The *Tīrtha*s Gaṅgāsāgara and Gokarṇa: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract: Religion is an integral part of Indian culture which flows from ancient times to till the recent period. In early-medieval times people lost interest in Vedic rituals and they started to make donations to the brāhmaṇas. Also the concept of '*Tīrthyātrā*' was evolved and by it common people started to earn merits. Many decayed or new settled towns became transformed into brāhmaṇical *tīrtha*s slowly. We find 'Vaiṣṇava', 'Śaiva', 'Śākta', 'Sage' and etc holy places built on river confluences, river banks, forests, deserts, mountains and so on. Among them 'Gaṅgāsāgara' and 'Gokarṇa' are two important pilgrim centers which attract the pilgrims from all over country. Gaṅgāsāgara is situated at the river confluences of 'Gaṅgā' and 'Bay of Bengal' at West Bengal. '*Mahābhārata*' mentions that Pāṇḍavas donated many things at Gaṅgāsāgara. Other texts like '*Viṣṇusaṁhitā*', '*Matsyapurāṇa*', '*Varāhapurāṇa*', '*Padmapurāṇa*' and etc tell about its sanctity. Inscriptions such as Nālandā copperplate of Pāla king Devapāla (ca. 813-50 AD), Bānkipore inscription of Chālukya king I Someśvar (ca. 1042-68 AD) and etc describe its importance. It is the place where first 'Devī Gaṅgā' was arrived on earth by the devotion of 'Bhagīrath', a king of Ikṣāku dynasty. A temple and āśrama of Kapil Muni are established here which destroyed many times by the flood, tsunamis and high tides of sea. But it was also reconstructed. 'Gaṅgāsāgara Fair' is the second largest fairs of Subcontinent which held every year in the occasion of 'Makarasaṁkranti'. People took holy dip here at this confluence in Makarasaṁkranti. It is famous as 'Sarvatīrthamaya'. Gokarṇa is a Śaivite pilgrim centre situated at Karṇāṭaka between 'Gaṅgāvālī' and 'Aganasinī' rivers. It is one of the seven pious centers of India which corroborated by Epics, *purāṇa*s, inscriptions and etc. Nālandā copperplate of Pāla king Devapāla, inscriptions of Kalachurī and Kadamba kings etc mention its holiness and popularity. 'Ātmaliṅgam' of Mahādeva is established in 'Mahāvāleśvar' temple of Gokarṇa. Many mythical stories are attached with Gokarṇa which made it famous. Also 'Koṭitīrtha', 'Bhadrakālī' temple, 'Gaṇapati' temple and etc are established and patronized from ancient period at Gokarṇa. This ancestral pilgrimage centre glorifies the religious traditions. So these two *tīrtha*s are very much popular from early-medieval phase. The codification of the purāṇas that time also helped the places to be auspicious. Many people of different regions and castes united in those holy places and exchange their religious and cultural values. The pilgrimage centers help to enrich our cultural heritage and mixed culture also in today.

Key-Words: Anteṇṇa Daśā, Aśvamedha, Ātmaliṅgam, Brahmahatyā, Chār *Dhām*s, *Drāviḍa* Style, *Kāvya,* Kūrmaprastha, Mahāvāleśvara, Makarasaṁkranti, Mokṣa, Muktikhetra, Nāgā Sādhus, Nayanārs, Sāgaradvīp, *Śāligrām Pīṭha,* Saṅgama*,* Sapta Muktisthala, Sudarśana *Chakra*, *Tīrtha, Tīrthayātrā,* Tuṁbi, Varadeśvar Liṅgam

Introduction: Indian Subcontinent is famous for her process of cultural synthesis. This is the land of mixed culture. From the ancient period to modern times the history of India is evaluated by many new aspects especially from the view of religions. Polity, economy, religion, culture and etc are the integral part of Indian culture. But we know that India conceived various kinds of religious thoughts. The concept of '*tīrtha*' and '*tīrthayātrā*' are evolved with it. The institution of pilgrimage of the holy places is a continuous religious tradition of common people especially for the Hindus which flows also in today. Religion is a product of social development. To understanding this concept one need to be understand the growing process and popularity of *tīrthayātrā* which is still going on in a new dimension.

The term is first occurred in '*Ṛgveda*'s several places. But here *tīrtha* means 'Way or Path' for salvation in certain hymns. [1]Also some hymns tell that *tīrtha* is a high river bank which is most suitable for meditation. '*Taittarīya*' and '*Vājasaneyī*' *Saṁhitā*s also attest above statement. But another important text is the '*Arthaśāstra*' of Kauṭilya mentions that *tīrtha* means a Government Department. [2]So there are a lot of differences about the use of the term *tīrtha*. But whichever is clear that this concept was flourished between 400-1200 AD mainly in early-medieval times. Actually people were started to discontinuing the process of 'Yagya' (Sacrifice) ritual. Sacrifices were not only killed the animals but also costly. Also the religions like Buddhism and Jainism spread new kinds of thinking who don't allow any kinds of rituals. But in early-medieval period Brāhmaṇism was revived for many reasons. The codification of the '*Purāṇa*s' helped some places to highlight. Also kings made donations to the brāhmaṇas and for this reason they were settled down in many towns and villages. Slowly these areas turned in to a pilgrimage centre. For earning merits pilgrims did *tīrthayātrā*. In India we find numerous pious sites where people used to go. New kinds of mental changes, social changes, codification of *Purāṇa*s, regionalism and especially the rise of Brāhmaṇya class made this process very much clear. On river banks or confluences, mountains, plain lands, deserts, forests and etc places these pilgrimage centres were grown. Gaṅgāsāgara and Gokarṇa is the great specimen out of them. Varieties kinds of Brāhmaṇya *tīrtha*s are found such as 'Sage', 'Vaiṣṇavite', 'Śaivite', 'Śākta' and so on in India. But these two mentioned pilgrim centres not only influence our cultural heritage but also the religious process. These two early-medieval *tīrtha*s today also existed with a wave of cultural activity.

Gaṅgāsāgara: Gaṅgāsāgara is situated at the confluences of Gaṅgā and Bay of Bengal in South 24 Paraganas at West Bengal. Here the holy Gaṅgā River is also famous as 'Huglī'. It is situated 130 KM south from Kolkata and this place became famous as 'Sāgaradvīp'. This *tīrtha* is very much popular not only for the Bengali people but also for many pilgrims who come here at every year in the precious occasion of 'Makarasaṁkranti' to took a holy dip in this confluence. A temple of Vedic Ṛṣi Kapila is established here which increases the religious and cultural importance of this place. The fair of Gaṅgāsāgara (Gaṅgāsāgara Melā) is one of the second largest religious fairs in India. This meritorious *tīrtha* attract many pilgrims from not only all over India but whole world.

The earliest reference of Gaṅgāsāgara is found from the Vanaparva of '*Mahābhārata*'. [3] It tells that after bathing at this confluence the Pāṇḍavas made

donations like lands, precious items and etc to the brāhmaṇas. '*Viṣṇusaṁhitā*' and also other texts of Gupta period clearly mention the religious importance of this place. This book also tells about many death rituals such as the ceremonies of 'Śrādha', Piṇḍadāna' and so on which are held in Gaṅgāsāgara. One of the Śloka of '*Viṣṇusaṁhitā*' mentions such as follow:

"Gaṅgādvāre Prayādecha Gaṅgāsāgara Saṅgame

Satataṁ Naimiṣāraṇye Varanāsyaṁ Viṣeśah"//[4]

We know about Kapila Muni who was the Vedic sage and his reference is found from Buddhist and Brāhmaṇya texts. According to *Purāṇa*s this Mahā Ṛṣi was the son of Kardama 'Prajāpati' and 'Devahūti' (Daughter of Dakṣa). He was the master of whole world. 'Dream', 'Waking' and 'Sleep' these three natures or 'Daśās' are occurred from 'Guṇa' which is described by Kapila Muni. He was well known for his 'Anteṇṇa Daśā' and capable to destroy the whole nation. '*Viṣṇusaṁhitā*' while describing about Kapilmuni mentions about Gaṅgāsāgara such as follows

"Maharṣih Kapilāchārya Kṛtagya Medinīpatih

Tṛpadīstrīdaśādhkhya Mahāśṛṅgah Kṛtāntakṛta"//[5]

Many early-medieval *Purāṇa*s like '*Matsyapurāṇa*', '*Varahapurāṇa*' and '*Padmapurāṇa*' tell about the religious sanctity of this *tīrtha*. '*Matsyapurāṇa*' mentions that it is a place of 'Sarvatīrthamaya'. [6] '*Padmapurāṇa*' also says about it. [7]

"Gaṅgāsāgaramityah Sarvatīrthamayaṁ Śuvam"//

All these mythological stories help it to become popular among the common people.

We find many Paurāṇic stories centered with Gaṅgāsāgara. Vanaparva of '*Mahābhārata*' and '*Purāṇa*s' tell about a mythical story about king Sagara.[8] The virtuous king 'Sagara' of Ikṣāku dynasty had two wives 'Vaidarbhī' and 'Śaivyā' but they had no progeny. On that time male descendants were necessary for perpetuating the family and for this reason Sagara accompanied with his two wives went to Himālayas and started meditation for honor of Śiva. Soon after this his two queens were conceived. Vaidarbhī gave birth to a 'Tuṁbi'. Seeing this king decided to throw it but hearing an aerial voice he remembered the words of Śiva. Mahādeva told him that Vaidarbhī would give birth to sixty thousand sons and later times all of them would die. The sixty thousand seeds provided by 'Tuṁbi' dip clarified butter. Then the king obtained sixty thousand brave sons at the appointed time. Other queen delivered a healthy son named 'Asamaṅja'. Asamaṅja was a mischievous and cruel. He also pounced upon the children of weak and old citizens, caught them by neck and threw them in to a river. But the sixty thousand sons of Sagara were no less cruel but they did not give to king any immediate occasion for their banishment. King Sagara did an 'Aśvamedha' sacrifice and his sixty thousand sons accompanied the horse. But on eastern sea they suddenly lost the track of the horse and failed to locate him. Since the horse was no where visible on the surface of the earth, the sons of Sagara started to digging the earth. Then earth became open and they entered. They saw the horse in a hermitage of Kapilmuni. The haughty sons of Sagara proceeded to capture the horse without doing homage to the sage. Angered by this misbehavior, the sage Kapila stared hard and transformed them in ashes.

When Nārada reported this news to Sagara he summoned his grandson 'Aṁśumāna' (Son of Asamaṅja) to assist this matter. Aṁśumāna was modest, truthful, obedient

and kind. He reached to the hermitage of Kapila Muni and did his proper obeisance. He wished to know the myth by which his sixty thousand uncles could find a place in the heaven. Kapila pleased by Aṁśumāna and told him that if the 'Gaṅgā' could be brought from the Himālaya to Kapilāśrama the sixty thousand dead sons would be released from sin by her touch and get heaven. Also Kapila asked Aṁśumāna to take the sacrificial horse with him so that the proposed Aśvamedha sacrifice of Sagara could be completed. Sagara was very happy to see Aṁśumāna with the sacrificial horse and then the sacrifice was completed finally.

According to the mythical stories we come to know that after the death of Sagara 'Aṁśumāna' became the king. After Aṁśumāna his son 'Dilīpa' took over the kingdom. Dilīpa went to the Himālayas and started meditation of Devī 'Gaṅgā' but he was unable to please her. It was his son 'Bhagīrath' whose unprecedented meditation moved Gaṅgā to appear before him. Gaṅgā suggested to Bhagīrath that to please the Lord Śiva who alone could bear the brunt of Gaṅgā's descent from heaven. Bhagīrath then meditated to Śiva who was pleased to appear before him and agreed to hold Gaṅgā in his mated locks. After these efforts Gaṅgā descended to earth passing first through the mated locks of Śiva to the earth. Gaṅgā asked Bhagīrath to show her the route through which she would pass. This sheered in the spectacle of conch blowing Bhagīrath moving ahead of Gaṅgā and ultimately arriving at the hermitage of Kapila on the eastern sea. It is believed that Gaṅgāsāgara is the place where first Gaṅgā was arrived. Gaṅgā liberated the sixty thousand sons Sagara of and they went to heaven.

Not only from the literary sources but also many inscriptions tell about Gaṅgāsāgara. 'Nālandā' copperplate of Pāla king 'Devapāla' (ca. 813-50 AD) mentions that after defeating the enemies the army of 'Dharmapāla' (Father of Devapāla) took holy bath at this Saṅgama.[9] Two early-medieval inscriptions also tell about it. 'Bānkipore' inscription belongs to Chālukya king of Kalyaṇī 'I Someśvara' (ca. 1042-68 AD) says that above king donated cows to the brāhmaṇas of Gaṅgāsāgara. [10]Also in this inscription 'Gaṅgāsāgara' is compared with the 'Vanavāsī' *tīrtha* of Karṇāṭaka. The inscription reads that one who protects the pious foundation at Vanavāsī shall gain the same fruit as they had decorated the horns and hoofs of thousand kine with five kinds of jewels at Gaṅgāsāgara. Another two inscriptions are discovered from 'Gāwārhāda' and 'Annegerī' of the reign of Chālukya King 'II Someśvara' (ca. 1068-76AD) dated 1071 refer Gaṅgāsāgara as a holy spot.[11]

This 'Sāgaradvīp' region has a historical identity. Many scholars believe that an ancient civilization was established here but then it destroyed for various reasons. The surrounding regions of Sāgaradvīp were covered by poisoned insects and animals. But the first British officials discovered this region and used it as an area of salt production. One of the most important features of this region is the presence of migrated people who came here for living purpose. Especially people were come from 'Medinīpore' and 'Oriśā' regions. The villages of this island are destroyed by flood or high tides of sea. Even today only forty three villages are survived in this cultural land but which of them fifteen or sixteen are in danger zone. Beside it Gaṅgāsāgara is famous for two reasons. One of the 'Āśrama of Kapila Muni' and second is the 'Gaṅgāsāgara Fair' which held in every 'Makarasaṁkranti'. Traditionally it is believed that a queen named 'Satyabhāmā' established the temple of Kapila Muni in

430 AD. But this temple was destroyed by sea water and then reconstructed in several times. In 1842 AD the whole area excluding the ancient temple and some images was driven in to Bay of Bengal.[12] But not only tides but also Cyclone affected this temple in several times. The chief minister of West Bengal Bidhanchandra Roy reconstructed this temple of Kapila Muni in1961AD. But unfortunately it was again destroyed. Recently an organization named 'All India Narayana Akhra' has been developed this temple in a new manner. An inscription is discovered from this temple dated 430/437 AD. It mentions the names of various holy places of eastern India which destroyed by floods and tsunamis of sea. The names of king 'Mādhav' and 'Kapila Muni' are included in this list. The temple of Kapila Muni and also the whole Gaṅgāsāgara region were destroyed and rebuilt several times which corroborated by an inscription and archaeological reports.

The temple of Kapila Muni is a specimen of great architecture. Probably Svāmī Rāmānanda established an image of Kapila Muni in this temple at 1437 AD. His right and left hands are adorned respectively by 'Water Pot' and 'Garland'. This image was made by limestone which came from 'Oriśā' region. Besides the image of this great Vedic sage, sculptures of 'Bhagīrath', 'Rāma', 'Sītā', 'Gaṅgādevī' are installed in this temple. Which is striking is that here the worship of 'Mahadeva' (Identified with 'Viṣṇu' or 'Śiva') is held. [13]The pilgrims every year come at this place on the holy occasion of 'Makarasaṁkranti' and after the holy bath they worshipped the god with rice, oil, sesame and so on.

Another attraction of Gaṅgāsāgara is the religious fair which famous as 'Gaṅgāsāgara Melā'. It is the second largest religious fairs in India which is held every year at Gaṅgāsāgara in 'Makara saṁkranti'. Pilgrims from various places join this fair and after the holy bath in Saṅgama they worshipped to Kapila Muni and Gaṅgā for earn '*Puṇya*'. A report says in 2014 more than sixteen lakhs people were come here. Maximum persons belonged to 'Madhyapradeśa', 'Mahārāṣṭra', 'Uttarpradeśa' and 'Vihāra'. So this fair has cultural values where the religions, cultures and many things are exchanged among the pilgrims. There are two kinds of pilgrims have been come here. One is common people and second is sages. The common people come for earn merits and try to free from the cycle of rebirth. But the sages especially the 'Nāgā Sādhus' are stayed here for various purposes. They have a philosophical way of thinking which sometimes beyond the understanding of commoners. The habitants of Sāgaradvīp are actually maximum belong to poor class and in this fair they try to earn money from the pilgrims to sell their homemade products. After the four '*Dhām*s' of India e.g. 'Vadrīnāth', 'Jagannāth', 'Rāmeśvarama' and 'Dvārkā' the name of 'Gaṅgāsāgara' is come. The *Purāṇa*s also approve the holistic nature of this large fair. Also many temples likes 'Oṁkārnāth' is established here. 'Bhārata Sevāśrama Saṁgha' and 'Rāmkṛṣṇa Āśrama' are two very famous cultural centre situated at Sāgaradvīp which spread the message of unity.

Gaṅgāsāgara is not only a famous pilgrimage centre of Bengal but also a place of developed folk cultures. The temple and āśrama of Kapila Muni and the auspicious religious fair spread its glory to all over India. Early literary texts like '*Rāmāyaṇa*', '*Mahābhārata*' '*Purāṇa*s' and also many inscriptions describe its religious sanctity. Even in the poems of or '*Kāvya*s' of modern poets such as 'Bankimchandra

Chattapadhyay' and 'Rabindranath Tagore' the mentions of Gaṅgāsāgara we find. Many times this holy place was destroyed by floods and tsunamis but it reconstructed also every time. *Purāṇa*s mention 'A Pilgrim has to come to the Gaṅgāsāgara *tīrtha* one time and the earned merit is similar with the collected *puṇya*s from all pilgrimage centres. This is the specific importance of this place. The Gaṅgāsāgara region is unique for its cultural waves beyond West Bengal. It helps to unite the pilgrims not only by religious manner but also culturally affected our mixed culture.

Gokarṇa: Gokarṇa is an important Śaiva *tīrtha* of north Kannaḍa district of Karṇāṭaka and it is 30 miles from Goa. It lies between the 'Gaṅgāvalī' and 'Aganasinī' rivers near Kārwār coast. It is bordered by Ārabiān Sea and Western Ghāṭs. Also it is situated at the confluence of Ārabiān Sea and three rivers e.g. 'Gaṅgāvalī', 'Aganasinī' and 'Sidhheśvar'. It is well known as one of the greatest seven glorious pilgrim centre of India. It contains many temples dedicated to Lord Śiva. The mythologies of this region attract the pilgrims. The story of 'Rāvaṇa' and 'Ātmaliṅgam' made this place very popular. This 'Ātmaliṅgam' is established in the 'Mahāvāleśvar' temple which is most famous temple of Gokarṇa. It is the optimal combination to attain 'Mokṣa' believed by the pilgrims and brāhmaṇas. Here the Liṅgam of Śiva is installed as a form of ear of cow and for this reason this holy place famous as Gokarṇa.

But we find the name of Gokarṇa in many sources and there is a problem of identification its geographical location. '*Varāhapurāṇa*' refers Gokarṇa as a region where Lord Gokarṇa (Śiva) was installed at the confluence of two rivers e.g. 'Sarasvatī' and 'Yamunā'. [14] Also the '*Liṅgapurāṇa*' mentions of other Gokarṇa which was the sub *tīrtha* of '*Vārāṇasī*'. Interestingly we find four Gokarṇa sites in India. Firstly, Gokarṇa is the name of a village situated on the banks of 'Bāghmatī' river in Nepāl.[15] Secondly, the 'Mahā Kosala' (Old Kosala or South Kosala region ruled by the Sūryavaṁśīya kings) country is placed to the south of Gokarṇeśa, to the north of Aryāvarta, to the west of Tairabhūkti and to the east of Mahāpurī (Delhī). Thirdly, Gokarṇa was a part of 'Kūrmaprastha' because this Prastha was situated to the north of Gokarṇeśa, to the west of Kāmākhyā of Āsāma, to the south of Maneśa and to the east of Śāradā. [16] Fourthly, '*Saurapurāṇa*' says about Gokarṇa which according to it situated on the banks of river 'Sindhu' (Indus). [17]So the exact geographical location of this site is very debatable. But now-a-days most scholars trace it at Karṇāṭaka. Presence of numerous temples and mythological stories made this place one of the most famous Śaiva *tīrtha*s of India.

Many literary and archaeological sources describe the sanctity of this place. Epics, *Purāṇa*s and especially early-medieval inscriptions clearly mention the religious values of Gokarṇa. According to Vālakhaṇḍa of '*Rāmāyaṇa*' a great sage Bhagīrath was blessed with sons at this sacred place because for a long time he was heirless.[18] Bhagīrath has the credibility to insisted Gaṅgā come to earth by his meditation. Also the Vanaparva of '*Mahābhārata*' describes it is the place of holy bathing. Not only had the presence of Śiva but also the 'Kinnaras', 'Mahānāgas', 'Siddhas', 'Gāndharvas' and 'Karaṇas' made this place auspicious. Ādiparva of '*Mahābhārata*' refers Gokarṇa as an abode of Mahādeva. A *Kāvya* of Kālidāsa '*Raghuvaṁśama*' tells about Gokarṇa which is a holy place.[19] Beside these texts *Purāṇa*s like

'*Varāhapurāṇa*' and '*Kūrmapurāṇa*' tell about this tīrtha. '*Kūrmapurāṇa*' mentions that Gokarṇa is the greatest *tīrtha* among all holy sites of Subcontinent and it is an abode of Śiva where pilgrims have to maintain some rules and regulations. [20]According to this *Purāṇa* a pilgrim who comes in this place must be worship the excellent 'Ātmaliṅgam' of Śiva for his blessings. [21]There is a many mythical stories attached with Gokarṇa but one of them is the story related with 'Rāvaṇa', a demon king of Laṅkā which need to be mentioned.

According to '*Nāradapurāṇa*' Rāvaṇa, demon king of Laṅkā invaded the world of Indra and vanquished all the gods and noticed the Liṅgam established by Indra. [22] Rāvaṇa was a great devotee of Śiva and started meditation of him. Then Śiva was affected by his prayer and asked him for his demands. Rāvaṇa wanted the Śiva Liṅgam and a beautiful wife. 'Pārvatī' in disguise went with him. Also he carried the Liṅgam to Laṅkā. Lord Viṣṇu knew that if Rāvaṇa took this Liṅgam to Laṅkā he would become invincible. Viṣṇu also knew that Rāvaṇa performed morning and evening prayers like a good brāhmaṇa and that he would break the journey with the approach of dusk. Then Viṣṇu by his 'Sudarśana *Chakra*' covered the sun and seeing this Rāvaṇa thought it was the time for evening prayer. That time Rāvaṇa halted in the vicinity of modern Gokarṇa. After breaking his journey he searched for a good brāhmaṇa to whom he would entrust the Liṅgam for some time. Then that time Gaṇeśa appeared as a brāhmaṇa. Rāvaṇa gave him the Liṅgam and went for evening prayer. After waiting for long time Gaṇeśa called out to him but there was no response. Disguised brāhmaṇa placed the Liṅgam on earth band walked away. When Rāvaṇa returned he tried to lift the Liṅgam but could not do so. Then being angry he twisted the Liṅgam and it got the shape of cow's ear or Gokarṇa. After this he saw the disguised brāhmaṇa Gaṇeśa and gave severe blows on his head before departing for Laṅkā. Gaṇeśa felt very humiliated. At the moment Śiva appeared and said Gaṇeśa that Gokarṇa would be famous as a Śaivite centre but everyone at this place must worship Gaṇeśa first before approaching Lord Gokarṇīśvar. Even today the pilgrims first worship to 'Siddhagaṇapati' and then 'Śiva'. Also Devī 'Pārvatī' was settled down at Gokarṇa as 'Bhadrakālī' who protects the whole region.

But besides this myth another story we know from '*Varāhapurāṇa*' and '*Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*'. [23]They say that Lord Śiva once disappeared from his place and started wandering in a form of deer. The gods became perplexed and started to haunt him. Then 'Brahmā', 'Viṣṇu' and 'Indra' spotted the deer and recognized it as Śiva. They caught the deer by its horns but the deer disappeared again by leaving the remains of the horns in their hands. Then Viṣṇu took the top of the horn rooted it in a place which forms part of north-eastern Vihāra today. This horn shaped Liṅgam or phallic emblem of Śiva which was planted in this place became known as 'Śṛṅgeśvara'. Now this place is famous as 'Siṅgheśvarasthāna' in the Mādhaipura district of Vihāra. Indra took the lower part of horn and carried to heaven. Similarly Brahmā got the middle part of horn and established it in an appropriate place to be worshipped as a Liṅgam. So this story is different from the mythical story of Rāvaṇa.

Another myth of '*Nāradapurāṇa*' tells a story related to the submergence of Gokarṇa by the western sea.[24] Such flooding of coastal area by sea is a common phenomenon even today. We know the story that the sixty thousand sons of king 'Sagara' followed

the track of their sacrificial horse of 'Aśvamedha' sacrifice. Then suddenly they lost the track and the horse was disappeared. The horse could not be traced out and they started to dig the earth for recovery the animal. For this reason particularly the coastal areas caused depression of coastal line and consequently flooded by the sea. As a result of this, towns, villages, forests and foothills were all submerged. The people of these submerged areas took shelter in 'Sahyādrī' mountain thinking for approaching the great saint 'Paraśurāma' for their remedy. The saints and holy men of this area also with them left to the hermitage of Paraśurāma on the mountain of 'Mahendra'. Seeing the procession of sages and holy men towards his Āśrama he rose from his seat and did appropriate obeisance to all the distinguished guests. The saints then revealed the purpose of their visit. Paraśurāma thought although he had renounced the arms once again. Then the great descendant of 'Bṛgu' left for the flooded area in the company of his guests. Travelling a great distance in the direction of south-west from his hermitage Paraśurāma arrived at his destination. Then he called out Varuṇa, the lord of the sea to apper before him and gives help in the matter. But out of haughtiness Varuṇa did not respond to the summons. Enraged at this Paraśurāma fitted a particular missile to his bow with a view to drying up the whole sea. Frightened at this, Varuṇa hastened to present himself before Paraśurāma. Addressing Varuṇa the great sage said that the lord of the sea should cause the flood water to recede and make Gokarṇa visible again. Varuṇa was agreed with this proposal. Then Paraśurāma went back to his hermitage and all the gods and holy men get their land back. They started to sing praise for Śiva. So all of these legends are attached with Gokarṇa and they made very much popular it among the pilgrims.

Beside the Paurāṇic sources we find the mention of Gokarṇa is in early-medieval inscriptions. 'Nālandā' copperplate of Pāla king 'Devapāla' (ca. 813-50 AD) mentions about this *tīrtha*. [25] It is the earliest inscriptional reference of Gokarṇa. The army of Pāla king 'Dharmapāla' (ca. 775-812 AD) after defeating the enemies went to many holy places and did some religious rites. Gokarṇa is one of them where they did some rituals for earning merits. Similarly 'Jubbalpore' stone inscription of Kalachurī king 'Vimalaśiva' mentions that this king after doing some religious rituals made donations to the brāhmaṇas of Gokarṇa. [26]

"Prabhāsa Gokarṇagayādi *Tīrtha* Ṣvaṇṇya Mapadhya Surādivarye"//

'Kāpa' copperplate of Kelāḍi 'Sadāśiva Nayaha' refers Gokarṇa as a village of north Kannaḍa which is not far from river 'Revā'. [27] Also the 'Gokarṇa' copperplates of Kadamba king 'Kāmadeva' dated 1177 Śakasaṁvat were discovered from Gokarṇa which proof the hold of Kadambas there. Also it mentions Gokarṇa as a Śaiva *tīrtha*.[28] All of these sources proof its popularity and the religious importance. The sacredness of this place is ambiguous.

Gokarṇa contains probably 140 temples which of them 'Mahāvāleśvara' is the main one. The brāhmiṇa priests of Gokarṇa believe that the king 'Mayūravarma' (ca. 345-65 AD) of the Kadamba dynasty ordered to construct a Śiva temple at Gokarṇa. He wanted to gain knowledge of Vedic rites and Aśvamedha sacrifices. After travelling to 'Kāñchīpurama' he was insulted by a guard and decided to attack the 'Pallavas'. After defeating the Pallavas he performed an 'Aśvamedha' sacrifice for maintaining his suzerainty in this region. He constructed a famous Mahāvāleśvar temple at

Gokarṇa. This 4th century AD temple is considered as holy as the Śiva temple of Vārāṇasī in north India on the banks of Ganges River. Sometimes Gokarṇa is called' 'Dakṣiṇa Kāśī' for this reason. 'Ātmaliṅgam' or 'Prāṇliṅgam' of Śiva is installed here which brought by Rāvaṇa according to legends. This temple is one of the seven sacred 'Muktikhetra' or 'Sapta Muktisthala' (Place for Salvation) of Karṇāṭaka. The other Muktikhetras are 'Udupi', 'Kollur', 'Subrahmaṇya', 'Kumvasi', 'Koṭeśvar', and 'Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa' in Karṇāṭaka. After the death of king Mayūravarma his son 'Kaṅgavarma' brought brāhmiṇa families from different lineages to maintain administration of this temple here. We find mention of this temple in '*Raghuvaṁśama*' and '*Tevarama*' canon of Nayanārs (A Śaiva Sect). It is reconstructed in Vijayanagara period (ca. 1346-1646 AD). During 17th century queen 'Chennammāji' and her son 'Somaśekharanāyaka' of Kelāḍi region and 'Viśveśvaraya' of Halasunāḍu Kundapura region built the 'Chandraśāla' and 'Naṅdī' pavilions in this temple. Even the Mārāṭhā king 'Śivāji' (ca. 1630-80 AD) in 1665 AD worshipped in this temple after disbanding his army. In 1676 AD an English traveler 'John Fryer' visited Gokarṇa and wrote a detailed account of it.

This temple was always patronized by many dynasties and able to maintain its position. Mahāvāleśvar means 'All Powerful' that this temple glorifies our culture from ancient times to till recent period. Beside Mahādeva her wife Umā was also settled down at Gokarṇa as 'Bhadrakālī'. The temples of 'Bhadrakālī' and 'Mahāvāleśvara' are located on the shores of Ārabiān Sea on the west coast of India, near the city of Kārwāra. Mahāvāleśvar temple was built by granite which is a great specimen of '*Drāviḍa*' style of architecture. The 'Ātmaliṅgam' is enshrined in the temple on a square '*Śāligrām Pīṭha'* (Pedestal). The pedestal has a small hole from where pilgrims used to see the top portion of Liṅgam. Also an image of two handed Lord Śiva is established in this temple. This stone image is probably 1500 years old. Many devotees obey a ritual here. After shaving their heads the pilgrims do fast and took a holy dip in the Ārabiān Sea, opposite the temple. After offering Lord Gaṇeśa they go to see the 'Ātmaliṅgam' of Mahāvāleśvar temple. The idol is placed inside a pit on the floor. They touch the idol and do the worship themselves. This is a unique feature where devotees are allowed to touch the god. Many festivals like 'Śivarātri' and 'Rathyātrā' are celebrated here with graciously. In Śivarātri a very large number of pilgrims come here to celebrate the union of Śiva and Pārvatī. Images of Śiva and other deities are pulled through the town by the pilgrims. In one word Mahāvāleśvar from ancient times maintains its prosperity among the pilgrims.

Another important temple of Gokarṇa is Bhadrakālī temple. According to legends, after pleased by the meditation of Rāvaṇa Śiva gave him the 'Ātmaliṅgam' and his wife 'Umā'. Lord Viṣṇu met with Rāvaṇa in a disguised form of a Brāhmaṇa. Then Viṣṇu made the face of Umā aged and exhausted. Looking this look Rāvaṇa abandoned her and went to 'Kailās' Mountain to complain. Then Umā resided at Gokarṇa. She stays in this Bhadrakālī temple as a protector of whole city. It is a part of Mahāvāleśvar temple.

'Koṭitīrtha' is a wonderful place of Gokarṇa which very religious. It is situated to the south-east side of Mahāvāleśvar temple.[29] 'Koṭi' means 'crore' that sacred springs implies this sacred tank contains water from innumerable holy springs. But who built

this and when it not clears to us. On the southern side of this tank a 'Varadeśvar' Liṅgam is established by sage Agastya. It is believed that a pilgrim is free from the sin of 'Brahmahatyā' (Killing a Brāhmaṇa) after bathing this holy Kuṇḍa. Also the sacred waters are considered to be auspicious for performing the last rites of departed soul. Now-a-days the Ghāṭs of Koṭitīrtha are reconstructed by the Govt. of Karṇāṭaka. This pond is used for many rituals. People used to go in Mahāvāleśvar temple usually after bathing here.

In Gokarṇa there are number of temples that have religious importance. 'Mahā Gaṇapati' temple is one of them which were built for the honor of Gaṇeśa. It is believed that Gaṇeśa deceived the demon king Rāvaṇa and saved the 'Ātmaliṅgam' of Śiva. In Mahāvāleśvar temple we find a granite image of Gaṇeśa who has two hands and 5ft in height. This temple has an own identity and famous as 'Siddha Gaṇapati'. Gogarva is a pilgrim site of Gokarṇa. According to *Purāṇa*s the 'Ātmaliṅgam' of Śiva was vanished in the form of cow to a nearby cave. This cave in later times was famous as 'Gogarbha'. It is the holy place among sages. Also it is known that after entering this cave one can go for 'Vārāṇasī', the final visiting place for the pilgrims. There is a path towards Vārāṇasī is set up in this cave. But there is no historical proof about this route. Many temples of Gokarṇa such as 'Umāmaheśvar' temple, 'Tāmragaurī' temple, 'Veṅkaṭaramana' temple etc help to glorify Gokarṇa as a *tīrtha*. We know that Gokarṇa is mainly a Śaiva tīrtha. But here also a Viṣṇu temple is established which famous as 'Veṅkaṭaramana' temple. It is the only one Viṣṇu temple in Gokarṇa. Viṣṇu had a great role in the establishment of 'Ātmaliṅgam' of Śiva at Gokarṇa which corroborated by literary sources. This temple is marked by ornate pillars guarding the entrance to the sanctum. The idol faces west. The presence of Viṣṇu and Śiva in one place is the proof of religious tolerance.

So the literary and archaeological sources clearly show that Gokarṇa is a Brāhmaṇical tīrtha. Many mythical stories especially the legends of demon king 'Rāvaṇa' made this place famous. The temples of Gokarṇa attract the pilgrims and they come here to earn *puṇyas*. Many political dynasties patronized these temples from ancient period. It is the Śaiva pilgrimage centre and we know Mahādeva is considered to be one of the most feared and powerful gods whose wrapped in mystic. He is portrayed in Hindu *Śāstra*s as the ascetic, lover, an epitome of benevolence and a towering inferno, the mendicant and the tāntric, the masculine (Śiva) and feminine (Śakti) power, as being constantly ithyphallic and as one in the deepest meditation are found in one Supreme Being. The spirit of Gokarṇa emphasizes common people to come here and enjoy the religious sanctity of this place. It helps to enrich our cultural identity by its gracious presence.

Conclusion: After the long discussion about 'Gaṅgāsāgara' and 'Gokarṇa' *tīrtha*s it is clear that they give gravity in our cultural and religious histories. '*Tīrtha*' is a Sanskrit word means 'Crossing Place, Ford' or refers to any place that is holy. Also '*Khetra*', '*Gopīṭha*' and '*Mahālaya*' mean 'Holy Place'. Especially from early-medieval times the concept of pilgrimage was born. Buddhism and Jainism these two religions lost its popularity among the masses. This time Brāhmaṇya religion was started to famous. Vedic rituals also lost its importance for heavy religious rituals. But we know that ritual means the manner of performing religious rites served as an essential part of

customs of our Indian society. It can be divided into two parts e.g. 'Sacrificial' and 'Domestic' rituals. But with the changing of social structure the concept of rituals were changed. In early-medieval phase the common people and also kings and aristocrats started to make donations to the brāhmaṇas. They gifted lands, villages, kines, jewelleries etc many things. The brāhmaṇas settled down at many places and taking all of these gifts and honors they started to make these places pious. Beside these processes the mythological stories which were spread in that time helped the pilgrim centre to be more famous. People went there for meritorious purposes. Many rituals like 'Śrādha', 'Piṇḍadāna', 'Ritual of bath', 'Ritual of suicide' and especially 'Worshipping the gods' etc were attached with these religious places. Two things were practiced by the pilgrims. One is making 'Donations' to the brāhmaṇas of holy places and second is '*Tīrthayātrā*'. They stopped to do rituals and started *tīrthayātrā* for earn *puṇya*s and free from the cycle of rebirth. All of these made a simple place to be a *tīrtha*. Many kinds of pilgrim centres such as 'Vaiṣṇava', 'Śaiva', 'Śākta', 'Sage' and so on were flourished in a new manner. Especially the Brāhmaṇya and Paurāṇic religions are spread in these holy sites.

'Gaṅgāsāgara' and 'Gokarṇa' are situated on eastern and southern India respectively. Gaṅgāsāgara is popular for the presence of temple and Āśrama of Kapila Muni. Also the Gaṅgāsāgara fair is the cultural platform where numerous pilgrims come and join every year in the occasion of 'Makarasaṁkranti'. This centre of Bengal attracts people by its cultural and charming atmospheres. Gokarṇa is mainly a Śaivite *tīrtha* where the mythical stories of '*Rāmāyaṇa*' are attached very strongly. This is the ancestral *tīrtha*. The 'Ātnaliṅgam' of Śiva is established in the 'Mahāvāleśvara' temple of Gokarṇa. These two pilgrimage centres enrich not only our religious thoughts but also the process of cultural synthesis. India is the place of mixed culture. Many people of different regions and castes are united in these holy places and exchange their cultures and values. From ancient to till the present day 'Gaṅgāsāgara' and 'Gokarṇa' glorify the rich tradition of *tīrthayātrā* and cultural milieu. They bear the religious, social and cultural traditions of Indian Subcontinent which is beyond doubt.

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