

Full Length Research Paper**Baidyanath Deoghar: A Holy City of Eastern India****Deependra Nath**

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Journal No: 45640

Article history

Received: 12-10-2017

Revised: 21-10-2017

Accepted: 30-11-2017

Corresponding Author:**Deependra Nath**Associate Professor,
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Man's cultural habitat is represented in the form of settlement – rural and urban. There are a few towns in the world where religion is a dominant or significant function. This does not, however, hold good in context of India. In this part of the world where societies are tradition bound, religion – which is a set of beliefs and practices and having infinite capacity to provide peace, tranquility, contentment – plays greater role in every domain of human endeavor. Here almost every aspect of life is intimately intertwined with religion. This research paper is directed to investigate the role of the religious factors in the evolution and morphological lay-out of Baidyanath Deoghar or popularly known as Deoghar. As no study has been taken up up-till now so, the author intends to highlight the following aspects of Deoghar City.

Keywords: Baidyanath Deoghar, religious towns. Jyotirlinga, Cultural Evolution

Introduction

Man's cultural habitat is represented in the form of settlement-rural and urban. There are a few towns in the world where religion is a dominant or significant function. This does not, however, hold well in context of India. In this part of the world where societies are tradition bound, religion—which is a set of beliefs and practices and having infinite capacity to provide peace, tranquility, contentment—plays greater role in every domain of human endeavor. Here almost every aspect of life is intimately intertwined with religion. In such a scenario, religion becomes an important aspect of urban mosaic. Even in the ancient urban civilization of Harappa Culture (third and second millennium B.C.) religion occupied central stage. In all the major cities of Harappa Culture structures meant for religious function i.e. sacrificial altars, Great Bath etc. were located in the citadel itself (Alchin, 1993).

A number of modern towns and cities have their own personalized deity's viz. Mumba Devi for Mumbai, Abu Devi for Mt. Abu, Patan Devi for Patna etc. Further, all these places to which greater religious significance is attached have gradually evolved as urban centres, particularly to cater to the needs of devotees who throng such places in large numbers viz. Rishikesh, Haridwar, Allahabad, Varanasi, Bodh Gaya, Ujjain, Somnath, Puri, Tirupati, Deoghar etc. in such towns religion is the dominant function. It seems, since time immemorial that places of religious significance have provided nuclei for evolution of urban centres viz. Baidyanath temple for Deoghar, Krishna temple for Mathura, Sun temple for Konark, Minakshi temple for Madurai etc.

Objective and methodology

The religious towns and cities constitute a very important part of urban geography more so in traditional societies like Indian. There have been few and sporadic attempts to carry out the geographical studies of holy cities of India. One such study which has been widely appreciated is on Varanasi by Dr. R. L. Singh (Singh, 1955). Some other work of similar nature have been carried out by Ujjain Singh (Singh, 1962), R. L. Dwivedi (Dwivedi, 1963), G. D. Singhal (Singhal, 1972), S. M. Bhardwaj (Bhardwaj, 1972), V. N. P. Sinha (Sinha, 1975), R. P. Sinha (Sinha, 1982) and N. Palit (Palit, 2002). But there is a need to present a comprehensive study of all the major holy cities of the country. The holy cities have their own importance in the social, economic and cultural lay-out of a city and its surroundings. This research paper is directed to investigate the role of the religious factors in the evolution and morphological lay-out of Baidyanath Deoghar or popularly known as Deoghar. As no study has been taken up up-till now so the author intends to highlight the following aspects of Deoghar City:

- Role of site and situation in the evolution of the city
- Importance of religious and spiritual factors in the evolution of the city
- The morphological characteristics and demographic attributes of the city
- Measurement of linkages among religion, morphology and demography in context of the city
- Role of tourism in the growth of the city
- To assess major problems of the city and suggest systematic and balanced growth of Deoghar on the basis of some standard principles of urban planning
- The city is characterized by seasonal flow of devotees during the month of Srawana. The bearing of this seasonal flow is examined and suggestions are given for such phenomenal influx.

The author has adopted histogenic, empirical, statistical and behavioral approach for threadbare analysis of geographical phenomena of the city of B. Deoghar. The methodological approach is directed in such a way that the present study can be defined as a pioneering work in the field of cultural and urban social geography. Hence both primary and secondary data have been collected. A number of field surveys have been organized to collect firsthand information. The primary data about the residence and other information of devotees have been collected by volunteers stationed at the temple for certain days during different months. Other primary data have collected through stratified sampling method with the help of questionnaires. The secondary data have been compiled from various documentary sources both published and unpublished.

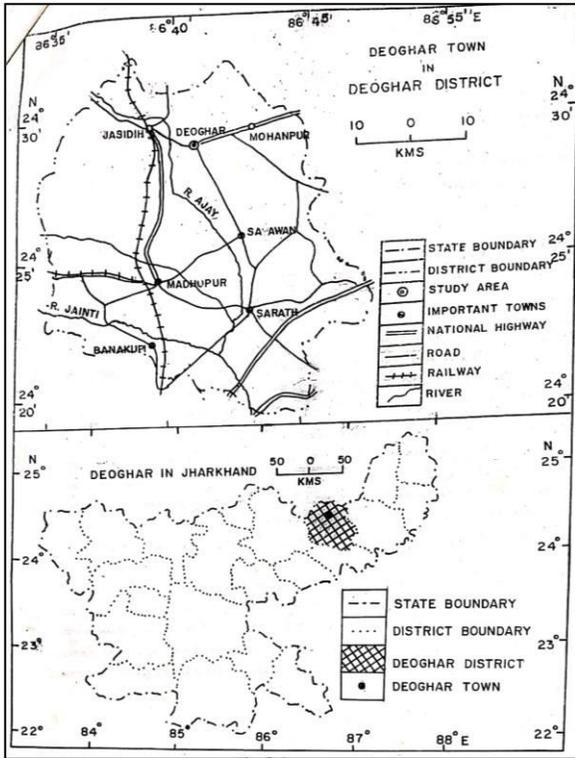


Fig 1. Location Map of Deoghar

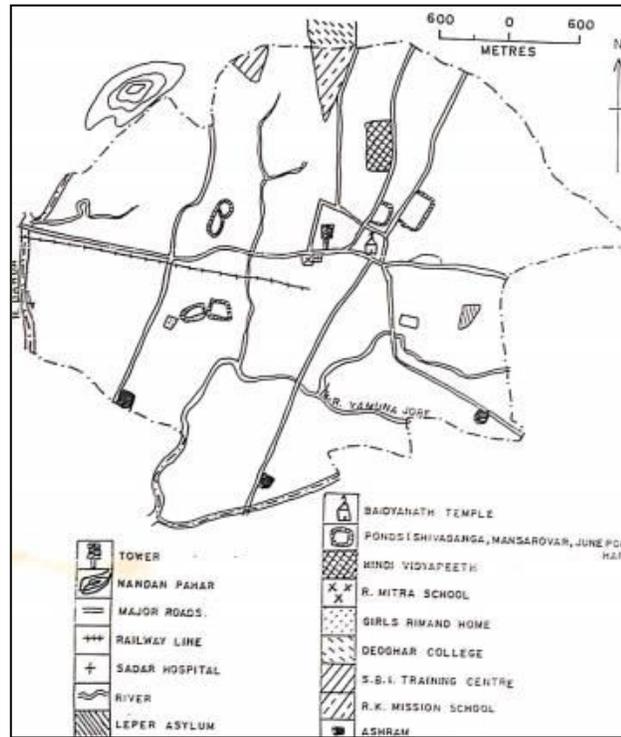


Fig 2. Deoghar Geographical Personality

Religious and historic evolution of the city

Deoghar, literally meaning abode of gods, is a Hindu pilgrimage centre of national and international repute. Lakhs of devotees from far and near come here after arduous trekking of approximately 105 km. in the holy month of Srawana to offer sacred *Ganga Jal* to Lord Mahadeva to have his grace. The town is a seat of one of the twelve *Jyotirlingas*. It is a *Shaktipeetha* also. Lord Siva performed the last rites of his consort Sati here. Late Dr. Rajendralal Mitra, one of the most eminent nationalist historians of yesteryears, proclaimed this temple town the most important religious centre of eastern India (Mitra, 1883). In Hindu religious text the place is generally referred as Baidyanath Dham, the general populace, in this day and age refer it as Baba Dham.

So far as geographical factors are concerned, first of all, the location of the town may be examined with evolutionary perspective. The grid location of B. Deoghar is 24° 29' 43" north latitude and 86° 44' 36" east longitudes (Hunter, 1877). The relative location, here more relevant, of the place in north-eastern part of Chotanagpur plateau, almost on the edge of the plateau, just south of a *ghat* which connects it to the plain, and not far from the Ganga plain. The town is situated on the left bank of an ephemeral stream Darua. The site of the town is a rolling pen plane with a few granite outcrops and is dissected by upper course of a rivulet called Jamunajor. The town presents a picturesque site as if ensconced amidst the lap of Trikuti Pahar (752 m), Tapovan Pahar, Nandan Pahar (281 m), and Digaria Pahar (523 m). In the olden time the place had extremely rich foliage of greens. Some semblance is still remaining. The salubrious climate is another advantage. The quality of underground water is of therapeutic value. The neighboring country is almost desolate with a few scattered hamlets. The geographical setting of B. Deoghar town is, no doubt, serene and pristine. Thus the geographical conditions are ideal for establishing temple of greater significance. The town is located not much away from human agglomeration of the middle and lower Ganga plain, but at a considerable distance to give devotees a sense of penance and accomplishment. The tranquility and pristinely atmosphere of the place provides spiritual solace to the searching souls.

Another explanation regarding the location of the temple may be traced on somewhat religious line—Lord Siva is worshipped by both man and demon, Aryans and Dasyus. He offer boon to both of them with equal affection. Deoghar is located just beyond the Aryans dominated Gangetic region (Anga Janapada) on the one hand and on the outskirts of Dasyus dominated Chotanagpur plateau on the

other. This transitional location is perhaps the cause of establishment of a Jyotirlinga temple here. Again this may also be corroborated by similar transitional location of some of other Jyotirlinga temples in different part of Jambu Dwipa.

According to Shiva Purana: In Treta Yuga, the cruel titan, Ravana, King of Sri Lanka felt that the golden metropolis in the kingdom and unrivalled one in the world would not be perfect without the presence of Shiva in it. The titan with this very objective, repaired to the Kailash mountain, the abode of Mahadeva, to secure the grace of that divinity. It is, however, so happened the Lord was in society of his consort at that time, who was then in a huff and Nandi, universal warden at the gate of the Lord's mansion, would not permit a stranger to pass in. But the demon king was not to abide by Nandi's instruction. So he took Nandi by neck and hurled him a long distance away. This made the mountain tremble and Sati in fear gave up the anger and sought the protection of the Lord. Mahadeva was extremely pleased by this occurrence. So when Ravana pleaded Him for his misdeed, instead he offered him boon. Then the demon king prayed to the Lord to take His permanent residence with the former. This was, however, not ranted but he agreed with a pre-condition that he might take one of the twelve Jyotirlingas which would be as effective as Himself in persona. The pre-condition was that the transfer should be affected without break in the journey. Moreover the Lingam would not be proceed any further if put anywhere on the earth during the course of journey to Sri Lanka. Ravana readily accepted the pre-condition as he was accustomed to such non-stop journeys.

The gods and goddesses dreaded the very presence of Mahadeva in the capital of one who was the greatest enemy of the hierarchy of heaven. Hence they devised a plan to outwit their enemy. Accordingly, regent of water, Varun, caused an unpleasant incessant and intense sensation to relieve. Ravana unable to bear unpleasant sensation descended to the earth and handed the Lingam to an old Brahmin to hold the same till he returned. But he was greatly delayed by the plan of mischievous water god, Varun. When Ravana returned, the Brahmin (Vishnuin the garb of an old Brahmin) had is disappeared and the Lingam was lying on the ground at a considerable distance from where Ravana had handed it to the Brahmin. The place where Ravana alighted and handed the Lingam to the Brahmin (Vishnu) is now called 'Hirlajori' and place where the 'Lingam is placed by Vishnu is Deoghar and the Lingam itself is called 'Baidyanath'.

The place is also called 'Ravaneshwara' as Ravana made it a point to daily worship the Lingam. The place is also called 'Ravaneshwara Vaidyanath'. This name again comes from the Siva Purana. According to this reference Ravana, in order to please Lord Siva, cut down nine of his heads and offered them in oblation to the Lord. Afterwards, when Lord Diva propitiated, He not only fulfilled Ravana's desire of having invincible strength but also joined the nine heads to his body as if by the operation of a Vaidya or surgeon. This name 'Ravananeshwara Vaidyanath' is quite common in Sanskrit literature. The other names are 'Hardalapeetha' or 'Haridrapeetha'. According to legend the Hridaya (heart) of the deceased Sati had fallen here. Hence the two names come into currency and the place is one of the sites of Shakti Peetha out of 51 such sites.

The evolution and growth of the city has positive correlation with the spread of fame and grandeur of the temple. It is a general belief that the temple might have been build during the reign of Pala or Sena dynasty Bengal. Since the middle of the 16th century the fame of the temple started to increase when the Maithili priests (pandas) took over the charges of the temple from Nath Panthis. As the number of devotees increased the size of the settlement also grew. Moreover, the temple received royal patronage. Raja Man Singh (the celebrated general of Emperor Akbar) paid his obeisance on his way to Orissa conquest. Diddhaur estate, Laskhimipur estate and Nawab of Budewan provided their state patronage too the temple. During the British period the English officers (1787) tried to streamline the functioning of the temple. According to an official estimate of Collector of Birbhum (1789) about 50,000 pilgrims used to visit the place in a year (Hunter, 1877). This shows that the town would have grown considerably in size by; that time. In 1855 Deoghar became the district headquarters of a newly created district of Santal Pargana (Mishra, 1997). But the honor of being district headquarters was short-lived as in 1872 it was moved from Deoghar to Dumka. However, Deoghar remained Sub-divisional headquarters of a sub-division of the same name. In 1984 the erstwhile sub-division of Deoghar was converted into a District hence once again Deoghar town became a district headquarters. In 1869 a municipality was established at Deoghar (Roy Choudhary, 1965) and since the town has been growing and expanding continuously. And at the same time the fame of the temple has been spread for and wide even beyond the frontiers of India. In the last five decades the number of devotees thronging to the temple has increased at an exponential rate and so is true about the population growth of the town, which has grown to become a city. Similarly the Deoghar Municipality of the yore has been transformed to Deoghar Municipal Corporation.

Conclusion

Problems and Concluding Remarks

Although the holy city of Baidyanath Deoghar has occupied a prominent place in the urban system of eastern India, its problems have continued to create hindrance in the comprehensive and planned growth of the city. The foremost problem is related to the land system. There are two categories of land—salable and non-salable. It has historical legacy. The present city system requires right away repealing of the law to bring uniformity of land price which would not only solve the land problem but it would be helpful in the planning and development of this sacred city. It would also bring social and cultural closeness between tribes and non-tribes. These problems need to be addressed in the next master plan of the city. In fact the master plan of the city needs to include the out-grown urban areas including the present township of Jasidih. These two urban centres make an urban agglomeration and the new plan must consider the integrated functional behavior of the city.

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