

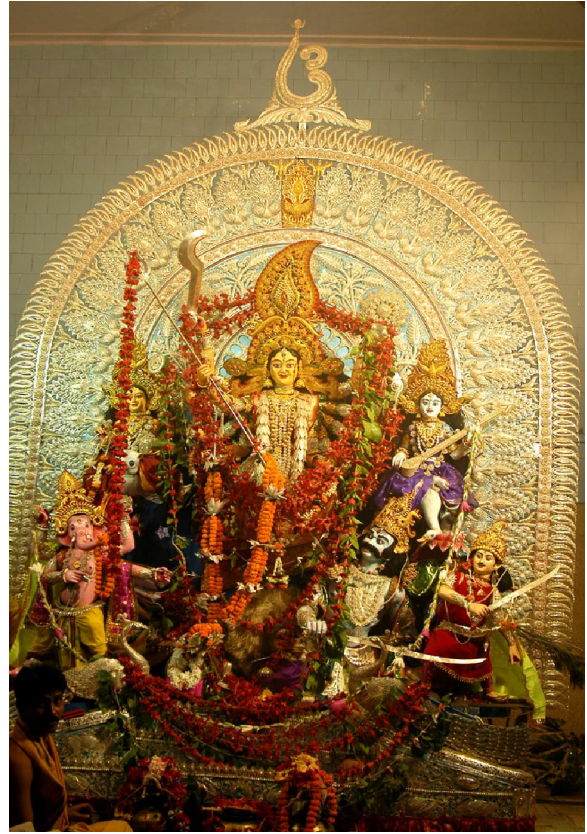


The Concept of Mother Goddess in the Art and Literature of Orissa

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The concept of Mother Goddess probably accommodates the largest number of paradoxes. She is a virgin and yet she is also the mother, a mother goddess. She is the Saivite Parvati and also a Vaishnavi. She is the purest of the pure. She is blood-thirsty Kali and also the very embodiment of the merciful and beautiful Amba or Lalita. She is invincible; she is the slayer of demons. She is Durga, with many arms. She is Sakti, the divine principle. This multiplicity of paradoxes proves the continuous popularity of the Sakti cult in India over the centuries.

The very word *Sakti* denotes power. She can be seen through the different phenomenon of life. *Durga Saptasati* says that everyone has inherent power called *Sakti*, which is a manifestation of *Para Sakti*, the supreme goddess. In the *Sakta* scheme of cosmogonical evolution, the unmanifested *prakarti* alone existed before creation. She wished to create, and having assumed the form of the great mother, created Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Referring to the Mother Goddess cult of Mohenjodaro, Marshall rightly observed that it was in the later *Sakta* phase of the primitive Mother Goddess cult that the Devi became the manifestation of the all-powerful female principle, viz. the *Prakriti* or *Sakti* having associated with the male principle, the *Purusa*. She becomes Jagadamba or Jagatmata, the mother of the universe and the creator of gods. She is Mahadevi, the consort of Siva.



Saktism gained prominence in the epic period when gods receded into the background. In the *Mahabharata* Aditi is regarded as mother of the Adityas. She is also the mother of Vasus and Rudras. In *Harivamsa*, she is identified with Durga. Later Vedic goddesses, however, received greater importance in the epics while goddesses



like Usha, Aditi, Bhru etc went into oblivion and were reduced to insignificance. Most of them are brought in relation to Vishnu or Siva. Lakshmi-Vaishnavi play an important part in the subsequent religious history of India. The goddess mentioned in the two great epics have been identified with Saraswati, the consort of Brahma. As the goddess of fluency and eloquence, the goddess Saraswati is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*.

The goddesses like Ambika, Aparna, Bhadrakali, Durga, Gouri, Kali, Kausiki, Sakambari, Uma etc were of Saivite affiliation but later they all had been identified with the Supreme Goddess of the *Saktas*. The *Mahabharata* also mentions some of the prototypes of Devi or Sakti. It narrates among the various names of the Goddess- Kumari, Mandaravasini, Kalaratri, Kaushiki, Sakambari, and so on. She is called the favourite of Narayana, born of Yasoda holding sword and shield, four-armed and four-faced, the destroyer of Mahisasura, who resides in the Vindhya. Uma, also known as Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya and the wife of Siva, is mentioned in the *Ramayana* and in the *Mahabharata*. Her name recalls *Maa* or the mother and her conception goes back to the primitive and universal cult of the female principle. The epithets used are Giriputri, Girija, Nagakanya, Salarajaputri, all indicating her association with Himalayan region. Uma is equated with Durga in the Durga *stotras* of *Mahabharata*. Her name is Durga as she saves people from difficulty. She is called Mandaravasini, Kumari, Kali, Chandi, etc.

In the *puranas*, a lot of information has been given about Saktism. The glory of the Goddess is revealed in its fullest form there. In *Devi Bhagavata Purana*, the *Sakta* Goddess is conceived as the *Adya Sakti* that resides in Brahma as the creative principle, in Vishnu as the sustaining power, and in Siva as the destructive

force. This *Adyasakti* pervades all space and annihilates all things of this phenomenal world. The Goddess is unmanifested and takes three forms of Mahalakshmi, Mahakali and Mahasaraswati representing *raja*, *satvika* and *tamasa* attributes.

The *Matrikas* or divine mothers play an important role in the Devi legends. In the *Mahabharata*, we come across numerous *Matrikas*. In the *puranas* they are regarded as the offshoots of the goddess Kaushiki or Chandika, namely Yogesvari or Vaishnavi, Brahmani, Kumari, Indrani, Maheswari, Chamunda and Varahi each having a separate identity.

In later period Saktism became almost identical with tantricism. Tantric ideas profoundly influenced the principles and practices followed by the *Saktas*. The evolution of Yogini cult gives ample evidence to this and all these forms of Devi have been duly represented in the art and literature of Orissa. The contribution of Orissa to *Sakta* cult and *Sakta* art is rich and significant both from literary and historical points of view.

Architectural Representation of Mother Goddess in Orissa

The walls of Vaitala, Sisiresvara and Markandeswara temples of Orissa contain exquisite images of Mahisamardini Durga.

The panel of Parsurameswara temple of Bhubaneswara represents a fine specimen of Kalyana Sundara murti, i.e the marriage scene of Siva and Parvati. A good number of sculptures of Orissa depict the Ardhanarisvara form in which the right half comprises all the iconography features of Siva, and the left half those of Uma.

In mediaeval Orissan temples the Gajalakshmi motif is carved on the shrines. She is elaborately depicted even in separate niches. Sri or Lakshmi as the Goddess of Wealth and



Prosperity occurs in the innovational stanzas of many inscriptions. The Hathigumpha Inscription of Kharavela throws light on the conception of this deity in the first century B.C. Of the important Orissan Gajalaksmis, we may refer to those on the tympanum of the Anantagumpha, on the doorway of the Muktesvara temple, on the eastern doorway of the *Jagamohana* of Konark, and on the wall of the shrine at Mahavir Chowk in Jajpur. On the door frame of Ratnagiri Mahavihara another beautiful mediaeval Gajalaksmi is found. The association of Lakshmi with Narayana is alluded to in literature and inscriptions. The Hindol plate of Subhakara Deva makes a reference to Lakshmi adoring the lap of Vishnu. We have fine specimen of Lakshmi- Narayana image found at Kendupatna in Cuttack district and Chaurasi in Puri district. Lakshmi is specially associated with Varaha and Narasimha incarnations of Vishnu. In connection with the former, she is installed in the Varaha temple at Jajpur and in connection with the latter she is found on the Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar. Her tantric Mahalakshmi form is represented in an eighteen armed image at Jajpur in the front of Trilochana temple. In the Lakshmi temple inside the inner courtyard of the Jagannath temple at Puri, the goddess takes specific *veshas* on various occasions.

Images of goddess Saraswati, the deity of learning stands on a lower pedestal in the sculptural representation of Orissa. There is an image of the goddess inside the Jagannath temple, but compared to that of Lakshmi, it is quite insignificant. That goddess Sarala of Jhankada bestowed poetic power on Sarala Das, the great poet of mediaeval Orissa, is a well-known fact. And it is to be noted here that she is identified with goddess Saraswati.

A piece of sculpture from Khiching is unique. It shows the half-length figure of a seven hooded nagini wearing a *karanda-mukuta* and playing on a *veena*. The pattern of this image signifies that the deity is not an ordinary snake

maiden, but a goddess with iconographic affinity with Saraswati.

Goddess Ekanamsa, mythologically associated with Vishnu-Krishna, is worshipped as the principal deity in the Ananta Vasudev temple at Bhubaneswar. Descriptions of this goddess are found in *Brhatsamhita*, *Vishnu Dharmottara*, etc.

The growing importance of Saktism brought the *Matrikas* into greater prominence. The images of the eight mothers from *Mukti Mandapa* near Jajpur and the eight mothers with Sivaduti on the bank of Baitarini indicate their popularity. At present, we have two sets of *Matrikas* at Jajpur. An inscribed image of Chamunda also comes from Jajpur which was installed by queen Vatsadevi of Bhaumakara dynasty. The Parsuramesvara temple of Bhubaneswar contained a group of *Saptamatrika* on the north west corner of the northern wall of the *Jagamohana*. The Vaital temple contains a terrible Chamundi figure as its presiding deity. In the inner wall of the *Jagamohana* we find a group of *Saptamatrikas*, all of them sitting in *yogasana* pose on a full blown lotus with their different attributes. In the Muktesvara temple, the presentation of seven mothers occurs on an eight petalled lotus carved on the ceiling of its *Jagamohana*. The figure of a four- armed Vaisnavi with Garuda beneath her seat hailing from Khiching deserves special mention. The goddess gracefully holds *sankha* and *chakra* in her back hands. She has her front right hand in the *abhaya* pose and child in her front left.

The Yogini cult also revived on account of the increasing influence of the cult of seven or eight mothers. Initially their numbers increased from eight to sixteen and then to sixty-four and more. In Sanskrit literature, the *yoginis* have been represented as the attendants of various manifestations of Durga, engaged in fighting with



Sumbha and Nisumba and the principal *yoginis* are identified with *Matrikas*. There is a temple of sixtyfour *yoginis* at Hirapur. All of them are in standing postures. There is another temple of sixtyfour *yoginis* at Ranipur-Jhari in Bolangir district.

That Orissa had long association with Tantricism is evident from its identification with Uddiyana, one of the four famous Tantra *pithas* of ancient India. Innumerable images of Tantric goddesses have been found from different sites. Mention may be made of images of Tara (Jajpur-11th century A.D.), bronze images of Hariti and Kurukulla (Banpur), now preserved in Orissa State Museum, images of Vasundhara from Khiching and those of Arya Saraswati and Aparajita from Ratnagiri.

The Tantric influence is so deep that it is felt in the worship of some Hindu goddesses. Tantric rituals are observed for Goddess Bimala, the principal female deity of Jagannath temple, Puri. The very shape of the image of Stambhesvari, the presiding deity of Sonapur, also establishes the fact. Here the goddess is being worshipped in the form of a pillar. The temples of Mohini, Kapalini and Gauri at Bhubaneswar, Bimala at Puri, Kichakesvari at Khiching, Biraja at Jajpur, Mangala at Kakatapur, Charchika at Banki, Ugratara at Bhusandapur, Varahi at Chaurasi. Sarala at Jhankada, Samalesvari at Sambalpur and Tara Tarini in Ganjam show the wide prevalence of Sakti-cult in Orissa.

Saktism in Literature

Madala Panji gives details of the cult of seven mothers whose images were installed by Bhima Keshari. It also makes a mention of the construction of the Samalai temple at Sambalpur by one Yadukesari. Sarala Das's *Chandi Purana* deals with the *puranic* and popular legends of the Devi. In his *Bilanka Ramayana*, Sita is identified with the great goddess who killed Ravana. Goddesses such as Ugratara, Baseli,

Mahesvari, Kalika, Karikali, Ahimukhi, Jambaki, etc. are mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. Jagannath Das, the mediaeval poet of Orissa, composed a work on *Saiva-Sakta* doctrine which came to be known as *Tula-Bhina*. In *Bata Abaksha* of Balarama Dasa, Lord Jagannath is described as being attended upon by sixty-four *yoginis*: Katyayini, *Sapta Matrika*, Bimala and Biraja. The work also makes a mention of seventy-six local goddesses identified with different aspects of *Sakti*. The *Prachi Mahatmya* of Dvija Trilochana mentions deities like Candaghanta, Rama Candi, Bhagavati etc. The Orissa State Museum contains several Tantric manuscripts and in this context reference may be made of Jagannath Acharya's *Durga Yajna Dipika*, Kesava Rath's *Tarinikula Saradarcana Paddhati* and Raghunath Das's *Vanadurga Puja*.

Thus Saktism evolved out of the prehistoric Mother Goddess cult, and symbolized the facts of primitive life manifest in various forms. Its development here is manifold like a number of streams, issuing from a single source. The significance of each of these streams has to be understood in the context of the prevailing religious beliefs and practices.

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