

संशोधक

UGC CARE LISTED
ISSN No.2394-5990

● वर्ष : ९० ● मार्च २०२२ ● पुरवणी विशेषांक ०८



इतिहासार्थ वि. का.राजवाडे संशोधन मंडळ, धुळे



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या संस्थेचे त्रैमासिक
॥ संशोधक ॥

पुरवणी अंक - मार्च २०२२ (त्रैमासिक)

● शके १९४४ ● वर्ष : ९० ● पुरवणीअंक : इंग्रजी ८

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कार्याध्यक्ष, इ.वि.का. राजवाडे संशोधन मंडळ, धुळे ४२४००१.

दूरध्वनी (०२५६२) २३३८४८, ९४०४५७७०२०

कार्यालयीन वेळ

सकाळी ९.३० ते १.००, सायंकाळी ४.३० ते ८.०० (रविवार सुटी)

मूल्य ₹ १००/-

वार्षिक वर्गणी ₹ ५००/-; आजीव वर्गणी ₹ ५०००/- (१४ वर्षे)

विशेष सूचना : संशोधक त्रैमासिकाची वर्गणी चेक/ड्राफ्ट ने
'संशोधक त्रैमासिक राजवाडे मंडळ, धुळे' या नावाने पाठवावी.

अक्षरजुळवणी : अनिल साठये, बावधन, पुणे २१.

महाराष्ट्र राज्य साहित्य आणि संस्कृती मंडळाने या नियतकालिकेच्या प्रकाशनार्थ अनुदान दिले आहे. या नियतकालिकेतील लेखकांच्या विचारांशी मंडळ व शासन सहमत असेलच असे नाही.



अनुक्रमणिका

१	Poverty is a Serious Socio-Economic Problem in the Development of India - Dr.Milind Gulhane, Nagpur -----	८
२	Raja Rammohan Roy's Role in Modernization of India - Dr.Anjali Andrew, Nagpur -----	१४
३	The Notion of Agrarian Rituals, Festivals and Famines: A Study of Folklore and Popular Culture in Colonial Orissa - Santanu Kumar, Delhi -----	१८
४	Impact of Awareness and Perception of Youth Towards E-Media on their Purchase Decision of Branded Clothing -1) Mr.A,jinkya Deshpande, 2) Dr.Ashish Linge, Nagpur -----	२६
५	Zadie Smith's 'White Teeth': A Dexterous Delineation of a Reconstructed Multiculturalism -Dr.Amit Titare, Nagpur -----	३४
६	Talvar Community of Neglected Schedule Tribe Community - Borappa Patil, Dr.KLN Murthy, Belgavi -----	३९
७	Literature And Modern Society - Dr.Anil Dodewar, Nagpur -----	४३
८	Education system of India : Post Independance Period - Dr.Archana Thakre, -----	४६
९	Exploring the significance of literature in determining Modern Society - Dr.G. R. Hashmi, Kamptee, Nagpur -----	५०
१०	Contribution of Vasudev Balwant Phadke -Dr.Duryodhan Rathod, Nandurbar -	५४
११	Influence of Gandhian Philosophy on Pre-independence Indian English Fiction - Dr.Kapil Singhel, Nagpur -----	५९
१२	Impact Of The Pandemic Covid-19 On Performance Of Fmcg Shares In The Market - Dr.Pratap Chavhan, Nagpur -----	६५
१३	Role Of Libraries In Our Changing Society - Dr.Premlata Kurhekar, Wadi, Nagpur -----	६९
१४	Contribution of Women, Dalit and Tribal in Nation Building - Dr.Sanjiwani (Gadwe) Varma, Delhi -----	७३
१५	Contribution Of Agriculture In Indian Economy -Dr.Sudhir Godghate, Nagpur -	७७
१६	Relevance of Gandhian Philosophy in Post-Independence Indian English Fiction - Dr.Vinita Virgandham, Bhiwapur -----	८०
१७	Modernization and Its Impact on Indian Society - Dr.Vinod Dongarwar, Nagpur -----	८५
१८	The Contribution Of Mrunalitai Gore In Shaping Modern India - Dr.Deepali Bhave, Nagpur -----	९०
१९	Role Of Agriculture, Industry And Commerce In The Context Of Economic Growth Of India - Dr.Bhavesh Bhuptani, Nagpur -----	९६
२०	Custody: A Revolutionary Dissention and Emancipation from Biological Oppression -Dr.Dipak Dharme, Amit Titare, Nagpur -----	१०२



२१	The Makers Of Modern India – Dr.Shamrao Koreti, Nagpur -----	१०७
२२	The Study Of Nabard's Role In Nation-building Through Rural And Agricultural Development Of India – Dr.Laxman Gaikwad, Nagpur -----	११७
२३	An Overview Of Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy In Physical Education – Dr.Lemdeo Nagalwade, Chandrapur -----	१२२
२४	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Harbinger of Indian Democracy – Dr.M. R. Kamble, Nagpur -----	१२५
२५	Contribution Of E-commerce In Making Modern India – Dr.M. M. Thaore, Armori, Dist.Gadchiroli -----	१२९
२६	The Western Pioneers in Making of Modern Baroda State – Dr.Hridesh Mourya, Vadodara (Gujarat) -----	१३३
२७	Historical Subjugation Of Women And Fallacy Of Nation Building – Dr.Maruti Wagh, Koradi -----	१५०
२८	Makers of Modern India with special reference to Social Reforms of Dayanand Saraswati - Dr.Meghana Sharma, Bikaner (Rajasthan) -----	१५४
२९	Leadership Of Mahatma Gandhi, Other Contemporary Leaders, Movements And People's Participation - Dr.Navnath More, ?? -----	१५९
३०	Maulana Azad's Contribution In Indian Nationalist Movement – Dr.Mubaraque Quraishi, Tumsar -----	१६४
३१	Educational Development Post-Independence in India: An Analytical Study – 1)Dr.Pradhnya Kamdi, 2) Prof. Sunil Narnaware, Nagpur -----	१६९
३२	Web Content Analysis of Maharashtra Veterinary Institute Libraries Website : An Analytical Study – Dr.Prasanna Dange, Shahada, Dist. Nandurbar -----	१७५
३३	Impact of socio-economic and political reformation during the British Rule in India - A Historical review - Dr.Premchand Gaikwad, Madha, Dist.Solapur ---	१८२
३४	Contribution of Revolutionary Movements – Dr.Priyambada Choubey, Mumbai -----	१८६
३५	Rabindranath Tagore: A Pioneer of Indian Renaissance – Dr.Rajnikant Sonar, Shirpur, Dist.Dhule -----	१९१
३६	Iravati Karve's Contribution to Indology – Dr.Ravi Khangai, Nagpur -----	१९४
३७	Role Of Libraries In Shaping Of A Modern Indian Society – Dr.Sandip Salunke, Raver, Dist.Jalgaon -----	२००
३८	Environmental Communication: Applying communication Tools Towards Sustainable Development - Dr.Sarita Karangutkar, Nagpur -----	२०५
३९	Aspiration And Actuality In Manju Kapur's Novel Difficult Daughters: A Study In Contrast - Dr.Sobal Rose G. Veliannur -----	२०९
४०	Understanding The Contribution Of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule For A New India – Dr.Sujata Gaurkhede, Nagpur -----	२१३
४१	Teaching Language through Literature: A Systematic Way to Social Development – Dr.Vinod Shende, Kamptee -----	२१८



४२	Contribution of Revolutionary Movements	
	- Dr.Motiraj Chavhan, Bhiwapur, Dist.Nagpur -----	२२२
४३	Road Accessibility and Demographic Structure of Raigarh District	
	- Dr.Priti Mahajan, Kalamboli, Navi Mumbai -----	२२६
४४	History as a Text: New Historicist reading of pre-Independence Indian English Poetry	
	- Dr.Govind Rathod, Nagpur -----	२३१
४५	Insights : Contribution overview of Commerce in Boosting Economy	
	-1)Dr.Kailas Kalyani, 2) Dr.Richa Kalyani, Nagpur -----	२३५
४६	Sharing E-resources in Digital Environment	
	- Kishor Desai, At P.Kundal, Tal.Palus, Dist.Sangli-----	२४१
४७	Five Point Someone-What Not to Do at IIT:Reflection of Cultural and Structural Influence of Modernity on Indian Society	
	- 1) Mangesh Shamkure, Nagpur, 2) Dr.Mangesh Adgokar, Amravati -----	२४८
४८	Missing Women : Historically Most Untapped Reservoir Of Human Resource In India	
	- 1) Ms.Priya Deshpande, 2) Dr.Avinash Talmale, Nagpur -----	२५३
४९	Indian Agriculture sector: A Source of Rural Employment for Rural people	
	- Dr.Chandrakant Khune, Thane -----	२५९
५०	Digital Library For Research	
	-Ms.Deepa Patil, New Mumbai -----	२६४
५१	Contribution of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce Sphere in Nation Building	
	- Ms.Meenal Rajdev, Nagpur -----	२६९
५२	Why Indispensable to Give Voice to Voiceless Tribal? The Representation of Tribal People in Mahasweta Devi'sChotti Munda and His Arrow	
	- Dr.Dharmpal Fulzele, Ms.Archana Rathod, Brahmपुर, Chandrapur -----	२७२
५३	Problems Faced By Agricultural Landless Laborers In Chandrapur District, Maharashtra: A States Analysis	
	- 1) Pankaj Mandape, 2) Dr.Sawarnalata Warke, Nagpur-----	२७६
५४	Role Of Information And Communication Technology In Current Educational Scenario-	
	Dr.Poonam Jha, Ranchi, Jharkhand -----	२८३
५५	Reflection of Society in the Select Novels of Arundhati Roy and Arvind Adiga	
	-Dr.Priyanka Suryagan, Mumbai -----	२८९
५६	Madhusudan Das And His Vision Of Self-reliant India: Making Sense Of Indigenous Economic Development	
	- Mr.Baira Dash, Bhadrak, Odisha -----	२९४
५७	Dalit Women in India Past and Present Scenario	
	- Mr.Praull Rajurwade, Chimur -----	३००
५८	Portrayal of Realism in Chetan Bhagat's : 2 States - The Story of My Marriage	
	- Mr.Mangesh Shamkure, Nagpur -----	३०३
५९	Digital Initiatives of Govt. of India to shaping of Modern India with special emphasis on Higher Education	
	- Mr. Sunil Narnaware, Nagpur -----	३०८
६०	Analysis of Reasons of Problems of Lack of Inclusive Growth of Higher Education in Maharashtra State	
	-Dr.Rita Sontakay, Nagpur -----	३१४



६१	Contribution of Savitribai Phule for Women Educations	
	- 1) Mr.B.L.Lakkannavar, 2)Ms.Shivamma Hendegar, Bijapur, Karnataka	--- ३१७
६२	Implications of ideology as promulgated by Mahatma Gandhi in the present social, political and democratic scenario in India	
	- Dr.Shivraj Kombe, Amrawati	---- ३१९
६३	Portrayal Of Female Characters In The Select Short Stories Of Mahasweta Devi: Inverting The Stereotypical Images Of The Women	
	- Mr.Vaibhav Masram, Gadchiroli	----- ३२२
६४	Women Empowerment: Economic Development and Contribution to Nation building	
	- Ms.Varsha Bhujbal, Nagpur	----- ३२७
६५	The Architect Of Modern India: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Economic Ideas And Contributions	
	-Mr.Vijay Somkuwar, Chandrapur	----- ३३१
६६	The Role Of Literature In Shaping Modern Society	
	- Dr.Jayant Walke, Nagpur	----- ३३७
६७	Analyses of Forest Area in Kolhapur District	
	- Dr.Ranjit Pawar, Ajara, Dist.Kolhapur	----- ३४४
६८	Gandhi's Stance On Women's Participation In India's Freedom Struggle	
	- Dr.Anisa Sabir, Aligarh	----- ३४८
६९	The Problem of Forced Social and Cultural Identities in the Novel Without Dreams	
	- Dr.Ashutosh Popate, Chimur	----- ३५३
७०	Historical and religious places in East Vidarbha with special reference to Gadchiroli district	
	-Mr. G. D. Balki, Rajura, Chandrapur	----- ३५८
७१	Impact of GST on Professional and Business Community in Chimur Tehsil of Chandrapur District	
	- Dr. H. T. Gajbhiye, Chimur, Dist.Chandrapur	----- ३६३
७२	India And Pakistan Conflict - Kasmir Issue 2019	
	- Dr. R. S. Ratho, Mumbai	----- ३६७
७३	Study Of Employees' Socio And Economical Problems In Domestic Gas Distribution Management System	
	- Dr. P. M. Chandragiriwar, Nagpur	----- ३७४
७४	A Study on Online Food delivery services during the COVID -19 in Nagpur	
	- Dr. R. D. Rahangdale, Chimur, Dist.Chandrapur	----- ३७९
७५	Role of Lok Adalats in Modern India	
	- Dr.Chandramani Kashinath Bhowate, Ekodi, Dist. Bhandara	----- ३८४
७६	Contribution of Women, Dalits and Tribal in Nation Building	
	- Mr.Abhijeet Patil, Kolhapur	----- ३९०
७७	The Contribution Of Small And Cottage Industries Of India In Nation-building Through Rural Development	
	- Dr.Rekha Gulhane, Nagpur	----- ३९३
७८	Investors' Preferences towards various Investment Options: A Conjoint Analysis	
	- 1) Dr.B. B. kakade, 2) Dr.Ashish Linge, Nagpur	----- ४००





**Historical and religious places in East Vidarbha
with special reference to Gadchiroli district**

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Preface :

Gadchiroli district, with a total area of 14,412 square kilometres, was created by separating Chandrapur district on August 26, 1982. Gadchiroli district is 180.43' to 210.50' north latitude and 790.45' to 800.53' east longitude. Gadchiroli district is located to the east of Vidarbha in the state of Maharashtra. Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh state is to the east, Chandrapur district is to the west, Bhandara district is to the north and Adilabad, Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh and Jagdalpur district of Chhattisgarh are to the south of Gadchiroli district. River Godavari and Indravati are to the south and east of Gadchiroli. Near about 76 percent of total area of district is covered by forest. The total population of the district is 10,72,942 and the population of males and females are 541328 and 531614.¹ Male to female ratio is 1000:982. The sex ratio in Gadchiroli district is better than other districts in Maharashtra. Gadchiroli district has the highest population of Scheduled Tribes of 41,5,306 which is 38.17 percent of total population. Gadchiroli district is known as a tribal district. This district is very remote and is in undeveloped state till now. Gadchiroli district is a completely Naxal-affected district. Although Naxalism is the biggest obstacle to the development of the district, now a days project like iron ore production from the Surjagad hills has started for its development.

BACKGROUND OF THE GADCHIROLI DISTRICT :

Gadchiroli district was earlier included in Chandrapur district and Gadchiroli, Sironcha was functioning as a tehsil in Chandrapur district. Gadchiroli tehsil has existed since 1905 with the transfer of land and property between Chandrapur and Bramhapuri. In the later period, the Gond king

of Chandrapur, Khandakya Ballalshah, established his kingdom by establishing Chandrapur. Thus, the Gond kings ruled the area for the next few years.²

In the later period, part of Chandrapur came under the rule of Marathas. After Berar came under the control of British East India Company in 1853, Chandrapur became an independent district of Berar in 1854. The area was under central jurisdiction until 1956, when the state was restructured. After that, Chandrapur was included in the Bombay State as per the state restructuring. The state of Maharashtra was formed by the Central Government in 1960 and Chandrapur district was included in it and then on 26th August 1982 Chandrapur district was divided and an independent Gadchiroli district came into existence.³

After the formation of Gadchiroli district, the district was divided into 6 subdivisions. They are as follows- 1) Gadchiroli 2) Desaiganj (Wadsa) 3)Aheri 4) Kurkheda 5) Chamorshi 6) Etapalli. Each subdivision consists of two tehsils. The district has a total of 12 talukas and 1688 revenue villages. It has two cities 1) Gadchiroli 2) Desaiganj (Wadsa).⁴ The district has 9 Nagar Panchayats (Kurkheda, Korchi, Dhanora, Chamorshi, Mulchera, Aheri, Etapalli, Sironcha, Bhamragad) and three Municipalities (Gadchiroli, Desaiganj and Armori).

Memories of the ancient temple at Markanda in Gadchiroli district, the fort at Vairagad, Surjagad fort and Tipagad fort evoke memories of the past.

Markanda Dev -

An important religious site in Gadchiroli district is the Markandeshwar Temple situated on the banks of the Wainganga River in Chamorshi Tehsil. This temple is very ancient and Dr. V. V. According to Mirashi, the temple was built by Rashtrakuta king Gavind III⁵ in the 8th or 9th century. The peculiarity



of this temple is that there are some similarities between this temple and the temple at Khajuraho and it is customary to compare this temple with the temple at Khajuraho.⁶

The village is on the west bank of the northbound course of the Wainganga River, which flows to the south for two miles. After the construction of the temple, the village was named Markanda after the sage Markandeshwar. A British official, General Cunningham, has inspected the temple complex and recorded the temple.⁷ As this is a very important geographical feature of the Wainganga river, the temple may have been built at this place giving religious significance to the Dakshinavahini river Uttarvahini.

The main temple in this group of temples is the Markandeshwar Temple. The story of sage Markandeshwar is mentioned in Puranas.⁸ There were 24 temples here earlier. Over time, only 18 temples remain. Some of these are in a state of disrepair, while others are on the verge of extinction. Some temple shoes look just as left. Out of all these temples, four temples are in good condition. Markandeshwar, Mukundeshwar, Nandikeshwar, Yama and Dashavatar are the major temples here. All the images are carved from the base of the temple to the top. In this image, Vishnu, Surya, Agni, Brahma, Sivagana, Ganapati, Kartikeya, Parvati, Durga, Chamunda, Trimurtisurya, Shivatandava are prominent. It is mentioned that the number was 409 earlier.⁹ The history of Rajurkar's Chandrapur is found in this book. This may have been due to the destruction of some temples. All these temples are surrounded by one wall and this wall is in a dilapidated condition at present and the stones of the wall are scattered elsewhere. After seeing the idols of these deities, the local people of the area may have been worshipping these deities at that time.

The temple of Markandeshwar is facing east and has entrances in three directions, east, south and north. On the outside of each entrance is a small porch-like pavilion. The porch (semi-

mandapa) of this temple has four parts namely sabhamandapa, antaral and sanctum sanctorum. The sanctum sanctorum was composed of the main peak and other small peaks supporting it. From the base to the top, it looks like it is decorated with beautiful carvings and embroideries.¹⁰ Due to the demolition of the western side of the temple's spire, the area looks dilapidated today. The front of this temple is the sabhamandap. There Shiva's vehicle Nandi is installed. Since this temple has been neglected, it seems that the stones of this temple have been removed from a long time ago.

In the group of other temples, there is a temple of Nandikeshwar in front of the Markandeshwar temple. It has a very large image of Nandi. This image is now broken. The river flows in front of this temple. The second largest temple in this group is known as Mrikund Rishi, the father of Markandey Rishi. The upper roof of the temple is supported by ornate pillars with four beautiful carvings. And there is a very high peak on this holy place. This peak is almost complete and is a masterpiece of fine art. This temple is dedicated to Shiva. Here is the Shivling. In all these temples, the sacred place is dedicated to Yama Dharmaraja, the god of death. The surface of this temple is dedicated to Mrityunjaya Shiva.¹¹

Some other temples have a Dashavatar temple of Vishnu with a sculptural invention of Dashavatara. The temple has a 22 meter open very long and 2 meter circular path. The temple is divided into 12 rooms. The two rooms are dedicated to the idol of Vishnu and the remaining 10 rooms are for Dashavatara. Each section has a seating arrangement for the idol. But now many sections are empty. This temple seems to be very ancient in all these temple groups. Artisans may have been brought in from outside to build these temples because if the artisans were local here, such structures would have been built elsewhere but we do not see that.

Mahashivaratri at Markanda is a 15-day pilgrimage in February-March. This Yatra was



started by Rani Hirai of Chandrapur. The peak of the sanctum sanctorum of the Markandeshwar temple during the reign of Rani Hirai collapsed. Then Rani Hirai erected a pillar and arches for the assembly hall and made it a roof. After completing the restoration work, Rani Hirai started her journey here.¹² It is still going on today.

The importance of this very ancient, historical and religious place is important for Gadchiroli district. At present, part of this temple has been demolished. The temple is maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. The temple's spire is being repaired, but at present it has been neglected by the Archaeological Department, so it is on the verge of extinction..

Fort of Vairagad :

During the rule of Rashtrakutas and Chalukyas in East Vidarbha, the Naga dynasty ruled in the ninth century at Vairagad, east of Waingange.¹³ The first king of this dynasty was Kurumapruhod. This king built forts at Vairagad, Gadbori and Rajoli. The fort of Vairagad, built by Manaraja Kurumpruhod, was built by Yusuf Adil Khan, the commander of the Bahamani Sultan Muhammad Shah III. In 1441, after a six-month siege, he conquered and landed. Yusuf Adil Khan's motive behind this attack was to capture the diamond mine at Vairagad.¹⁴ There was a diamond mine at Vairagad fort. This information is also found in Abul Fazl's book Ain-e-Akbari.¹⁵ and in the District Gazetteer 1422 is given as.

Later, Gondaraja Babaji Ballalshah of Chandrapur (1572-1597) built a new fort on the site of the fort which was demolished by Yusuf Babaji Shah appointed Harchandra Gond as fort keeper. He was formerly the caretaker of King Puramshah of Tipagad. The fort covers an area of ten acres. It is built of solid black stone with a deep moat around it. The height of the wall should be 15-20 feet high. The entrance to the fort is to the south. You have to go through three gates to enter the fort. The first door is attached to the wall by a wall. After entering, another door is opened and

after entering, the main entrance of the fort is opened. After walking a few steps, you come to a platform. On it was the house and office of the fort keeper¹⁶ nearby is a Keshavnath temple. This temple is built on the side of the wall. It is built by Harchandra fort. This temple is dilapidated and the idols were taken to the village by the villagers and a temple was built there. The well on the fort must have been used to supply water to the fort. Also, the Keshavnath temple adjacent to the fort wall may have been used for worship by the people living on the fort.

The feature of this fort is that the deep moat around the fort should be dug to protect the fort from the enemy. This part was economically important as there was a diamond mine on Vairagad fort. Therefore, the state should have a constant fear of foreign invasion, deep trenches may have been dug to protect it from foreign invasion. The fort has collapsed in some places. To the northwest of this fort is a hill called 'Idga'. In 1422, Yusuf Adil Khan invaded Vairagad. The tombs of about 108 Muslim soldiers who were killed in the battle are on the hill. There is a diamond mine at the foot of this hill. Later, this fort was in the possession of Gond kings till the end. The fort was conquered by Raghuji II of Nagpur in 1795. The diamond mine has names like Vairagar, Vajrakar, Vaiduryagar in Sanskrit. That is why the village got its name Vairagad. This mine was in operation till 1843 AD. Due to depletion of diamond stock, it was discontinued during the reign of Raghuji Bhosale III.¹⁷

Tipagad fort :

Tipagad hill is 2000 feet (609.60 m) above sea level in Dhanora tehsil of Gadchiroli district. This hill is 3 miles from Murumgaon. (4.82 km) The fort is fortified on the hill where necessary. The fort is 1066 yards long, wide and two miles in circumference, east-west and north-south respectively. Inside the fort there is a lake which is very deep. A river originates from this lake. She joins the river Khobragade. It is called Tipagadi



river. The same river is known as Valochana near Vairagad. There was a children's fort on the side of the lake, but now there are only ruins. This kindergarten has a basement minus the basement. There is a small lake in the northwest corner of the fort. Gond Raja Puram Shah was the mandlik of Babaji Ballal Shah. After conquering the fort of Vairagad, it was handed over to Puram by Babaji Shah. Apart from this, Puram had annexed parts of Chhattisgarh to his kingdom. He had 2000 soldiers, 5 elephants and 250 cavalry.¹⁸ The water of the lake at Tipagad fort is being used to meet the water needs of the fort as well as for agriculture.

After Puramshah's death, Babaji Ballal Shah appointed Harchandra, the general of Puram, as the fort keeper of Vairagad and took possession of Tipagad, which was under Puram's control. It was Harchandra who established Saptadhama at Vairagad. These Saptadhams are Bhandareswar, Nandikeshwar, Pataleshwar, Dubleshwar, Anchaleswar, Rameshwar and Mahabaleswar. Of these seven temples, Bhandareswar's temple is located on a high hill west of Vairagad village. The temple is small and has Shivpind in it. The remains of Nandikeshwar are on the banks of the river Vailochana to the east of the village. The rest of the dhams have been darkened in the belly of time. Their remains are also not available.

Summary :

While studying the historical and religious places in Gadchiroli district, one has to study mainly Markanda, Vairagad, Tipagad, Surjagad. At present the condition of the temple at Markanda is not very good. The collapsed stones of the temple are scattered elsewhere. This temple comes under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India. In today's situation, the renovation of the temple seems to have started. Much of the work is under construction. The historical heritage of Gadchiroli district needs to be preserved by paying special attention to this historical building. Similarly, the condition of the fort of Vairagad is also bad. Since all this area is covered with forest, this area was

not taken care of by the British after the establishment of British rule. Therefore, the historical buildings here were neglected. These include Vairagad fort, and Tipagad fort. The British wanted wood from this area. For this, he achieved his goal by making his center at Sironcha. But did not pay attention to this fort. They have not been repaired. So various trees grew on this fort and now only the broken remains of those forts are left there. To know all these forts, we have to rely entirely on archeological tools and tools written in the past. It will not take long for the historical heritage of Gadchiroli district to be destroyed in the course of time, if these historical monuments are not taken care of in time. It is the responsibility of everyone to preserve the heritage we have inherited.

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