



Saktism in Purusottama Kshetra

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Puri or Purusottama Kshetra has a great antiquarian value in art, architecture, literature, religion and tradition. For centuries, it has been the principal religious centre of the Hindus; one among the four *Dhams* of Hinduism alongwith Dwarika, Badrinath and Rameswaram. This holy city has been variously referred in ancient Sanskrit texts and *Puranas* as Nilachala, Niladri, Nilagiri, Purusottama Kshetra, Srikshestra and Sankhakshetra. Even in Rig veda, Yogitantra and Kalika Purana, Puri is referred as Purusottama. We find syncreticism of different cults; such as Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Saktism etc. in Jagannath Cult. In the daily rituals and practices of the Jagannath temple, Jaina, Vaishnavite, Buddhist, Saivite, Tantrik influences are found. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to study traces of Saktism in Purusottam Kshetra. Saktism is the worship of Sakti or the female principle-the primary factor in the creation and reproduction of the Universe. Faminine Sakti commands as much respect as does Vishnu or Siva. Saktism is a popular religious cult of the kings and people of Orissa from very ancient time to the modern age. In Sakta literature, Orissa is well known as Odrapitha. The city of Viraja, Ekambra and Puri were notable early *Sakta Pithas* in Orissa as attested from various literary, archaeological as well as folk tradition.

Although Purusottama Kshetra came to be recognised as a great centre of Vaisnavism,

particularly during the reign of Imperial Gangas, it was also a centre of Saktism of India as attested from literature, tradition and archaeological remains. In the tantric lore, Lord Jagannath is considered to be a Bhairava and Vimala is worshipped as Mahadevi. In Devi Bhagavata, Vimala is considered to be a *Kshetra Sakti*. Matsya Purana refers to Purusottama Kshetra as a *Sakta Pitha*, with its presiding goddess Vimala, Vamana Purana refers to Purusottama alongwith Viraja as a sacred pilgrimage centre. Tantric literature *Rudra Yamala* composed in C. 950 A.D., glorifies Jagannatha as adorning the *Mahapitha*. Kalika Purana refers to Odrapitha as a famous *Saktipitha* which was the celebrated seat of goddess Katyayani and God Jagannath. *Tantra Yamala*, another Tantric work refers to Jagannath as the presiding deity of Purusottama Kshetra in Utkala. Vimala has been mentioned as presiding goddess of Purusottama Kshetra in the list of 108 *pithas* found in the *Pranatosini Tantra*. In the puranic list of 108 names of the mother goddess in Namastottara Sata, we come accross the expression "Vimala Purusottama". In the list of *Mahapithas* and *Upapithas* given by the author of *Siva Charita* also we come accross *Nila parvata* or *Nilachala*, an *upapitha* where Vimala is the presiding Devi and Jagannath is Bhairava. Thus many tantric texts, recognise Puri as *Pada pitha* where the foot portion of the Sati fell at Purusottama Kshetra as per the *Dakshayajna* episode.



If we take into account the recent discovery of the stone images of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra alongwith Daksina Kalika dated to c. 9th century A.D. by scholar Sasanka Sekhar Panda at Tetelkhunti in the district of Balangir, it allures us to conclude that in these forms the Jagannath Triad were worshipped in the upper Mahanadi valley in the 9th century A.D. In the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, Jagannath has been identified with Dakshina Kalika (*Tara Saksyat Sulapani Subhadra Bhubaneswari / Niladrou tu Jagannatha Saksyat Daksina Kalika*).

The worship of holy trinity in Shree Jagannath Temple, represents the inter relation between Vaishnavism and Saktism. Devi Subhadra enshrined between Lord Jagannath and Balabhadra is no other than Ekanamsa, one of the manifestations of Durga or Katyayani. In *Brahama Purana*, Ekanamsa is identified with Katyayani. In *Purusottama Mahatmya* of *Skanda Purana*, Subhadra has been identified as the *Sakti* of Vishnu, Krishna as well as sister of Krishna. It is interesting to note here that Ambika, an aspect of Durga appears first as Rudra's sister and then as consort. So there is some similarity between the cult of Durga and the cult of Subhadra. Devi Subhadra has been regarded as parasakti, Yogamaya, Kampilya vasini, Ekanamsa, Bhubaneswari, Mahalakshmi and also in many other forms of the supreme power of the world. She is worshipped in *Bhubaneswari mantra* (Hrim) which implies that she is the *lipta* (*gnana*) *Sakti* of Lord Jagannath. Learned scholars B.C. Pradhan and Herman Kulke hold the view that the iconography of Subhadra resembles that of the iconography of the Goddess Khambesvari. So Subhadra existed in the Jagannath triad atleast during the Somavamsi period. she was a *Sakta* deity and was adored as Katyayani, Durga and Bhadrakali. The *Sakta* element in Subhadra is well indicated even today. The *Parsva devatas* in Subhadra's chariot are Durga and Chamunda. She is also worshipped

daily in *Bhubaneswari mantra*. Thus it seems that the central placement of Subhadra in the Jagannath triad is an indication of pivotal position of *Sakti* in the great *tantra pitha* of Puri. Learned scholar Sasanka Sekhar Panda has opined that goddess Samalei of Sambalpur is worshipped in the same *Bhubaneswari mantra* as in the case of Subhadra in Sri jagannath temple, Puri. The uniconic form of goddess Samalei like the present anthropoid form of Subhadra seems to be identical. Samalei initially worshipped by the tribals and later absorbed into Hindu fold by the Somavamsis, who were ruling over Orissa from the upper Mahanadi valley from Subharnapura in c.9th-10th century A.D.

The temple of Goddess Vimala, an important *Sakta* shrine is located in the south eastern corner of Lord Jagannath temple. She is also known as Shreekshetrasvari. On examination of ritual pattern connected with Jagannath temple, it is observed that the role of Vimala is more important than that of Lakshmi, because, rituals of Vimala are based on tantric *nities*, where as that of Lakshmi is Vaishnavite in character. *Tantra Chudamani* describe Vimala as Bhairavi and Jagannath as Bhairava. It is pertinent to mention here that the *Bhogas* of Lord Jagannath became *Mahaprasad* after these are offered to Goddess Vimala. Learned Scholar Herman Kulke has drawn our attention to the representation of Jagannath in the form of Ajaikapada Bhairava on a sculptural panel of the temple of Konark. The above quoted literary and sculptural evidences very well indicate that Puri was a centre of Tantric form of Saivism and Saktism where Jagannath was worshipped as Bhairava and Vimala as his *Sakti* (*Odresu Vimala Saktin Jagannathastu Bhairavah*).

The Goddess Vimala is four handed image of chlorite stone, holding *naga keyura* and human figures in the upper hands and kalasa or *Madyapatra* and rosary in lower hands. The



origin of Vimala goes back to much before the emergence of Lord Jagannath in Srikshetra. Noted scholar Dr. H.C. Das has dated the image to Bhaumakara period, when most of the *Sakta tantrik pithas* emerged in Orissa.

Both Vaishnavite and *Sakta* rites are found in the ritual pattern of Vimala. Earlier in the dead of the night of *Vijaya Dasami* of *Dasahara*, animal sacrifice was performed. Later on this practice was stopped with the imposition of Vaishnavite rites. The tantric rites of *Dakshinachara*, *Vamachara* and *Kaulachara* are performed here.

Deep influence of tantric rites can be observed in the *Yantra* of Purusottama. The *Yantra* consists of an eight petalled lotus with the *Vijamantra "klim"* in the centre. The priests of Lord Jagannath temple first propitiate Lord Purusottama with goddess Lakshmi and then worship eight *Saktis* of Vishnu, namely Vimala, Utkarsini, Yajna, Kriya, Yoga, Prathvi, Satya and Isana. Vimala is regarded as one of the eight *Chandis* of Purusottama Kshetra. The other seven *Chandis* are Ramachandi, Herachandi, Baselichandi, Alamchandi, Dakshinachandi and Jhadesvari. In the traditional rites Vimala is invoked as the *Maya sakti* of Jagannath, *Kriya sakti* of Balabhadra and *Ichha sakti* of Subhadra. She is regarded as the consort of Balabhadra.

Durga Madhava Rath Yatra

Every year, the car festival of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra is celebrated with pomp and ceremony in the month of (June and July) at Puri. But few people know about another car festival at Puri that takes place (in the month of September - October, popularly known as Durga Madhav Rath Yatra or Sakta Gundicha Rath Yatra. This festival begins on the 9th day of *Dasahara Puja* and ends on the day of *Dasahara*. The festivals centres round two deities, i.e. Durga, a Sakta deity and Madhava, a Vaishnavite deity. In Purusottama kshetra Lord

Jagannath and Goddess Vimala are regarded as Madhava and Durga respectively. Goddess Durga is worshipped in the inner sanctum of main temple near the Bhandarghar. The deity of Madhava worshipped on the left side of Sri Jagannath on *Ratna Simhasana* in inner sanctum. He is also known as young Purusottama and joins the festival on behalf of Lord Jagannath.

The festival begins with *Sahasra Kumbha Abhiseka*, on the dark fortnight of Aswin. After being permitted by Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath, Goddess Durga comes out to sit on Somanath Mandap to take bath with thousand pots of purified and scented water and then offered Puja. The deity of Madhava also after getting permission from Lord Jagannath, leaves *Ratna Simhasana* and joins Goddess Durga. Both the deities are tied together near the Bhandarghar and after getting permission from Lord Jagannath, they are taken to the temple of Goddess Vimala, who also offered ceremonial bath and *Puja*. On the ninth day of *Dasahara*, both the deities are taken together in a chariot to Narayani temple near Dolamandap Sahi of Puri town. There they offer *puja* and *prasad* and at the night, they returned again to Srimandir. This festival continues for nine days and occupies a prominent place in the twelve festivals of Lord Jagannath.

Since early medieval period, Durga Madhava cult is very popular in Orissa. Madhava is a compound of two words, i.e., *Ma* (Mother) and *Dhava* (Father). So Madhava implies both the combination of Mother (*Sakti*) and Father (*Purusa*). Durga Madhava worship can be found in the Madhavananda temple in the Prachi valley.

Saptamatrikas

Purusottama kshetra as a significant *Saktapitha* for the worship of *Saptamatrikas* is further known from the archaeological evidences. A group of Saptamatrikas, made of chlorite stone is found near the Markandesvar tank at Puri. Here



all the sculptures, except Chamunda are associated with babies. The artist has taken maximum care to depict the celestial smile in the facial expression rather than showing them as war goddess. These *Matrikas* are assigned to the epoch of the Somavamsis. It is the definite evidence to indicate that Puri was well known as a *Saktipitha* by the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. According to *Madalapanji* the *Saptamatrika* temple was constructed by one Bhimakeshari of Keshari dynasty.

Varahi Temple

Another early *Sakta* deity 'Varahi' from *Saptamatrika* cult is worshipped at Bali Sahi of Puri town. The image is made of chlorite stone, four handed, holding fish and skull cup in the upper two arms, the lower right arm is in *abhaya* pose and lower left holds a child on her lap. She is worshipped by the Brahmins with non-vegetarian food; particularly fish. The image is very elegantly carved, emitting celestial smile and graceful look. Iconographically the image is dated to Bhaumakara period, i.e. 8th-9th centuries A.D.

The sculpture of Mahisamardini Durga in the *Bhogamandapa* of Jagannath temple further support the theory that Purusottama kshetra is a *Sakta pitha*. The *Sakta* environment of the temple further indicated by the fact that the shrine is said to be protected by *Astasaktis*, namely Sarvamangala, Bhubaneswari, Indrani, Kutamachandi, Chamunda, Durga, Vimala and Lakshmi.

In the early medieval period Saktism, Saivism and Vaisnavism entered into the fold of Jagannath. A later sculptural representation in the *Bhogamandapa* of the Jagannath temple depicts the figure of Siva, Mahisamardini Durga and Jagannath in one panel. In the Draksaram temple Inscription of 1216 A.D. Anangabhimha III is described as *Purusottamaputra*, *Rudraputra* and *Durgaputra*. Therefore it is amply suggested that Purusottama, Rudra and Durga were

considered to be identical with Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra respectively. As learnt from Kanchipuram temple inscription, Anangabhimha III by 1230 A.D. dropped the epithets *Rudraputra* and *Durgaputra* and described himself only as *Purusottamaputra* and *Parama Vaisnava*. As rightly observed by learned scholar B.C. Pradhan Saktism in Orissa began with the cult of Stambhesvari and was ultimately synthesised in the assimilative character of the Jagannath Cult.

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