Since time immemorial, Kendrapara has been most sacred soil for Hindus. Year in and out, over countries, streams of pilgrims flowed into this land. Tulasi Kshetra, the Adobe of Tulasi is the ancient name for Kendrapara. It has come to the present stage by the inner current of religious consciousness of the then ‘Tosala’ state. It changed its name in stages as Gupta Kshetra, Brahma Kshetra, Kendrapalli, Kandarnagar, Kandharapadhi at various point of time. At present it is known as Kendrapara, the centre of a great cultural heritage.

LOCATION:

Kendrapara, the oldest Sub-division and the Municipality of Odisha is situated between 20° 18’N and 20°.49’E latitude and 86°.25’E to 87°.1’E longitude. Kendrapara town stands as the epic centre of this vast alluvial plain at 20°.30’E latitude and 86°.25’E longitude as area stretches from the Bay of Bengal in the east to Asia mountain range in the west, the river Vaitarani in the North and the Mahanadi valley in the south. The average annual rainfall varies from 59”.47’ to 150 cm. Enriched by numerous rivers, rivulets and forests Kendrapara occupies a unique place for pride of its own. It is now widely believed that before 2000 years, the entire area was submerged in the Bay of Bengal. Due to change of the course of river Mahanadi a horse shoe lake came into existence and later transformed into alluvial plain. Washed in the south by the rivers like Mahanadi and its distributaries and in the north by the Brahmani river system, the economic status of the entire plain has been enriched due to bumper production of food grains. Sri Siddha Baladev is the Presiding Deity of Kendrapara, Tulasikshetra. This Deity represents the agricultural pastoral activities of the two great communities that inhabit the vicinity. Lord Baladev, the symbol of agriculture and war, was worshipped by one milk-man Siddha Das, who comes of a native village Kuhudi. The legend says that worship of Lord Baladev was the culmination of the
religious war between the Aryans and the aboriginals. Lord Baladev the elder brother of Lord Krishna was the popular Lord of Aryans. It was quite obvious that cultural war ensued between the then ruler of the area, ‘Kandharasura’s great sage of the Buddhistic ‘Arhata’. He was the representative of the ‘Adivasi’ Kandha and ‘Uria’ Kandha culture. In the cultural trustee the Aryans gained control over Baladev worship where the present Juma Masjid and the post office of Kendrapara stand. In order to keep Lord Baladev away from the anger of the aggressors, the Deity was worshipped for several years near to ‘Sakhibata’ by the side of the river Luna, a distributary of the Mahanadi.

OLD TEMPLE OF THE DEITY:

At first the deity Baladev was venerated in ‘Chaturasramandapa’ with Tulasi during the reign of Maharani Kalyani. Then the temple was erected by Jajati Keshari in 10th Century who had dug a large tank, known as ‘Mavoi’ Puskarini, which still exists near present District Hospital. Historians say that a big temple was built by the king Ananga Bhima Dev III for Lord Baladev for spreading Jagannath cult in the 13th century A.D. The magnificent Rekhadeula of the 13th century was destroyed first by Kalapahad. Then the newly built temple was destroyed completely in 1661 A.D. The cause of destruction of the temple was that Baladev was not paying Jijja Kara to the Centre. Most probably this religious tradition in this vast alluvial area began in the 3rd or 4th century acquiring agricultural essence and roots. Circumstances brought Lord Baladev as the leader or pioneer of agriculture and war. That’s why symbolically a plough and saunanda ‘Musala’ adorn his hand.

PRESENT TEMPLE:

The present temple at Ichhapur was built in 1670 A.D. by the combined efforts of the feudal rulers of Kujanga and Chhedera namely Gopali Narendra Sandha and Srinivas Narendra respectively. It was then only BATADEULA and at a later stage, the present Tri Deula (main temple). Bedha and Gundicha temple were constructed by Marhattas through the endeavours of Saint Gopi Das during 1770-73 A.D.

DESCRIPTION OF DEITY:

Lord Baladev ‘was worshipped with Revati and Tulasi. Yellow coloured Tulasi indicates sense and style. Atibadi Jagannath Das had lived for some years in his Oriya Matha and brought change to the deity and the mode of worship. This was the centre of ‘Jnanamishra Bhakti’, then after Sri Chaitanya’s frequent visit every year Prema Bhakti was added to it. Then the Sadabhuja Gauranga was installed in the temple as a mark of Prema Bhakti alias Gaudiya Bhakti. Besides that, as it may Baladev and Tulasi turned to Baladevjev and Subhadra and statue of Lord Jagannath was added to it in accordance with the tradition of Puri Srikshetra. The deity Baladev was embellished and worshipped first by Indradyumna. According to the Skanda Purana, king Indradyumna came from Avanti and met Udaraja at night after which he started for a visit to Nilamadhaba worshipping. Baladev here in ‘Dhatu Kandar Aranya’; Eyes of bigger size bear testimony of its time older in comparison of Lord Jagannath. Prior to Nilamadhaba, one Mudgal Madhaba was worshipped in the “Dhatu Kandara’ forest to the north of ‘Chitrotelpa’ (Mahanadi). It indicates that Baladev who was adored by Milkman community has older antiquity.

SRI CHAITANYA IN KENDRAPARA:

Sri Chaitanya visited Kendrapara with his followers. They stayed in Chhedera, at present known as Baranga, for five days and took ‘nabanna’ (new rice) in the month of Margasira’
(November) then was transported to Bengal. When Sri Chaitanya came to Orissa particularly to Puri, Srikrshetra and stayed for eighteen years, at that time he used to come to pay homage to Lord Baladev and to spread his ‘Sankirtana Rasa’ or spiritual hymn and returned with his disciples to Nilachala Dham just before the ‘Snana Purnima’. He was very much pleased in holy Tulasikshetra for its name and paid obeisance to Tulasi plants everywhere. This name is popular.

SANTHA GOPIDAS:

Santha Gopi Das who had constructed the main temple, Deula Bedha and Gundicha Mandira of Baldevjew. He came to this place in 1728 AD as a pilgrim with ‘Yamayata’ from North. He came across Baladev in a jungle, in a very simple and poor temple. Then he spread no pains for worship of the deity in a dignified manner. Then Santha Gopi Das met Raghujee Bhonsale after Marahattas captured Cuttack in 1751. Raghujee granted twelve “Petal Bahel” to Santha Gopi Das in 1790 AD in favour of Lachhmanjee and Raghunathjee of Kusiapal. Actually villages were not granted for Baladevjee but to Raghunathjee of Ichhapur Matha and Lachhamanjee, for which he could mobilize him to grant some villages for the management of the deity. In fact Gopi Das was the architect of the entire temple complex and solely responsible for advancement of the Kshetra and its popularity growing gradually and steadily. From 1728 AD till 1942 AD ‘Mahantei’ system of administration ran smoothly.

MANAGEMENT:

During the reign of Marhatta, according to the directive of British Govt. in 1810 AD, the property of Endowment merged in Revenue Board but the ‘Mahanta’ of the Matha remained as caretaker (Marfatdar) of that property and deities from 1730 to 1942 AD. In succession about nine ‘Mahants’ remained in charge of the temple and worship of the deity in 1863 ‘Pancha Committee’ that consists of five members, managed the temple and looked after its rituals. The first Pancha “committee headed by Radhashyam Narendra (1796-1877) managed the various rituals of the deity smoothly. The temple did not remain as only a religious holy place but became a living institution affecting different aspects of social life. Its influence spread far and wide and could form an indelible impact on mass mind and bound these together.

HOLINESS:

In spite of the fact that Buddhism had a strong base in this part of the land, yet Vaishnavism also had a considerable grip over the people. Thus tantric Buddhism and new Saivite traits got assimilated into this Kshetra, which is evident everywhere in Orissa. Those Brahmins settled in Odisha might have started worshipping the deity about two or three hundred years ago. Before the arrival of the Brahmins, all the deities were being worshipped by aboriginal or Abheera, Aheera or herdsmen. Thus the cultural stream of the place acquired complexity and diversity. Tulas Kshetra is believed to be as important as Puri Srikrshetra because of religious conviction that pilgrimage to Lord Jagannath is not complete if it is not followed by a visit to Lord Baladevjee. Lord Baladev is the excuser and Saviour of Jagannath. He grants pardon to those who come to this place after a visit to Jagannath. So Siddha Baladev is admired as Badathakura or elder brother.

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