



RESEARCH ARTICLE

LITERARY EVIDENCES AND ARCHITECTURE OF RAMTEK, MAHARASHTRA

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ABSTRACT

The origin of Indian History is generated more or less by the literary text written by great poets and writers such as Kalidasa, Valmiki, VedVyas, Tulsidas before or later of the 3rd millennium BCE. The literature has played a very important role in developing the Indian culture. As we know Sanskrit literature begins with the oral literature of the Rig-Veda a collection of sacred hymns dating to the period 1500–1200 BCE.[1]. The main objective of writing this paper is to identify the various literary evidences of historic and religious place of Ramtek in Maharashtra and to understand the architecture of the place with context to its evolution and geographical setting so as to understand the importance of this place. Ramtek today has been evolved as a Religious place for pilgrims because people have a belief on the fact that this is the place where Lord Rama, Lord Sita and Lord Lakshmana rested here on the hills of Ramtek when in exile. The major attraction here in Ramtek are the Rama temple which is believed to be more than 600 yr old. My Research is focused on the mention of Ramtek in various literary text and justify the location of the Ramtek with its Architecture.

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INTRODUCTION

India is known for its roots in its history, culture and religion. The formation of culture in India is due to the result of the old text written by various great poets, writers such as Valmiki, kalidasa, vedavyas and many more. The architectural methods which is practised today in India are a result of examination and implementation of cultural interactions and literary interpretation (Raj Jadhav). Ever since human beings have invented scripts, writing has reflected the culture, lifestyle, society and the polity of contemporary society. In the process, each culture evolved its own language and created a huge literary base. This literary base of a civilization tells us about the evolution of each of its languages and culture through the span of centuries. Sanskrit is the mother of many Indian languages. The Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas and Dharmasutras are all written in Sanskrit. There is also a variety of secular and regional literature. By reading about the languages and literature created in the past, we shall be able to understand our civilization better and appreciate the diversity and richness of our culture. In India there are various places recognised mostly by the built form such as temple, mosque, ghats, kund, Mahals etc or the history, mythological stories associated with place but there is also the location factor that

the site on which sacred places are built is due to the topography, its history, literature and the geographical location and settings of the place. As said sacred sites in South Asia, the nature of the topography is explained through the myths, literature, such as the orientation of the place, the natural elements, the flow of river, the hills and their summit, the presence of sacred tree etc (Savitri Jalais, 2012). A symbol of Hindu culture is part of a long tradition of belief transmitted by sacred text and pilgrimage practices (Asgar ali Engineer, 1992).

Location of Ramtek and its geographical settings

Ramtek is located 45 km away from Nagpur in the state of Maharashtra, India. It has an average elevation of 345 metres (1131 feet). Ramtek has got Historic temple of lord Rama. It is believed that Ramtek was the place where Rama, the Hindu god, rested while he was in exile. In Literature Ramayana it is written that the Aashram of great Hindu sage Agastya was situated close to Ramtek. While the sages performed religious rites, the demons used to disrupt their activities and slayed a great number of holy men. Lord Rama was distressed to hear about this, and took a vow to relieve the world from the demons. 'Tek' means vow in local language, hence the word Ramtek comes from 'Vow of Ram'. Thus it is believed locally that whoever takes a vow at Ramtek is blessed by the gods for its fulfilment. The 'padukas'¹ of Lord Ram are believed to have been worshipped here for centuries. The present temples is

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believed to have been built by the King of Nagpur Raghuji Bhonsale, after his victory over fort of Deogarh in Chindwara near Nagpur (Vaidya, 2001). Shri Ram temple known by various names such as Ram Mandir, Ram dham and Ramtek fort Temple is located on the Ramagiri hill at Ramtek,. The historical temple, Constructed atop the hill at an elevation of 345 mt from land is to be more than 600 years old and is dedicated to lord Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana (Vaidya, 2001). The temples has been evolved as a Religious place for pilgrims where we can see variety of Temple Architecture of the Maratha period.



Fig. 1. Map of Maharashtra showing Ramtek (Source:map of Maharashtra)

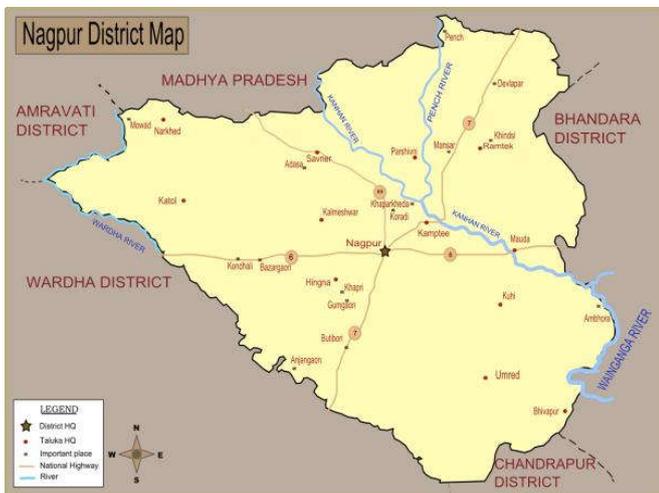


Fig. 2. Nagpur District Map locating Ramtek (Source:wikigringro, 2008)

Evidences of Ramtek in the Literature

The first mention of Ramtek is traced in the Kalidasa work of Meghadootam. It would be interesting to give Kalidasa reference to the geography of India by way of comparison This stanza of Meghadootam given below explains, the beauty of Ramagiri and has narrated the entire journey through the eye of the cloud messenger. Meghadhootam narrates as the Water on Ramagiri was blessed because it was used by Lord Seeta, the daughter of Janaka for her bath. The trees cast thick and cool shadow in the forest of Ramagiri. kalidasa has explained the beautiful landscape of Ramagiri as the story of Yaksha's

Meghadhoot (cloud messenger) who has started its journey from Ramagiri (Kalidasa Meghdootam,).

कश्चित् कान्ताविरहगुरुणा स्वाधिकारात्प्रमत्तः
शापेनास्तङ्गमितमहिमा वर्षभोग्येण भर्तुः ।
यक्षश्चक्रे जनकतनयास्नानपुण्योदकेषु
स्निग्धच्छायातरुषु वसति रामगिर्याश्रमेषु ॥ १ ॥

From the above evidence we can clearly justify that Kalidasa has written Meghadhoot on the hills of Ramagiri which is today known as Ramtek.

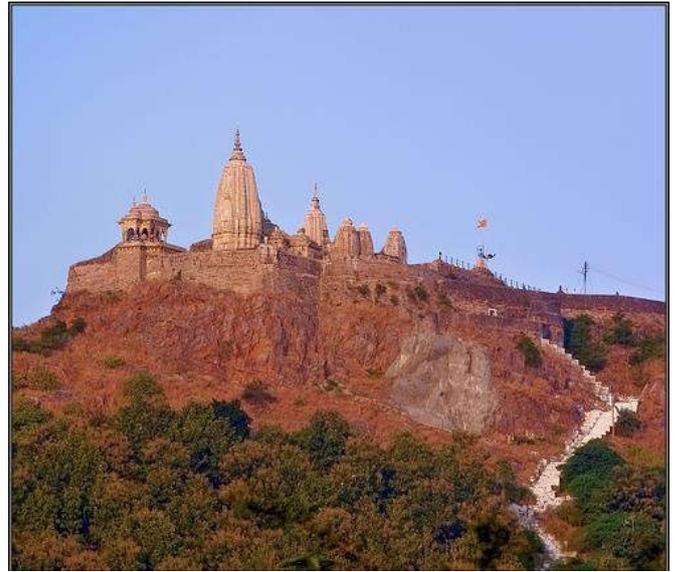


Fig. 3. Temples of Ramtek on the Ramgiri hill (Source: Siddhesh Dhupe, 2015)



Fig. 4. Ram Temple in Ramtek (Source: Muk.Khan, 2013)

But the contradiction about the location of Ramgiri does not end here. Kalidasa who is known as a Classical Sanskrit writer, widely regarded as the greatest poet and dramatist in the Sanskrit language. His plays and poetry are primarily based on the Hindu Puranas. Scholars have speculated that Kalidasa may have lived either near the Himalayas, or in the vicinity of Ujjain, or in Kalinga [Edwin Gerow, brittania.com] Kalinga that comprised north eastern parts of modern state of Andhra Pradesh, most of the modern state of Odisha and a portion of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh States.

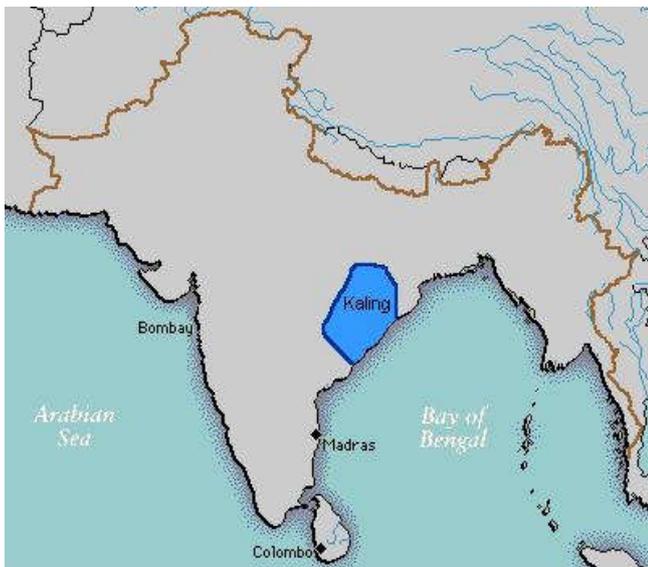


Fig. Map showing location of Kalinga
(Source: Deepak gupta, 2006)

The three speculations are based respectively on Kalidasa detailed description of the Himalayas in his *Kumārasambhava*, the display of his love for Ujjain in *Meghadūta*, and his highly eulogistic descriptions of Kalingan emperor in *Raghuvamśa*. [Edwin Gerow, brittania .com]

There is also a mention of Ramagiri in the kovalaram plates of Chalukya-Bhima II that vikramaditya II held sway over both vengi-mandala and tri-kalinga, mention of the inclusion of Tri Kalinga, a part thereof, in the Vengi Chalukya kingdom .The following stanza in the colophone of the medical text entitled Kalyana-Karaka by one Ugradityacarya that the work was composed at Ramagiri which is describe as adorned with structural as well as rock cut temples and situated in the Tri Kalinga Country which was under the Vengi ruler:[9] *Ajay Mishra (Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas, Pāṇḍuvamśins, and Somavamśins)*

**Veṅg-lāa-Tri-Kaliṅga-deśa-janana-prastutya-sān-ūtkaṭa-
Prodyad = vṛkṣa-latā-vitāna-nirataih siddhaiś = ca vidyādharaih /
Sarve mandira-kandar-opama-guhā-caity-ālay-ālamkṛte
Ramyē Rāmagirāv-idaṁ viracitaṁ śāstraṁ hitaṁ prāṇinām** [1115b]

The Ramagiri mentioned in the Kalyani-Karaka by Ugraadityacarya should be apparently different from modern Ramtek near Nagpur which is generally believed to represent the Ramagiri mention in the opening stanza of Kalidasa Meghadoota (Purva-megha,verse1) (Shastri, Ajay Mitra, 2001). *Ajay Mishra* in his book (*Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas, Pāṇḍuvamśins, and Somavamśins*) propose to identify it situated in the koratput District of Orrisa bordering the Srikakulam District of Andra Pradesh which alone would satisfy the description. There may occur many contradiction regarding the exact location of Ramagiri, the Meghadoota, in which the places mention on the route of the cloud messenger from Ramagiri near Nagpur to Alaka are the Following

- Satpura hill in Maharashtra
- Malava or plataeu
- Reva
- The vindhya ranges
- Ujjain

Etc. here there is a clear relevance of satpura ranges which are the ranges in the Maharastra therefore the route which is described in Meghadoota can conclude the fact that the location of Ramagiri in Meghdhoota is the place near Nagpur, Maharashtra and not Orrisa. The second Mention of Ramtek is in the Valmiki Ramayana, Book 7, the 'Uttarakanda' [Final Chapter], sargas 73-76, in the Adhyatma Ramayana version of Ramayana.

There is a mention of Shambuka, a character in some of the verses of Adhyatma Ramayana. According to that version, Shambuka, a *shudra*² ascetic, was slain by Rama for attempting to perform penance in violation of dharma, the bad karma resulting from which caused the death of a Brahmin's son. It is believed that Shambuka was beheaded in a hill at Ramtek, near Nagpur in Maharashtra. But according to the geographical description of Ram's journey to Lanka there is a mention of Dandakaranya Region in the Ramayana which is a territory covering the region south of the Vindhyan mountain range (Covering portion of Madhya Pradesh, Gujrat, Maharashtra and Andra Pradesh. Its geographical limits were vindhyan mountain to the north, Krishna river in the south, and the mouth of Godavari river in the east.

The sage Agastya who directed Lord Rama to spend the rest of the exile in a place called Panchavati, is two Yojanas down south (1 Yojana=9 miles) on the northern bank of the river Godavari. Rama built his forest dwelling in the woods of Panchavati, near the sources of the Godavari river, and within a hundred miles from the modern city of Bombay.

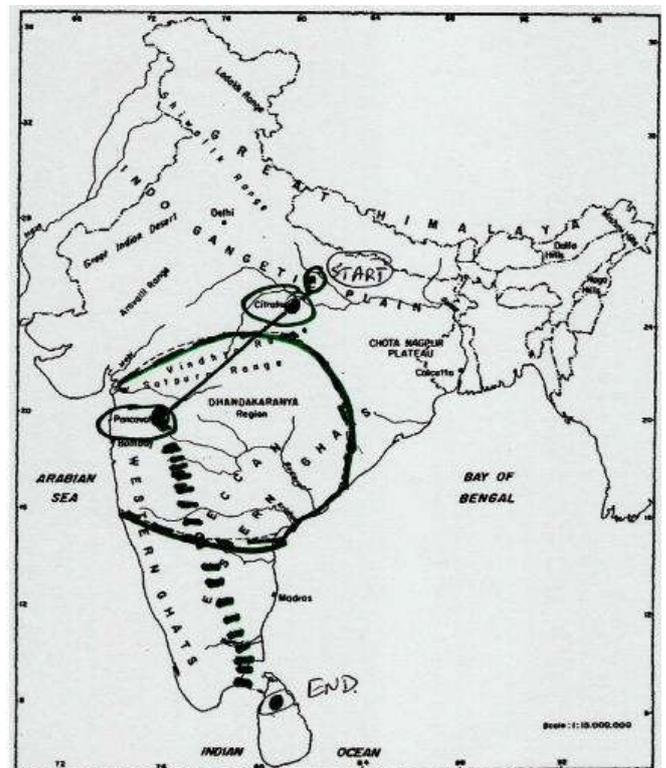


Fig. 5. Map showing Rama's journey from ayodhya to Lanka
(Source: StoryOfRamasJourneyfromAyodhyatoLanka.pdf)

The river Godavari originate in the western ghat at a place called Trriyambakeshwaram close to the current day Nashik in Maharashtra. Is Panchavati really located near Nashik causing Lord Rama to travel westward of it located close to the mouth of the Godavari river which would have involved a southerly

travel. However there is a tenuous claim that Panchavati is located on the north of Godavari River near Ramtek or near Nashik both the places fit very well with the botanical description of the landscape as found in Valmiki's Ramayana.

Mention of Ramtek

Two old Marathi text, the *Lilacaritra*³ and the *Sthanapothi*, describe the place on Ramtek hill where Chakradhara swami live for ten month during the first part of his spiritual career as a lonely *samnyasin*⁴ (McGregor, 1992). The ota (dais or raised platform) on which he sat, was within a "Rama temple" named Bhogarama. Why did Chakradhara travel to Ramtek, and in which sort of temple did he stay? The answer to this question might be in the thirteenth century under the regime of the Yadava Kings of Devagiri Ramtek. The lengthy Yadava inscription of Raghavadeva, the proxy of the Yadava king Ramachandra, which is found in the Lakshmana temple on Ramtek hill, eulogizes Ramtek or Ramagiri and surroundings as an important holy place dedicated to Rama, and this is endorsed by the monumental temple construction including the Lakshmana temple itself, which may date from the thirteenth century. Ramtek, situated about 45km north-east of Nagpur, which the bhosales has made their capital, new building activities were initiated. Raghujji bhosale is credited with the construction of new fortification on Ramtek hill.

Evolution of Ramtek

Ramtek as a place has evolved drastically. The evolution of Ramtek or Ramagiri from a local holy place into a sacred centre has risen in the thirteenth century under the regime of the Yadava king of Devagiri. Ramtek has risen to an important visnuite, that is to say Ramaite, centre of pilgrimage (Shastri, Ajay Mitra, 2001). The geographical location and the story Meghdootam by Kalidasa must have attracted the Yadava king of Devagiri to build temples on this Ramtek hill. In the 13th century, Ramagiri as a sacred centre seems not to have emerged directly out of a local pastoral cult. Since the 4th century AD, the sanctuaries on the hill have attracted the attention and care of those in power.

Architectural spaces of the Ramtek Temple complex

Ramtek is associated with the 4th-5th century Vakatakas, who have their capital at Nandivardhana, 5km southwest of the hill. Portion of temple, sculptures and inscription at Ramtek are assigned to these early rulers.



Fig. 6. Lord Rama Temple, Ramtek
(Source: Muk.khan., 2012)

In the 12th-13th centuries Ramtek was incorporated into the kingdom of the Yadavas (McGregor, 1992). The temple erected at this time suffered at the hands of the Delhi invaders, and were virtually abandoned until the 18th century, when the bhosales of Nagpur undertook major restoration work of these temples. The tour of Ramtek begins at the Ambala lake, at the base of the southern extremity of the hill, 2km southwest of the town. The road passes through an arched gate. Framed by round bastion. Nearby stands the Kevla Narasimha temple, a modest red sandstone structure, much restored. An inscribed slab of the Vakataka era is set into the wall (Baker, Hans, 1990). From here it is a short distance to the Varaha gate. Just outside stands a triple dome, erected in memory of one of Aurangzeb's courtiers. Immediately on the right after passing through the arch entrance is an open pavilion. The Lakshmana and Rama Chandra temples stand one behind the other at the western end of the third and topmost enclosure. They are the largest and most important religious monuments at Ramtek. Invariably crowded with devotees. Jain temples such as Shantinath Digambar Jain temples are built 400 yrs ago (Feldhaus, Annie, 1996). Each temple is approached through a Mandapa with triple porch extension.



Fig. 7. Google map showing the Jain Temple complex
(Source: wikimaps.com, 2012)



Fig. 8. Jain Temple, Ramtek
(Source: www.wikimapia.org)



Fig. 9. Ambala Lake, Ramtek
(Source: wikimapia.org)

The Ambala tank, which is lined with stone revetments and steps throughout, has many temples on its banks, most of which are of modern construction. The story of the tank is that there was once a Suryavansi Rajput king named Amba who was a leper. He happened to come to the spot of the present tank while hunting, and feeling thirsty he took water from a spring and washed his face and hands with it. And to his amazement he found that the marks of leprosy disappeared from his skin where the water had touched it. He, therefore, excavated the spring, and from it came up the waters of Bhogavati or the Ganga. For this reason, people throw the ashes of the dead into the tank, whose water is as sacred as that of the Ganga (Mirashi, 1974).

For the purpose of immersing the ashes of the dead a particular part of the tank on the east has been set aside and a ghat has been built which is known as Dasakriya Ghat. In all, eight ghats have been constructed on the tank and have been named after the sacred Aslatirthas⁵. The town has about 27 tanks, several of which are held to be sacred (Feldhaus, 1996). All such architectural buildings in Ramtek have evolved this place into a religious place today. The temple have historic and mythological, and Religious Value. People believe in the sanctity of this place and come here to worship with true heart.

Conclusion

The literary evidence of Ramtek have evolved this place into important pilgrim place because of the group of temples of different religion are built in the vicinity of the Temple complex. This place have achieved a great importance as a Religious and Cultural site from the Yadava regime. People have a great belief in the sanctity of the place. Pilgrims come here to bathe in the tank on the day of Chaitra Purnima when a fair is held. The fair is attended by about 2,000 people coming from a distance of 32.18 km. (20 miles) around. Looking at the rituals performed, this place is of cultural importance. The temple complex needs to preserved for the pilgrims. The stones of the Temple are crumbling down the hill. The temple complex need to be conserved by restoring the damage and destruction occurred due to soil erosion. The associated Cultural landscape of Ramtek is rich with religious associations, rituals, meanings and places associated with mythological and past events, people, and their history of evolution . The temples need to be protected for keeping its sacred value intact. Inscriptions written on the walls of *Lakshmana* temple etc. should be preserved as Inscription help in understanding the history of the Place, people and time. Evidences of Ramtek will help generate the concept to prove this site to be as a Cultural Landscape and will eventually help in conserving the Maratha Architecture of the different phases which are seen on the hill of Ramagiri.

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