



History & Tradition of Choudwar in Odisha

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(Abstract:-Choudwar, an ancient city of Odisha was a great historical importance in ancient times. Due to historical excavation much things have been come to lime light. Though it is shrouded in mistry the contributions of Somavamsi, Suryavamsi and Ganga rulers made the city significant. The religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Shaktisim, Vaisnavism played side by side to make the soil culturally fertile. The temples of Kedaresvara, Kapilesvara, Batesvara, Chhotesvara, Maninagesvara, Balunkesvara, Uttaresvara entitled as a “Asta Sambhu Temple” at Choudwar is a great monumental work in the field of art and architecture.)

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As a Historical place choudwar needs no introduction. It is unanimously accepted that choudwar was one of the important ancient cities of medieval Odisha. This city was also widely accepted as a place of mixed religions of medieval Odisha.

Choudwar thirteen kilometers away from Cuttack and forty kilometers away from state capital Bhubaneswar on NH-5 and NH-55 is a place of great historical importance. Choudwar is situated on the north bank of river Mahanadi and Virupa, is an extended literate and morum plature. It lies between in eastern coastal plains and western hilly region of Odisha. In the past choudwar was more extended in area than the present. The village of kapaleswar, Govindjew patna, Mundamala, Kedareswara, Jaj-Bhairava, Agrahat, Bandala, Chhatisa, Indranipatana and Chasapada studied with archaeological remains were included in the choudwar area.

Presently industrialization and Urbanization have shadowed the historical city of Choudwar which have been recollected by scholars like Andrew Stirling, John Beams, Parama Nanda Acharya, R.P. Chanda, H.K. Mahatab and so on. Lastly in the second world war base of royal air-force was built at choudwar. The rest of the remains of fort were destroyed by the British Government for the establishment of air-base in the Pre-independent era. Choudwar has become an industrial town with Odisha textile mill, Titlagarh paper mill, Kalinga tubes, Livra Carpets, Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Limited, Tile factories were established at choudwar.

John Beams the then commissioner of Odisha writes in the Bengal district gazetteers, Cuttack, 1906 that the ruins of city (choudwar) cover a very large area and consist of walls laterite stone which or largely quarried for metalling roads.

Ranglal Banarji, the Deputy collector wrote about choudwar the walls of a large fort are still traceable. According to tradition the walls are one kosa (two miles) long one each side. Numerous mound and several temples still exist inside. At present there is nothing to prove the above reports. Due to ignorance of the local people and without protection by Government, the fort remains of choudwar made in rubbles used otherwise. During digging of earth the ancient wells and walls of the ancient house comes to light. Some historians believe that there were four gates on the fort walls naming this fort as choudwar four gates.

In course of yajanagar of the 9th century A.D. (as stated above) contracted in to yajanagar or jajnagara, K.C. Panigrahi opines that yajanagar (as another name of choudwar) finds mention in the Mahabharata of Sarala Das who flourished in the 15th century A.D. As such Dr. Panigrahi identified yajanagara with choudwar. Sarala Das has identified the Somavamsi king Janmejaya-I with the puranic Janmejaya (of Mahabharata age) who hailed from lunar-race. Janmejaya, the son of king Parikhita had



performed a Snake Sacrifice(sarpa-yajna) to avenge the assassination of his father by the serpent Takshaka. Local people say that king Janmejaya of Kosala (Sonapur-Balangir territory) had accomplished a sarpayajna at Choudwar in imitation of the puranic Janmejaya. Whatever the sacrifice may be, but the remains of sacrifice altar (vedi) and a pit one still traceable at Agrahat. As such the local hearsay and the tradition recorded in the Madalapanji bear some kernel of truth.

”Suna vaivasuta manu badanti Agasti’

Pandava mane rahile ye Amaravati.

Suhanikanya ku bibhahele Dharmasuta

Rahile ye panchastari varsa pariyanta

Parikshitarajya dele yajnagari,

Pancha katakara madhye eka adhikari.

Choudwar one of the most important historic place of Odisha. According to Hindu mythology in Odia Mahabharata Sarala Das mentions Choudwar as ‘Jajnagara’. In Madalapanji it was mentioned as ‘Nagara-choudwar-kataka’. And another important work of 16th century was Krishna Das Kaviraj’s Chaitanya Charitamita was mentioned, Choudwar as Chaturdwara. According to Muslim records whole Odisha depicted as Jajnagar. In 1135 A.D. the Ganga capital was shifted from Mukhalingam to Choudwar, Cuttack. Minhaj in his Tabaqat-i-nasri, records that in the region of Rajaraja -III. Two Muslim brothers named Muhammad-e-sheran and Ahmad –e-sheran unsuccessfully invaded Jajnagar in the year 1205. Some scholars of modern period like K.C. Panigrahi, Paramananda Acharya, G.S. Das accepted the view that the present Choudwar was known as ‘Jajnagar’ in medieval Odisha.

Under the Somavamsi rule Choudwar was an important seat of administration. A popular legend is that Janmejaya of epic fame performed the snake sacrifice at Agrahat to avenge the death of his father, Parikshita. According to K.C. Panigrahi, N.K. Sahu, Paramananda Acharya, H.K. Mahatab and some other historians, this legendary Janmejaya was no other than Janmejaya Mahabhavagupta-I, the founder of Somavamsi rule in the plains of Odisha. In the “Dwapara” era Pandavas lost the game with Kauravas and were sent to forest for long twelve years and after that they had to undergo one year disguise. During this one year of disguise the Pandava ‘s took shelter in the kingdom of King Virata. According to the historical data, Choudwar was the capital of King Virata and Pandavas along with their wife Draupadi stayed here in disguise. Moreover, there are witness to the fact in the adjacent street named Munda Sahi where the spot of Bhima’s kneeling sign and the place where Arjuna kept his famous arm Gandiva can be seen.

Choudwar was also widely accepted as a place of mixed religions and culture of medieval Odisha. Choudwar was the center of multi religions. Different types of religions flourished in this land in different times. Some of the significant religions like Saivism, Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism have taken their incredible place in this region. The wide spread growth and development of these religions have enriched the culture and traditions of this soil. Choudwar has a number of Siva temple from the medieval origin. Choudwar has still structural remains of a number of Siva temples. There are eight Siva temples, which are popularly known as ‘Asta-Sambhu’ temples. The eight temple names are Kapaleswar, Chatesvara, Batesvara, Utteresvara, Jhotesvara, Kedareshvara, Maninagesvara and Balunkesvara. Besides Saivism, Buddhism and Jainism have also found their place in Choudwar. The sculptural remains of Choudwar cover all the religious faiths of medieval Odisha. It is not possible to give an account of the



abundant sculptures scattered throughout the place. So an account of important antiquarian discoveries of choudwar include statues of Buddha in different mudra, two bronze masks of Buddha each having an inscription "ye Dharma Hetu prabhava" behind the ear, Avalokitaswara, prajna-paramita, Tara having an inscription (dharani) at the bottom, Mariachi, vajra varahi, Statues of Jain Trithankaras, One statue of Trithankara is decorated with eight planets or Grahas, Ambika the Goddess of Jain pantheon, Hindu pantheon-Vishnu, saptamatrikas, Astasambhuj Durga, Uma-Maheswar, Ajaikapada Bhairava, Astadikpalas & their consorts and etc.

-In 1976 a Copper plate grant was discovered in the village of mundamala.

-Ganga fanams are found in choudwar.

-The other ancient structural remains of choudwar include the foundations of the fort, wells and stone-cut tanks.

Another finding is the copper plate grant of kamarnava discovered in choudwar have been published in November-1994 issue of jhankara. Somavamsi inscription of two lines on the left door jamb of the Vimana of kedareswar temple has so far not been deciphered.

Ganga-Fanams, small gold coins of various weight during the Ganga rule in Odisha are found in choudwar. At choudwar so many boards of Ganga-fanams (fanam) have been discovered. So it would not be wrong to say, that the sculptural remains of choudwar appear to cover all the religious faiths of medieval Odisha.

Remarks:-

In my opinion choudwar as a city center in medieval Odisha attracting the people from every corner of the country. The people like traders, monks, craftsmen, and courtesans of different areas settle in the city with their personal beliefs and faith of various pantheons. Maybe the famous religious teachers and preachers coming to the city to propagate their faith, it is clearly indicated from the antiquities of this region that it is cosmopolitan in nature. This land nurturing every faith including Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain in its cradles. All these faiths flourish side by side and creating an example of religious tolerance in its heyday. Because we read several references and we found so many monuments, sculptures, inscriptions, coins etc. But still choudwar did not get any recognition as a religious development. We noticed several ruined temples at choudwar. So we need to preserve these ancient temples and monuments to maintain our tradition of choudwar. That's why we have to work on choudwar more. Like we can excavate this area to know more about it. Odisha Government should take a step towards choudwar like rebuilding the temples preserving the ancient monuments and sculptures. We found so many sculptures, broken images surrounding the temple. We need to preserve these things for our next generation and to maintain the tradition of choudwar. Where as many sculptures are still scattered in few places and people did not recognize the value of these sculptures. That's why it is very important to take a right step to preserve these sculptures by building a side Museum at choudwar because these valuable materials are going to be destroyed by nature and human beings.

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