

## Makar Mela at Kalijai Hill

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Odisha abounds in spot of scenic beauty and the natural lake Chilika adds to its aesthetic looks. Chilika, a wonder creation of Nature, is a vast and picturesque lagoon/lake in the heart of coastal Odisha. It displays lavish scenic beauty. Chilika is not just a lake but an ever flowing living entity. In the works of the great Odia Poet, Radhanath Ray, it is a place of entertainment for 'Utkal Laxmi' and so goes the line.....

“Utkal Kamala Vilas Dirghika  
Marala Malini Nilambu Chilika  
Utkal Tuhi Charu Alankar  
Utkala Bhubane Sobhara Bhandar”

Queen of natural beauty, Chilika, the largest brackish water lake in Asia covering an area over 1100 sq.km is a great attraction for the tourists. Chilika lake is regarded as a magnificent gift of nature.

“Sundar Truptira Abasada Nanhi  
Jete Dekhuthile Nua Disuthai”

The lake is a mute witness to the rise and fall of so many castles, temples and forts.

“Atitara Tuhi Sakhi Puratana  
Dekhilu Narara Utthana Patana  
Kete Rajadhani To Tire Utthita  
Hoitanhi Puni Hele Astamita”

x      x      x

“Itihas-ranga Stali Tu Chilika  
Toratire Para Srimati Manika  
Haste Bhunjithile Sadare Labani  
Bhabagrahi Prabhu Bhakti Chintamani”

The blue water of Chilika lake that spreads around speaks of the glorious heritage of ancient Utkal. The hillock covered with green bushes in it, speaks of many legends and folktales. The confluence of grandeurs and geese along with other beautiful birds pronounces the co-existence of Nature's creations where from “Beauty” and “Truth” comes up, that's why, the poet and Philosophers get attracted to the Chilika. The magnificent sight of the lake enables a man with aesthetic sensibility to be transported to a different world where 'Art' and 'Beauty' reign supreme.

Kalijai Temple or Kalijai Pahada is situated on an island considered to be the abode of the Goddess Kalijai. She is venerated due to the folklore and the legend. It is an excellent destination.

“Kalijai Bada Pratyaksha Debata  
Koti Koti Dandabata  
Pahadara Na Raijey Kshyata Lo  
Kalijai Parabata”

The temple of Kalijai is located in the island of Chilka lake of Puri District. Formerly it came under the ex-Zamidari of Parikuda. The popular Kalijai legend talks of the beautiful rustic

bride, Kalijai who met watery-grave on the way to her in-laws house when the boat carrying her capsized on account of a storm. Since then, Kalijai has turned into an angelic spirit who safeguards the people on the sea.

Jai, a small girl was living with her parents in a village on the bank of the river Salia. She was very much liked by her parents for her beauty and religious bent of mind. She used to worship at the feet of Goddess Bhagabati on all ceremonial days. When she came of an age her parents gave her in marriage to a handsome young man of Parikuda Garh. After the marriage is over her father accompanied her to Parikuda along with a cart load of dowry articles. To reach Parikuda, the only available means of communication then was a long boat journey from Balugaon. So Jai with her father boarded the boat clear over the wide expanse of the Chilika water. He successfully avoided the invisible rocks within the deep Chilika water while plying the boat through the favourable cool wind. Jai was all along feeling uncomfortable as she had left her mother and childhood friends. Seeing her plight on the occasion of first boat ride, the father of Jai repeatedly advised the boatman to move boat cautiously across deep waters and rocky beds.

“Bhalakari Naha Buha Re Nauri  
Jhiaku Maduchi Dara;  
Gadhe Gada loke Chanhi Basithibe  
Jhia Jiba Sasughara”

The boatman as usual plying the boat carefully singing songs of the Chilika lake and praising the glory of the river Goddess.

“ Deulakirati Kalijai Giri  
Marakata- Setu Praye yara Shiri”

They were a distance away from the destination. Suddenly a dark cloud appeared in

the sky. The soaring thunder lightening and violent breeze caused panic among the boat riders. Before long large drops of rain started falling and soon it became a heavy downpour. The boatman could not control the boat as it was tossing over the violent waves of the deep Chilika water. It continued for a long time and the boat losing all its balance dashed against a huge rock. Several riders including Jai drowned in the water. The wailing cry of the riders did not overpower the loud thunder. No sooner the boat dashed and sank in the lake water the cloud disappeared on the vast sheet of sparkling water. But to every body's supreme Jai could no more be found. Her father repeatedly asked the boatman regarding her whereabouts.

“Bapa Pacharanti Khoji Naurire  
“Jhia Mora Gala Kanhi ?”  
Buji akhithia Nauri Nije Lo  
Tunda ta phitai Nanhi”-Kalijai  
(Godabarish Mishra)

The boatman apprehended her drowning when the boat caught in the whirlpool. They all searched the lake for a great distance but could not find any trace of Jai. Her father crushed his fate in giving marriage the daughter at a far off place and returned home with a heavy heart. Since then the rocky hill against which the boat dashed came to be known as the Kalijai hill. The boatman and people travelling in the lake have seen on many occasions the spirit of a young lady with disheveled hair and tearful eyes roaming in the thick forests of the rocky island. Local people identify her with Jai. Local people subsequently built a small temple and installed a stone idol calling her Kalijai.

“ Tolile Pahada-Sikhe Kale Ukte  
Sudar Deulatie;  
Se Deula Puni Samudre Sate Lo,  
Rahiba Debata Kie ?”

In the historical point of view, the real name of Kalijai is Kala Jai means victory over the era. Kalijai or Kalajayi was presiding deity of royal Palace of Parikuda Garh (Krushna Prasada Garh). Goddess was installed there and a temple was built to protect enemy those were coming on sea route. The main *pidha* temple and its front flat-roofed pillared *mandapa* are built in recent years on the rocky bed of this island, on a common platform and thoroughly plastered. The outer walls of this temple are devoid of sculptural decoration. The presiding deity under the name of Kalijai is greatly revered by the boatmen and the people who travel through the deep water of the Chilika lake. They believe that Kalijai is a very kind and helpful Goddess and those who pray at her feet never face any danger in the Chilika lake. The presiding deity is installed on a masonry pedestal erected very close to the inner back wall of the Garbhagriha. To her side another image under the name of Malajai has been given preserved for worship. As both the figures have been given deep coats of vermilion it becomes different to arrive at their iconographic features. A small image of Kanaka Durga kept in one corner of the Garbhagriha. Since the Kalijai temple of Chilika lake remains inaccessible during rainy season, the rulers of Parikuda built another shrine for the deity at Parikuda for annual observance of Dasahara festival.

Kalijai Island is home to the Goddess Kalijai. Out of various fairs and festivals of this spot, it hosts a huge fairs on Makar Sankranti annually called Makara Mela in the month of January. This fair attracts a large number of visitors both from outside and inside the country. Maa Kalijai is venerated by the local people. There are 132 fishermen villages having 31,000 fishermen. They are quite active in fishing at Chilika, visit Kalijai temple on this day to offer their ritual items. The lake Chilika is very much

important from the socio-economic point of view. It is life-line of thousands of fishermen families who completely depend on Chilika for their livelihood. On the day of Makar Sankranti, the special *nitis* observed in this temple. Goddess wears new clothes and Shri Santosh Singh Mardaraj, the king of Parikuda Garh comes from his fort namely Krushna Prasada Garh in royal procession by boats to this temple to offer special Bhoga, new cloths along with ritual requirements to Goddess on behalf of royal palace and coronation (Abhishek) observed here.

Maximum devotees came to this spot to offer their sacrificial animals, through victim system is strictly prohibited here from early time. The festival helps bring all fisher folks together, who though display their own little quirks in the festivities, celebrate as one. It was celebrated by all with much fervor. Each caste added to the gaiety with their own unique customs, attire and celebratory dances. People donned new attire and greeted each other on the occasion. It is one of the biggest annual festivals of fisher folk. The festival is enjoyed with boisterous music, dance and drums. In this time Chilika lagoon became full of motorized boats and general boats. The lake became a perennial source of solace and joy to all emotional-beings. The grandeur and greatness of the lake have a lusting impact on the viewers. Indeed 'Makar Mela' of Kalijai hill is a 'thing of beauty' and hence a 'joy for ever'. Its sanctity makes it a place of pilgrimage which attracts tourists from around the globe. It is a witness to so many events and incidents of mythological and legendary importance.

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