

The Perishing Tradition of Osha, Brata and Mela in Orissa : An Overview

Pratap Kumar Dash

Orissa has a good deal of well-known tradition of Oshas, Bratas and Melas. The ceremony and sanctity of these traditional religious festivities are unparalleled. But these days, such occasions seem to become less lively and some of them are gradually perishing too. Thus, I would like to make it known to the world, especially to the modernised Oriyas who are least aware of it. There are atleast 18 major Oshas in a year. They are *Budhei Osha* (known as *Budhei-Sudhei* observed on wednesdays in the month of Bhadrab and goddess Bimala or Tarini is worshipped with the establishment of the idol of Buddhiman in a *sila*), *Chaitra Mangala Osha* (observed on Tuesday in the month of Chaitra and goddess Mangala is worshipped), *Alana Osha* (observed in the month of Ashwina and goddess Lakhmi is worshipped), *Shani Osha or Tota Osha* (observed every Saturday, Lord Shani is worshipped in a mango grove), *Janhi Osha or Tulsi Puja* (observed in the month of Aswina, moon god and Tulsi are worshipped finally on the day of Kumar Purnima), *Bata Osha* (where the bhogas are covered with a branch of Bajramuli, Lord Jama is worshipped). *Dutiya Osha or Puajiuntia* (known as Dutibaman Osha, observed in Ashwina, worship of Sun God, making the sand effigies of fox and eagle, the branch of Apamaranga is collected for the purpose), *Danda Panhara* (observed in the

month of Pausa, worship of Lord Shiva), *Sathi Osha* (observed in Bhadraba, goddess Sathi is worshipped), *Kanji Anla* (observed in Margasira, goddess Sathi is worshipped with other puja items like bitter kiper, *kanji*, radish curry, *poi plant*, *Balunga* and plant of saru), *Sukutuni osha or munibara bani*, (Lord Shiva and Parvati are worshipped), *Nisha Mangalabara Osha* (observed in the month of Ashswina and Mangala is worshipped), *Margasira Gurubara or Dhanamanika* (observed in Margasira and goddess Lakhmi is worshipped), *Benatia osha*, *Purnima Osha*, *Bada Osha*, (observed in the month of Kartik, Lord Shiva is worshipped).

There are atleast 32 Bratas, observed in Orissa in a year. They are *Santoshi Mata Brata* (observed with fasting on every friday in which goddess Santoshi is worshipped and pickle is not eaten), *Sudasa Brata* (observed in Kartika, goddess Lakhmi is worshipped), *Kedar Brata* (in which Kedarnath is worshipped, with 21 forest flowers and 21 betel nuts), *Sumbadasami Brata* (the sun god is worshipped), *Radhastami Brata* (worship of Radha), *Somanath Brata* (observed in Bhadrab, Lord Shiva is worshipped), *Kukkuti Brata* (observed in Bhadrab, Lord Shiva and Parvati are worshipped), *Pandu Osha Brata* (observed in Margasira and worship of Judhisthira), *Sabitri Brata* (observed in Jyestha, Lord Jama is worshipped), *Nagala Chaturthi*

(in Kartik, worship of Shiva), *Sankata Chaturthi* (observed in the month of Magha, worship of Shiva and Parvati), *Rabinarayan Brata* (observed in Margasira and worship of the sun god), *Balitrutiya or Tija Brata Katha* (observed in Bhadrab and Lord Shiva is worshipped), *Sambara Dasami* (observed in the month of Pausa, worship of Shiva), *Shibaratri Brata* (observed in Phalguna and worship of Shiva), *Rai Damodara Brata* (in Kartika and worship of Jagannath), *Shri Krishna Janmastami Brata* (in the Bhadrab and worship of Lord Krishna), *Ananta Brata* (In the month of Ashwina and worship of Ananta murti or Basuki), *Pusa Rabibara Brata* (in the month of Pausa, worship of the sun god), *Binayaka Brata* (in Bhadrab and worship of Lord Ganesh), *Skanda Sasthi Brata* (observed in Chaitra), *Magha Brata*, *Guru Panchami Brata* (in Ashwina), *Guru Purnima Brata* (in Pausa) *Roosi Panchami*, Baisakha, Sita Nabami Brata (in Jyestha) *Ramba trutiya* (in Jyestha), *Bipattarini Brata*, *Gouri Brata*, *Kartika Brata*. There are almost seven *Melas* observed these days. People observe them in the specific days of a week which are not over lapped with each other. They can do it round the year. The *Melas* include *Trinath mela* (observed on Sunday and worship of Bramha, Vishnu and Maheswar), *Sanishchara Mela* (observed on Saturday and worship of Shani), *Nabagraha Mela* (worship of the nine grahas on a specific day in consultation with the Purohit), *Tarini Mela* (observed on Tuesday), *Panchanana Mela* or *Akhandalamani Mela* (observed on Monday), *Astasambhu Mela* (worship of Lord Shiva) and *Hanuman Mela* (observed on Saturday).

The source of these Oshas, Bratas and Melas goes back to the ancient times. Some of them are directly derived from Bhagabat (Kartika and Janmastami Bratas), where as most of them

are derived from *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and *Shiva Purana* etc. However some of these are traditionally observed. The language of most of such writing are in the nine lettered lines in couplet. But some are described in prose too. Some of these books are written by a few identified persons whereas most of the writings are written by anonymous writers. The literature of such religious books mostly refer to folk traditions and settings. Besides we have a series of pujas like *Baluka puja*, which are observed rightly too. Mostly the Oshas and the Bratas are observed by women of Orissa. But the Melas are observed by all the family members. Most of such Oshas, Bratas and Melas are observed traditionally. They are highly religious although some unreasonable systems are there. Each Oriya family must wait eagerly to such an occasion in a year. These constitute the essence of Oriya tradition. Most of such occasions are observed by bramhin families. Even people of other castes also observe them with a greater sanctity although they depend upon a bramhin to perform the puja at times. However, the advent of modernity has already hampered such traditions. People in various parts of Orissa observe them as a traditional part of seasonal worshippings and some also observe it farcically. This seem to become gradually less pompus and lack of life.

The get-together on such occasions imply a lot to the people of Orissa. This amounts to a greater cultural unity and establishes good relationship among the neighbours variously. These Oshas are usually observed in certain places which are called as *kothi*. But still some Oshas and Bratas are observed at the altar or even in the temple of gods and different type of food items such as fruits like coconut and banana are taken as *bhogas* commonly. Along with *hulahuli* and *haribol* sound, these pujas are performed in

religious congregations. But in case of Yajnya or Jagar Melas, at the end, a *homa* is arranged where a coconut is burnt as a matter of religious ritual.

In such occasions the idols or photos of the particular gods and goddesses are well decorated and installed in the proper direction (usually eastward or westward). Different flowers and incense sticks etc are also set. But some occasions are there when specific things are arranged as in case of Shanischar mela iron nails and teal oil are essential. For Trinath mela, betel, betelnut and sacred thread are required. It is a rule that in the time of Janhi Osha, none of the girls would snatch janhi or its flower. Most of such occasions are vegetarian in nature too. Cakes are prepared from unboiled rice and biri, where as *khiri* can be prepared from unboiled rice and molass or sugar. People prepare these *bhogas* using ghee and not any edible oil as ghee is taken as a pure product. In Alana Osha, no salt is eaten. In case of the worshippings of Vishnu, the use of *Tulsi* is there where as in case of the worshippings of Shiva, Parvati or Kali, *bela* leaves are used. For all the goddesses, vermilion is required. In case of goddesses Mangala and Kali, China rose is important, where as in case of goddesses Lakshmi, white flowers as well as lily like flowers are arranged. For Shiva *Gayasa* and *Dudura* are important flowers. Such occasions are often associated with pure dung of a cow as dung is marked auspicious. *Panchamuruja* (made of a specific stone and colours of five kinds) and *pancha mrita* (raw milk, ghee, curd, honey and molass) are often sprinkled for making the altar pure. A *Purna Kumbha* is set with pure water and a small branch of mango with more than six leaves kept on it and is placed on the right side of the altar to mark the auspicious moment.

In such Oshas, Bratas and Melas mainly Lord Vishnu or Krishna, Lord Shiva and Adishakti

or Mangala or Durga and goddess Lakshmi are worshipped. But as the ancient Oriya people had faith and honour for several other gods, goddesses, stars and planets, they used to worship the sun on the occasions of *Samba Dasami* and *Rabinarayan Brata*. They worship Lord Jama or Pluto on the occasion of *Jama Dutiya Brata Osha* and *Sabitri Brata*. Lord Ganesh is worshipped for the auspicious purposes on the *Ganesh Brata*. Ananta or Basuki the bearer of the earth is worshipped in the Ananta Brata. Snake, the *Bahana* of Lord Shiva is worshipped on *Nagala Chaturthi*. The moon is worshipped on *Kumar Purnima*. Lord Hanuman is worshipped in *Hanumana mela*. Even the nine planets or Grahas are worshipped in the *nabagraha mela*. In some occasions, instead of photos or effigies, stone idols (as in *Budhei osha*), turmeric idols (as in *sathi osha*), sand (as in Baluka Puja) are made for worship.

These occasions are set in a year as per strict astrological calculations as mentioned in *Panji*. Preparation of cakes and sweets, invitation to neighbours and relatives, distribution of bhogas among them are the other ceremonious parts of them. Some special food items are prepared to observe these festivities. On sudasa Brata *mandas* are prepared. In Manabasa, Khiri, Khechudi, Kakara and Chakuli are prepared. In Sankata Chaturthi Bundi is prepared from fried unboiled rice. In Dutiya Osha, many varieties of fruits and vegetables are arranged for bhoga and are used in the following day to prepare a curry called *ghanta*. We find that the fruits like *jambila*, *naranga*, *kerandakoli*, *padma puskar* (from padma) are required on the occasion of Dutiya Osha. In *Danda Panhara* hints about the food items in Orissa are given. *Dudha gainthala*, *mula kanji*, *muga manda*, *muga paiti*, fish-pepper curry etc. are mentioned in the same book. It is further mentioned in this book that when a

child gets birth, its fifth day is celebrated as *panchwati*, sixth day as *sathi ghar*, 7th day as *uthiari*, 10th day as *Dushi Bandapana* and 12th day as *Bara Patra*.

Apart from instructions regarding religious faith, these books also suggest some of the important things like prohibiting killing of bramhins, not committing adultery, not to kill cow, to donate wealth and money to bramhins and poors, to establish love and faith among husband and wife mutually and to adopt the vedic duties of *Dharma*, *Kama*, *Artha* and *Moksha*. These books speak of loyalty of family life as well as to other social institutions. Thus, such an important under current of Oriya culture ought to be saved by Oriyas amidst all oddities.

Notes

1. *Sila* - a flat and sized stone meant for preparing spice paste.
2. *Kanji* - a kind of curry prepared with broken rice, raddish, sour - rice- water and *bhursunga* leaves.
3. *Poi* - a creeper used in curry.
4. *Balunga* - riceless paddy stalks.
5. *Saru* - a common vegetable which grows underground.
6. *Kothi* - a particular place of worship, especially small temples or a particular room where all gather for worship.
7. *Jachagnya* - offering made for certain fulfilment of wish.
8. *Hulahuli* - the enchanting of auspicious sound made by women while worshipping.
9. *Haribol* - making a sound together by men in the name of god.
10. *Homa* - a major part of puja that takes place with offering of sal wood, pure ghee, pured in a *shruba* on a small sand heap at the altar.

11. *Gayasa* - a kind of wild flower.
12. *Dudura* - a kind of bell - shaped flower
13. *Panji* - a book containing astronomical calculations regarding festivals, ceremonies and cultural informations of our tradition.
14. *Manda* - a kind of stuffed cake, round shaped having either coconut or mung in its centre, prepared either from flour or unboiled powder rice.
15. *Kakara* - a flattened cake of the kind of manda.
16. *Chakuli* - a flattened and thin cake prepared in an earthen pan called *palama*, prepared from biri and rice.
17. *Bindi* - a cake of handful size prepared from powdered fried unboiled rice, molass, coconut scraps.
18. *Ghanta* - A widely liked curry of mixed vegetables.

References :

1. *Shree Radharaman Panji*, Radharaman Pustakalaya, Cuttack.
2. *The Oshas, Bratas and Melas*, published by Dharmagrantha Store, Cuttack.
3. *The Oshas, Bratas and Melas*, published by Saraswati Vidyabhandar, Cuttack.
4. *The Osha, Bratas and Melas*, published by Tripathy Pustakalaya, Berhampur.
5. *The Oshas, Bratas and Melas*, published by Tarini Pustakalaya, Berhampur.
6. *The Oshas, Bratas and Melas*, published by Binapani Pustak Bhandar, Cuttack.
7. *The Oshas, Bratas and Melas*, published by Orissa Jagannath Company, Cuttack.

Pratap Kumar Das is a lecturer in the Department of English, Ranpur College, Ranpur in the district of Nayagarh, Orissa.