



Maa Mundeshwari Temple (Unique Heritage of Shahabad)

Rana Uday Prasad Singh, Ph.D., P.G. Department of History
Jagdam College, Chapra, Bihar, INDIA

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Author

Rana Uday Prasad Singh, Ph.D.

shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

Received on : 20/06/2023

Revised on : -----

Accepted on : 27/06/2023

Plagiarism : 05% on 20/06/2023



Plagiarism Checker X - Report

Originality Assessment

Overall Similarity: **5%**

Date: Jun 20, 2023

Statistics: 101 words Plagiarized / 2039 Total words

Remarks: Low similarity detected, check with your supervisor if changes are required.



ABSTRACT

Mudeshwari a hill name is stands at a distance of 7 miles South-West of Bhabhua the headquarter of Kaimur district of Shahabad region of Bihar. Ramgarh is the nearest village from the hill. Buchanan visited the place in between 1812-13 and reffered to a tradition that demon or a Daitya chief called Munda Occupied the the hill and built the temple after his name. Munda was believed to be a Chero Raja by the people of the locality.

KEY WORDS

Unique, Octagonal, Sculptural, Architecture, Mandapa, Garbhagriha.

INTRODUCTION

The Mundeshwari hill at is about 600 feet high and probably derives its name from the temple¹ situated on its summit belonging to the Gupta period. As on inscription² at this place also ascertains. There are several other inscriptions on this hill³ and from the architectural as well as sculptural points of view this hill seems to be of great significance.

The only unique temple of the early period in this part of the state, which is still in quite a good states of preservation, mainly due to extensive repairs and renovations undertaken earlier, is the Mundeshwari temple, in the district of Rohtas. The Mundeshwari temple standing on the summit of Mundeshwari hill, forms an important landmark in the history of temple architecture, as it is one of the only remaining octagonal temples in India, built of stone, brick being the generally favoured building material.⁴ Although a distinct style of temple architecture known as the Nagara style was evolved in Magadha with its centre at Patliputra, specimens of this style are very rare even in Bihar.⁵

However, the Mundeshwari temple is the only specimen of Nagara architecture so far available in Bihar. The general form of the temple makes it quite clear that it has undergone both ruins and some reconstructions that have had a considerable effect on its appearance.⁶ The Mundeshwari temple as a matter of fact was literally rescued from the jungles and debris at the beginning of this century. The clearance of the jungle then brought to light a number of relics. On the eastern slope of the Mundeshwari hill a number of images and rock-carved figures were discovered. The relics make it clear that the hill was once the site for a cluster of temples and the Mundeshwari temple, at the summit, must have been the main shrine.⁷ The temple underwent considerable changes during the Pala period when many additions and alterations were carried out.⁸ Later in the modern period when it was noticed, it was much in ruins, as evident from the accounts of scholars like Buchanan,⁹ Bloch,¹⁰ Kuraishi,¹¹ etc., and then its conservations and some renovations were undertaken by the Public Works Department of the British Government.¹² It is as a result of this that the temple is still existing and in spite of the fact that much of its ruins have been removed in recent times and sculptures and architectural pieces brought to the Patna Museum, much remains to speak highly of the remarkable architectural features of the temple.

Historical Overview

The Mundeshwari temple, octagonal in plan, is 40 feet in diameter externally and 20 feet internally, made of dressed stone slabs.¹³ The four walls of the temple facing the cardinal direction each have a doorway, denotes eight dishas, although currently only one, the southern doorway, provides access to the interior of the temple; the other doorways having been sealed, the eastern one probably in the course of some reconstruction and the other two by modern screen doors. The mouldings of these doorways are clearly based on the Gupta pattern, seen especially on monuments generally dated to the late fifth or sixth century A.D., such as the Nachana temple and the Deogarh temple. However, the floral patterns have become formalised, and show only an echo of the luxuriant pattern of Gupta lotus creepers.¹⁴ Evidently, the mouldings of the doorways show the range of styles in sculptured members that are almost contemporary with one another. Although subtle differences are apparent in the treatment of the floral décor of the four doorways, the differences never so great as to indicate that one of the doorways might have been carved long after the others.¹⁵

Further, the decoration also consists of a broad round moulding at the base of the plinth of the same type as that at Bhurma and the stone-work of the earliest main shrine at Sarnath near Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. The plinth is as well decorated with *Kirttimukhas* with garlands hanging as loops from their mouths and tassels at the junctions of the loops. The carvings of the great stone doorframe consists of bands of arabesque work, superimposed panels containing single or double human figures and other well recognized Gupta decorative motifs. Although fragments of bas-reliefs exhibit the general decadence of the post-Gupta plastic art, the carvings of the pillars and the pilasters of the windows, bearing chitya windows on them all proclaim the Mundeshwari temple to be direct descendent of Gupta temples proper, yet not very far removed from the age of the Early Gupta. As Nachana kuthara and Bhurma as well as Aihole and Pattadakal, pierced stone frames admit light into the interior and even the lower part of the jambs of such window frames bear the figures of the river goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna.¹⁶ The guardians at the base of the mouldings are all in niches that are crowned by a small arch, a sort of keyhole shape. Though earlier used on other parts of temple, niches of this shape are widely used during the seventh century A.D. to enframe the guardians at the base of doorways.¹⁷ The intermediate walls, between the ones with doorways, each carry three niches, a large central one with a smaller niche on either side each capped by a low *udgama*, as we also see on such seventh century temples as the Lakshmans temple, at Sirpur and the Parasuramesvara temple at Bhuvaneshara. Thus, the facade follows the architectural pattern common to seventh century temples in both Central India and Orissa. So too the mouldings of the plinth (*Adhithana*) of the Mundeshwari temple correspond generally with the *adhithana* mouldings of the late sixth century Gop temple in Gujarat as well as with the contemporary temple at Kusama in Rajasthan.¹⁸

The original roof of the Mundeshwari temple which was certainly a *sikhara*, had fallen completely when the temple was conserved as the beginning of this century, and irrespective of the original position of the ceilings, the Public works Department of the British Government crowned it with a low parapet of undressed or roughly dressed stone plaque as it is now seen. It is, however, interesting to note that in 1790, when the English artists Thomas and William Daniel visited the site, the entire temple except of the entrance was buried, but from the mound shown in their drawing¹⁹, It can be inferred that little if anything of the superstructure remained even then. As best we can guess that originally the *sikhara* followed the parabolic elevation widely used in North India by the seventh century A.D., and that the square plan of the superstructure was symmetrically inscribed within the octagonal plan of the temple walls, probably reflecting the form of the raised square platform inside the temple. A *sikhara* of this part would certainly account for the architectural members, including several amalakas and chandrasalas, still at the site,²⁰ Several half amalakas found scattered on detached architectural members lying scattered around the monument provide an indubitable proof that the *bhumi-amalakas* had originally been used on the *Sikhara* of the temple. On the Parasuramesvara temple at Bhubaneswar, which is contemporary of the Mundeshwari temple, *Bhumi-amalakas* made their appearance on the corner facets of pilasters (*konik-pages*) of the spire at regular intervals of three courses.²¹ It may, therefore be presumed that the *bhumi-amalakas* occupied similar positions on the Mundeshwari temples.²²

Further, there are also sufficient indications of a *mandapa* before the southern doorway and that the roof of the porch was supported with eight pillars. Traces of the porchway still remained at the beginning of this century, when the temple was cleared and conserved and part of the very slab that formed the roof was noticed among the pieces lying about the site. It was decorated with a huge full-blown lotus, exactly like on the slabs that serve as ceiling for *mandapas* of Gupta and later temples. Today, however, no part of this *mandapa* remains except its plinth, much broader than the porchway itself. Because this *mandapa* would have obscured the side niches on both the South-East and South-West walls of the temple, it is doubtful that it was part of the original conception of the structure and hence it is presumed that it was added in the course of some renovation or modifications.²³

The *Garbhagriha* of the Mundeshwari temple is also octagonal in plan, as mentioned earlier, with a raised square platform in the centre. A 45-inch tall *chaturmukhi linga* of undistinguished quality stood at the centre of the plinth until it is theft in 1968.²⁴ However, besides an image of goddess Mahismardini, locally called Mundeshwari and other images also present there are two large stone vessels perhaps meant for keeping offerings. Now, several images brought from Mundeshwari to the Patna Museum²⁵ can be related to the sculptures still attached to the temple and most of them are contemporary with the figures still in situ.²⁶

The sculptures which may have been originally a part of the temple architecture, however, do not clearly suggest whether the Mundeshwari temple was a Vaisnava shrine or a Saiva temple since in it is quite evident that the image of Mundeshwari did not occupy the central position in the *garbhagriha* and so cannot be regarded as the presiding or principle deity of the temple. The Mundeshwari inscription²⁷ seems to suggest that it was a Vaisnava shrine but there is absence of Vaisnava sculptures. Hence it may be suggested that the Mundeshwari temple was a Saiva temple as the Siva-linga occupied the central position and also the sculptures around are mostly Saiva- For instance, the recumbent Nandi outside the west doorway as well as the figure of Ganesa, Karttikeya etc. all are *Saiva images*. But this cannot be regarded as conclusive because besides other images there are Surya images and some erotic figures as well. At best it can be presumed that besides the Mundeshwari temple there may have been other shrines as well, in which these images were installed. Evidently the temple are still represented by some scattered remains of buildings which show that the hill was once covered with a cluster of shrines of which only the main temples has now remained. K.C. Panigrahi²⁸ on the basis of Mundeshwari inscription suggests that the Mundeshwari temple was originally a Vaisnava shrine with Narayana as the presiding deity; thereafter it become as Saiva temple, and Vinitesvara, originally a subsidiary deity then became the presiding deity. Later, with the passage of time and change in religious history,

Mundeshwari a *Parsva devata* in the Saiva shrine of Vinitesvara become the presiding deity of the temple when Shaktism has supplanted Saivism. This is, however, a matter of presumption an nothing can be said convincingly as the architectural features of the temple hardly suggest anything clearly in this regard.

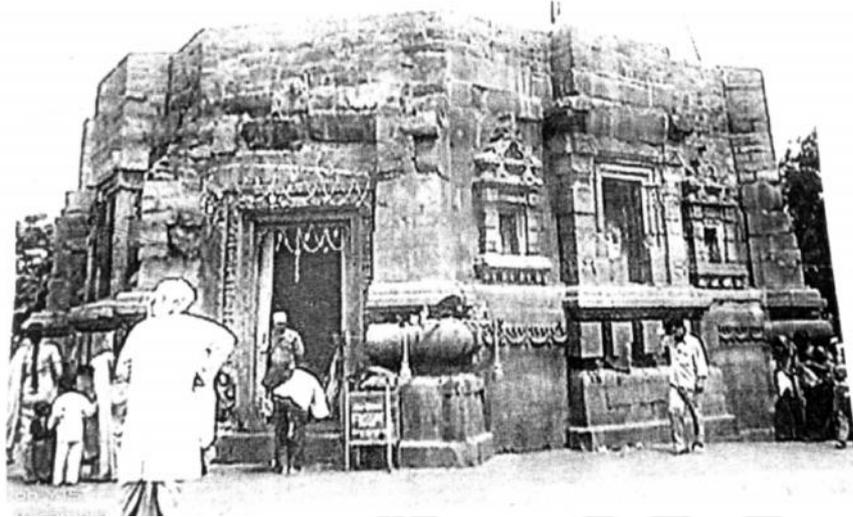
CONCLUSION

The architectural features, fairly corroborated by the evidence of the sculptures and the inscription, suggest that the Mundeshwari temple belonged to the 6th – 7th century A.D. In addition the architectural form and even the building material of the temple are closely related to temples in the area corresponding to modern Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, essentially the *Madhyadesa* or ancient Indian geographic divisions, than to any temple type in Eastern India, The Prachya region (*Prachyadesa*) of ancient India.²⁹ Thus, Architectural features of Mundeshwari Temple show the unique combination of ancient temple architectural style of Madhyadesh (Madhya Pradesh) and Prachyadesh (Orissan style). With octagonal garvagriha and group of many shrines on this hill. It also shows the religious co-ordination in vaisnava, shakt & shaiva gulf of the people of the Shahabad region.

REFERENCES

1. Infra p. 204.
2. Infra p. 117-117.
3. Infra p. 117-127.
4. Asher, F.M., *The Art of Eastern India*, p. 28, Delhi, 1980.
5. Roy Choudhury, P.C. op. cit. p. 55.
6. Panigrahi, K.C., JBS, vol. XLIV, p. 14.
7. Roy Choudhury, P.C., Bihar District Gazetteer., p. 56.
8. Banerji, D.R.; *The age of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 156-57; Varanasi, 1933.
9. Buchanan, H.; *An account of the District of Shahabad*, pp. 133-135; Patna, 1926. pp. 133-35.
10. An Rep, ASI, 1902, 0,20 and 1903-04, pp. 9-10.
11. List of Ancient monuments protected under Act VII of 1904 in the province of Bihar and Orissa (ASI, New imperial series, Vol.-II) pp. 143-46; 1931.
12. An. Rep. ASI, 1902-03.
13. Gupta, P.L. CHB, Vol. I Part II, p. 204
14. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 38.
15. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 40.
16. Banerji, R.D., op. cit., p. 157.
17. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 40.
18. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 38.
19. Asher, F.M. op. cit., Plate 42.
20. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 38.
21. BRS, XLIV, pp. 18-19.
22. Jamuar, B.K., *The Ancient Temples of Bihar*, p. 50. New Delhi, 1985.

23. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 39
24. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 39-40.
25. Gupta, P.L. PMCA, pp. 47-49; Weiner, Sheila, From Gupta to Pala Sculptures p. 171.
26. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 41
27. Supra, p. 121.
28. JBRS, XLIV, p. 18.
29. Asher, F.M. op. cit., p. 42.



Mundeshwari Temple (Shahabad) Bihar



JAMUNA Stone Built



VISHNU Stone Built
