



## Socio Cultural and Religious Aspects of Images in Odisha

### KEYWORDS

ODISHA, RELIGION, GODDESS, CULTURE

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**ABSTRACT** *The cultural heritage of Odisha beautifully comes out in the form of its awesome art and craft items and amazing folk performances. Odisha is largely rural and the traditional values that are still retained form an integral aspect of the Odishan culture. Odisha's strategic geographical location has engendered the assimilation of the culture of the Aryans and the Dravidians. The culture of Odisha can very well be described as an Indo-cultural synthesis. Odisha serves as the coastal passage between the northern and southern parts of India. It is because of this geographical location that the people belonging to both Aryan race and the Dravidian race make up the population of the state. Odisha is known for its respect and mutual tolerance towards other religions. It is owing to this fact that, the culture of Odissi people reflects some aspects of all the major religions of India.*

At the outset it would seem useful to say a few words about the people who have lived in India and about the history of the sacred texts of Hinduism a few elementary yet necessary statements to show now this complex of innumerable deities come into existence along with their names and myths which are so entangled that even specialists find it difficult to give precise answers about specific gods, goddess or myths.

A branch of Hinduism known as Shaktism or Tantrism, it is more widespread in north east India too. Odisha and Assam then in other areas and involves the worship of the divine in its female form. The origins of Tantra are rather obscure. It appears that magical practices influenced all the earliest civilizations. On the Indian subcontinent religious magical practices, rather similar to these throughout the ancient world, had developed since the very earlier times. Though no overall system is apparent, it is clear that those "systems" or "rituals" which produced a desired result did so because of common natural principals. The influence of Hinduism upon the Tantras is most marked from the time to the Muslim invasions. The great sage Shankaracharya had already strengthened and given life to the Brahmanism (Hindu) philosophy of the eight century and his expounding of the Vajrayana philosophy in clear Hindu terms had already brought about a great religious revival. From the thirteenth century to the present day Tantrism has maintained a strong influence on religious practices throughout the East, despite attempts at suppression by the Muslims and the orthodox Hindus, Many Hindu temples house images which trace their origin to the tantric visualizations and there are few religious observations which do not have a strong element of tantric symbolism. Factually, a few decades back the Jamindars or land lords or have given the Kings encouragements to the village Chitrakarars or Karigarars to prepare the model of images, signifying the Shakta, Shaiva or Vaishnavism Gods or Goddesses on commission basis or in salary basis for the different festivals and ceremonies. The images of different Gods and Goddesses were enshrined in the temporary temples or halls. Sometimes the rich people were also constructed the temples separately for this purpose and on permanent basis with lasting materials as burnt brick and stucco within the premises of or close to their residences. Accordingly, they also spent money on these back frames by getting them made in good wood for the permanent use.<sup>13</sup>

Many of these rich families were having sufficient means, to maintain such tradition. In the most cases the permanent land endowments were made long back and so, the income coming yearly from such land is spent for those purposes. So far the religious purposes entire community of the village or town used to and do take part in the worship, continuing this tradition.

The process through which is a thought, at first indistinct, gradually becomes definite and exteriorise itself is similar to the process. The people cannot rise above their daily necessities, their worldly feelings and ambitions. So they created certain image of Gods as off springs of their deity necessities. They receive attention so long as needs exists. When need are satisfied and everyone is above want and disease these Gods without bath, food and water, drag on a miserable existence and once disappear from the view altogether. Most of them lead poor lives like their worshippers the farmers of the Indian villages, the economic condition of the villagers can be easily grossed from a look at these writhed Gods. Most of them have no temple, not even a shed against sun and rain. They are instituted by the roadside or on the bank of some river or ponds under some shady tree or in the open field. They may be represented by an animal, a pot an offering, a place of offering, an inspired priest or seer or the temple itself. The devotee bestows mental faculties and miraculous powers upon them. In the lower state of religion, in figure to themselves a certain moral order of the world, although in a very primitive form and this moral order must have a director and an origin.<sup>1</sup> Such directors then become the Gods whom they identified with the powers of nature, which inspired them with hope and fear. Thus they come to ascribe to them mental faculties.

Most of the people of the village are ignorant of higher or metaphysical aspect of Hinduism the Vedic Gods like Vishnu, Rudra, Varuna are more names to the mass minds. They are symbols of aristocracy, too busy with the complicated affairs of higher class of people. The proud Brahmins took the sole agency of their worship, made them the commodity of the trade, pleaded for ordinary people's welfare before them in exchange of fees, were in charge of issuing passport to heaven. They were the God's specially chosen people who would never allow others to touch the image. Those Gods were too great lord the villagers

and so inapproachable. They created their own Gods and Goddesses.

The fetish Gods fell far below the definite and splendour of the Vedic and Puranic Gods. The villagers left no stone unturned to bring them to the same status. Thus they become as powerful and virtuous as the Vedic and Puranic Gods. Hundreds and thousands of Goddesses with local names were treated to be the manifestation of Durga. She is acquired the new names as Jagulei, Panewari, Bana Durga, Patrasuni etc. etc. in Odisha, So the image worship of one or many Gods and Goddesses, in visible form is a part of human nature, and in vogue throughout the world.

In Odisha, people believe that this presentation to god or Goddess would bring in more flowers and fruits. Many traditional cruel things are committed in the name of worship. The bull is worshipped as a conveyance of Siva. Nobody kills a Sarpa; the cobra snake for it is the favourite of the same God. Boys and girls do not dare killing a Musha, the rat, for it is the conveyance of Lord Ganesh, the God of learning. Biccha a poisonous reptile is a pet of Chandi. To kill it, is considered an offence. Monkeys who supported to Ramachandra in his war with Ravana are treated with respect by the orthodox people. Hanuman their leader and ardent devotee of Lord Rama is worshipped also in the name of Mahabira in many of the Odishan villages. The ox treated with great respect by the householder is worshipped on Gamhapurnima the full moon day of Shravana. After bath the oxen are it is decorated with garlands of flowers, turmeric and vermilion.

Worshipped in the new moon of the month of Pausa, Tulasi the basil is the most sacred plant worshipped by the Hindus. Ganga is said to dwell at its root. Brahma the creator, on its branches and all other Gods make their permanent residence on its leaves. This plant is the meeting point of the heaven and earth, There is a basil plant in front of the house of every Oriya villager. Brundabati the Goddesses of the plant blesses her with health wealth and children. No old man or woman takes anything before watering the basil plant. The worship of the plant goes on thought the year with special functions by the widows in the month of Kartik. Dhanagacha or the rice plants represent the Goddess of wealth. She is worshipped when ears of corn occur in the womb of the plants on when

the harvesting is finished. Her greatest festival is on every Thursday of the month of Margasira. Ears of golden corn artistically joined together covered with red saree and decorated with garlands of flowers symbolize the Goddess of wealth before whom the whole of Lakshmi Purana is sung. Pathara Sila or grinding stone for pressing spices represents Sathi; the Goddess of destiny, the husking paddle symbolizes Viswakarma. Plough or Langala the symbol of the Goddess of wealth is worshipped during Akshya Tiritiya when the ceremony of the first sowing of paddy is performed. The boys and girls of the village primary schools worship the coconuts representing Saraswati the Goddess of learning. The worship of a palm leaf manuscript (Pothi) in Bhagavata temple is a regular feature of the Odishan village. Durga is the Goddess of the army. The sword, shield and other ancient weapons representing the Goddess are worshipped by the Kshatriyas. The wheel of potters is worshipped on Kural Panchami. The tools of Goldsmith, Blacksmith and carpenters are worshipped in the occasion of Dasahara. They stop their work altogether during the period of worship. Thus there is no end to Gods and there is no end to worship.

Another believe of the people on fetish God of the villagers the presentation of eyes, ornament etc. who suffers from the eyes ears or either disease. An innocent villager promises the golden and silver models of the village God and Goddesses. Such type of practices is not dedicated in Odisha only.

It is general garment that uncountable decoration has been made on fetish God who may hundreds in number. It is a common street in Odishan villages. Approach a Banyan tree found in root coloured, with vermilion and garland, broken clay horses, scattered to and fro indicate the disorderliness of irregularity of worship of these Gods and Goddesses.

Such God and Goddesses are worship and orated as desire of man. It is his believe that when Gods could not help him to shape his tune man comes to the sacrifice offer some time, though it is a believer in on outer ingested doing or on doing things. No longer we can these own individuality. Similarly a man having the further progress would ready on his own centre.

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