

Sacred Centre of Mata Sitla Devi Temple of Gurugram

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Abstract – Gurugramtown is a glaring of urban growth. It has experienced growth spurt both spatially and demographically. The city stands today grown and developed from a small town to being a Millennium City of India. Gurugram like other urban centers of the country is multi- functional. The settlement of Gurugram is believed to be in the period of the Mahabharata when Guru Dronacharya settled here and in whose memory a tank still exists. A temple (Sheetla Mata) is also found here and on these people believes that it gradually became a religious center. They even say that permanent according to another explanation, the word Gurugram comes from an amalgamation of the words 'gur' (Jaggery) and gaon (Village). This indicates that it has sugarcane growing area and thus gur, that is jiggery, was produced in Gurugram. It is evident that in its historical past Gurugram has been identified as a small farming settlement. To begin with, it was a Guru Gram of Dronacharya-studded with tanks and temples; later on it became a place of military importance and now it has developed as an important industrial area.

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OBJECTS

The present paper divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the origin of Gurugram town and history of Sitla Mata temple. Second section deals with the rituals ceremony of the temple. Third section presents an overview of the town.

I

The origin of Gurugram city lies in period of *Mahabharata* when Guru Dronacharya settled here. The growth of the city goes back to the B.C. and has taken various shades over time. Gurugram has been a 'gaon' that is the village since its historical past with a small core town. In the early period, the town has different stories and beliefs about the origin of the city's name, the most common legend can be traced back to the *Mahabharata* periods in Hindu mythology. Gurugram is the ancestral village of Guru Dronacharya, the teacher of the Pandavas and Kauravas. It was under the Pandavas. It is said that name of Gurgaon is a corruption of 'Guru Gram', i. e. village of spiritual leader. The traditional account is that Udhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, gave this village to his Guru Dronacharya, in whose memory a tank still exists on the West side of the road to the railway station. According to tradition, Guru Dronacharya gave training in archery and erudition to the Kauravas and Pandavashere. On account of its association with Guru Dronacharya or otherwise, this Gram was considered historically significant. Adjectives like *Bada*, *Chhota* or *Unchaare*

sometimes suffixed with place name to describe their physical character.[1][2]

The British in their early records also comment that known as Gurugram Masani the A mile away from the town is the Gurgaon village, known as Gurgaon Masani the village is worthy of mention only for its temple.[3] Gurgaonis now a days a very important place of having Mata Sitla Devi temple. It was a village of Gurgaon- Masani in those days. The site of temple of Sitla, the goddess of small pox, which is held in great repute throughout the region, is worthy of mention. The temple is located on Sitla Mata road in Gurugram city. During late 20th century it lays between sector 6, 81 and 12-a near ammunition depot. The presence of a tank on its western side testifies its religious significance as well as antiquity.

"Tradition has it that Kirpai Lalita, the wife of Dronacharya used to live in Keshopur, a village in the Union Territory of Delhi. Dronacharya visited the village daily to see his wife, Lalita, busied herself in attending to the children, especially the diseased ones. People called her Mata (Mother) out of affection and respect. Once Dronacharya detained by circumstances, could not go to her for some time. The ideal wife could not bear the separation and ended her life. A temple was built in her honour by the villagers and she began to be remembered as Mata Sitla or Mata Masani, the goddess of small pox."

According to another legend than three centuries ago, Masani Mother appeared in a dream to Chaudhry Singh Ram alias Singha, a fief holder of village Gurgaon. She expressed her desire to leave Keshopur and come to Gurgaon. She bade him to build a place for her by authorizing him to appropriate all the offerings made to her.

To the south of the village, lay a pond near the temple of Dronachaya. It is said that Singha selected this place as the site for installing a statue of goddess Masani but the goddess urged him in one way or the other not to trespass on the territory belonging to the Guru. Therefore, Singha built the shrine to the north of the village. The village was divided into two portions known as 8 *biswas* and 12 *biswas*. Singhalived in the portion of 8 *biswas* where shrine was set up in the portion falling under 12 *biswas*. The legend goes that even after Singha had brought and installed the goddess Masani, after her own heart's desire at village Gurgaon, the residents of Keshopur village continued to dispute the claims of the Gurgaon folk. For over 200 year's Singha and his heirs appropriated the offerings to themselves. This controversy was put at rest during the time of Begum Samru, the Governor of Jharsa under the Mughals. Her child who had contracted small pox was cured after being consecrated in the prescribed manner before the goddess Masani at Gurgaon. However, Begum Samru, took the proceeds during the month of *Chet* each year when the area was under her control. As a reward they were granted the village and they started taking the offerings themselves. The Brahmin priests are stated to have agitated for it sometime in the around 1860 but their claim was rejected by the courts and that of the village land-owners was upheld. It was thence finally established that the goddess had begun to live at village Gurgaon.

The present temple building is said to have been built by Jaswant(Jawahar Singh) Singh, the chieftain of Bharatpur, in memory of his victory over Delhi for which he invoked the blessings of the goddess. A pond is attached to the temple now.[4] A few people cite the name of Suraj Mal of Bharatpur in place of Jawahar Singh's name. The statue of the goddess is of mixed metal with gold polish and weighs about 6 kilogram. It is kept in a wooden casket for the placing which there is a small marble platform in the temple.

II

The statue remains in the possession of the pujari (priest) who moves it to the shrine only when it is needed. The festival begins on every Monday and ends on Tuesday evening. The main purpose for which the devotees come to pay homage and make offerings is to entreat the goddess to help them ward off small-pox. This is done by a ceremony known as *jaldena* or *kabuliat*: the devotees spend a sleepless night at the temple, chanting hymns and songs in honour of the goddess. A section of the visitor come

for the *mundanceremony* (the first hair-cutting ceremony) of their children and offers the hair at the altar of the goddess. Another section of the visitors comprise the newly married couples who come to invoke the blessings of the goddess for a happy married life. Many and diverse are the offerings made to the goddess, such as: miniature silver or gold canopies, flowers, garlands and lighted earthen lamps fed with pure *ghee*. Huge fans, clothes and eatables things; scarfs, flags, skirts and handkerchiefs, rice, loaves, candy-drops, sweet-meats, cows, calves, cocks, goats and lambs, studded with the picture of the goddess Masani, are offered every year by the Bargi caste people of Delhi. Cows and calves are, however, not offered for some time now but some things being offered to goddess are like; coins, shells, cotton seeds, bangles, combs, vermilion myrtle and coconuts. Animals are not allowed to be sacrificed. Intoxicants are not offered to the Mother and they are strictly prohibited within the premises of the temple. After making obeisance and offerings to the Masani Mata the pilgrims touch one or two of the eighty four bells hanging from the ceiling of the temple and say loudly *Bol Chaurasi Ghante-Wali-Ki-Jai* (victory to the Mother with 84 bells). Many pilgrims would put the mark of their open palm soaked in cow-dung and vermilion or myrtle, on the outer walls of the temple. The pilgrims then make circumambulation of the temple and present small offerings at each one of the small shrines. Before the pilgrims leave the premises, at the entrance they are met by a group of sweepers holding an important broom made of peacock feathers, a live cock and *mashak* (water-carrier's leather sack) containing water. The sweepers touch the pilgrims with the broom and the cock and sprinkle water from the *mashak* over them. All this signifies blessings from the goddess that small-pox shall never attack the pilgrims so anointed. In return these sweepers get a few coins. After this the pilgrims take a dip in the holy pond and leave for the temple of Chogana Mata. Animal sacrifices are made by Rehgar caste people in the temple of goddess Choganan. A pig or goat is killed and the blood is sprinkled on the flowers to be offered by these people to the goddess. They also offer chicken and pig meat which is fed to dogs and donkeys. The general practice is for the sweepers to keep a pig beside the altar of the goddess. It's one ear is made to bleed. The blood that comes out of the ear of the pig is sprinkled by the sweepers on the children for whose protection against small-pox the pilgrims offer sacrifice. The higher castes make only floral and cash offerings but no animal sacrifice to the Choganan Mata. More than a lakh pilgrims visit the temples from different parts of the country in the course of a year. Men and women are almost equal in number. The more devout among the pilgrims who had previously made rigid vows, after getting down from the train, or any other vehicle, reach the temple in what is known as *dandwat* pose. Holding a coconut

in the hand, the devotee lies down with his face downwards and stretches himself out to the farthest point, he then gets up and repeats the process all over again till the temple is reached. A peculiar feature of the Masani fair is the disposal of the offerings. The fair is held on two days in a week Monday and Tuesday, throughout the year. In the month of *Sawan*, members of the scheduled castes like Saperas and Sansis alone come to attend the fair other caste generally do not attend in that month. The fair is at its peak in the month of *Chet* though the attendance is considerable during the three succeeding months and then again in the *Asoj Navratras*. It is held at village Gurugram, adjoining the Gurugram town. It is named after Masani the goddess of small-pox. A temple to the goddess known as Sitla-Mata-Ka-Mandir, is situated outside the *abadi* of the village. The history of the fair is traced back to the days of Mahabharata.[5] The pilgrims are visited from Punjab, North West Punjab and Oudh to the number of fifty or sixty thousand annually. The offerings which amount often to 20,000 thousand were formerly appropriated by the Begum Samru, but now are a perquisite of the proprietary body of Gurugram village. Pilgrims visit shrine on Mondays throughout the year, but the largest gatherings amounting sometimes to 20,000 in one day occur on the four Mondays in *Chet*. The official agencies do not interfere with the organization of the fair- they only assist the Mela Committee in the organization of the fair particularly when the fair is attended by large numbers in the month of *Chet* (March-April).[6] The Mela Committee consists of leading land owners and a few other respectable members of the village. The members of the Committee are not paid any remuneration. Social organizations like Bharat Sewak Samaj, Mahvir Dal and the SewaSamiti also help the Mela management. The police department makes adequate arrangement to maintain law and order at the fair. The district medical officer of health is in charge of public health and sanitation.[7]

III

Gurugram has been referred to as the icon of India's growth and has reputation at the international level.[8] The city's saga needs to be explored to understand the growth of the city with the series of developments taking place simultaneously. The growth of Gurugram dates back to its period of origin and continues till day. Being nearer to Delhi- the capital of India, it provides space for the development of planned residential colonies and accommodates a large number of government and semi government offices and their employees to reside therein.[9]

The process of urbanization is accompanied by the physical growth of the city, which has been accomplished in various stages in Gurugram town. The old site of town might have emerged on such situations, which possibly were suitable for religious

purpose. The old town is now considered as religious centre due to its legendary or epic origin. Sitla Mata temple in this village, are ground which religious people settled permanently hence obstructed settlements here from adjacent areas. Therefore gradually this settlement became a religious center.[10] In ancient period the town like many other cities was surrounded by a wall, which is evidenced by a gate still existing in front of railway station.[11] Process of the growth of town have taken place from its antiquity which is also an evident from its growth around the village in a circular manner, whereas, the development in the subsequent period indicates an axial pattern resulting mainly due to transport links passing through the town. The growth of the town in all aspects like (population, area, religious factor, economic conditions, etc.) has been spectacular after partition of the country. There is found another temple in Gurugram city. Bhim Kund also known as Pinchokhdajhod is a 10- acre wetland in Bhim Nagar locality of Gurugram city developed by Guru Dronacharya use to bathe after teaching archery lessons. Gurugram village and this pond is the location where Arjun saw nothing but the bird's eye before his arrow pierced it. It lays between sector 4, 6 and 8 about 3 km from Rajiv Chowk. There is an Eklavya temple in honor of fame Eklavya in Khandsa village now in sector 37 of the city. As per folklore this is the only temple of Eklavya and it is the place where Eklavya cut his thumb and offered to Guru Dronacharya. Now locals want the government to develop a tourism circuit in honor of Dronacharya and Eklavya. It seems thus, that Gurugram was an old small settlement with some religious significance for the surrounding area. People visited the place for pilgrimage and particularly in the local fair at the temple. It was a village till the end of the 18th century. Economically and politically unremarkable the settlement probably had on grant existence till its position changed under the British who took over the area in 1803.

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