



Antiquity of Durga Puja in Odisha

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Various accounts exist which ascribe the origin of Durga Puja in the state of Odisha. All historical accounts agree on the influence from other regions although some mythological accounts describe an independent origin.

Durga Puja is a festival, which is observed for ten days. Odisha being the land of Lord of Universe Shree Jagannath, the land of sacred Hindu Kingdom, the land of Santha, (saint), Muni/Rusi (hermit) Raja and Maharaja, the royals of Odisha patronage annual *Sharodiyo Utsav* before the state's unification with Republic of India. The Durga Puja is celebrated in two different ways in Odisha. In *Shakti Peethas* (temples of Goddesses) the Durga Puja is observed with proper rituals for 3 to 16 days known as *Tridinatmaka* (3 days from Astami, Nabami and Vijayadashami), *Panchadinatmaka* (5 days from Sasthi, Saptami, Astami, Nabami and Vijayadashami), *Nabadinatmaka* (9 days from Ashwina Ditiyaa to Vijayadashami) *Shodadinatmaka* (16 days from Mulastami to Vijayadashami) by *Panchama Upachara* and



Shodasa Upachara, which starts from 7 days earlier to Mahalaya and ends on Vijayadashami known as Dussehra. Goddess Durga is also worshiped by devotees in different *Pandals* across the state. The *Pandals* are beautifully decorated decorative.

According to *Markandeya Purana* the King of *Chaitra/Chedi* dynasty Raja Suratha started rituals of Durga Puja during 300 BC. The *Chaitra* dynasty belongs to Kalinga (modern Odisha). Durga Puja has different names in different *Puranas* and *Sastras*. In *Devi Purana* and *Kalika Purana* it is named as *Vijaya Dashami*. It is named as *Maha Parbana* in *Devi Mahatmya* and *Dussehra* in *Markandeya Purana*.

The present form of worship of Durga with earthen idol in Odisha was started during the reign of Ganga King Chodaganga Dev in the 11th century at Puri. The earthen idol of Mahishamarddini Durga is known as *Gosani* and the Dussehra festival is known as *Gosani Yatra*. It is noteworthy that the co-worship of *Mahishamarddini Durga* with *Madhava* (Lord



Jagannath) is prevalent from 11th century, Eastern Ganga dynasty period, in Puri.

Before the concept of *Sarvajanin Durga Puja* started, it was being conducted by princely houses and the first such Puja being conducted anywhere in the world at the same venue and continuing till date is in Odisha. It is at Rameswarpur in Bhadrak district of the state, where it was started about four centuries ago by the *Mahashay* family who migrated in from *Kotarang* near Howrah as a part of *Todarmal's* famous survey of India during Emperor Akbar's rule.

Close view of Cuttack's Durga Puja

It is said that in the year 1512 to 1517 AD *Chaitanya Deva* had come to Cuttack, the capital of Gajapati Empire of Odisha and the then emperor of Odisha Gajapati Pratap Rudra Dev received him at *Gadagadia Ghata* situated near the river bank of *Mahanadi* very close to the kings palace popularly known as *Barabati* fort. In that year *Shree Chaitanya Deva* started Durga Puja at *Binod Bihari* temple presently known as *Balu Bazaar*. Further it is also believed that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, whose birthplace, is Cuttack had organized Durga puja with great pomp and show to organize youngsters in British India exactly like *Lokamanya Balgangadhar Tilak* had done it at Maharashtra (the Ganesh Utsav). The first recorded *Sarvajanin Durga Puja* in the state is said to have been in the year 1832 in the *Kazi Bazaar* area of Cuttack.

A *Pandal* in Odisha is called "*Medho*". For many years, the most expensive installation was the *Chaandi Tarakasi Merrha* (*Chaandi Tarakasi* means pure Silver filigree ornaments) of *Choudhuri Bazaar*, *Alisha Bazaar*, *Kazi Bazaar*, *Buxi Bazaar*, *Daragha Bazaar*, *Balu Bazaar*, *Sankarpur*, *Shikharpur* area of Cuttack. The

ornamentation was done entirely in gold and silver. The bejeweled Devi in Cuttack's Durga Puja attracts huge congregation from all over the world.

A substantial increase in funding has led to the gold plating of the ornamentation. Now it is known as "*Suna Medho*" (*Suna* means Gold). A few other Pujas in Cuttack now have silver ornaments, too.

The Durga Puja festivities are also prominent in *Maa Katak Chandi* Temple. *Maa Cuttack Chandi* is the presiding deity of Cuttack. The goddess popularly called as *Maa Katak Chandi*, sits and rules on the heart of the ancient city. She is worshiped as *Bhuvaneswari*. *Maa Chandi* is worshipped in 16 incarnations (*Sodasha Abatara*) of Durga during the Puja. In Cuttack, people deeply devote *Maa Katak Chandi* as 'The Living Goddess'.

The grand *Pujas* are being celebrated country wide but particularly as special celebration in Odisha.

One reason for the wide acceptance of Durga Puja is the importance of *Maa Tarini*, who is considered one of the embodiments of *Shakti* in *Odia* culture. In addition, the state is close to Bengal and the people share a common socio-cultural history spanning millennia. Odisha is home to many important shrines dedicated to the Goddess; great festivities are organised there during *Durga Puja* and *Kali Puja*.

It is thus one of the prime festivals of Odisha as well. People in Odisha celebrate it on a large scale. The Goddess Durga is among the sacred Goddesses of Odisha. The celebrations are quite similar to the neighbouring state of West Bengal.