



Shaktism in Odisha

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In Odisha there are Shakta shrines of which the shrines of Dakhina Kali at Jalasara Khandi, Taratarini at Purnagiri over Rushikulya, Ramachandi at Jhadeswar in the foot of the Krishna Giri Hills, Mangala at Kakatpur, Sambaleswari at Sambalpur, Charchika at Banki, Ramachandi at Konark, Sarala at Jhankada, Tarini near Anandapur, Siddha Bhairavi at Mantridi near Berhampur, Viraja at Jajpur, Chamunda on Vindu Sarovar at Bhubaneswar, Bhuasuni near Sisupalagarh, Chamunda at Khiching in Mayurbhanj, group of Saptamatruka at Parsurameswar, Sree Jayadurga at Bilaspur, a Brahmin Seasan in the southern part of Ganjam District near Samapa, the capital of the then Kalinga along with a Jantramurti in the same village, Manikeswari at Bhawanipatna, Dwarbasini over Bindusagar at Bhubaneswar, with Devipadahara tank nearby, having about a large number of small temples, Narayani near Barakula, Singhasani near Panchabhuti, Bhagabati at Banapur, Ugratara in Bhusandapur, Bimala in the precincts of Sri Jagannath temple, Cuttack Chandi at Cuttack along with Gadachandi, Mahurikalia near Berhampur Ganjam, Khambeswari in Aska, Byaghradevi in Kulad Bhattarika at Badamba, charchikai at Banki, Bhadrakali at Bhadrak, Viraja at Jajpur, Shayama Kali at Hinjili, Bhairavi at Chikiti, Kusangai at Kusang and Budhi Thakurani at Berhampur, sixty four yogini at Hirapur and Ranipur Jharial attract our attention.

Saktism established itself as a separate cult in the early part of Orissa History with the emergence of famous Brahmin and non-Brahmins worshippers of Devi Bhavani with *Gurumantra*. After some time it merged in Saivism so much so that its separate entity is hardly discernible.

As is evidenced from the *Mahabharata*, the *Harivansha* and *Vayu Purana* the Sakta Shrine of Viraja existed at Jajpur in the pre-Christian era. In the then Kalinga on the river Vaitarani, Viraja Tritha was situated as it is stated in the *Vana parva* of the Mahabharata. Sakta Pitha of Viraja at Jajpur is a very ancient shrine.

The Sakta Shrine of Viraja seems to have been dominated by Buddhism before the Ganga period in Odisha. Guhasiva of the Dathavanasa tradition was probably the ruler of Kalinga in the pre-Gupta period, who was a staunch follower of Buddhism and his predecessors were also Buddhists. When there was a revival of Brahminical Hinduism in Odisha, there was therefore the necessity of reforming the Sakta Shrine during the Gupta period. The great Brahminical shrine sprang up with the well known tradition that Gayasura was killed by Vishnu and that the head of the dead body fell at Gaya and the navel portion at Viraja. The shrine seems to have been reconverted into a pure Brahminical shrine with Viraja as its presiding deity.

Viraja Mahatmya which forms a part of *Skanda Purana* describes that there was a great Brahminical sacrifice at Jajpur performed by



Brahma and Viraja was born from the sacrificial pit as per the tradition already recorded. A two handed Mahishamardini is the image of Viraja which is now worshipped in the temple.

Buddhism during Bhauma period was a mixed form of religion in which Buddhism, Saktism, Saivism and Tantrism had become strangely amalgamated and therefore the Sakta shrine at Viraja might have been influenced by the mixed religion followed by the Bhaumas who were the rulers of Tasala with their capital at Viraja. At Jajpur there are several Sakta images, particularly of Chamunda which were worshipped by *Saktas*, *Saivas*, Buddhists and *Tantrikas*.

There are number of Sakta Temples in the great Saiva centre of Bhubaneswar which shows an amalgamation of Saivism and *Tantrika* Buddhism.

These temples were mostly built during Bhauma period. The most ancient Sakta shrine of Bhubaneswar is the temple of Vaital. Its sculptures prove clearly that the strange esoteric rites were being performed inside the temple by the so called *Tantrikas*. Four Sakta Shrines sprang up on the four sides of Vindu Sarovar during the Bhauma period. They are now known as Vaital, Mohini, Utteraswar temples. On the east of the tank, the names of the Sakta shrine which still exists, has been lost. Either the images of Chamunda or Mahisamardini is found inside the shrine of which Vaital is the most prominent. It is told that human sacrifices were being performed in this Vaital temple with the strange esoteric rites in the dead hour of night. The study of the architecture and sculpture of this shrine gives us an indication to this effect and nature.

From the word *Vetal*, the name *Vaital* has been derived. *Vetal* indicates a spirit. *Kapalikas* and the *Tantrikas* wanted to attain *Siddhis* with the help of this so called *Vetal*. *Svarnadri Mahodaya* gives a description that the venerable goddess Chamunda garlanded with human skulls exists on a spot on the west, in the

vicinity of the tank *Vindu-Sarorara*. She is known as *Kapalani* and is of dreadful and terrific form. In this context, the shrine of *Vetals*, is referred to. The adorable deity of worship of the *Kapalikas* was this terrific *Kapalini* with dreadful eyes. Generally these *Kapalikas* were Shiva worshippers but very often the deity of their worship was a Chamunda, *Malati Madhab* drama of Bhavabhuti provides us an information that a *Kapalika* wanted to sacrifice Malati to Chamunda who had been brought for that purpose only. There was a faith that Kali praises *Kapalika* who is ever collecting human skulls for Her garland. In *Dasakumara Charita*, the story of Kanakalekha also gives an example of this nature. These are the proofs that the *Kapalikas* use to sacrifice human beings to goddess Chandi to attain *Siddhis*.

From a study of Vaital Temple, the form of Saktism that we find is not an independent one. It was certainly allied itself with Saivism and Buddhist-tantrism. The Vaital temple not only bears the *Sakta* images but also *Saiva* and Buddhist-tantric deities as it has been seen. The mixed form of religion was an extreme sect of Saktism, Saivism and Tantrism that was followed by *Kapalikas*. Some revolting practices such as wearing of skulls, sacrificing human beings, eating food and drinking water in human skull-ups and keeping alight sacrificial fire with the brain and lungs of men were indulged by the *Kapalikas* in transe conditions.

Bhuasuni, in the vicinity of Sisupalagarh and the presiding deity at Khiching in Mayurabhanja have the same characteristics and are depicted in terrific forms with sunken bellies and emaciated sinewy bodies garlanded with skulls, seated on corpses with jakals by their sides. Another form of Saktism is the worship of *Saptamatrukas* which can be traced back to the 6th / 7th century A.D. or may be earlier also. In the Parsurameswar, Vaital and Muketeswar Temples at Bhubaneswar, the Groups of *Saptamatrukas* are to be found.



At Jajpur two groups of these deities are to be found being worshipped at different locations. On the bank of Markendeswar tank at Puri, the Sapta Matrukas are found. All these groups contain the images of Ganesh and Virabhadra besides containing the images of Varahi, Indrani, Vaishnavi, Kaumari, Sivani, Brahmi and Chamunda. The babies are not found in the arms of earlier *Matrukas* but in the arm of later *Matrukas* babies are invariably found. In Odisha and in the then Kalinga the worship of *Matrukas* formed an essential part of Saktism and it had been widespread throughout.

Out of the group, some times Chamunda and Varahi were selected and worshipped as single deities. In the Prachi Valley of Puri district, a Varahi temple still exists at Chaurasi. It is not unlikely that similar rites were followed here also.

In the Balasore district another Varahi shrine is to be found at Narendrapur near Gadi. In a thatched house the presiding deity was being worshipped previously, now being enshrined in a temple. In the Raja Bagicha of the Nilagiri town in the same district a single image of Varahi was lying and it seems originally to have belonged to a shrine. In Odisha, the Varahi worship was widespread. It was believed by the people that to ward off all the epidemics it was necessary to propitiate her as she was to be the cause of all epidemics.

Tatarini now on the top of Purnagiri hills at Raipur on Rusikulya were known as daughters of the great Tantrik Basu Praharaj in the 18th Century A.D. in Kharida in the district of Ganjam and after his death they were enshrined in the temple. Basu Praharaj was a famous *Devi Bhakta* in Ganjam.

Shri Jayadurga, now worshipped in Bilaspur in the district of Ganjam in the house of a Brahmin was brought from Bhawanipatna in the 19th Century A.D. by *Punya Sloka* late Bhubaneswar Tripathy over his head by walking from Kesinga through the dense forest of Parvati

Puram now in Andhrapradesh to Bilaspur in the district of Ganjam in Odisha. Devi Jantra is now in the same village in another household, worshipped by Bhakta Tantrik the late Baidhar Tripathy in early 18th Century A.D. It is said that she was in the talking terms with *Bhakta Siromani* Baidhar Tripathy who did miracles.

Bhagabati at Banapur and Ugratara at Bhusandapur are very famous through the worship of *Bhakatas* even now along with Tarini at Ghatgaon, Dhakhina Kali at Jalasarkhandi, and Maa Mangala at Kakatpur.

The connection of Goddess Mangala of Kakatpur with Sri Jagannath shrine during *Rathajatra* is well-known through out the world. No *Rathajatra* would be conducted unless *Bhaktas* of Jagannath get *Swapnadesh* from the Devi Mangala at Kakatpur.

During Ganga period in Odisha in between 12th-14th century A.D. worship of Sakti images were not been patronized by the Ganga kings. Chodaganga Dev banished all goddesses from Odisha as per the traditions recorded in *Madalapanji*. In *Madhyaparba* of *Mahabharata* another tradition recorded by Sarala Das points out to the fact that the king was responsible for the removal of Ramachandi from her original shrine at Konark to the sea shore at *Liakhia Muhana*. Excepting a few like Viraja and Parvati etc. Chodaganga Deva was antagonistic to *Sakta* images in his kingdom. All these traditions points out to the fact that the king was not in favour of *Sakta* worship at all. During this period all male deities were provided with consorts or their female counterparts. Parvati temple inside the Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar and Laksmi temple inside the Jagannath temple at Puri were built during the Ganga period. Saktism in Orissa took a different turn during the Ganga rule.

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