



AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE FAMOUS RELIGIOUS PLACES OF SOUTH ODISHA

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South Orissa comprises of the undivided districts of Ganjam, Phulbani and Koraput (presently South Orissa divided into eight districts viz., Ganjam, Gajapati, Boudh, Kandhamal, Rayagada, Malkangiri, Nawrangapur and Koraput) was a part of the ancient kingdom of Kalinga, which finds mention in the *Mahabharat*, a great epic of India. The district of Ganjam originally formed a part of ancient kingdom of Kalinga which was supposed to have been found in the 19th century B.C. and which extended from the Bengal frontiers of Orissa to the river Godavari, a distance of about 500 miles. The territory comprising a part of the ancient Atavika land referred to in the special rock inscriptions of Ashoka. Ashoka occupied Kalinga in 261 B.C. but the land of the Atavikas, which could not be conquered, remained outside his empire.

The formation of the linguistic Province of Orissa in 1936 may be regarded as one of the landmarks in the history of the evolution of the Indian Union. The demand for linguistic States, which became so conspicuous in India after independence, had its genesis in the movement of the Oriya-speaking people for a separate Province in the basis of language during the later half of the British rule. This movement had a long and chequered history ranging from the last quarter of the nineteenth century till the new Province was created on 1 April 1936.

The story of language agitation in south Orissa is not merely a complicated one but highly interesting as well. Linked up with the changing rulers, the face of south Orissa underwent frequent alternations that affected the social and cultural life of the people. In fact, the life in south Orissa was

like a river that changed its course too frequently to acquire a distinctive contour of its own for quite some time.

The South Orissa remained attached to the main political authority during the reign of Gajapati kings of Orissaⁱ. After the fall of Gajapati Mukundadeva in 1568 the kingdom lost her political supremacy and failed to perpetuate its integrity within her territories. The northern Orissa remained under the administration of Afghansⁱⁱ while southern part of it gradually slipped into the hands of the Muslimsⁱⁱⁱ.

The South Orissa remained under the Muslim control until 1753 A.D., when Salabat Jung, the Nizam of Hyderabad assigned the Northern Sarkars to the French General, D. Bussey^{iv}. During the interim period, the history of the land witnessed many upheavals. The Qutb Sahi dynasty of Hyderabad ruled over it from 1571 to 1687 A.D.^v In 1687 A.D. Aurongzeb, the Mughal emperor of Delhi conquered Golkunda and annexed the whole country^{vi}. The newly conquered province was placed under administration of the Subadar of Deccan, who was afterwards designated as Nizam of Hyderabad^{vii}.

The whole Chicacole Circars including Ganjam was administered by a Muslim Foujdar of Chicacole with the assistance of a deputy at Itchapur^{viii}. Even after the death of Aurongzeb in 1707, Ganjam remained under the ruling family of Hyderabad which had assumed the virtual sovereignty over the tract^{ix}. At the time of Taki Khan's administration the Nizam of Hyderabad occupied all the territories, south of Chilika lake in 1730

The district of Rayagada is one of the new districts carved out of the old Koraput District in 1993. Rayagada district is situated in the south-west of the central Orissa in between 19U N to 21U.9' N Lat. And 82U.7 E to 84U.1' E Long. It is bounded by the districts such as Kalahandi in the North West, Koraput in the South West, Srikakulum district of Andhra State in the South, Gajapati in the East and Kandhmal in the North East. The total area of the district is 7585 Sq.Kms. The total population of the district is 7,14,599 as recorded up to 20.07.1993 by the News Bureau of Orissa. The physical feature is sub-mountain, tropical forested, and drained by the Nagavali river to the western central region and Vamsadhara river to the eastern central region of the district. These rivers discharge into the Bay of Bengal draining

through the Srikakulam and Vijayanagaram districts of the Andhra State. The primitive inhabitants of this area are mostly Kondhs.

The natural beauty of Rayagada district fills one's heart with immense joy and thrill. The charming valleys of the rivers Nagavali and Vamsadhara, vast stretches of hills, evergreen forests, perennial streams, stiff and massive rocks standing like mythological demons and deep holes in the rocky river-beds presenting thrilling sights are the attractive features of the district. Rayagada, district is famous for many charms particularly the number of famous temples and mathas. The following is a list of the famous temples of the district.

- Maa Majhighariani Temple is famous in Southern Division of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Most of the devotees come from Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh including undivided Koraput District.
- Maa Mangla Maa Temple lies in the Raniguda area of Rayagada. It is near the hathipather.
- Gayatri Temple a beautiful temple with Goddess Maa Gayatri, Saraswati and Maa Majhighariani. As it is in the compound of Engineering College, students do meditation and pooja after their studies in the temple. Lot of devotees come to the temple regularly. A Spiritual Library is present in the temple ground floor. Books on Indian culture in large number are available here.
- Laxminarayan temple is at IMFA Factory, Therubali. The deities Laxminarayan, Hanuman, Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra and Lord Siva are worshiped by thousands devotees.¹
- Paikapada is a historical place famous for its many Siva Lingams. The deities like Lord Jagannath, Maa Dhakineswar Kalika, Surya, etc. are worshiped here. The car festival of Lord Jagannath is also celebrated. During Sivaratri a large number of pilgrims come to observe the function. The place is near Theruballi. It is believed that there are 99,99,999 shivlingams (only one less than 1 crore) in and around Paikapada shrine.
- Chatikona is located about 48 km from Rayagada surrounded by a series of valleys and wooded hills of varying colours and the place is a center of pilgrimage for the temple of Mahadev. It offers picnickers gorgeous view of the waterfall. The Siva temple is the focus of hectic activities on Siva Ratri. The Dongaria Kondha of Chatikona represent the primitive section of the tribe.

¹ Dr. Prasanta Banapili, Temples and Mathas of Rayagada District – A Study
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- Minajhola is only 134 km from Rayagada. It has a siva temple at the confluence of three rivers. It is situated in the heart of dense forest, rich in wildlife. Sivaratri is a popular festival of this place. Though there is no good all-weather road yet, the place is worth visiting.
- The Devagiri hill rises to a height of 120.2 meters. Unlike other hills it is not narrower upwards. The top of the hill is a flat platform of rectangular plain, which can be approached only from the northern side. There are 476 steps which are the unique feature of the Devagiri. At the top of the hill, there are perennial pools of water called Ganges, Yamuna, Saraswati, Bhargavi and Indradymna. There is a cave looking like two jaws. The Siva Lingam is enshrined at the meeting point of the jaws. Sivaratri is its biggest festival, which draws a large crowd every year. It is 50 km from Rayagada.
- Padampur houses the shrine of Manikeswari Siva. It is identified to be the seat of Dharmakirti, the Buddhist-Logician-philosopher. It is a 7th-century temple. It is 90 km from Rayagada.
- Gayatri Temple at Padampur is a beautiful temple with Goddess Maa PanchMukhi-Gayatri, Maa durga and Maa Mahalakshmi. The temple is famous for Saraswati Puja Sri panchami in January–February. It is 90 km from Rayagada.
- Maa Markama Temple is located at Bissam Cuttack, 40 km from Rayagada. The temple got a new look and surrounded by lush green forest. Many people visit from near and far especially on Tuesdays. The town college has also been named after Goddess Markama.

In the history of mankind Orissa always stands great for human values, glory and superb intelligence. Orissa has gifted with nature's bounty, a 482 km stretch of coastline with golden beaches, serpentine rivers, mighty waterfalls, forest-clad blue hills of Eastern Ghats with rich wild life. Orissa is quite rich in its heritage that houses many remarkable monuments of ancient times. The entire length and breadth of Orissa is marked with remarkable tourist places and each place of India has a tale to tell to its tourist. The patrons of culture and Architecture can perceive the marvelous Architecture of the temples, rock-cut caves and also the forts that once belonged to the Great Oriyan Kings, radiating the rich heritage of Orissa. The land, while retaining its pristine glory, also offers the visitors modern amenities. Its territory formed a part of the ancient Kalinga of Mahabharat time. In the ancient time Orissa rose to prominence as a Kingdom under Kharavela, a great conqueror and patron of Jainism, in the second half of the 1st century B.C. Other great rulers belonged to the Keshari dynasty and the Eastern Ganga dynasty who were also great builders. At one point of time the vast

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kingdom of Orissa had spread from Ganga to Godavari. The flourishing maritime trade with South-East Asian countries i.e. Java, Borneo had brought in a golden era of affluence and opulence. The Kalinga School of architecture flourished from the 7th to 13th century A.D. The most important monuments of this period can be seen in and around Bhubaneswar and Puri. The Mukteswar Temple is the finest piece of architecture of Kalinga. The Lingaraj Temple of Bhubaneswar, the Jagannath Temple of Puri and above all the world renowned world heritage Sun Temple at Konark are the epitome of temple architecture and sculpture of Orissa. The modern Orissa came into existence in April 1, 1936. The Britishers declared it as a separate province. In 1948 and 1949 the area of Orissa was almost doubled and the population was increased by a third with the addition of 24 former princely states. In 1950, Orissa became a constituent state of India. It is governed by a chief minister and cabinet responsible to an elected unicameral legislature and by a governor appointed by the president of India. Utkal Gaurav Madhusudan Das was the architect of Modern Orissa and subsequently Sri Nabakrushna Chowdhury, Dr. Harekrishna Mahatab, Sri Biju Patnaik and others engineered their best efforts for catapulting Orissa to himalayan heights of fame and glory. In fact, Orissa has become a multi dimensional, multi coloured, many splendoured, vibrant and boisterous modern state all set on its journey in the present millenium to make its presence and voice felt in the nooks and crannies of the world through the Universal Cult of brotherhood, its unique cultural heritage, luxuriant forests and wild life, sprawling Chilika Lake, bountiful coastline, wide range of tribes and colourful canvass of art and culture. Orissa has been resurgent again rejuvenating and resuscitating its ancient glory, glamour and greatness. Its lush green countryside and fertile plains, tiny hamlets fringed with palm, coconut trees and mango groves offer the charm of rural beauty while the urban pockets, the four cities in particular, with the splendour of modern technology provide the amenities necessary for a comfortable stay. This wonderful land of fascinating beauty boasts of colourful festivals round the year. Orissa is also the land of unique handicrafts and other excellent artefacts.

ⁱ H.K. Mahatab, *History of Orissa, Vol.1, p.343.*

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p.346.

ⁱⁱⁱ T.J. Maltby, *op.cit.*, p.79.

^{iv} *Ibid.*

- v *Ibid.*, pp.79-80.
- vi *Ibid.*
- vii *W. Francis, Vizagapatam District Gazetteer, p.38.*
- viii *Ibid.*,
- ix *J. Maltby Wheeler, Early Records of British India – A History of the English Settlements in India, pp.134-135.*