



Goddess Tarini at Ghatagaon

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There is a long tradition of Sakti worship in Orissa. The temples of goddesses built at several places - Biraja at Jajpur, Chandi at Cuttack, Charchika at Banki, Mangala at Kaktpur, Bimala at Puri, Samaleswari at Sambalpur, Patneswari at Patnagarh speak volumes of the followings of the Sakti Cult in Orissa. Similarly, the seats of Ambika, Sarala, Narayani, Bhattarika, Bhairavi, Taratarini, Ramachandi and Tarini are quite familiar in Orissa.

Ghatagaon has been famous as the seat of Goddess Tarini since the fifteenth century. By that time, Sakti cult had become popular in the southern parts of the country. It is believed that Goddess Tarini was originally the presiding deity of Kanchi. The King of Kanchi was an ardent devotee of the Goddess, by whose blessings happiness and prosperity was prevailing in the kingdom. During those days Gajapati Purusottam Dev ruled over Orissa. He proposed to marry

Padmavati, the beautiful Princess of Kanchi. The King of Kanchi, who knew that Purusottam Dev used to sweep the chariots of the three Lords at Car Festival every year, thought it below his dignity

to give his dear daughter in marriage to Purusottam Dev. The proposal was instantly rejected. Humiliated, Purusottam Dev attacked Kanchi, but was defeated. This, however, could not deter him to prepare himself for another battle. He prayed to Lord Jagannath and sought His blessings. The Lord appeared before him in a dream and told him to watch the roof tops of the houses which he would come across the next morning. He told the King to appoint the lord of that



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house, on whose rooftop the Lord's *dhandamala* would be noticed, as the General of the expedition. The next morning, Purusottam Dev noticed it on the rooftop of Gobinda Bhanja, the eldest son of King Trilochan Bhanja of Keonjhar, who was staying in Puri those days. Purusottam Dev appointed Gobinda Bhanja as the General



and made his second Kanchi expedition. It is widely believed that Lord Balabhadra and Lord Jagannath took part in the expedition to help King Purusottam Dev win the battle.

Gobinda Bhanja appeased Goddess Tarini of Kanchi with his unflinching devotion. After the battle was won, he advised the King to bring the images of Lord Madanmohan, Lord Raghunath and Goddess Tarini to Orissa. King Purusottam gladly agreed to the proposal. But it was found impossible to carry the huge idol of Goddess Tarini.

In the long run, Gobinda Bhanja's earnest prayers bore fruit. The Goddess told him that she would follow Gobinda Bhanja willingly, but if he looked back, she would not move any further. In this way Goddess Tarini came to be installed in Puri.

In 1480 A.D. King Trilochan Bhanja of Keonjhar passed away. The Gajapati King of Puri installed Gobinda Bhanja as the new king of the state. Gobinda Bhanja sought the permission of the Gajapati King to take Goddess Tarini with him to Keonjhar. Initially Purusottam Dev was unwilling; but the Goddess appeared in a dream and expressed her desire to go to Keonjhar. Accordingly, the King gave his permission, but it was a Herculean task to remove the deity. Govinda Bhanja prayed to the Goddess, who told him that she would follow him as long as he did not look back. Bhanja heard the sound of her *nupur* and proceeded to Keonjhar. On the way, suddenly he failed to hear the sound and looked back to ascertain if the Goddess was still following him. Since Gobinda Bhanja looked back, the Goddess did not wish to proceed further. She told him to go to Keonjhar and rule his kingdom from the capital. She would come to his rescue as and when he remembered Her. In this way, Goddess Tarini, the presiding deity of the State of Keonjhar, came

to be installed at the place which was later known as Ghatagaon.

Goddess Tarini was originally worshipped in Kanchi. The priests of the Goddess belonged to the Kondh tribe. A few Kondh dehuri families were brought to Puri to perform rituals when the Goddess was installed in Puri. A few of them were again brought to Ghatagaon when the Goddess came to be installed there. People belonging to several castes lived there, but there was no Brahmin family. For want of Brahmin priests people faced a lot of difficulties while performing the rituals at childbirth, death and at other times. The king looked upto the Goddess to find a solution. The Goddess appeared in his dream and told him to keep a pot full of sanctified ghee on one of the branches of a tree. Anyone taking a little ghee from that pot would be purified. The place where the ghee would be sprayed, would also be sanctified. Since then the place was named at Ghatgaon, which literally means the village of the pot.

Everyday the *Dehuri* performs the rituals such as giving the deity a bath, smearing the body with vermilion or *sindur*. Coconuts and bananas, flowers, etc. are offered to the Goddess. Devotees also offer rice, areca nut, saris, bangles and other things to the deity. People from distant places send coconuts in buses plying through Ghatagaon. *Makar Sankranti*, *Bisuva Sankranti* and *Raja Sankranti* are the important festivals observed here. Among other festivals, Durga Puja, Dushahara, Laxmi Puja and Kali Puja are also celebrated at this place. People believe that Goddess Tarini offers solace to the devotees when they are in distress; she is the saviour of her devotees at the time of crisis.

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