



Saivism in Odisha

Dr. Gourishankar Tripathy

Origin of Saivism traced back to the period of Harappa and Mohenjodaro centered round with Vedic civilization. In India it is one of the oldest forms of religions. From very early times, it would have existed in ODISHA. As attested to by archaeological monuments, origin of Saivism in the then Orissa can be traced back to 4th-5th century A.D. with its changing fortune in history. By the 4th-5th century A.D. Saivism became the dominant form of religion of Orissa when both Jainism and Buddhism have receded back to the background.

In the Bhaskareswar temple at Bhubaneswar, it has been observed a huge Siva Linga which was originally a part of Asokan Pillar built before Christ. From the close proximity of this temple a fragmentary Lion Capital was dug out by the famous Historian Prof. K.C. Panigrahi now in the museum at Bhubaneswar. On the body of the Lingam and the Lion Capital there are distinct evidences to show that both were destroyed deliberately. On the Lion Capital there are ample evidences to prove that such destruction took place in the 5th century A.D, "as there is a line of inscription in the script of the 5th Century A.D." After heavy chiseling the pillar was converted into a Siva Linga. In front of the temple, the capital after deliberate breakage was buried within a very short distance from the Lingam. It appears that there was a violent struggle between the Buddhist

and Saivas during that period at the manner in which a Buddhist monument was converted into a phallic emblem. A tradition seems to have been found in Ekamra Purana where it has been described the history of Bhubaneswar from the orthodox stand-point. There was a deadfall war which is said to have taken place between demons and Gods on the bank of the river Gandhabati. This river is now known as Gang flowing in the close proximity of Bhubaneswar. In this war demons were defeated and the Gods came victorious with the help of Mahadev Siva. By a traditional account, it is supported by archaeological evidence. If we conclude that the 5th century A.D. was the period of conflict, we shall not be far from truth that the Buddhism was defeated by Saivism. Hence there was revival of Hinduism in India in 5th century A.D. under the great Gupta Emperors of the north, and the same revival took place in the then Orissa.

We may also assign a number of rock-cut caves to the period when Ashokan Pillar was destroyed. Till now very little attention was received by the scholars so far. In the vicinity of the temple of Bhaskareswar these caves are still to be found, mostly to the west only. On the edges of an immense lateritic quarry, they have been excavated. To the south east of the place, gateways of Sisupal Garh stand upright. Pancha Pandab Gumpha is the most remarkable group



of caves which are still in a tolerably good condition. Consisting of three spacious chambers with spacious verandahs, with the Bhaskareswar temple, the proximity of *gumphas* clearly indicates that they were intended for the abodes of the Saiva ascetics.

To practise penance, the Saiva ascetics lived in caves. From the archaeological remains at Dengaposi in Keonjhar district, this is also an evidence. The Saiva ascetics were attracted towards the natural rock shelters in the hills in two neighboring villages by name Dengaposi and Sitabhangi. In the 5th- 6th century A.D. it is proved by a line of writing in the tempore paintings of this place that these shelters were the abodes of the ascetics practically assigned to this period which represent a royal procession. It is also evident from the rock inscriptions, that the Saiva ascetics lived with their disciples in these caves. The ascetics worshipped to a famous Mukhelingam which is still found to be there.

That the Gupta period in the then Orissa was marked by Saiva ascendancy finds much evidence in the archaeological remains of Dengaposi and Sitabhangi certifying the caves near the Bhaskareswar temple which furnish us the ample proofs to a considerable extent. It may be pressurized that its triumphant process may be continued in this century also as in the past though the future of Saivism in Orissa in 6th century A.D. cannot be traced.

As is evident from the Ganjam plate of Madhava Raj-II of 619 A.D. seems to have given definite turn to the ascendancy of Saivism in the then Orissa in the first part of the seventh century A.D. when SASANKA, the king of GOUDA, was the overlord of Kongada.

He was a follower of Saivism had been indicated by his coins circulated and he was represented as an enemy of Buddhism by whom a number of Buddhist monument had been

demolished completely. In the revival of Hinduism, it seems he played a great part in stamping out Buddhism. Connected with Saiva Shrine of Bhubaneswar is the four sacred books a persistent tradition had been recovered which state that SASANKA built a Saiva temple in the Shrine of Tribhubaneswar who ruled up to Kalinga. However, the temple built by Sasanka could not be identified. We cannot confirm the literary evidences of the sacred texts, since his activities at Bhubaneswar are not attested to by more authentic evidences. With the progress of Saivism at Bhubaneswar and Orissa historians raise strong presumptions that Sasanka had something to do for this.

SASANKA is not a mere traditional figure like Indradyumn and Indrabhuti. Known from his inscriptions, coins, he was a historical king who had been supported by Yhan Chuang's account and Harsha_Charity of BANA. By unquestioned epigraphical records, his overlordship over the then Kalinga has been proved. This evidence cannot be lightly brushed aside when the sacred texts credit him with the building of temple at Bhubaneswar.

Ekamra Puran defines SASANKA on the tradition as follows.

“With his mind fixed on none (except on me), My devotee Sasanka the lord of the earth, will rule a portion of the earth extending up to Kalinga.”

With the king SASANKA of Gauda, therefore we have identified with the SASANKA of the tradition.

It is the Pasupata sect of Saivism that had a period of ascendancy in the then Orissa, during the period of Bhauma rule which started from 736 A.D. The first Pasupata teacher “LAKULI” was born in the first century A.D. as *KAYA rohana* which is the modern KARVAN in the defunct state of Baroda. He was considered to



be the last incarnation of the God Siva. Out of his four disciples at Mathura *Kusika* established himself where as Garga at Somanath in Kathiawad. On the early group of temples at Bhubaneswar the frequent occurrence of the Lakuli images has a great significance on their origin.

Such monuments were associated Pasupatism had been indicated on the early group of temples having Lakuli images. That they are connected with Pasupata sect is known from their names of some temples of Bhubaneswar. Parsurameswar temple proves that its original name is Parsurameswar from an inscription on the Jagamohan of the temple.

One of the sacred texts Kapilsamhita and the name of the temple Kapileswar are associated with the name Kapil who was one of the Pasupata teachers. Temples like Nakuleswar and Mitreswar are also connected with names of Pasupata teachers. The famous Pasupata teachers were Nakuleswar, Kapil, Parasara and Mitra.

A custom which was observed by the followers of Pasupata sect had been followed by the oldest Matha of Bhubaneswar. To set up a Lingam to represent a dead teacher it was a practice with the sect to erect a temple for it. In the Bharati Matha of Bhubaneswar, the same practice is still being followed. A Gurvayatana has sprung up within its compound as a result of this practice.

As many as fifteen miniature temples of sand stone and laterite are now there in the compound, each of which contains a Lingam. In the open space and the niche, a number of Lingams are to be found also.

Many more temples still be buried in the kitchen garden if credence is given to the statement of the Mahunta of the Matha. It can reasonably be concluded that the origin of the

Matha goes to the time of the earliest standing temples, since each of the Lingam represents a generation of teachers. In the seventh chapter of the Ekamra Purana this tradition gains ground from a tradition already mentioned. That Yama, gave a splendid *matha* to a Pasupatacharya who lived in the close vicinity of the temple, who was the builder of the temple. To represent their dead teachers it was a practice with the Pasupatas to set up Lingams. For setting up innumerable Siva Lingam in Bhubaneswar these practice seems to have led in the minds of the people. For increasing the number of temples in Bhubaneswar, Pasupatism is responsible as described in Ekamra Purana.

In the early shrines of Bhubaneswar, the influence of the Pasupata sect can thus be traced. But for the origin of this dead, it is difficult to know from where it has come. A branch at Mathura connected with two early shrines at Bhubaneswar is found in the names of the successors of Kusika, a disciple of Lakuli. It appears from a study of the existing temples at Bhubaneswar that Pasupatism, Tantrism, Saktism and Saivism all became inseparably mixed up. A strange amalgam is formed in the early medieval period of the then ODISHA due to this strange mix up. Such a strange thing came to pass in the field of religion in the early medieval period not only in ODISHA but also in the other parts of India also.

With Pasupatism it is true that Saktism became mixed up in the then ORISSA. In its scripture of vital temple a strange amalgamation of Saktism, Mahayana Buddhism and Saivism assigned to the Bhauma period has been mixed up with the touch of time.

This vital temple bears such images like Lakulisa while the presiding deity is a Chamunda. There we find Bhairava, Virabhadra, Amoghasidhi, Gajantakari and the male deity with the head of a boar. Assigned to the Bhauma period, the adjacent



Siva temple of Sisireswar, bears on it the Buddhist Tantrik images like Amoghasidhi, Aralokitiswar and Kuvera etc. particularly during the Bhauma period, a mixed form of religion has been followed by the then Odisha. It appears that in the early medieval period, Saivism cannot be extricated and treated separately. Sakta shrines on the four sides of Vindusagar were established during this period only. They bear the influence of Saivism as much as Saktism. Siva was considered to be superior to Vishnu and other deities during this period, however, it appears.

A panel of sculptures appears on its southern façade in the Markendeswar temple situated on the western bank of Vindusagar, in which Brahma and Vishnu have been represented with folded hands, paying respect to the Lord Sivaji Maharaj. This evidence is enough to prove that it appears Siva was considered to be the Supreme deity of the Brahminied Pantheon.

The Bhanja rulers of Bhauma period built three small Siva temples of Baudha bear distinct Tantrik influence. In each case, the ground plan is Star like. Most likely it was necessitated by the cult practised in them. Enshrined in them, the Saktis of the Lingams are also star like. That the temples and the deities were made in the forms of *mandalas* or mystic figures were indicated by the shapes. The Tantriks wished to attain their Sidhis with the help of these mystical figures.

During this period, Saiva temples at Jaipur have been built also bear Tantrik influence.

In the Mahabharat and Harivamsa, there is mention about the presiding deity of the place who is no other than Viraja. Her antiquity is to be traced to a much earlier period.

During the Bhauma period connected with the Tantrik practices the rituals of the deity seems to have undergone a great change with all forms of religions in Odisha. Tantra had become

inextricably mixed up when Somavamsis started their rule about 931 A.D. in this contrary. As per Bhakti Bhagavata a Sanskrit work of Ganga Period, the earth was submerged into the ocean of Tantras during the Bhauma period.

As their Surnames Mahasivagupta and Mahabhabagupta indicate the Somavamsis were the staunch Saivas. They style themselves as Parama Maheswar as per their copper plate grants. But during the Bhauma period, the type of Saivism which they professed, was not the same as was prevalent in the then Orissa.

With its centre at Kandambaguha identified with Kadawaha in the former state of Gwalior, it seems to have been influenced by the *Mattamayura* sect of Saivism which was prevalent in the central India.

In the old Somavamsi temple at Ranipur-Jharial in the Titilagarh subdivision of Bolangir district, the name of Gangasiva known as Vyomasiva is known from the inscription which is the famous ascetic of this sect. At Ranipur-Jharial, it is apparent that Gangasiva had also a secondary establishment.

Before they came to the then Orissa, the Somavamsis of Kosala were in the occupation of this territory and by the *Mattamayura* sect it was of rite likely that the type of Saivism professed by them was influenced to a great extent.

Clinging to a family deity of their own, the Somavamsis were typical Hindus. They were worshipping all other deities by extending toleration and patronage to all other sects.

In the course of time, they revived the most important Vaisnava shrine of Jagannath at Puri. In raising the great Saiva temple of Lord Lingaraj at Bhubaneswar, the kings of this dynasty were instrumental. Kolavati Devi, the mother of Udyat-Kesari, built the Brahmeswar temple at Bhubaneswar with the performance of



Aswamedha sacrifices at Jajpur, it is they who are credited with which are being worshipped now on the bank of the Baitarani at Jajpur to whom Saptamatrukas are attributed to.

The beautiful monolithic pillar at Jajpur had been set up by one of the kings of this dynasty. This is now known as Subha-Stambha originally crowned with a Garuda figure. Retaining all the conventions that had acquired religious sanctum through long practices in the preceding centuries, they seem to have been cosmopolitan in their religious outlook.

During his reign Udyotkesari tolerated then creation of Jain monuments at Khandagiri which has already been seen. As were indulged in by the Tantrik Saivas such revolting practices do not seem to have been favored by them.

In their terrific forms the Sakta images continued to be sculptured on the temples, as is evidenced by a few such images appearing on the Brahmeswar temple. Assignable to this period the only Sakta image that served as the presiding deity of the Gauri temple near Kedareswar, is found in the pacific form.

Except only one on Lingaraj temple, the images of Lakulisa do not appear at all on other temples built during Somavamsi period which are to be found in large numbers in Mukteswar temple.

A mixed form of Saivism and Saktism prevailed in Orissa in the Bhauma period as we have already seen but they have been restored by the Somavamsis to their purer forms.

Originally Gangas were Saivas, but they became more inclined towards Vaisnavism after their conquest of Orissa as represented by Jagannath cult than towards Saivism. Saivism continued to be a major sect during their period of rule. Ganga kings and their relatives built temples by donating lands for their maintenance and they continued to show reverence to Siva.

Soon after his conquest of Orissa Chodaganga Deva donated a perpetual Lamp in the shrine of Lord Lingaraj at Bhubaneswar and for its maintenance granted sufficient lands with villages. In A.D. 1142 a similar perpetual lamp had been donated by Pramadideva at the shrine of the Kedareswar at Bhubaneswar with similar land grants.

Megheswar temple at Bhubaneswar had been built by Svapneswardeva who was the c-in-c of Ganga kings. On the Saiva temple at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar, Mukhalingam, Drakasarama and Bhubaneswar, numerous Ganga inscriptions appear in bold letters proving conclusively that they retained their veneration for Lord Siva though they later became included towards Vaisnavism.

Two innovations seem to have been introduced into the Saiva shrines of Orissa during their rule. The first one was the Nata-mandir – a specious hall and the second one was the provision of perpetual lamp in the important shrines.

They retained all other conventions barring these two innovations of the Somavamsis.

Suryavamsi period culturally merged into Ganga period as they followed the Pattern of Saivism established by the Gangas only.

Lord Lokanath at Bilaspur, Lord Amareswar at Barida Jagannathpur Sasan, Lord Tumbeswar at Pratapur are the famous Siva temples including Gupteswar in the then Jaugada which was identified as *Samapa*, the southern capital of Toshali.

There are many other Siva temples spread throughout the state of Odisha which are also very famous.

Dr. Gourishankar Tripathy, 847, Kapil Prasad, Sundarpada, Old Town, Bhubaneswar-751002.