



Twin Goddesses Tara-Tarini on Purnagiri

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The shrine of the twin Goddesses Maa Tara-Tarini is situated on the top of a hillock called Purnagiri, which is a part of Kumari hills, 708 feet high, on the south of the River Rushikulya. A flight of 999 steps on the eastern side of the hill leads to the top of the mountain where the shrine of Tara-Tarini is situated. This part of the hill is called *Dahihandi*. There is also a zig-zag motorable road by which one can approach the shrine situated at the hill top. The view of the surrounding landscape from the hill top is quite enchanting. The verdant hill girdled by the quietly flowing Rushikulya and the long stretch of fertile plain encircled by mountain is a beholding sight.

The place has achieved tremendous fame for the worship of the Twin Goddesses Tara and Tarini. Both the deities are about 10' high and are crudely fashioned in stone but attached with silver eyes. Two fully elaborated brass heads enshrined in between them represent their *Vijepratimas*.

The Tara - Tarini *Pitha* is considered as a *Shakti pithas* out of 51 *pithas* Tantric cult. It is believed that at this *pitha* two breasts of Sati fell for which the two deities have this peculiar shape. This famous *Shakti Pitha* had a tradition of human and animal sacrifices even till the advent of the British in Odisha. The temple erected for

the deities, is of modern origin. With the rush of visitors to this place in recent years, several new constructions in the premises have come up in the shapes of *Mandapas* and *Dharmasalas*.

Associated with legends and beliefs with some Puranic corroboration, the

place has gathered much mythological importance through centuries. Pilgrims visit this place throughout the year. The four *Melas* held on the four Tuesday of the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) every year attract a large number of devotees. The tonsure (*Mundan*) of babies are conducted in large numbers, particularly as auspicious days on payment of a fee to the Tara- Tarini Trust Board



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which manages the affairs (*Nitis*) of the temple. A big fair is held here in the month of *Chaitra*. The local authorities look to the sanitation and public health works. A large number of people gather here on *Mahavisuba Sankranti* day (mid- April)

The place is well connected with the bus services from Brahmapur and Chatrapur equally distance about 30 kms. Buses from Brahmapur and Purusottampur stop at the Tara-Tarini junction from where one has to walk a distance of about 2 kms to reach the place.

Twin Goddesses Tara-Tarini are enshrined in heart of Ganjam district, pastly popularly known as flourishing Kalinga Kingdom. They are said to be set up on the hill top on the bank of the river Rushikulya, by one great Pandit Basu Praharaj as per a popular legend. This hill top is popularly known as "Dahihandi" (pot of milk curds). The Aryanised Goddesses or *Shakti* with the name of Tara- Tarini came to be worshipped in a shrine, initially began as a *Tantra pitha* where Tantric devotees attained their salvation through the practice of *Tantra* worship of mother Goddesses known as Tara Devi, Kali, Mahalakhmi, Bhairabi, Bagala, Matangi, Chinnamasta, Dhumabati, Bhubaneswari became a famous place of pilgrimage in Odisha. Ganjam was not only a cradle of human civilisation, it was equally so of culture- particularly for its religious faiths, cults, beliefs, festivals, rituals, rites, temples, shrines, monasteries, monuments and institutions. The shrines made of stones, bricks and mortars, were constructed here in different periods of historical times. The worship of trees is said to be the earliest one and next to it began the worship of the Mother Goddesses i.e. *Matruka Puja*. From the time cycle it is clearly observed that *Matruka Puja* started in the tribal forms i.e - Tarapenu and Stambeswari. Stambeswari or *Khamba* or wooden pillars, trees symbolises the Mother Goddess. Who choose the trees or pillars

as the abodes of her divinity, which is still in vogue in the Sonepur region i.e. Western Odisha and Aska Southern Odisha. When the Aryanisation of tribal Goddesses started, different Goddesses in different places were installed and worshipped as Narayani near Nirmalajhar in the vicinity of Khalikote, boarder of Ganjam-Khurda-Puri; Tara-Tarini near Purusottampur on the right bank of the Rushikulya river, Byaghradevi in Kulada, Kuraisuni near Mujagada, Balakumari in Chikiti on the hill top, Budhi Thakurani Mahamayee in old Brahmapur, Siddha Bhairabi in Mantridi, Mahurikalua near Mohuda, Singhaseni in the dense forest in the boarder of Polasara and Banapur, Ranaghanta(Warbell) at Tilisingi inside forest near Bhanjanagar, Bimalai in Nirmalajhar, Ratni in Polasara and also Ekapada Bahairabi worshipped in the Swapneswara temple at Polasara which is said to have been built by the Ganga King Chodaganga Deva in the 12th century A.D, Durgadevi in Ganjam town etc.

It is very peculiar that Tara-Tarini Goddesses are not set up by any king or tribal community. Almost all *Shakti pithas* of Ganjam are built or and all Goddesses worshipped by any king as their *Istadevi*. One great Sanskrit scholar of Brahman cast having profound knowledge in *Tantra, mantra* Pandit Basu Praharaj set up Devi Tara - Tarini at the top of the mountain i.e. Purnagiri. Near Purusottampur, in a small village Kumbhari on the left bank of the River Rushikulya Basu Praharaj was born in 1707 A.D and died in 1782 A.D. He was a great Sanskrit Scholar who read at Birajagannathpur sasan. He earned good name and fame as an eminent *Sastragyna Pandit*. But he was very unhappy due to his childless life. He devoted most of his time in meditation and *Shakti Sadhana*. One night Basu Praharaj dreamed to get twin daughters. A great *Habana Yagna* was conducted and twin Goddesses Tara-Tarini came out. Basu Praharaj kept them with much care as his daughter in his house. When he



became old twin Goddesses vanished and told in a dream to Basu Praharaj to set up them on the top of Purnagiri mountain. Two sisters are worshipped on the mountain top by almost all people of Ganjam and other parts of different districts of the Odisha as presiding deity or Istadevi. In front of Maa Tara Tarini, *Ghanta Chhamundia* i.e. Bell *Samiana* and long swords are kept which represents the motherly affection of Goddesses. In due course of time childless trader Citi Ramaya of Brahmapur constructed 999 steps (*Pahacha*) from the foot of the mountain to top and also he was blessed with a daughter by Maa Tara - Tarini. After some years Purusottampur Policestation O.I.C and later C.I. of Chhatrapur Abhimanyu Pradhan utilised most of his time with devoted mind for the construction of motorable road from the mountain foot to top and provision for pipe water supply and electricity.

Now Maa Tara - Tarini are worshipped by *Sipati* community popularly known as *Sudra Sevak Mali*.

As per mythological and local tales the life span of Basu Praharaj comes to 1707-1782 A.D. but much before Basu Praharaj, Adikavi Sarala Dash mentioned the name of Tara - Tarini in *Chandi Purana* 'Yogini Chapter'. In right side Tara and left side Tarini is popularly known as Great *Stana Pitha* as per the narration of *Tara Prasad* publication which appears in between 1688 - 1716 A.D.

Whatever it may be Maa Tara - Tarini are twin sisters but they are one *shakti* and known as *Sankata Tarini Abhayapradayini*. Some have also pointed out the association of Tara, the primordial deity of the Mahayana Buddhist Pantheon and her transformation into Tara - Tarini.

Devotees of different parts of Odisha and neighbouring Andhra Pradesh visit Maa Tara-Tarini throughout the year, especially during cultural *yatra* in Chaitra month Tuesday five to

six lakhs of pilgrims and tourists visit this place. In the post Independent era the shrine has gained prominence as a major tourist destination.

The total need of the time is to develop Tara - Tarini complex as a spiritual, cultural and tourist center of national eminence due to its tremendous potential for tourism, the locational advantage (Green hill and River Rushikulya around it), the cultural fame of the shrine and unflinching devotion of the people of Odisha.

The Tara - Tarini Development Board (T.T.D.B) was constituted and registered under the Society Registration Act 1860 during 2003. The R.D.C (S.D) Brahmapur and D.M. and Collector Ganjam are the Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. Eminent citizens of Brahmapur and nearby areas are its members. To undertake various work for the improvement of Tara - Tarini Temple Complex and surrounding areas, the total cost would be approximately 3 crores rupees. Tara- Tarini hill has already been installed with the rope car with private initiative from the foot hill to the top of the hill, construction of multipurpose Kalyanamandap and strengthening of the water supply for 24hours. Without affecting / displacing the deities from the original position, 65 feet tall main temple with *Mukhasala* and a *Bhogamandap* have been constructed with stones. A very nice arched gate of the height 22 feet like Mukteswar Temple Gate at Bhubaneswar has been constructed with cost of 11 lakhs rupees. The entire area will be well facilitated with wide road and bright light. Presently O.T.D.C Panthasala and Diganta I.B are situated on the foot of the hill. Very soon *Kalyanamandap* and *Yatrinivas* will be constructed by T.T.D.B.

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