagamohana* for convenience of the devotees. The niches of the inner wall of the compound contain loose sculptures of Ganesha, Kartikeya and Parvati and Chamunda. An image of Mahisamardini Durga locally known as Bhagavati is worshiped in the *sanctum* of the main temple. The deity appears to be eight armed figures of Mahisamardini Durga. Of the eight hands in the four on the right objects are sword, spear, short dagger, and arrow and the hands of the left side display shield, bow, conch and disc. The chopped off head of the buffalo demon is lying on the lotus pedestal. She is adorned with decorative ornaments. Ganesha and Parvati images are kept in southern and northern niches respectively as *Parsvadevatas*. The Parvati image is locally worshipped as Bhubaneswari. A separate shrine has been constructed in front of the *Jagamohana* for worship of Goddess Polaksuni, which is an

image of Mahisamardini Durga. Another image of Chamunda is kept near the Polakasuni image.

Tikarai Temple

In the Tikarai temple near the Tehsil Office there are images of very early date. The presiding deity of this temple is Mahisamardini Durga, locally worshipped as Tikarai. Another image is worshipped as Tarini or Ugratara. The Goddess is seated on Lalitasana on a well-designed lotus pedestal. Her right foot is also perched on a small lotus. Her right hand is in the Varada-mudra and she holds the stalk of the lotus in the left hand being placed over the knee. The corresponding female attendant of the left side is Ekajata seated in *Maharajalila* pose on a lotus with a fierce mane and hair rising upwards like flames, the pot bellied dwarfish deity holds in her right hand a *Katari*, the skull cup in the left hand being broken. The Torana in the background is fitted with a *Makara* head on either side of horizontal bar and a trifoiled arch at the top. The inner facet of the arch is relieved with diamonds, each alternating with, a disc. Artistic finish and iconographic features of this image can safely take it back to the 10th century A.D.

Fairs and Festivals

Banapur is not only an ideal choice for monuments and other attractions but also for her colourful fairs and festivals. *Makarasanranti* is celebrated with gusto in mid-January when the sun enters the orbit of Capricorn. Sun-god is worshipped with great flavour and enthusiasm by one and all. The festival can be enjoyed at Banapur in Daksa-Prajapati Siva Temple.

Panchu-Dola or Holi is the most popular and coloured festival of Banapur celebrated on Phalgun-Purnima (March-April) and a day succeeding. Based on the romantic plays of

Radha and Krishna people converge on the streets with their idols on gayly decorated "Vimanas" singing devotional songs in their praise and throwing, colour powders and waters on each other.

Durga puja symbolising the victory of good over evil is celebrated in October. Bhagavati temple is famous for *Durgapuja*. Pilgrims from different corners of Orissa enjoy this festival at Banapur.

Cuisine

The most popular is fish of both salt and fresh water. Prawns and crabs, which form delicious dishes for the consumers. Cakes (*Pithas*) of powdered grams like *Chakuli*, *Kakara*, *Manda*, *Arisa* etc. are also popular.

Handicrafts

In Orissa, Banapur is the famous center of cane furniture. Here the chairs, baskets, garden swings, and household items are made with cane. A variety of baskets with different types of cane are made. Mats of bamboo straps are quite common.

One of the important places for excursion near Banapur is Chilika lake. Nestling in the heart of coastal Orissa, the blue lagoon, Chilika, which is India's biggest inland lake and one of the stirring places where one would like to go again and again. The migrating birds of Chilika make it a tourist paradise in winter season. Shaped like a pear the lake covers 1,100 sq.miles. It is listed as the Asia's largest brackish water lake according to Ramsar Convention of 1971. The Chilika lake covers an area of about 450 sq. ml spreading to a length of 72 kms from south to north and breadth of 16 kms sided by a long bar of sandy ridge of the sea in east and the National Highway in the east.

A number of islands dot the expanse of the lake with colourful names such as Nalban Island, Birds Island, Honeymoon Island etc.

Kalijai

Another rocky island is the Kalijai, home the Goddess Kalijai which commemorates to the tragedy enacted in the past. Kalijai was newly married and was being taken by boat across the lake to her husband who lived in the Parikuda-Maluda Islands in the eastern shore towards the sea. A sudden storm, which is common in the lake in the spring dashed the boat against a rock and everybody was saved except the bride. Since then her ghost is said to be haunting the Island. There is a temple on the rock, which is visited by pilgrims. It is also a picnic spot. A huge fair is held on Makara Sankranti annually in the month of January. Maa Kalijai is venerated by the local boatman.

Parikud

A large estate with an area of 67 1/3 sq. miles was held by the Raja of Parikuda. From Parikuda one can also enjoy the Chilika lake.

Maluda

Inside the Chilika lake Maluda Island is in the eastern sea shore towards the sea. Birds are used to come here during rainy season from Siberia and Man Sarobar in the Himalayas. The common teal is the smallest of the migratory ducks to have flown across the trans-Himalayan range. Egrets of various sizes were busy, scooping insects and frogs. Snipes and sand pipers who feed in the open in broad daylight are a delightful sight. Avocets with their long, slender and upturned black beaks and long necks could be seen in plenty. One can enjoy the Maluda Island by boating, which is available from Barakul on the Chilika.

The Chilka is an ideal place for aquatic biological research. There are immense

varieties of insects and fishes. Amphibians like snakes and frogs are many. Bird life can be studied by itself. Sunset and sunrise are memorable experience here.

Satapada

The simplicity of nature comes in different forms at Satapada which is quite perfect for a short vacation. Dolphins are a great attraction as are the migratory birds. Good connectivity and facilities that come for nominal price make it an ideal choice for a weekend trip. With natural charm of being located near the confluence of Chilika and the ocean and its proximity to Puri (50 km.) it is an ideal spot to enjoy Chilika lake. From Satapada, one and half hour boat ride would take the tourist to Rajhans Island and two and half hour ride would take to Nalaban Island, which forms the core of the Chilika sanctuary with its varied flora and fauna. Since last five-six years this spot is a major tourist attraction because of the development of a Dolphin Center.

Barakul

About 5 km from Balugaon on the National Highway No.5 is Barakul from where the scenic beauty of the Chilika can be better enjoyed. At Barakul there is an Inspection Bungalow of Works Department on the bank of the lake, which has since been converted to a *Panthanivas* from where the beauty of Chilika Lake can also be better enjoyed.

Salia Dam

At a distance about 14 kms to the west of the Banapur the Salia Dam has been constructed amidst a picturesque site. Here one can enjoy the beauty of the nature. The total length of the river is about 30 miles. The dam has been constructed in the catchment area which is about 69,000 acres connecting two

hills on both sides and serves as a minor irrigation project.

Bhusandapur

Bhusandapur, a village on the way to Balugaon near Banapur is famous for the shrine of Ugratara amidst picturesque surrounding. A four-handed Chamunda is worshipped as Ugratara believed to be the titular goddess of the Gajapati kings of Orissa. The place is an ideal place for picnic. The place is connected by a good motorable road.

Achitarajapur

Achitarajapur is about 1.5 km from the Banapur town in the district of Puri. Here on mound of ruins, the obviously of a circular *Stupa*, stands modern temple, on which several ancient Buddhist images have been fixed including the Buddha image.

Approach and Accommodation

Banapur is 5 kms northwest of the Balugaon town and 100 kms from Bhubaneswar. Bhubaneswar is reachable by different modes of transport such as air, sea and road.

Bhubaneswar is the nearest Airport at a distance of 100 kms away. Balugaon town is situated on National Highway No.5. This town is connected by South Eastern Railway. The Calcutta-Chennai rail route touches Chilikalake at Balugaon, Chilika, Khalikote and Rambha. The Chennai bound National Highway No.5 linking Calcutta, Cuttack-Bhubaneswar-Balugaon-Barkul-Rambha-Berhampur and Visakhapatnam runs along the lake. OTDC and other private tour operators provide luxury, coaches and cars from Puri and Bhubaneswar both (A/c and Non A/c) at reasonable rates. Taxi and auto-rickshaws are also available at Balugaon for Banapur and other excursion sites.

Besides motor launches of OTDC Ltd. are available at Barakul, and Rambha, and of the Revenue Department at Balugaon, country boats can be hired from Private operators at these places and Satapada as well.

Orissa Tourism Development Corporation organizes water sports in Chilika at the Water Sports Complex, located at Barkul. A Naval Training Center has been established near Chilika. It specially attracts the tourists those who are interested in the adventure tourism. Other tourists also like this sports because they enjoy the spirit of a sportsman.

There are various hotels for accommodation of tourists like : Ashoka Hotel, Balugaon, OTDC Panthanivas, Barakul (Non A/c and A/c), NAC Guest house, Banapur, Yatrivas, at Satapada and OTDC's Panthanivas, Rambha.

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