

## Book Review-2

**Nihar Ranjan Nanda, *Gajapati Kapilendra Deva: The History of the Greatest Hindu Conqueror of 15<sup>th</sup> Century India*, Bangalore: Subbu Publications, 2023, 248 pp., 1 399, ISBN: 978-8196209438**

"History is about the debate between competing interpretations of events, individuals and ideas based on the utilization of historical evidence." — Bruce A. Lesh

The recent release of *Gajapati Kapilendra Deva: The Greatest Hindu King of 15th Century India* by Subbu Publications has been warmly received and commended. Filling a significant gap in the historical literature on one of India's most illustrious emperors, who founded the Suryavamshi Gajapati dynasty in Odisha during the 15th century, this book stands out for its thorough analysis of Kapilendra Deva's reign. Unlike earlier works such as Godavarisha Mahapatra's 1931 publication and Utkal Sammilani's *Odia Samrajya Pratisthata Gajapati Kapilendra Deva*, this new book offers meticulous examinations of various facets of Kapilendra Deva's rule, including his military campaigns, administrative strategies, cultural contributions, and lasting impact. The author underscores the paucity of contemporary sources regarding Kapilendra Deva's 32-year reign, acknowledging the difficulties inherent in reconstructing his life and accomplishments. Despite being a software engineer by profession, the author's passion for history has led to a remarkable achievement in utilizing a limited number of primary and secondary sources. Moreover, the author diverges from the opinions and interpretations of earlier scholars in various instances. The book is structured into twenty-one chapters, commencing with a chronological timeline of Kapilendra Deva's reign, starting from his coronation on June 29, 1435, and culminating with his death in February 1467. The book begins with an introduction that sets the historical context of Kapilendra Deva's rule, emphasizing the extensive geographical reach of his reign. In the second chapter, the author delves into a wide array of literary sources in Odia, Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, and Bengali, among others, as well as epigraphic sources to illuminate Kapilendra Deva's enduring legacy. Subsequently, the following chapter examines the political landscape of India during that era, elucidating the various kingdoms that held sway at the time. Regarding Kapilendra Deva's origins, multiple sources such as Madala Panji, Kataka Rajavamsavali, Jagannatha Kaifiyat, and contemporary inscriptions present conflicting views. However, after consolidating power he in his inscriptions mentioned

his actual family whom he mentioned to be of warrior profession which implies he was neither a beggar nor a thief as suggested by Madala Panji or Kataka Raja Vamsavali rather he was a noble Kshatriya origin (p-54).

The next chapter deals with his initial days, where Kapilendra Deva was likely to be more concerned about the internal enemies. It is without a doubt that he had to face considerable opposition from different feudal lords which threatened his very existence as the king of Odisha. In such a situation Kapilendra followed a typical carrot-and-stick approach (p-57). Among the rebel chiefs whom Kapilendra subdued were the Gangas of Khimandi, Silvamsis of Nandapur, Matsyas of Oddadi and Vishnu Vardhana Chakravartins of Panchadharha.

The next two chapters discuss the war against Vijayanagar and the Bahamani sultanate. There was a tripartite struggle between Bahmani, Vijayanagar and Velamas to gain control of the fertile Krishna-Godavari delta. This is the time Kapilendra joined the issue with them (p-107). The debate around the Malwa and Delhi campaigns of Kapilendra Deva by Prabhat Mukherjee, KC Panigrahi, R. Subhramanyam and Venkataramanayya, the author concluded that "It is not impossible, but with the presently available evidence, we are unable to reach any conclusion. If we consider KC Panigrahi's opinion that Kapilendra might have allied with the sultan of Jaunpur at some point in time to help him invade Delhi which Jaunpur sultan did partially successfully in reality, then it doesn't sound unlikely. However, Jaunpur and Odisha had enmity during the reign of Kapilendra as per some Islamic sources. Therefore, it is difficult to accept it" (p-129). The military conquests of Kapilendra Deva corroborated by various primary sources have been depicted vividly by the author. Following the annexation of territories and the defeat of primary adversaries, Kapilendra Deva was bestowed with the regnal title of Shri Shri Gajapati Gaudeshwara Naba Koti Karnata Kalabargeswara, which translates to "the Lord of Bengal (Gauda), the Lord of the Karnataka region or Vijayanagara, the Lord of Kalaburgi, and of ninety million subjects." This title continues to be utilized by the Gajapati of Puri to this day. Referring to Navakoti the author concluded that this Navakoti only refers to 9 crore or 90 million subjects or some units, not exactly the population, referring to the Vijayanagar kingdom alone or Vijayanagar and the Bahmani Kingdom together (p-154). The Jaunpur Conundrum delves into the clash between Kapilendra Deva and the forces of Jaunpur. While KC Panigrahi's analysis records the victory of the former, Nizamuddin's accounts favour Hussain Shah. The author adopts KC Panigrahi's perspective, influenced by the chainichakada. From controlling five to six districts surrounding the capital Cuttack to defeating five to six primary kingdoms of the era, Kapilendra Deva elevated the kingdom of Odisha to become the largest Hindu kingdom of its time, surpassing even the Vijayanagar empire in size. In Chapter 11, the author outlines eleven factors such as the Purushottam Jagannath Samrajya, a military state, the power of Iron ore, sea trade etc. that

propelled Kapilendra Deva to succeed against his rivals. Hamvira Deva, the eldest son of Kapilendra Deva was the man behind the success of Kapilendra Deva in the south but unfortunately, Kapilendra Deva chose Purushottam Deva as his successor (p-181).

Duarte Barbosa observes, "The inhabitants of Odisha exhibit exceptional prowess in warfare. The king of Odisha commands a formidable army consisting of foot soldiers." The author highlights that the Odia military employed various formations when marching against their enemies, including Hantakaru Dala, Aguani Thata, Pradhana Bala, Pachhiani Thata, Anga Bala, and Paridandas, with further details available in Sarala Das's writings. Additionally, the author mentions the presence of 36 significant forts under Kapilendra Deva's rule. The inadequacy of data is the major cause behind the unexplored administrative history of Kapilendra Deva's period (p-210). Sarala Das vividly portrays the social life of the period in his Mahabharata, ingeniously adapting it to the cultural and social milieu of Odisha. The author remarkably says, "For Odias Kapilendra Deva was no less than what Shivaji Maharaj was for Maharashtra or Krishnadeva Raya was for Karnataka. This great Hindu Hero from the eastern part of India must be celebrated" (p-234). The sentiment expressed is not solely that of the author but resonates with every proud Odia who holds a deep awareness of their history and cultural heritage. Kapilendra Deva, far from being merely an emperor associated with the eastern part of India or Odisha, symbolizes a transcendent figure, one who extends beyond the confines of regionalism. One notable advantage of this book is its reader-friendly approach.

However, a limitation that cannot be overlooked from a historical analysis perspective is that the choice of wording and sentence structure during analysis, interpretation, or posing certain historical questions could have been more aligned with the conventions of academic history. Nihar Ranjan Nanda, an Engineer whose enthusiasm for History and Researcher, has crafted a book that meets a pressing need. In his debut publication, Nanda has demonstrated considerable skill, offering a valuable contribution to the field.

Mahitosh Gopal

*Lecturer in History, Indira Gandhi Women's College  
Cuttack, Odisha*