

# A Fascinating Study of Syncretic Culture in Orissa

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## **Introduction :**

The new Islamic Culture was introduced in India by the Arabs in North India. The expansion of Muslim culture was attempted by means of peace and aggression. Peaceful means was followed by the Arab traders and Muslim Saints (Dervishes). Aggression means was adopted by Arab, Afghan, Turk and Mughal invaders. Apparently rise and expansion of Islam constitute a most fascinating episode in the history of mankind. A proper understanding of the historical role of Islam and the contribution it has made to human culture has required supreme importance.

In 636 C.E. Arab fleet first appeared in Indian water and made some settlement across the Indian coast. According to Rawldanso and Francis Day that Arab Muslim first settled on the Malbar Coast about the end of 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. In the last quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Arab again attacked Broach and other harbour of the Kathiawar coast. Then trade began to flourish and settlement continued to multiply. They acquired property and independently followed their religion. After the demise of Prophet Mohammed (570 to 632 C.E.) within a century the Arab subjugated extensive territory. It was in 711-13 a young Arab military general Mohammed - bin - Qasim conquered Sindh and Multan. Politically that conquest was insignificant, yet it had far-reaching effects on Muslim culture though Islam bears some impressionable lesson from the Indian soil.

The whole process of conquest and consolidation was completed by Sultanate ruler and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century C.E. India was extensively gone to the control of Mughal. At that time Orissa was occupied by Sulaiman Karani in 1568 C.E by defeating Mukunda Dev (the last Hindu

ruler of Orissa). This was for the first time Orissa (extensively a Hindu dominated province) came under an invader's influence. From that period onwards Orissa was directly or indirectly occupied by the Muslim Rulers who ruled it through their appointed Subedar and administrator. The rule of Muslim over Orissa influences it in various ways. Therefore, the Muslim effect directly fell on the life and culture of the common men viz., society, religion, economy and literature.

## **Society :**

Islam came to India after it had played out its progressive role. Its leadership had been wrested on the learned and cultured Arabs. As regards the spread of Islam in India no great people with a long history and old civilization can ever succumb easily to a foreign invasion unless the invaders command the sympathy and acquiescence. Islam brought a new pattern of life. The common mass was attracted by the social system of Islam. It gives every true believer equal spiritual status. There were many positive results of the interaction between Hindu-Muslim. But their results were neither acceptable to orthodox Hindus

nor orthodox Muslims. In spite of opposition, assimilation did take place. Purdah or veil system, seclusion of women folk was introduced elaborately. In case, they moved outside they used palanquins covered with curtains. We have reference of the queen of Raja Rudra Pratap of Puri who used to visit Sri Chaitanya in covered palanquins. Muslims adopted local habits of eating and drinking. A number of social taboos and restriction regarding caste among the Hindus helped Islam to attracting lower section of society. Missionary zeal of Islam also helped spread the new religion. It was not liked by the orthodox Hindus in Orissa. Due to the impact of Islam, chastity of women valued, the custom of Jauhar and Sati were restricted.

In custom, manner, dress, etiquette, food and ceremony Islam left permanent mark in the society of Orissa. Popular dresses like *Archakan, Salwar, Jama, Paijama, Rumal, Shawl, Takia*, etc, are of Muslim origin. Fruits like, *Kishmis, Pesta, Badam, Angur, Annar*, etc were brought to Orissa by the Muslims. Ornaments like *Bajuband* and *Kamarband*, the use of *Paper, Pen, and*

*Scent* etc. were introduced by the Muslims. Samputas food like *Biriani, Palau, Chapati, Jalebi, Halwa* and other meat preparation are of Muslim influence. Many places in Orissa were renamed by Muslim in their own which are still in use by present people in Orissa viz *Rasulgarh, Rasulpur, Ahmad Nagar, Mohammedpura*, etc.

### **Religion :**

In the pre-Muslim period Hinduism in its various creeds and forms was manifested in the construction of many temples. All religious thinking and spiritual attainment gathered a form of synthesis under the institution of Lord Jagannath. The concept of Patitapaban, it is believed, developed as a result of Muslim influence. Muslim migration to Orissa continued after its conquest and they exploited the liberal social set up of Orissa and managed to set up their own religious places, like Mosque, Madrassa, Maqtab, Tomb and Shrines. first at Cuttack and later on other places of Orissa.

Satyapir cult became popular in Orissa due to the influence of Muslim. Common worship of the common folk of the two communities- Satyapir

began in 16th century C.E. during Hussain Shahi dynasty (1494-1538). In Orissa Satyapir worship became popular in 18th century C.E. Islam gave Orissa the message of universal brotherhood, equality in society, outrightly rejected caste system and untouchability. These principles consciously or unconsciously had a great impression upon the philosophical Hindu mind and found place in Jagannath cult.

The pre-Islamic practice in Orissa of the Babas, Gurus, Sanyasis, and Bairagis helped sympathetic period for the acceptance of Muslim equivalents of the Satyapirs. The shrines of *Bhujakhiapir* at Balasore, *Qadam-i-Rasool* at Cuttack, Noor Bibi Mazaar at Sambalpur, Abdul Sakoor shrine at Tarbha are the centres of spiritual solace for the people of Orissa. These saints were very popular amongst the masses. The members of the order were called Fakir, mendicant or dervishes. Some of the ceremonies and rituals which came with Islam were regarded as auspicious and which were gladly accepted by the Oriyas. One example is *Tajia* or Muharram procession. Some of these were sponsored by local elite. The concept of Nirakar is not new to Orissa but it had its echo in the writing of

Pancha Sakha (five associates) after the spread of Islam in Orissa. These languages are highly meaningful, symbolic and esoteric. They established their *Pitha* or centre aloof from the political power like the Sufi Saints. In this backdrop it is no wonder that Sufism found easy adherence in Orissa. The Panch Sakhas predicted the end of Kaliyuga and coming of Kalki Avatara and Satyayuga like the Sufi belief that the Millennium or Dooms day was approaching for the restoration of original faith of Islam.

#### **Economy :**

Agriculture played a dominant role in Orissan economy. The fertile soil and moderate rainfall of Orissa encouraged production. So, agriculture was in a flourishing condition. Simultaneously different rivers served to irrigate and fertilise Orissa. Muslims impact also witnessed in the food grains like : Rice, Vegetables, Fruits, Oil Seeds, Spices, Cash Crops, Sericulture, Dairy industries and other Non-Agricultural products. Muslim component in peasant population grew in number. The living pattern of both Hindus and Muslims cultivators were identical in Orissan rural society.

#### **Literature :**

A number of Islamic literatures took shape in Orissa. The original works of Arabic, Parsi, Turkish and even Urdu were translated into Oriya Language. Khwaja Mainuddin-Chisti (Sufi Saint) of Ajmer primarily encouraged the spread of Parsi language in India. During Muslim rule in Orissa Parsi language was spoken and official records maintained in Parsi. Poems of poet Abhimanyu Samant Singhar, Baldev Rath, Upendra Bhanja mark the influence of Parsi, Arabic and Urdu languages. Islam had direct impact on Fakir Mohan. He was named Fakir because his grandmother symbolically sold him to a Muslim Fakir or Dervishes. In his childhood Fakir Mohan used to collect alms as a Fakir boy and from the begged he used to prepare *Sirmi* and distributed to the poor in the name of Satyapir.

#### **Pala :**

18<sup>th</sup> Century marks the growth of Satyapir sect. It was manifestation of Hindu-Muslim unity. This century also witnessed the rise of Pala. Kabi Karna was the founder of Pala literature. It had a series of 16 books one of which depicted

the miracle of Satyapir. Pala is divided into two types viz.

- I. Baithaki Pala and
- II. Thia Pala.

#### **Tamasa and Jatra :**

In the second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century poet Bansiballav Goswami wrote the Tamasa. He synthesized Islamic tenet with Oriya literature. The tradition of Jatra was very much prevalent in Orissa. Historians believed that, Jatra is the sound impact of Islamic literature over Orissa. Poet Salabeg and Uzir Bag wrote hundreds of Bhajana on Jagannath and Radhakrishna Cult in Oriya literature. Parsian poet Saikh Sahdi's (1194-1282) *Pand Nama* was translated into Oriya by Abdul Majid Saheb of Balasore in *Prabodha Bakya* or *Hitapodesh Mala* edited and published in 1869. Madhusudan Roy has written a series of books on Muslim Prophet and Saints. Qawali and Ghazal are examples of the impact of Islam in Oriya literature and language. Countless words of Parsian, Arabic, Urdu and Turkish entered into Oriya Vocabulary and were assimilated in the spoken language of the common mass. Oriya poets

used the work in their Kavya or poems. Orissan society reflected a sense of hospitality to the strangers which deserves merits. Culturally, Islam had its unique and remarkable contribution. It brought some new idea and some new problems, but left a legacy, that is successfully utilized by the succeeding generation for ever.

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*Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik reviewing various schemes of Tourism Department at Secretariat on 25.8.2010.*