

## NRUSINGHANATH

•Narayan Pruseth

For the last so many centuries Nrusinghnath has magnetically attracted pilgrims and tourists. It stands majestically amidst the boulders



and the crevice; a series of cascades and rapids, murmuring rivulets and verdant trees, shrubs and medicinal herbs of northern flank of the Gandhamardan hills in the Padampur Sub-Division of Bargarh District, Orissa History and culture of this place have mingled inextricably with this famous place.

This temple is an earliest surviving Vaishnava monument, built in 1413 A.D. by Vijjal Dev- I the fourth Chouhan ruler of Patna. It has been dedicated to Lord Nrusinghanath "in his feline incarnation (marjara Keshari)". The image of Marjara Keshari of black chlorite stone having the head of a cat and body of a lion is the presiding deity of the sanctum. The temple consists of a Viman and a Jagamohan. A descriptive genesis of this incarnation of Vishnu in the form of Marjara Keshari is found in "Nrusingha Charita" of baba Jaga Das, a famous Kandha poet of 18<sup>th</sup> century (1). According to the narration Malati the beautiful daughter of Udunga rishi living on the bank of the river Godavari was ravished by Ravana, the king of Lanka, Cursed by her father, Malati was thrown into the river Godavari. Later on she was protected by Goddess Godavari. She searched for her father but in vain. Again she was raped by Mushika and thus from Ravana and Musaka

born of her a demon called Musakadaitya who when grew up ate up his mother. He also became a source of constant trouble to Gods.



The Gods being defeated for several times by the Musakadaitya prayed Lord Ramachandra for his mercy. Ramachandra assumed the form of Nrusingha. Seeing him in this form, Musakadaitya fled in fear, assumed the form of a mouse and entered the crevice of the mountain Gandhagiri. On the request of Gandhagiri Nrusingha established himself there and awaits in ambush there in that feline form to devour the mouse demon, Musikadaitya.

Once upon a time the Nrusinghanath area (Nrusinghanath – Melchhamunda – Ganiapali Ong velly) (2) was a great seat of learning during the Buddhist period Historians believe that prior to the establishment of Vaishnavism at Nrusinghanath, here there was a famous Buddhist Monastery run by Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna.

This Buddhist Bihar is said to have been developed during the medieval period and in this center of learning Buddhist and Hindu philosophies were taught. (3) Historians have also interpreted the account of Chinese Pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang in the line to prove that his description of "Po-lo-mo-lo-ki-ki" is Parimala giri which is no other place than famous Gandhamardan Hills. The four stone pillars inside the Jagamohan also exhibit the

finest example of Buddhist mannerism art. (4) There pillar belong to 6<sup>th</sup> century A.C. Although the place has remained a place of attraction for the Hindu pilgrims there was no detail discussion about the temple and its exotic sculp-



tures. Only reference have been made in “Kosalanda Kavyam”. Before the establishment of the British rule, an European traveler Mr. Leckie had travelled the Borasambar area, but unfortunately, he could not visit the temple. Later on the place found minor place in the reports of (some of the British Officers. But towards the end of) 19<sup>th</sup> century Mr. J.D. Beglar visited the temple and made an exhaustive study of the art and architecture of the temple. Although Mr. Beglar was not allowed to enter inside the temple his study revealed the exquisite art and architecture of the temple to the outside world. He believed that the temple was built in the Khujraho style and once very elaborately sculptured inside and out, but having fallen into decay, has been repaired with a liberal allowance of plaster, which covers up everything.” (5). After the publication of this report it attracted the attention of Archaeologists and its architecture was studied by the famous archaeologist G.R. Bhandarkar and his report in detail was published in Archaeological Survey of India (1904-05). Bhandarkar’s opinion is that the temple had originally “three doors ways, facing the east, north and south, but now only the first two remains, the third being blocked up the replaced with masonry work, thus giving an uncouth and unsymmetrical shape to the right wall. (6)” The door frames

of the temple are the stone of dark colour and beautifully carved with pair of musicians, Gaja Laxmi floral ornamentation Siva, Ganga on a crocodile, Yamuna on a tortoise. In the lintel above the east door we have the Nava-Graha.



Near this door frame there is a standing image of a warrior with hand floded and with a sword. Bhandarkar writes “Judging from analogous instances this seems to have been a figure of the personage who was principally connected with either the construction or the restoration of the temple”. In 1964 another statue was discovered by Prof. N.K. Sahu. He has identified the two statues with that of Vaijal Dev –I, the Raja of Patna, who erected the temple. Added to these one can find several elegantly carved status of Laxmi. Trivikram, Vamana, Bali Narasingha and Varaha.

The most important part of Nrusinghanath is the stone inscription available in the temple. It is important from the point of view of development of Oriya script. It is written on a slab of black stone and consists of four lines which as follows:-





**THE TEXT :**

ନମଃ ନୃସିଂହାୟ ସ୍ଵସ୍ତି ଶ୍ରୀ ବିକାରୀନାମ ସମ୍ଭବର  
ଚୈତ୍ର ପୌର୍ଣ୍ଣମୀ ଶୁକ୍ରବାରେ ହସ୍ତାନକ୍ଷତ୍ରେ ପାଟଣା  
ନଗର ସ୍ଥିତ ବସୁରାଜ ଦେବଙ୍କ ପୁତ୍ର ବୈଜାଳ ।  
ଦେବ ମନୋହର ପୁତ୍ରାର୍ଥେ ଗନ୍ଧମାର୍ଜନ ପର୍ବତେ  
ବିରାଳ ନରସିଂହନାଥ ସ୍ଵାମୀଙ୍କର ଦେଳ ତୋଳଇଲା ।  
ହୃଦୟ ଭୃଷଣ ରତ୍ନମାନ ଗାଈ ଶତେକ ଲୋହାସିଂହା ।  
ଗ୍ରାମ ପାଶେ ଆଦି ମେରତା ବରିଲୋନା ଲୈଖଦେ  
ଭୂମି ରାପାଙ୍ଗ ପ୍ରଦମ୍ପଣ ଅହଣ୍ଡ ରାତ୍ରିଣ୍ଡ  
ସଂଧ୍ୟାଧର୍ମେ ପୂଜାପାତି ରୁଜାକ ପାଣିଗ୍ରାହୀ ପରାଣେ ।  
X X X ଦେଲା ପ୍ରଶସ୍ତିକାର ଅପ୍ପା । ଶ୍ରୀ ନରସିଂହ ପ୍ରାତୟେ ।

**Translation :**

“Vaijal Dev, son of Vatasraj Dev, the Raja of Patna, caused the erection of the temple on the fascinating hill Gandhamardan and presented a necklace of precious stones along with hundred cows to the God Vidala Narasinghnath. He also granted to the priest of the temple for maintenance of worship some lands situated on the locality known as Adimereda and Varionala and a mango grove known Rapanga lying on the vicinity of Lohasingha. The gift was made on Friday, the full moon day of Chaitra, the moon remaining in the Hasta Naksatra in the year Vikari. The object of the donour in making the gifts was to have a son through propitiation of God. The text was composed by Agha” (7).

The inscription is in transitional Oriya script very closely approaching Oriya language and this is one of the earliest Oriya inscriptions (8)/ The date of the inscription is 14<sup>th</sup> March 1413 A.D.

Besides its unique art and architecture of the temple, Narsinghanath is rich with ineffable natural beauty. Kapildhar, Chal-dhar, Bhim-dhar and its flora and fauna impress the viewer. The water of the Papa-harini Nallah is regarded as sacred and considered effica-

cious in washing away sins. Go-Kund, Sita-Kund, Panchu-Pandava- Kund are the place of interests for pilgrims. There are also several rock sculptures of Siva, Nandi, Gopal, Brahma, Vishnu, Durga, Five brothers of Pandavas and Ganesh.

Few years back some gold coins were found in a village very near to the hill. These coins are supposed to be the coins of Buddhist period. In March 1976 seven silver coins of Hasanganga (1357 A.D.) of Bahamani Kingdom were found near Nrusinghanath.

Recently the state culture and Archaeological deptt. have undertaken to cast off the masonry work and now the temple in its original form stands amidst scenic splendour. After the completion of the work it will throw more light on this hitherto hidden chapter of history and culture of this place.

1. The Book has been published now. The palm –leaf manuscript was collected by Prof. Gopabandhu Guru and edited by Prof. Narayan Pruseth. Besing on this manuscript Borasambar Zamindar Sri Sadananda Singh Bariha wrote” Nrusingha Mahatmya” published by Bhubaneswar Bohidar in 1908.
2. The description of Ongathatavisaya in the Patna Plate (Inscriptions of Orissa Vol – II) has been identified as Ong valley.
3. “Buddhism in Orissa” by Dr. N.K. Sahu (Utkal University)
4. History of Art of Orissa” by Dr. Charles Fabri.
5. The account has been taken from an article of Mr. J.D. Beglar published in the Archaeological Survey of India (1882) Vol. XIII.
6. Archaeological Survey of India 1904-05.
7. “Nrusinghnath Stone Inscription of Vaijal Dev- by Binayak Mishra – Indian Historical quarterly Vol. XII No. I (3/1936)
8. (i) Sri Surendra Mohanty – Rajendra Collge Magazine (Silver Jubilee issue)  
(ii) Vaijal Dev by Dr. J.K. Sahu – Souvenir, Bolangir writer’s conference 1976.  
(iii) Beglar inclined to consider it as a Hijra or Fasli date but Gen. Cunningham refuted it.