

Kanak Durga Temple: A Landmark in the Folk Tradition of Paschim Medinipur

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Introduction

Chilkiagarh is unique for its harmonious co-existence of tribal culture and Bramhin conventions. Also it is considered to be an oral tale to be told for everybody. In the course of time this region has gone through various changes. My work tries to look at the changes in mainly two ways-- historical and cultural. Chilkiagarh is part of my own locality. Over the years several visits to that place have helped me a lot to learn about the place. I have interacted with common people there and most of the sources are oral. So, there are fuzzy zones for reading the text differently.

Geography

Situated in PaschimMidnapur district the main attraction of Chilkiagarh is the

Kanakdurga temple. The temple is covered in the west by a dense forest, in the east by Dulung rivulet. The forest is covered with medicinal plants of 433 types. Nearly 318 types of medicinal plants are there in the forest. From Bihar and Jharkhand, Jamboni (P.S) can be called 'Gateway of Bengal'. In Chilkiagarh there grows a mixed



The temples is The temple is covered in the west by a dense forest, in the east by Dulung river.

culture in combination with cultures of Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa. River Dulong flows through tribal villages bearing scripts of silence. Local management has already taken a few steps to develop eco-tourism like boat riding, airy park for children and guest house adjacent to the main temple. There some tea stalls to ignite thought process in eco-lovers. Monkeys with long tales may jump on us from nowhere. It causes shock to a newcomer.

History

The history of Chilkigarh is closely associated with the history of Dhalbhum. Dhalbhum kings originated from North West of Madhya Pradesh. Their first king was the Suryabansha king Ramchandra. His son was Birsingha. Birsingha had two sons- Gunadhar Singha and Jagatdeo Singha. At a point of time there was a clash between Gunadhar and Jagatdeo. Jagatdeo left his home. He came to a part of Bihar (now Jharkhand) which was full of dense forest. The place attracted him very much. Then

there was a clash between Jagatdeo and Dhabaldeb. Jagatdeo defeated Dhabaldeb very easily. Jagatdeo at the request of queen of Dhabaldeb took the surname 'Dhabaldeb' for his remembrance. At that time Puri's Lord Jagannathdeb's glory became widespread. Jagatdeo changed his name and became Jagannathdeb Dhabaldeb. He was the seventh of



The Old temple of Mother Mahamaya at Chilkigarh. The idol has been shifted to a new temple in the same compound as seen below.

eight kings named Jagganath. Jagatdeo came in contact with king Gopinath in Junglemahal. King Gopinath gave his only daughter Subarnamani to King Jagganath. With this marriage the relation between Junglemahal and Dhalbhum became stronger. Later Mangobindo became the king of Chilkigarh. His time is called the Golden Age of Jamboni. He ruled for thirty years. Mangobindo was very much interested in Indian art and culture. The last king was king Jagadishchandra who ruled till 1953.

Demography

Chilkigarh has a heterogeneous population; people of different communities have been living here. All of them maintaining their cultural peculiarities and it became a melting pot of cultures. High caste Brahmins have lived side by side with a huge low caste, outcaste and tribal population like the Bagdis, Bauris, Doms and Santhals.

Main Story

The main story revolves round a dream. Devi Mahamaya came in a dream and ordered king Gopinath to set up a temple for Her worship. Devi Mahamaya in that dream also described her idol. On the very next morning king Gopinath found two visitors who saw the same dream at night. They were artist Jogendranath Kamilya

and Brahmin Ramchandra Sarangi. It was artist Kamilya who translated this dream into reality. Some think that Devi Kanakdurga is Devi Chandi. She is the Goddess of Energy and Power. The old temple is widely known as Baramahal. Later king Kamalkanta planned to shift the temple. But in a dream he saw Devi Kanak Durga in blue sari. Devi ordered the king not to shift her temple. So that Devi Kanakdurga still remains in that place over three hundred years. There is a saying that the king's family never wear blue sarees. As practiced so far, only a person with Sarangi (Brahmin) as a surname can be the 'pujari' of the temple.

The Kanak Durga temple lies in the south direction of the place. Some believe that at a time there was a draught in that region and the people were starving. One day people witnessed a miracle: suddenly massive clouds covered the skies and there was thunderous rain. Fields turned green again. But interestingly the rain did not take any life. One aged person of Chilkigarh attributed this to the grace of Devi Mahamaya. The inhabitants of Chilkigarh submitted themselves humbly to Devi Mahamaya



Idol of Mother Kanak Durga (or the Golden Durga). The original idol was of stone. Now it is wrapped in gold.

by setting up a small temple under a banyan tree. This four-hundred year old Banyan tree still stands in quiet dignity as the witness of time passed. Some say there was a huge stone just in front of that temple. They think that this stone is the key which leads to an inner chamber. That chamber is a restricted place. Only a Sarangi (Brahmin) has the right to enter into that secret chamber. Many different types of trees and plants of various species surround the temple. In that forest we find many small temples of Lord Shiva. There is a saying that those temples spontaneously emerged out of the ground overnight.

Yet another oral story of Devi Mahamaya as the protector of the region has been handed down across generations. Initially the temple priest would get frightened to return home alone through the forest in the dark night. But as the lore goes, Devi Mahamaya soon assured him Her protection on his journey back, but on condition that he would never look back! This is how under Her protection the priest would traverse through the forest fearless, night after night. Over the years the glory of Kanakdurga became widespread. There was a custom of the slaughter of an animal to God during Nabami puja. The practice continued for better *health* and *prosperity*. The meal resulting from a *slaughter offering* was seen as holy.

Material Culture

A historian of religion stresses on material culture utilized in the cultural task of reflexivity, that is, the capacity to be reflective and negotiate meaning-varies from culture to culture. Material culture is thereby a constitutive part of the construction of a culture's worldview. It provides a theoretical basis for the efforts being made in a variety of fields to understand the role of material culture in a society.

The first idol of Devi Kanak Durga during the time of King Gopinath was made of stone. Later the idol became a gold idol. The word 'Kanak' means 'Gold'. From the iconography of the idol we get a distinct picture of the then society. The temple shows influences of the Orissia temple architecture and folk tradition. Pictures of various incidents of day to day life are engraved on the temple. We cannot read them due to the dilapidated



The site for offerings for the goddess.

condition of the main temple these days. The temple reminds us of the Surya Temple of Konaraka where we find these sort of pictures. The temple architecture shows that the temple was built three to four hundred years ago. There is a huge Banyan tree just in front of the temple. This tree is around 300 years old. This Banyan tree is regarded as a sacred tree in Hindu cosmology. The rare species of monkeys that dwell in the surrounding forests are regarded the ancestors of the king's family. So nobody hurts them. These monkeys are valuable part of the eco-system of this mysterious and beautiful place. They have been maintaining the ecological balance through the passage of time.

Visual Culture

Over the years Chilkigarh remains a place of varied cultural nuances. This temple was the meeting place of Aryan and non-Aryan cultures. The temple remains a reflection of religious rituals and social system. The temple stands as living history which remains instrumental for many oral beliefs handed down generation after generation. There was a custom of sacrificing men to Devi Mahamaya. The sacrifices could not be stopped until the blood mixed with the Dulung river. During the time of king Mangobindo there was a festival called 'Kite Festival'. It was considered as a sacred festival which was a valuable part of ancient Indian culture and tradition. Artist Jagganath Das used to make huge kites for the king. During the days of the Durga Puja the place becomes more lively. Aryan culture becomes fused with folk culture during the festival days.

Worship of Mother Goddess

The Sakti cult emphasizes total immersion in life, where even the basest of human impulses are mastered, transformed into higher forms of energy and harmonized for one to attain spiritual realization. The worship of Goddess is often associated with worship of related Gods. The Saktas, like other Vedic worshippers, offer Panchopachar Puja to Maa Jagat Janani (Universal Mother). Similarly the puja of Devi Kanakdurga symbolizes the puja of the Goddess of Sakti. Mother-goddess cult in India is of pre-Aryan origin. The puja at Kanakdurga temple is not an egoistic satisfaction but rather an act of transcendence. Through control of sense one attains spiritual ecstasy.

Significance of Dream

Dream plays a very significant role in this story. Dream is being used here as a trope to naturalise our belief system. No question can be raised on that belief. Dream also places religion at a much higher level. It is beyond the reach of human beings. Mr. Atanka Sharangi, present pujari of the temple refers to the dream in conversation with the author and relates to its influence on local people in the neighbouring villages like, Dubra, Parihati, Gidni, Jamboni, Alampur etc. He claims that the temple is one of the old surviving historical temples of the region. The temple is the abode of peace of mind. People talk about it and stories pass on through mouths.

Conclusion

T. S. Eliot in his essay 'Tradition and The Individual Talent' talks of 'tradition' in the 'historical sense' which involves a perception not only of the past-ness of the past but of its presence. This historical sense bears the cultural heritage of a place and its people. Over the years, the Kanak Durga temple remains instrumental in bearing the cultural heritage of Chilkigarh. A serene approval haunts the hungry human hearts as we depart from this forest enclosed temple place, kicks the pendulum faster to pronounce, "Come here and enjoy this eco-soothing place but beware of unnoticed seduction."

Note

Most of the references in the text are based on oral sources which can be interpreted differently.

References

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