
Bhubaneswar: An Epitome of Heterogenous Cultural Traditions (Archaeological, Cultural and Folk Traditions)

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Abstract: *Bhubaneswar, the present Capital City of Odisha, has been the cradle of cultural developments through many centuries right from the Prehistoric times to the contemporary times of today. 2,300 years ago, it was also the Capital City of a major Political Province of the Great Mauryan Empire, and it was referred to as 'Toshali'. Before it became the Capital of Odisha (erstwhile Orissa) in 1948, Bhubaneswar had been a Temple Town and an important Cultural and Religious centre to the followers of Buddhism (Baudha Cult), Jainism (Jain Cult), and Shaktism (Shaakta Cult) along with Shaivism (Shaiva Cult) and Vaishnavism (Vaishnava Cult). The presence of so many different religious faiths in fact gave the city its pluralistic character and became one of the factors responsible for its eventual selection as the Capital city of the modern State of Odisha. The city bears the imprints of several religious faiths as much as that of western rationalism. All these combined together formed the very essence of "Sanaatan Dharma" of the hoary past of the Great "Bhaaratavarsha" of unconquered India. All the different religious faiths or belief system have a perfect blending or synchronization for peaceful cohabitation even today. That is why this place has been named as 'Tribhubaneswar' in ancient times, which etymologically meant the three worlds of God: Swarga (Heaven), Martya (Earth) & Paataala (Hell), altogether making it a unique place on the planet.*

Keywords: Sanaatan Dharma, Sisupaalgarh, Toshaali, Vihaaras, Bhaaratvarsha, Emaamrakshetra, Yaksh-Yakshis

Introduction

Bhubaneswar, the present capital city of Odisha, was declared as the 'World's best' and 'smartest city' in terms with the people's choices in recent times. The name Bhubaneswar itself is formed with the conjoint of two Odia words namely 'Bhubana' meaning 'the World' & 'Ishwara' meaning 'God', so Bhubaneshwara etymologically meant 'The 3 Dimensions of the Land of God' namely 'Swarga' (Heaven), 'Martya' (Earth) & 'Paataala' (Hell), which were created by God (Paramaatmaa) for the survival of living organisms in three different dimensions (3D) or 'aayaams'. Through time immemorial Bhubaneswar is known by different names like 'Toshaali', 'Emaamrakshetra', 'Temple City', 'Capital City of Odisha' & now the 'Smartest City' of the World with the grace of the Almighty.

Geography of Bhubaneswar

Bhubaneswar is geologically a reclaimed landmass of the mid-Pleistocene period, which was submerged beneath the sea 30,000 years ago. With the receding sea level during the mid or late Pleistocene, the landmass gradually became exposed. The present sea level over the landmass extends up to the Naraaj-formation of the Cuttack-Mahaanadi region. It is mainly covered by rocks of the lower Gondwana Group. It consists of a mixed matrix of Primary Laterite, limestone, Secondary Laterite and Sandstone. Almost 60% of the region is bedrock of laterite and at places mixed with limestone formations along with 10% of Sandstone outcrops and 20% of marshy lands. There are some pockets of exposed waterholes, which are still in flow in spite of the huge alterations of the landmass due to the process of modernization.

There are a few perennial streams like *Budhi Nullah* in the north & *Ganguaa Nullah* originating from the Chandakaa-Deraas region. It flows eastward and finally terminates in the *Dayaa* River near Sisupaalgarh, and other small streams flow up to the Jhaarpadaa area. The locality 'Jhaarpadaa' got its nomenclature due to the intersecting point of three or four streams from three different directions. One of the perennial streams runs through Nicco Park, Satyanagar, Laksmisaagar and confluences at the Jhaarpadaa area. There are a few streams in Dhauli, Badagada, Patiaa, Sailashree Vihaar, Sikharchandi, Laksmisaagar, Raajbhavan, Khandagiri areas. There is one heavy perennial stream called 'Malaaguni' or 'Maalini' which flows through Utkal University Campus area from a water hole of Rangamaatiaa region to Unit-9 Science-Park area. Due to a good, webbed chain of water networks of perennial streams and up level recurrent charged ground water levels, the region is well-vegetated with the availability of natural food resource throughout the year. The region comes under a moist-deciduous climatic zone, which receives four months of incessant torrential regular rain. For the sustenance of life in the past, two basic necessities were food & shelter. Food was always available from the thickly vegetated area and cultivable land surrounding the topographically featured landscape region and for the making of houses plenty of raw materials were available in the form of laterite blocks of stones, bamboo from forested lands and straw from wasted paddy cultivation. Due to the resourceful nature, of the region, Bhubaneswar has always attracted folks or populations in large number from all regions around India & from Abroad. Thus, the region became the cradle of a Cultural Confluence for the last two and half millennia till Today.

Culturalism and Archaeological Remains

Bhubaneswar has sparsely found archaeological remains right from the Prehistoric to the late medieval period. The place has a long range of cultural continuity as evidenced from sparsely distributed or excavated archaeological or cultural remains. Cultural imprints of various centuries or ages were found in bits & pieces in many parts of Bhubaneswar and areas surrounding it. The first cultural imprints of Prehistoric times can be seen in the form of *Rock Art* (rock engravings & paintings), from the rock

shelters of Udayagiri hill () where one or two scholars have done research in the recent past (Prof.Sadasiv Pradhan, Dr. D.B. Garhnayak). A few specimens of Prehistoric tools (Neolithic Celts of basalt rock or chlorite) were found from the exposed laterite bed of the Utkal University Campus during 2006-08 by an Archaeology student (Mr. Pabitra Mohan Pradhan). But, unfortunately these tools are currently missing from the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology (most probably kept by Prof Dr. Sadasiv Pradhan [Head of the Department, during the time period] or with Dr. Dibishad Brajasundar Garhnayak [then a PhD. Research Scholar, now Dy. S.A. in Archaeological Survey of India]).

The Utkal University Campus is built completely on a laterite bed by the side of a perennial stream or rivulet called 'maalini' or 'malaaguni' which must have had thick vegetation & huntable game animals which would have been quite hospitable for settlement during the Prehistoric Period. The area also has rock-shelters & caves in the nearby vicinity. These congenial facilities must have propelled human settlement in the region of Bhubaneswar, which must have been continuous & densely populated during the Prehistoric times. Cultures here shifted subsequently to the surrounding Khordaa, Puri & Cuttack districts during the Neolithic and later Chalcolithic Periods.

, We find the next traces (imprints) of culture transforming during the Early Historic Period from 5th Century BCE to 4th century CE. The first archeological specimen of the Early Historic Period in Bhubaneswar is the ruins of the fortified settlements of Sisupalgarh. The time-bracket of the Cultural scope or landscape at Sisupalgarh stretches or ranges from 500 BCE to 200 CE. Such a long-time range must have created the flourishing of not just one Cultural Centre but multiple Cultural centres or hubs as small catchment areas or settlements. Such sites at nearby localities like Mahaabhoi Shaasan (north-west corner of Sisupalgarh), Narisho, Taalapadaa, Raadhaanagar, Laathi, Kalinganagar, are at distant areas or landscapes but are quite akin to the Cultural Period and setup of Sisupalgarh with findings of similar artefactual inferences.

Sisupalgarh is the most important fortified settlement in Eastern India and, India's noted Archaeologist Prof. Dr. B.B. Lal opined that the beginning of the Settlement of the site ranged from 3rd century BCE on the basis of his excavation's Cultural findings of ceramic assemblages like rouletted ware in Period II A & B and in period III, along with Black-and-Red ware of Megalithic traits in Period II A, a Kushana Copper Coin of King Huvishka in Period III (Lal 1949:78). Paul Yule, R.K. Mohanty & M.L. Smith argued the beginning of settlement in Sisupalgarh to 200-100 BCE (quite similar to B.B.Lal's given date) on the basis of or on the lines of available earlier dates for rouletted ware, later dates for Black-and-Red ware and the given C14 and other dates available for roulette ware from Arikaamedu, (Yule 2006, p.45; Mohanty and Smith 2008). The site is rich in its Architecture, Cultural Assemblages, and Proper articulation of fortification according to the methods laid down in Kautilya's 'Arthashastra'. It is one of the best specimens of Fortified Settlement of Early Historic Period in India.

Unfortunately, neither the archaeologists in India nor from abroad could completely expose the actual rich Cultural potentiality of the site.

The absence of evidence of any craft activities clearly attests to the character of the site as a pure consumption city (Mishra 2020). Excavation by B.B. Lal in 1948 and recent excavation by Mrs. M.L. Smith of Cotsen Institute of Archeology, California, Los Angeles, U.S.A., and R. K. Mohanty of Deccan College Of Post Graduate Research Institute, Pune, Maharashtra, India (2006-10) and by Archaeological Survey of India, Excavation Branch-IV, Bhubaneswar at Suabarei in Puri District, Jhariaambaa in Talcher District, Kalahandi-Balangir Districts throws some light about the sites which had to depend on the periphery regions or distant lands for the steady supply of finished goods for their immediate necessities of daily consumption or consumable commodities. Sisupalgarh was a site of Political power, Cultural value & religious ethos and became the Centre of perfect synchronization of all these three, for which it gained much importance. So, it was imperative and usual for all- other sites to provide or supply commodities of daily use or necessities to this site. It must have acted like a Political Centre or Capital City of all the surrounding urban centres. The fortifications, the tall strong monolithic laterite pilasters, the findings of large amount of gold ornaments by local people during the 90's robber trenching activities and also during the digging up of foundation stones for building houses & wells, attests to the rich politico-cultural-religious hegemony of the site and also shows the rich material cultural hoary past of the site for time immemorial.

The religious character of the site can be understood from the findings of Yaksha & Yakshi images outside the fortification wall in the modern day Sisupalgarh village (Panigrahi 1961) which are now showcased or displayed in Odisha State Museum's Architectural & Sculpture Gallery. Apart from this, a few architectural fragments of an extant Stupa were also recovered from the compound of Bhaaskareshwar Temple. There were also some broken stone railings found here containing *suchi & thaba* (Panigrahi 1961). One of the stone fences of a Stupa, which might have existed near the now standing Shirdi Sai Temple, must have been razed by some religious fanatics to claim or establish their religious dominance or authoritativeness. The existence of other religious beliefs or faiths in the site during the early times has been attested through artefactual inferences. The existence of an early form of Vaishnavism was prevalent among the folks of Sisupalgarh, which is evidenced by the finding of Kushaana coins of King Huvishka (Ancient India, Lal, 1949). Since the Kushaanas are followers of the Bhagavata Cult of early Vaishnavism, it can be surmised or presumed to believe or come to the conclusion that there was a Kushaana influence over Odisha. Even imitations of Kushhانا coins locally termed as 'Puri-Kushaana Coins' were minted in Odisha of which many Coin hoards have been discovered in the Coastal & Hinterlands of Odisha belonging to the Early Historic Period.

The second phase of the Early Historic Period, from 3rd century BCE onwards, saw the mushrooming of a number of settlements around Sisupalgarh. Explorations around

Dhuli () has yielded evidence of many Early Historic Settlements, where cultural developments continued up to the Early Medieval Period (Brandtner 1991: 39-40). The mud fortified settlement of Mahaabhoi Shaasan, immediately northwest of Sisupalgarh, is a rectangular in plan measuring about 400x300 meters in perimeter. But the nature of the settlement is unknown (Yule 2006, p.16), It is located near or close to the neighbourhoods of Bhaaskareswara, Brahmeswara, and Megheswara Temples. A small mound with a deposit of more than three meters in height have been found here. The surface findings of this mound yielded ear ornaments, animal figurines, iron nails belonging to Early Historic Periods (IAR: 1984-85, p.59). The Saamantraipur burning ghaat on the right bank of river Gandhavati (*Gangua Nullah*) revealed a deposit of seven meters. The exposed laterite block walls on the periphery of the mound revealed a structure from which Early Historic Potteries or Potsherds were found.

The earliest phase specimen of sculptural Art in Kalinga is the crudely hewn out elephant figurin emerging from sleep, which signifies the attainment of enlightenment from the cycles of birth, rebirth & death after taking birth for hundreds or thousands of years. This marvellous piece of Art is carved at the top of the boulder containing Ashoka's Rock Edict XVIII in Dhuli and is made from sandstone found in the same region. But the quality of the sandstone here is not at par with its counterpart the Grey Chunnar sandstone which is the medium of Mauryan Art in general. The plastic realism of Mauryan Art imprinted here is attested or certainly contemporary to the Inscription and reference made to an incised figure of an elephant which appears along with the Ashokan Edicts at Kalsi (Dehradun, Uttaraakhand). The same rock edict can be found in Jaugada near Berhampur in Ganjam district of Odisha, within the same time bracket & is similar in contents. The existence of the edicts here in Bhubaneswar clearly speaks about the importance of the place as the provincial Capital Kalinga (Odra Desha, Utkala Pradesha, Orissa of Independence India, Present Bhubaneswar of Modern Odisha) of the great Mauryan Empire of the second millennium BCE, and its name then was 'Toshaali' (Panigrahi 1961).

Since the province was under the hegemony of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, its subjects or Citizens must have been devout followers of Buddhism and practiced it whole-heartedly. The evidence to the prior existence of Buddhism or Boudha sect or shaanti faith has been found prior to the Kalinga War of 261 BCE. The Buddhist monk Shree Upagupta was said to have baptized Ashoka the great into the fold of Buddhism and after Ashoka's adoption of the Buddhist faith, Buddhism became a pan-Indian religion or faith, through proper efforts by the King & widespread propagation by his son Rahul and daughter Sanghamitra, his own kinsmen, and the subjects of the empire. Efforts were made for appropriate propagation of the religion through the length & breadth of the Empire. So many monolithic pillars were erected in all the provinces and Stupas were constructed at important crossroads or junctions bearing orders of the emperor to be followed by his subjects in the form of Rock Edicts throughout the kingdom. It not only spread in the Indian sub-continent but also to foreign lands like Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Korea, Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal etc. Buddhism had

its far-reaching influence over almost all of Asia. Buddhism was already practiced in Kalinga and after its Mauryanization it became widespread and was practiced by all the subjects of the Maurya Empire, which made the people simple & peace loving and refrained from any violent acts or war. Though Buddhism is now almost in an extinct condition in India or not practiced by the peoples of Hindu Sanaatan Dharma or Sanaatans its traces can be found in bits & pieces in the people's way of life and in their names and cultural practices of the present religious fold. Many people in Khordaa region have Buddhist surnames (shaanti, shaanti kara, kara, vihaari or Bihari, kabaata, Dhavala or Dhala, Dhalabehera, Behera et..) and people still worship the sacred remains (bodily remains or ashes) of their beloved deceased kinsmen in their respective houses, which is still found to be in practice in most of the households in Bhubaneswar, and along with this many more cultural practices of the Buddhist faith continues in current religious faiths. So, religion (Dharma) has become a way of living, not confined to one particular faith or belief system.

In contemporary times we find many Apartments, Buildings, Resorts & Hotels named 'Toshaali'. This might be an attempt made by everyday Citizens to revive the old glory of the best Capital City of the World.

We shall now discuss about the most noteworthy feature or aspects of past religious specimens & their vandalism by some religious fanatics by virtue of their wrong beliefs. The extant remains of an Ashokan Pillar with edict can be found in the form of a colossal Lingam (Phallus) in Bhaaskareswar Temple, along with railing pillar remains of a Stupa, a fragmentary lion figure resembling the lion capital (intact in Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar); all this cumulative evidence clearly speak about the existence of a Buddhist Stupa with a complete Ashokan Pillar (Panigrahi 1961).

Prior to the 5th Century CE, before the establishment of the Shaivite Cult of Hinduism or Hindu Dharma of the Great Sanaatan Dharma and due to religious fanaticism and hard heartedness, deliberate attempts were made to eliminate all the evidence of a flourishing Buddhist Religion or a new sect of the Sanaatana Religion. It must be discussed here that Buddhism & Jainism are two rebel children of Hinduism, as in the modern societal norm Hinduism is the first religion that formed out of the Sanaatan Dharma or Religion, and other religions of the World followed suit. As of today, there are ten religions with billions of followers and many sectarian groups.

Buddhism was at its peak till 4th century CE, but its influences are so effective that most of the Cultural Practices of Buddhism can be seen in the daily ritualistic practices of Hinduism in Bhubaneswar (Land of God's Three Worlds), Khordaa and in other parts of Odisha as well. Remnants of Buddhist Vihaaras of later periods (8th CE) were found in Cuttack District. It also seems some Buddhist remains of Vihaaras & Stupas were found in Sisupalgarh Excavations (Lal 1948), (Smith & Matney & Mohanty 2006-2010). Proper largescale (Both Horizontal & Vertical) Excavations can expose many Buddhist Stupas & Vihaaras in the area.

During the period of 1st Century CE to 4th Century CE, there is a small hiatus in the historicity of the place (both politically & commercially or in trade). But there are few artefactual or archaeological remains available to help substantiate about the religious faith and belief system that existed within the general public or masses. Many life size Yaksha & Yakshi images were recovered from the Sisupalgarh, Badagada & Kapileswar village areas. Sculpturally these remains were dated to 1st century CE to 4th century CE. From the findings of these images, it can be surmised that the people slightly diverted from their usual religious practices and resorted to nature worship. They seem to have worshipped infinite natural powers & tried to give them a concrete or definite form or shape. The initial period of image making saw its gradual development through a strong religious belief system. People used to worship Naaga (the Serpent God), Tree (Vrikshika), Yaksha (Guardian God of Wealth) & Yakshis (Consort of Yaksha), along with the elements of nature like the Sun, Moon, Water, Fire, Star Constellations (such as Orion, Nebulae, Urshaa Major, Urshaa Minor, Seven Stars chain) of different seasons, Weather Gods, Dasha (Ten) Digapaalas (Gods of Cardinal & sub-Cardinal Directions of the Planet Earth, Dasha Mahaavidyaas (Ten Commandments or Supreme Knowledges). So the people tried to emulate & give a concrete shape or form through images made of perishable or non-perishable materials like wood, stone, metal, and of many other materials, and also made Temples or Synagogues to place their deity there and worship them whenever required, even at their own houses or homes. The forms of the gods were described along with their attributes in ancient religious scriptures such as Vedas (4), Vedaangas, Upanishads (7) and Puraanas (18). Life size images of Yaksha-Yakshi, Naaga-Naagis, Agni (Fire God), Varuna (God of Water) were built of stone as it is one of the permanent materials which survive many thousands or lakhs of years just as their God who lives forever in their memory & is immortalized in their life through several generations for posterity. The locally available sandstone became their medium of art. Some images are now showcased or displayed in Odisha State Museum and some are still lying in village ponds.

The last extant art specimens of the Early Historic Period in Bhubaneswar is the 'Paandava Gumph' in the Mahinsha Khaala area. These are five caves hewn out of the laterite rock bed in the Badagada area, named after the 'Paandavas' of Mahabharat. There is a Panchu Paandava square or chowk in Kendrapadaa district leading to Olakanaa village and nearby it is the Olaasuni Caves, which can also be related with the Paandavas of Mahabharat time. The two Epics of Ramayana & Mahabharata are ingrained in the memory of every Hindu of the Indian Diaspora on a Pan-Indian stage (The Raama Raajya of Bharata, the Bhaaratavarsha of 1875 CE), Wherever we travel in India, one can find Cultural specimens or imprints related to the heroes or characters related to these two epics. The Cultural remains throughout India are named after Lord Raama, Maataa Sitaa, Lakshmana, Bharat, Satrugna, Lava-Kusha, and the number goes on with the 700 Slokas (Verses) of Shree mad Bhagavad Gitaa. These mythical legendary heroes, their related stories and archaeological specimens or imprints can be found in all the Villages, Districts, and States of India (throughout the length and

breadth of India). So how can the aptly named 'Ekaamrakshetra' of the famous Kalinga be devoid of this privilege? Architectonically & Sculpturally the Paandava Caves belongs to 4th centuryCE. They are in the Badagada region of Bhubaneswar. The name 'Badagada' sometimes makes me to believe that there might have been a Fort which existed there (probably of mud) leaving no traces now. The name Rasulgarh also gives that impression accentuated by the slight traces of fortifications still existing there in the form of Maa Kochilei Temple (The Goddess of the Fort, the protector of the Fortress). Mancheswar, Rangamaatiaa, Gaadakana, & many other names specify about the rich heritage of Bhubaneswar.

The Shaakta Cult was prevalent in the region from an earlier time as evidenced by the existence of many Banadevis (Goddess of Forest), and Goddess Temples like Maa Budheswari, Maa Giridurgaa, Maa Kochilei, Maa Sikharachandi, Maa Daalakhai, along with many other Temples of goddesses. The Cult practices & Rituals are found continuing even today among people who take part in traditions like Baatamangalaa Puja, Baasantika Durga Puja, Budhei Osha, Saarodiya Durga Puja and many more.

Many Occult practices were also prevalent during the entire stretch of the Early Historic Period in Khandagiri & Udayagiri cave regions and can also be seen today (Personal communication with Dr. Soumya Ranjan Sahoo). Other places are of key importance for study and further research.

Hatigumpha Inscription and Other Inscriptions

The Hatigumphaa Inscription is one of the noteworthy Inscription of Indian History. The Inscription is not only famous for its sequential record of the great king Kharavela of Chedi Dynasty, but it is also well known for its charismatic representation of the king along with his queens. The Inscription has been written in Brahmi Script & Paali Language. It contains 17 lines & starts with Jain symbols but ends very abruptly. It deals with the record of land grants given by King Kharavela's chief queen 'Naganikaa' or 'Nayanikaa' for the construction of caves for Jain monks to reside or take shelter during rainy seasons, scorching hot summer seasons and during chilling winters. Many other caves were also constructed or built by local administrators called 'Akhadamshas' (local municipal officers or workers of local self-governments) & by members of different guilds such as 'Tilakaaraka', 'Paanikara', oil merchants Guilds and many more.

Conclusion

In spite of the many differences in people's way of living or faith in diversified belief systems, there was peaceful co-existence among the general public or folks. The followers of one faith respected the followers of other faiths or sects and there was a sectarian and unified societal bonding among the peoples. There was no factional differences or mutual jealousy among the followers of different faiths or sects, for which the same (all) cultural systems co-exists till today with other religious faiths like Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and other Occult practices.

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