



The Temple of Markandeswar of Puri

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Introduction :

The temple of Markandeswar is one of the important Saiva shrines of Puri. The name Markandeswar is connected with the name of Markandeya, a great devotee of Shiva. Iswar or Shiva is worshipped by Markandeya is called Markandeswar. It is one of the earliest Shaiva shrines located in Srikshetra. The great sage Markandeya is the founder of the shrine. In Narasingha Puran the legend of Markandeya is stated in a nice manner. Markandeya or Markanda was the son of Mrukandu and Manaswini. Mrukandu did not have sons for a long time. So he performed penance for several years to please Shiva to get a son. Shiva granted a son who would live up to sixteen years. Even from boyhood Markandeya knew all the Shastras. His pleasing manners got the approval of his teachers and the boy was liked by one and all. But the parents were sad and whenever they looked at their son a gloom spread over their face. The secret of the short span of life was hidden from him. The 16th year was fast approaching and one day unable to control their grief they wept before him. Markandeya asked the reason why they wept. Father Mrukandu with tears running down his cheeks told him the story. From that day onwards Markandeya started performing penance. The boy was soon engrossed in severe



austerities. The day of his death came and the boy sat before Shiva in his form of Linga Shakti in deep meditation. The messengers of Yama, the God of death could not approach Markandeya for the radiation from him was too hot for them. They were unable to take away the life of Markandeya. Finally Yama himself came to fetch him. Then Markandeya crying loudly for help embraced the idol before him. Yama threw his rope in a loop and it went circled round the idol also. Angry Shiva rose from the idol and coming down killed Yama to save the child. From that day onwards Shiva got the names Mrityunjay and Kala-kala. After that at the request of Devas Shiva gave back life to Yama again on the condition that



the young Markandeya would live forever. Thus he made Markandeya to be of 16 years for ever. The Puranas state that after getting the blessing of Shiva, Markandeya lived for ten crores of years.

Markandeswar Temple:

Markandeswar Temple is situated about a distance of half a kilometer to the North West of Sri Jagannath Temple complex. The locality is called Markandeswar Sahi in which the temple stands for year. The exact geographical location of the temple is longitude 85°49'94" E and latitude 19°48'62" N.

The original temple here is dated back pre - Ramayana times because in the Ramayana we find the sage Markandeya as one of the Dharma Shastries in the court of King Dasarath. The present temple is erected in much deeper ground level. Most of the scholars accept that the present structure of Markandeswar Temple was constructed during the Somavanshi period of Odishan history. Pt. Kripasindhu Mishra the author of Utkal Itihas has stated that Markandeswar Temple and stairs to the tank were built by Koshala Keshari. Eminent scholar Jagabandhu Singh in his book Prachina Utkala has also mentioned that Markandeswar Temple was constructed by Koshala Keshari (Shakabda 761-785 or 740-764 AD). Madalapanji also supports the above statement. According to the opinions of the learned historian Dr.S.N.Rajaguru "Markandeswar Temple seems to be the earliest centre of Shaivacharyas in Srikshetra or Puri. The Saiva teachers of Chodaganga Deva and his family lived in that ancient temple which might have been constructed by a Sailodbhava King of Kangoda in about 7th or 8th Century AD". Prof. H.V. Stietencron has pointed out that there is some resemblance in architectural style between Markandeswar Temple and Mukteswar Temple of Bhubaneswar which belongs to 10th Century

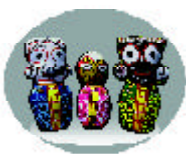
AD. The both temples must have belonged to Somavanshi rule in Odishan History.

Importance of Markandeswar Temple:

There are four prominent Ashrams or hermitages in Srikshetra connected with Srimandir rituals and Markandeyashram is one of them. The other three Ashrams are Bhruquashram, Angirashram and Kanduashram. There are five prominent Shaiva shrines known together as Panchapandavas or five brothers namely "Yameswar, Lokanath, Markandeswar, Kapalmochan and Nilakantha. Markandeswar is locally called Bhim & Arjun. It is known from the Mahabharat that five Pandav brothers during their *tirthayatra* in Vanaparva visited Yajnavedi and performed religious rites there. It is said that five Shaiva shrines were attached to memorise their arrival at Puri. There is reference in Skanda Purana Purusottama Mahatmya that this kshetra is called Shankhakshetra as it is conch shaped and at the centre stands the temple of Sri Jagannath. It is surrounded and protected by eight shrines called Astashambhus. Markandeswar is one of them. The others are Kapalmochan, Kshetrapal, Yameswar, Ishaneswar, Bilweswar and Nilakantha. As per the reference in Brahamapuran, the sage Markandeya founded this Shaiva shrines in Vishnukshetra in order to close the rivalry between Shaivas and Vaishnavas. Sri Jagannath directed Sudarshanchakra to dig a pond for Markandeya. That pond was named after Markandeya and became the Adyatirtha among the Panchatirthas viz. Markandeya tank, Swetaganga, Rohinikunda, Mahodadhi and Indradyumna tank.

Description of the temple:

According to Vastushastra the temple of Markandeswar belongs to Triratha class, Rekha order and its height is about sixty feet from the ground level. The temple is about twenty feet below the present road level. The whole structure



consists of three divisions such as Vimana, Jagamohan & Natamandap.

The structure of Vimana or main temple is facing towards east and the presiding deity is Mrityunjay Sivalinga, the temple is built in both sand stones and laterite stones which is thickly plastered with lime mortar so the decorative ornamentations are not visible outside. There are *parsvadevata* images of Ganesh & Karttikeya in the outer parts of Vimana. The sanctum preserves the Mrityunjay Lingashakti at its centre and Sivalinga is in cracked condition due to sudden appearance of Siva from Linga to save his devotee Markandeya from Yama's attack. The same incident has been depicted with a painting in one portion of inner wall. The other portion bears the picture of Sri Jagannath in his four shapes. In the front side wall the picture of Shiva in the stage of meditation is drawn in colours. The top portion of the Vimana or main temple consists of beki, Amalakasila, Khapuri, Kalasa, Chakra and Dhawaja. Dopicha lions and other figures are fixed which serve as the supporting elements of amalakasila.

The Jagamohan of the temple is a Pidha-Deula and its height is about 40 feet from the ground level of the premises. In the corner of the inner part of Jagamohan the Ishna is placed. In one side of the inner wall of Jagamohan is depicted with a painting of Rishipanchami rites in which goddess Laxmi uses to listen canons of Rishipanchami Brata from the sage Markandeya. The Jagamohan is occupied by a small stone slab which contains the legendary images of Markandeya, Mrityunjay Shiva and Yama.

In side of Natamandap the big wooden bull, the traditional mount of Markandeswar and Parvati is kept to be used on the occasion of their marriage ceremony. On the other side the wooden Vimana is placed which is used in carrying the deity for participation in Chandana Yatra.

Goddess Parvati is housed in a small temple. The upper part of the inner wall of the said temple is depicted with Dasamahabidya Viz. Kali, Tara, Sodashi, Bhubaneswari, Bhairabi, Chhinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagala, Matangi, Kamala or Raj Rajeswari. On the southern side of Jagamohan there is a Kitchen or Roshaghara and a well in front of the kitchen. There are two small temples in the premises known as Panchapandav temple and temple of Baidyanatha and Rameswar. Outside wall of the main temple contains a rare image of cat - faced Hanuman or a Marjar Hanuman, in the Valmiki Ramayan (Sundarakanda - 2nd Canto) it is stated that Hanuman entered in Ravan's harem to trace Sita in form of a cat.

In front of the main gate way entrance there is a platform called Gamha-vedi. It is connected with festive occasion of Gamhapurnima and Balabhadra Janma. By the side of Gamhavedi there is a temple of Saptamatrukas or Seven sacred mothers. In the temple the seven stone images each about four feet high kept over a platform. The seven mothers are Brahmi or Brahmani, Maheswari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Indrani and Chamunda. They are accompanied by images of Ganesh and Birabhadra Shiva. Each mother except Chamunda has her child in her lap. The temple of Sapta Matruka is one of the important Shakta shrines of Odisha. Images of Sri Jagannath, Sri Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and other deities are worshipped in a separate temple. In front of Sri Jagannath temple there is the Kaliyadalan Mandap or Boitideula. Its upper part is designed as a boat which is a rare structure in Puri. It was built by Kirtichandra, the King of Barddhaman in West Bengal in 1746 AD. By the side of Kaliyadalan Mandap there is a Dolamandap. The small temple of Dhableswar is in front of Dolamandap. On the auspicious day of Bataosha observed on the 14th day of the



bright fortnight of Kartika devotees in large numbers come to worship the deity.

Markandeswar Tank:

The temple of Markandeswar is connected with Markandeswar tank in its rituals and festivals. It is the first and one of the five sacred *tirthas* or bathing places of the pilgrims in Srikshetra. The other four *tirthas* are Swetaganga Tank, Rohini Kunda, Idradyumna Tank and Mahodadhi (Ocean). Markandeya Tank is an open structure which is enclosed within stone walls made of laterite blocks. The tank is irregular in shape and 8.5 meters below the present road level. Its sides measure 106.68 m. (350 Ft) on the northern side, 154.8385 m. (508 Ft) on the eastern side, 117.348 m. (385 Ft) in the southern side and 165.2026 m. (542 Ft) on the western side. The tank covers an area of nearly 1.6187 hectares (4.598 Acres).

It is situated in the mauza Markandeswar Sahi, Khata 668 at Plot No.136. Generally the southern side of the tank is used as the bathing Ghat by tourist & pilgrims. The tank is presently used for rituals as well as normal bathing. Rituals like obsequies, Pindadana, Tarpan and Mundana Kriya are observed at the steps of the tank. The tank is fed by natural springs from underground. Both inlet and outlet of the tank are found which serve to keep the water of the tank clean. An inlet channel in west side is found in dilapidated condition. The speciality of the tank is that there is a sacrificial altar at the centre of the tank.

Festivals & Rituals :

The festival of Ashokashtami is observed on the 8th day of bright fortnight of Chaitra (April) in the temple with great enthusiasm. Mahasivaratri in the month of Phalguna (March) and the marriage ceremony on the eve of Sheetalashasthi in the month of Jyestha (June) are celebrated here in pomp and ceremony. Markandeswar participates in Chandan Yatra at Narendra Tank

in the month of Balsakham (May) with Yameswar, Lokanath, Kapalmochan, Nilakantha, Rama and Krishna in a colourful boat. Sri Sudarshan from Srimandir arrives at Gamha Bedi on the full moon day of Shravana (August) to perform birth rites of Sri Balabhadra. Kaliadalan festival is observed in the month of Bhadraba (September). On this occasion Madanamohan, Rama and Krishna arrive at Kaliyadalan Mandap from Srimandir. Besides these special rites are performed in the temple in consonance with the rites in Sri Jagannath temple on five occasions namely Ashrama-bije, Kamada-ekadashi, Shravan-shuklanavami, Rishipanchami and Margasira Shukla Chaturdashi. Traditional sandy Linga worshipped by Neta girls belong to servitor group of Srimandir has special attraction in the shrine. At that time Neta girls with their attractive dress and gold ornaments look like Odissi dancers. The girls used to sing prayers addressed to Markandeswar, Shiva & Parvati, Sarvamangala etc.

Inscription :

Four ancient stone inscriptions are found in the Markandeswar temple premises which are of great interest to historians. Out of them two stone inscriptions pertain to the Ganga dynasty. All the four inscriptions have been edited by Dr. S.N. Rajaguru in the volume I & II entitled "inscriptions of the temples of Puri and origin of Sri Purusottam Jagannath published by Sri Jagannath Sanskrit Visvavidyalaya, Puri.

The 1st Markandeswar temple inscription was edited by Dr. D.C Sircar and Dr. S.N Rajaguru tried to rectify some of errors in his reading. Its language is Sanskritised Odia and the script belongs to North-east Indian Kutilalipi. Its length & width are 31" and 12" respectively. The inscription states that in the 57th auspicious and victorious reign of Chodagangadev, a perpetual lamp to burn before Markandeswar (excluding)



a half of Nirolagram belonged to Purusottam, (the other half is donated) to its resident who accepted the Eka-Chhaya. The service charter was made under the witness of Mudrahasta Devadhara, Nilakantha Pushpalak and Sevaka Narayana Somajaji.

The 2nd inscription is written in Sanskrit language in North Indian script. The text covers five lines having measurement of 14 ½" x 8". The present inscription states that in Magha and the bright fortnight of sixth *tithi* and in holy Friday, his brother Veera – Pramadiraja granted some property to the Saivacharyas in the temple of Markandeswar. Pramadiraja is the younger brother of Chodagangadev and his brother was associated with and appeared in battles of Utkal and Bangi in between 1112 & 1152 A.D., for long 40 years.

The 3rd is Panchapandav temple inscription which is written in mixed script of Devanagari and Bengali. The inscription is not clear but from three lines it is known that this small temple was built by Nanaji, the Maratha chief and his minister Munjaji who appointed to masons named Sutradhar Sagaranga & Bhimandas. The temple was constructed when Puri was under Maratha rule from 1751 to 1803 AD.

The 4th inscription is Kaliyadalanmandap or Boitideula inscription which is five lined and written in Odia script and Sanskrit language. Its time is 1667 Sakabda or 1745 AD. The inscription states that King Harekrushna Singh cleaned the Markandeswar Tank and constructed steps to the tank. He built the Mandap and called himself Keertichandra.

Conclusion :

There are three famous Markandeswar Temples in India and Markandeswar temple of Puri is one of them. The other two temples are in Karnatak state. The Markandeswar temple of Kaloor in Manvi taluk, Raichur district, Karnatak

is surrounded on all sides by granite hills which are full of antiquities. The temple noted for its beautifully carved pillars is the prominent attraction. The other Markandeswar temple is a very old place with natural beauty. It is a good tourist spot in the district of Gadchiroli, popularly known as Kashi of Vidarbha. As per the description of the Brahmapurana, Skandapurana, Bamadeva Samhita and Niladrimahodaya etc. Markandeswar temple of Puri is connected with tank is very important from the cultural, religious, historical and architectural point of view. The same temple is supposed to be the place where the young Markandeya worshipped Shiva in order to win over his destiny. This is where Shiva fought with Yama and blessed Markandeya. The temple of Yameswar in Puri is the place where Yama worshipped Shiva and built a temple there. Srikshetra is the place where Markandeya saw Balamukunda. As a Shaiva shrines its importance is equal to Yameswar and Lokanath temple. The available sculptures in the temple premises indicate that they were made in different periods of administrations. The temple and tank are closely connected with some of the rituals of Srimandira. Markandeswar tank is 1st amongst five holy *tirthas* of Srikshetra.

References:

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