The origin of the custom of worshipping the snake Goddess Manasa according to J.N. Banarjee may be traced to the 'Sarpabali' ceremony of the Griha-sutras. Both the Buddhist and the Jaina religious texts testify to the wide prevalence of the popular cult in India.

Following the tradition of 'Mahabharat', the snake Goddess Manasa is at present generally identified with Jaratkaru. The sister of Vasuki the Naga King, wife of the sage Jaratkaru and mother of the snakes in the epic always denotes Kadru as one of the wives of the sage Kasyapa. In the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Manasa has been described as the mind born child of Kasyapa, but the spiritual daughter of Siva who instructed her to go to Puskara and meditate there on Krisna who was recognised by him. Mention may also be made here of the epic and puranic accounts of Krishna's encounter with Naga Kaliya of the Mathura region and his victory over and severe chastisement of the later. These stories however signify the supression of the more primitive Naga cult by the generally accepted Krishna-Vishnu cult.

The popularity of the cult of Manasa during the 16th century A.D. is known from the biography of Sri Chaitanya and the 'Manasa Mangala' by Vijaya Gupta of Phullasri (Bakhargan). Sarpabali ceremony was being performed during the rainy season for the purpose of honouring and warding off the snakes but the existence ceases after the birth of her son Astika. In the same epic the Nagas, the off-spring of the poisonous snakes, are said to be the mother of all the snakes. In the Ramaryan it is 'Surasa' who is said to be the mother of the snakes, but no divinity was attributed to them.

From the Archaeological evidence the only source for that period, most scholars would support the existence of some snake cult in the proto Indian period. Among the early inhabitants of India there was a powerful tribe or group of tribes known as Nagas. It is often suggested that the tribes of snake worshippers
were called Nagas by the Aryans. The snake cult is more closely associated to Siva than to any other deity of the Hindu pantheon. Siva is worshipped as a snake God as Negeswar. So, it is believed that Manasa is to be the daughter of Siva. It is perhaps the close association of snakes with Siva.

In Bengal it is observed that live snakes are also preserved and worshipped in popular Saiva shrines. In such places the snake cult as been merged in the local Saiva cult where no rites of the snake Goddess manasa are performed separately. When Manasa met Shiva and requested him to bless her so that she would be worshipped by men. Shiva said there will be twelve festivals in twelve months. People will worship you.

The wide distribution of the Naga figures belonging to different periods all over India suggest the popularity of the Naga worship. They are still worshipped on the day of Nagapanchami. The deity is believed to be serpent Goddess and is primarily worshipped to get rid of snake bites, curing chronic diseases and get a child showing the association of the deity with fertility cult.

The rites and rituals relating to the worship of Manasa have variations in different parts of Bengal, but the basic elements are almost the same and identical.

Goddess Manasa or the serpent deity is still regarded as an object of popular worship in Bengal and its neighbouring regions. She was originally worshipped by primitive people but gradually found a place in the orthodox pantheon of Hinduism. It is only in the later puranas like the Devi Purana, Padma Purana, Bhagavat, Brahma Vaibarta purana etc. that the name of Manasa is mentioned as the serpent Goddess.

The prevalence of the Naga worship can be traced from the remote past, at least from the Indus valley civilization. The Mahenjodaro seal and pottery have thrown much light on the religious life of the people and on their attitude towards the serpent. On the obverse of a seal there is a figure believed to be a prototype of the historical Siva of the Hindu pantheon seated on a dais attended by two devotees on either side. Behind each of the devotees is depicted the vertical figure of a cobra. There were other seals which represent snakes in association with trees. The use of the snake in seals leads us to believe that the veneration to the snake was popular among the people of the Harrappa Culture as it is even today in India.

Of course it is admitted that the Mahabharat speaks of the name of Jarat Karu, sister of Vasuki and contains a detailed account of her but there are a few pottery which also show that respect was paid to the snake.

For the Jaina version of the snake Goddess Padmavati the ‘sasana’ devata of the twenty third Jina ‘Parsvanath’ is associated with snakes and is Hindu counterpart of the snake Goddess Manasa, one of whose name is Padmavati or Padma. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the Namasa images in Orissa State Museum.

Orissa State Museum preserves a good number of Manasa sculptures brought from different parts of Orissa. These are under display in the Archaeology gallery of the Museum awaiting serious study of scholars and visitors.

Manasa AY 107
Find spot - Dharmasala
Time C, 9th century A.D.
Measurement 2’.7” x 2’.0” x 1’.1”

The two sand stone image of Manasa sits on a lotus pedestal. The left hand holds a lotus
and the right hand holds a drinking pot. The five hooded snake protecting the image like a canopy. The image in excellent condition for display.

**AY/48 Manasa**
Find spot - Dharmasala
Time C. 10th century A.D.
Measurement - 2'.1" x 2'.6" x 1'.00"

This two armed crosseleged image of Manasa sits on a lotus pedestal and left hand holds a full blown lotus and right hand holds a drinking pot. The five hooded snake protecting the image. The sculpture in excellent state of preservation.

**Manasa AY /238**
Find spot - G.R.P. Malkhana, Cuttack
Measurement - Height 86 C.M. and 44 CM
breath
Time C. 9th century A.D.

A beautiful granite stone carved image, recovered from the G.R.P. Malkhana Cuttack by Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar and now under display in the entrance hall of O.S.M. The image is four armed, seated in lalitasana, right leg resting on a lotus flower and left leg crossed on the pedestal. She holds a Dambaru encircled with serpent coil in the right upper hand. The left upper one a trident and left a small drinking pot. This is ornamented with a kiritamukuta and conical prava-mandala decorated ear studs, necklace beaded upavita. Her thin drapery covers the legs down to the anklet. The five hooded snake protecting the image. The sculpture is in excellent state of preservation.

**References :**
2. Mahavarat Adiparava
4. Devipurana
5. Padma Purana
6. Devi Bhagavata

Gitarani Praharaj is Curator, Archaeology in the Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik laying the foundation stone of Collectorate Building at Khurda on 2.9.2007. Shri Surjya Narayana Patro, Minister, Energy, Information Technology and Culture and Dr. Prasanna Kumar Patasani, MP are also present.