



## Archaeology of Nabarangpur District, Odisha

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Abstract:

*Nabarangpur district (Lat: 19° 09" and 20° 06" North, Long: 81° 51" and 82° 52" East) is situated in the south-western part of Odisha. It is surrounded by Bastar district of Chhatisgarh in west, Raipur of Chhatisgarh in north, Kalahandi and Koraput district of Odisha in east and south respectively. The district is divided into 10 administrative blocks. Most of its population is tribal and most of the land is forested. The Indravati river is the most prominent river of the district. It is a tributary of the Godavari and sustains perennial flow. It originates in the Kalahandi district flows through Nabarangpur and Koraput districts and enters into Bastar district of Chhatisgarh. The Tel and Bhaskel are the others rivers flowing through the district. The climate of the district is typically tropical to subtropical with three seasons i.e. summer, winter and monsoon.*

*Keywords: Nabarangpur, Bhaskel, Indravati, Temple, Bada, Gandi, Mastaka, Nilakanthesvara, Siva.*

### **Prehistoric Archaeology of Nabarangpur:**

The prehistoric research in India was firstly carried out in 1863 when Robert Bruce Foote of Geological Survey of India picked up the first Stone Age implement from the laterite pits of Pallavaram near Madras. Just eleven years after the discovery of Foote Valentine Ball<sup>1</sup> found four stone implements in Odisha from places like Kaliakata, Bursapali, Harichandanpur and Dhenkanal. Since then a number prehistoric sites were reported from various places of Odisha from time to time by the scholars like N.K. Bose, D. Sen, G.C. Mohapatra<sup>2</sup>, K.C. Tripathy, P.K. Behera and many more. Following K.C. Trpathy the systematic investigation was carried out by S.C. Nanda<sup>3</sup> in the upper Indravati basin in the present Nabarangpur and Koraput districts. The investigation brought to light 17 upper Paleolithic and 85 Mesolithic sites. Some of the prominent upper palaeolithic sites of the district are Kosagumuda, Majhidhanua, Borogaon, Gadabaguda, Rengiguda. These sites yielded side scraper, end scraper, burins, borers, denticulate, knives and blades. Chert is the main raw material that has been used for manufacturing upper Paleolithic tools of Indravati valley.

Some of the important Mesolithic sites are Hirlidanguri, Dakutha, Rangapiajaguda, Ekamba, Bairagiguda, Phupugaon, Muchagaon, Nagalatal, Lauguda etc. These sites yielded Mesolithic artifacts like crescent, triangle. Trapeze, a variety of blades, lunates etc. semi precious stones like quartz, chalcedony, granite and jasper were used.

## Early Historic Archaeology of Nabarangpur:

Podagarh (Lat: 19° 36" North, Long: 82° 16" East) one of the early historic sites of Nabarangpur district is located at a distance of 23 kilometre from Umerkote via Dhodra. Podagada constitutes a part of the revenue village Bhandariguda. Previously, it was in Umarkote taluq, but at present it is the part of Dabugaon Tahasil of Nabarangpur district. The ancient township was located on the left bank of the rivulet Singari joins the river Bhskel near Nandapur. In its heydays, the city seemed to have stretched over the twin river valleys Singari and Nangi as is evident from the traces of ruins spreading over this part. Nangi flows 6 km to the north of Podagada and joins the Bhaskel near Dhodra. Both the perennial rivulets have originated from the hilly and forest region of Podagada plateau (2000 feet height).

The Podagada hill containing the ruins of the fort and the rock inscription rises to a height of 3043 feet. The hill fort with its strategic location resembles to a great extent to the Yadava hill fort of Devagiri (Daulatabad). The antiquity of Podagada (Bhandariguda) i.e. ancient Puskari goes back to the early historic period with the discovery of the surface findings of ceramics of red ware, black and red ware, grey ware etc. Similar types of potteries were discovered from the early historic sites of coastal and western Odisha. According to G. Ramdas, Puskari is identical with the famous Puskara *tirtha* of Mahabharata, where it is stated that 'all places of pilgrimage are pious in Kritayuga but Puskari is sacred in Treta age. This place was said to have been surrounded with a fort and a mountain existed nearby containing diamonds. Ramdas believes that Podagada contains all these and so it is identical with Puskari. He further suggests that the capital of Puranic Nisadha was Vidura (Vaidurya) and it is synonymous with Puskara. If the suggestion of the learned scholar is to be accepted then the antiquity of place goes back to great antiquity.

Krishnamacharlu, who visited Podagada tract and discovered the rock inscription in 1922, describing the vast archaeological wealth of this area states that provenance (of the epigraph) has been described at some length only with a view to indicate the extent of decadence that has come over a country, which judging from its few known inscriptions and monuments, once enjoyed a civilized and cultured life in the early centuries of the Christian era. G.Ramdas, who visited every village in this *Pargana* (Podagada area) are found the vestiges of ancient civilization that was rampant here in the obscure antiquity.

The formidable stronghold, as gleamed from the ruins was located on the hill and is presently called Podagada i.e., a burnt fort suggesting its destruction by fire and sword of the enemies. The entrance or Simhadvara to the fort was from the southern side, where we find brick bats and fragments of stone and burnt brick pillars and door jambs. The bricks measure 8:4:2 and the door jamb contain floral designs. The flight of steps (**Fig-1**) leads to the stone slab containing the promulgation of Skandavarman at a height of about 40 feet from the ground level. Here also we find remnants of an elaborate and massive gate-way. Ramdas thinks that the colossal stone pillar supported an arch. Remnants of only one pillar are found and the local people say that elephants were tied to it in remote antiquity. The design of the pillar however, suggests that instead of arches the pillars supported a corbelled gate-way (**Fig-2**).

In one corner there exists an iron sword together with a few other iron implements such as nails, small trident and hooks and at present they are worshipped by the local folk. In the north and west the flat rock surface ends in precipitous fall. Perhaps a stone rubble wall had been constructed on these sides and the broken brick walls represent the remnants of the fort palace complex. The pattern of this hill stronghold was very much alike to the Yadavas fort of Daulatabad. From this place one can have a clear view of the surrounding area for miles. Even now old vestiges may be seen spreading over the deals, giving the impression of the onetime bustling Puskari city. A moat was encircling the whole formidable formation the traces of which is distinctly visible even now and was being connected with the Singari flowing nearby. A pond exists near the southern entrance to the fort. In the north, beyond the moat another mountain is there, which was very probably used as the watch tower. At present at the foot of this hill stone sculptures of Bhairava, Hanuman, Uma-Mahesvara and Ganesa were lying in a thatched cottage together with a heap of broken terracottas of horses, elephants and horse riders and various divinities.

To the east of Podagada hill on the valley of the rivulet that connects the moat and the river Singari near the present village of Bhandariguda we find extensive ruins of a township in the shape of pottery, brick bats, and broken pieces of terracotta's and wax bangles, tiles terracotta balls, beads of clay and semiprecious stone. The depressions running in straight lines amidst the ruins suggest the existence of road and streets.

To the west, not very far from the fortification, a broken brick temple near two ancient tanks may be seen. Krisnamacharlu identifies the temple as a Siva Shrine. The roof has fallen and the walls and entrance have dilapidated and the entire complex is in utter ruin. To us it appeared that originally the temple was two-chambered. From the study of the extent sculptures in its vicinity, it is probable to think that it was a Siva temple. It was originally built on a brick and stone platform as evident from its ruins. At present in the sanctum we find a Bhairava image and a lingam and along with a Vrisabha. In front of the temple, the figures of Vrisabha, Ganesa (**Fig-3**), and worshipper couple's memorial sati pillars are found. In one of the later pillars, a warrior riding a horse and piecing a wild animal with a long spear has been depicted.

To the north of this place at a distance of 1 k.m. we find another group of memorial pillars like Hero and Sati stones (**Fig-4**). Apart from these antiquities we find here pottery, brickbats, terracotta figures and balls, broken pieces of tile, beads of semi-precious stones and clay, terracotta bangles, stone missiles and traces of houses, *vihara* and places in profusion.

This archaeological evidence is duly corroborated by epigraphic references. The Podagada stone inscription of Skandhavarman which is still standing on the hill fort in solitary splendor, speaks in laudable term that the king had restored the city with palatial buildings and residential sectors and fortification. The epigraph also states that he established the Padamula of Visnu, which very probably indicates a Vihara of Visnu to which a satra was also attached. In other Nala records we find reference to gardens and it is probable that Puskari was also adorned with gardens and orchards. With the exuberance of religious institutions, satras, residential sectors, palaces and fortification, Puskari appears to have been a bustling city of opulence as the seat of administration of the glorious Nala dynasty<sup>4</sup>.

### **Nilakanthesvara Temple at Papadahandi**

The Nilakanthesvara temple at Papadahandi (Lat. 19° 20' 56" North, Long. 82° 31' 28" East, Elev. 585 Mtrs) is located at the midst of Papadahandi town of Nabarangpur district, Odisha. It is on the left side of the National Highway No-26 leading from Bhawanipatna to Visakhapatnam. It is also located at a distance of 12 kilometers away from the district headquarter. This is a living temple facing towards the east as per the rules prescribed in the Silpa texts of Odisha. Nilakanthesvara as a citadel of Saivism is totally forgotten from historical studies and research till the present day. Papadahandi the erstwhile Pipalahundi is famous for the Nilakanthesvara Siva temple like Lord Lingaraja and Lord Jagannatha temple respectively in Bhubaneswar and Puri. The village is identified with Pipalahundi mentioned in the inscriptions of early medieval period found at Podagarh of Umerkote in Nabarangpur district. The temple is under the Endowment department, Government of Odisha. This is a white washed temple by the local people for which the identification of sculptures is very much difficult.

Rituals like *Mahasivaratri*, *Kartika Purnima*, *Sravana Somabara*, *Dhana Sankranti*, *Pana Sankranti*, *Ganha Purnima*, *Dola Purnima* etc are celebrated here by the local people with great enthusiasm. Social functions like marriage, thread ceremony, *mundana kriya* etc are observed here.

### **Plan and Elevation of Vimana:**

On plan temple has a sanctum and a *jagamohana*. The sanctum has a square *rekha vimana* and the *jagamohana* or *mukhasala* is *pidha* order belonging to the Kalingan School of temple architecture. The *vimana* is *pancharatha* on plan having a central *raha* flanked by two *anuratha* and *kanika pagas* on either side of the *raha paga*. Architecturally the temple has resemblance with the Brahmesvara temple in Bhubaneswar and Narasimhanath temple of Paikmal in Bargarh district.

The temple was built with sandstone. The presiding deity of the temple is a *Sivalingam* with a *yonipitha*. The *garbhagriha* measures 8.6 square feet whereas the outer part measures 21 square feet. The doorjamb measures 33 ft in height and with a width of 23 feet. The *vimana* approximately measures 50 ft in height from *pista* to *kalasa*. The *dopicha simhas*, *deula charinis* are found in the *beki* portion of the *vimana* and *jagamohana* whereas udyota lions and *bhararakshas* were inserted into the *gandi* of the *vimana*.

With the fivefold divisions of *bada* the temple has a *panchanga bada* having *pabhaga*, *tala jangha*, *bandhana*, *upara jangha* and *baranda*. The *bada* consists of total 33 niches that enshrined with *parsvadevatas*, *Vyala* figurines, amorous couples, *nayika* figurines, *astadikpalas* and erotic figurines. So far as *parsvadevatas* are concerned the temple houses the images of Kartikeya in west, Parvati in north and Ganesa in south with their traditional attributes and ornamentation as usual to Kalingan style. The *pista* measures 2.9 feet in height. The *baranda* has ten horizontal mouldings. The *pabhaga* has five mouldings of *khura*, *kumbha*, *pata*, *kani* and *basanta*. Ten *bhumi amlas* are found carved in the *kanika paga* of the *vimana*.

### Jagamohana:

The *jagamohana* welcomes the devotees to the sanctum sanctorum. It is a *pidha deula* having nine *pidhas* separated by a single *potalas*. It measures 30 feet in height from bottom to top. In the *bada* portion there are altogether 30 sculptural niches of various religious and secular images. The doorjamb of the *jagamohana* is carved with *lata sakha* and *puspa sakha*. In the architrave there is a *navagraha* panel depicted with their usual attributes and seated with *padmasana* pose. In the *lalatabimba* portion there is an image of Gajalaxmi seated in *padmasana* depicted within a *chaitya* medallion.

The temple is decorated with *pidha mudi* in *upara jangha* and *khakhara mudi* in *tala jangha*. In lower *jangha* conjunction there are *vyala* figurines and the upper *jangha* conjunction decorated with female figurines with various postures. The temples of coastal Odisha upper *jangha* conjunction are carved with erotic sculptures.

The temple is enclosed by a rectangular compound wall having three gateways in west, north and south direction. However at present the western gateway is operational.

### Detached Sculptures:

There are four detached sculptures lies in the western part of the temple premises such as amorous couple, Buddha in *padmasana* pose delivering his sermon to his disciple, Hero stone carved with the abstract form of Sun and Moon and Nandi. There are cracks in the ceiling of the *garbhagriha* for which rain water percolates into the sanctum.

### References

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Fig.1. Staircases leading to the fort



Fig-2. Corbelled gate way made of stone



Fig.3. Image of Ganesa



Fig.4. Memorial stone