

## Shakti Worship and Goddess Sarala: A vital Aspects of Odishan Culture

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**Abstract:** *This paper attempts to study the Shakti worship in Odisha. It outlines how the mother Goddess worship was started in Odisha with the existence of Gramadevati. As a whole the concept of mother worship has spread in Odisha and numbers of temple have been rised in different names. The significance of Shakti worship is highly influence in to the socio-cultural and religious life of the people of Odisha. This paper would highlight the tradition and customs of Shakta Tatrism has been adopted in different Shakti Peeths in Odisha. However, the Goddess Sarala, regarded as one of the most spiritually elevated expressions of Shaktism from time immemorial. Devi Sarala is Goddess who patronized the socio-cultures of Vaishnav and Shakta. The main purpose of this paper is to review of Shakti culture influence in to the socio-religious life of the people of Odisha.*

**Keywords:** *Devi Sarala ,Durga, Odisha, Peeth, Sindura, Shakti, Tulasi etc.*

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**Date of Submission: 30-02-2024**

**Date of Acceptance: 10-03-2024**

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**Introduction**

The cult of mother Goddess worship is one of the important features of Shakti worship in India as well as in Odisha. The mother Goddesses worship was started in Odisha with the existence of Gramadevati, otherwise known as the guardian of a village. Even today the position of Gramadevati

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is highly predominated in to the socio-cultural and religious life of the people. In course of time, the tradition of mother Goddesses worship came into practice. According to ancient scriptures, it was during the Bhauma period that Shaktism first made its appearance in Bhubaneswar and it was the Bhaumakaras who patronized the Shakti cult in Ekamra Kshetra through Shakti temple. These Shakti shrines contain either the images of Chamunda or of Mahisasura Mardini and in many other temples, different manifestations of Shakti such as Mahisasuramardini, Sapta Matrukas, Parvati, Gauri, Chamunda, Bhubaneswari, 64-Yogonis, etc. appeared as Parsva Devatas.<sup>1</sup>

The 'Puranas' like 'Sakdapuran' and 'Agnipurana' highlight a new concept of Yogini cult, that the Yoginis are different manifestations of Goddess Durga. The 'Sakdapuran' also says that the Yoginis are the consorts of Goddess Durga. But 'Agnipurana' gives a very new notion regarding the evolution of Yogini cult. It states that the Yogini concept started with the concept of 'Astamatrikas'. The 'Astamatrikas' are Brahmani, Maheswari, Kumari, Vaishnavi, Aindri Chamunda, Mahalaxmi and Varaha.<sup>2</sup> As the head of the Yoginis, Goddess Durga has been interpreted in eight forms such as Ugrachandi, Shadrakali, Durga, Ugratara, Kausaki, Kali, Sivadutta and Chandrika. Each and every form of Goddess Durga again manifests into eight forms. As a result, a new tradition began in Shaktism.<sup>3</sup> All over Odisha there has been spread Shakta culture and a number of temples have been risen in different names like Sarala (Jhankada), Vimala (Puri), Ramachandi (Konark), Bhagabati (Banapur), Kalijai (Chilika), Narayani (Balugaon), Taratarini (Ganjam), Tarini (Ghatagaon), Bhadrakali (Bhadrak), Viraja (Jajpur), Mangala (Kakatpur), Manikeswari (Kalahandi) and Samalei/Samaleswari (Sambalpur).<sup>4</sup>

According to historical evidences, it is believed that this famous temple of Sarala Chandi was constructed in Sarola Grama during the Bhauma dynasty in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The Goddess "Maa Sarala" was being worshiped in this temple till the end of Hindu rule in 1568 A.D. by the support of historical data the supreme commander of the Muslim army Kalapahada of Bengal sultan Sulemankarani attacked the temple of Sarala Chandi at Sarola grama and partly demolished its far famed Shakti temple. After hundred years the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb was devastated the old temple of Sarola grama and a few meters away in the west of the temple he built a mosque. The present temple was built during the Maratha administration in between 1753 and 1803. Maratha

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Subedars took initiatives and helped the local rulers of Kujanga, Kanika, Benahar and Harishpur to construct the present temple. The new temple is 500 years of old which is situated in the village of Kanakpur of Jhankada Pragana (Kanakabati Patana) in the district of Jagatsinghpur, Odisha, India. The temple compound is consists of a Deula of Pidha order, a Jagamohan or Mukhasala with three Pidha-roops aligned in a north-south axis, and a flat roofed Mandap. The walls of Deula and Jagamohan are divided into two stored by Madhya Bandha. The paga is designed as pidha-mundis on both stored though they are not niches. The anuraha recess has two superimposed figure motifs on each story. They are filled with erotic kanya motifs, lion motifs on Brahamanical deities. But folklore goes back to thousands of years, to the age of Parashurama. It is said that it was God Parashurama who had carved the Goddess with the tip of his arrow. The remnants of the old temple are not visible. Tradition, legend and literature remained as the silent witness to the existence of Sarola Chandi in the Sarola Grama (village). In this context one among the great verses of Oriya Mahabharat may be quoted here :-

“Nila sunder giri uttar diga kone. Saraswata bhumi Bharat khanda aisanya,  
Chandra bhaga bolikari nadi eka goti, brudha matanka paruse maho dadhi bheti,  
se nadi tirare parsuramaje ghato, kanaka bati patana nama prakasai. Ta utare  
anuja sarol boli grama Bijaya maheswari sarola chandi nama”.<sup>5</sup>

The Goddess Sarala, regarded as one of the most spiritually elevated expressions of Shaktism from time immemorial. Maa Sarala is Hindu Goddess who patronizes the socio-cultures of Vaishnav and Shakta. It is one of the eight most famous Shakti shrines of Odisha. The main Idol, carved out of stone is of eight armed keeping her right feet on the lion in Mahinsha Mardini posture. Rarely does one find the use of Vilva Patra and Tulsi Patra in any temples, as they are symbols of two distinct divisions of Hindu culture. It is believed as a synthesis of divine figure of Durga and Saraswati.<sup>6</sup> There is also some controversy regarding the deity, where it is suspected that the deity may be a Buddhist tantric figure, as she holds a book, Veena and hand bell – known Mahayana symbols. It is said that Huen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, visited Odisha and he had taken a ship from Chititola port

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to Sri Lanka, which historians attribute to modern day Tirtol. This may be a possibility as geography shows that Paradeep was an island and the land in and around Kujanga was under water – sea/river. There is a geographic evidence to support this. To be at safer side, we may conclude that Goddesses Sarala represents the Shiva-Shakti worship which evolved from an amalgamation of Shaivism (worship of Shiva), Shaktism (worship of mother Goddess) and/or tantric form.<sup>7</sup>

Mother Goddess Sarala was popularly known as ‘Sarala Chandi’ till fifteenth century as it is stated in Oriya Mahabharata. The Chandi or Sapta Sati Interpolated in the ‘Markandeya Puran’ known as one of the Shakta Tantrik text of brahminical religion. The entity and culture of the Goddess Sarala has been derived from Sapta Sati Chandi written by great sage Markandeya. As per the description in the text Goddess has retained Shiva’s trident, Vishnu’s Chakra, Vayu’s bow, Surya’s arrow, Vishwakarma’s Axe, Indra’s thunder, Ayiravata’s bell and Himavan’s Lion. It is considered as the main sources of the idol Goddess Sarala. Chanting of sacred verses of Sri Chandi is one of the most learned practices inside the temple. Everyday chanting of the sacred text at the Shrine not only one of the important rituals but it is a very protective for devotees. Tantrik aspects of rituals are still in practice from time immemorial, which is the witness to the undeniable fact that is a great Shakta Tantrik peetha.<sup>8</sup> The aspect of Pancha ‘MA’ Kara puja by Panada Pujak is found in the daily rituals where the Naivedyas are substituted by Coconut water, Cakes made up of Blackgram and different kinds of rice are offered. These rituals substitute the Pancha ‘MA’ kara of Tantra. Ghata Nrutya as it is being performed by the ‘Roul’, the Shudra Sevak of Goddess is another aspect of Tantrik Worship. Roul is described as a Tantrik (Maha Gunia) in Oriya Mahabharat. A wooden stand carrying potful of water (Ghata) is decorated in flowers. Roul Sevak wearing Sarees, Bangles (Khandu), ankle (Pahuda), vermilion (Sindoor), Kajala different types of ornaments. Decorating himself in a mythological picturesque manner heading the Ghata without any support gives swinging dances. It is supposed that the will of the Goddess is acted in dance from of the Roul. The ritual seems to be one of the oldest customs of Shakta tantrism as has been adopted in different Shati Peeths. The practice of animal sacrifice (which has been discontinued since long) on the occasion of Mahashtami Siddhi Puja, Dussehra is another witness of Shakta tantric peeths, though the ritual is not in vogue at present. The attributes which are there in the main Vighraha or Dhruva Vighraha clearly says that the image is

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a mixed amalgamation of Matangi and Mahishamardini. Some important ritualistic ceremonies are still observed in the old shrine thrice in a year. The processional idol “Chalanti Vighraha” of Sarala is brought in a gorgeous palanquin from the present temple to the Sarola grama seven times in a year to commemorate the ancient rituals. The idol of the deity ceremoniously installed on the old throne where she had been worshiped for centuries. A male goat was traditionally sacrificed through the pancha upachara puja at the place as the last ritual in the occasion of Dussehra. Mahabisuva Pana Sankranti noon is the great occasion (Jhamu Yatra) Roul sevaks dance on fire and green coconut offered to Devi by panda pujakas. In the down of Dola Purnima decorated vimans consisting of several deities from adjacent localities congregate along with the goddess. This interesting occasion is observed with pomp and ceremony. This particular occasion, when Goddess Sarala is worshipped along with other deities, signifies that Maa Sarala is an amalgamation of Vedic cult, tantric rites and vaishnavik efflorescence.<sup>9</sup>

They are more or less similar invocation incantation manner of worship but everywhere throughout the state and in the neighbouring states like Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and West Bengal. Folk song dances like Pala, Daskathia, Ghodanacha, and Opera pay their obeisance to Goddess Sarala. Literary activity, commencement of learning “Vidyarambha” her very name invites devotional and protection.<sup>10</sup> It might have influence and touched the right chord in the hearts of the Oriyas. And Oriya-speaking person in the field of acting, drama, song, folk dance, literature and creative art pays his highest devotion and regards at the beginning of his performance in the respective field and respective form. The Goddess Sarala Thakurani has been the fondest introduction to the artistic excellence, learning and literacy brilliance. The Goddess Sarala known as Vakdevi is conceived as the active and eternal source of all wisdom, intelligence and inspiration. The daity personifies “Bramha-Vidya” (the mystic knowledge of the absolute), that is the topmost religious concept in the perspective of Dhkshinachara Shakti sect. she is also known as Utkal Bharati, where Utkal signifies the state of Odisha and Bharati is one of the epithets of Saraswati and Tantrik Matangi.<sup>11</sup>

It is believed that the substance of life and the power of knowledge are given by the Goddess and therefore the other name of the Goddess is “Sharada” this belief was authenticated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century

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A.D. Siddheswara Parida a devotee belongs to a traditional farmer family adopted his name ‘Sarala Dasa’(servant of Maa Sarala) by the name of his beloved Goddess. Later on Siddheswara was designated as the foremost poet of Oriya literature by his composition of great epics The Oriya ‘Mahabharata’, Bilanka Ramayan, Chandi Puran and Laxinarayan Bachanika which laid down the solid foundation of Odia literature.<sup>12</sup> His contributions to literature were reckoned as sources of inspiration for the succeeding writers in Odia.

## Conclusion

Hence Sarala Dasa has appropriately been called the gems of literature in Odia which substantiate the poets which has been fulfilling the people’s quest for literary juice and devotional reverberations. The great poet Sarala Dasa has been christened the Byasa and Muni of Odisha. He had been an illiterate man and composition of the great and epoch-making verses in Oriya Mahabharata was the result of the magic power transferred to him by his beloved Goddess Maa Sarala.

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