

The History and Historicity of Mountain Mahendragiri

Abstract

Mahendragiri is one of the historical place in Odishan history. The mountain is referred in various ancient and medieval inscriptions and literatures. The history of Mahendra is very ancient. There are various ancient and medieval inscriptions and literatures which referred about the mountain. Archaeologically it is one of the significant place in early Odishan history. It is very rich evidences of existence of Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism and Vaisnavism as well. Ecologically it is very important to develop the socio-cultural activities surround it. The local inhabitants were very much dependant on the mountains. The history is very illuminating for the local culture, from their stories and folk tale which is completely associated with the mountain. Geographically the region is fall in the southern part of Odisha. Odisha is being start from the southward with the Mahendra mountain at present. But in the early days might be more southward upto Rajmundry present Andhra Pradesh.

Keywords: Mahendragiri Mountain, South Odisha, History, Culture, Religion, Kalinga

Introduction

The mountain Mahendra is one of the significant historical sites in south Odisha. It is very important in Odishan historical point of view. Geographically, the mountain is part of Eastern Ghat. It is now fall in Gajapati district mostly surrounded by the hills and mountain ranges. The mountain is 25 Kms towards westwards from the Bay of Bengal. The highest peak of the mountain is 1490 metres above the sea level. From the mountain the holy river Mahendratanya is originated flows toward west wards and fall in the Bay of Bengal near Barua (Baruva) present Andhra Pradesh. The mountain is very well known from the various ancient Hindu literatures, the foreign accounts and lastly but very important from the myth and stories of the Savara tribes who were constantly inhabited till the present days. In the present paper we will discuss the histories of the mountains from the natural resources (ecological), literary sources, archaeological accounts related with the mountains and the myth and stories of the local tribal regarding the mountain.

Background

The Mahendragiri mountain is 60 Kms from Paralakhemundi the subdivision of Gajapati through land route of Garabandha, Kinchlingi and Kainpur and another route from Berhampur via Manjusa and Budha Amba. Now days the convenient route has been connected to this place from both side of Berhampur and Paralakhemundi. The road is cleared connection from Paralakhemundi to Berhampur in the foot of Mahendragiri upto Buratal. From Buratal to top of mountain road is connected for temporary. The distance of the site from Buratal is 6 Kms. The mountain is covered with full of terrain forests. The mountain is believe one of the sacred place of Hindu. Historically it is very significant for Odisha history.

Aim of the Study

The present paper is deals the history of Mahendra Mountain and historicity of the mountain through which it influence the Odishan history through the ages. In the paper the history will analyses with various inscription, literature, stories and folk tale. Secondly it deals with the ecological importance of the mountain through which the history of the region can deciphered. Thirdly we will take focus on the historicity with the archaeological evidences.

Scope of the Study

Culturally it is very relevant to the Odishan history. Although there are various scholars has touch very little about the history of the mountain so far as the importance of the region. The present culture which is grown

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in this region is the reflection of the past which were untouched by the scholars.

There are lies much history around Mahendragiri which is occupied a prominent place in political and cultural history of Odisha. The place very important from the earliest times down to beginning of the medieval period. This is principal centre for political and religion. There are several ruling dynasties mostly related with the mountain such as the Satavahanas, the Matharas, the Imperial Guptas, the Sailodbhavas, the Early Gangas and their feudatories, the Kadambas, the Imperial Gangas and the Cholas. The important mountains folk like the Malayas of the Pandyas, the Sahya of the Aparantas, Saktimati of the people of Bhalliatra, Ruksa of the people of the Mahismati, Vindhya of the Atavyas and the Pariyatra of the Nishadas the Mahendragiri is par excellence for the Kalingas inhabited by the Savaras¹. Pliny has mentioned in his description as Oretas as the people of India in whose country the mount Maleus is stood. Many historians have identified Oretas as people of Odisha and the Mount Maleu is identified as Mahendragiri². Pargiter³ rightly identified Mahendra with portion of eastern Ghats near Ganjam, which is pointed out by Wilson. The Mahendra region is presently inhabited by aborigine tribes called Savaras.

The Mahendra mountain is inscribed since the ages of the Epic and Puranas. In the Mahabharata Mahendragiri was an important seat of Brahminical culture where Parasurama is not only said to have performed penance but also taught archery to Maharathi Karna. It is also known that a Hayhaya prince, Sahasrarjuna, who was passing by foot of Mahendragiri was defeated by Parasurama. It is said that Pandavas led by Yudhistira have taken rest in the skirts of Mahendragiri then they proceeded to Godavari⁴. The archaeological monuments of mount Mahendra of temple of Yudhistira, Arjuna, Bhima and Kunti bear testimony to the visit of the Pandavas. In the epic Ramayana it is depicted that Hanuman was left for Lanka in search of Sita from Mahendragiri which is referred in Champu Ramayana. Besides that it is very lively tradition of local folk with the mountain Mahendra among the aboriginals resides in this region named Savaras. According to the Savara myths Ramma and Bhimma are two brothers who were migrated to this place and settled down in this place. They might be abode Mahendra mountain as their sacred place probably from that concept the mahendra mountain is known as *Kulaparvata* or *Kulagiri*. From this legend the Savara race was associated with the Lord Jagannatha of Puri⁵. As per the *Markandeya Purana*, reference the Mahendra mountain is refers as Kulachala⁶. Where in Vamana purana mahendra mountain has refers as

“Mahendra Malaya Sahyah Saktiman Ruksha Parvatah/

Vindhyascha Patrascha Saprtra Ku aparvatah”//

According to the Puranas, the king ruled over Kalinga, Mahisa and Mahendra was called as Guha declared himself to be contemporary of Imperial Guptas⁷. From Dathavamsa, it is identified that Guhasiva was a ruler of Kalinga and devout worshiper of the tooth relic of Buddha. It is draw to conclusion

that Dantapura which is not far from Mahendragiri, was some time an important seat of Buddhism probably in 2nd and early decade of 3rd century AD. If the Datavamsa was compiled in 310 A.D during the king Kirtisri Meghavarna, the son of Mahasena⁸. At present there is nothing definitely known the historicity of Guhasiva but according to N.K Sahu⁹, he was belong to Murunda ruler. As per the Kalidasas, *Raghuvamsa*, Mahendragiri has been regarded as the very heart of Kalinga. Kalidasa has mentioned in his poet that Hemangada, was the king of Kalinga as the lord of Mahendragiri, whose glory was snatched by Raghu (*Sriyam Mahedran thasya Jahara Na Tu Medinim*). It is said that the palace of Hemangada was probably situated on the sea shore which is not far from Mahendra hills. The sea could be seen through the windows of the royal palaces and roaring of its waves drowned the sound of music, and awoke the king in the early morning from his sleeps. In the Swayambara of Indumati held at court of Bidarbha, Sunanda, a companion of Indumati during the introduction of kings, Hemangada was not only lord of Mahendra but also Mahodadhi(sea), who was as determined and powerful as the mount Mahendra. Thus Mahendra region was the political headquarters of Kalinga which is stated in *Raghuvamsa*¹⁰.

In the 15th century, the Odia poet Saraladasa¹¹ has referred in his work, Mahabharata, that Mahendra region and it king to be very powerful with his elephantry corpse, the origin of Gokarnesvara on mount Mahendra. As per his statement that *Panchapandava*, during their exile they sojourn at Mahendra hill. During their temporary stay at the Mahendra hill, one day Arjuna by mistake killed a cow which was grazing at the foot hill of the mount to thinking it to be a rhinoceros. Naturally the Pandavas repented a lot for the mistake, they pray to God Krishna to save them from this sin. Consequently, Krishna invites all the gods to meet on the summit of the Mahendra hills to forgive Pandavas. Siva Linga was sprang up from the place where the corpse has been stroked. The Siva Linga which arose from the ear of the cow was worshipped by Pandava brothers as Gokarnesvara¹².

Politically, the Mahendra is taking important part in ancient and medieval Odisha. There has been many inscriptions which were referred on mount Mahendra. The inscription which give us the historical data about the region¹³. According to the Matharas inscriptions, this is politically and religiously important district known as *Mahendrabhoga Vishaya*. The Satavahana king Gautamiputra Satakarni inscribed in his Nasik Inscription in (102-130 A.D) has been styled himself as lords of mountain where he includes Mahendragiri¹⁴. His son Vasisthiputra Pulmayi also claimed to be the lord of Mahendragiri. So from the inscription it is clear that the Satavahana kingdom had extended their kingdom upto Mahendragiri in the east till second half of second century.

According to Allahabad pillar inscription¹⁵, Mahendra was conquered by Samudragupta, as per the records, he was defeated Svamidatta of Kottura who was one of the twelve kings of Dakshinapatha.

The Kottura has been identified with the modern Kothor, about 20Kms, to the south east of Mahendragiri. The Matharas have acquired some of the towns at foot of Mahendragiri called Vardhamanapura¹⁶ and Sunagara¹⁷. In the Dhavalapeta grant of king Uma-Varman of Mathara styled himself as the lord of Kalinga. In the grants the village called Kotura is in Mahedrabhoga *Vishaya*. The Kotura is the same as the Kottura mentioned in Allahabad Inscription. Probably the Mahedra region was occupied by the Mathara after Samudragupta and organized the same into a district administrative unit called Mahedrabhoga *Vishaya* or appointed as the feudatory of Gupta.

In the Mandasore inscription¹⁸ of Yasovarman, the Gupta feudatory of Malwa, who had successfully checking the Huna inroad. Mihirakula defeating the Gupta king Kumaragupta II. He asserted the his independence in 530 A.D and occupied extensive territory, Mahendragiri was the southernmost of his kingdom. The Sailodbhavas regarded Mahendragiri as *Kulagiri* in their inscriptions. The Banapur plates of Madhymaraja I (670-690 A.D) also declares as a *Brihat Kulagiri*. The top of Mahendra mount is the religious centre of Sailodbhavas which may be the southern boundary of their kingdom¹⁹.

As early as 7th century Eastern Gangas of Kalinganagara (modern Mukhalingam) were devout worshipper of God Gokarnesvar. In the early records, they are depicted not only the glory of Mahendragiri but also of the God Gokarnesvara as their family deity till the Gangas are shifted to *Varanasi Kataka* (Modern Cuttack) as their Capital. From the Vizagapatnam plates²⁰ of Imperial Ganga Anantavarman Chodagangadeva (1077-1147 A.D) a distant descendant of kolahala, being derived of his throne by his paternal uncle, set out with his four brothers like five Pandavas to conquer the earth. They came to the Mahedra mountain and worshipped God Gokarnesvara. Soon after they the grace of God Gokarnesvara they defeated Savaraditya (Baladitya) the chief of the Savara tribe and took possession of Kalinga country²¹.

The Kadambas who ruled over the north western part of Mahedra regions the feudatories of Early Gangas also issued their grants which gives us some information's. The Simhipura plates²², records that a village called Dharmapura in the district of Mahendrabhoga to three hundred Brahmanas by Dharmakhedi of Kadamba kula who were assumed the title of Mahendradhipati. The Mandasa plates²³ in 991 A.D records the grant of a village called Majhipathara Khanda situated at the centre of Mahendrabhoga by Dharmakhedi. The Nirakarapur plates²⁴ of Udayakhedi alias Udayaditya (1009-1023 A.D) records the grant of a village called Pagadakheda of Mahendrabhoga *Vishaya* to the Varaha Brahmanas.

Conclusion

Mahendragiri mountain is has its own history since the early times to present age. The society, culture and its religion surrounding it has also influencing very much. Once it is historically, socially, religiously an important place for the Odishan history. But in the present age it is one of the backward region of Odisha. The people, the society, the religion has also forgotten now a days. It has degraded due to various causes particularly the man made as well as some time the natural. The environment, the ecology, the society, the culture, and religion has much affected. We should have acknowledged the glorious past of the mountain and its surroundings.

Endnotes

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