

Kuruma: A Lesser Known Buddhist Site of Orissa

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The ancient Buddhist site of Kuruma is situated 8 kms to the south-east of the famous Sun Temple at Konark in the district of Puri. On the top portion of the very site there is a modern temple which houses three Buddhist images viz. crowned Buddha seated in Bhumisparsa mudra, Padmapani Avalokitesvara and Revanta. These three images are jointly worshipped as 'Yamadharmas' by local inhabitants. Because of the close proximity of the famous Sun Temple at Konark, it is an important site from tourism point of view. Prior to the exploration work conducted by the Orissa State Archaeology, Sri Brajabandhu Dash, a local school teacher has collected many rich antiquities, which were exhibited at Kuruma in 1972.

Before going to discuss about the excavated site of Kuruma, it would be better to throw some light on Buddhism in Orissa. According to Prof. Romila Thapar - "Buddhism was a product of socio-intellectual movement of 6th c. B.C." After the death of Buddha, his followers were divided into two sects such as 'Hinayana' and 'Mahayana'. The latest phase is 'Vajrayana' which is believed to be originated from Orissa. The contribution of Orissa to these three distinct schools of Buddhism is striking. Especially the contribution to the last school is quite amazing.

It is a matter of pride for Orissa that two caravan traders named 'Tapassu' and 'Bhallika' are stated to have been the first lay disciples of Buddha.

After the terrible 'Kalinga War' in 261 B.C., 'Chandasoka' became 'Dharmasoka'. Then emperor Asoka started the new spiritual imperialism 'Dharma Vijaya' based on peace and fraternity. Buddhism received the stimulus



under his patronage. It is believed that 'Tissa' came to Kalinga and a monastery called 'Bhojakagiri Vihara' was built for him by his brother, emperor Asoka. *Dathavamsa*, the Buddhist text from Ceylon speaks of the transfer of the sacred tooth relic of Buddha to Ceylon from Dantapura, the then capital of Kalinga, where it was previously placed. Orissa remained a stronghold of 'Hinayana' Buddhism upto the reign of Harshavardhana and it is clearly evident from the story of

King Harsha being challenged by the 'Hinayana' monks of Orissa, for his benevolence shown to the monks of Nalanda Vihara.

Towards 7th/8th century Tantric Buddhism was a dominant force in Orissa as well as in other parts of India. Interestingly a Tibetan work named *pag-sam-jonzang* refers to 'Oddiyana' (Orissa) as the land of the Tantric Buddhism. In later period the Vaishnava literature of Orissa incorporated many aspects of Tantric Buddhism in a modified way. Subsequently Buddha was regarded as the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. After deplastering work of Jagannath Temple of Puri, a beautiful dhyani Buddha image came to limelight.

Kuruma and its Neighbouring Area

The mound of bricks which was excavated by State Department of Archaeology attracts the attention of the visitors is seen by the side of a tank called 'Dharma Pokhari'(tank of Dharma) at one end of the village. Prior to this excavation, a stone slab containing the beautiful figure of Buddha was lying on the bank of this tank. Later on, this image was replaced and enshrined in a newly built shed. Besides the Buddha image, other two images were found near the tank as they were placed by the side of the said image. One of these figures is identified with 'Heruka'. Local people call this image as 'Dharma' (the Sun God) and another image is named as 'Yama'(the God of Death). An image *dhyani* Buddha was recovered from the 'Dharma Pokhari' in the year 1960. At that time the tank underwent an extensive renovation work by Government aid. Now this image is housed in the Orissa State Museum. Debala Mitra informs that the place name 'Kuruma' reminds of the 'Kuruma Stupa' of Odradesha

illustrated on the manuscript No. 1643 (dated 1015 A.D.) of the Cambridge University Library.

Near Kuruma a village named 'Abdan' is located which is 8 km. from Konark. In this village a famous goddess called 'Chitresvari' is being worshipped. It is said that, the goddess was brought by a sailor from Ceylon and was handed over to the then ruling chief of 'Golara'. In the temple, goddess 'Chitresvari' is seen seated on a lotus with cross-legged position. The petals of the lotus are neatly carved and bears the name of the doner, 'Nrusingha Charan Samantara' in early Oriya script.

The famous village 'Chaurasi'(literally means 84) is situated in Nimapara Police Station area of Puri District, which is 10 km from Kuruma. The sacred Prachi river flows by its northern and southern sides. The famous temple of Varahi stands in this village.

Sculptures of Buddhist Pantheon at Kuruma

The beautiful Buddha image depicted on the stone slab is unique of its kind in whole Orissa. Here Buddha is seated cross-legged with right hand in Bhumisparsha mudra while the left hand placed over the left knee. A profusely carved necklace is adorning the neck of the image. The image wears a beautiful crown which is unique for its plasticity.

The Avalokitesvara image is seated on a lotus. The petals of the flower are well carved. The lotus seat or *padmasana* is over an apron of the height of 10". The height of the stone slab containing the image is 7' and its breadth is 3'. Another image of Buddhist pantheon represents 'Revanta'.

Excavation of the Site

The trial excavation of the site at Kuruma was conducted by State Department of

Archaeology in 1974-75. An ancient brick wall measuring 29 meters in length was exposed in the western side of the mound. This brick wall consists of 7 layers of brick of the average size of 22 x 17 x 7 cm. The excavation was carried upto the average depth of 3 meters. Contemporary brick structures of the average size of 4.25 meters in length and 1.85 meters in height have been recovered from the two trenches. The composition of the two common layers underlining the structure are mostly of hard clay and brick bats. After digging upto the depth of 2.49 meters, three ovens, rectangular in shape were discovered in the ground level. The discovery of such ovens in one place probably indicates the habitation area of the concerned period. The antiquities recovered are mainly pottery of red ware and beads. The present findings have been tentatively assigned to c. 9th/10th century A.D.

Kuruma is much more important for its strategic location, due to its proximity to Konark. Not only it is important from archaeological angle but also from tourism point of view.

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Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik inaugurating the Biju Patnaik State Police Academy at Ransinghpur, Bhubaneswar on 5.3.2005. Shri Biswabhusan Harichandan, Minister, Rural Development, Industries & Law and Shri Prasanna Kumar Patsani, M.P. are also present.