

## The River Valley Cultures of Odisha: An Exploratory Study of the Birupa-Chitrotpala

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**Abstract:** A review in the Birupa-Chitrotpala river valley suggests that the settlements in the region during the early historic period were centered on the establishments affiliated to both Buddhist and Brahmanical religious ideologies. The Chitrotpala is a distributary of the Mahanadi flows for about 80 kms, in the present districts of Cuttack, Kendrapara and Jagatsingpur and meets Bay of Bengal near the estuary at Paradeep. The Mahanadi - the life line of Odisha, provides a number of archeological sites developed right from the early historic period and carries the legacy of a name 'Sali' and a small town named after as Salipur on the bank of the river Chitrotpala. The dotted archaeological sites ranges from at least third century BCE to thirteenth century CE continuously that delivers the cultural flow in a micro region, notwithstanding age or any period which is an interesting parameter to study the early historic paradigms of history, culture and trade first from agriculture, then Buddhism and Brahmanism stitching all together with trade mechanism in the river valley. A chronometric analysis is undertaken to unfold various aspects to reconstruct the cultural past of the region, otherwise contribute to understand the role of agriculture, trade and religion.

**Keywords:** The Chitortpala, Sali, Agriculture, Religion, Trade and Culture

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## Introduction

Civilizations developed generally on the river valleys. Most of the ancient remains be it a Buddhist settlement or a urban center or a temple site where human interaction with natural resources or trade and communication facilitated, historical sites or settlements obviously has got impetus to grow which all has been known from the Ganga Valley or Krishna-Godavari delta. The Mahanadi River formed an important artery of communication linking fertile delta along the east coast with uplands i.e. Boudh and Sambalpur region in the interior. A secondary agrarian core was formed by the region with the distributary of several rivers like the Kathajori, the Devi, the Daya on south and the Birupa and the

Chitrotpala on the north-east with broken Asia hill ranges providing access to the Bay of Bengal. In the core area of Asia hill ranges major early historic settlement sites like Radhanagar, Langudi, Lalitgiri, Udayagiri, Ratnagiri were developed in between 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE to 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. Several scholars have already carried out research on the said major settlements (Mitra, 1952, Ray 1986, Mohapatra, 1986, Donaldson, 2001, Patnaik, 2012, 2021). However, a field study was undertaken in the recent times around the historic town Salipur which shed some new light on cultural efflorescence and trade during early historic and medieval periods with a port site and large settlement sites at its back. (Fig. 1.) The study is made at the regional context which has its pan-Indian contestation with regard to the river valley cultures.

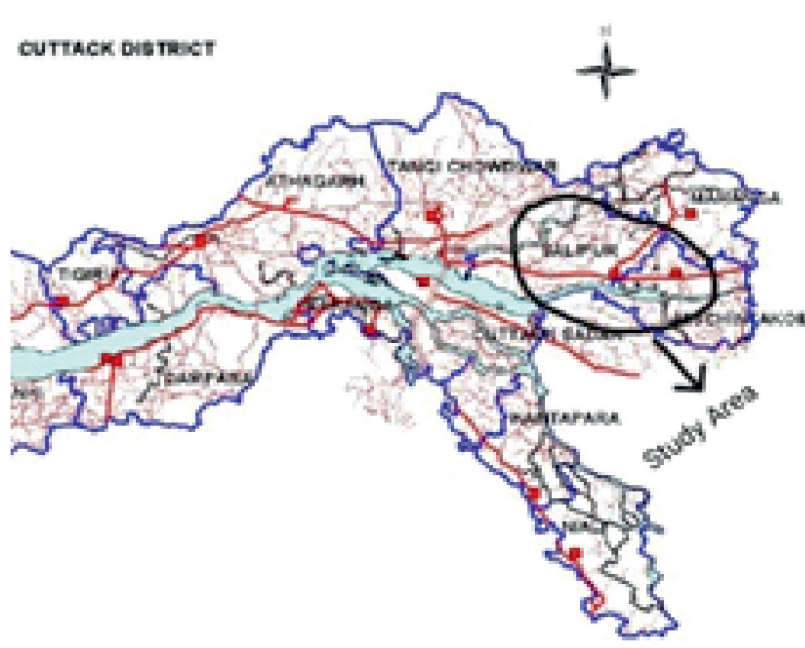


Fig. 1: Study Area of the Chitrotpala river valley around Salipur (District Map)

The River Chitrotpala, a distributary of the Mahanadi flowing mostly in Cuttack, Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur districts to the south of the tiny town of Salipur. The Mahanadi is the largest and widest river of Odisha, several distributaries are branched out of it, forming a complex riverine network. The River Chitrotpala starts from Guali near Salipur, 20 kms downstream towards Kendrapara and within 6 to 8 kms, again it subdivides into Chitroptala (main river) and Luna (distributary). The Chitrotpala flows eastward approximately 80 kms, merges into the Bay of Bengal near Paradeep. The river Chitrotpala is useful to cultivate winter crops as well as summer crops, particularly, paddy, sugarcane and groundnut cultivation along its course Each of these rivers is flowing in such a network that is considered sacred and represents a series of monuments and settlement sites shedding new light on the evolution of historical parameters.

### Sali and Salipur

Salipur, a small town in the Cuttack district is located on the bank of the Chitrotpala river signifying emergence of culture along the river banks. The first archaeological evidence of the beginning of cultivated rice in Odisha in the second millennium BCE comes from Kuchai and Baidyapur in Mayurbhanj district which shows clear transition from Mesolithic hunting gathering to food production. (IAR 1961-62:36, Thaper, 1978: 11-21). Sharma (1983) suggests that the transplantation of

paddy began from 600 BCE, which definitely improved the production of rice; a new variety of rice namely *Sali* also emerged in this period.(Sharma,1983:122).Apart from rice, sugar-cane and cotton figured among cultivated crops. Cultivation of these crops are known from Odishan region in between the river Mahanadi and Vamsadhara as is evident from number of chalcolithic and early historical sites. The fertile alluvial coastal plain of Odisha drained by rivers like the Mahanadi, Brammani, Baitarani, Risikulya and Subarnarekha and their tributaries provided ideal environment for the growth of agricultural base economy and subsequently emergence of urban economy. In early Odisha, crops of different varieties were cultivated in which rice was predominant. The use domestic rice (*Oryzasativa*) in Odishan region are reported from the excavated Chalcolithic sites like Sankerjung, Golbai, Suabarei, Khameswarpali, Bharatihuda and Durgadevi in the time bracket of c.1700 to 700 BCE. Recent excavations at Durgadevi in the district of Balasore yielded rice (*Oryza sativa*) from Chalcolithic phase dated to 1350 BCE, suggests that Odisha was a rice grown region since Neolithic–Chalcolithic period.(Naik, 2023).The plant remains of Golbai and Gopalpur confirm the presence of a distinct agricultural economy in Neolithic-Chalcolithic Odisha based on rice (*SativaOruza sativa*), pulses (*Vigna spp.*, *Macrotylomaunilorium* and *Cajanuscajan*) and millets (*Brachariaramosa*, *Panicum spp.*, *Setaria spp.* and possibly *Paspalum sp.*( Kingwell-Banham E, *et.al*,2018: 1-14).

The fertile coastal plain of Odisha is drained by several perennial rivers and their tributaries, including the Daya, Birupa, Chitropala rivers which provided an ideal environment for summer crops. The Mahanadi delta is dotted with Neolithic–Chalcolithic settlement sites, dating between 4000 and 3000 yrs BP, generally located along the edge of rivers, which have produced archaeo-botanical evidence for rice and pulse cultivation. Similarly, the archaeo-botanical remains of Suabarei(on the river Daya of Mahanadi river system), recovered from stratified context belonging to the Chalcolithic phase show that the people grew rice, protein-rich pulses like horse gram and green gram/ mung bean, and also ate jujube fruits and nuts. Two seasons of rice cropping were practiced (kharif/summer and rabi/winter at Suabarei region in Mahanadi delta.(Naik, *et.al*,2019: 1373-1379).Again the archaeo-botanical evidence from Deltihuda in Cuttack district belong to the time brackets 1367 + 45 BCE to 1054 +57 BCE. Rice at Deltihuda constituted the dominant cereal along with millet (Eleanor-Kingswell, Mishra, *et.al*,2021:51-56). As referred to, the name Salipuris primarily derived from the combination of two words Sali (paddy) and Pur (place),it is due to the fertile soil of river valleys. Śāli (शालि) is a Sanskrit word for a group of species of rice (*śāli*), identified by Caraka in his *Carakasamhitāsūtrasthāna* (chapter 27), a classical Ayurvedic work. It is also known by its synonym names Dhānya and Vṛīhi. It is used throughout Ayurvedic literature such as the *Caraka-samhitā* and the *Suśruta-samhitā* also referred to in Buddhist and Hindu literary texts. (Thapar,1984 :73). In fact, Salipur is one of the largest producers of paddy in Odisha even today. It is similar to that of Salihundam, which is located on the river bank of Vamsadhara. Salihundam is a famous Buddhist site, nearer to the ancient port of Kalingapattnam in the district of Srikakulam which was in the geographic orbit of Kalinga or Early Odisha. Two inscribed conches discovered in the monastic area refer the names ‘Salipedika’ or ‘Salipataka’. The settlement was known as Salipetaka or Salipedaka and Maha Ugapavathe (Mahodaeparvata). Here Sali means rice. Pataka or Vataka or its variants Vatika or Vada might have been the town (Salipetika) where rice was stored or marketed. (Subrahmanyam,1964). In fact, rice was the most suitable crop which appeared in the later Vedic period. Available evidence suggests that rice became a crop in parts of Peninsular India during the Iron Age (Kajale, 1989, 1991, 1997, Fuller 2006a: 53, Cooke et al. 2005), with the earliest few finds from the Jorwe horizon on the Northern Peninsula. In the latest levels at Inamgaon in Maharashtra, dated to 1200-900 BCE, rice occurs in small quantities (Kajal, 1988b). Rice might have spread southwards in eastern coastal regions, from Odisha, and then up to the Deccan

towards the west. The spread of rice in South India during the Iron Age may have constituted part of a major culinary shift as well as agricultural change. The Iron Age adoption of rice was accompanied by some changes in ceramic repertoire that suggest the influence of northern Indian food traditions. (Fuller, 2005: 769). Kapasira excavation in the middle Mahanadi valley revealed rice and millet impressions on the several burnt clay lumps some of which bear reed impressions from Iron Age level. (Behera, *etal*, 2021-22:134-157). In the early historic period, shallow tray bowls (*thali*) of 10-15 cm in diameters become more and more common, generally accompanied by a smaller cup bowl, suggesting a different eating pattern. (Allchin, 1959).

As mentioned, the two names such as Salihundam, a Buddhist settlement on the banks of the river Vamsadhara, known in the inscription as Salipetaka or Salipedaka (rice bowl) and the name Salipur near major Buddhist settlements Rameswara and Brhamavana on the Chitrotpala, in the lower Mahanadi valley signifies the production of rice which the names *Salid* notes. The riverine settlements are not far from the coast which perhaps accelerated the trade and commerce and establishment of Buddhist settlements around 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE in the coastal area of Kalinga region (ancient Odisha). Again, an inscription of 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE from Langudi Buddhist sites records '*puspasbharagiraya-haladharakasa-pararcha-balasa*' which refers a ploughman substantiate the production of paddy by ploughing the field. Langudi-Radhanagar-Kayama represents a Buddhist culture complex from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 5<sup>th</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> century CE, not far from Salipur. (Patnaik, 2021:204). Further, this relates the story of Tappasu- Bhalika from Utkala (ancient Odisha) mentioned in *Pujavaliya* of Sri Lankan chronicle regarding offer of rice cake and honey to Lord Buddha. The name of Salipur to some extent represents the tradition. Again agriculture in ancient Odisha mainly depended on timely rainfall as elsewhere in India. The crops consisted mainly of rice of different varieties and Sali is one of them. Buddhist texts differentiate between the ordinary variety or *vrihi* and the fine quality grain, *Sali*. Among them the latter were *theraktasali*, *kalamasali*, *mahasali* and *gandhasali*, (Thapar, 1984:73). We get references to rice (*tandula*) in many epigraphical records and to food grains (*sasya*) but do not come across specific references to any other food grains like *godhuma* (wheat) in the Odishan region. (Tripathy, 1997:430). Thus, the archaeological remains on Chitrotpala are quite fascinating to study the human relationship.

The microscopic exploratory study carried out and documented the scattered historical sites and the outcome suggest the existence of a trade network during the early medieval period which again substantiated by the standing temple site of Batesvara on the bank of the river Chitrotpala. Hiuen Tsang, who visited Kalinga in 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, mentioned a large port called *Che-li-ta-lo*, which served as a resting place for seagoing ships and traders (Watters, 1961). Further, another Chinese scholar Wang-Ta-Yuan visited Odisha in the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE and it is learnt that rice was the staple food of the Odia people, which was sold at an unbelievably low price of 46 baskets for one cowrie during that period. (Takkasu, 1896). The prosperity of maritime trade during the Bhaumakara (736 -923 CE) period is narrated by the Arab and Persian geographers, and indicated that brisk maritime trade was carried out with the foreign countries through seaports like Nubin, which is not yet identified (Subuddhi, 1978). The natural resources and industries of Odisha suggest that in addition to ivory, cloth various types of cereals, rice, barley, salt, timber, conch shells stone diamond and iron products were exported from this country. The Kalinga varieties of cloth and rice find mention in 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century literature *Manasollasa*. (Chattopadhyay, 1994:72). Kalinga desa (Odisha) and Bengal were chief centers of textile business. Kalinga produced diamonds, though limited quantity. The sapphire of ordinary quality was also obtained from Burma and Orissa (Odisha) (Motichandra, 1977: 208-209). The Mahanadi was served as one of the major trade route connecting sea and hinterland which is perhaps the reason



why the number of Buddhist and other temple sites are developed on the Mahanadi River and her tributary river banks. The Mahandi is referred to as Chitrotpla in the ancient texts. In good olden days in Chhatisgarh, the Mahanadi from its origin till Rajim was known as Nilotpala and from Rajim onwards it was known as Chitrotpala. A good number of historical sites like: Rajim, Siripur, Sambalpur Sonepur, Gandharadi, Boudh, Banasvaranasi, Pargalpur, Simhanath, Naraj, Bhattarika, Brhamavana, Natra, Nagaspur, Ramesvaraetc, were developed along the river Mahanadi and distributaries.(Nayak, 2020-21:34-41). The region around the Chitrotpala rivers near Salipur is provided with number such historical Buddhist and Brahmanical sites. (Fig.2 a. & b)

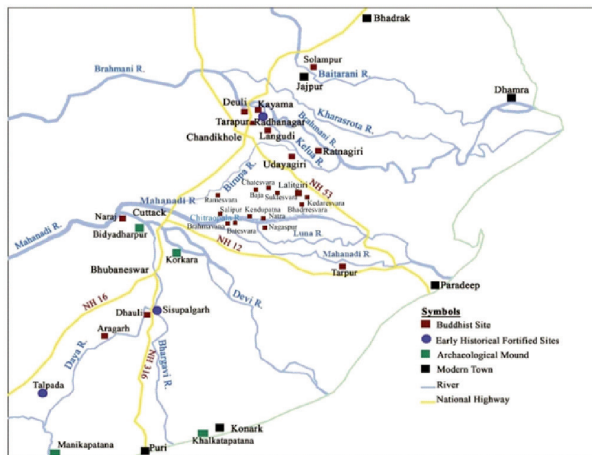


Fig. 2a: The Mahandi delta and Salipur

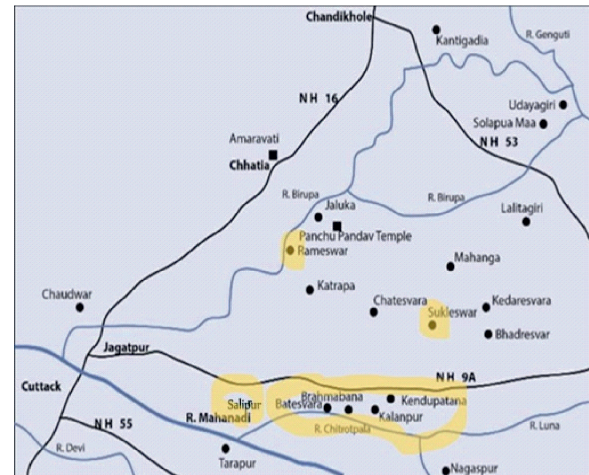


Fig. 2b: Location of archaeological sites around Salipur

## Ramesvara

A low lying hillock is known as Ramesvara named after medieval Saiva temple. It is located on the right bank of the rivers Birupa another distributaries of the Mahanadi about 10 kms. northwest of Salipur. Many years ago a hoard of 376 punch-marked coins was found from this place (Mohapatra, 1986, Tripathy, 1986). During our recent exploration of the site, it is observed that the Siva temple of medieval period on the hill slope was constructed on the ruins of a Buddhist edifice probably a stupa. (Fig.3) The contour of the mound presents the landscape akin to be a stupa mound and number of architectural members such as *suchis* and some pillar fragments found scattered and some stand fixed in a row. Further upward on the same hillock, a plain flat land stretched up to a kilometer in length like that of Lalitagiri and Aragarahand the area is known by the locals as Naharapadia, where remains of brick walls on plan and few images of the Buddhist pantheon could be seen. A ruined monastic establishment has been converted into an *ashrama* of Nahara Mahapurusa in recent times. A good number of potsherds of plain red polished ware, grey and black ware, brickbats, and architectural pieces are noticed on the site and some of them are partially exposed. On the outcrop of the hill, particularly on the eastern edge, cut marks and two cisterns of two meter in length and one meter in width have been noticed. (Fig.4) Cisterns were made purposefully on the hillock at Buddhist sites with cut marks (post holes). The available evidence suggests that the site had a monastery or monasteries along with a stupa. The site needs to be excavated to understand the contacts with other Buddhist sites of Birupa valley near Salipur like that of Udayagiri along the trade routes. The finding of punch mark coins and stray archaeological remains are the evidences that show, the Buddhist settlement site must have thrived in the early centuries of the Common Era.



Fig. 3: Ramesvara Temple & Mound



Fig. 4: Naharapadia- the Mound

### Batesvara and Brahmavana

Batesvara, a small hamlet on the left bank of the River Chitrotpala, just one km in distance from Salipur College having ancient ruins. Presently, the compound has three temples namely the Shankaresvara, Batesvara and Bhagavati. The two Saiva temples Shankaresvra and Batesvara are the ancient ones having 5 m in height. However, the temple of Batesvara contains two *parsvadevatas* namely: Ganesh and Kartikeya belong to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century style. During exploration local people informed that Shankaresvra Siva temple was located on the bank of the River Chitrotpala. The temple was destroyed over the period due to the ravages of the river. The scattered stone blocks belong to the parts of the temple which are visible on the riverbank.(Fig.5). Several fragments and images are kept in the present Bhagavati temple complex. Similar to this the Kosalesvara temple of Subarnapur district has been destroyed by the River Mahanadi. The name Batesvara has a great significance in the maritime history of Odisha. There is another temple named Batesvara which is renovated recently by the State Archaeology at Kantiagada near Palur. Batesvara temple is located on a marine trade route at Kantigada near Huma along the Ganjam coast. The site signifies as a place of communication for departure and arrivals of the traders *orsadhava* in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. Batesvara i.e, ‘God on way’ was supposed to have worshipped by the mercantile community before undertaking voyage on sea or river for their successful trading and happy and safe return. In 1985 scholars reported to have collected an anchor fragment, Chinese pottery and some coins (IAR, 1985-86). Similarly, the present Batesvara temple, of course in ruin on the bank of Chitrotpala also signifies the place of trading in the historical period particularly between 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Further, another standing temple in the vicinity is the Bhagavati with a tall ten armed Durga image, more than two meter in height enhances the association of the trader community with the site. The ten-armed Mahisamardini in the sanctum of the Bhagavati temple of which many of the arms are broken off and some are displaced. Her right foot is on the buffalo carcass and left is on the back of her lion. A shield is strapped to her major left arm while the major right hand thrusts a trident into the head of the demon. The remaining right hands hold a *sakti*, flaming *chakra*, a sword, and pluck an arrow from a quiver. The lower left hand holds *nagapasa* while the other hands are missing. She is richly ornamented and wears two types of earrings. The demon is bearded and holds a shield in his left hand. The image is late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century (Behera and Donaldson, 1998:126) which again signifies the continuation of maritime trade.(Fig.6). In most textual accounts, it is invariably the goddess Durga or Tara who are



particularly associated with ships, especially in respect to their safe voyage, both being conceived as great saviour goddess who lead their devotees to the other shore. In the *Brahma-VaivartaPurana* (*Prakriti-Khanda*, 2-29-37), for example, it is stated: “In the sea of the world, the Goddess Durga herself, like a dexterous pilot, takes over the worshippers of Krsna to the other side of the sea on the boat of Divine Faith”. The name “Durga” etymologically means the deity who removes grave dangers, (*durgatinasini*) as noted by K.K. Dasgupta, and Hindu devotees conceive her as the great saviours who, being prayed to, delivers them from terrors like captivity, drowning and harassment from robbers, etc. (Dasgupta, 1967:116). The image of Durga, especially in her aspect as Mangala, primarily represents the benign or, as Mahisamardini, the warrior aspect of the Devi, the images of the Brahmanical Tara and /or Kali, also worshipped for safe voyages and protection at sea, represent her more terrifying aspect. Now, the Bhagavati temple is a living one and revered by locals with daily rituals and worship. However, its proximity to the Buddhist site Brahmavana, only 2 km again preserves the strong tradition of riverine commerce.

Just a few meters from Batesvara, a mound at Brahmavan on the bank of Chitrotpala is located where a small scale excavation was conducted in the year 1977 by State Archaeology (Patnaik, 2021). Some Buddhist remains along with images were recovered and now kept in the shed. During our explorations, we found that the mound as such is one kilometer long having six to eight meter habitational deposit with scattered potsherds and Buddhist sculptures. (Fig.7). A monastic establishment was exposed having cells and verandah during surface clearance in the year 2014 on its northern end (Fig.8). There are several Buddhist images datable to the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, still kept at the site in a shed. Altogether seven images of course, cement plastered and disfigured which suggest about the monastic establishment datable to the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. Those images belong to Buddha, Manjusri, Avalokitesvara, Tara or Hariti. It is suggested that still some more sculptures are buried. Different types of pottery namely red ware, fine grey ware, red polished ware and black and grey ware found abundantly from the surface and on the riverside section during exploration along the River Chitrotpala near Brahmavana. There is every possibility, if excavated; some substantial remains of a settlement may be unearthed. The archaeological finds suggest that the present site must have served as thoroughfare along with a Buddhist establishment which reminds us a riverine port site as has been mentioned by Hiuen Tsang as *Che-li-ta-lo*.



Fig. 5: Ruins of Batesvara Temple

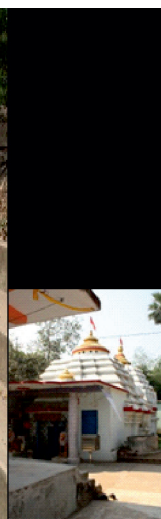


Fig. 6: Bhagavati Temple



Fig. 7: Brhamvana Mound



Fig. 8: Monastic Remains

## Nagasapur

Another site just few kilometers from Brhamavana is Nagasapur which is a tiny village, having a temple which is locally known as *Satabhauni* (seven sisters) on the left bank of the river Chitotpala which is 30 kms away from the Sea. The Satabhauni temple housed seven Buddhist images, which are unique in feature and superb in their workmanship. Among the images two belong to Tara and one each of Khasrpana Lokesvara, Arya Sarasvati, Manjuvara and Prajna paramita. The Arya Sarasvati and Prajna paramita are particularly significant because of their iconography. Arya Sarasvati is a rare image denoted as goddess of learning. The popularity of Arya Sarasvati with Buddhism is known from the *Sadhanamala* and eight Sadhanas are devoted to Arya Sarasvati (Mitra, 1981). She is seated in *lalitasana* posture and her right hand is in *varada* mudra and the left hand is placed on the heel of the right foot. The lotus stalk which comes out from the seat is seen supporting a book; this feature helps to identify the image. Arya Sarasvati is richly ornamented and wearing a large *patrakundals*. The *makara-torana* along with a *kirtimukha* has been shown at the apex. The image could be dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. The finding of Arya Sarasvati signifies that the site is associated with knowledge and teaching. The Buddhist believes that the worship and meditation of Arya Sarasvati begets Siddhi or success. Similarly goddess Prajna paramita also signifies the same nature and is regarded as transcendent of wisdom. She is regarded as goddess of 'supreme knowledge'. Prajna paramita is a central concept in Mahayana Buddhism and its practice is believed to be the essential elements of the Bodhisattva Path. The practice of Prajna paramita is described in the Prajna paramita *Sutras*. Tara and Prajna paramita are both referred to as mother of all Buddhas, since Buddha is born from wisdom. Out of ten surviving Prajna paramita images of Odisha, the Nagasapur image is one of them. She is seated in vajraparyanka posture, her hands are in *dharmachakra mudra*, and the lotus stalk is seen under her left arm with the full blown blossom supporting a book. The sculpture could be dated to the c. 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. (Fig. 9.a & b.). Similar images are reported from Lalitgiri, Ratnagiri, Baneshvarnasi, Mangalpur and Choudwar of Odisha. (Nayak 2020-21: 40). All known existent images of Prajna paramita in India, date from 800 CE or later. Buddhist scholars agree that Prajna paramita sutras represent the earliest layer of Mahayana sutra literature. However, this is a rare image and denotes wisdom. The Arya Sarasvati and Prajna paramita images of this site of 11<sup>th</sup> century, suggest that the River Chitotpala valley was a center of learning and was having a monastic establishment and the same nature of the site famous for Prajna paramita image is Baneshvarnasi on the middle Mahanadi valley in the district of Cuttack. (Patnaik, 2021). Further, the worship of Mangala, celebrating maritime activity and the safe return of ships from distant voyages, is especially popular in the Champeswar- Baneshvarnasi area where such images are painted on the walls of houses. Mangala is generally associated with the lion while the ships, with their peacock-design, are nearly identical with ancient prototypes. Baneshvarnasi and Champeswar were on the right bank of the Mahanadi in the district of Cuttack. (Fig. 10). Further, there are a number of old wells, mounds and partially buried shrines around the place. The local people narrate a few legends that connect the place to the maritime activities of the past. It is reported by the villagers that many years ago, while digging a pond, their forefathers had come across an anchor and parts of a ship. All these items are now lost. They speak of a stone platform which is under water in the middle of the river. A.P. Patnaik reported that three sand-stone objects at this place, lying by the side of the village-road, which clearly appeared to be three different types of stone anchors (one with one hole, one with two holes, one with three holes) of historical period. (Fig. 11) Most probably, the villagers had found the objects while digging the earth near the road (Patnaik, 2003, Vol. II: 333). This piece of evidence along with Buddhism at Nagasapur on the bank of the river Chitotpala proves the possibility of the existence of a port town may be of *Che-li-ta-lo* of Hiuen Tsang because the time period of the antiquarian



remains befits with the time of the great Chinese scholar. These archaeological remains shed light on the history of the region which all in the context of trade, port and religion.



Fig. 9.a: Nagasapur present shed



Fig. 9b: Buddhist images



Fig. 10: Banesvaranasi Buddhist Site



Fig. 11: Anchors from Nagasapur

The other Buddhist establishments are **Natra** and **Kendupatna** along the River Chitraotpala and not far from each other. Both the sites suggest that there seems to be some Buddhist cultural complex datable between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century CE, contemporary with Brahmapura. A good number of Buddhist images, most importantly life size Buddhist divinities of Avolikesvara (Lokesvara), Arya Sarasvati, Manjuvara, two images of Tara and Prajnaparamita are housed at Natra and Kendupatna. The rare images such as the Arya Sarasvati and Prajna paramita denotes the importance of the site and place of wisdom also an important Buddhist settlement on the Chitrotpala river bank. (Fig. 12a and b)



Fig. 12a: Natra Buddhist Images



Fig. 12 b: Natra, Avalokitesvara image

### Manikesvara Siva Temple

The Manikesvara Siva temple complex is located in the Suklesvara village at a distance of 5 km from Salipur. The description is necessary for our purpose is that, the Manikesvara This temple has played a greater role in the trade and pilgrimage of the region in the 9<sup>th</sup> century on the River valley of Birupa. The temple at present survived up to the plinth level, which has been renovated by the

State Archaeology (Fig.13). Numerous architectural fragments piled up on the side of the temple and some important members are displayed in the site museum. The style and decorative motifs of the temple and its corner shrines mostly resemble with the Buddhist art work of Ratnagiri monuments, which is 20 km away from this site. However, the Jagamohan of the temple is of 11<sup>th</sup> century, which is a later addition. This temple is contemporary to Mukhalingeswar temple on the bank of the River Vamsadhara at Mukhalingam in the district of Srikakulam Andhra Pradesh and Patelsvara temple of Paikapada near Rayagada and Simhanath temple on the island of the river Mahanadi. All these temples belong to 9<sup>th</sup> century and on the trade route as has been proved from the nicely carved Mahisamrdini Durga images in the niches. A ten armed Mahisamardini of about 2.5 meter in height is found in a shrine of later period on the northeast corner of the temple Manikesvra compound. Probably this is the largest Mahisamardini sculpture so far discovered in Odisha (Donaldson, 1985). The image of Durga, especially in her aspect as Mangala, primarily represents the benign or, as Mahisamardini the warrior aspect of the Devi, the images of the Brahmanical Tara and /or Kali, also worshipped for safe voyages and protection at sea, represent her more terrifying aspect as discussed earlier with regard to the image of Durga in the Bhagavati temple of Batesvara. The images of Durga along coastal Odisha worshipped for safety in navigation is the example housed in the Ramachandi temple near Konark ships starting and returning home pay their homage to goddess. At Dakesvari Pitha, situated in the village of Orasahi on the bank of the Vaitarani river near the coast. The presiding deity is a twelve armed Mahisamardini, though her mask like face, ornamented with foil for eyes and nose and covered with vermilion, is reminiscent of Camunda. She is known as Dakesvari because she is believed to reply to the call of her devotees and to help them in their time of woe and misery.(Fig.14) According to one version of the local legend, as noted by H.C Das, She used to dwell grazing their cattle, began blowing their flutes and enjoying themselves, the goddess, being disturbed by the noise, came out of the water and asked them to stop playing their flutes. The boys ignored her and refused to stop. She thus killed them out of wrath. An eye-witness of the incident reported in to the parents of the dead children. The distraught villagers came in a group to the tank. They propitiated the goddess with the sacrifice of animals and thus regained therein as Dekesvari. Another version, however, relates that the boatmen recovered her image from the river and installed her there as the presiding deity. It is now customary for the fisherman and boatmen to pay her obeisance before rowing their boats on the river or into the sea. Another tradition has it that the Pandava brothers (of the Mahabharata epic) propitiated with fishing and navigation, including the following who are considered to be the younger sister of Dekesvari: 1) Dhamarai (daughter of the sea) of Dhamara, an important port known from historical records and situated at the mouth of the river Vaitarani: 2) Pattamamagala of Chhatrapada near Narendrapur, 3) YadiMangala of Balikudi, 4) Kharakhai of Kasturikana, 5) Budhi-Basuli of Tentulida, 6) Dalesvari of Kandagoredi and 7) Andhra Ghhiri Thakurani of Bantalapur.(Donaldson, 1985)

The **Manikesvara** temple is one of the largest temples of the contemporary period with *pancharatha* style. Although the temple is dedicated to Siva but there are numerous Vaishnavite features could be seen. Besides, fragments of Chaitya motifs crowning *vajra-mastaka* are found which are scattered in the debris. Many of the blocks are carved with human figures. Vaishnavite and Shaivite cult images *asparsvadevata* are present in situ. The image of north *raha* niche is of Parvati, but the head and arms are missing with lion and deer, which is deviation of this period where image of Mahisamardini is generally observed. The southern *raha* niche has an image of *Bhiskatanamurti* of Siva sculpture found instead of Ganesh. The sculpture is in *urdhalinga* pose along with tiger-skin garment which is clearly discernible. The other cult images scattered around in the compound are Haraparvati, Surya, Vishnu, Natraj, Mahesmurti and as many as eight Mahisamardini Durga





Fig. 13: Manikesvra Temple, Suklesvara



Fig. 14: Durga Image (Bhagavati temple in the compound of Manikesvra temple )

images. Besides, frieze fragments contain the scenes from the Ramayana, Kaliyadalana, (now in State Museum), Siva and Parvati playing chess etc. are found in the site. The other decorative motifs noticed are *Salbhanjikas*, dancing *ganas*, *kirtimukhas*, and an unusual scene of donkey headed figures engaged in conversation. Two inscriptions of 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century CE reported from the temple, the first inscription reads as *Sutradhārakaṣorapravā (Sauraprabhā) asyadataḥ || sidhakapratimā* which means Sauraprabhā, the *sūtradhāraka* has donated this; the image of a *Siddha* perhaps a saint.(Fig.15a.). The second inscription datable to the 8<sup>th</sup> century reads *askarmmadamṇḍaścotkirṇṇa* means *Karmmadanṇa*, the engraver (Fig. 15b).The script is *devanagiri* and the language is Sanskrit. The two inscriptions are deciphered by Subrat Kumar Acharya, epigraphist at our request.The 300 m long compound houses a number of smaller ruined and fragmented temples dedicated to the Saiva, Vaishnava and Shakta affiliations. The cultural affiliation of the site is known from above donatory inscriptions found in the temple. The findings suggest the cultural efflorescence of the River Birupa valley which paved a way to understand the trade and pilgrimage, moreover hammed with a communication network for which such unusual temple of the 9<sup>th</sup> century was built during the Bhaumakara period.





Fig. 15a: Image of a *Siddha* - a saint

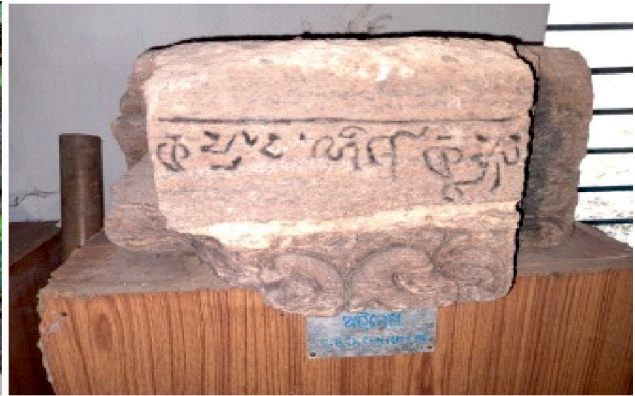


Fig. 15.b: *Karmmadanṇa*, the engraver

Another land mark temple of the region is **Chatesvara** which is located at Kishnapur village near Paga of Salipur. This temple is dedicated to Siva and having one of the Siva linga within a circular *yonipith*. The temples consisting of *deula* and *jagamohana*, enclosed by a compound wall, faces east. The *deula* and *jagamohana* have been renovated at a later date. In the *bada* some original sculptures could be seen. As usual the *bada* has been divided into five parts. The depiction of *dikpalas* found in the lower *jangha* and their consorts found in the upper *jangha*. In the recesses of the lower *jangha* are *gaja-vidalas* while the recesses of the upper *jhangha* there are some depiction erotic couples and *nayikas*. One lady figure with a long braid accompanied by two attendants carved on northern wall of the *antaralais* a significant sculptural art. On the western side *bada* of the *deula* there are two panels depicting Krishna playing the flute accompanied by cows and two *gopis* again is a significant art depiction. One special feature about the balustrade windows of the *jagamohana* is that they are flanked by Naga pillars (*stambhas*). On the basis of a number of detached sculptures of different faiths like Saiva and Sakta, the original temple can be assigned to the Eastern Ganga rule during 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. A miniature four-armed Vishnu, broken images of Chamunda, Surya and Buddha, Udyotasimha, Nandi, miniature temple and other architectural members are found fixed in the temple. The temple is *pancharatha* on plan and the *bada* has multi-segmented horizontal mouldings in elevation. (Fig.16)



Fig. 16: Chatesvra Temple



Fig. 17: The Chatesvra Inscription



## The Inscription

The well-known Chatesvara inscription of 25 lines is found in a detached black granite slab found inside the *Jagamohana*. The original inscription is dated to the time of Ananga Bhima Deva III (1211-38 CE). The language of the inscription is Sanskrit and composition in verses of various matters. The style is highly ornate. This inscription refers to a temple of Kamntaka (*Dhama Kamatakasya*). The inscription begins with a praise to the ocean from which the moon is born then in a conventional way to the Ganga king descending from the moon. We get the chronological position of Ganga kings beginning from Anantavarma Chodagangadeva to Anangabhimadeva and his minister Visnu himself who built the temple of Chatesvar. (Tripathy, 2010:157). (Fig. 17). This temple thus represents pinnacle of cultural efflorescence of the region which begins from earliest Buddhist remains of and the rich agricultural base at its back as the name Sali suggests. But the mature phase of the region from 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century CE could be glanced through the standing monuments as discussed and perhaps the building such land mark historical monuments are the result of the trade and commerce on the river valley of Chitortpala.

## Che-li-to-lo

The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, visited Odisha in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE and described *Che-li-ta-low* as a busy port. It is stated in Hiuen Tsang's account "On the south-east frontiers of the country, on the boarders of the Ocean, is the town *Che-li-ta-lo* about 20 li round. Here it is merchants depart for distant countries and strangers come and go and stop here on their way. The walls of the city are strong and lofty. Here are found all sorts of rare and precious articles. (Beal, 1952 : 411). Outside the city, there were five convents, one after the other; several high storied towers were present, carved with figures of saints, which were exquisitely done. Going towards south after 20,000 li the country comes is Simhala (*Seng-Kia-Lo*). In the still night, looking far off, we see the precious stone of the tooth stupa of Buddha brilliantly shining and scintillating as a bright torch bearing in the air. Further, he mentioned the location of *Che-li-ta-lo* on the south-east frontier of Odra lying in the northern part of Odisha from where merchants depart for distant countries. Motichandra (1977) suggested that *Che-li-ta-lo* or Chartrapura served as the point of departure (*apheterium*) to Palura or Dantapura. Since the River Chitrotpala is flowing towards the south-east of Mahanga and the most celebrated Buddhist site Lalitgiri with a relic Stupa is not too far (about 20 Kms). The relic stupa of Lalitgiri is dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and one of the most celebrated stupa of the region which is surrounded by a number of Buddhist sites namely Tarpur, Bateswar, Brahmavana, Natra and Nagaspur, along the river Chitrotpala during 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Some views of the scholars may be outlined here for our understanding. Cunningham (1963) has re-establishes *Che-li-ta-lo* with Charitrapura and identifies it with the present town of Puri. Nevertheless, it requires more investigation with proper archaeological evidence. Majumdar Sastry (1927), Waddell (1892) suggested *Che-li-ta-lo* could be identified with Chitrotpala, a branch of the River Mahanadi at Nendra or Nendota. Waddell after quoting Burnouf's translation of Hiuen Tsang's description of the city, writes—"In the locality here indicated—in exact keeping geographically with the distance and directions noted by the pilgrim—in the Mahanadi delta, about 15 miles below Cuttack, we find older channel of the great Mahanadi river is still known as "Chitrotola River". (Watters, 2012: 195). We may suggest it present settlement of Natra where an old port was existed with exotic Buddhist remains and Mahayana images. Rhys Davids advances a compromising opinion by accepting Cunningham's restoration as a Charitra and Waddell's identification of the place at the mouth of the Chitrotpala near the village Nendra or may be Natra. Many scholars of our time try to identify *Che-li-*

*ta-lo* with Chilika and some suggest to Puri as Charitrapura. Scholars like K.S. Behera have declined to accept modern Puri as suggested by Cunningham.(Behera, 1977).The places having antiquarian remains at Brahmavana, Natra and Nagasapur,all Mahayana Buddhist sites near Salipur on the bank of the river Chitrotpala as elucidated with has some clue to identify as *Che-li-ta-lo* port which again matches the description of Hiuen Tsangwith a celebrated Stupa of Lalitgiri dominating the land scape and Mahayana sites all around. As some of the sites like Natara and Nagasapur preserves best Mahayana images of Prajna paramita, Yamntaka, Araysarsvati, Avalokitasvara, Tara, proves that the sites must have visited by pilgrims and traders since such rare images are popular among the traders and pilgrims due to a port site nearby. The finding of some anchors of the early medieval period from Nagasapur as mentioned earlier substantially proves the fact. After subjugating the pilgrim's report to close scrutiny that port of *Che-li-ta-lo* was very close to the major Buddhist complex of Lalitgiri, Udayagiri and Ratnagiri. Among all the sites identified by previous scholars such as Puri, Chandrabhaga, Chilika, Chitrasvari (Parida,1999) the present site on Chitortpala seems more nearer to the description of Hiuen Tsang. However, the identification of *Che-li-ta-lo* to some extent presented with evidences needs more investigative exploration and excavation with Brhamavan and Ramesvara Buddhist sites of the region. Incidentally, parallel development of both Buddhist, Brhamanical as well Sakta monuments in the periphery of Salipur ranging between 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century to 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century has provided some clue for the historians as studied at micro level.The region includes up to Paradeep. It may be mentioned that there is every justification to accept the historical fact so far that the location of *Che-li-ta-lo* must be at the mouth of the river Chitotpala and the Mahanadi as has been seen that every culture complexes developed in and ancient and early medieval period must be backed by a port which is very well attested to from the culture complexes of Chandraketurah-Mogalmari Buddhist settlements with a port site at Tamralipti, again settlements of Sisupalgarh-Aragarh-Jaugada with a port site at Palur, and Salihundam-Dantapuram with a port site at Kalingapatnam, and further Thatlakonda- Bhavikonda-Parvalkonda with a port site at Vishakhaptna and many more such sites in the East and West Coast. (Patnaik&Nayak, 2024). Thus, the large Culture Complex of Lalitgiri-Udayagiri-Ratnagiri, Langudi-Radhanagar-Kayama must be backed by the port of *Che-li-ta-lo* on the Mahanadi-Chitrotpala estuary.

The other references are given in Hiuen Tsang's account on the Buddhist sites of India such as Purusapura, Bodhagaya, Pataliputra, Nalanda, Kanauj seems to be located exactly as described in the account. Accordingly, the location of *Che-li-ta-lo* also seems logical around the river Chitraotpala as discussed and few other scholars have also discussed same (Patra,2024:110-116). However, number of such port sites like Pithunda, Kannagar, Baruva referred to in inscriptions, travelogues and literature has not yet identified in their historical context. More research in this line is still underway to get the proper historical understanding. However, Salipur on the bank of the river Chitrotpala and the monuments and sites in the valley of both Chitrotpala and Birupa presents a cultural sequence from the earliest historical phase till 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century CEwhich is reflected in the name itself *Saliin* relation with rice cultivation followed by riverine culture with Buddhist settlements and Saiva, Sakta monuments calumniated with gigantic temple complexes under Gangas even Gajapatis in 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century CE as known from Chatesvara temple which all discussed at the micro level to understand the aspects of cultural efflorescence and trade pattern leading socio-cultural life of the region as known from our preliminary study.

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