

TARAPURGARH REVISITED



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Monday

The news that a ring-well was found while levelling the surface of Tarapurgarh for the purpose of building a stadium had reached me since August 2013. But incessant rain and the devastating Failin prevented me in visiting the site. Finally, the opportunity came on the 25th of November 2013 when I had to join a religious ceremony at the Jogeswar Temple, Binka. The local correspondent of the Odia daily Prameya and one of his associates joined me on the spot.

On reaching the site I was led by the contractor to the actual spot and told that the ring-well was found while digging earth by an excavator. The well was covered by a terracotta lid which broke during the excavation.

The diameter of the well measures two feet and six inches (or 67 cms.) uniformly from top to the bottom. There are eight terracotta rings of approximately one foot height each, making the depth of the well around nine to ten feet from the surface. The thickness of the rings measures around two inches. The texture is of black and red type-black in the centre and red on the outer surface.

The earth layers in the vicinity contain shreds of pottery, burnt clay-lumps, black ashes of charred rice husks with occasional finds of husked rice.

Experts opine that ring-wells are associated symbols of urbanization. They are sometimes indentified as soak-pits, draw-wells or privies or even granaries. From localional point of view, this ring-well might be of the last category.

On my visit way back in 2001-02, I had collected shreds of pottery, a piece of iron, a broken terracotta horse and multi-coloured stone pieces from the surface exploration of Tarapurgarh. An interesting find was a stone sculpture representing the brest portion of a woman. In local parlance it stands for goddess “Tara Tarini”, the presiding goddess of Tarapurgarh. This prompted me in writing an article (in Odia) “ Tarapurgarh : A riverine trade Centre of ancient Kosala” which got published in the Souvenir of Bolangir Lokautsav, 2004.

Tarapurgarh is located hardly two kilometres to the south of Binka, on the right bank of river Mahanadi. A moat used to encircle the fort in three sides, the east being exposed to the river; The river-water filled the moat making it a typical *Jaladurga*. Now, the moat at various places is either covered by thicket or converted to rice-field.

An early-medieval fort, Tarapurgarh continued to be a stronghold till the Maratha invasion of Raghuji Bhonsle in 1799. The Maratha general Bhup Singh attacked Sonapur, then under Raja Prithvi Singh. Tarapurgarh was being defended by Mukunda Rao, the Diwan of the King. He was defeated and arrested by the Marathas who seem to have devastated the fort.

Remains of the fort continued to exist upto the reign of Maharaja Biramitrodaya Singh Deo as evident from his court poet Pandit Damodar Mishra Shastri. Writing in 1921 the poet described the fort looking like a “white mansion”

Despite archaeological potentiality, the site lay neglected. Now its very existence is threatened.

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