



DEITIES OF THE ANANTA-VASUDEVA TEMPLE AND THEIR REFERENCE IN THE INSCRIPTIONS OF BHATTA BHAVADEVA AND CHANDRADEVI



Dr. C. S. Mohanty
Director, Krishnarao Research Institute ,
Jabalpur.
Visiting Faculty, A.I.H.C. & Archaeology,
Rani Durgavati University .

ABSTRACT:

Ananta-Vasudeva Temple is one of the ancient temples in Temple city Bhubaneswar, now the state capital of Orissa. It is situated on the north Bank of Bindu Sarobar lake in the old town of the city , in between the famous the Mukteswar and the Lingaraj Temple. As the Anantasayi Vishnu or Vasudeva is sitting inside the name of the temple become Ananta-Vasudeva Temple.

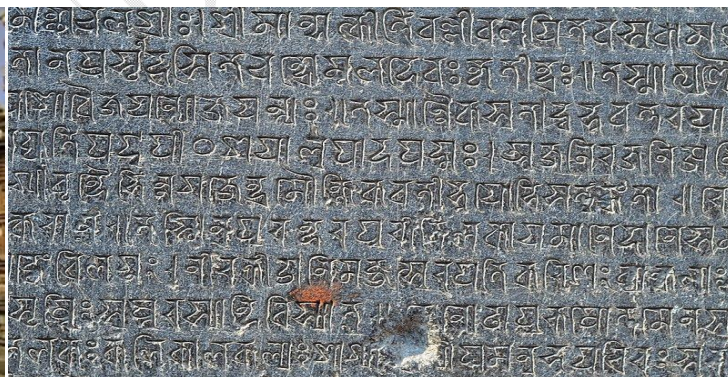
KEYWORDS: ancient temples , Temple city Bhubaneswar , Anantasayi Vishnu.

INTRODUCTION

The inscription of Bhatta Bhavadeva mentions in verse 3 that the village Siddhala is the ornament of Radha where his forefathers dwelt. In verses 4 to 25, the poet describes the versatile qualifications and fortunes of Bhatta Bhavadeva and then in verse 26 Radha country is again described where, on the outskirts of a village, he excavated a tank for the supply of water to the public.



The Temple-Outer View



The Inscription of Bhatta Bhabadeba Inside the Temple

Inverses 27, 28, and 29 mention is made of his installing a stone image of Narayana (V.27) and of building a temple for him (V.28) and of building the images of Narayana, Ananta and Nrusimha in the niches of the said temple (V.29). The strain of description lends support to the suggestion that all these works were done in the Siddhala village mentioned in verse 31. N. G. Majumdar rightly remarks:- "The name of the village is not mentioned. It was evidently Siddhala, the home of Bhavadeva.:¹ He again notes at p. 192 "some writers identify Siddhala with the present village of Siddhala near Ahmadput in

Birbhum district" (Vide Birbhum Vivarana by Harekrishna Mukherji). In the J.R.A.S., 1935, pp.97-99, Dr.N.K.Bhattacharya notes this stating that it 'may be correct.'

Verse 28 describes the temple erected by Bhatta Bhava Deva. The poet compares this edifice which surpasses the charms of the abode of Indra, with Siva's abode Kailasa for its height, Hari's for its beauty, ornamentation and flashing discus. Beholding its attractiveness even Siva is desirous of abandoning Kailasa, his abode.

The above description suits well to a temple standing in a solitary place, but such description of one in the vicinity of earlier temples, such as the Great Lingaraja and Brahmaesvara, is beyond the conception of any poet. Had the Ananta-Vasudeva temple been loftier than the Lingaraja temple, there was no difficulty in accepting the truth in the fancy of the poet. The following suggestion of Mr.N.G.Majumdar would have been quite correct if the date of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple would have been earlier than that of Lingaraja or Brahmaesvara:-

"It is rather tempting to suggest that the poet here is reminded of the existence of Tribhuvaneshvara (Lingaraja) close to Ananta-Vasudeva. According to Vaishnavite tradition Siva asked the permission of Vasudeva to stay in Ekamrakshetra (i.e.Bhuvaneshwar) and the latter granted it"² This tradition has got nothing to do with the construction of the temples at Bhuvaneshwar. It only establishes the supremacy of Vaishnavism over Saivism.

The images known as Narayana, Ananta and Nrsimha by name (Narayan-ananta-nrsimha murti), were installed (v.29) in the niches of this temple with the cult images of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple, all writers have been misled in expressing their views. The views of previous writers on this point are quoted below:-

Dr.Rajendralal Mitra writes as follows about the images of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple:

"The presiding divinities of the temple are two brothers Balarama and Krishna under the names of Ananta, 'the eternal' and Vasudeva. The images are of very coarse make and about 5 ft. high. The figure of Ananta has over its head a canopy formed by the expanded hood of a many headed cobra. Though the temple is occupied by two images, it is held to belong exclusively to Vishnu..."³

Mr.M.M.Ganguly mentions that "the temple of Ananta-Vasudeva is a Vaishnavite one dedicated to Ananta and Vasudeva or Balaram and Krishna, a dual image of whom is enshrined in the vimana."⁴

Dr.Mitra's two images have been represented in a single image in the account of Mr.Ganguly who perhaps did not see the images at all. His conception of the single image of Ananta-Vasudeva is perhaps due to the idea of the image of Harihara.

Mr.M.M.Chakravarti has written the following:-

"From the inscription one learns that Bhavadeva built a high wheel-crested temple, placed in its inner sanctum the images of Vasudeva, Ananta and Nrsimha..."

"...Within the inner sanctum may be seen the three images (not two as Dr.Mitra Says)"⁵

Mr.Gurudas Sarkar also supports the views of Mr.M.M.Chakravarti.⁶

The verse 29 has been translated by various scholars.

(1) Captain G.T.Marshall translated it as follows:-

"He (Bhavadeva) placed in that house of Vishnu, in the innermost sanctuaries, the images of Narayana, Ananta and Nrsimha as the Vedas in the month of Bramha"⁷

(2) Dr. Rajendralal Mitra published this translation in his Antiquities of Orissa, Vol.II, p.86.

(3) Dr.Kielborn summarised the contents of the verses as follows:-

"This Bhavadeva, then, had a reservoir of water constructed in the country of Radha (v.26). Moreover, at the place, where the inscription is, he set up a stone image of Narayana (Vishnu) (V.27) and founded a temple of God (V.28) in which he placed images of his in the forms of Narayana, Ananta and Nrsimha (V.29)."⁸

Like Captain Marshall and Dr.Mitra, Mr.N.N.Vasu interpreted the verse to mean that three images were placed in the Garbhagriha of the temple.⁹

Mr.N.G.Majumdar also translated this verse 29 in the same way as follows:-

“(Verse 29) There, in Vishnu’s temple in the respective sanctums (Garbhagrihas) he ardently placed images of the god in the form of Narayana, Ananta and Nrsihma like the (three) Vedas in the mouths of the creator (i.e.Brahma).”¹⁰

None of the above scholars, excepting Dr.Kielborn, has been able to fully interpret the verse in its real sense. Mr.Majumdar’s reading is not grammatically correct as he has put ‘I’ in place of ‘I’ in the word murttih which is murtti, the plural form of murtti in the objective declension unless it is a printing mistake.

Garbhagriha is an architectural term signifying a single room with one door. But in the inscription we find the plural form in the locative of the word ‘Garbhagrihantara’ situated in the ‘Vesma’ erected for the god. I consider it be a technical term of the architecture signifying the places exterior or attached to the sanctum, that is, the three niches of the temple, wherein Parsvadevtas are placed. If it is taken in this sense, i.e., antara means bahirbhaga (out side) and not inside, the translation of verse 29 will stand as follows:-

There in the Vishnu’s temple, in three respective niches, outside the sanctum, he ardently placed the images of gods, Narayana, Ananta and Narsimha like the three Vedas in the mouths of Brahma.

It may be said here that only three faces out of four of Bramha are represented in sculpture and three Parsvadevatas of this temple have been compared here with three faces of Bramha representing three Vedas (Vedatrayi).

However none of these images with the exception of Nrsimha which occupied the eastern niche but is now missing are found to occupy the temple and the priests of the temple do not know any existence of Narayana, Ananta and Nrsimha in the Garbhagriha. They perform the daily worship of Ananta (Balarama) Vasudeva (Jagannatha) and Subhadra and while doing so they recite the following dhyana of each god:-

1. Dhyana of Vasudeva:

कलाभ्राजजनपुञ्जसुन्दरमुखं पद्ममाभिलाषस्मितं
शक्राद्यामखन्दितपदयुगं शडकारवाहुद्वयम्
आनन्दाप्लुतवारिधि प्रभजतं सौख्यैकहेतुं विभुं
संसारार्णवतारणं त्रिजगतांनार्थं भजेकेशवम् ॥

2. Dhyana of Ananta or Balarama:

दोभ्यीं शोभितलाडमलं समूषलं कादम्बरीचञ्जलं
रत्नैरच्चितकुण्डलं भुजबलैराक्रान्तभूमण्डलम्
बज्राभं गुरुचारुगण्डयुगलं नागेन्द्रचूडोज्ज्वलं
संग्रामे चपलं शषडकधबलं श्रीकामपालं भजे ॥

3. Dhyana of Subhadra:

मालाभूजाभूषितां सुमनसामानन्दकाल्लोलिनीं
फलेन्दीबरनीललोलनयनां श्रीरामकृष्णानुजाम्
सर्वाभीष्टफलप्रदाननिरतां त्रैलोक्यसम्मोहिनीं
देवेषीं भबदुःखदाहषमनीं देवीं सुभद्रां भजे ॥

The description of three images, which are worshipped in the Ananta-Vasudeva temple, is given below:-

1. The standing image of Ananta measures 55” x 18”. It has a seven-hooded snake canopy and two hands. The right hand holds the Hala (Plough) and left hand Mushala. There is a diadem(Mukuta) which is very indistinct. The outer garment hangs from the left shoulder with a knot near the right knee. A similar image of Ananta is fixed to be raised wall at the bathing ghat of Bindusagara in front of Ananta-Vasudeva temple.

2. The standing image of Subhadra measures 40” x 17”. A temple – decoration is carved on its back slab and there are two full-blown lotuses above the head of the images. The image itself stands on

a lotus pedestal. Two palms are broken. The image is decorated with a Vanamala's and other ornaments. Two female attendants are found standing on her each side.

3. The standing image of Vasudeva measures 58" x 18". It has a semicircular halo. There is the crown (Mukuta) on its head and it wears a sacred thread. The image has four hands, the left upper hands hold a conch or Sankha and the lower hand a discus or Chakra; the right upper hand holds a Mace (Gada) and the lower hand holds a Lotus-bud. The image has two silver eyes which perhaps have been put by the priests. This piece of sculpture is similar in design to that of the Bindusagara tank in front of the Ananta Vasudeva temple.

All the three images stand on one stone platform facing to the west and have been fixed at the back with the masonry construction.

The images of Matangi Mahalaksmi measuring 34" x 21½" is kept in the south-west corner of the sanctum and a stone pillar known as Sudarsana is also kept at her side.

If we take the above images of Vasudeva to be the very same with Narayana of Bhatta Bhavadeva's inscription, we get the image of Vasudeva and Ananta in place of "Narayana and Ananta" of the said inscription. But how does a female image come in to occupy the place of Nrusimha? On enquiry, I learnt that the priests do not know anything about the image of Nrusimha and their old palm-leaf manuscript which are read in the procedure of worship of these gods, are silent about Nrusimha. The priests informed me that there are only two Nrusimha images of Bhuvaneshwar, one of the Ugra Nrusimha in the Uttaresvara temple and another the Lakshmi Nrusimha in the temple facing west on the southern side of the compound of the Lingaraja temple. The image of Nrusimha of the Uttaresvara temple does not originally belong to that temple as it is kept now in the Natamandira. It measures 46" x 23". The width of space occupied by the image of Subhadra is only 17" and so an image of 23" wide cannot be put in there. But the dimensions of the image of Nrusimha are exactly similar to the eastern niche of the temple which is generally in all Vaishnava temples occupied by the image of Nrusimha and the carvings and dimensions of this image are identical with that of the images of Vamana in the northern niche and Varsha in the southern niche of the temple. So the image of Nrusimha of the Uttaresvara temple can be identified with the image of the eastern niche and not of the sanctum of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple. It seems that it was removed along with the commemorative inscription by Major Stuart from the temple and left at his camp for some reason or other. The image of Lakshmi-Nrusimha of the Lingaraja temple compound measuring 64" x 32" is in a temple occupying an independent position and for it there is no space at all on the stone pedestal of the cult images of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple.

There is also another temple known as Anantesvara facing north on the southern side of the Lingaraja temple compound. The workmanship of these images is different from that of the images of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple which are no doubt earlier. These images are also called Ananta, Vasudeva and Subhadra and their description is given below.

The image of Ananta measures 47" x 19". The back slab has a trifoliate arch with a Crocodile (Makara) design at each end. The canopy consists of seven snake-hoods and there are two Vidyadharies on back slab beyond the hood. The 5th and 6th hoods from left are broken. Both the hands are broken from the elbow. The image stands on two other lotuses at the extremity of each side and two devotees sit on the intermediate lotuses. All these five lotuses are carved on a single lotus pedestal. The image has diadem (mukuta), sacred thread, necklace and garland of Wild-flowers (Vanamala).

The image of Subhadra measures 32" x 14". There is a trifoliate arch on the back slab. At both ends of the arch there are two Vidyadharies holding garlands. Her right hand is broken and she holds the petals of a full-blown lotus which emerges from the lotus pedestal with her left hand. The image stands on the middle one of the three lotuses and the remaining two are vacant.

The image of Jagannatha or Vasudeva measures 43" x 19". In the middle of trifoliate arch a Rahumukha is carved and on each side of the Rahumukha, there is one female riding on a flying male Vidhyadhara. At the two Makara (crocodile) bases of the arch there are two images of Garuda. It has two hands and not four like the images of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple. As the hands are broken at the elbow no weapons are found now. The image possesses necklace of Kaustubha, sacred thread and

garland of wild flowers. The image stands on the middle lotus out of five and on the right there is the image of Lakshmi holding a lotus and standing on the lotus flower at the side and on the left there is the image of Sarasvati playing on the Vina. There are two devotees, now broken, on two lotus seats on each side between the middle one and the two end ones.

All the three images stand on a common pedestal which has been divided into three compartments by insertion of four pilasters lending support to a projection. One pilaster to the right of Ananta is missing and so also a portion of the projection.

The images of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple and that of the Ananteswar temple are found to be made according to the texts of the Hayasirsha Pancharatra, Matsya Purana and Pratistha-Prasanga as quoted in the Haribhakti-Vilasa. Mention of Purusottama, Balarama Srikusna and Subhadra in the epigraph of Chandradevi also indicates that the texts of Pratisthaprasanga was very familiar in Orissa in the 13th Century A.D.

The name of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple is very significant. Rai Bahadur R.P.Chanda writes the following in this connection:-

“In all available exposition of the Pancharatra system, Vasudeva is mentioned first and is followed by Samkarsana. But in both of or inscriptions (of second century B.C.) the order is changed Samkarsana is named first and Vasudeva comes as the second. The mention of Samkarsana first and Vasudeva afterwards in awe records of such two distant place as Ghasundi in Rajputana and Nanaghat in the Deocan, shows that in those days Samkarsana was popularly recognised as a divinity equaling Vasudeva in rank”¹¹. The names of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra of Puri on this analogy seem to be of remoter antiquity and “may perhaps be the last remnants of the primitive as Vedic Pancharatra ritual”.¹²

When the images of the inscription of Bhatta Bhavadeva cannot be identified with those of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple, it can safely be said that Bhatta Bhavadeva, the minister of Harivarmadeva, did not build the temple of Ananta-Vasudeva at Bhuvaneswar. The inscription slab, which is fixed now on its compound wall, was identified by mistake to be its commemorative slab. Then where is the inscription slab of this temple which was removed from it by Major Stuart ???

According to the text of inscription No.4, it can be said with certainty that Chandradevi built the present Ananta-Vasudeva temple. The deities namely Balarama, Krsna and Subhadra (Bala-Krsna Subhadramcha) mentioned in the inscription are even now worshipped in the temple. The locality and the position of the temple at Bhuvaneswar remain the same according to the description given in the inscription of Chandradevi. Mention is made in the inscription of Bhatta Bhavadeva that in the front of the temple he excavated a tank (verse 31) and outside the temple laid out a garden(verse 32). This Bhati or tank of the inscription of Bhatta Bhavadeva has been identified with Bindu-sagara of Bhuvaneswar. Mr.N.G.Majumdar writes that “the tank referred to in the inscription is no longer traceable and some scholars are of opinion that it has been probably absorbed in the tank of Bindusagara;”¹³ The poet Vachaspati of Bhatta Bhavadeva’s inscription does not give any religious importance to the tank, but the poet Umapati of the inscription of Chandradevi written in 1278 A.D. puts it saying that “these holy places do not attain the divine rank of even a drop thereof”¹⁴ and this statement of Umapati seems to have been based on the authenticity of the Garuda-purana which mentions the sanctity of Bindusagara. The date of Bhatta Bhavadeva’s inscription according to the calculation of Mr.Majumdar has been estimated as belonging to the “first quarter of the 12th century and even the last quarter of the 11th century A.D.”¹⁵ and of Mr.M.M.Chakravarti’s suggestion about the absorption of other tank dug by Bhatta Bhavadeva in the Bindusagara at a subsequent period to that of the first quarter of the 12th century A.D. is accepted, the attainment of the divine rank of Bindusagara is to be attributed to a period of less than 100 years from the time of the poet Umapati which is perhaps untenable.

The description given in the Ekamra-chandrika, Kapila-samhita, Svrapadrimahodaya and Ekamra-purana go to show that in the Ananta-Vasudeva temple are enshrined the stone images of Jagannath. Balabhadra and Subhadra which are known as ‘Shilabrahma’ whereas such images at Puri are known as ‘Darubrahma’.

The above four Upapurisas faithfully record the religious traditions sacred to the Ananta-Vasudeva temple and the Bindusagara tank of Bhuvaneshwar and it will be observed from the books that no-where names of 'Narayanananta-Nrusimha' or 'Narayananta' from the inscription of Bhatta Bhavadeva, and this goes, to some extent, against the identification of the temple of Ananta Vasudeva with that built by Bhatta Bhavadeva, whereas, on the other hand, the inscription of Chandradevi, daughter of a Cansa King of Orissa, makes distinct mention of gods Srikrapa, Balarama, Subhadra, and of PUSOTTAMA in verses 13, 21 and 23 which are found in the above-named Upapurisas. There are also two temples still standing in a dilapidated condition in the compound of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple dedicated to goddesses Lakshmi and Sarasvati. These temples were built in imitation of such temples in the compound of the Jagannatha temple at Puri.

From all these points one is arrived at a definite conclusion that the inscription slab of Bhatta Bhavadeva identified as the inscription of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple and subsequently returned to Bhuvaneshwar and fixed in its present position, does not belong to Bhuvaneshwar, it originally belonged to the temple of Narayana or Ananta-narayana erected at the village Siddhala in Radha or Uttara Radha (according to the Belava copper-plate of Bhoja Varman) from where it was brought to the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal; Calcutta, by some antiquarian whose name was not recorded in the list of donors of the Asiatic Society. Had it not belonged to the collection of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, there would have been left a chance of its being considered as an inscription from Bhuvaneshwar, but its return from the collection of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta is unquestionable and so there is no doubt about the fact that the inscription of Chandradevi, now preserved by the Royal Asiatic Society of London, is the original slab of the Ananta-Vasudeva temple of Bhuvaneshwar. It is also desirable that if the original slab cannot be brought back from London, a plaster cast* of it may be put at the place of Bhatta Bhavadeva's inscription which may be removed from Bhuvaneshwar and preserved in the Indian Museum in Calcutta or in the Museum at Bhubaneswar.

Stone images of Ananta or Balarama, Vasudeva or Krishna and Subhadra were identified in his article on 'Ekanamsa and Subhadra' first late Mr. Jogendra Chandra Ghosh, it was published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters, Vol.II, 1936, No.1, pp.41-46, together with a plate showing a set of images preserved in the Lucknow Museum. It will appear from what I have narrated above that there are three such sets of sculptures at Bhuvaneshwar. The catalogue of antiquities of the Gwalior Museum contains a photograph of images of Balarama and it is expected that such sculptures are scattered in other parts of India. A proper survey of these three Vaishnava images will enable us to locate the area where the Pancharatra system of worship was prevalent and popular in ancient and mediaeval periods of Indian History.

NOTES AND REFERENCES :-

1. Inscriptions of Bengal Vol.III, p. 78 and Note no.1.
2. Ibid., p. 40, Note No.6.
3. Antiquities of Orissa Vol.II, p. 84.
4. Orissa and Her Remains, p. 369.
5. J. and P.S.B., Vol.VIII, p. 338.
6. 'Mandirer Katha' (Bengali)
7. J.A.S.B., Vol.VI, p. 97.
8. E.I. Vol.VI, p.. 204.
9. Castes and Sects of Bengal, Vol.I, p. 349.
10. Inscriptions of Bengal, Vol.III, p.49.
11. Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No.5, p. 121.
12. Indo-Aryan Races, p. 121.
13. Inscriptions of Bengal, Vol.III, p.32.
14. E.I. Vol.XIII, p. 154.
15. Inscriptions of Bengal, Vol.III, p.32.