

## A Study on Sacred Centre of *Paknapat* in the Mayurbhanj District of Odisha

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine the sacred centre of *Paknapat* located in the mountain near *Kainpur* village of *Jamda Block* in the district of *Mayurbhanj*, *Odisha*. The sacred centre has been presented in this paper in the framework of the theory of sacred complex of *L.P. Vidyarthi*. The God *Paknapat* has been worshipped by the *Bhumij* tribe since 400 years. The place is well known for fulfilment of individual as well as family desires through the worship known as “*Mansik*”. The *Paknapat* is also considered as the regional deity under which 52 villages worship for village level agricultural activities. The place makes no discrimination in terms of entry and worship. Both men and women not only from tribal community, but also non-tribal communities irrespective of different religions are allowed. Over the period of time, certain changes in terms of sacred performances are observed. Though the elements of little traditions are still dominating, but certain elements of great tradition especially of the Hinduism are visible at present in the sacred performances.

**Keywords:** Sacred Complex, *Paknapat*, *Jamda Pir*, *Mayurbhanj*, Sacred Centre

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## Introduction

In a broader sense the term “sacred” is primarily used as “synonym for religion or religious, to denote transcendental reality and in reference to things set apart with special meaning” (Evans, 2003). Durkheim stated that “all known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristics: they presuppose a classification of all things into two classes or opposed groups ... profane and sacred” (1951:52). The context and meaning of the term sacred varies from culture to culture. A plant may be a sacred entity for one group but it may be a simple plant for another group. For scientific understanding of the meaning of sacred centre, detailing of the definition of ‘sacred complex’ given by *L.P. Vidyarthi* is essential. According to *Vidyarthi* (1961), “a sacred complex is

intricate and interdependent grouping of sacred centres, sacred performances and sacred specialists and is in cultural-structural relationship with the whole Hindu civilization". Vidyarthi further said that "sacred centre represent a single spot where a sacred performance takes place. It is considered as the "smallest unit of worship, represented by an image, river, tank or tree" (1961:6). Vidyarthi borrowed the idea of sacred complex from the concepts of "great traditions", "little traditions" and "cultural specialists" of Robert Redfield (1961: xv) and the concepts of "cultural media", "cultural performance" and "cultural stages" of Milton Singer (1961:xvi). Vidyarthi replaced the term "cultural" with "sacred" and developed the concepts of "sacred geography", "sacred performance" and "sacred specialist" to discuss the sacred complex in Hindu Gaya. He also introduced few terms such as "sacred cluster", "sacred segment", and "sacred zone" to describe the sacred centres (1961: xx). Every sacred centre has a sacred geography, sacred performances and sacred specialists. It can be man-made structures like temple and also a natural setting like a mountain, hill or river where sacred performances are performed by the specialists.

Numbers of anthropological and sociological studies have been conducted on sacred complex in India and neighbouring countries. The notable works are Sacred Complex in Hindu Gaya by L.P. Vidyarthi (1961), Jha on Janakpur (1971), sacred complex in Kathamandu by M. Jha (1995), Mahapatra on Lingaraj (1971), Narayan on Deoghar and by Vidyarthi et. al. on Kashi (1972), S. Acharya on Puri (1997) and Sacred Complex of Ujjain by D.K. Samanta (1997). D.K. Samanta (ibid) examined the complexities of the pilgrimage centre that is the city of Ujjain in the Malva region of Madhya Pradesh. He emphasized on Ujjain as an important focal point of regional wheel of moving pilgrims and sacred business as well. Present paper is an account of the Sacred Centre of Paknapat located at Kainpur village in the Jamda Block of Mayurbhanj district in the state of Odisha. The major objectives of the study are to unravel the historical background of the Sacred Centre of Paknapat. The study also critically discusses the sacred geography, sacred specialist and sacred performances in the Paknapat. Further an attempt has been made to analyze the socio-religious and economic significance of the sacred centre.

### History of Paknapat

The narration on the history of Paknapat by the principal priest of the sacred centre of Paknapat reveals that the tribal communities have been worshipping the Baba Paknapat since last 400 years. The two brothers from Bhumij tribe, *Kate Bhumij* and *Pate Bhumij* started the worship. They lived in Halmat village in Sindhum District of the Jharkhand State. They used to cultivate different crops in their agriculture field. Since the location of the village was near the hill, different wild animals used to destroy the crops frequently. They were very concerned about the destruction of crops by wild animals because their survival was depending on the crops they harvest. They thought of creating a trap to catch the animals and eat the meat. They created a trap to kill the animal. They fixed bow and arrow in the field which would automatically hit the animal when entering into the agricultural field. At night they were hiding near the field to watch the animal to be hit by the arrow. Both the brothers fall asleep in the night. In the mid night elder brother heard a sound of 'tik tik'. Immediately he woke up and saw an animal was running away from agricultural field. He shouted loudly, which made younger brother to woke up. Both the brothers went to see the animal where the trap was planted. They could see the blood drops of the injured animal and decided to trace. But the problem was they did not have lantern or lamps. Anyway they started searching the animal following the blood drops. Night became morning, but they could not find the animal. But they continued the search. In the journey, they crossed Jharkhand border and entered into the Odisha province. The village they reached was

Muskudur located very close to the present day Paknapat Mountain. Finally they spotted the injured animal hiding in the hollow point of a big banyan tree located near the Muskudur village. They tried to catch the animal but again failed. The animal was very badly injured and legs became completely amputated and merged with the body. The animal managed to run into the cave which is even today located in the mountain of Paknapat. They waited near the cave in anticipation the animal would come out. The day became night. They were so tired that both of them again fall asleep. The elder brother had a dream. The “East God” came in dream and said that “if you worship me, you would not have any problem in farming as well as in the family, I am Baba Paknapat. From today onwards, the people of your family will worship me”. The elder brother woke up and he was very worried and anxious. Then he shared all the details of dream with his younger brother and decided to start worshipping Paknapat.

### Methodology

The present qualitative study has adopted different anthropological methods for primary data collection. The study was conducted in month of February- April, 2020. The methods used for data collection were interview, observation and case study method. The key informants were the priests and members of management committee of the Paknapat. Through interview, the historical background of the Paknapat was unravelled. Apart from that, interview method was instrumental in understanding sacred geography, structure and also the roles and responsibilities of sacred specialists as well as details of sacred performances. Weekly visitors were also interviewed to understand their perspective on the Paknapat. Observation of weekly sacred performances and annual *Jantal* worship was done and verified the data on sacred ingredients, process of worship as well as the sacrifice of animals which was collected through interview method. Case Study method was applied specifically to collect data from the visitors to understand the unique experiences and the purposes of visits.

### Mayurbhanj King and the Sacred Centre of Paknapat

Before India’s independence, the Mayurbhanj province was ruled by the Bhanjadeo dynasty. In different geographical locations of Mayurbhanj, there used to be *Rajkosh* (Centre or branch offices where taxes were collected and deposited by the King’s men). A village called Belpush was one of the Rajkosh which is located in the Jamda block of Mayurbhanj district. In the year 1882, the King of Mayurbhanj Raja Sri Ramchandra Bhanjadeo visited the Rajkosh from Rairangpur with his officials. During that time no roads were there and area was covered with dense forest. When the King was returning way back to the palace sitting on the elephant, a big branch fell down from the tree. And the place where the incident took place was near the Paknapat Mountain. The king thought it might be sign of problems ahead. So he stopped and asked his minister whether any abode of God or Goddess nearby. Someone said the Bhumij community worship in the Mountain. King immediately ordered his men to call the tribe who worship. Two people from the Bhumij community came. The King told them to worship on their behalf, so that they would reach safely to the palace. The Bhumij tribe immediately worshipped to the Baba Paknapat on behalf of the King. After that king proceeded to the palace and arrived safely. The King was very happy that he had come home safely. The King decided to go to the place again. The King’s two sons, Purnachandra and Pratapchandra, also visited that place. As per the current priest, during the visit of king and his sons, they said that the deity is the God *Narasingha Nath*. From that day the worship of the King’s house was also included in the sacred performances of the Paknapat. At the advice of the King, nearby 52 villages were brought under the worship. Since then, “*Babon mouza*” (52 villages) have been worshipping in the Dhulia puja (details presented in the subsequent section).



### Sacred Geography of the Paknapat

God Paknapat is worshipped in the mountain located near the Kainpur (Koyong) village. In terms of sacred geography, the entire mountain is considered sacred. The place does not have any modern temple structure. God Paknapat is worshipped in the cave like structure naturally made of big rocks. Along with main deity of Paknapat, other deities of nearby forests are also worshipped. Earlier only stones were being worshipped, but at present few idols of animals like horse and elephant can be seen at the worshipping place. A cave, the entrance of which at present is blocked by a stone is considered extremely sacred which is located at the middle of the worshipping place. It is believed that there is a palace inside where lions, big snakes and deities reside. There is a sacred well (fountain) in the mountain, the water never dries. The common visitors are not allowed to use the water of the well. Only priests use the water during sacred performances. The other important sacred structure is the un-deciphered engravings (rock painting) in the rocks which is located in the northern direction of the mountain. The people of the nearby villages never hunt animals and also do not cut any tree of the Paknapat Mountain.



Main place of worship



2<sup>nd</sup> Place of worship



Sacred Fountain

### Sacred Specialists

The sacred performances at *Paknapat* are performed by priest from the Bhumij tribe. The main priest is called as “*Mulo Dehury*” and next to main priest is “*Upo Dehury*”. Currently the main priest position is occupied by Balaram Hembram and the Upo Dehury is Samay Hembram. In the category of priest, there are all together 35 priests in the *Paknapat* out of which 18 are elderly persons and remaining others are younger generations. All are from the Bhumij tribe of Kainpur village. The position of the priest is hereditary. The major sacred performances are done by the Mulo Dehury and Upo Dehury. The others assist them in different ritual activities.

The other categories of specialists are the persons who sacrifice the animals offered to Baba *Paknapat*. They are five in numbers. There is specific site for sacrifice of the animals. Whenever any desire or wishes of the people are fulfilled, they bring the animal especially male sheep but sometimes goat and chicken as well. After completion of worship at the main section, they bring the offered animals to the place of sacrifice which is located just below the main place of worship. A man holds the animal; second man ties the animal in a wooden pole, third man fix the animal’s neck on the specially designed wooden pole (*janto*). The fourth man beheads the animal with a sacred cutting axe known as ‘*kapi*’. The last man allows the devotees to the place of sacrifice one by one. The sacred specialists wear white dhoti and white banyan. The women who participate as volunteers from the puja committee also wear white saree with red borders with bow and arrow designs. They believe that white symbolizes peace. The main priest and the deputy priest observe certain rules and regulations. They do not touch unclean or polluted objects until the worship is completed. They also do not take or eat food before the sacred performances. In the past, girls were not allowed to worship in the Dhulia puja. Initially only the village level worship was being done. Perhaps in course of time, the villagers of Kainpur might have started to address individual or family problems with the supernatural blessings of *Paknapat* which gradually spread to other villages. Since people are experiencing different problems of health, employment and education and many other types of problems. Women were not allowed initially because of monthly menstruation which is considered polluted by the tribal society in the study area. Later on they were allowed to visit the place subject to they are pure. That means they will not visit the places during the menstruation. Or if someone



intentionally visits the place during this period, some sort of supernatural punishment will be given to that woman.

### Sacred Performances

The sacred performances include different types of offerings, fire rituals, prayers, and recitations, observance of some sacraments and festivals, sacred baths, water offerings, artistic and dramatic performances etc. Singer (1955:26-27) has referred to such activities as “cultural performances” which L.P. Vidyarthi described them as “sacred performances” (1961:30). Sacred performances in the Paknapat can be divided into two categories. First one is weekly worship on every Sunday and the second one is an annual worship during *Jantal* festival and *Nuakhai* puja. As mentioned in the previous section, the place is open for visitors once in a week i.e. on Sunday. On every Sunday the main priest (Mula Dehury) and deputy priest purify the places of worship with sacred water of fountain which is located in the Paknapat Mountain. After that, ingredients used for the worship are prepared by the assistant priests. The ritual ingredients are coconut, sweet (lodu), banana, vermilion, incense stick, turmeric powder, sandalwood powder, dipa, ghee, oil, sacred water in a jug, milk and different flowers. Traditionally, the ingredients used were only sundried rice and vermilion as used by the tribal communities in different rituals practices. Cow dung is used for cleaning of the floor of the place of worship. Kings visit to the place added ingredients of the Hindu religion. First of all, the main priest and deputy priest perform worship starting with Baba Paknapat. When that is completed, the visitors who have come to the place with different personal problems are allowed to the place of worship. Two categories of people come to the place. One category comes with different individual or family problems and they worship to resolve by doing a *Manasik* (vow). Priest asks them why they have come and ask them to directly request the Baba Paknapat to resolve the issue or fulfil the wishes. During that period people vow to offer the deity either sheep (one or two), goat or chicken if their problems or issues get resolve. The second categories of the visitors are those whose problems have been resolved after worshipping at Paknapat. They come with the animal which they had promised to offer. The process of worship in this case slightly differs. They need to register at the counter and a token number is allotted. They present the animal and inform the priest for which they are offering. Then priest performs the worship by presenting it to the Baba Paknapat. When that is completed, the offered animal is taken to the place of sacrifice. Previously, one buffalo was being sacrificed once in every five years. Due to government intervention, the buffalo sacrifice discontinued at the Paknapat. But the sacrifice of other animals such as male sheep (*gadra*), black male goat (*boda*) and cock of different colours are prevalent today.

### Pakna Jantal

Pakna Jantal is an annual worship. Two different types of worships are performed, one is called Dhulia Jantal festival and the other one is Nuakhai Jantal festival. Jantal means worship. Dhulia puja is performed during the rainy season in the month of Asadha Akadasi (September). It is also called Asaliya puja. 52 villages (babon mouza) participate in the worship (details in subsequent section). Apart from worship, a fair is also organised where large number of visitors participate. Committee members prepare a master plan well in advance and distribute duties and responsibilities.

### Ritual of the Jantal:

Sacred performances during the Jantal start with purification of the place of worship and sacred bathing of the deity. For this the two leading priests bring water from sacred well and consecrate the place

with cow dung as it is done most of the time in the tribal rituals. After purifying the place, the aruya rice flour is used for preparation of symbolic depiction (Akhandamandal) in the place. Inside that circle, the name of Gods, tree and animals are written. Vermilion and turmeric powder are also used in the process. After that incense stick and dipo are lighted. Then the ghoto (small earthen pot) filled with sacred water from the fountain is placed in the place of worship. The ingredients for the worship are arua rice, vermilion, flowers and garlands, coconut, banana, sweets and batasa. Looking at the ingredients, it seems that Hinduism has slightly entered into the sacred performances. After initial worship by the priests, offerings from 52 villages are presented to Paknapat one by one. Representative of 52 villages bring a male sheep (that means 52 sheep are sacrificed annually) which are sacrificed for welfare of the village with special reference to agriculture. The sheep are beheaded at a place just below the main worshipping place. The committee keeps heads of the animal and body is handed over to the respective villages. Sacrificed head meats are considered very sacred and only selective people can eat. The priests and assistants who are in the fasting can only eat the head meat. During the Pakna Jantal, people from neighbouring villages participate in large numbers. During this time all the visitors are allowed to climb upto the hill top of Paknapat Mountain. So far no accidents or injuries have been reported from the place during Jantal fair. No wild animals, insects or snakes are visible during this time. People strongly believe that God Paknapat protects all the visitors not only from wild animals but also from accidents in the Mountain. Most of the people whose wishes and problems have been resolved after worshipping at Paknapat prefer to give the Manasika during Jantal fair. Apart from the sacred performances, below the Mountain, a fair is organised where different types of shop stalls are allowed with the permission of committee. Committee collects certain amount of money from the stalls which are used for developmental activities of the Paknapat.

### **Nuakhai Puja**

This is second category of annual worship performed in the Paknapat. In the native term this sacred performance is called “*Namajom*” or “*Jom nawa*” which means new eating or first eating of new harvested crops. First offering is given to the God Paknapat after harvest. They bring rice from 52 villages which are offered in the name of the villages. Rice beer is also offered in either shal leaves cups or *bhalia* leaves cups. The Bhalia leaves are used for the prevention of diseases. In return people pray for good health as well. The tribal communities in the study area also worship and offer first fruits, flowers and crops to the deities in their respective sacred groves. During this worship, participation is restricted to the people of Kainpur and representatives of the 52 villages. So gathering of devotee are less in comparison to the Jantal festival.

### **Socio-Economic and Religious Significance**

The sacred centre of Paknapat comes under the traditional political jurisdiction of Jamda Pir. All together 52 villages constitute Jamda Pir (inter village tribal council). Most of the villages are tribal villages and settled agriculture is the principal source of livelihood. With the order of the then Mayurbhanj King, the 52 villages were included for certain specific worship related to agricultural activities. Once in every year 52 villages worship to Baba Paknapat for the following purposes: overall well being of the villagers, good harvest, timely adequate rain, and crops to be protected from insects and worms, wild animals. People as well as bullocks while working in their agricultural fields should not encounter snakes, centipedes and scorpions, no lightning should strike while working in agricultural field. And finally there should not be any injury and health issues of the villagers while working in the field. For that all the 52 villages sacrifice male sheep to the Baba Paknapat annually.

Jantal Worship Mantra (*Bakhen*) in Santali:

*Johar Gosain Jantal bonga ne endo jantal bonga nutum te dane le emam kan chalam kan sukte saunwar te atang kah tela kah-am. Jarge dah jali dah ko hoi agu chape aguiam. Khetre Kharai re irra le enale petez alo lapug alo jonge gange sahar koh lahar koh-maa. Gelere bilire chene ko chutia ko hod alo hab alo, hak kako domon kakoam. Olah re dhula re duli bale saika bale tobed koh tohed koh-maa. Ature manare rogah bhignag ko alom lagao ocha bajao ochoa. Bairi ko balhi ko nel daram njed daram kakoam. Desh re disom re sukh ge suluk ge err kah tarse kah aam. Jiwi re jatire gunko birda ko bid kah bered kah-aam. Johar!*

This *mantra* or *bakhen* (Incantation) has been collected from the priest of Santal village to understand the purpose of Jantal worship at the village level. Structural analysis of the mantra or *bakhen* reveals interesting meaning. The meaning indicates that people are requesting the Paknapat for timely adequate rain in the area. Primary data says that most the tribals in the Jamda block are settled agriculturalists. Primarily they cultivate paddy, which requires adequate water. The area does not have irrigation facility and entirely depend on rain water. They also pray for bumper quality crops, so that people can survive the entire year. Further they ask for the protection of crops from birds, animals and rats. Part from that they pray for healthy and well being of the people of their village and also peace and order in the earth.

The names of the 52 villages are *Kainpur, Dabha, Pasna, Baluyadhipa, Hesla, Dublabeda, Kanapani, Dulki, Lipighutu, Gulta, Dumha, Dauda, Tentoposi, Sonapush, Laujoda, Hatbadala, Kendrai, Dungaria, Bhulbeda, Harilabeda, Muskudur, Banduduma, Holda, Chaproy, Sijukola, Laxmipusi, Belpush, Baghiya, Kansor, Deukundi, Roma pahadi, Jarkane, Bhagbeda, Panpush, Tabol, Murgaghutu, Pukahria, Khalorda, Taron, Chapai, Bhalubosa, Heselpata, Dumbaria, Nuiti, Rangamatia, Chitritangore, Matiyal, Chandikhman, Chigidipukharia, Sonamara, Uparbeda and Jodapukharia.*

Paknapat is well known for the worship called 'Manasik'. People come with different problems which may be individual or family. They do 'manasik' (vows) with a promise to offer usually a male sheep, male goat or fowl if their problem or wishes get fulfilled. The principal purposes of the visits are disease or illness, not having children after marriage, employment or getting jobs, score good marks in exams, children education, success in business, family problems, getting married and winning case in court. This place is very well known for fulfilment of individual or family wishes.

Gopinath Mohanta (Male- 40), a resident of Dhupa Sahi of Kainpur village said "I was very worried and psychologically tensed because we did not have children after marriage. Then, I worshipped at Baba Paknapat for children. Now we have two children. As promised, I sacrificed a male goat".

The sacred centre of Paknapat allows not only the visitors from tribal communities, but also from non-tribal communities without any discrimination. The place is also open for both men and women, even small children are also allowed to visit and worship. Initially, women were not allowed, but later on they made it open for everyone. During the menstruation, the women must abstain from visiting the sacred centre or else supernatural punishment will be inflicted upon the wrong doers.

### **Management, Preservation and Development**

All the activities of the sacred centre are managed by the villagers of Kainpur. There are three committees in the village namely, *Om Sri Sri Paknapat Baba Narasingha Thakur Puja Committee, Jahira Committee* and *Sramik Yuba Sangha Committee*. The first one monitors all the activities of the Paknapat which include organizing weekly as well as annual worship, development activities in and



around the sacred centre, management of funds received from the devotees in the form of donations and protection of sacred geography (i.e. the mountain) from neighbouring villages. The committee is also responsible for maintaining visitors' register with details of the purpose of visit as well as the address. This gives an account of why people make a visit to the sacred centre and also the territorial coverage of the place. This committee has 40 to 50 members including male and females from the Kainpur village. The remaining other two committees do not deal the issues of sacred centre.

### **Development Activities**

The Paknapat is located in a hill which is a natural setting. The place does not have temple like structure as mentioned in previous sections. Earlier there were no steps to climb up to the place of worship. Especially the older people and also the sick were not able to go the place of worship. Recently steps have been constructed which became easier for the visitors of all sections to reach the place of worship. Apart from that, aluminium safety fences have also been created which is necessary in terms of safety of the people. In addition to that, all weather road have been constructed, as a result of which all types vehicles can go near the foothill of the mountain. Even if the development plans are being implemented as per the demand of the time, natural settings and structures have been kept intact. For drinking water, two tube wells have been built. They are not getting adequate funding for the development activities as well as the management of the sacred complex of Paknapat. Major share of the funding comes from donations by the people whose desire and wishes have been fulfilled after worshipping at the Paknapat. The committee has also acknowledged the individuals who have contributed in their individual capacity for the development and management of the sacred complex.

### **Conclusion**

The sacred centre of Paknapat plays a very instrumental role in terms of addressing not only individual issues of different kinds, but also the collective village level socio-economic and religious issues in the locality. Looking at the changes on sacred geography, sacred specialists and sacred performances, reveals that no changes have been made in the geography and specialists. Only steps and safety fences have been added keeping in view the demand of the time. The sacred specialists are still from the Bhumij tribe and no changes have been made in this regard as well. But in terms of sacred performances, certain changes have taken place. Most of the rituals ingredients are from the Hindu religion. As discussed, this has been added during the visit of the Mayurbhanj king. The Buffalo sacrifice has been stopped by the government, whereas other animals like sheep, goat and cocks are sacrificed even today. Gradually the elements of great tradition in the sacred performances can be observed in the Paknapat. Another interesting finding of the study in terms of the great tradition is that many equate Paknapat with God Nrusingnath. They call Paknapat, the avatar of Nrusingnath. Another element of great tradition is the priest's advice to the visitors to light the lamp in Thursday in their house in the name of Paknapat. In the tribal society of the study area, no such traditional practice is found in terms lighting dipa regularly on Thursday. This is the practice of Hindu religion. Only during Soharai festivals, this can be found once in a year in the tribal villages in the study area. Paknapat is also important in terms of regional identity and solidarity. He is also identified as Pir Deity under which 52 villages worship for the economic purposes. The place is visited not only by the tribals but also by the non-tribal communities. It also includes both sections of the population that is educated and uneducated. The changes in sacred performances have been accepted by all sections of the population who are visiting the place for different purposes. Though the elements of little traditions are still dominating, but elements of great tradition are also gradually visible in the sacred centre.

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