

PANCHARATNA AND NAVARATNA TEMPLES OF BIRBHUM, WEST BENGAL (17TH - 19TH CENTURY A.D)

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ABSTRACT:

Temples of Birbhum are mostly made of bricks and religious in nature. But few temples are stone made viz, Vishnu temple of Kavilashpur (Rajnagar) and Siva temple of Panchara (Khayrasole) etc. In Birbhum, temple architecture has assumed an identity. Due to lack of suitable stone in all parts of the district, the temple makers used burnt bricks instead of stone and terracotta as a medium for temple decoration, sometimes stucco (mortar, lime with sand) works. The makers of architectural production of the district are Kings and Zamindars, high officials of the kings, rich merchants, saints, and above all the ordinary people of the locality. But it appears that most of the temples of Birbhum are built by local rich persons, who are also pious. In Birbhum, there are seven types temple, but most of the temples of Birbhum are Deul type. But I have tried to discuss most important and terracotta decorated two types- Pancharatna and Navaratna.)

Key words: *Temple style, Pancharatna, Navaratna, Features, Materials, Terracotta Decoration and Patron.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Birbhum (it lies between 23° 32' 30" and 24° 35' 0" north latitude and 88°1' 40" and 87° 5' 25" east longitude.) is one of the important district, situated at western part of the West Bengal. Several theories have been put forward regarding the origin of the name Birbhum. It is commonly appears in English documents as *Beerbhoom*. According to W.W Hunter, it means the land of heroes (*vir-bhumi*), and another suggestion is that it signifies forest land, 'Bir' in Santali meaning *Jungle*. According to the Census District Handbook, 1951 'probably the local explanation is the correct one, i.e., that Birbhum means simply territory of the *Bir Rajas*, *Bir* being the title borne by the early Hindu rulers just as *Man*, *Singh* and *Dhal* were the title of the chiefs of Manbhum, Singhbhum and Dhalbhum'. Birbhum is bounded on the north and west by the Santal Pargana and the district of Murshidabad, on east by the district of Murshidabad and Burdwan, and on the south by Burdwan, from which it is separated by the

Ajay river. The district is well drained by a number of rivers viz- Ajay, Mor, Hingla, Bakreswar, Brahamani, Kopai, Mauyrakshi. The geological formation represented in Birbhum are Achaean Gneiss, the Gondwana system, laterite and Gangetic alluvium. Birbhum was administered from Murshidabad until 1787, and it was constituted as district with Bishnupur until 1793. In 1820 Birbhum was reconstituted as a separate district and restored to its former area. With Suri as the district head quarter.

2. TEMPLE STYLES

Before discussing about *Ratna* temples of Birbhum, it is important to perceive the religious condition of the district. Because religious belief is expressed through temples and main deity of the temple. All the cultural movements have had their contribution to the art of building¹. Hinduism had played an important role in the religious life of the people. Different religious trends like, *Saktism*, *Vaishnavism*, *Saivism* deeply affected the people of the district. *Vaishnavism* appears to have been popular in the district, *Vaishnava* poet *Joydeva* was born in *Kenduli*. Another *Vaishnava* poet of the district is *Chandidas* (Nanoor), and probably *Nityananda*, one of the chief disciple of *Chaitanya*, who was born at *Garbhabas* near *Birchnadrapur*. In Birbhum there are five *Saktapithas*, generally *Saktism* was prevalent in the district. Thus the temples of Birbhum are dedicated to various deities like- *Shiva*, *Kali*, *Lakshmi-Janerdan*, *Radha-Vinod* etc. Most of temples in Birbhum are dedicated either to Siva or Vishnu².

The *Matsyapurana*, describe the possible forms of the Hindu temple and says, that they may be built either of wood or brick or stone (Kramrish, 1946) In Birbhum, there are seven types temple, but most of the temples of Birbhum are Deul type. I have given a table of different types of temple of Birbhum.

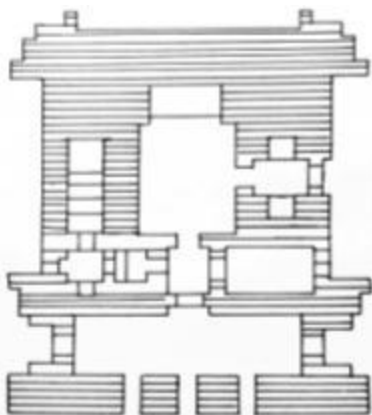
¹. Brown, P. – Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu Periods), 4th Ed., Bombay, 1959, p. 1.

². Dey, Mukul – *Birbhum Terracotta*, New Delhi, 1959, p. 5.

TEMPLE TYPES OF BIRBHUM

- **Bangla style - (a) *Ek-Bangla* (Panchara, Dubrajpur) (b) *Jod-Bangla* (Itanda, Bolpur)**
- ***Chala* style - (a) *Char-Chala* (Mallarpur, Maureswar) (b) *At-Chala* (Hetampur, Dubrajpur)**
- ***Dalan* - (Perua, Khayarasol)**
- ***Deul* type - (Parshundi, Khayarasol)**
- ***Dolmancha* type - (Ganpur, MD. Bazar)**
- **Octagonal - (Akalipur, Nalhati)**
- ***Ratna* type - (a) *Ek-Ratna* (Gopalpur, Khayarasol)
(b) *Pancha-Ratna* (Surul, Bolpur)
(c) *Nava-Ratna* (Ghurisha, Illambazar)
(d) *Tero-Ratna* (Modipara, Dubrajpur)**

Generally *Ratna* means jewel, but in architectural idiom, *Ratna-* is a double storied Bengal temple style. *Pancharatna* means five towers (pinnacles). A *Pancharatna* temple is built on square structure rising (Ground plan, fig-1) in two stories and is crowned by four miniature- spiral towers or turrets on each corner of the first storey and a central one crowing the top of the second storey , total five *Ratna* or tower hence it is *Panchratna* (Fig-2).

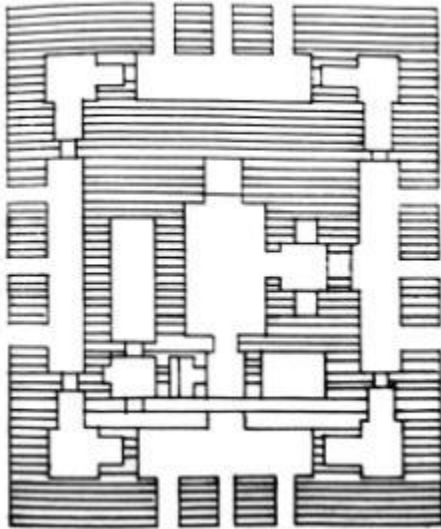


Ground plan of *Pancharatna* temple (from Temples of Birbhum) fig-1



Structure of *Pancharatna* temple fig-2

Navaratna or nine towers temples, has generally three storied, third storey like a rectangular box. It stand on a square (Ground plan, fig-3) platform. The temple had eight towers on each four corners of its two roofs and one tower on the top roof (on the rectangular box) of the temple, total nine towers, so it is *Navaratna* (Fig-4).



Ground plan of *Navaratna* temple
(from Temples of Birbhum)
fig-3



Structure of *Navaratna* temple
fig-4

In redefining, Pika Ghosh rejected the impotence given to shape, number, and roofing elements. She understand, “Ratna temple as having a single lower storey that act as a base, with one or more miniaturized shrines, each with its own roof, placed on the upper terrace above the sanctum. The upper shrine acts as a cap”³. All the Ratna temples are stand on a high plinth and square platform. Only façade of the temples are decorated by terracotta plaques, few are stucco works, remain three sides are plain. It seems that the towers or *Ratnas* have been originated from orissan *Sikhara* type, but it is not fully imitation of *Sikhara* type, there also added some trends of regional architecture. Dome is an interesting feature of Muslim architecture, it may be the concept of turrets or towers were originated from dome shape. According to David J. McCutchion, “the question is often raised- not always with the greatest objectivity – whether this multiplication of turrets should be considered a Hindu or Muslim feature. Certainly the clustering of *chhatris* or domes at different roof levels is common Islamic practice”, .The Ratna temple seems to flourish in the 16th century A.D, but we have no extant examples from before 17th century and it was a favourite style of the Malla king of Bishnupur (Bankura)

³. Ghosh, Pika : Temples to Love : Architecture and devotion in seventeenth century Bengal, Indian University Pres, USA, 2005, p. 11.

3. PANCHARATNA TEMPLES

3.1 Supur: It is five kilometers from Bolpur, the village is situated on northern bank of the river Ajay. There was a Raja named Suroth, and a pious Brahman- Ananda Chanda Gowsami and according to folklore tradition, he protected the villagers from Bargi attack (Maratha looters). According to Markandeya Purana, Supur was a part of the kingdom of Kalinga's king Suratha. It is believed that the kingdom of king Suratha was Swapur and the name supur is originated from Swapur. In Supur there are one twin Shiva temple, and four Deul type temples and a Pancharatna temple (pic-1) at Hattala, built in 1817 A.D (1224 B.S). The temple is facing south, situated on raised plinth (3' 4"), and four stair cases



Pancharatna temple of Supur
pic-1

(Easter side) attached to the plinth. It is brick made temple and façade of the temple is decorated by few terracotta panels. Single arched entrance and peak of the central tower there is an iron rod. Present owner of the temple is Ganapati Dey, he renovated the temple, like, placement of tiles on the floor and inner walls of the Garbhagriha and pavement of open varandha.

3.2 Itanda: is a village, twelve kilometers south- east from Bolpur and under Bolpur police sation. There is a small brick made *Pancharatna* temple at Bazarpara (pic-2), built in 1750 A.D (1235 B.S), by Rasananda Sadhu, mention on the foundation plate. An interesting feature of the temple is decorated platform (pic-3). Three sides of the platform are richly decorated by floral designs, which is absent others *Ratna* temples of Birbhum. The temple is facing south and the façade is decorated by terracotta plaques. Single arched entrance. Threshold of the door is made of black stone. The façade is decorated with court of Rama, Hanuman and Jambuman, some bearded European noble men wearing a crown type head gear⁴.

⁴. With the advent of the English into the villages and provincial town of Bengal about the middle of the 18th century and the spread of their trade under the East India Company, the influence of Christianity and the European manner of living were felt even in the remote corners of Birbhum, Mukul Dey - Birbhum Terracotta, 1995, p.5.



Pancharatna temple of Itanda
pic - 2



Decorated platform (Itanda)
pic - 3

3.3 Chinpai: the village under Dubrajpur police station, and seven kilometers from Dubrajpur. There is a beautiful *Pancharatna* temple at Mitrapara (pic-4), founded by Panchanan Mitra, during middle of the ninetieth century A.D. The temple is dedicated to lord Shiva, hence it is Shiva temple. The temple is situated on a high plinth (2' 5"), facing south and one wooden door, which also southern side. There are two covered varandhas (south and west). Each varandha, there are eight pillars, two *joda* pillars are attached to the outer wall. The pillars are slight tapering and embellished by floral designs (top and bottom). Middle of the outer wall there are some floral designs.



Pancharatna temple of Chinpai
pic - 4

3.4 Jalandi: the village is fifteen kilometers from Nanoor, and it is under Nanoor police station. I have noticed, three Shiva temples (pic-5) in a single platform. Middle of the temple is *Pancharatna*, built in eighteen century A.D, remain two are Deul type. According to Sukhomay Bandhopadhya, “here as we notice, both Hindu and Mahamadan impact on temple art are visible in a single platform. The Hindu impact is seen in the *Pancharatna* temple, while the Mahamadan impact is clearly noticed in other two temples.” These temple are situated on a very low plinth (1’) and facing west. There is a open common varandha, and single arched entrance. Two towers of the western side are totally damaged by lightning. Eastern side towers and central tower are remain, so now it is looked as a *Treratna* type. Façade of the temple is slight decorated by terracotta and stucco works. Top of the central tower there are portraits of lotuses and *kalasha*, and above all there is a *Trisula*. Image of two tigers are depicted on the eastern out side wall. Present owner of the temple is Praduit Pal.



*Pancharatna temple of Jalandi
pic - 5*

3.5 Surul: the village is very closed to Bolpur- Santiniketan and just two kilometers from Bolpur bus stand. In 18th century Surul was a commercial resident under John cheap of East India Company. There is well decorated *Pancharatna* temple (pic-6), Lakshmi-jonerdan temple, attached to the Surul Choto Bari. Foundation plaque is broken so it seems, from different decorations that the temple is built during 18th century A.D. This is the earliest and most well terracotta embellished temple. The temple is situated on low plinth (1’) and platform of the temple is square (21 23’). There are three arched entrance and covered varandha with iron railing and four pillars. Among four pillars two are attached to the outer wall. Pillars are tapering also well decorated. Terracotta decoration on the façade is divided into three parts. Middle of the façade there is a scene of the battle between Rama and Ravana. Northern side of the façade there are well depicted the coronation scene of Rama and scene of Sita’s purification (*Agnipariksha*). Top of the



*Pancharatna temple of Surul
pic - 6*

façade there are floral designs. Three parts of the façade there are portraits of temples (bottom). Bottom of the decorated parts have been damaged, and it should renovate. Although the temple is renovated by Rabindranath Konar and Manju Konar in 1995 A.D (from a marble plate, in front of the main entrance). Height of the temple is thirty feet (approx)

3.6 Illambazar: it was an interesting trading centre, and there were the manufacturing of lac ornaments, toys, tussar silk, and cotton weaving industries. Mrs David Erskin lived for some years, after her husband's death (O Malley, 1910). At Bamunpara (near Hattala) there is a well-conditioned *Pancharatna* temple (pic-7), built by Kshudiram Bandhupadhaya, from foundation plaque, we have known, the temple is founded in 1846 A.D (1768 Sakabda, 1253 B.S). it is brick made Lakshmi Janerdan temple and facing south. Plinth (4') of the temple is highest among the Ratna type temples of Birbhum. Stair cases are attached to the plinth on the western side. There are covered varandha and open varandha. Three arched entrances with four pillars, but the pillars are not decorated. Terracotta embellished façade of the temple is divided by pillars into three parts (like Surul). Eastern part of the façade there are terracotta images of Mahishasuramardini (pic-8), Kartik, Ganesh, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Bellow the *Mahishasurmardini*, there are two parrots facing each other. Middle of the façade, there are images of Radha-Krishna within a circle, milking of a cow and swan headed boat etc. Top of the façade there is a long carving panel, depicted the scene of *Sankirtan*. Top of the every tower there are the portraits of lotus and *kalasha*, and central tower there is a *Sudharsana Chakra* of Vishnu.



Pancharatna temple of Illambazar
pic - 7



Mahishasuramardini images from
Illambazar
pic - 8

4. NAVARATNA TEMPLES

4.1 Joydeva, is a village under Illambazar police station and twelve kilometers west from Illambazar, situated on the northern bank of the river Ajay. The village also called KenduaBilla or JodevaKenduli. The village is well known, and it is the birth place of Vaishnava poet Joydeva, who flourished in 12th century A.D. He composed *Git Govinda*, a Sanskrit lyrical poem in praise of Radha-Krishna. An annual fair in his honor is held in the village on the last day of the Bengali month *Poush (Sankranti)*. There is a beautiful brick made Navaratna temple- RadhaVinod temple (pic-9), built in 1863 A.D, by Nairani Devi.



Navaratna temple of Joydeva
pic - 9

According to an inscription on a tablet, was built by the mother of Maharaja Kirti Chand Bahadur of Burdwan, and dedicated to the God in Sakabda 1605⁵. The façade of the temple is totally decorated by beautiful terracotta plaques and facing south. Triple arched entrances and a covered varandha with four pillars. Two (sides) are attached to the outer wall, pillars are embellished and slight tapering. Various size or bricks are used to create the pillars. All the four sides of the temple there are open platform. Above the archway, are depicted the ten incarnations of Vishnu, Ramanya scenes, specially Jatayu's attempt to rescue Sita, monkeys bringing tress and rocks for the causeway to Lanka and fighting both Ravana and Kumbhakarna with Rama. From top to bottom at the corners hangs a Chain of Destruction, series of men and animals. Inside the Garbhagriha there are a black stone Krishna and Asthadhatu (alloy of eight metals- gold, silver, tin, lead, copper, mercury, iron and zinc) Radha. It is believed that the temple is to stand where the house of the famous poet Jodeva existed. The temple under the Archaeological Survey of India, and there is notice board by ASI, Kolkata circle. The damaged terrace over the roof of the temple was re-laid with lime concrete (IAR- 1960-61, p-82)

⁵. O'Malley, L.S.S. – Bengal District Gazetteers : Birbhum, Kolkata, 1910, pp. 119-20.

4.2 Brahmandihi is the village under Nanoor police station and four kilometers from kirnahar. There is a broken *Navaratna* temple (pic-10), brick made and facing north. The temple is situated on a plinth (1'8"). It has been said from the aged villagers, that the temple was covered by walls and fragment of walls have been noticed. It seems that the temple has been built during 17th century A.D. There were porches on all the four sides. No decoration remains, apart from some floral motifs on the western wall. Few years ago an iron railing (door) is fitted in memory of Girindranath Dey. Now there are an arched entrance, and portraits of two entrances have been seen on the left and right sides of the middle entrance. That seems there were three arched entrances. Unfortunately lower four towers have totally been damaged, four towers of the upstairs and central one remain. And so, the temple now looks like a *Pancharatna* temple. The openings in the windows of the upper storey were provided with wire- netting and cracks and opening in the bricks work filled with coloured cement mortar (IAR-1960-61, p-82)



Navaratna Temple of Brahmandihi, Pic No. 10

4.3 Charkalgram Six kilometers from Nanoor and the village under Nanoor police station. There is a deplorable conditioned *Navaratna* temple (pic-11) at Brahmanpara, and originally it is Shiva temple, built in 18th century A.D. It is large brick made temple with triple arched entrances and porches on all the four sides. Façade of temple was slight terracotta decorated. The temple is almost same as the Brahmandihi and height 35' (approax). The general condition of temple is not satisfactory, it should to renovate as soon as possible. Now only central tower is remains, and looking as *Ek- Ratna* temple.



Navaratna temple of Charkalgram pic - 11

4.4 Ghurisha the village under Illambazar police station and nine kilometers west from Illambazar. There is a gorgeous brick made Lakshmi-Janerdan temple (pic-12) facing east. According to Sukhomay Bandhapadhaya, 'the name of the founder of this temple is Khestranath Dutta, a GandhaVanik by caste, the founder traded in lac with the European merchants, living at Illambazar'. The temple is built in 1739 A.D (1145 B.S). There is a covered varandha and four pillars, two are attached to the northern and southern sided walls and remaining pillars

are stand in middle. Pillars are carefully equipped and slight tapering (pic-13). Above the middle arched entrance there is portrait of singing *HarinamSankirtan* with *Srikhola* and *Karatala*. There are also images of Rama, sita, Srichaitnaya and various floral designs. Infront of the temple there is an open platform (latter added) attached to the plinth. Left hand side of the Garhbagirha's door, there is a marble plate, which mention, that the temple is renovated like- placement of marble on the floor and tiles on the walls (bottom level), by Kalyani Nag (Bahadurpur, Burdwan) in July, 2013. Present owner of the temple is Panchanan Das.



Navaratna temple of Ghurisha
pic - 12



Decorated Pillar of Ghurisha
pic - 13

5. CONCLUSION:

Above, I have tried to bring forward the main features of the terracotta temples architecture, ornamentations and decoration of the temples. But slowly the temples have been destroying and main deity of the temples also been stolen. Few cases i have noticed that the fine terracotta decorations have been covered by cement plastering. In ancient times temple was the main center of economic and socio-religious activity. These temples also help us to reconstruct the social and religious condition of the district. I'm hopeful that this paper will draw the attention of the Government, archaeologist and local rich person to take few necessary chemical treatments for protecting the temples. Otherwise, few years later these temples will be collapse.

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