

A Historical Study of the Memorial Stones from the Present Khorda District, Odisha: Their Political and Socio-Religious Significance

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Abstract: *Humankind's innate need to remember, honour and forge a connection with their ancestral past is demonstrated by the tradition of erecting memorial stones. These stones have been utilized to honour notable figures and occasions, symbolize cultural identity and maintain communal memory. The memorial stones are placed in remembrance of someone's bravery, sacrifice and dedication. The sites of Kanjiyagarh, Chandramapatapur, Lendo, Sisupalgarh, Pandiabili, and Banapur in the present Khorda district of Odisha bear the traces of memorial stones having enormous historical significance. From the eighth to seventeenth century CE, there were various dynasties such as Bhaumakara, Somavanshi, Eastern Ganga, Gajapati, and Bhoi that ruled over the Khorda region. Their battle for political supremacy led to the erection of a number of memorial stones in honour of warriors and rulers. These portray the political and socio-religious facets of the area, which make them important from a historical standpoint. Highlighting the nature, origin and historical background of these memorial stones is the main aim of this paper.*

Keywords: *Memorial Stone, Kanjiyagarh, Chandramapatapur, Sisupalgarh, Khurda, Odisha.*

Introduction: In Odisha, the hero stones are generally called *Veer Shila*. Before going into the details of the hero stones of Khorda district, a brief understanding of its historical importance is of immense significance. These stones are more than of archaeological interest since the monument's concept not only relates to the changing perception of a hero's death but also indicates an important variant of what is generally described as the Indian view of death and afterlife. The latter derives from the high culture of Brahmanical text and practice, whereas the cult of the hero stone is a substratum cult but with a widely distributed following. As Thapar argued, historians and archaeologists have until recently tended to ignore this cult. This may be partially explained by its being culturally a substratum cult and by the fact that it contradicts the neat generalizations culled from the classical Sanskrit texts (Thapar 2000: 680-95). The locations of erecting the hero stones are neither randomly chosen nor uniformly distributed across all geographical terrains. They are prevalent in Odisha in places like

Puri, Khorda, Jajpur, Koraput and others. The struggle of various dynasties, local and supra-local lineages and their territoriality are certainly not restricted to Odisha, but the latter had many pockets where such issues played crucial roles in making the history of the early medieval, medieval, and late medieval periods of the concerned region and essentially found their respective places in the hero stones. Sculptural art has preserved the history of activities of the local heroes (Gopal 2023: 191-209). Like royal images, soldiers were not frequently included as temple motifs until the Somavanshi period, except for the Madhukesvara temple at Mukhalingam, near the northern tip of Andhra Pradesh. However, this was heavily inspired by the temple-building traditions of south India. When the soldiers are shown in the temples, they are frequently found carrying a sword and shield in a standing position as prominent motifs on *pagas*. Sometimes they have a female companion with them, such as at the Rajarani temple or while they are with their family, as at Konark. From these war scenes, as prolifically found in the Konark ASI museum, and also in the Odisha State Museum, one could envisage the nature of the historical reality of those battlefields (Donaldson 1987: 1173).

Hero Stone of Chandramapatapur:

A solitary specimen of hero stone has been found in Chandramapatapur, about 10 km from the Nirakarpur railway station. The hero stone, measuring 80*46*35 cm divided into three panels. The lower panel narrates the battle scene, where we can see both infantry and cavalry. There are two warriors holding swords in their right hands, seemingly in an attacking mood while riding the horse, and one of them follows the two warriors. (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1

was seated on a robust elephant with a bow and arrow and also with various armours. Three people are seated on an elephant, where the hero was seated in the middle. The one who is seated in front of him is driving the elephant. The person seated behind the hero holds the parasol over his head. One enemy is depicted in the right corner presumably in the position of defending the bow and arrow thrown at him by the hero.

In the middle of the panel hero

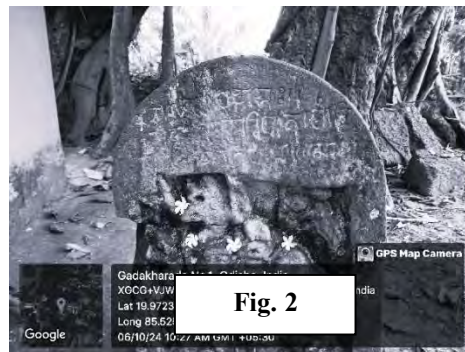


Fig. 2

The inscription is in the upper portion although many of the letters have become hazy

due to the weathering. Rajaguru and Tripathy dated the inscription as early as the eleventh century C.E. According to Tripathy the panel which was originally rectangular in shape has been substantially eroded, as a result of which certain letters from the second and third lines have disappeared, making it hard to determine the writing's precise meaning.

The inscription deciphered by Snighdha Tripathy (Harichandan 1999: 237-38) is as follows:

Line 1: *Om Ranaka Sri Prahash*

Line 2: *Baddham Dala Sannipatayani*

Line-3: *Hasti Baghapat Jasyadhumarahu*

The inscription deciphered by Rajaguru (Harichandan 1999: 237-38) is as follows-

Line 1: *Om Sri Ranaka Siya Dasah*

Line 2: *Brahmabala Sannipataya*

Line 3: *Hari Bhagbati Jasa Dharm*

Line 4: *Kimba Dharmachara*

Significance of the inscription:

According to the meaning, this is a representation of a fight, and it seems that the inscription is about a valiant warrior named Sri Prahasa (Siya Dasa) who served as the elephant division's Ranaka (Military title or warlord). In that fight, he routed numerous enemy troops. In the conflict, he was as ferocious as the smoke of Rahu's anger or just (Gopal 2024: 20-31). The inscription is written in Proto-Nagari characters from the Northern class of the alphabet. This illustration shows a severe conflict, and the inscription implies that Hasti Baghapati was Shri Prahasa/Siya Dasa, the army's main commander on elephants. He is regarded as a brave fighter who killed numerous enemy soldiers throughout the battle. His fiery prowess was demonstrated in this conflict by being compared to Rahu; alternatively, he would have been viewed as a devout adherent of *dharm*. Looking more closely at the epigraphic analysis by both the epigraphists, the military general's name (Ranaka) is differently read, with one version being recorded as 'Prahahah' and the other as 'Siya dasah'. (Tripathy 2023: 229-49).

She also mentioned that according to its palaeography, the inscription was likely written around the time of the Somavamsin monarch Udyotakesarin. Prahasa, who was given the feudatory royal title of Ranaka, was established as his subordinate king in the early years of his rule in the province of Odra, which he had conquered and which was a part of the Dakshina Tosali division. The third regnal year of Udyotakesarin's reign, the Kandavindhya Copper Plate Charter, mentions Prahasa, a high-ranking royal

official who was named Mahaksapataladhyaksa (the head of the record department). According to Odisha epigraphic documents, such as those of the Somavamsins, high-ranking royal commanders were frequently promoted to the position of feudatory kings and assumed the subordinate royal title of *Ranaka*. When written hero stones are discovered, such as those at Mahavir Square and Chanditala in the Jajpur district, '*Ranaka*' is mentioned (Routray 2004: 78-82). Alongside these written stones, other uninscribed hero stones from the same era have been discovered near the village. Some of these are still utilized by people as paddy field boundary marks. Hero stones have been placed in circles and are revered as village deities in the Khordha district, demonstrating their continued cultural relevance. One noteworthy find is the gold coins of Ratnadeva and Prithvideva from the Kalachuri dynasty of Ratnapur (present-day Chhattisgarh), which were discovered in the village of Ratnapur, which is close to Khordha. In light of military action, the closeness of these discoveries to the hero stones raises the possibility of a connection between the Kalachuri dynasty and the rulers of this area. These discoveries raise the likelihood of confrontations between the Kalachuris and the Somavamsins in this area. The Kalachuris were known to have fought against the Somavamsins, the imperial Gangas, and other Odisha royal dynasties, especially in the Bolangir-Sambalpur region (Tripathy 2023: 229-49).

Hero Stone of Sisupalgarh:

An inscribed hero stone presently preserved in front of the Honourable Vice Chancellor's Office in Ravenshaw University Campus, Cuttack, which was discovered by Kedarnath Mohapatra, Superintendent of Archaeology, Government of Odisha, in 1934 from a paddy field in Sisupalgarh (Fig. 3) (Das 1967: 59).



The slab measuring 132*50 cm shows the image of an army general or hero. He is identified as the chief of an army, or Dandanayaka. Arikala Netari-Ganda is his name, indicating that he was from the southern area, particularly from the Chalukyan kingdom or the Cola kingdom. Based on palaeographic analysis, the inscription can be dated to a time frame not earlier than the 12th century CE. During the Ganga invasion of the northern region of Odisha, this general most likely became a member of the imperial Ganga army (Tripathy 2023: 229-49).

Fig. 3

In this slab, there are two niches. The bigger niche depicts three figures where the hero stands in the middle (Fig. 4). He holds a shield in his left hand and a sword over his



head in his right. He is dressed in a *dhoti* that hardly reaches his legs and is knotted around his waist. His body is adorned with a chain, bangles, and a thread that extends from his left shoulder to his right hip; it can be identified as an *upavita*. His hair is wrapped up on the back of his head. The fact that his feet are spread wide suggests that he is likely going to the battlefield. Two attendants are also shown here. Over his head, the attendant in the rear is holding a parasol. The hero

Fig. 4

is escorted by the other in front. On the top of the upper niche, there are four lined inscriptions, which read as

Line 1- *Om Dandanayaka Gosa*

Line 2- *Rana Svami Arika*

Line -3 *La Netari Ganda Va*

Line -4 *Bhava Balamabhisa*

Significance of the inscription:

The first *swasti* symbol in the inscription, which denotes good fortune, indicates that the commander-in-chief, Dandanayaka Gosarana, will bring victory for his people. Bijhari and Ganda soldiers are therefore not afraid. According to Buhler, this stone slab's script is proto-Bengali. It does, however, appear to have some proto-Oriya scripts because we can observe a few Oriya scripts (Acharya 1984: 928-929).

A smaller niche exists below the larger one, and it also features a figure (Gosa rana) in the same role as the commander above, but without the attendants. Only his hair is knotted over his head, and the sword he is holding in his right hand is partially concealed behind his head. Hero is also wearing a *dhoti* that is draped down to his knees and knotted around the waist below the navel. If we observe their faces, we can see that the bigger niche's hero is facing into the front, whereas the smaller niche's facing into the right side.

Hero Stone of Lendo: This hero stone, measuring 49*40*13 cm, is situated on the right side of the new Jagannath Road. The village is roughly 3km from Nirakarpur railway station under Tangi tehsil. The temple is called Ladukesvara, and it faces east, and it is made of a *pidha*, *jagamohana* and *rekha deul*. Inside the temple complex, several loose sculptures have been discovered, including Deulacharini, Kartikeya,

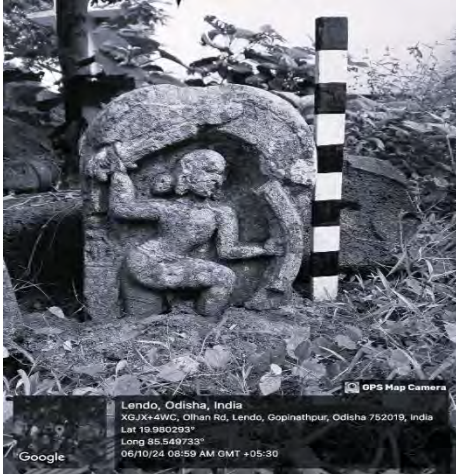


Fig. 5

Ganesh, an amorous couple, Astikajarata Karu, besides a hero stone, etc. Based on the sculptures' iconographical styles, the temple can be dated to the 14th-16th century CE. The hero stone is a monolithic slab having a semi-arch structure. In a niche, a figure holding a shield in his left hand and a sword in his right hand, which is over his head. He is wearing *Karnakundala*. His hair is braided and fashioned in a Chignon at the back, although his face is corroded (Fig. 5). He is wearing a waistband. One attendant figure is visible on his back side. As this hero stone has penetrated the ground, the lower portion is not fully discernible.

Hero Stone of Pandiabili: Along the Bisiapara-Tirimal road in the Jatni *tehsil* of the Khordha district stands Pandiabili village. A tiny building is located inside the newly built Dadhikhai temple (Patnaik 2014: 262). The local villagers hold a special place in their hearts for the uninscribed hero stone, dateable to the late medieval era. A hero with a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left is depicted inside the niche of the vertically built monolithic stone. The hero is ready for both close-quartered and wide-ranging battles with a dagger placed at his waist. (Gopal 2024: 20-31).

Hero Stone of Banapur: Banapur is a town approximately 135 km away from Bhubaneswar. It is famous for the Bhagavati temple, and according to Bal Mukunda Das (Executive Officer of Bhagavati temple), it was established in 1630 CE by Jaganath Harichandran Man Singh Mardraj Brhmarbar Roy, king of Bankadgarh. The main deity of the temple is Goddess Mao (Maa) Bhagavati and her sisters Birajai, Ulakasuni and Palakasuni. In the back side of the temple, there was a hero stone. This hero stone was originally collected from the Swapanesvar temple, near Bankadgarh in Niladri Prasad area of Banapur. The local people have shifted it to the Bhagbati temple, and at present, this stone is in active worship. The stone measuring 99*68 cm shows a hero seated on a horse's back, and his left hand holds the bridle to control the horse, and in his right hand he holds a sword. He is wearing bracelets on both hands. We can notice that two circular designs have been made at the top two corners of the slab.

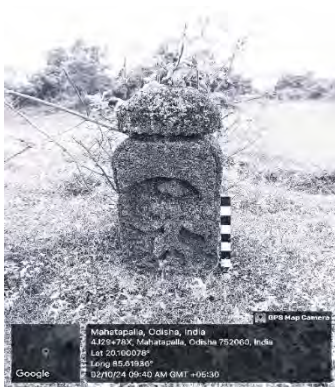
Kanjiyagarh: The temples of Barahi Thakurani, Atharbhaya Birshila, and Tansanalgangarh Pond, which are situated at the western end of Mahatpalla village in the present Khorda Thana of the Khorda District, preserve the lost glory of the Gajapati dynasty. Kanjiyagarh is located about 8 km from the present town of Khorda Police Station. The word ‘*Kanzia*’ is derived from the word Kanji. Though the term kanji means a medicinal drink, kanjia refers to a very small fish, which is edible. The local legends state that the adjective of the word kanji-egg has barren semantics. In Kanjiagarh, there were supposedly nineteen brothers who always fought against royal power. (Chamupati 2000: 52-5). The Bhoi of Odisha originally held sway over Kanjiagarh, which is six miles south of Khorda town. The Bhoi dynasty was a medieval Hindu dynasty that ruled from 1541 to 1560 CE. It began in the historical Odra region, which includes most of the modern-day Odisha, northern coastal Andhra, and the southeast part of West Bengal. Gobinda Vidyadhara had usurped the throne from the weaker Suryavamsa Gajapati dynasty’s ruler as the kingdom began to wane. Vidyadhara had a brief reign, as the ruling chiefs of Odisha with the ensuing internal rivalries and constant invasions threatened him. He was eventually overthrown by Mukunda Deva of the Chalukya dynasty in 1560 C.E. The dynasty moved its capital to Khorda under Ramchandra Deva-I as Mukunda Deva lost his crown in 1568 CE to the Sultans of Bengal, who eventually lost it to the Mughal empire in 1576 CE.

The Kanjiyagarh fort presently has very little to document other than a pond known as Isanagadia, the shrine of the Baghei or Badhei Thakurani, and a few memorial stones, besides a few recently constructed huts. Before starting a war action, the Paikas, [The Paika translates to warrior or fighter in Odia. Paika Akhada, their style of fighting, can be traced back to ancient Kalinga and was patronized during the time of King Kharvela. Paikas of Odisha were the landed militia who were involved in performing policing on behalf of the Gajapati rulers. They also acted as warriors to help the king during wars. They were divided into – (i) Praharis which refer to experts in fighting with swords. (ii) Banuas –which connected to excellent marksmen using matchlocks and (iii) Dhenkias, which means archers on the battlefield] would take a ritual bath in a tank. They used to give sacrifices in order to call upon the Badhei Thakurani. The expansive area known as Garh Tangi offered perfect conditions for gathering a sizable contingent of Paik troops at once. According to the legends, the Sardar of Kanjiyagarh had eighteen sons, each of whom possessed superior military prowess. The Bhoi had been plotted by them; however, Bhois were successful in killing them. The 18 sons of the Sardar who were killed in the fort are generally considered to be depicted in the hero stones. Within *rekha-style* niches, they are depicted in a warlike manner, brandishing long swords and rectangular shields (Mahapatra 1986:123).

R. P. Mahapatra has described Kanjiyagarh as a fort area, which was used to defend the state at that time and also acted as a military centre. In this regard, S. K. Moharana has mentioned that Kanjiyagarh was a part of powerful military bases all around

Jagaddalapura, and the other historical remnants of these may still be found today at Sisupalagarh, Bhubaneswar, Khurda, Rathipuragarh, Pipli, Sahajaparikataka (Jagati), Naranagarh, Aragarh, and Kanjiagarh. In addition to these locations, many of the surrounding villages are inhabited by people with common military titles such as Ranaranka, Bahuvallendra, Baliyarsingha, Olatasingha, Palatasingha, Jhapatasingha, Pahadasingha, Rayasingha, Uttarkavata, Daksinakavata, Vahinipati, Viravara, Satrusala, Vairiganjana, and so on. They played the role of paika soldiers. They were so powerful and courageous in their military operations that the Muslim rulers of the nearby regions were afraid to assault them surrounding the Jagaddalapura (Moharana 2001:58). According to Mishra, Kanjiagarh's construction dates back to the sixteenth century CE (Mishra 2001: 65-7).

The specifics of every hero stone, some of which are upright and others of which have fallen on the ground, display the heritage of this place. Each of these eighteen hero stones also known as Atharbhaya hero stones are stone slabs with a single sculptural panel.



Hero Stones of Kanjiyagarh:

Hero Stone No. 1: This hero stone stands on the ground and measures around 115*50*22 cm. It looks like a small *sikhara* temple decorated with *amalaka*, *khapuri* and a niche adorned with two figures, one is big, and the other is small. The large hero occupies most of the stone spaces. Hero, who is *alidha* in posture in a combating manner, holds a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left hand. He is wearing a *karnakundala*, and his

hair is braided into a chignon at the back. A parasol or *chatri* was depicted over his head, held by a small figure. The overall posture looks like he is moving forward with aggression. Their faces are not visible in this panel because of the corroded condition of the stone (Fig. 6).

Hero Stone No. 2: On the other hand, another hero stone (Fig. 7) has fallen on the ground in the same place, measuring about 118*55*25cm. In this specimen, the hero is standing in the niche portion, while the stone at the upper portion is decorated with *beki* and *amalaka* without a *kalasa*. Hero is standing in an *alidha* posture with his left leg being slightly elevated. He holds a sword in his right hand. The object held by his left hand is unclear. Hero's hair is braided into a chignon at the back, and he is seen wearing a belt on his waist. In this panel, the



Fig. 7

hero is again portrayed in a combat posture.

Hero Stone No. 3: This hero stone is broken. Lying on the ground, the lower portion of the specimen is found partially broken along the right side, whereas the upper portion of this panel is adorned with *amalaka*. The extant specimen measures



106*57*29cm. Hero is depicted in the niche portion of this panel holding a sword in his right hand and a mace in his left hand. The right leg of the hero in the air brings somewhat dynamism to the specimen, with his left leg being firmly placed on the ground (Fig. 8). The artist might have shown the incidence of progressing towards the battlefield through this specimen. No parasol or attendant figure is depicted in this panel.

Fig. 8

Hero Stone No. 4: In this hero stone, the hero in the niche is standing in *alidha* posture. It measures 104*60*27 cm. The hero holds a sword in his right hand and a shield in his



left hand, although his face is not clearly visible due to the corroded condition of the stone (Fig. 9). The braided knot of his hair is depicted on the backside of his head. His lower garment is tucked in his waist. His overall standing posture, showing his left leg moving forward and his right leg touching the ground, brings dynamism to this specimen and might have been indicative of the work of an expert hand.

Fig. 9

Hero Stone No. 5: This hero stone, in an upright position, measures 86*35*25cm. The specimen is elongated and was probably once crowned by a *Jhampasimgha*. However, the above statement is quite debatable as now it is in a completely dilapidated condition. In this stone within the niche hero holds a bow in his straightened left hand, whereas his folded right hand is shown holding the arrow. His face is not clearly visible due to the eroded condition of the stone. His hair in chignon fashion is visible on the backside of his head. His right leg is slightly elevated from the ground, whereas the left leg is in a bent position and touches the ground. He wears a lower garment that is tied to his waist with some parts hanging below. This hero stone is unique as it shows the hero holding a bow and arrow in the place of a sword and shield, as in other examples.



Fig. 10

Hero Stone No. 6: This specimen (Fig. 10) has a *sikhara* temple-like appearance with an *amalaka* above measuring 96*43*25 cm. Here also a male/female devotee is seen worshipping the Siva *linga* within the niche section of this memorial stone. The devotee's hair is braided in a chignon on the backside. Besides those from Badabeguniapada and Tripuri (Behera 2016: 37-40). Instances of similar memorial stones, also known as votive temples, depicting a devotee worshipping a Siva *linga* are also found at Viraja and Trilochonesvara Temple complexes in Jajpur (Acharya 2016: 97-114

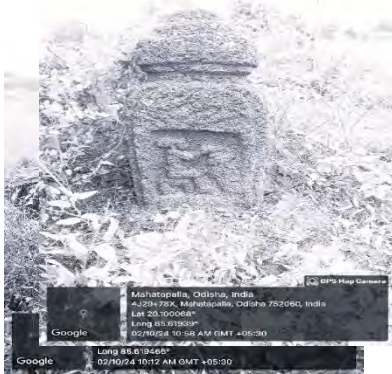


Fig. 11

Hero Stone No. 7: This hero stone in upright condition on the field measures 99*48*33cm (Fig. 11). The specimen has a *sikhara*-like appearance with an *amalaka* portion above. The principal figure of the specimen is a female devotee who is carved in the niche and bears the same characteristic features as the previous stone. Such depiction shows clear affinity to those found from Badabeguniapada and Tripuri in Puri district (Behera 2012: 41-43).

Hero Stone No. 8: The next documented specimen, which is broken into two parts along the lower portion of the stone, measures 109*44*22 cm. The principal theme shows the effigy of the hero in a combat posture. He holds a sword in his right hand, though the object held by his left hand is quite obscure and bears the same characteristic features as those of hero stone no. 1.



Fig. 12

Hero Stone No. 9: This specimen, in an upright position and measuring 99*54*22 cm, is rectangular in shape with its upper portions most likely having *beki*, *amalaka*, and *kalasa*. In this hero stone, the hero in the niche is depicted as holding a sword or dagger in his right hand (Fig. 12). The object in his left hand is unclear. The legs of hero are in a folded posture, and his hands are seen in a straightened pose

on opposite sides. He wears a belt around his waist, and some parts of his clothes are shown hanging from his waist.

Hero Stone No. 10: This particular upright specimen is quite obstructed by a tree. The extant visible portion measures 107*60*34 cm. It is conical in shape, where the hero is depicted in the niche portion. The feature of the hero is similar to the previous specimen; however, its lower part was found to have penetrated the ground during documentation.

Hero Stone No. 11: During documentation, this specimen was found lying with its



frontal portion touching the ground and its back portion being visible. It is also broken along the upper part. When placing the two parts together, the extant portion measures 109*49*24 cm (Fig. 13). This specimen shows a distinct *amalaka* portion at the top. The hero is depicted within the niche in the central part of the stone and carrying similar characteristic features to those of hero stone no .1. However, due to the corroded condition of the stone, the faces of the figures are not clear. The lower portion of the specimen is in dilapidated condition due to the weathering of the corroded

Fig. 13

stones used to carve it.

Hero Stone No. 12: This stone also lies on the ground in the same place. It measures 64*45*22 cm and is broken along the lower right portion. It is again a very weathered specimen. The hero holds a sword in his right hand. The posture is similar to most of the specimens. No parasol or *chhatra* is seen over his head. His head is totally obscure.

Hero Stone No. 13: This concerned specimen with the measurement of 116*39*24 cm has a clear-cut *sikhara* with *amalaka* and *kalasa* being in corroded condition. The niche contains the principal theme, like the other specimen. Despite considerable erosion, the stone's hidden central position behind the bushes might have carved a female devotee and bear similar features to hero stone no. 6.

Hero Stone no. 14: The hero stone is broken into two parts from the middle section.



The lower part of the hero stone is in upright condition, whereas the carved upper portion is lying on the ground and penetrating the earth. The extant lower part of the specimen measures 50*49*17 cm. From the positioning of the legs, it is evident that the hero is in an *alidha* posture. A miniature attendant figure behind him is shown holding a *chhatra* (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14

Hero Stone No. 15: This specimen shows a clear affinity to the previous one. It is also broken into two parts. The lower section is in upright condition, whereas the upper broken part is lying with the frontal portion on the ground. The standing and extant lower portion measures 25*48*21 cm.

Historical Background of Kanjiagarh Hero Stones:

Before getting into the observations on the said hero stones, it's important to understand how significant Kanjiagarh was with respect to the existing hero stones. Kanjiagarh is rich in legends, all of which are closely related to the hero stones that were built there.

Dibyasingh Chamupati points out that there were 19 brothers in Kanjiagarh, in accordance with traditional custom. They had always been against the monarchy. Nandapur Dalabehera, under Gajapati's leadership, murdered these defenceless brothers for dozens of days. These brothers passed away, and their successors departed Kanjiagarh. Kanjiagarh was thought to have been overthrown under the reign of Suryasulhi Gajapati (1435-1533). This historical incident is thought to have occurred before Odisha was occupied by the British. (Chamupati 2000: 52-55). However, based on their texture and structure, the laterite stones that these hero Stones are made of may be traced back to the 15th and 16th centuries CE. None of them has inscriptions.

With its wide range of variations of hero stones, carved in stones portraying both secular and religious affiliations, as well as the extensive military significance. The repertoire under discussion is quite intricate.

- A variety of military weapons, including swords and shields (*Dhala-Tarabari*), bows and arrows, and a mace, are wielded by the main characters in the eleven Hero Stones. On the weapons like nail, *thunka*, *barudakumpa*, *jhuli kata*, *sagadinali*, *olatadhara khanda*, *khapur*, *dhal*, *kanda*, *katari*, *bank*

achuri, katidhal, katimala, rudhi, and dhanu, were used by the Paiks. (Rath 2016:302-05). Therefore, the area overall depicts a clear picture of warfare and also demonstrates the military prominence of eastern India.

- The aforementioned hero stones are noticeably devoid of inscriptions. Four hero stones among them are partially damaged. Additionally, in contrast to the usual miniature *sikhara* shape, a separate set of four hero stones has a curved upper edge originally representing *Jampasingha*. There is also another set of four hero stones which show attendant figures standing behind the main character, carrying a parasol (*chhatra*). Besides the Viraja temple complex in Jajpur, where such a portrayal is visible, many eastern Indian specimens bear it. (Mishra & Acharya 2017:13-21).
- Apart from the above hero stones, this particular mound also laid bare the traces of three interesting specimens where the principal figure (probably female) is seen seated on a low stool and offering something to the Siva *linga* placed in front of him/her. It seems that these memorial stones display a pre-battle ceremony, symbolizing a long-standing custom of praying for victory before the beginning of combat. The affiliations of heroes to Saivism are evident from these stones.
- The memorial stones are found arranged in both north-south and east-west directions. Dibyasingh Chamupati is of the opinion that all these hero stones originally faced towards the east, where the Maa Bhagei Thakurani shrine is located (Chamupati 2000:52-55).
- On the head of each hero is a knot. In the society of that time, there was a tradition of keeping a knot of hair at the back of the head. It protected the back of the head from injury during battle. These *Veera Shilas* were worshipped during the traditional Dashar Puja of Barahi Thakurani. This puja has been stopped for the past ten years (Chamupati 2000: 52- 55).
- As mentioned above, the present researcher could locate fifteen memorial stones and a single piece of an undecorated stone altogether. There is considerable debate among scholars regarding the number of memorial stones installed there. As per the local legends, the name of Atharavaya had its root in the name of eighteen brothers who got defeated in the war and killed and were subsequently memorized in the form of hero stones. R. P. Mahapatra said that this place bears eighteen memorial stones, whereas Mahitosh Gopal talks about the presence of nineteen specimens altogether. Though Dibyasingh Chamupati, in his authored book, claimed that nineteen hero stones exist at this place, the present researcher felt that the name Atharabhaya is the symbolic representation of eighteen brothers. Thus, this place might have originally carried altogether twenty-one memorial stones, of which eighteen depicted

heroes in a combat posture and three were shown as worshipping the lord, *Siva*.

Hero Stones in the Gallery of Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar:



No. 1: It has three exquisitely executed panels showing various sculptural figures measuring 83*40*15 cm. The top panel represents heaven; the middle panel represents atmosphere. And the lower panel represents Earth. In the lower panel, a warrior is shown holding a sword in his right hand that is rising over his head and a shield in his left. He is demonstrating a hostile pose. A necklace, armband, wristlet, anklet, and waistband are among the accessories he is wearing. He has three attendants, whereas two are fighting in the front, and one is at the back with a *chhatra* (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15

In the central panel, the *apsaras* transport the hero to heaven on a palanquin following his death. The hero sits inside the palanquin while two *apsaras* in flight grab hold of the warrior. The upper panel features three sculptured images. In the centre is *Ekapadabhairava*, also known as the warrior deity; to his right is a woman standing, while to his left is an image kneeling. When the hero arrives in heaven through *apsaras*, the warrior god provides him with sanctuary, as the third or top panel illustrates. It appears that the woman is a companion of the warrior deity (Behera 2016: 37-40).



No. 2: This specimen, measuring 58 * 45 cm, is dated to approximately 1300-1400 CE. In this slab hero occupies a larger area than in other panels. This slab shows a temple structure where *pidhas* are present. The hero holds a sword in his right hand, over his head, and in his left hand, a shield is depicted. His stance with slightly stretched legs is quite aggressive, and it is assumed that it was made by a skilful

Fig. 16

artist. He is wearing lower garments. He is adorned with *karnakundala* and *hara*, and his hair is clasped into a bun. One female worshiper is also depicted at the top of the panel on the right side (Fig. 16).

No. 3: The stone in the Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar, can be dated to the 10th century CE, labelled as *linga puja*. The slab shows a little shrine measuring 60*30*20 cm. The shrine is essentially a *pidha* temple with *amalaka* and *kalasa*. The principal



figure is a woman who is kneeling, worshipping *Shivalinga*, and holding flowers in her hands. Five effigies are shown at the bottom of the stone slab. They're all kneeling with their hands folded. It appears that one individual is performing the puja duties, and others are following in their footsteps. The other people who are shown are therefore a little smaller in stature (Fig. 17).

Fig. 17

No. 4: This hero stone is now placed in the garden of the Odisha state museum, measuring 43*45 cm. The stone is conical and tapered at the top. Here, the hero is sitting on a horse's back, and his left hand is reining the horse, and his right hand is perhaps raised and holds unclear weapons. One minuscule is identified on his back side, who is assumed to have held a parasol over his head.

No. 5: This hero stone, which is corroded, is preserved in front of the garden in the Odisha state museum, measuring 93*35 cm. In this slab, a hero holds a shield in his left hand to protect or to save himself, and he holds a weapon (possibly a sword) in his right hand, which is unclear. He is attired in lower garments, and his face is also indistinct.

No. 6: This hero stone is again preserved in front of the garden in the Odisha state museum, measuring 81*39 cm. This slab has an arch structure at the top and is also quite corroded. Here, the warrior holds a shield in his left hand and holds a sword in his right hand. He is attired in garments, and his hair is tight in a knot. His standing positions are lightly bent down, demonstrating the skilful carving of the artist.

These specimens in the Khorda district that the present research work has documented show interesting pictures of war, memory and loss. Throughout time, the shape of the hero stones evolved, and this evolution was connected to the hero's position and the deed he carried out. The most basic type of stone was a flat slab that was used to illustrate a hero brandishing a sword or bow and arrow. Status is indicated by the

horse's accessories, and the hero of higher status rode a horse. For instance, the *Swastika* symbol in the Sishupalgarh hero stone indicates a number of other connections given the symbolism of the items connected to good fortune or the ceremony as well as we can see that how a person became the deity who is worshipped by the local people. Though most of the figures suggest their identity as warriors, a number of worshippers are also frequently found in the entire repertoire. The inscriptional specimens attest to the strong presence of local lineages and regional rulers in the act of fighting and saving their own lands. The hands of skilled artists have made these stones artistically relevant. The title Ranaka attributes to these heroes also made the repertoire historically significant and is indicative of a feudalistic polity existing in this landscape during the entire early medieval and medieval, and late medieval periods.

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