

## Cultural Profile of Khurda Kingdom

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The origin of Bhoi dynasty and formation of Khurda kingdom can be traced back to those days when the power of Suryavansi Gajapatis declined with the breaking of the Orissan Empire. But all these happened under the force of circumstances. The degradation of administration under the Suryavansi kings were slow and gradual. The first ruler of the dynasty Kapilendra Dev was an able ruler and empire builder. His son and successor Purusottam Dev, though was a great defender of foes, lacked proper vision. He was followed by Prataprudra Dev, who was largely responsible for the downfall of his own empire. He bought peace by selling his freedom. His patronage to Vaishnavism became instrumental for devastation of military power, giving a scope for decline and dissolution. The death of Prataprudra, weak successions to throne, internal squabbles and foreign interventions brought disaster. The first two weak successors were Kalua Dev and Kakharua Dev, who were sons of Prataprudra Dev. Taking advantage of their weakness, Govinda Vidyadhar, the Prime Minister became the de facto ruler of Orissa. But he was followed by still more weaker rulers, like Chakrapratap, Narasingha and Raghuram, who were killed one after another due to acquisition of power and treachery of Mukunda Harichandan, Commander of Cuttack Fort. After a political assassination, Mukunda Dev captured the throne. But his

authority was challenged by another minister and General, Danardana Vidyadhara. Meanwhile, the Afghan intrusion to Orissa made the situation more critical. However, Mukunda Dev could retain the power. After the death of Mukunda Dev, Ramachandra Dev; son of Danardana emerged as the natural leader and retrieved the lost glory of his father. He founded a new kingdom and a new dynasty. The dynasty is known as 'Bhoi Dynasty' and the kingdom as 'Khurda Kingdom'.

The suitable place that was chosen by Ramachandra Dev-I for his capital was Khurda, which had natural and strategic importance. It was situated in between Puri and Cuttack. During this period, the Khurda kingdom was covering an extensive area of 13,935 sq. miles that was stretching from river Mahanadi in the North to the borders of Khimidi in the South and from Khandapada Daspalla region in the West to present Jagannath Road in the East. So geographically, it was forming the Gateway between the North and South. It was therefore, during the period of Ramachandra Dev-I that, Khurda kingdom became the largest territorial entity in Orissa. The territorial disintegration of Khurda began during the rule of Ramachandra Dev-II by passing over of areas spreading from Tikali Raghunathpur to the Chilika lake to Nizam of Hyderabad. Finally, it was during the reign of Birakishore Dev that, major portions of Khurda

kingdom, beginning with four Parganas like Rahanga, Limbai, Sirai and Chabiskuda to Chauda or fourteen Garjats were ceded to the Marathas.

From 1568 to 1817 AD, during the long period of 250 years, Khurda witnessed the rule of thirteen kings among whom twelve were from the Bhoi dynasty. However, first the Mughal, followed by the Maratha and finally the British rule over Orissa had its repercussions on Khurda kingdom. It was attacked several times by different Muslim Subedars. Especially, Srimandir of Puri and Khurda fort were the targets of the invaders. During the reign of Purusottam Dev, Mukunda Dev-I and Ramachandra Dev-II, the kingdom was severely affected by the incursions of the Mughals. In many cases, it is found that, the rulers had to leave the capital for a temporary period to save their lives from the atrocities of the enemies. Finally, Khurda passed to the British administration during the reign of Mukunda Dev-II and his able advisor Jayi Rajguru.

In spite of repeated Muslim attacks, whenever the kings got the opportunity of enjoying peace and tranquility, they spent their resources in building forts, temples and other monuments, which are now existing in and around Khurda in dilapidated conditions.

Balabhadra Dev, the Bhoi ruler, erected a fort in a place, 16 kms to the south-east of Khurda which was named after him as Balabhadrapur garh. It worked as a second line of defence to the main fort at Khurda. The Khurda fort itself was reconstructed by the last Bhoi ruler, Mukunda Dev-II. It is now in ruins. Some traces of its walls and the ramparts are still remaining. Similarly, Lalita Devi, mother of Birakishore Dev had constructed a Vishnu temple along with many Mandapas inside the temple compound. Birakishore Dev himself was

responsible for renovating the old royal buildings at Puri. Divyasingha Dev-II brought the Aruna Stambha from Konark and installed it in front of Singhadwara of Puri Jagannath temple. Ramachandra Dev-II was instrumental for the construction of a mosque at Kaipadar. Because he gave shelter to Bokhari Baba, who became famous as a saint subsequently attracting admirers both from Muslim and Hindu communities.

Within the Khurda kingdom, there existed a good number of forts, temples and Muslim monuments which directly or indirectly carry the glory of the Bhoi kings. On the top of the Aragarh hill, a Buddhist Chaitya was as watch tower to determine the movements of the enemy forces. Commanders and Chiefs, stationed at Ghatikia garh, Kalupada garh, Kanjia garh, Rathipur garh and Rameswar garh along with many others actively supported the Khurda kings at the time of their crises. Therefore, they played a very dominant role during this period under discussion. The temple and mosque architectures of the Khurda kingdom were really note-worthy. The Hindu temples were mainly constructed in *Pancharatha Rekha* order, with all its characteristics of *Jagamohana*, *Natamandir*, *Pabhaga*, *Vimanika*, *Angasikhara* and *Amalaka*. Every temple were also consisted of the images of *Dwarapalas*, *Parswadevatas* and *Navagraha* icons. The Islamic mosque, mainly seen in and around Pipili were regarded as *Pir Asthanas*. Those were constructed during the reign of Aurangzeb, the contemporary of Divyasingha Dev-I. The architectural style of the Muslim shrines were by and large the same having the arches, the minarets and the domes. In many cases we find a tank existing in the close vicinity of the mosque.

The rulers of Khurda kingdom were also great patron of art and culture. Ramachandra

Dev-I provided his patronage to literary activities also. It was during his reign that the famous work *Durgastab Chandrika* was written. He restored the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra in Srimandir, which were earlier hidden during the Orissa invasion of Kalapahara. Narasingha Dev-I revived the rites and rituals and ceremonies of Srimandir, which were not observed for a long time due to constant Muslim attacks on the temple. He also set up Neelachakra at top of the temple of Lord Jagannath which was blown earlier due to a cyclone. During the reign of Hari Krishna Dev, Hinduism was promoted. Many literary works, mostly epical were composed for this purpose. Divyasingha Dev-II organized *Jhulana Jatra*. Except these, some rulers of Khurda kingdom carried out the plastering and white washing of the Jagannath temple of Puri.

The cultural and constructional activities of the rulers of Khurda signify their ardent interest

for the promotion of learning and building of monuments. But due to repeated Muslim invasions, they could not undertake the building activities upto their expectation. They were successful only to a certain extent. They have left their contributions in shape of forts, temples and mosques of the kingdom. But it is a matter of regret that, most of these forts and religious shrines are in ruins now. Although, Orissa State Archeology has declared some of these shrines as protected monuments, under the Act of 1956 (2), still these remains need to be repaired and renovated to retain the cultural heritage of Khurda intact.

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### **EXTERNALLY AIDED PROJECT (EAP)**

Orissa Tribal Empowerment and Livelihood Programme (OTLEP) has been launched on 2nd October-2004. It has an outlay of Rs.430 crores and is a DFID-IFAD-WFP assisted Project. The programme aims at empowerment of tribals, providing them Livelihood Support and Food Security through Watershed mode approach.

In the first phase, ten blocks in four districts namely Koraput, Kalahandi, Kandhamal and Gajapati are being covered. The programme is being implemented through NGOs who have already been given the schedule of activities to be completed within a particular time frame. At present bases line survey in the villages is going on through participatory approach.

During the Year 2004-05 an amount of Rs.83 lakhs has been spent by the end of January-2005, according to the sources of ST & SC Development Department, Government of Orissa.