

Sea Goddesses of Orissa

Sila Tripathi

National Institute of Oceanography, Goa

In an intriguing mix of myth and reality an attempt has been made to outline a few folklores and glean from their information about Indian maritime history. Folklore is the science of the survival of archaic belief and custom in the modern age. Folklore can be considered as one of the sources of maritime history for it has been preserved through oral traditions about major events relating to shipwrecks or submerged ports. Sometimes it is covered with fanciful mythological and poetic embellishment which need to be sieved through. India is noted for folklores eulogising the adventures of seamen and the divine help received by them in a turbulent sea.

Modern Orissa anciently known as Kalinga is famous for its folklores during the period 3rd Century B.C. to 8th Century A.D. Kalinga lies on the east coast of India and stretches from the river Ganges to the river Godavari in the South.

Orissa has many folklores, some of which relate to the maritime activities of the people. Particular mention may be made of four folklores which speak of the distressed sailors on sea and the protection offered by the Sea Goddess. For example the ballad known as the *Khudurukuni Osa* centres around a festival celebrated by the ladies in honour of the Goddess *Khudurukuni*. *Khudurukuni* the Sea Goddess who brought the brothers and saved the traders from foreign countries. *Chari Mahajana Katha* is a folklore concerning four merchants who were saved by the Sea Goddess.

Boita Vandapana speaks of a religious festival in which the boat is worshipped. It is K.B. Das who first wrote in Oriya¹ about the socio-religious festivals

and subsequently translated them into English². The *Boita Vandapana* festival is celebrated in Orissa on the full moon day of the month of Kartika (October-November), when the North-East trade wind begins to blow. The merchants and sailors who take advantage of the wind to set sail for the south-east Asian countries make offerings to the Sea Goddess and to the boat in the early hours of the day.

In Oriya the poem narrates as :

A KA MA BAI

A stands for the month of Asadha (July-August) when the traders would return from the overseas trade and KA stands for the month of Kartika (October-November) when the traders would set sail for overseas trade, MA stands for the month of Margasira (November-December) and BAI for the month of Baishakha (May-June) when they stay in foreign countries for trade.

Now-a-days people go to the nearby river bank, sea shore, pond or tank with votive boats made of banana tree barks and pieces of light wood (pith) place *Chandan* (Sandal wood), flowers, coins, betelnuts, betel leaves and lamps in it and float it symbolising that traders have a safe journey. After this ceremony they go to the Siva temple and ladies observe *Vratas*.

Khudurukuni Osa has acquired socio-religious significance in the cultural history of Orissa. The festival of *Osa* is celebrated by maidens and newly married girls on every Sunday of the month of Bhadrava (August-September). At this time the Sea Goddess *Mangala* is worshipped and the story of *Taapoi* a *Sadhava* girl

belonging to the trading community is related.

On the day of observing this festival the girls make a drawing of Goddess Mangala standing on a sea-going vessel. This Goddess is revered because she was the one who punished Taapoi's sisters-in-law for the illtreatment meted out to Taapoi during the time her brothers were in a foreign country. The closing ceremony of the festival takes place on the last Sunday of the same month. This festival propogates the Shakti cult among the women of Orissa without the aid of Priest or temples.

A folklore of importance is that the sea Goddess Kalijai, who lived on an island in Chillika, which is a salt water lake, (Lat, 19° 45' N Long, 85° 30' E). A temple is dedicated to a Goddess on the island but the approach to the island is dangerous as it is in the cyclonic zone. Failure to offer prayer at the temple of Kaliji signals a definite disaster. As mentioned in the ballad a bride met with her death when her marriage party was sailing to Maluda island from Parikuda island. The above tragedy was a result of a cyclone. Only two people survived to relate the story and apparently they had offered prayers at Kalijai temple before leaving. Later some sailors are said to have heard the crying of the bride and built a temple for Kalijai on the island in her honour. On the *Makara Sankranti day* (January 14th-15th) people celebrate the festival of Kalijai and during this time animal sacrifice is prohibited.

The temple of *Dariya Rama Chandi* in Jambhu island near Paradeep at the

mouth of the river Mahanadi is noted for a unique stone sculpture of the Goddess who is shown seated in a boat. It is believed that the Goddess Ramachandi helps the sailors to reach the destination safely. On the *Visuva Samkranti day* in April fishermen offer worship, and sacrifice animals at the temple.

The importance of the Sea Goddess in Hindu religion is due to maritime traders. It is the Sea Goddess who saved traders in time of distress and directed them towards more secure pastures. So this belief still persists in todays highly evolved Hindu culture and it will continue for times to come.

References

1. Das, K.B., 1964 *Lokagalpa Samchayana* (Oriya) Orissa Sahitya Akademi, Bhubaneshwar
2. Das, K.B. & Mahapatro, L.K., 1979 *Folklore of Orissa* N.B.T. New Delhi.

Bibliography

1. Das, K.B., & Mahapatro, L.K., 1979. *Folklore of Orissa* N.B.T. New Delhi.
2. Das, K.B., 1958. *Odia Lokagita O Kahani*. Vishvabharati University Santinekatan.
3. Das, K.B., 1964 *Lokagalpa Samchayana*, (Orissa Sahitye Akademi Bhubaneshwar.)
4. Mishra, Godabarish; 1976 *Kalijai* (Oriya) Cuttack.
5. Mohanty., Braja Mohan., 1979 (Ed) *Odisara Parba Parbani, Oshabrata, Janiyatra* (Oriya) Cuttack.
6. Panigrahi, K.C., 1961. *History and Legends*. Utkal University, Bhubaneswar.