

INDIA

The Temple Sites at Telkupi (“Bhairavasthan”) Jaina Architectural Remains Submerged by Panchet Dam in Jharkhand and West Bengal

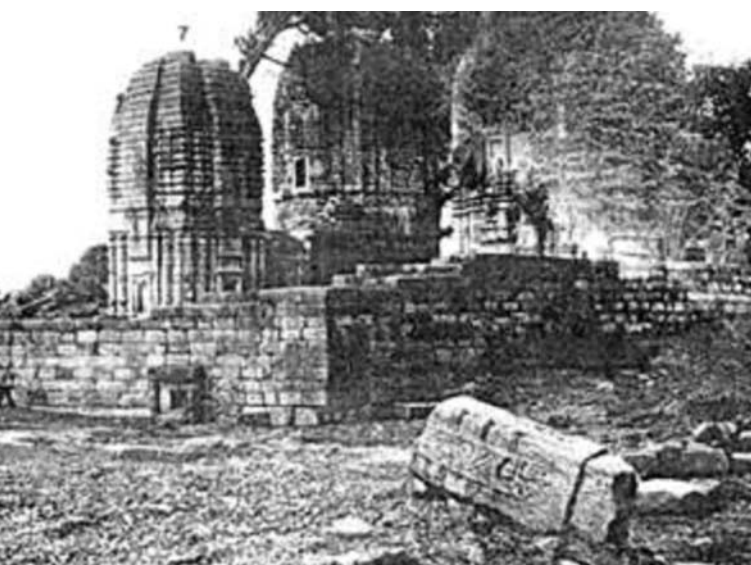
With his report on the consequences of the Panchet Dam, erected half a century ago, Bulu Imam is complementing his report in Heritage at Risk 2004/2005, pp. 94-103 (“Threatened Jaina Heritage Route in Jharkhand and West Bengal”). More than 20 temples from the 8th to 12th centuries (Pala period) were submerged between 1956 and 1962 by the waters of the Damodar river. In the meantime, the remains of these ruined temples are becoming visible again in the silted-up reservoir.

During the mid-1950s the fate of the twenty-odd temples at a place ancestrally known as Bhairavasthan was sealed during the submergence of a large area along the banks of the river Damodar on the border of Jharkhand and Bengal through the construction of the Panchet Dam across the river. The Dam was built by the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) which was following the Dam building models of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) dam building project on the Tennessee River in USA with big dams like the Norris Dam on the Clinch river, and the Wilson Dam on the Tennessee river. This project was India’s first big industrial project begun and supervised under the constant attention of the Prime Minister after whom the project was called Nehru’s Dream.

For the archaeological heritage of Jharkhand it was a catastrophe apart from the human and ecological aspects. Hundreds of villages were submerged in over six large dams and thousands of smaller dams. Like the TVA the DVC ignored the territorial rights of indigenous societies who had lived on the land ancestrally.

Bhairavasthan was some nine kilometres from Telkupi on the south bank of river Damodar. This location falls about thirty kilometres south of the town of Dhanbad. When the local villagers saw the waters of the Damodar river rising in 1957 they immediately informed the Archaeological Survey of India in Calcutta, and asked it to immediately arrange for the translocation of their stone and brick temples dat-

Temples 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 & 10 at Bhairavasthan (Bloch’s photograph, 1903)



of the temples in original condition in 1957 is inadequate and we have to rely on the photos taken in 1872-73, by Beglar; the photos of Bloch in 1903, and those of Bose in 1929. This is supplemented by the photos of the ASI Eastern Circle taken in 1960. Beglar had documented Temples 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15, and 18 in 1872-73. We have to rely on his photos and documentation to get a picture of the Bhairavasthan temples in their pristine condition.

The Director General of the ASI visited the Telkupi site with Dr. Mrs. Debala Mitra and they went to Bhairavasthan and according to Mitra in the Preface to her monograph on Telkupi (1969) they learned locally that most of the temples and the greater part of the village had gone under water and find only the tops of Temples 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15 and 16 protruding above the waters of the Damodar, and temples 17 and 18 standing at the edge of the water. The Eastern Circle photos of 1960 show the temples mentioned above standing above the water in fairly reasonable condition on dry land. There was still a chance to remove the temples. In the photograph of 1962 taken by the West Bengal Directorate of Archaeology, the temples are submerged. What happened could only be the result of extreme negligence, and callousness on the part of the development authorities. This should not have occurred again. But in the Chandil Dam on the Suvarnarekha river this is precisely what happened nearly forty years later.

Truly it had earned its name River of Sorrows. The West Bengal Government was thereafter asked to order the dewatering of the area so that the Temples could at least be examined and possible translocation considered. But it was too late and the authorities concerned considered dewatering the area impractical and the most priceless Jain temple architecture of Jharkhand and West Bengal was needlessly destroyed and became “The Ghost Temples of Telkupi”. Even now villagers say that at evening they can hear *kir-tans* being sung across the waters and boatmen pray before entering the waters lest they by mistake guide their craft over a temple...

Telkupi in local traditions was the place where the legendary Jain king Vikramaditya used to come from Dulmi, a place a hundred kilometres to the south near the ill-fated Icha and Chandil dams in what is now Seraikela-Kharsawan district, and rub oil on his body then return back to Dulmi where he would bathe in the tank called Chhatara Pokhar. Beglar notes that in the Manjhi Santal songs of Telkupi sexual freedom for girls was recorded during the annual spring fair during March-April (Sarhul), a tradition which Colonel Dalton upholds in his ethnological observations of Bengal.

Telkupi was under the Rajas of Panchet and Kashipur in the area called *Shikarbhum*, or “Land of Shikar (i.e. hunting)” which was the old name of Hazaribagh district until the arrival of the British in the eighteenth century, and when Dhanbad was within the district. Telkupi is about a hundred and thirty kilometres southeast of the Jain temple centre of Parasnath Hill, and thirty kilometres south of Dhanbad town today. Half the waters of the Panchet Dam are in Jharkhand and half in West Bengal. Some images of the temples are in Jharkhand at Katapatthar in Dhanbad district, and some in local temples or private houses on the West Bengal side of the border in Puruliya district.

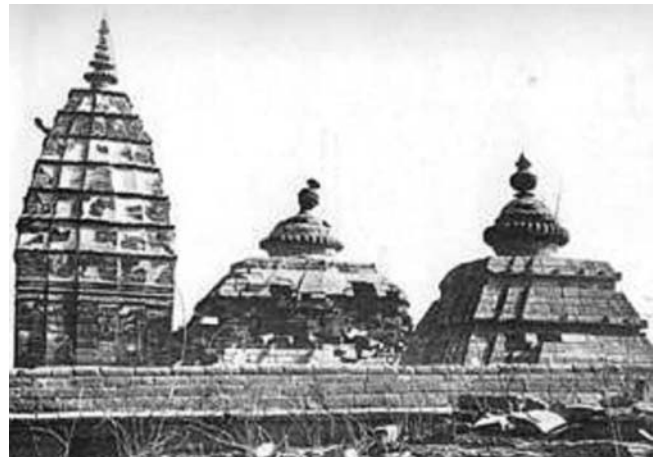
The earliest reports of the Telkupi Temples is by J. D. Beglar who visited the place on two occasions. His report records three clusters of temples, the largest consisting of thirteen temples on the banks of the river Damodar which was the Bhairavasthan. W. W. Hunter in his work *Statistical Account of Bengal* refers to “eight or nine of these temples at Telkupi on the Damodar”. He refers to the image of Bhairava being worshipped. For clarifying the tribal ancestry of the

temples Bhairava is an ancient forest form of Shiva accompanied by two dogs and is a particular cult. W. W. Hunter also refers to Bhairavasthan as a Jain site with some Buddhist influence also. This is important in trying to understand the early nature of the site in the Pala period when they were built and when the local religion was Buddhist and Jain. The temples originally may have numbered over forty, but even before the Panchet Dam the banks of the river must have eroded sufficiently to destroy many temples on its banks. In 1903 Bloch of the Bengal Archaeological Survey refers to the temples, and he specifically refers to the worship of Bhairav, Kali (Tara?), Mahadeva (Shiva), Linga (Shiva), and Surya (Alokitesvara?). Bloch also took some photographs at Bhairavasthan (Temples 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13). Bose took some photos of temples in 1929 (Temples 8, 10, 14). The last photographs of the ruins were taken in 1960 by the A.S.I. Eastern Circle after the Damodar had done most of its work. Misra's photograph of 1957 was taken just as the waters were rising and getting ready to reach the temples. This photograph shows Temples 8, 6 and 10 in quite good condition, although the trees have been removed from their vicinity. The Eastern Circle photographs of Temples 8, 6, 9 and 10 of 1960 show them damaged but standing above dry land, and apart from No.6 most have a lot left in them, especially Temples 8, 9 and 10. At this time translocation was still possible. This was not even attempted. Two years later, in the photograph of May 1962 taken by the West Bengal Directorate of Archaeology, the Temples are shown more than half submerged with Temples 8, 9 and 10 bravely trying to hold themselves up while Temple 6 is a heap of stone slabs. The beautiful and profusely decorated temple 19 seen in Bose's photograph of 1929 was completely destroyed as shown by the Eastern Circle photo of 1960. At this time Temple 18 was standing on dry land at the edge of the waters and would meet a similar fate.

Today Temple 10 is still submerged up to half its height, but in the earth at the edge of the dam, due to the flooding and silting up of the reservoir. There is no trace of temples 8 and 9. The Panchet Dam has lost much of its water and silted up and the temples have become ruins, once again giving a possibility of archaeological excavation and reconstruction. Was this necessary? Some of the Jaina statuary from Telkupi temples has found its way to the Bhairav mandir, an unroofed enclosure in village Katapathar (Jharkhand) where they are standing in the open. Others are in Shivpur mandir in the village of Shivpur (West Bengal).

According to W. W. Hunter in his *Statistical Account of Bengal* (List of Ancient Monuments of Bengal, 1896) the image from Telkupi of Bhairav from which Bhairavaasthan gets its name, was of Lord Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara of the Jains. In the opinion of F. B. Bradley-Birt the statuary was Jaina (Chota-Nagpore: A Little-Known Province of the Empire, 1903/1910, p. 181). In the INTACH survey of Jaina monuments of South Jharkhand (Purulia, Seraikela, 2006) the Jaina statuary was invariably found in the sites with similar temple architecture as the Bhairavasthan temples of Telkupi. There is therefore every reason to assume Telkupi was a Jaina temple cluster. Further evidence is had by the fact the legendary Jain king Vikramaditya is believed to have come annually to Telkupi on pilgrimage.

Obviously, the Temples were originally sites of Jaina worship before or during the Pala period. Earlier they would have been local aboriginal worship sites and Gram Devtas or village deities under trees (*Chandi*, *Burhi Ma*, mother goddess) have been recorded. That there was a variance of worship is borne out by the fact that many of the temples faced in several directions. Temples 2, 4, 5, 8 faced east; Temple 1 faced south; Temples 3, 12, 13 faced west. Some of the Temples did not have porches, while some like Temples 6, 8, 10 had porches.



Temples 10 with porch and Temple 9. With compound wall in front. (Eastern Circle photograph, 1960)



Temples 8, 9 and 10, partly submerged by Waters of river Damodar impounded by the Panchet dam. (West Bengal Directorate of Archaeology photograph, May, 1962)



Telkupi Temple No.10 (the last of the Telkupi temples standing). Note that the dam has silted up and agriculture is being practiced. There are no signs of temple 8 and 9.

The questions which remain unanswered for us are: Why did the Archaeological Survey of India in Calcutta not act sooner? Why could the West Bengal government not intervene? Why could Prime Minister Nehru not be appealed to? Above all, the finger points at the Damodar Valley Corporation itself and the question begs answer why it was allowed so openly to destroy a National Heritage of the greatest importance. The tragic feature of Telkupi has been that only a few of the images were removed before the waters of the Damodar rose above them, while most of the stone

images which were free were washed away in the lapping of the current of the waters. The people were, it seems, loth to touch them for fear of desecrating the hallowed Temples.

Debala Mitra in 1959-60 recorded seeing submerged images of *Maheshasuramardini*, *Ganesa*, and *Uma Mahesvara* of the Late Pala period under the waters. She also noted a submerged *Vishnu* image in Temple 9, and an *Ambika*, and *Andhakasura-vadha* statue in the porch of Temple 10. TS boatmen refused to let him remove the submerged statues as they considered it would bring bad luck. That modern India should have thus treated one of its most precious archaeological and religious sites is a matter of great shame. Many villages apart from Telkupi were submerged along with their temples and statuary by the Panchet Dam. No lesson was learned from Telkupi and the same exercise was repeated a hundred kilometres to the south less than fifty years later in the southern tracts of Vikramaditya's kingdom from Dulmi and Patkom to Ichha on the Suvarnarekha river in the building of the Chandil Dam, wherein scores of Jain Temples and villages were submerged. A few pieces were salvaged by zealous local conservationists and found place in a small museum at Patkom.

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Remains of Jaina statuary from the Telkupi Temples



Rama Setu and Setusamudram Project, Protest against Channel Passage through Adam's Bridge

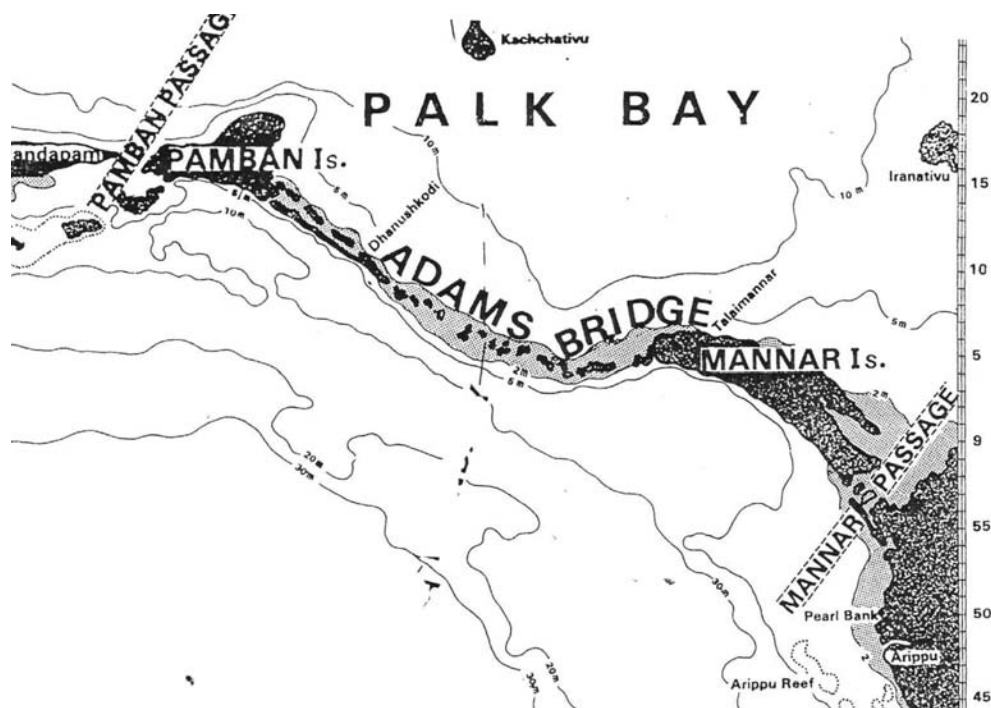
An international seminar organised by the Rameswaram Rama Setu Protection Movement on May 12, 2007 in Chennai, was inaugurated by Dr. S.R. Rao who is the founder of Society of Marine Archaeology in India and member of ICUCH. Scientists and professionals have urged the government to review and realign the Setusamudram Channel Project (SSCP), without impacting Rama Setu. SSCP which creates a channel passage in the Indian Ocean has serious security implications and a disastrous impact on the long-term ecological stability on the coastline of Tamilnadu and Kerala.

Rama Setu is an ancient monument of national and international importance. Presenting overwhelming archaeological, epigraphical and scientific evidences, seminar participants resolved that Rama Setu should be declared and protected as a World Heritage Site. Experts noted that by aligning the channel close to the medial line, an international waters boundary is likely to be created between India and Srilanka in violation of the consistent stand so far taken by the two countries, declaring the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Straits as 'Historic Waters' hence Internal Waters. Fishermen are concerned that such a boundary, under pressure from the US Navy, will prevent the exercise of their historic rights to the aquatic resources in the waters. A demand was made that tsunami protection measures should be made an integral part of the project to prevent the devastation of Tamilnadu and Kerala coastline and desiccation of thorium resources of Manavalakurichi, Aluva and Chavara, in case of another tsunami caused by recurrent earthquakes in the Indian Ocean region. Participants in the seminar noted that Sir AR Mudaliar Committee Report of 1956 clearly stated that any idea of cutting a channel through Rama Setu should be abandoned because of the problems of maintaining a mid-ocean channel and the turbulence of the Indian Ocean waters. This turbulence is now enhanced by the events such as the tsunami which struck the Indian Ocean coastline on December 26, 2004 resulting in the death of over 250,000 people.

Press Release: *Save Rama Setu: letter of 30 March 2007 from Dr. S. R. Rao addressed to the Honourable Minister for Shipping and Transport, Govt. of India*

Dr. S. R. Rao earnestly requests the Hon'ble Union Minister to save the traditionally-known Rama Setu mentioned in various Puranas as a bridge built by the legendary Hero of Ramayana. He notes that it is of great emotional value as a sacred tirtha.

Dr. Rao requests the Hon'ble Union Minister to see that the cutting of the rock or any kind of damage to the rock is avoided and adds, "It is no less important than Swami Vivekananda Rock where a memorial is built. Alternate routes suggested by experts may kindly be considered in the interest of saving the Underwater Cultural Heritage of India, namely Rama Setu or Adam's Bridge. My study of the submergence of Poompuhar shows that most of the ancient sites on east coast are being swallowed by the sea. The latest victim is the shore temple at Tarangambadi. During my two visits to Sri Lanka, as a member of the ICUCH, I visited the Rama Setu site and had discussions with Commander Devendra Somasiri, another member of ICUCH from Sri Lanka about its importance as a Heritage site."



Map showing Adam's Bridge

The geographical location that connects the Indian main land and Sri Lanka, which were culturally united in the early period, is known as Palk Strait (India) and the Gulf of Mannar (Sri Lanka).

A cursory look at the sketch map illustrates the problems of navigation in the above area. Separating the Gulf of Mannar in the south from the strait in the north is a chain of islands, reefs, shoals and shallows, consisting of the island of Mannar, Ramar Bridge (also known as Adam's Bridge), the island of Pamban and Ramesvaram. Significantly the strait is flanked by two ancient temples, Ramanatha temple and Thiruketesvara temple on the Indian and Sri Lankan sides respectively. On the Indian side it attains importance because of its association with the Ramayana epic.

Successful protest against six-lane road proposed close to Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi

In a letter of 28 July 2006 to Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, Chairman of the 2010 Commonwealth Games Committee at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, ICOMOS protested against the plans for a highway near Humayun's Tomb (see *Hindustan Times*, 12 July 2006). On 1 September 2006 ICOMOS received a positive answer in so far as alternative plans will be respecting the visual integrity of this famous monument. Here is the wording of the two letters:



New Delhi, Humayun's Tomb

28 July 2006

Dear Sir,

Humayun's Tomb, New Delhi, India

ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) is very concerned to hear that the Delhi municipal authorities are planning to construct a major highway of six lanes which will be passing within 40 metres of the World Heritage site of Humayun's Tomb (inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1993), the first garden-tomb on the Indian subcontinent dating from 1570.

Please be informed that the inscription in the World Heritage List does not only oblige the relevant State authorities to look after the conservation of the monument or site itself, but also to guarantee its visual integrity. No doubt, the latter will be seriously disturbed if the municipal authorities go ahead with their road construction plans.

The outstanding artistic quality of Humayun's Tomb and its spectacular situation in a carefully designed garden should not be sacrificed for short-term considerations, such as an improvement of the traffic route to Nehru Stadium during the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

ICOMOS therefore urges you to reconsider the road construction plans and find alternatives.

In view of the dramatic consequences for the visual integrity of Humayun's Tomb and other protected monuments in its vicinity ICOMOS is also going to inform the UNESCO World Heritage Center of the threat.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Michael Petzet
President

1 September 2006

Dear Prof. Dr. Michael Petzet,

I am in receipt of your letter dated 28.7.2006, in connection with the proposal to build an underground road linking N11-24 (Nizamuddin Bridge) to Sabz Burz round about on Mathura Road passing near the World Heritage Site of Humayun's Tomb.

In this connection, I am to inform that you are probably referring to the earlier alignment of the proposed road, which was passing at a distance of 42 metres from the wall of Humayun's Tomb.

Now the alignment is proposed to be altered in the following manner:

- The proposed road has been shifted north of Subj Burj and the alignment will have twin tunnels of 11 m diameter each, 5 m below ground level. The corridor will pass through these tunnels at a depth of 12.1 m below ground surface and each carriage-way will be two-lane (7.5 m) and not three-lane as proposed earlier. Due to shift of alignment the nearest point of alignment will now be 276 m from the wall of Humayun's Tomb, against 42 m of the earlier proposal.
- Since it is a tunnel corridor below ground from Lodhi Road to Railway Track, so the visual integrity of Humayun's Tomb will not be disturbed.
- As the road will be passing through the tunnels at a depth of 12.1 m below ground level, so it will not cause any damage to the garden.

Further, I may add that the purpose of above road is to meet an imperative need to decongest Bhairon Road and Ring Road and to provide for a short route between East Delhi and Central/South Delhi, which will incidentally facilitate a smooth flow of traffic from Games Village to Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium during the Commonwealth Games 2010.

Yours sincerely,

K. S. Mehra
Principal Secretary
Govt. of National Capital Territory of Delhi