



Critical Discussion on Tulasi Kshetra

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Kendrapara, popularly known as Tulasi Kshetra, occupies a prominent place in the religious map of Odisha for the magnificent temple of Baladevjew. Tulasi was the daughter of demon Kandara. As the demon became tyrannical and the people suffered a lot, God Balabhadra killed him. By the request of his daughter Tulasi, Balabhadra married her and the place became famous as 'Tulasi Kshetra' after Tulasi.¹

Historians debate on Tulasi Kshetra. The name might have been derived from Tosali. N.K.Sahu states that Lokavighraha, a Vighraha king changed the name of 'Kalinga Rashtra' to 'Dakshina Toshali'.² He further states that around 600 A.D. northern Tosali extended from the river Kapisa to Mahanadi and Southern Tosali extended from river Mahanadi to Rishikulya. Both the Toshalis remained under Sambhuyasa and Lokavighraha, respectively.³ However, around 602-03 A.D. Sambhuyasa

succeeded in unifying both the Tosalis. From this Tosali, it is suggested that the term Tulasi is derived.⁴ Of course, the fact is not tenable.

Another reference to Tulasi Kshetra is found from Sarala Dasa's *Mahabharata*. He was a poet of the 15th Century and most probably

served in the army of Kapilendradeva. There after he became a saint and composed the *Mahabharata* in Odia language. He might have composed this epic amidst Tulasi-garden and named this place as 'Tulasadevapura' which later on

became famous as Tulasi Kshetra. It is worthwhile to quote a stanza from his *Mahabharata*.⁵

*Tulasadevapura je puni Bhrata khanda
Jambu Rashtra Odra Rashtra Svarna Maratanda
It means :*

"There are many places like Tulasidevapura, Bhrata Khanda, Jambu Rashtra, Odra Rastra and Golden Martanda".





The fact can be analysed with caution. It is learned that there were many Tulasi trees near the Baladevjew temple in the past. Even today a garden exists near the temple which contains Tulasi trees and it is famous as 'Tulasi Kanana' (Tulasi Garden). It is probable that amidst the Tulasi trees, he was writing his epic and must have given the name Tulasidevapura' from which 'Tulasi Kshetra' has been derived.

Bipra Madhuri, a poet of Sixteen Century Odisha also refers to Tulasi Kshetra. In his book, *Tulasikshetra Mahatmya*, he states⁶

*Kandara Atmaja Karane
Kshetra Rachilu Prabhu tene
E Brahmakshetra Pratisthita
Tulsikshetra Name Kshyata*

It means:

“For the sake of the daughter of Kandara (demon), you created this land (*Brahmakshetra*) which became very famous as *Tulasikshetra*”.

Here, a fact can be discerned that Sarala Dasa who was flourished earlier to this poet had mentioned Kendrapara as “Tulasadevapura”. Poet Bipra Madhuri named this place as Tulasikshetra. A suggestion can be made here that in the 4th-5th Century A.D., Balabhadra who was the State deity and had lost its importance, was again made popular around 15th-16th Century A.D. Further, the name 'Bipra' prefixed to Madhuri suggests that the poet was a Brahmin. During 15th-16th Century A.D., there was also a need for the Brahmins to revive Baladeva or Balabhadra Cult in Odisha due to obvious reasons.⁷ Thus, Kendrapara became famous as Tulasi Kshetra from around 15th-16th Century A.D.

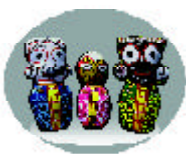
Tulasi Kshetra and Kendrapara are interchangeable terms. Very often Tulasi Kshetra is described as Kendrapara. There are also various opinions regarding the derivation of the terms 'Kendrapara'. The episode of demon



Kandara has been cited. Some opine that the term 'Kendrapara' has been derived from the name of 'Kandarasura'.⁸

It is very interesting to note that the present place names centering to Kendrapara are known according to the names of the fallen body parts of the demon king.⁹ Such as Asureswar is derived from the fallen cut head (*Asura Sira*) of the demon. Balagandi is derived from the fallen *gandi* (trunk) of the demon (i.e. Kandara Padi) Kamar-Khandi is derived from the fallen *Kamara* (waist). *Navi Khanda* or Lahakhanda is derived from his fallen *Navi* (Naval) of the demon. Angulai is derived from the fallen Anguli (finger) of the demon. Besides these places God Baladev founded some Siva temples (Asthasambhu) over the other fallen parts of the demon like Swapneswar Siva Temple at Kantia, Bileswar Siva Temple at Kajala, Amareswar temple at Gopa, Kapaleswar Temple at Garapur, Rameswar at Biraswati, Lankeswar temple at Gualsingh, Arteswar Temple at Jagannathpur (Nilakanthapur) and Garveswar Siva Temple where demon's body parts like feet, neck and waist (part) were fallen. The demon's body (*Gandi*) is buried at Balagandi which is proper Kendrapara.

Some research scholars have formed the opinion that Kandarasura who lived near Chandikhole was not a demon but an ardent Buddha arhat (follower of Buddhism) and a



tantric. He was a leader of a aboriginal race like Kondha (Kondharasura). According to his name the place name “Kandharapara” or ‘Kendraparah’ has been derived.¹⁰ But other scholars think differently that the name, Kendrapara is derived from the word “Kendara” (one kind of musical instrument made of gourd) and ‘para’ means hamlet of a village. This instrument is played by some sects of people called Nath Jogi (Yogi), who earns his livelihood by playing ‘Kendara’ and by moving from door to door for alms.¹¹

After the advent of the new Nathism, some sects of people adopted Nathism and called themselves Natha or Natha Yogi. It is worth mentioning here that one ancient stone image of Machhendranath, one of the chief preacher of Nath cult is worshipped at Rajnagar (Pattamundai). It is understood from an inscription on the body of this image that Nath Cult was prevalent in Kendrapara area during 9th Century A.D. The descendants of Nath family are now living in area surrounding Kendrapara at Ichhapur (Kendrapara) Choudakulat, Taradipal (Pattamundai), Chandiapalli (Aul), Nikirai, Kashati, Chandol, Rajnagar, Derabis etc and Kendrapara being its Kendra (Centre) the name derived Kendrapada or Kendrapara.¹²

Another thing to be noted that the word ‘Kendrapara’ is derived from the word ‘Kendra Palli’. In ancient times, it was a centre (*Kendra*) of business. People carried on their trade and commerce from this place to other places through the 3 important rivers of Odisha which flow on the soil of Kendrapara. They are the Mahanadi, the Brahmani and the Baitarani. There were some villages (Palli) on the banks of the rivers. The soil was rich and fertile. There was bumper production of fine rice, ghee, salt, fish, fine clothes etc. There is a river named Gobari near Kendrapara town which helped the people to carry on their business. There was another river named Madhusagar (dead)

near Kendrapara town which in ancient times helped a lot the people for business. Some remains of boats, ships, Buddhist statues have been discovered from that dead Madhusagar. It indicates that Kendrapara was a centre of business. Since it was the centre (*Kendra*) of business in the coastal area of Odisha, it was known as “Kendrapara”.

There is another river named Chitrotapala which flows through this district. It touches Jagatsinghpur district. It has been suggested that *Che-li-ta-lo* port was somewhere on the river bank of Chitrotapala in Jagatsinghpur district, adjacent to Kendrapara.

In this connection, Hiuen Tsang’s accounts can be analysed. He mentions that *Che-li-ta-lo* was a Port of Odra.¹³ It was a great port of Buddhist importance. It was situated on the sea coast. From his account, it is known that Charitra was not only a prosperous port but also a centre of Buddhism and it contained four Buddhist *stupas*. It was a rendezvous for merchants who embarked on the sea and for others from distant places who travelled here and there. The Simhala (Sri Lanka) was about 20,000 li to the south of *Che-li-ta-lo*. Standing on the seashore of this city in a calm and tranquil night, one could see the brilliant light from the pearl of the *stupa* over Lord Buddha’s relic in Simhala.

Cunningham¹⁴ identifies *Che-li-ta-lo* with Puri and most of the scholars accept this view. In recent years endeavours are being made to identify it with a place near Chandbali in Bhadrak district or Tirtol in Jagatsinghpur or with a village named Manikpatna on the bank of Chilka lake. However, to the present writer, *Che-li-ta-lo* might be a place near Diamond Triangle (Lalitgiri, Ratnagiri and Udayagiri) from Chandikhole in the present Jajpur district towards Paradip Port which was during the visit of Hiuen Tsang, a Buddhist Centre. Except this place, no place discussed earlier contains Buddhist remains.



The discussion on *Che-li-ta-lo* by Hiuen Tsang gives thought for analysis as Kendrapara. The place *Che-li-ta-lo* was a resting place of the merchants who traded in that area. If *Che-li-ta-lo* can be a port located near Chitrotpala of Jagatsinghpur district, it is definite that the merchants must be resting in a village (Para) which is nearer to that port. Since, Kendrapara is very nearer to Jagatsinghpur, the possibility of its location near *Che-li-ta-lo* cannot be ruled out. Since, it was a centre (*Kendra*) of business and the merchants remained in Village (Para), with tolerable degree of certainty, it can be stated that the name 'Kendrapara' has been derived from these two words – 'Kendra'/Centre of business and 'Para' (living place of Merchants).

Tulasi Kshetra looks like Tulasi leaf (holy basil). God Sri Baldev likes Tulasi (holy basil) very much. Tulasi can be used in two senses. One Tulasi is the wife of Balabhadra and another Tulasi is *holy basil*. The second statement is the most appropriate. Tulasi is used in every rite and ritual of God Sri Baladev. Without Tulasi Bhoga (offerings) cannot be named as *Mahaprasad*. The gods live near Tulasi tree and that place is the sacred. It is said:¹⁵

Tulasyam Sakala Deva Vasanti Satatam Yata.
Atastamarchayelokal Sarban Devan Samarchayan.

It means :

"In Tulasi (holy basil) dwell all the Gods. So, for the worship of Gods, human being use those leaves."

Tulasi leaf has medicinal values. Man recovers from illness like cold, cough, asthma, indigestion etc. by taking Tulasi leaf as a medicine. It is an Ayurvedic medicine which heals many diseases.

It is very interesting to note that Kendrapara is termed as Tulasi Kshetra. The historical debates among the historians continues

regarding its name. However, one thing can be surely discerned that due to the august presence of God Baladev, this place has figured prominently in the religious history of Odisha.

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3. Ibid, p.22.
4. N.Mahalik, 'Balabhadra Upasana and Tulasi Kshetra', in *Orissa Review*, July, 2005, p.39.
5. Sarala Das, *Mahabharata*, (Adyaparva), Cuttack, 1973, p.57.
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