



The Ruins Of The Dhandi Dol, Kalabari, Gohpur

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Abstract:

The 5th century which saw the first development of art and architecture in Assam was succeeded to the Ahom period, although later in the period of late fourteenth century, the Ahom period saw its art and architectural zenith in the late seventeenth century, for example, the Umananda temple in Guwahati, Assam. The Dhandi dol was one of those temples built during the late seventeenth century when the Ahom king Swargadeo Rudra Singha was ruling over the state. Although the temple building has the regional belief that it was built during the days of Sulikpha alias Lora Raja between his reigning period 1679-81 C.E., there is no concrete evidence to prove this belief. Moreover, the architectural remain i.e. the temple plinth and a top part of the temple signifies the architectural development that began in the late 17th century. The Nagara temple architecture of North India is clearly depicted in the temple elements such as the garbhagruha, antarala and mandapa. Also, the few sculptures excavated depicts the Ahom sculptural style, like the round face with wide nostrils and larger lips, facial expression remaining stiff and sometimes having a brief smile on it or totally absent. As a part of the methodology, a field visit was made to the location and several secondary sources were used.

Keywords:

Dol, Temple Architecture, Temple Plinth, Sculpture, Late Medieval, Ahom.

Introduction:

Dhandi dol is located in the 9 km. south east of Gohpur region, Assam. The dol is entirely made of brick, evidenced by its ruins, is a perfect example of Ahom architecture of Late Medieval period. According to local belief, the temple was constructed by Swargadeo Sulikpha alias Loraraja (A.D.1679-81). But their architectural style as well as huge stature point to a period after Rudra Singha (A.D.1696-1714), when the Ahom architecture went to zenith both in form and dimensions.¹ The Darrang Gazetteer mentions the dol to be built under the patronage of Swargadeo Rudra Singha around 1705 C.E.² The complete structure of the temple does not stand today. The dol got demolished in an earthquake of 1897 C.E.³ The temple is found not mentioned in any Ahom official record. Thus, making it difficult to gather

¹ Sharma, P.C, *Architecture of Assam*, Agam Kala Prakashan, 1988, pg. 140 (footnote 34).

² Gogoi, Nityananda., *Buranjje Porokha Biswanath Prantor*. Guwahati: Prithivi Publication, 1990. p. 64.

³ Ibid.

authentic information about it. The plinth of the dol plan and few scattered ruins are presently found in the site. Ahom Buranjis say about a donation of 205 bighas 2 kotha 17 lochas of nispikheraj land to the dol by the Ahom king.⁴

Interestingly, the temple was constructed in a well-protected location. The inner enclosure wall of the temple was made entirely of brick, while the outer wall was built with earth. The total land area of the temple premises covers approximately 19 bighas and 3 kathas. Near this dol, another historic dol named Basudev dol can be found. The region around this dol is known as 'Dolguri', a name derived from the Basudev dol. Unlike the Dhandi dol, more substantial



Figure 1: Location map of Dhandi Dol in Sonitpur District (Source: Google map)

information about the Basudev dol is found in the records from the Ahom period. According to popular belief, this temple was originally a site for the worship of lord Siva. After being destroyed by a natural disaster, regular worship at this temple came to a halt. According to local people, the Chaturbhuja icon of lord Siva that was discovered is believed to have been the main idol worshipped in this temple.

Architecture of the Dhandi dol:

The existing structure of the dol still stand in a good condition. The remains of the dol points that the dol was constructed based on the North-Indian style of architecture. It consists of three elements of the style, the garbhagrha



Figure 2 Temple plinth



Figure 3 Top part of temple remains

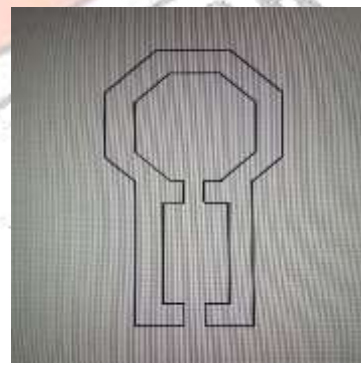


Figure 4 Plan of temple plinth

(sanctum), the antarala (vestibule), and the mandapa (hall). The temple plinth of the dol is same as the Garakhiya dol of Nazira, Sivsagar, constructed during the days of Ahoms in their first phase of rule. The measurements of the temple plinth are clearly brought out by Professor Swapna Kakati. The garbhagrha having adhithana is of octagonal shape with a radius of 5.5 meters. The shape is not rare in the temples of the Ahom period, as similar design is found in the Maghnawa dol of Lakhimpur and Ghuguha dol of Dhemaji districts in Upper Assam. This shape has a deep spiritual meaning influenced by Ahom religion⁵ and accordingly resist the dol to get demolished by the natural disaster like the

⁴ Rajkumar, Sarbananda., *Itihase Soaura Chasahata Bachar*, Makhan Hazarika, Banalata, Natun Bazar, Dibrugarh-I, 2023, pg. 212

⁵ Burhagohain, Nobin, *Ahom Jugar Doul Aru Iyar Sthapatya Kala*, Banalata, 2021, pg.26

flood and earthquake. No altar or religious symbols are found inside the garbhagrha. The garbhagrha is connected through an antarala 2.1 meters in length and 1.2 meter in width. The mandapa of the temple plinth in rectangular in shape of 4.5 meters long and 3.5 meters wide, with walls approximately 1.2 meter thick. Only one doorway leads outside from the mandapa and no pillars inside is found. The brick used in the construction measures 9 inches by 7 inches. The foundation platform of the old temple, built with brick, stands about 1.7 meters high.⁶ Fortunately, the top part of the temple is found as ruins of the temple in the site made up of bricks.

Sculptures of Dhandi dol:

There are five sculptures found in the site of Dhandi dol. Out of the five sculptures, four are religious in nature and the fifth is unidentified. All the sculptures depict the Ahom sculptural style representing local art and craftsmanship, a completely different and unique from the all-other artistic traditions in Assam. Most of the sculptures are small in size and are generally flat and face forward. The sculptures are made up of stone having the rectangular or square stelas in the back side and rectangular pedestal in the below. The stela and the pedestal are simple without any designs. The hands of the sculptures are placed oddly at the side without proper joints. Some sculptures show that the arms are stretch down to the waist unnaturally and necks are sometimes very short. The overall look of the sculptures is flat, dull, stiff and basic. Mukuta of the sculptures are unfamiliar to the Early Medieval period, lacking the superhuman quality in the divine images with pointed ribs and sometime the ribs are decorated. Further, dress and the poses of the picture maintain a regal dignity. The nose of the images is flat, the lips are thick and the eyebrows are deeply cut. The open eyes and the facial expression are rigid and angry. Focus on emphasizing slim waists, broad chests and strong hips was central. The descriptions of the sculptures briefly discussed below.

1. Sculptures of Agni:



Figure 5: God Agni



Figure 6: God Agni

In the figure 5 and 6, a man is seated on a ram like animal often called mesha or sheep. Thus, iconographically, God Agni is mounted on the vahana mesha or sheep.⁷ The mukuta he is wearing is denoting the Ahom artistic style of decorated pointed ribs. The ayudhas he is holding are the srushti or the sacrificial spoon on his right hand and in the left hand a weapon like ankusha or goad or parashu or axe in the figure 4 and in figure 5, parashu in the right hand and srushti in the left hand. The dress of both the figure shows local dhoti with embroidery as lower garment and the ornaments used are the kankana and pair of bracelets in both the arms, hara and karnakundalas. The facial expression is stiff with

⁶ Kakati, Swapna, *Archaeology of the Northern bank of upper Brahmaputra valley: A study of the Monuments, Sites and Ancient Remains*. PhD Thesis. Dibrugarh University, 2020, pg. 147.

⁷ Gupta, S.P., Sashi Prasad Asthana, *Elements of Indian Art*, Indraprastha Museum of Art and Archaeology, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd. New Delhi, 2002, pg. 119.

the eyes opened depicting a rigidity on both the images. In the figure 5, face of Agni is little elongated than the figure 4 and the mukuta is also depicted differently. The direction of the seated position of the god and the vahana is different in both the figures. The sculpture presently is preserved in the Dipholo Siva temple, located a short distance from Dhandi dol.

2. Sculpture of Indra:



Figure 7: God Indra

The figure 7, depict God Indra, riding on an airavata or elephant. Beside him seats a woman and beside her seems like two apsaras or celestial dancing girls, one on the top which is not clearly visible and another in the below. The woman beside Indra might be his consort, Indrani. Though the facial expressions are clearly visible, the head portion of the male image got mutilated making the mukuta invisible. The facial expression of the figures are as usual stiff with rigidity. Ayudhas of the male figure are vajra in his right hand and a danda or stick like object in his left hand and the upper apsara is seen to hold a darpan like object. Ornamentations evident are bangles, necklace and earrings in the male figure. The ornaments of the other figures are not visible. The stela of the image is seen to have a crescent design on its back. The dress of the male is dhoti as lower garment and the others are not clearly visible. As the upper portion of the vahana is mutilated. The pedestal which was found in the images of God Agni, is absent here. The sculpture is presently preserved in the Tezpur District Museum, Assam.



Figure 8: Chaturbhuja Shiva

3. Sculpture of Chaturbhuja Shiva:

The figure 8 depict a male figure having four hands or chaturbhuja, is considered a rare artefact within Assam with no similar icon found elsewhere in the state. The facial expression of the icon is very rigid with no movements. The hand postures are same for all the four-hand holding the trishulas or tridents. The elevated thing in his head is just similar to the elevated hairs of Lord Shiva called Jata. Thus, considering all the features, the icon is identified as the Chaturbhuja Shiva. Today, this icon is worshipped as the main deity of the dol. But as the photography of the image is prohibited strictly, the lower bodily part of the icon is unidentified. Historian Nityananda Gogoi, based on the Yogini tantra, has

mentioned in his book that Siva is present at this place in the form of Tribikrama Vishnu.⁸ He also noted that, based on the stone and its artistic style, this idol is believed to have been brought from outside Assam. He further mentions that influenced by South-East Asia sculpture; this idol is considered a rare Siva icon within Assam.⁹ The deity stands on samapada-sthanka attitude. It wears simple alankaras and vastras. This icon made of black colour stone. Since historians believe that this statue was brought from outside Assam, its features do not match those of any local sculptural tradition of Assam. Observing the delicate carving on the stone, the features of this icon somewhat align with the Late Medieval school of sculptural art. As this sculpture is found in a temple site of 18th century, this further strengthens that the sculpture belongs to the Late Medieval period. At present, this icon is preserved in a temple at a place called Dipholo Siva temple, located a short distance from Dhandi dol.

4. An unidentified image:



Figure 9: An unidentified image

The figure 9 is an unidentified stone image found in the site. The ears and the four hands of the sculpture is clearly visible, though the image got badly mutilated. This sculpture now is preserved in the Tezpur District Museum, Assam.

Conclusion:

The Dhandi dol which still exists on its temple plinth no longer consists all of its historical assets. It is one of the existing temple plinths made in the Late Medieval period during the reign of Swargadeo Rudra Singha in the early eighteenth century, though according to local belief it was built during the days of Sulikpha or Lora raja. The existing temple plinth is similar to the temple plinth of Garakhiya dol in Nazira, Sivasagar district influenced of the North Indian style of architecture consisting elements like garbhagrha, antarala and mandapa. The garbhagrha in octagonal shape similar to the others creations of the Ahoms. The bricks used in the construction signifies that the temple was built during the days of Ahoms. On the other hand, only few sculptures of the dol have been found. The sculptures are basically religious in nature consisting of two sculptures of God Agni and others are of Chaturbhuja Shiva, Indra and an unidentified image. Chaturbhuja icon of lord Siva discovered at the site is considered a rare artefact with no similar icon found elsewhere in Assam. These sculptures bring out the shortcomings of the Ahom artistic styles often being two dimensional with little elevation in the surface. These are the results of lack of artistic refinement of the period. Despite this, the sculptures of this era possess a certain distinct feature, conveying a sense of energy and the vitality of an expanding and dominant society. The interpretation that the sculpture is brought from the other region, not in Assam is strengthened by the fact that the artistic style does not signify the local style. But the material which has been used is

⁸ Tasya purbenaibba Dhanu: samsthitashi Tribrikama/

Tang pranamya nara vaktya sarbban kamanbaployatt// *Yogini Tantra*, uttarakhandalam, sastha patal, verses- 99; Gogoi, Nityananda, *Buranjie Porokha Biswanath Prantor*, Guwahati: Prithivi Publication, 1990, p. 65.

⁹ Gogoi, Nityananda, *Buranjie Porokha Bishwanath Prantor*, Guwahati: Prithivi Publication, 1990, p. 65.

similar to the stone developed during the Deopani Style of Sculpture in Assam, i.e. the black stone.¹⁰ This point out two facts that either the material was taken to the outer region of Assam to sculpt the icon or the icon was totally sculpted in the other region altogether with the material. Although, it is very difficult to know who was worshipped in the dol but by local information it is know that Chaturbhuja Shiva was the principal deity worshipped in the dol, indicating the prevalence of Shaivism. The exact cause of the destruction of the temple is unclear. However, local belief suggests that it may have been damaged by the earthquake of 1897 C.E. while there is another belief that it was destroyed during a foreign invasion.

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¹⁰ Dutta, M, *Sculptures of Assam*. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1990. pg. 56