CHAPTER - TWO

SĀKTAPĪTHAS OF ORISSA

A study of the available source materials for our dissertation on the history of Sakti worship in Orissa indicates that there emerged a good number of Sāktapīthas in Orissa during the early centuries of the Christian era. Worship of the Divine Mother with its non-Aryan elements seems to have been a popular faith in Orissa particularly among the tribes from very early times. In course of time Aryan elements influenced the religious faith which resulted in a fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan elements in the Sakti worship in Orissa. During the Mauryan rule in Kaliṅga when Brāhmaṇical form of Hinduism was as popular as Buddhism in Orissa the Atavikas¹ of the forest regions of Kaliṅga seemed to have been the worshippers of the Divine Mother. Even now in every forest (Atavī) in Orissa the Divine Mother is worshipped in the form of a post or a pillar and the concept of Vanadurgā became popular in mediaeval period. Tārā, on the summit of the hill called Tārā-Tārīṇī at Purusottamapur, Kandhunidevi in the forest regions of Suruda, Manināgesvari

on the summit of the hill called Maqinaga hill at Ranpur are some of the illustrations of the worship of the Divine Mother with its non-Aryan elements among the tribal people of Orissa. Such centres of Sakti worship are in legion in the hills and forests of Orissa.

Bhdrakalipitha:

The earliest epigraphic reference to such a tribal goddess in Orissa is to be noticed in the Bhdrak Stone Inscription of Maharaja Surasarma² palaeographically assigned to the 3rd century A.D. According to the reading of Dr. K.C. Panigrahi, Parṇadevati was the presiding deity of Bhdrak when Maharaja Surasarma was ruling over the region. The very name Parṇadevati indicates that she was a tribal goddess and it is very likely that the present name Bhdrakālī evolved in course of time from the tribal goddess Parṇadevati. Thus in the light of epigraphic evidence Bhdrak, not far from Virajā, is the earliest known Saktapitha of Orissa with a tribal basis.

Virajā Ksetra:—

Although Bhdrak appears as the earliest Saktapitha of Orissa in the light of the epigraphic evidence, in ancient Indian literature Virajā is considered to be the earliest in

Orissa. The Mahābhārata refers to the river Vaitarani as the heart of Kalinga. The illustrious Saktapitha of Viraja is located on the bank of the said river. The same epic further indicates that a visit to Virajātirtha on the bank of the river Vaitarani destroys all sins. In Chapter 114 of the Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata 30 verses have been devoted to indicate the sanctity of Viraja. Vayu Purāṇa indicates that Viraja is an asexual daughter of Ajaśpa.

An anecdote in Viṣṇu Purāṇa refers to Viraja as Nābhidgaya, a well known pilgrimage centre of ancient India. In all these literary texts, however, there is no categorical reference to the goddess Viraja as Divine Mother. Like Purusottama which refers to the pitha as well as the deity, the term Viraja was applied to the goddess as well as the Saktapitha. In the Mahābhārata Viraja is mentioned as a Tirtha. The same name is applied to Goddess Viraja whose image was originally enshrined at Kalasapura, situated at a distance of about 3 K.M. from Jajpur where the deity is now enshrined. The image of Viraja as we shall discuss in Chapter IV of this work, is to be assigned to the Gupta period on

3. Ete Kalingah Kaunteya Yatra Vaitarani Nadī/ Yatra Jayata Dhamopi Dham Sansārameteyavai//
4. MBH,Vana Parya, Ch:85, Vrs.6 Tato Vaitarnbh Gañchhet Sorva pāpa-Pramochanānim/ Virajām Tīrthāmādāya Virajati Yathā Sasi//
6. A later Bengali work Manasa Maṅgala said to be composed in 1510 A.D. by Bansi Das connects the Nābhidgaya tradition of Viṣṇu Purāṇa with Sati's navel Nabhi Kātiyā Viṣṇu Padilla yekhāne/ Nābhidgaya nāma tāhā vikhyāta Bhuyane// Quoted by Sirca, D,C., The Saktapithas,p.34n; OHRJ,Vol.IV,Nov. 3 and 4,p.43.
iconographic consideration. The ruins of the temple of Kalasapura where the deity is originally enshrined, also indicates that the temple belongs to Gupta period. R.P.Chanda and following him K.C.Panigrahi have accepted the view that the original shrine of Viraja at Kalasapura belonged to the 5th century A.D. Infact, the image of Viraja is the earliest form of the Mahisamardini Durga in the Orissan iconography. The colossal Sapta-Matrika images further indicate that under the Bhauma-Karas and the Somavamsis, Viraja continued to be a dynamic centre of Sakti worship in Orissa. The inscribed image of Chamunda noticed near the temple of Somesvara at Jajpur is another significant iconographic evidence to indicate that under the patronage of the queen Vatsadevi Saktism was a vibrant faith at Jajpur in 8th or 9th centuries A.D. The present temple of Viraja at Jajpur appears to have been built under the patronage of the Imperial Ganga's, during the reign of Yayati III, Mahasivagupta, when their capital was shifted from Yayatinagara in South Kosala to Guhesvara-pataka which was renamed as Abhinava Yayatinagara. The Muslim historians refer this Abhinava Yayatinagara as Jajnagar which was subsequently called Jajpur.

6A. MASI,No.44, p.4.


7. It is striking to note that an instruction of Narasimha IV is found on the walls of the temple of Sidhesvara in close proximity with the temple of Jajpur. E.I.,Vol.XXIX,p.1055.
The Saktapitha of Viraja at Jajpur, thus, has a hoary history. In the literature of the early medieaval period, too, the sanctity of Jajpur as a pitha has been described. According to Kapila Samhita, Viraja is the Parvati Ksetra, whose presiding deity is Viraja. Brahma Purana, another literary work of the medieaval period also eulogises the glory of Viraja pitha. It refers to the installation of the image of Viraja by Brahma himself.

Viraja Mahatmya, a late medieaval literary work refers to Viraja Durga-devi, the presiding deity of the Ksetra as being born from the sacrificial fire. It is known from the Parlakhemundi copper plate grant of Prthvi Maharaja that the city of Viraja was named as Virajānagara in the name of the presiding deity Viraja and that by the close of the 6th century A.D. Virajānagara was well known. In the Soro copper plate of Bhanudutta and the Ganjam grant of Jaya Varman of the time of Unmatta Kesari the city of Viraja is referred to as a political headquarters.

9. Viraje Virajā Kātā Brahmanā Samprati śthitā (Brahma Purana, Chapter XIII, Vṛ.1.).
10. A copy of the manuscripts of the Viraja Mahatmya preserved in the Orissa State Museum Ch. XVIII of the work gives a detailed account of Viraja-Saktapitha.
In the Tantric texts of early mediaeval period the city of Viraja is eulogised as a great Saktapitha of India. In Kubjikā Tantra Viraja is counted as one of the 42 Siddhāpithas of India. In the said work there occur the names of Viraja and Vimalā as powerful manifestations of the Divine Mother. Janañānava Tantra gives a list of fifty celebrated Saktapithas of India and in the said list Viraja is mentioned as the 28th Saktapitha of India. In the 5th Patala of Brähmanīla Tantra Viraja has been mentioned as Virajāpura Kṣetra. It is interesting to note that in a small work called Āstādāsapitha ascribed to Śaṅkarāchārya Viraja devi is described as the presiding Sakta deity of Utkala and the Manuscript No. 5913 of the text now preserved in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal is said to have been written down from the dictation of an Oriya Brāhmaṇa who was an inhabitant of Jāhājapura or Jajpur on the Vaitarani. Similarly another tantric text called Pitha Nirṇaya or Mahāpitha Nirupana also cites Viraja as a well


known Saktapitha among the fifty-one Mahapithas of India. Pranatosini Tantra is the earliest account which associates Viraja with modern Jajpur. While presenting a list of 108 Saktapithas its author refers to the goddess Viraja as the presiding deity of Yagapuri or Yajapuri.

In the late mediaeval period Yajapura continued to be regarded as the leading Saktapitha of Orissa. Sarala Das, the celebrated author of Oriya Mahabharata of the 15th century A.D. refers to the Virajapitha of Jajpur with deep religious fervour. In the 16th century A.D. Balarama Das, also refers to the same tradition in his Bata Avakasa.

In the Bengali works of this period also Jajpur was regarded as a well-known Saktapitha. The Bengali poet Mukunda Rama of the 16th century A.D. in his work Chandi Mangala records that Jajpur was the sacred Saktapitha where the right foot of Sati fell and where Viraja is the presiding goddess. In the Bengali work Chaitanya Mangala Lochana Dasa informs us that

in course of his pilgrimage in Orissa Śrī Chaitanya visited Jajpur on his way to Purusottama Kṣetra and there he paid his homage to goddess Viraja.

De-bhogaka Kṣetra:-

In chronological sequence De-bhogaka Kṣetra in the Tel Valley near the village Terasinga in the Madanpur-Rampur police station in the district of Kalahandi may be taken as the next important Saktapitha of Orissa. We come across the mention of this Saktapitha in line 3 of the Terasinga plate, palaeographically assigned to the 5th or the first half of the 6th century A.D. The copper plate charter which refers to De-Bhogaka Kṣetra was issued by Tuṣṭikāra who was a devotee of the goddess Stambhesvari (See line 5 of the Charter). Tuṣṭikāra’s mother Sōbnihī Rājajanamī was also a devout worshipper of Bhagavati Stambhesvari (See lines 1-2 of the Charters). Terasinga copper plate grant is the earliest known epigraphical record about the prevalence of Stambhesvari cult in Orissa.

The find spot of the charter is very close to Belkhandi which was also a centre of Śakti worship in the early mediaeval

26. See line 5 of the Charter; Ibid.
27. See lines 1-2 of the Charter; Ibid.
period. The Sapta-Mātrkā images of Belkhandi are the significant illustrations of the development of Śakti worship in the valley of the Tel. Suvarṇapur, which is situated at the confluence of the rivers Tel and Mahanadi, is also a well known pīṭha of the Stambhesvari cult. We are of the opinion that De-Bhogaka Kṣetra identified with present De-gaon which was the earliest Śaktapīṭha of the Stambhesvari cult and in course of time the cult became popular among the Bhañjjas in the Baud-Sonepur region, the Sulkis in Kodālaka Mandala (Talcher region) and the Tuṅgas in Yamagārta Mandala (Bonai and Pallahara regions). The cult was popular in Ganjam district of Orissa. At Aska in Ganjam district, there is a temple of Stambhesvari and the locality is also known as Stambhesvari-Pāṭana.

Ekāṃra Pīṭha:—

Ekāṃra Pīṭha identified with modern Bhubanesvara is a well-known religious centre of India from about the 6th century A.D. Vaisnavism, Śaivism and Śāktism flourished in this great religious centre. Ekāṃra Purāṇa, Svarṇādi Mohadaya, Ekāṃra Chandrikā, Kapila Sāṃhitā and Tīrtha Chintāmani are the well known literary texts of the mediaeval period which deal with the sanctity of Ekāṃra as a Saiva Kṣetra as well as a Śāktapīṭha. Tāntric texts also glorify Ekāṃra Kṣetra as a great
centre of Saktism. Jñānānava Tantra recognised Ekāmra as one of the fifty leading Saktapithas of India. Brhan Nīla Tantra also indicates the importance of Ekāmra as a Saktapitha. The Tantrasāra associates Adīra or lower lips of Sati with this Saktapitha. The tradition of 108 pithas as noticed in the Prāṇatosini Tantra refers to Ekāmra as a Saktapitha and Kirtimati as its presiding goddess. Siva Charita refers to Ekāmra-desa as one of the fifty-one Mahāpithas of the Sākta order. The Purānic texts containing 108 names of the Mother Goddess called Nāmaśṭottara Sata also refers to Ekāmra as a centre of Saktism and Matsya Purāṇa associates the goddess Kirtimati with Ekāmra. Devī Bhāgavata endorses the same view.

Archaeological evidences indicate that in addition to being a Saiva Kṣetra Ekāmra was a great centre of Sakti worship. The representation of the Sapta-Mātrkā figures in the temple of Parasurāmesvara, Muktesvara, Vaitāla indicates that tantric form of Saktism have been widely popular at Ekāmra from the 7th century A.D. to the

30. Ibid, p. 22.
31. Ibid, p. 27.
32. Ibid, p. 38.
34. Ibid.
mediaeval period. The temple of Kapālinī, popularity known as the temple of Vaitāla, was made in or about 8th century A.D. was dedicated to goddess Chamundā. The temples of Mohini and Gouri are two more significant Sākta shrines of Bhubanesvara of the early mediaeval period. The installation of Ekanamsā flanked by Balarāma and Vasudeva in the Ananta Vasudeva temple is another significant example of the blending of Sāktism and Vaisnavism at Ekāmra Ksetra in the 13th century A.D. In the Angul copper plate grant of Sāntikaradeva a grant was issued from Ekāmra and an endowment was made on the bank of the tank called Vindusara on the occasion of lunar eclipse in the month of Srāvana during the epoch of the Bhauma-Karas. In the well known Brahmesvara temple Inscription of the time of Udyotakesara (Line-13) Ekāmra has been mentioned as a Siddha-tirtha. Ananta Vasudeva temple Inscription of the 13th century A.D. also refers to Ekāmra as a Ksetra where numerous temples were dedicated to different gods and goddesses. An image of eight armed Mahisasamardini Durga in the compound of the Lingaraja temple also indicates that by the 8th century A.D. Ekāmra was

36. See lines 16 and 18 of the Charter, OHRJ, Vol. XII, No. 4, p. 2.
38. Tatra cha kṣetramekāṁmāṁvarāma-sataśīrṣaṁ
Ekā-Devakulaṁ Deva Kulairakulamadbhutam
a celebrated Saktapitha. At a distance of nearly 3 miles (as the crow flies) to the east of Bhubaneswara there stands the Yogini temple at Hirapur. According to a tradition which is still continuing in that locality the Yogini temple of Hirapur is included in the Panchakrosa Ayatana of the ancient Ekamra Ksetra. The Yogini temple of Hirapur was undoubtedly a significant Tantrapitha of the Ekamra Ksetra.

Ranipadra Tirtha:

While Ekamra Ksetra with its Tantrpitha of Hirapur was considered to be a famous Saktapitha, Ranipadra adjacent to Somatirtha also attained celebrity as a famous Saktapitha of South Kosala. Ranipadra is identified with modern Ranipur-Jharial situated at a distance of 35 K.M. from Titilagarh railway station in the Bolangir District of Orissa. The Yogini temple of Ranipur is complementary to the Yogini temple of Hirapur and it is a significant landmark in the growth and development of Tantric Saktism in Orissa. The tantric teachers of the line of Kadambaguhavasi who migrated from Daitavana near Kuruksetra popularised the worship of Uma-Mahesvara and the worship of Siva along with Sakti. Under the influence of Sadashivacharya and Gaganasivacharya there

emerged at Ranipur, the famous Tantrapīṭha for the worship of the 64 Yοgīṇīs. Verses 15, 17 and 32 of the Ranod inscription glorify Ranipadra as a great Topavana. This Saktapīṭha flourished as a great centre of Tantric Saktism under the patronage of the Somavamsis.

Khijjingakotta:

Khijjingakotta, identified with modern Khiching situated at a distance of 16 miles from Karanjia in the Mayurbhanja district of Orissa is a famous Saktapīṭha whose presiding deity is Khijjīngesvari or Khichingesvari, now obviously corrupted into Kichakesvari. Khijjingakotta was the capital of the Adibhaṇḍajas whose progenitor is laid to be Virabhadra in the Bhaṇḍaja epigraphs. It is striking to note that the panel of Sapta-Mātrkās in art and literature is traditionally headed by Virabhadra. Thus, it is apparent that the Bhaṇḍajas, who were the worshippers of Virabhadra, were naturally the worshippers of Divine Mothers, too. Under their patronage Saivism and Saktism flourished simultaneously and Khiching became a stronghold of Sakti worship. There are three temples at Khiching dedicated to the Divine Mothers. One of them called the temple of Kotāituṇḍī which is assigned to the 9th century A.D., the temple of Kichakesvari or

Khijjingesvari is the largest temple of Khiching and it seems to be a prototype of the well known temple of Brahmesvara.

Jalesvara pitha:

In the tantric literature of the early medieval period Jalesvara is recognised as a significant Saktapitha of India. Hevajra Tantra of the Buddhists which was composed in the 8th century A.D. indicates that Jalesvara-Mahadeva and Jalesvari-Chandi preside over the Saktapitha of Jalesvara. Kālikā Purāṇa also endorses a similar view with regard to Jalesvara while presenting a list of fifty Tantrapithas. Jñānarnava tantra refers to Jalesvara as a significant Saktapitha. The Tantrasāra associates the belly of the Divine Mother with Jalesvara. A late medieval tradition as recorded the biographical accounts of Śrī Chaitanya indicates that Jalesvara like Virajā was an important Kṣetra of hoary significance which was visited by Śrī Chaitanya in course of his visit to Orissa.

42. Sircar, D.C., The Šaktapithas, p.12.
43. Ibid.
44. "Vidhyām Chaiva Mahāpitham Māyāpuram Jalesvaram"—Quoted by Sircar, D.C. in The Šaktapithas, p.21.
Purusottama Kṣetra:-

Although Purusottama Kṣetra came to be recognised as a centre of Vaisnavite importance particularly during the reign of the Imperial Gaṅgas, it was considered to be a great Sāktapīṭha of India in literature as well as in tradition. In the tántric lore Jagannatha is considered to be a Bhairava and Vimalā is worshipped as Mahādevī. In Devī Bhāgavata Vimalā is considered to be the Kṣetra-Sakti. Matsya Purāṇa Chapter XXIII refers to Purusottama Kṣetra as a Sāktapīṭha, with its presiding goddess Vimalā. Vāmana Purāṇa refers to Purusottama along with Viraja as a sacred pilgrimage centre. Rudra Yāmala, a famous work on tantra composed in C.950 A.D. glorifies Jagannatha as adorning the Mahāpīṭha. Kalīka Purāṇa refers to Oḍḍrapīṭha


49. OHRJ, Vol.III, p.16.


as a famous Saktapitha which was the celebrated seat of the goddess Kātyāyani and God Jagannātha. Tantra Yamalā\textsuperscript{52} another old tantric work of Brahmanical Hinduism refers to Jagannātha as the presiding deity of Puruṣottama Kṣetra in Utkalā. In the list of 108 pithas found in the Prāna Tosāi Tantra\textsuperscript{53} refers to Vimalā as the presiding goddess of Puruṣottama Kṣetra. The Brhān Nila Tantra\textsuperscript{54} also gives a similar reference to Puruṣottama Kṣetra as a Sākta-Kṣetra.

In the Puranic list of 100 names of the Mother Goddess Nāmāstottara Sātā (vr.9) we also come across the expression "Vimalā Puruṣottama". In the list of Mahāpithas and upapithas given by the author of Śiva Charita\textsuperscript{55} also we come across Nīla Parvata or Nīlāchala as an Upapitha where Vimalā is the presiding Devī and Jagannātha is Bhairava.

The significance of Puruṣottama Kṣetra as a Sākta-Kṣetra is also known from the archaeological evidences. The Sapta-Mātrkā images near the Mārkanḍeśvara tank assigned to the epoch of the Somavamsis, is the definite evidence to indicate that Puri was well-known as a Sākta-pitha by the 9th

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\textsuperscript{52} Bharatejchotkalādesa Bhusvargapuruṣottamaḥ Darurupi Jagannāthahā Bhaktām Abhayapradā. Quoted by Gurudas Sircar in "Mandirera Kathā(Bengali), p.140.

\textsuperscript{53} Sircar, D.C., The Saktapithas, p.27.

\textsuperscript{54} "Ramesvarī Setuvandhe Vimalā Puruṣottama", Brhān Nila Tantra, Pātala. Quoted by Sircar, D.C. in The Saktapithas, p.31n.

\textsuperscript{55} Quoted by Sircar, D.C. in The Saktapithas, p.68.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
and 10th centuries of the Christian era. The image of Vimalā enshrined in the campus of the temple of Jagannatha justifies the reference to Vimalā in the tantric literature as mentioned above. In Chapter VIII of our work we have given a graphic account of the iconographic feature of Vimalā and we have come to the conclusion that the image was in all probability installed in c. 8th century A.D. The sculpture of Mahiśamardini Durgā in the Bhoga mandapa of Jagannatha temple lends support to the theory that Puruṣottama Kṣetra is a Saktapitha. The Saktta environment of the temple is further indicated by the fact that the shrine is said to be protected by Astasaktis, namely Sarvamaṅgalā, Bhubanesvari, Indrāni, Kutamchandi, Chāmunda, Durgā, Vimalā and Laxmī.

What is very striking to note that the Bhoga (food offer) offered to Jagannatha as Naivedya is honoured as Mahāprasāda only when the same is offered to the Saktta goddess, Vimalā.

It is true that in the later Purānic literature attempts were made to synthesize Saktism and Vaisnavism and identified Subhadra with Kamalā, but as we have discussed in Chapter III of our work, Subhadra, the central deity of the Jagannatha Triad was originally a Saktta goddess, later on observed by the Vaisnavite thinkers as the sister and consort of Visnu.

57. Vide Skanda Purāṇa, Chapter, XIX, Vṛś.17.
Infact, it was the Sākta goddess Ekanamesa who was assimilated in the Puruṣottama Cult and appeared as Subhadra in the Jagannatha Triad.

Puruṣottama Kṣetra was, infact, a Sāktapīṭha and a Saiva Kṣetra which was later on adopted as a Viṣṇu Kṣetra. It synthesized the main tenets of Saktism, Saivism and Vaisnavism and it was recognised as one of the four great Dhamas of Bhārata Varṣa.

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