



The heritage centre Jajpur and the oldest bridge of Odisha

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Introduction:

Jaipur is a living example of India's oldest urban civilization[1]. In the past, it was therefore widely known as Jajanagra or Jajanagara. Especially the rulers of Bhaumakara and Somabamsi ruled Odisha with Jajpur as their capital. [2]. The most surprising thing is that six queens of the Bhauma dynasty reigning only in the history of India is very rare in world history. Goddess Birja is worshiped as the oldest Durga Devi of India[5]. In this connection, the famous historian Ram Prasad Chand's opinion is worth mentioning here.

The two armed Durga appears to me the earliest form of Goddess conceived by her votaries and Viraja represents the earliest phase of the cult of the Goddess. Jajpur therefore may on this ground be recognized as an old center of the cult of Viraja-Durga. X X X The two armed type of Mahisamardini carries us back to an early period probably to period pre-Gupta

(R.P Chanda, MASI 44) 1

In the Atharva Vedas, Matru-Shakti is praised as Bindhyavasini, none other than Goddess Birja[6]. In Devi Bhagavat Birja is eulogized as Bindhyavasini[7]. Not only this, the description of Birja remains in many ancient texts[8].

Hence, Jajpur has been able to maintain its uniqueness since ancient times as a major pilgrimage site in India and a very important place in the Indian political equation. Odisha's last independence war of 1568, which took place at Gohira-Tikiri near Jajpur, resulted in Orissa's independence and Jajpur's hellish destruction by the Afghan rulers[9][10][11]. Kirti-Karitini Jajna Nagar became a graveyard. The architecture of the rest of monuments which still exist[12].

Jajpur's oldest surviving heritage is a testament to the greatness of Utkal architecture[13]. In the same way, my writing is based on an oldest ancient bridge which is near the Goddess Birja Temple, the Mandakini river has been buried in recent times. What remains of the river is easily visible. In the past, this Mandakini-river was a branch of Baitarani. The much-forgotten Atharnala Bridge was built over Mandakini-river. Which carries the major influence of Utkalian engineering and architecture. In the past, the water flowed in the small tributary Mandakini River. Besides the bridge, it must have been difficult to cross the river to Visit Birja Temple. Moreover, the royal palace was also located near the Birja temple. Even now, the area near the Birja temple is known as Na'arapada. It is possible that the name of this area is Na'arapada because this name used to be Capital. Therefore, keeping in view the necessity of constructing a bridge across the Mandakini River, it was constructed. Here the question arises that why is it named Atharnala (a bridge which is consist of eighteen drain-holes) even though there are thirteen drain-holes in Mandakini-bridge? When the Mandakini river has been buried over time and has lost its existence, the people of this area have accidentally forgotten the name of the river and named it as Atharnala bridge after observing the significance of real Atharnalar bridge in Puri Jagannath.

This ancient bridge is made of old stones[14]. Which is still standing from the time of mankind. From above it looks like a modern pole. It is spread over a large quantity of bitumen. All kinds of vehicles pass through it even today. And the journey is not fraught with danger in any way. Even heavy goods such as buses and trucks are also moving freely. Its status as the oldest bridge in Odisha is undisputed. This bridge over the Mandakini river was the only vertical and transit route for the Devi Birja temple and the adjoining Na'arapada of Bhaumakar and the Keshari dynasty.

In the valley of Mandakini-bridge (Atharnala) lies the unique witness of the ancient history. Countless beautiful sculptures have in it. This bridge is 80.77 meters long and 9.75 meters wide. Over the thousands of years, this bridge has carried innumerable idols such as Shiva, devotees performing sankirtan, one-footed Bhairav, lotus medallion, Mahishmardini Durga, Nayika idol, Parvati, burden bearer, animal hunting scene, elephant training scene and Navagraha. Many statues of Mahayana Buddhism have been found. The Somavamsi rulers after Bhaumakara are famous in history as anti-Buddhist-Mahayana[15] [16] [17].

Therefore, it is not possible to place the sculptures of Buddhist monuments (Ekpad Bhairav, Kamal Padak, Ardhanari Shavar) in the architecture of Somsulhi period, but it is quite possible to find the place of Buddhist architecture along with Hinduism in the architecture of Bhaumakaras because Bhaumakaras were Buddhists[18]. In fact, Bhaumakaras have expressed his belief in Hinduism and Chaturvarna. [19]. Undoubtedly, Mandakini-bridge is an indelible achievement of Bhaumakaras, which was built in the 8th-9th century.

Who is to say where the end of the time-stream is. Today there are no more rulers of Bhaumakar and Somavamsi. All past incidents do not become history. When time deems important it becomes history. Which makes the future generations aware, creates awareness and love for the heritage and culture. For thousands of years, the Mandakini-bridge has been standing alone. As many people pass through him, it wants a little of his maintenance in return for the service.

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- 5-Viraja at Jajpur, the earliest Sakta Shrine in Orissa is a two armed Durga engaged in killing the buffalo demon. Riding on a lion She holds a spear (Sula) in Her right hand which pierces the body of the buffalo and pulls its tail in Her left hand. Her right foot presses the head of the animal. The date of the image is assignable to pre-Gupta or Gupta period. R.P.Chanda indicates the two armed Durga appears to me to be the earliest form of the goddess conceived by her votaries and Viraja represents the earliest phase of the cult of the goddess. (Mahapatra, Sanjaya Kumar, Mahisasuramardini in Orissan Iconography, Orissa Review Journal, September-October-2008, Page-21)
- 6-sā'pi debi tatra bindhyamagatā manu pujita
Lokesu prathitā bindhya-basini cha shaunaka, Atharva Veda.
- 7-'Manoreba jagāma bindhya parbatam
Sā bindhya bāsini bishnoranuja birajeshwari
Bahuba puja lokānām sarbeshām munisattamah, Debi Bhagabata'
- 8-Tato Baitarani Gachhet Sarbapāpa Pramochanim / Birjā Tirthamāsādyā birajati yathā shashi / Pratarechcha kula punayam cha Sarbapāpa Byapohati / Go sahasra Phalam Labdha Punati Swakulam Narah: Mahabharata Banparva, 85th Chapter.
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