Temples of Deulghata, Pakbira and Banda: A Photo Journey

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Purulia has long been a rich cultural zone of West Bengal and its heritage ranges from highly sophisticated folk arts to spectacular architecture. This happened because this land came under various cultural influences at different periods of history right from the 6th century BC when Jaina Tirthankara Mahavira—as reported in the Kalpasutra, passed through this land. Just like other parts of Bengal Purulia too faced the vicissitudes of time and yet the people from this part responded lively to every cultural event. Jainism had been one of those cultural events and quite interestingly the aboriginal people of this region embraced Jainism first and provided much needed shelter at a time when it faced crisis in some parts and still today they follow certain folk rituals, the origin of which can be traced back to Jainism. However, the Jain religion rose to prominence when Anantavarman Choda-Ganga-Deva (1078 AD) occupied the entire southwest Bengal up to the river Bhagirathi and created his second kingdom at Ambikanagar, Bankura. Since Anantavarmana was a follower of Jainism, the religion received royal patronage and many temples for the Digambara sect were built in Bankura and Purulia in the 11th and 12 century AD in honour of Parswanatha and Mahavira. Unfortunately the same Odishan kings who later on inclined towards Brahminical faith converted Jaina temples into Hindu temples for Shiva or Vishnu. Many temples in the course of time met this fate and images of Jain Tirthankaras came to be worshipped as the images of the Brahminical order like Vishnu, Shiva or Dharma Thakur. At some places attempts have been made to modify the images and in that process deformation took place. With the withdrawal of royal patronage, the temples soon lost their glory and in the centuries to follow none came to look after them. Many of them turned into heaps of ruins and a few which are still standing almost miraculously, may waiting the same fate. However the saddest incident took place in the mid 1950s when a very area called Telkupi was submerged deliberately under the newly constructed dam by Damodar Valley Corporation without allowing any scope for documentation or translocation. Telkupi was a major Jain settlement with temples and other artefacts dating back to the 9th century Pala period.

In this selection of the temples from Deulghata, Pakbira and Banda, I want to show their artistic beauty through some of my photographs. I also appeal to all to come forward to conserve the sites as soon as possible.

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Temples of Deulghata

Deulghata, literally meaning "the land of temples" in Bengali, is considered as one of the rich heritage sites of Purulia district as it bears the marks of ancient Indian history, especially Jainism. There were three brick temples out of which two are extant at present. The third one which was the biggest of the three collapsed a few years back because of a man-made accident. These are standing on the bank of river Kasai in Jaipur Boram village, almost 30km from Purulia town. Apart from these brick temples, there are some signs of a couple of stone temples too. Overwhelming natural beauty of Palash and Shimul encircles the whole place.

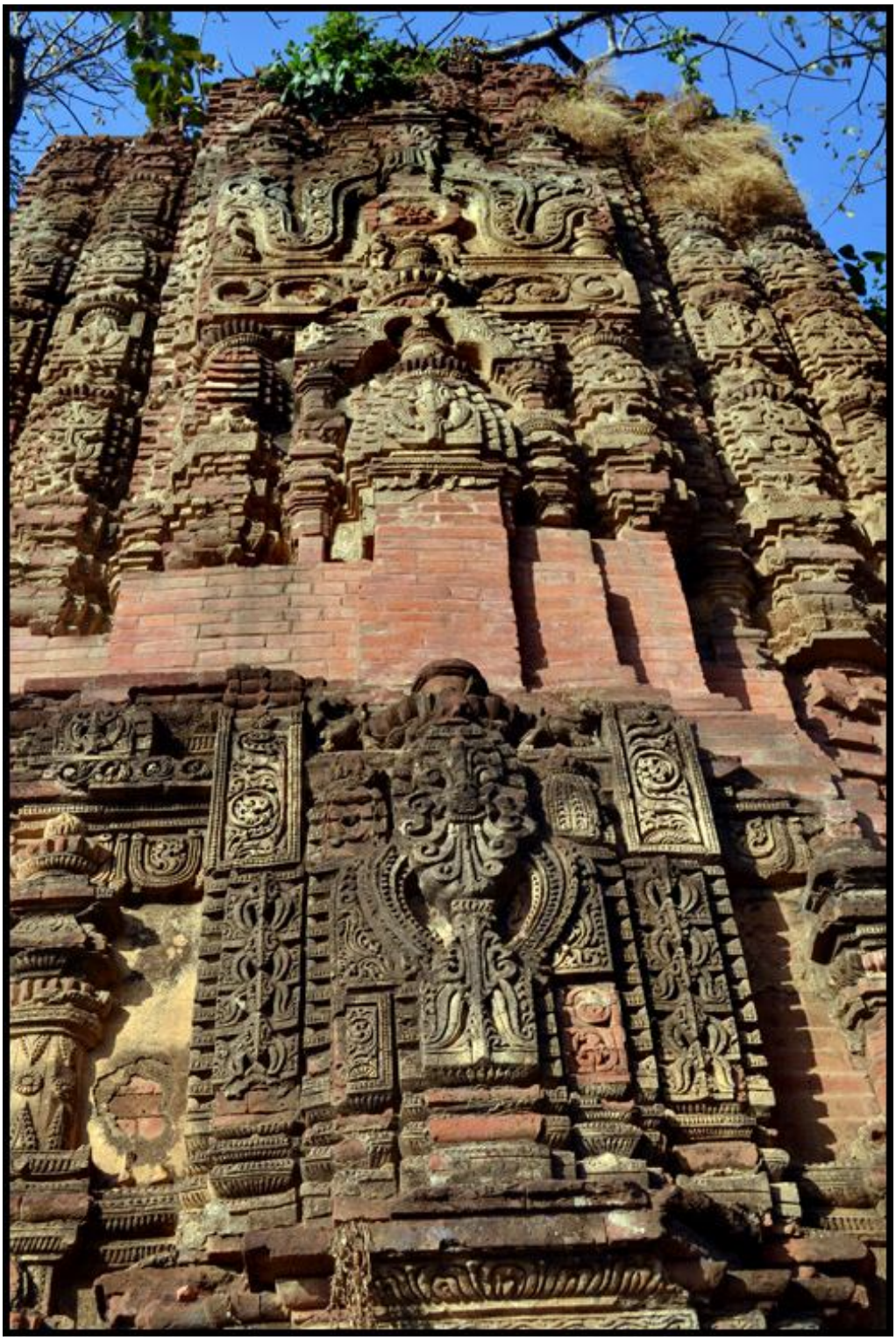
Surviving two temples (Deul) of Deulghata , still standing with dignity despite all natural calamities and human neglect

Front side of a temple

The temples have been repaired, only a few portions are original

The tallest temple, now a heap of debris

Mesmerising landscape of river Kasai (Kangsawati) beside of which the place is located. Temples are only 140 ft away from the river.



Curved brickwork with stucco application

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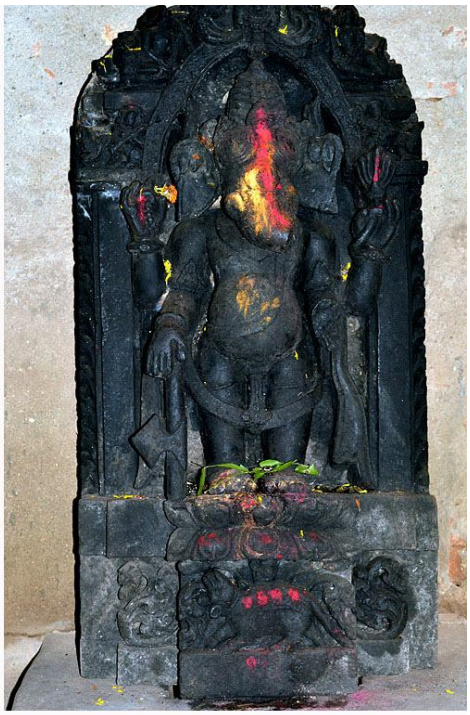

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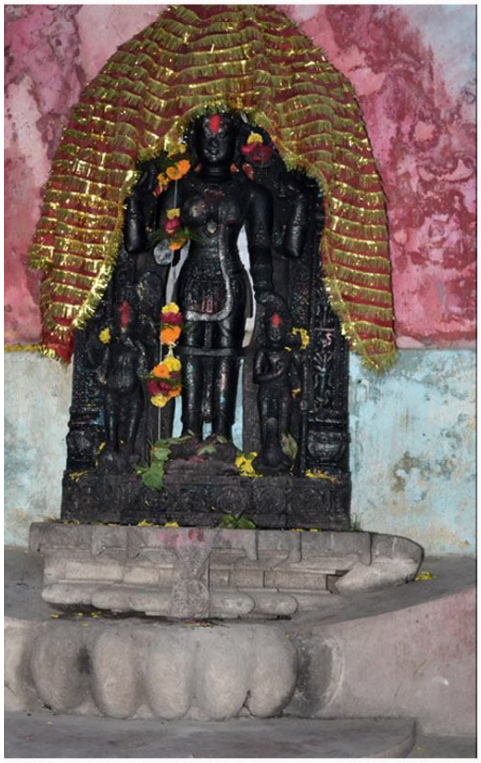

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1. Statue of a Jain tirthankar seated in meditation (3ft app.); 2. Ganesha (3ft app.) 3. Devi (unidentified) flanked by Saraswati and Ganesh on both sides (4ft), 4. Most attractive, statue of Mahisasurmardini (4ft) These idols have been worshipped by the locals since long past. The colourful decoration is the reflection of their devotion.

Temples of Pakbira

Located in Pakbira village, 40km away from Purulia town by Purulia-Puncha road, Pakbira or Pakbirrah is the largest and most famous archeological spot in Purulia district. A large number of Jain sculptures was found many can still be seen here, but most of them got dilapidated in course of time. At present three stone temples are standing here and innumerable statues, decorative stones and panels dot the whole place. Besides, a massive statue of Padmaprabha (which is considered the biggest Jain statue ever found in Purulia) is the cynosure of the place.

Front side of temples (though the upper portions have been recreated

Side view of the two temples

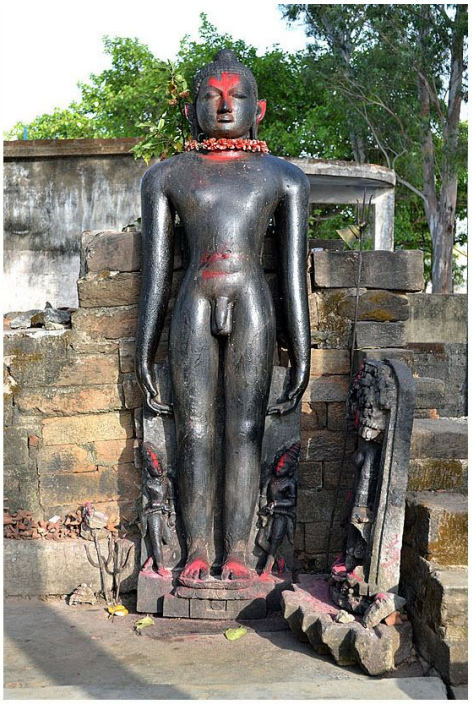
3rd temple standing separately from the two (smallest)

Broken statue of Jain tirthankar Chandraprabha. Padmaprabha (only lower part); and a part of Amalak

Broken Pata with magnificent architecture and Rishabhnath on the top (seated)

Votive pieces

Fallen grace



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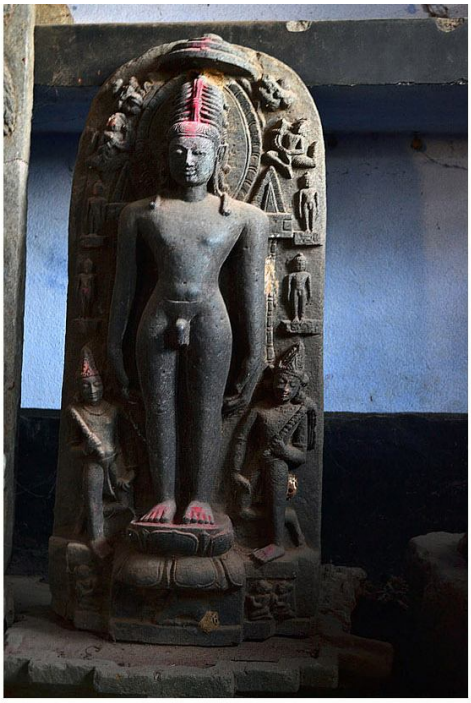

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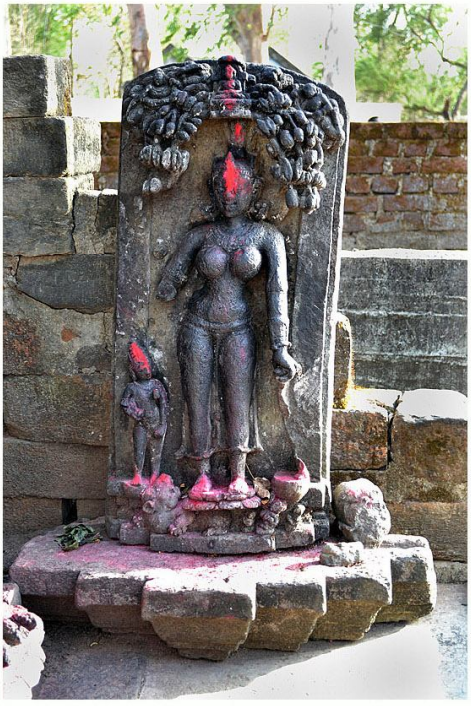

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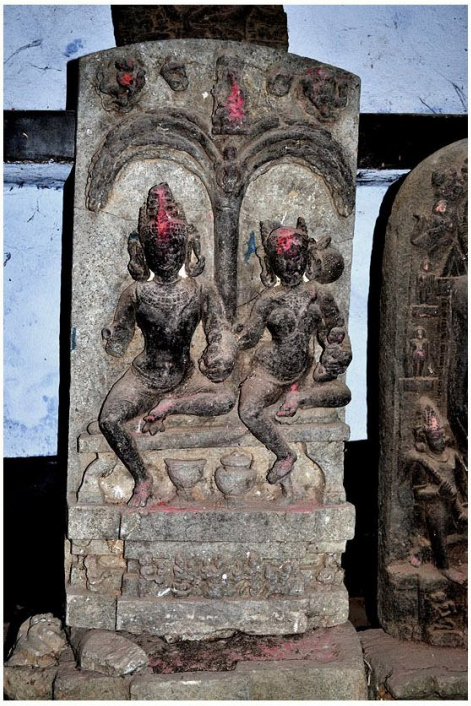

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1. Great statue of Padmaprabha (app. 8ft), worshipped as 'Bhairavnath' by the non-jain locals; 2. Rishabhnath (3ft); 3. Devi Ambika (3.5ft); 4. Statue (unidentified) (man and woman holding baby in their hands under a tree)

1

2

1 & 2: Among the thousands two extremely gorgeous broken statues

Temples of Banda

Banda, a village in Raghunathpur II, is 35 km away from Purulia town and 1km from Cheliyama village which is also famous for its terracotta temple. The temple at Banda is the finest in structure of all the stone temples found in Purulia. This is almost 75ft long a sand-stone temple in Rekha style of triratha variety with beautiful architecture and an amalaka still on its top. The ground plan is star shaped, with square internal cella and with a rectangular Mukhamandapa or Jagamohana. The Temple is considered to be from 11th century AD.

Beautiful location amidst Palash trees

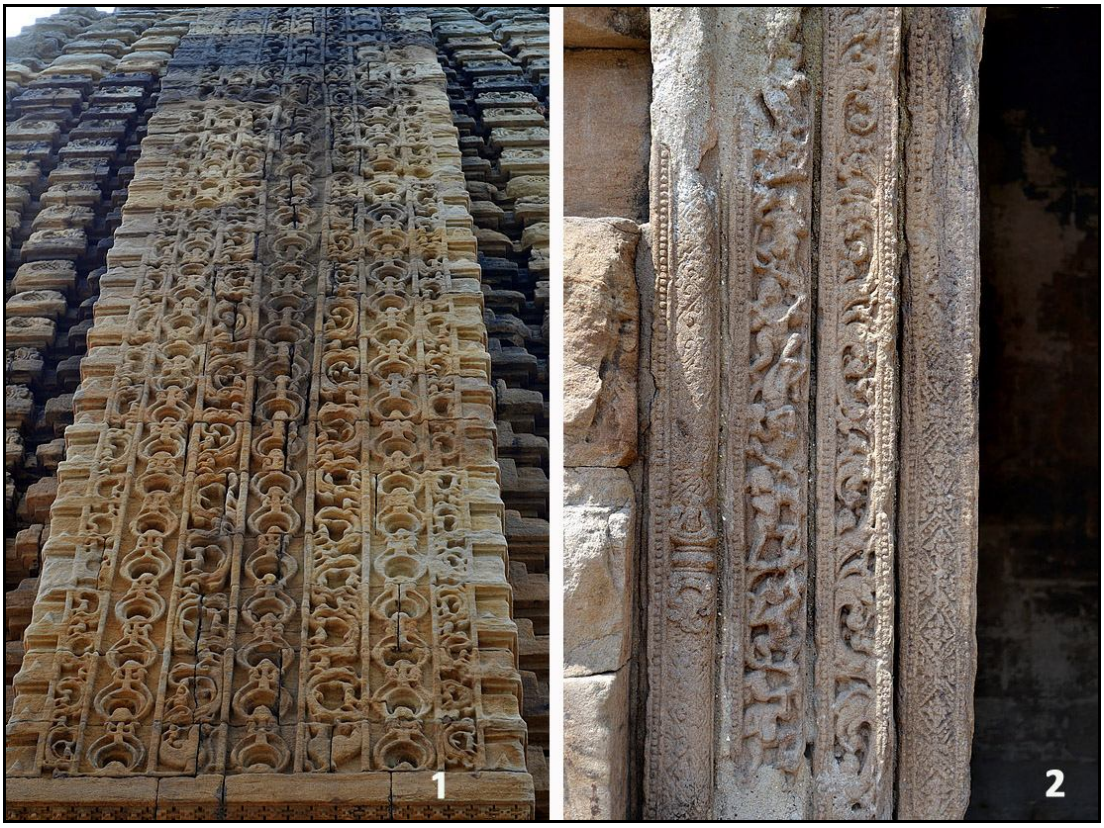
Back side of the Deul with prominent parts and architecture

Temple of Banda (front view) with ruined porch

Ruined pillars

Stone roofed porch with stone pillars

Front panel (door) partly broken but still beautiful



1. Clear view of 'Gandi' beautifully decorated details(curved stone). 2. Front panel of the door, images of dancers and musicians (stucco application)

Chintu Dutta is an Assistant Teacher of Anai Jambad High School, Purulia. He is deeply interested in the past heritage and history of Purulia. As an amteur photographer, he has dedicated himself to documenting the heritage sites of the district. He also loves to capture the colours of flora and fauna of the region in all its glory. Email: chintu_dutta@yahoo.co.in