

FADING FESTIVALS OF ODISHA



Colonel JC Mahanti (Retired)

**FADING FESTIVALS
OF ODISHA**
(A peep into the religious practices in Odisha)

Colonel JC Mahanti (Retired)

*To my parents late Brajasundar Mahanti (formerly of
Indian Administrative Service) and late Shanti Devi.*

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PREFACE

Most of the people of Odisha are Hindus. They once observed a number of festivals (*pujas, oshas, bratas, yatras* and *melas* etc.) throughout the year. Lightly, it is said there are thirteen festivals in twelve months. These festivals were highly religious and were the essence of Odiya life. The get-together and the exchange of various types of *bhogas* (food offerings to gods) implied a lot to the people. . Every family eagerly waited for these occasions. People in different parts of the State observed them as daily, monthly or seasonal events. In the long past, when many Odiyas were working outside the State keeping families at homes in villages, these were the occasions¹ (most popular being Raja, Dashahara and Dola) to visit their homes to enjoy the festivity with family members and relatives.

Come the solar month Jyestha. Young girls were seen celebrating Raja festival and swinging in *dolis* singing melodious Raja ballads in chorus and playing *puchi* and *chata*. In the lunar month Aswina, they observed Janhi osha worshipping *tulashi* plant and decorating the *chauras* with golden yellow *jhanhi phulas* (ridge gourd flowers) making shapes of Chandra as per its waxing and waning. The women observed many *bratas* and *oshas* besides *pujas* for the well being of the children and family members. Sunia marked the day when *rajas* and *zamindars* renewed the land leases and collected revenue from *ryotas* (tenants) in cash or kind which was known as *sunia bheti*.

With passage of time and changes in social living, many of the festivals have progressively faded or observed in lesser enthusiasm. Many might not even heard of them.

Along with festivals, many typical Odiya recipes are also forgotten. *Chitoupitha*, *chunchi patara* and *satapuri* etc. are now items of antiquity. Only in the Badadeula at Puri they are offered to lord Jagannatha on specific occasions. Observing these and finding that there are not many books in Odiya or English language describing them, I have tried to recollect my childhood memories and have briefly mentioned some of them in this book for the information of present generation. While doing so, I have taken help of many ancient treatises, booklets and folktales, collected local customs traditions and practices in different parts of the State and also consulted *bratis*¹ both in rural and urban Odisha to know about them. I acknowledge their help and assistances. It was a difficult job. I admit I might not have included all the festivals that were once observed in the State. I seek the indulgence of erudite readers to point them out so that they can be included in future editions.

The book is divided into three chapters and various sub-subheads. Chapter I describe the significances, back ground and rituals associated with *sankrantis*, *amabasyas*, *puernimas* and *ekadashis* observed on basis of the movement of the Sun and the Moon as per the Odiya *panji* (almanac). The folktales and stories associated with the mythology of Sun and Moon, the phenomenas of eclipses and the important *sankrantis* are described. Similarly, festivals and rituals associated with important *amabasyas* and *puernimas* and *ekadashis* are described. Chapter 2, deals with various *bratas* like Sudasha, Ananta, Shiva pradosha, Vinayaka etc. and *oshas* like Khudurikuni, Janhi and Bali trutiya etc. once observed in the State. Chapter 3 deals with the various festivals and religious events like Dushahera, Dipabali, Holi etc. observed on days other than the above mentioned days. The chapter ends with short notes on Pala,

1 Observers of *brata*

Preface

Dasakathia, Chitas and Jhotis that are invariably associated with the festivals. In short, it is a compilation of various festivals observed by the people of the State, some of which have almost faded.

Detailed rites and rituals of the festivals are not a part of the book. Some of them are available in booklets and treatises (*kathas*) on individual festivals. Only the religious importance and episodes associated with them are briefly described.

I have used many words and phrases from the local dialect. Their meanings and senses are given alongside in brackets when first used. However, they are summarised in Glossary for ready reference.

I am thankful to Shri Bikash Bihari Bishwal (formerly of Odisha Administrative Services) for going through the manuscript and suggesting many improvements. I am also thankful to Smt. Shruti Mahanti and Smt. Anita Bhatnagar for their encouragements and in going through the script and correcting the spelling and grammar mistakes.

It is expected that the book would be a condensed guide on the religious festivals in Odisha and the present generation would be benefited reading it.

JC Mahanti

Matrunavami, Aswina 1935

1.

SANKRANTIS, AMABASYAS, PURNIMAS AND EKADASHIS

Sankrantis (first days of solar month), *amabasyas* (new moon days), *puṇnimas* (full moon days) and *ekadashis* (eleventh days of lunar fortnight) are based on the movements of Surya (Sun) and Chandra (Moon). Since ancient times, Hindus have attached much religious importance to them. They are regarded as *grahas* (planets) in the *nabagraha* (nine planets) concept and are worshipped like gods. In the later stages, like many other gods and goddesses, they became mythical superseded by Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) who are regarded as supreme.

The Odiya *panji* (almanac) follows both the solar and the lunar methods for reckoning the beginning and the ending of months, years and for determining religious events. While the *sankrantis* are based on the transit of Surya in the solar methods, the, *amabasyas*, *puṇnimas* and *ekadashis* are based on the movement of Chandra in the lunar methods. These days are considered important for self-purification and attaining *mokshya* (salvation) and are observed by the people of the State. However, with passage of time, they are not observed with the same dedication as in the past. Though their importance has faded, they are still followed by many devout Hindus.

Mythology about Surya and Chandra

Before describing *sankrantis*, *amabasyas*, *puornimas* and *ekadashis*, it may be relevant to briefly mention few mythological beliefs about them based on which they are determined and observed.

Surya: - Surya is considered to be the most powerful in the universe. Vedas hold him to be the creator of *prakruti* (universe). The entire *prakruti* including the *debatas* (gods and demigods), *asuras* (demons) and *manabas* (human beings) originated from him. Imagined in red complexion with three eyes and four arms, he moves around in a *ratha* (chariot) drawn by seven horses with Aruna as the *sarathi* (charioteer) and represents the visible form of divine energy.

There are several stories about the origin of Surya. According to some, he is the son of Brahma. By others, he is the son of sage Kashyapa and Aditi who had twelve sons; all known as Adityas. Brahma bestowed them the rulership of heaven and allowed them to accept the share of offerings in *yajnas* (sacrifice before fire). *Asuras* were enraged and fought a fierce battle with them gaining victory. Aditi was pained and prayed Surya with rigorous penance. She wished to beget a son through him who could destroy *asuras* and restore the rightful glory to Adityas. Pleased with her devotion, Surya appeared before her and granted her the wish to be born as her son. Aditi was overjoyed and began undertaking rigorous penance to keep her mind and body pure. Kashyapa asked her if she wished to destroy the foetus with stringent regimen. This annoyed Aditi who aborted the growing foetus to show Kashyapa its divinity. Kashyapa worshipped it and transformed it into a baby to be known as Surya. Later Surya burnt the *asuras* with his scorching looks. Pleased with this, Vishwakarma gave his daughter Sanjana in marriage to him. Sanjana was the mother of Vivasvan Manu and the twins - Yama (god of Death) and

his sister Yami. Later, she also gave birth to Aswini twins who were the divine horsemen and the physician to *debatas*.

Unable to bear the radiance of Surya, Sanjana created her clone and named her Chhaya. She asked Chhaya to act as Surya's wife. In due course, Chhaya gave birth to two sons Sravani Manu (progenitor of mankind) and Sani and two daughters Tapti and Vashti. Surya had also two other wives - Rajani and Prabha. However, epics mention only about Sanjana.

Mahabharata describes Surya as the father of Karna through Kunti. According to it, Kunti received a *mantra* (divine hymn) from sage Durvasa that whenever she uttered it she would be able to summon a *debata* and beget a child through him. Without realising its seriousness, Kunti tested it summoning Surya. As Surya was forced to fulfil the obligation of the *mantra*, she begot a child through him while retaining her virginity. Unable to bear the stigma of an unwed mother, she abandoned the child Karna who later became the greatest warrior and one of the central characters of Mahabharata war.

Puranas mention several names of Surya. It is believed that those who chant them with pure mind and concentration are liberated from conflagration of miseries and obtain objects of their desires.

Incidentally, Surya's sons Sani and Yama control human deeds and life. While Sani bestows positive and negative results to one's deeds during lifetime, Yama bestows those after death.

Chandra: - Chandra was born out of *khira sagara* (ocean of milk) during the *samudra manthana*¹ (churning of ocean).

1 *Samudra manthana* was performed by *devatas* and *asuras* to extract *amruta* (nectar).

As Lakshmi was also born out of it, Chandra becomes her brother. Accepting Lakshmi as the universal mother, people, mainly children, address Chandra as Janha mamu² (maternal uncle).

Chandra is described as young and beautiful *debata* holding a club and a lotus flower in his hands. He rides a *ratha* pulled by ten horses and an antelope. When Chandra emerged from the *khira sagara*, his shining body nearly blinded other *debatas* who sent him to the *akasha* (astral plane) to shine during the nights.

In Hindu mythology there are several legends about Chandra. In one, he married Tara (wife of Bruhaspati³). With their union, Tara becomes pregnant and gave birth to Budha⁴. In another, he married the twenty-seven daughters⁵ of Daksha Prajapati on the condition that he would treat all of them equally. But Chandra loved and cared only Rohini and shined when he visited her. His other wives were thus neglected and complained about it before their father who cursed Chandra that he would stop shining. As darkness engulfed after Surya retreated, the *debatas* panicked and rushed to Brahma for help. Brahma expressed helplessness and suggested that only Shiva can come to their rescue. Therefore, Chandra should approach him reciting *Mrutunjaya mantra* ten crore times. Chandra did accordingly and Shiva, pleased with his prayers, freed him from the curse but partially. Since then, Chandra shines partially and waxes and wanes as the *tithis* (lunar days) pass. Only on the *puṇimās* (fullmoon day) he shines fully to disappear after a fortnight on the *amābasyas*

2 Colloqually Chandra is called Janha.

3 Planet Jupiter

4 Planet Mercury.

5 According to Hindu astrology, these twenty-seven daughters are said to be the twenty-seven *nakshyātras* (constellations) that the moon transits during a year.

(no or newmoon day) and the cycle repeats. The intervening periods are called *krushna* (dark) and *shukla* (bright) *pakshyas* (lunar fortnights).

When viewed from the Earth, Chandra has several dark spots that are astronomically craters⁶. However, a folktale mentions that once Ganesha ate to his fill and fell down from his mouse as a result his large potbelly busted. Chandra, who was watching, laughed for which Ganesha became angry. He broke one of his tusks and threw it at Chandra causing injuries. These injuries are believed to be the dark spots.

Astronomically, Surya (Sun) is a star in the solar system and Chandra (Moon) a satellite of the Earth. The Earth, while daily rotating about its own axis, orbits round the Sun once in a year. Likewise, the Moon while daily rotating round its own axis revolves round the Earth once in a month. The Moon does not have its own source of light and reflects the light of Sun falling on it. These give rise to the phenomenon of *dina* (day) and *rati* (night), *pakshyas* and *rutus* (seasons).

Surya paraga and Chandra grahana: - Interesting phenomena associated with Surya and Chandra are *paraga and grahanas* (eclipses) respectively. Hindus believe them to be acts of god. Bhagabata purana describes them associating to the *grasha* (swallow) of Surya and Chandra by Rahu and Ketu⁷. It is mentioned that during *samudra manthana* many things came out of the ocean. At the end, Dhanyantori emerged carrying the pot of *amruta* (nectar). The *asuras* were quick to grab him with the pot. Vishnu acting in the interest of *debatas* transformed himself into a beautiful maiden - Mohini. Dazzled by her beauty, the *asuras* handed over the pot to her to distribute *amrita* amongst them. But

6 Space researchers have studied these spots and even man has landed on its surface.

7 Shadow planets - ascending and descending nodes.

she distributed it only to *debatas*. Rahu and Ketu (who were *asuras*) saw through this ploy and sat disguised with *debatas*. But before they could fully swallow it, Surya and Chandra noticed them and informed Vishnu who chopped off their heads with *sudarshana chakra* (Vishnu's discus). But as they had already taken the *amrita*, they remained alive in spite of being reduced to trunk less bodies. Since then, Rahu and Ketu have not forgotten Surya and Chandra and swallow them. But, being trunk less they cannot hold them for long and the latters come out after a while. This is how mythology describes *paraga* and *grahanas* when Surya or Chandra temporarily disappears and their light do not reach the Earth. Thus total or partial darkness occurs.

When Surya was swallowed by Rahu and then regurgitated, he became angry and furious. He decided to destroy all creations since none came to his rescue. He started multiplying his divine radiance and generated heat that threatened to burn everything to ashes. The *debatas* beseeched Brahma to save them. Brahma then asked Aruna to act as the *sarathi* (charioteer) of Surya's *ratha* (chariot) spreading his long wings to shield the heat. When Aruna mounted the *ratha*, his wings masked Surya and the intensity of heat reduced. Brahma was mighty pleased with his services and granted that the duration of his stay of on the *prithivi* (earth) shall be known as *brahma muhurta* (divine moments - dawn) and anything performed during these moments shall be divine and flawless. Hence many consider dawn as auspicious moment.

Hindus consider the durations of *paraga* or *grahana* inauspicious. The inauspicious periods start four *praharas*⁸ (unit of time) before Surya *grahana* and three *praharas* before Chandra *paraga*. Many local restrictions are followed

8 Prahara is unit of time in local dialect equivalent to one eighth of the day i.e. four hours.

during these periods e.g. (a) abstaining from worshipping or performing any religious rites and taking food, (b) looking at Surya or Chandra, (c) pregnant women staying indoors lest foetus is affected etc. More importantly, orthodox people take bath in sacred rivers like Ganga and Yamuna etc. to wash away their sins and to attain *mokshya* as soon as *paraga* or *grahana* begins and perform *tarpana* (offering to the ancestors). It is believed that bath taken at *sparsha* (touch) or *mokshya* (release) i.e. the beginning and the end of *paraga* or *grahana* is most auspicious.

Scientifically, the eclipses are astronomical phenomenas. They occur due to the orbiting of the Earth round the Sun and the revolution of the Moon round the Earth. Solar eclipse occurs when the Moon moves in between the Sun and the Earth causing its shadow to fall on the Earth. It can happen only on an *amabasya* and can be total or partial. Total eclipse occurs when the Moon perfectly covers the Sun as its size is nearly the same as the Sun when viewed from the Earth. A total solar eclipse is an occultation while the annual eclipse is a transit. Likewise, lunar eclipse occurs when the Sun, Earth and Moon are in a straight line and the shadow of the Earth falls on the Moon or the Moon passes through umbra (zone of shadow). It can happen only on a *purnima* when the Moon is on the far side of the Earth. Like solar eclipse, lunar eclipse can be total or partial.

Sankrantis

The solar month begins with the transit of Surya from one *rashi* (constellation in zodiac) to the next. The day is known as *sankranti*⁹ and the solar month or the year begins. As Surya transits through twelve *rashis* in a solar

9 *Sankranti* usually falls towards the middle of Gregarian calendar month.

year, there are twelve *sankrantis* that are named after the twelve *rashis* e.g. Mesha, Brusha, Mithuna, Karkata, Simha, Kanya, Tula, Bichha, Dhanu, Makara, Kumbha and Meena. Apart from deriving the names after respective solar months, many of the *sankrantis* are also named after important festivals associated with them e.g. Mesha sankranti is known as Maha Visubha or Meru sankranti, Mithuna sankranti as Raja sankranti and Tula sankranti as Garvana sankranti etc.

While all the *sankrantis* are observed by devout Hindus, the important ones generally observed are Mesha, Karkata, Tula and Makara sankrantis. It is so because of the astrological and astronomical phenomena of *uttarayana* and *dakshinayana yatras* (transit to northern and southern hemispheres) of Surya and its position with respect to the *visubha rekha* (equator). In the *uttarayana yatra*, Surya begins its northward transit from Makara rashi (Tropic of Capricorn) in the southern hemisphere. Transiting through Makara, Kumbha, Meena, Mesha, Brusha and Mithuna rashis, it reaches Karkata rashi (Tropic of Cancer) in the northern hemisphere on the Karkata sankranti and then reverses its transit southward making *dakshinayana yatra* towards Makara rashi and the cycle reverses and continues. These days are known as summer and winter solstices¹⁰. In between these *yatras*, Surya transits over *visubha rekha* on Mesha and Tula sankrantis. These two days are known as vernal and autumnal equinoxes as the day and night are of equal durations. Thus, these astronomical phenomena occurring on the *sankrantis* make them important for which Hindus attach religious significances and observe. Besides these four *sankrantis*, Mithuna and Dhanu sankrantis are also observed in the State. Apart from their astrological and

¹⁰ Summer and winter solstices occurs twice a year around June 21st and December 22nd respectively when the Sun reaches the most northerly and southerly positions relative to equator.

religious significances, they are associated with harvesting and economic activities of the people.

The *sankrantis* being dedicated to Surya, the religious rites and rituals for all of them are similar and related to the worship of Surya. An important ritual observed on *sankrantis* is *upabasha*.

Upabasha: - *Upabasha* is a Sanskrit word derived from the noun *basha* meaning live or stay with the prefix *upa* meaning near. Together it means to live near. In spiritual term, it means to live near the god and involves abstinence from everything e.g. food, drink and even talk etc. and sticking to thoughts about god only. Therefore on the *upabasha* day, food and drink are restricted and the person spends time in reciting *bhajanas* (group prayers) and *kirtanas* (*bhajanas* with music). Usually, *upabasha* is kept from the sunset on the day before till the sunrise on the day following. Strictly speaking, it has to be *nirjala* i.e. without taking *jala* (water). Since, this cannot be endured by many, as a departure partial *upabasha* is kept from the sunrise to sunset. Eating cereals, certain kinds of vegetables, onion and garlic etc. are forbidden. The most preferred items are *pana* (sweetened water - water mixed with sugar candy), fruits, milk and milk products. (*Upabasha* is also kept on *ekadashis* and other important religious functions.)

The other important rites are *sankranti buda* or *snanna*¹¹ (bath) and taking simple food (*habishanna*). Some perform *homa* (worship before fire) invoking Surya. On the *sankranti* days, the observers get up early in the morning and take *sankranti buda* in nearby rivers or ponds. Standing in waist deep water, they worship Surya with palms folded (*Surya namaskara*) and recite Gayatri mantra. Many remember

11 Only certain time of the day is considered auspicious for *Sankranti buda*. They are mentioned in the *panjis*.

their *pitru purushas* (ancestors) and offer *tarpana* (offering to the dead). They keep *upabasha* or take simple meal once. The day is spent in visiting temples, meditating and reading religious scriptures. It is usual to offer *dana* (donations in charity) to *brahmins* (highest caste according to Veda) or feed them.

Mesha sankranti¹²: - Surya transits to the Mesha rashi and is over *visubha rekha* or *meru* on the Mesha sankranti. Hence it is called Maha visubha or Meru sankranti. The Odiya solar newyear and the solar month Mesha start from this day. The day also marks the onset of *grishma rutu* (summer season). In order to get relief from intense heat of summer, people serve cold water and *pana*¹³ to the thirsty. The *pana* is also served to friends and relations as a gesture of good will. Because of the serving of *pana*, the *sankranti* is also known as Pana sankranti.

The *pana* is also offered to the *tulashi* plant in the *tulashi chauras* (a small temple shaped flower pot) through the traditional devise called Basundhara theki. It is a symbolic gesture to provide relief to *tulashi* plant from the heat of the summer whom Odiyas consider Maa Brundabati or Tulashi personified. Generally, a *chhamundia* (shed made of leaves) is erected over the *choura* to provide shade to the plant. A small earthen pitcher with a hole at the bottom and filled with water or *pana* is hung over it. The hole allows the mixture to flow drop by drop over the plant. The *teki* is refilled with water or *pana* everyday during the entire month.

12 Generally falls on lunar month Baisalha (mid April)

13 Though the traditional *pana* is made of water sweetened with sugar candy or jaggery, it is usually a concoct of *bela* (wood apple), *kadali chakata* (mashed banana), *amba kasha bata* (tender mango pulp), *nadia kora* (coconut gratings), *chena* (cottage cheese), *dahi* (curd), *dudha* (milk) and *guda* (jaggery) seasoned with *golmaricha* (black pepper). Often it is mixed with *bhanga* (hemp) to add flavour for those who relish it.

In the Bhaviswa purana, the day is described as Jala sankranti. It is mentioned that during the legendary Mahabharata war, when Bhishma pitamaha (grand sire) was lying on the *sara sajjya* (bed of arrows) for eighteen days being grievously hurt and waiting for the auspicious period of *uttarayana yatra* of Surya to leave the mortal world according to his wish (*ichhya mrutyu*¹⁴), he felt thirsty and asked for water. As there was no water around the Kurukshetra battlefield, Arjuna, shot an arrow deep into the ground and water came out as a geyser. With it Bhishma pitamaha quenched his thirst. That day was Mesha sankranti. Out of contentment, he blessed the Pandava brothers mentioning that those who would offer water to the thirsty on this day would not only be freed of their sins but also would free their *pitru purushas* of their sins. This description in the Holy Scriptures is taken with reverence and people offer cold sweet water or *pana* to the thirsty.

A few festivals are associated with this *sankranti*. The famous Danda or Jhamu yatra ends on this day. Patua and Hingula yatras, Baseli puja and Chaiti ghodi nacha etc. are also held on or around the *sankranti*. They are observed mainly in the coastal and southern Odisha and also in erstwhile princely states. (More about these festivals are described in “Important pujas” and “Important yatras”).

Mithuna sankranti¹⁵: - Surya transits to Mithuna rashi on the Mithuna sankranti. People observe the *sankranti* with usual rites and rituals worshipping Surya. The important festival associated with it is Raja and thus the *sankranti* is also known as Raja sankranti. The festival is exclusive to the State and is observed mainly in the coastal districts. Basically it is a festival for young girls though others take

14 Bhishma pitamaha had received the boon of *ichhya mrutyu* from his father Santanu for his loyalty and devotion towards him.

15 Falls in the lunar month Jyestha (mid June)

part. It is also a festival associated with harvesting. Not long ago, Odiyas living outside the State were invariably visiting their homes to spend a few days with their families during this festival. (More about Raja festival is described in “Important festivals”.)

Karkata sankranti¹⁶: - The *dakshinayana yatra* of Surya starts from this *sankranti* and it transits to the Karkata rashi. It is not observed by many. Only in the Badadeula at Puri and other Jagannatha temples, the *dakshinayana bandapana* (special adoration with lighted lamp) of lord Jagannatha is performed.

Kanya sankranti¹⁷: - Surya transits to Kanya rashi on the Kanya sankranti. The day is also observed for the worship of Vishwakarma¹⁸, the established god of tradesmen. His worship is observed in a big way in factories and industrial establishments. They remain closed on this day. Individual tradesmen also worship Vishwakarma at homes. (More about Vishwakarma puja is described in “Important pujas”.)

Tula sankranti¹⁹: - Surya is over *visubha rekha* or Tula rashi on the Tula sankranti. Locally, it is also called Garvana or Garva dharana sankranti. In local dialect, *garvana* or *garva dharana* implies to carry in the womb. The *sankranti* is called so as by this time, the tiny rice spikes start developing into *sishsas* (kernels) like a foetus developing into a baby in the womb of a pregnant woman. The day is a mile stone achievement for the farmers and cultivators. Seeing the abundance of *sishsas*, it is the time for them to rejoice over the result of their hard works during the past few months. They worship Lakshmi praying for a good harvest. *Dhana*

16 Falls in the lunar month Ashada (mid July)

17 Falls in the lunar month Bhadrava (mid September)

18 Divine carpenter

19 Falls in the lunar month Aswina (mid October)

(paddy) and *kara* (a shrub with anti-insecticidal properties) leaves and branches are offered to the goddess along with varieties of *pithas* (cakes and savouries). All the members of the family take meals to their heart's content believing that they will always be provided with such dainty dishes. Thereafter the *kara* leaves and branches are taken to the fields and strewn all over the rice plants. The practice is believed to protect the plants from pests and insects and lessen effect of famine.

Dhanu sankranti²⁰: - Surya transits to Dhanu rashi on Dhanu sankranti. Like Tula sankranti, the farmers and cultivator community celebrate the day with festivity. By now, the rice *sishsas* have ripened and it is the time for harvest. They worship their established deity lord Jagannatha and Lakshmi for their kindness. After collecting the harvest, a special sweet savoury known as *dhanu muan* - made of *khai* (puffed paddy) and *guda* (jaggery) and rolled into a ball²¹ is offered to the deities. The *muan* is also offered to lord Jagannatha in Badadeula at Puri and other Jagannatha temples along with Gopala ballava bhoga which is the traditional first *bhoga* of the day. In addition, another *bhoga* known as Pahali bhoga²², (also known as Khechudi bhoga) is also offered to lord Jagannatha in Badadeula at Puri along with Gopala ballava bhoga from Dhanu to Makara sankrantis.

It is an interesting sight to find the farmers and their friends eating these *muans* while reaping. Pausa being a cold month, the *guda* in the *muan* provides extra energy while working in the fields. All over the villages and towns, the

20 Falls in the lunar month Margasira (mid December)

21 Now available in conical, triangular and round shapes flavoured with many ingredients.

22 The episode runs that when Rukmini (Lakshmi) visits her in-laws house, Yosoda prepares the delicious *khechudi* to the satisfaction of her son and daughter-in-law.

confectioners remain busy making *dhanu muans* which is not available during other time of the year.

At Bargarh in western Odisha, an eleven days long *yatra* known as Dhanu yatra is held every year commencing from this *sankranti*. The *yatra* is perhaps the biggest open-air carnival in the world depicting the Krishna leela (life story of Krishna) and the death of Kansha. (More about Dhanu yatra of Bargarh is described in “Important yatras”.)

Makara sankranti²³: - Surya transits to Makara rashi on Makara sankranti. It is another important *sankranti* from the religious angle. The *uttarayana yatra* of Surya and the day of the *debatas* start from it. The days start becoming longer and warmer compared to nights. It thus marks end of *sarata rutu* (autumn season) the beginning of *hemanta rutu* (late autumn season).

The *sankranti* is regarded as the beginning of an auspicious period as it is believed that the rituals are sanctified from this day onwards. From the sunrise to sunset, the environment has more *chaitanya* (divine consciousness). Hence, those observing this *sankranti* benefit from it.

Several anecdotes about the importance of this *sankranti* are mentioned in the epics. On this day, Vishnu ended the ever increasing terror of the *asuras* by finishing them off. So the occasion represents beginning of a period of virtuous living. Bhisma pitamaha, who had received the boon of *ichha mrutu* from his father declared his intent to leave the mortal world on this day. Therefore, Hindus believed that those who die during the *uttarayana yatra* period attain *mokhya*. Beginning from this day, Surya visits his son Sani and spends a month with him. Though father and son do not get along well, Surya makes it a point to visit Sani once

23 Falls in the lunar month Magha (mid January)

a year. Therefore, the day signifies the importance of the relationship between father and son. Most importantly, on this day, king Bhaghiratha performed the great penance to bring the river Ganga to the earth for the redemption of his *pitru purushas* - the thousand sons of king Sagara who were turned to ashes through a curse by sage Kapila. Every year, a great *mela* (fair) known as Ganga-sagar or Sagar mela is held on this *sankranti* at the legendary Kapilamuni ashram at Ganga sagara (confluence of the river Ganges and the sea - Bay of Bengal). Thousands of devotees and pilgrims from all over the country attend the *mela* and take *sankranti buda* at the confluence. Others who cannot make to Ganga sagar take *sankranti buda* in other sacred rivers. It is believed that *debatas* take bath in these sacred rivers and the water thus sanctified after their bath flows in them. Hence, the benefit of the highest order is achieved by *sankranti buda* at any time between sunrise and sunset.

Apart from the religious importance, the *sankranti* also coincides with harvesting festival. The farmer community observe it in a big way. By this time, the harvesting is over and it is a period of plenty with the reeks and barns full with freshly harvested paddy. Toiling hard since Raja sankranti, they find a period of rest and relaxation and enjoy the time. Life in the community bursts with festivity and joy. A special preparation known as *makara chaula* is prepared from the freshly threshed paddy and mixing it with *tila* (sesame seed) and *guda* (jaggery) and offered to the gods and goddesses for their kindness.

At Badadeula in Puri, the deities are dressed in Makara chaula besha. They wear Makara chula (a special headgear). *Uttarayana yatra bandapana* is performed. Special *puja* is offered to the deities and the *makara chaula* is taken round the temple premise that is known as *Makara* or *Nabanka beda*. Besides *makara chaula*, people make varieties of rice

based sweet *pithas*. Since the *sankranti* is in the midst of winter, the food eaten during this time is meant to keep the body warm and to give extra energy.

Makara melas are observed at many places mainly at Dhabaleswar near Cuttack, Hatakeswar near Atri in Khurdha, Makara muni temple at Balasore. In the tribal areas of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Kalahandi, Koraput, Sundargarh and Ganjam districts, where tribal population is in majority, it is celebrated with great zeal and joy.

Another important event of the day is kite flying. The period is favourable for the pastime. Children and adults fly kites of different shapes, size and colour and enjoy. In some places kite flying competitions are organised.

2.

AMABASYAS, PURNIMAS AND EKADASHIS

Amabasyas (new moon days), *puṛṇimas* (full moon days) and *ekadashis* (eleventh days of each fortnight) are based in the lunar methods. The revolution of Chandra round the Earth gives rise to the phenomenas of *krushna* (dark) and *shukla* (bright) *pakshyas* (lunar fortnights), *amabasyas* and *puṛṇimas*. The Odiya lunar months start in the *krushna pakshyas* from the day after the *puṛṇima* and the *pakshyas* ends on the *amabasya*. Thereafter, the *shukla pakshyas* starts from the day after *amabasya* and the month ends on the *puṛṇima*. In short, a lunar month has thirty days starting from day after the *puṛṇima* and ending on the *puṛṇima*. The cycle repeats and the next month begins. The first *tithi* after *puṛṇima* or *amabasya* is *pratipada* and the *tithis* thereafter are *dwitiya*, *trutiya*, *chaturthi*, *panchami*, *sasthi*, *saptami*, *astami*, *navami*, *dashami*, *ekadashi*, *dwadashi*, *tryodashi* and *chaturdashi*. The last *tithi* of the *pakshyas* is either *amabasya* or *puṛṇima*. In both *pakshyas*, the eleventh days are *ekadashis*. Many religious rites and rituals are observed on these days. *Shukla pakshya* is considered more auspicious and good for starting any new activity. The famous Mahabharata war started on the eve of *shukla pakshya*.

Amabasyas

Amabasya is the last day of *krushna pakshya* and thus falls on the middle of the lunar months. It is a day of spiritual significance since it is dedicated to pay homage and worship of *pitru purushas* (ancestors). In Garuda purana (Preta kanda), Vishnu has said that the *pitru purushas* visit their descendants on the *amabasya* days and those who offer *shradha* (rituals after death) and *tarpana* (offering to the ancestors) receive their blessings and get rid of their sins and sorrows. It is customary to take bath in any of the holy rivers and keep *upabasha* (fast) or take only one meal on the *amabasyas*.

There are twelve *amabasyas* in a lunar year corresponding to respective months. Of these, greater importance is given to Jyestha, Sravana and Kartika *amabasyas* though other *amabasyas* are also important and observed. In addition, if an *amabasya* falls on a Monday, it is called Somabati *amabasya*. It is generally observed by women who believe that it wards off widowhood and ensures progeny.

Jyestha (Savitri) amabasya: - The *amabasya* in lunar month Jyestha is Jyestha *amabasya*. It is also known as Savitri *amabasya* since worship of Savitri is held on this day. It is one of the important *amabasyas*. Epics mention that Savitri brought back her dead husband from the clutches of Yama (god of Death). Hence, married women (not widows) observe it and worship Savitri for the long life of their husbands. Many observe it as a *brata* and tie a red thread round their arms. Usually, two or more women join together and worship before *tulashi chaura* or at a common place. (More about Savitri *brata* and *puja* are described in “Important *bratas*” and “Important *pujas*” respectively.)

Srabana (Chitalagi) amabasya: - The *amabasya* on the lunar month Srabana is called Srabana or Chitalagi *amabasya*.

It is special event in the Badadeula at Puri. However, many observe it at homes. *Chita* is an emerald locket worn on the forehead of lord Jagannatha throughout the year. It is taken out during Snanna yatra lest it gets spoiled during the sacred bath. It is re-worn on this *amabasya*. Hence, it is named so. A special type of *pitha* known as *chitau pitha* made of rice flour and coconut milk is offered to lord Jagannatha. It is also prepared at home and offered to family deities. However, with time, *chitau pitha* has become a recipe of the past.

In some parts of the State, the *amabasya* is associated with viragoes. To appease the evil spirits, people worship and pray *Gendeisuni* an evil spirit in the feminine form of *genda* (a type of snail). Since the *amabasya* is during the rainy season, the *gendas* breed enormously in the paddy fields. Farmers working in the fields have their feet cut with the sharp edges of their shells. Then the farmer girls go to the fields and offer *pithas* to snails. In western Odisha, particularly in the district Sambalpur, a festival known as Hariali Kans is celebrated on this day. People believe that in the night, a virago called Tandei haunts and sucks the blood of the children. To save the children from her wrath, mothers draw peculiar designs below the naval areas of their children before the night falls.

Bhadrava (Satapuri) amabasya: - The *amabasya* on lunar month Bhadrava is also known as Satapuri amabasya. Like Chitalagi amabasya it is observed in Badadeula where *satapuri tada* (a special type of sweet savoury made of seven layers of stuffed *puri*) is offered to lord Jagannatha. At homes, many prepare this sweet and offer to family deities. Like *chitau pitha*, *satapuri* is now a recipe of the past.

Aswina (Mahalaya) amabasya: - The *amabasya* in the lunar month Aswina is also called Mahalaya amabasya. The fortnights ending with it are known as *mahalaya*, *pitru* or

apara pakshya. It is the most important period for performing *shradha* and *tarpana* for the *pitru purushas* (ancestors). According to sacred scriptures, it is believed that the *pitru purushas* leave *pitru loka* (abode of ancestors in the astral plane) on this day and come to live with their descendants on the earth for a month till Dipabali amabasya. Therefore, people perform *shradha* and *tarpana* for their *pitru purushas* during these periods believing to free them from sins, pave their way to Baikuntha (Heaven) and lead them to *mokshya*.

Mahalaya amabasya is the day when the earthen idols of Durga and other gods and goddesses in the *sarbajanina* (community) *puja* (worship) are given the initial coat of *khadi* (chalk) paint before final colouring and painting. Therefore, it is also called Khadilagi amabasya. (More about Mahalaya shradha is described in “Important pujas”.)

Kartika (Dipabali) amabasya: - The *amabasya* in the lunar month Kartika is Kartika amabasya. It is also known as Dipabali amabasya (Festival of light). It is one of the important *amabasyas* celebrated throughout the State. Traditionally people offer Badabadua shradha to their *pitru purushas*.

Over the years, the State has given place to the people of different regions and cultures. The practices followed in different regions are integrated and observed in addition to the traditional ones. Thus, the *amabasya* is associated with many festivals and religious events e.g. Dhanyantori jayanti, Dhanteras, Naraka chaturdashi, Badabadua or Paya shradha, Dipabali, Shyama Kali puja, Chota dipabali and Bhatru dwitiya etc. (More about these festivals are described in “Important pujas” and “Important festivals”.)

Pausa (Bakula) amabasya: - The *amabasya* in the lunar month Pausa is called Bakula amabasya. *Bakula* in local

dialect refers to mango blossoms. Around this time, the mango trees blossom and they are worshipped to yield abundant fruits. In the Badadeula at Puri, *bakula* is offered to lord Jagannatha and special food is prepared. Observing this *amabasya* and worshipping of mango trees have progressively faded.

Purnimas

Purnima is the last day of the *shukla pakshyas* and thus marks the end of the lunar month. Since there are twelve months in a lunar year, there are twelve *purnimas* named after respective months. However, some of them are named after important festivals associated with them e.g. Baisakha purnima called Budha purnima, Jyestha purnima called Snanna purnima and Ashada purnima called Vyasa purnima etc.

Baisakha (Buddha or Chandana) purnima: - The *purnima* in the lunar month Baisakha is called Baisakha or Buddha purnima being the birthday of Buddha (ninth incarnation of Vishnu and the founder of Buddhism). It is also called Chandana purnima as it falls within the forty-two days long Chandana yatra of lord Jagannatha at Puri. At Badadeula, special *puja* and *bandapana* are offered to lord Jagannatha. Chandana yatra is an important festival of lord Jagannatha and marks the beginning of festivals in Puri in a lunar year. (More about Chandana yatra is described in “Important yatras”).

Jyestha (Snanna) purnima: - The *purnima* in the lunar month Jyestha is called Jyestha purnima. It is also called Snanna or Debasnanna purnima as the Snanna yatra or the annual sacred bath ceremony of Chaturdhamurt is (Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshanachakra)

at Badadeula at Puri is held on this day. (More about Snanna yatra is described in “Important yatras”.)

Ashada (Vyasa or Guru) purnima: - Ashada purnima, also known as Vyasa purnima, is observed in the lunar month Ashadha. It is called so as sage Vyasa or Veda Vyasa, son of sage Parasara and Satyabati is said to have been born on this day²⁴. Vyasa is revered as a great spiritual *guru* (preacher) who classified Vedas into four parts. He is also the author of Mahabharata and a central figure in it. Hence this *purnima* is celebrated in his honour and is also called Guru purnima.

Previously, the spiritual *gurus* of Hindus and Buddhists were worshipped on this day. The day was also seen as an occasion when *guru bhais* (clan of preachers) expressed their solidarity with one another in their spiritual journey. In the past when there were *gurukula ashramas* (residential schools of *gurus*), the *sishtyas* (disciples) worshiped their *gurus*. With the progressive disappearance of *gurukula ashramas*, it is no longer followed.

Sravana (Gamha or Rakhi) purnima: - The purnima in the lunar month Sravana is known as Sravana purnima. It is the birthday of Balarama (Balabhadra), the elder brother of lord Jagannatha. *Puja* and *avisekha* (special worship) are held in Badadeula at Puri and other Jagannatha temples. The birthday of Balarama is celebrated in Paralakhemundi, Nayagarh and other rural areas of the State by a local game called *gamha diyan* (gamha jump). Hence, the *purnima* is called Gamha purnima.

Before the *purnima*, a makeshift ramp known as *gamha* is made of bricks, mud and grass etc. The middle of the ramp is made sloping giving the shape of a spur with its top like a tower. A short distance from the tower two poles are dug

24 Lived around 3000 BCE as claimed by some religious scholars

in opposite direction, which are connected with a bamboo stick. In the bamboo stick various fruits like oranges, bananas, coconuts etc. are hung. One by one, the participants run towards the *gamha* and on reaching the top, give a jump to catch the fruits hung. . One who touches a fruit receives a prize.

In the past, the *purnima* was a day when cattle were worshipped. Cows and bullocks were bathed and garlanded. *Haldi* (turmeric) paste and *sindura* (vermilion) were applied round their necks and foreheads²⁵. Their horns and hoofs were anointed with oil to shine and look nice. Women performed *bandapana* ((special adoration with lighted lamp) and they were fed well. In short, it was a day of expressing gratitude to *go-matas*.

The week long Jhulana yatra of Radha and Krishna that starts from the previous *dashami* ends on this day. It is an important festival held at many places for the worship of Radha and Krishna. (More about Jhulana yatra is described in “Important yatras”.)

Though Jhulana yatra is still celebrated at many places in both rural and urban areas, *gamha dian* and worship of cattle have virtually gone into oblivion. In their places, another festival known as Rakhya bandhan²⁶ or Rakhi which was not a traditional festival of the State except in Badadeula at Puri has become popular and is now observed. The *purnima* is also known as Rakhi purnima. (More about Rakhya bandhan is described in “Important festivals”.)

Bhadrava purnima: - The *purnima* in the lunar month Bhadrava is Bhadrava purnima. It is said that composition

25 These are the signs of worship)

26 I was told in the past priests from the temples tied *rakshya sutra* on the wrists of *maharajas* and *rajas* for their protection from enemies.

of Srimad Bhaghabata purana by sage Vyasa started from this day. The *pitru pakshya* (fortnight of ancestors) starts from the day after it. The *puṇnima*, as such is not much observed.

Aswina (Kumara) puṇnima: - The *puṇnima* in the lunar month Aswina is known as Aswina puṇnima. It is also known as Kumara puṇnima as it is the birthday of Kumara (Kartikēya). It is an important *puṇnima*. The day heralds the onset of the holy lunar month of Kartika. Two important events i.e. Kumara utshaba and Gaja Lakshmi puja are observed on this day. Kumara utshaba is a festival of young girls who worship Surya, Chandra and Kumara. Gaja Lakshmi puja is held as *sarbanjanina* (community) *puja* (worship) of Lakshmi. More about Kumara utshaba and Gaja Lakshmi puja are described in “Important pujas” and “Important yatras”.

The month following Aswina puṇnima is Kartika. Like Baisakha, Kartika is another holy month in the lunar year. The ancient scriptures e.g. Skandha purana, Narada purana and Padma purana etc. have described its significance. Padma purana mentions that Krishna himself said “Of all plants - tulashi; of all months - Kartika; of all places of pilgrimage - Dwaraka and of all days - ekadashis are most dear to me”. The month is full of religious events and festivals e.g. Yama dipabali, Dhanwatari jayanti, Naraka chaturdashi, Shyamakali puja, Dipabali and Yama or Bhatru dwitiya etc. Many observe Kartika or Rai Damodara brata during the entire month. Those fond of non-vegetarian food give it up during the month or at least during the last five days of the month known as panchuka. More about these festivals are given in ‘Important Festivals’.

Kartika (Rasha) puṇnima: - The *puṇnima* on the lunar month Kartika is Kartika puṇnima. It is also known as Rasha

purnima as Krishna performed *rasha leela*²⁷ with *gopis* in the moonlit light of *sisira rutu* (winter season). Following this mythological episode, Krishna leela (life story of Krishna) is enacted in many Krishna temples. The day is known as Deba dipabali (Festival of Light of gods) or the *dipabali* of gods. It is also the day when Shiva is said to have killed demon Tripurasura. Therefore, in some places, the *purnima* is called Tripurari purnima. Most of the Shiva temples are crowded with devotees chanting *bhajanas* (group prayers). *kirtanas* (*bhajanas* with music) and *sankirtans* (group *kirtanas*) are held during the whole day. Sikhs celebrate the day as the birthday of their first guru Guru Nanak Dev. Day long prayers are held in gurudwaras all over the country and thousands are fed *prasadas* (cooked food offered to gods) in *langers* (community kitchens). The month long Kartika or Rai Damodara brata starts from this day. It is an important *brata* for the women particularly widows.

Two events mark the importance of this *purnima* – (i) Boita bandana utshaba and (ii) beginning of Bali yatra at Cuttack. Boita bandana utshaba is exclusive to the State particularly to coastal areas. In local language *boita* is an argosy or a large sail boat and *bandana* is worshipping with lighted lamp. Thus, Boita bandana symbolises worship of sail boats with lighted lamps. It is being observed for past several centuries. Bali yatra at Cuttack is a large open air carnival held on in open ground adjoining Barabati fort by the side of river Mahanadi at Gadgadiaghat. It is said to be the largest *yatra* in Odisha next to Dhanu yatra of Bargarh. (More about Boita bandana utshaba and Bali yatra are described in “Important festivals” and “Important yatras” respectively.)

27 Rasha leela is a form of romantic dance of Krishna with Radha and group of *gopis*. It is considered to be one of the purest and most esoteric pastimes of Krishna.

The day after purnima i.e. on the pratipada of the krushna pakshya of lunar month Margasira is chadakhai. Those who are fond of non-vegetarian food particularly fish and had abstained from it during the entire Kartika month or five days of panchuka crave to satisfy their desire by eating it. Varieties of fish and meat items are prepared on this day.

Margasira (Pandu) purnima: - The *purnima* in the lunar month Margasira is Margasira purnima. It is also known as Pandu purnima being dedicated to Mahabharata fame Pandu (father of Pandavas) and Pandu osha is observed on this day. In Badadeula at Puri, lord Jagannatha performs *shradha* for his *pitru purushas*. Lakshmi is worshipped on all Gurubaras (Thursdays) during the month that is known as Dhana manakia or Manabasa Gurubara puja. (More about Dhana manakia or Manabasa gurubara is described in “Important pujas”.)

Pausa purnima: - The *purnima* in the lunar month Pausa is called Pausa purnima. It is said that the famous religious text Bhagabata was composed on this day. Therefore many call the day as Bhagabata janmadina. In Badadeula at Puri, *pushyavisekha* (*avisekha* with flowers) is performed and lord Jagannatha dons Suna besha (golden attire). The month long Magha brata starts from the day after this *purnima*.

Magha (Aghira) purnima: - The *purnima* in the lunar month Magha is Magha purnima. The famous Agni utshaba is celebrated towards the evening in which Agni (god of Fire) is worshipped. It is therefore known as Aghira or Agni purnima. (More about Agni utshaba is described in “Important festivals”.)

Phalgun (Dolo) purnima: - The *purnima* in the lunar month Phalgun is Phalgun purnima. It heralds the onset of *basanta rutu* (spring season). The major festival surrounding the *purnima* is Dolo yatra. Hence, the *purnima* is also known

as Dolo purnima. Dolo yatra is mentioned in a number of *puranas* and other Holi Scriptures. Padma purana mentions “One is expiated of all sins when he gets a vision of Krishna swaying in the swing”. Like Jhulana yatra, idols of Radha and Krishna from different temples are taken out in beautifully decorated *vimanas* (palanquins) around the localities and brought to a common place where *melana* (assembly of all *vimanas*) takes place and the idols are swung in *dolis* (swings). Temporary shops come up around the *melana* arena. The festival of Holi is observed on the day following the *purnima*. (More about Dolo yatra and Holi are described in “Important yatras”.)

Chaitra purnima: - The *purnima* in the lunar month Chaitra is Chaitra purnima. It has special significance for the *keuta* or *kaibarta* (fisherman) community who worship their established goddess Baseli (the mare headed goddess - another form of Shakti) during the entire month. She is said to be manifestation of Durga and one of the sixty-four Yoginis. Apart from the month long worship of Baseli, religious events known as Chaiti ghodi nacha or Dummy mare dance and Bagha nacha are performed by the *keuta* community. The biannual Takhurani yatra at Berhampur starts from this *purnima*. (More about Baseli puja and Chaiti Ghodi nacha and Thakurani yatra are described in “Important pujas” and “Important yatras”.)

Ekadashis

“*Na Gayatri ya param mantra, na Matru param yaa devi, na Kashi ya param tirtha, na Ekadashi ya samam bratam*”

(No *mantra* superior is to Gayatri, no *devi* is superior to Mother, no *tirtha* superior to Kashi, and no *brata* is more superior to *Ekadashi*.)

The word *ekadashi* is derived from Sanskrit word *ekadashi* which means eleven. Thus, the eleventh days of each *pakshyas* in a lunar month are *ekadashis*. Since there are twenty-four *pakshyas* in a lunar year, there are twenty-four *ekadashis*. However, there are two more *ekadashis* in a year having *mala* or *adhik masa* (extra month). Since, there is no fixed month for *adhik masa*, there is no definite month for them.

Significance of *ekadashis* (also known as Hari dina or Hari basara - day of Hari i.e. Vishnu) is mentioned in various epics like Padma purana and Skanda purana etc. According to Padma purana, *ekadashi* is the feminine energy of Vishnu who on this day killed demon Mura in the form of a maiden and protected Indra and other demigods from his menace. Pleased by the act of his feminine energy, Vishnu named her Ekadashi and asked her for a boon. The maiden prayed that she be granted with the power to wash away the sins of those who remember her and keep complete or partial *upabasha* on the eleventh day of each *pakshya*. Vishnu granted it. Thus, the *ekadashis* are dedicated to Vishnu and are one of the most sacred days for the Hindus. They are observed by Vishnu devotees for washing away the sins. Generally *vaishnabas* (devotees of Vishnu) and women (mostly widows) observe it with austerity.

Ekadashis are also observed by lord Jagannatha and special rituals are held in Badadeula at Puri and also in Vishnu temples. Out of the twenty-four *ekadashis*, four are called *bada ekadashi* since they are directly associated with special rituals of lord Jagannatha (Vishnu). There are always rushes of devotees at Badadeula at Puri on the *ekadashis* particularly on the *bada ekadashis*. The duration of *sahanamela* (time for community viewing) in Badadeula is extended to allow devotees to view and worship. Large quantities of *mahaprasada* (food offering in Badadeula) are also prepared for consumption by the pilgrims.

The aim and purpose of observing the *ekadashis* are by and large same. All are observed to be nearer to the Vishnu and attain *mokshya*. Some have specific benefits like washing away sins or bestowing a son or a progeny. Epics describe the benefits of individual *ekadashis* and the stories and legends surrounding their names.

The rites and rituals for all *ekadashis* are similar. The observers wake up early in the morning and after daily routine and purification bath, worship and pray Vishnu and his different incarnations. They keep *upabasha* and spend the day visiting Vishnu temples and reading or reciting Vishnu purana. Some devout observers keep awake the entire night reciting religious scriptures and offering prayers. Needless to mention that use of oil on the hair and body, shaving of beard, and indulging in gambling or sex are prohibited on these days. Some consider *ekadashis* as *bratas* though no sacred thread is worn.

Ekadashis are named after some incidents or anecdotes described in the epics or by the sages and peers. Each has a story associated with their names. They are briefly mentioned while describing individual *ekadashis*.

Varuthani ekadashi: - It is the first *ekadashi* of the lunar year on the *krishna pakshya* of Baisakha. The word *varuthini* signifies armoured or protected. Hence, the observers of this *ekadashi* believe that they would be protected from all harms and evils and gain good fortune. The benefit of this *ekadashi* was narrated by Krishna to Pandava brother Yudhistira. According to it, king Dhunda kumara was freed from a curse by Shiva by observing it. It is said that those who hear or read the glorification of Varuthini ekadashi obtain the merit earned by donating one thousand cows in charity and attain *mokshya*.

Mohini ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of Baisakha is Mohini ekadashi. It derives its name from an *apsara* (fairy) Mohini who was detailed by Indra and other demigods to test the devotion of a pious king named Rukmana towards Vishnu. Mohini succeeded in her mission to seduce the king but could not break his *ekadashi* rituals and his devotion towards Vishnu. It is said that maharishi Vasistha advised Rama to observe this *ekadashi* to get over the remorse due to the separation of Sita. The observers of this *ekadashi* therefore believe that they would overcome sorrow and grief and gain good fortune.

Jalakrida ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of the lunar month Jyestha is called Jalakrida ekadashi as it falls during the Bahara Chandana yatra of lord Jagannatha. It is an important *ekadashi* particularly in Badadeula at Puri. In the *yatra*, the *bije pratimas* (representative idols) of lord Jagannatha, Lakshmi, Bhudevi, and Ramakrishna along with Pancha Shivas are taken in grand procession to Narendran saravara for *jala krida* (aquatic frolic) and worshiped in *chapas* (barges).

According to Krushna, whosoever observes this *ekadashi* is freed of the sins and attains *mokshya*. Even heinous sin like killing a *brahmin* or a cow is washed away by observing it. The merit attained by observing this *ekadashi* is equal to the merit attained by bathing three times a day in lake Pushkara in the lunar month Kartika or taking a holy dip at Prayaga or Kurukshetra during eclipses. The *ekadashi* is also called Aparā ekadashi.

Nirjala ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of the lunar month Jyestha is Nirjala ekadashi. *Nirjala* in local Odiya dialect means without water. While in other *ekadashis* taking water is permitted, the observers have to abstain from it on this *ekadashi*. It is one of the

difficult *ekadashis* as the observers do not take water or any food during the entire period of *upabasha*. They are only permitted to take a tiny drop of water during *archana* (rite during worship). Sick or people with health problems, pregnant women and lactating mothers are excused from observing *nirjala upabasha*. The *ekadashi* is also known as Rukmini ekadashi since Rukmini vivaha in Badadeula at Puri is held on this day. At some places, the *ekadashi* is also known as Pandav Bhima or simply Bhima ekadashi. In the Mahabharata it is mentioned that Kunti, Draupadi and the Pandava brothers except Bhima were observing all *ekadashis* without fail. Bhima could not observe them as he could not keep *upabasha* resisting thirst and hunger. Being keen to observe the *ekadashis* like his brothers, he approached sage Vyasa who advised him to observe Nirjala ekadashi at least once in a year as it would bestow the benefits of all the *ekadashis*. Bhima did so and attained the virtues of all twenty-four *ekadashis*. Thus according to this episode, the merit attained by observing it is equivalent to observing all the twenty-three *ekadashis*

Khalilagi ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of Ashada is Khalilagi ekadashi. It is called so as it falls during the *anabasara* (convalescent) fortnight of Chaturdhamirti when *khali* (chalk paste) is applied on the wooden idols for the annual repair and repainting. Therefore some call it Anabasara ekadashi and also Yogini ekadashi²⁸. It is believed that observers of this *ekadashi* are freed from their sins and lead a happy life.

Harisayana (Padma) ekadashi²⁹: - The *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of Ashada is Harisayana ekadashi. It is one

28 As mentioned before, Vishnu appeared in the form of a *yogini* on this *ekadashi* to annihilate demon Mura.

29 *Sayana* in local dialect means slumber or sleep.

of the four *bada ekadashis*³⁰. From this day, Hari (Vishnu) goes into the sleep during *chaturmasa* (four months of the rainy season). Since he lies on a *padma* (lotus flower) in the *khira sagara*, the *ekadashi* is also called Padma ekadashi. As it is immediately after the Bahuda yatra of Chaturdhamurtis the deities keep *upabasha* and observe the *ekadashi* on the *rathas* which are decorated with lotus flowers.

Kamana ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of Shravana is Kamana (also Kamada) ekadashi. *Kamana* in Odiya language is desire. It is therefore believed that the desires of a person are fulfilled by observing this *ekadashi*. Anybody observing it and worshipping Vishnu and offering him a *tulashi* leaf attains *mokshya* - one of the prime desires. The merits of this *ekadashi* were explained by Brahma to sage Narada. It was re-narrated to Pandava brother Yudhistara by Krishna. According to it, the *ekadashi* is the purest of all *ekadashis* and most powerful for removing sins. It bestows merits equal to performing *aswamedha yajnas*³¹ (sacrifice of horse), taking holy dip in sacred rivers or visiting *chardhamas* and *saptapuris*.

Putrada ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of Shravana is Putrada ekadashi. At some places it is called Sravana Putrada ekadashi to differentiate it from the *ekadashi* of the same name in the lunar month Pausa. *Putrada* in local language is giver of a son. Thus, the *ekadashi* is considered beneficial to childless couples to get a child.

30 Other three Bada ekadashis are Vishnu Parswaparibartana, Hariuthapana and Bhaumi ekadashis.

31 In puranic days a king sent a horse across the neighbouring kingdoms to gain supremacy. If the horse returns safe, his supremacy was established and the horse was sacrificed in a *yajna*. Any king who does not accept supremacy can stop the horse. Then the superiority is decided in the battle.

Aja ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* in the *krushna pakshya* of the lunar month Bhadrava is Aja or Ananda ekadashi. It is also known as Kalia dalana ekadashi since on this day lord Jagannatha is dressed in Kalia dalana *besha*. It is said that by merely hearing the glory of this *ekadashi*, one gets *ananda* (pleasure) and the sins are washed away. In Padma purana, Krishna describes the importance of this *ekadashi* to Yudhistara narrating the story of Harishchandra who observed it and was freed from the sin of telling a lie. Harishchandra was a *satyabadi* (speaker of truth). His glory spread across all the three worlds. The sages decided to test his *satyabrata*. Sage Viswamitra lured him in many possible means and forced him to tell a lie. He thus lost his kingdom and wealth. His wife and son were sold to a *brahmin*. He himself led the life of a *chandala* (low caste person) cremating dead bodies at the Manikarnika ghat (cremation ground) at Kashi. One day sage Gautama passed through Kashi. He saw Harishchandra and understood his plight. He advised him to observe Aja ekadashi to cleanse his sins. Harishchandra followed it and he was freed of his sins. He regained his kingdom and was united with his family. It is mentioned in the *puranas* and scriptures that when a person observes Aja ekadashi with full devotion, all his sins of the present life are washed away and his life is filled with happiness and prosperity. The benefits of Aja ekadashi are equivalent to the benefits of performing *aswamedha yagna*.

Vishnu parswa paribartana ekadashi: - It is the *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of Bhadrava. It is said that Vishnu turns his sleeping posture while in slumber during *chaturmasa*. Hence it is named so. It is one of the four *bada ekadashis*. The *ekadashi* is also observed as the birthday of Bamana and its significance surrounds king Bali. Many observe Lakshmi-Narayana brata on this day. (Lakshmi-Narayana brata is described in “Bratas”.)

Indira ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of Ashwina is called Indira ekadashi. Its name derived from the story of king Indrasen who was an extremely honest and caring king. One day sage Narada visited him and narrated about his visit to Yamaloka. There he met king's father who was seeking *mokshya*. To attain *mokshya*, his father had sent a message to inform him to observe this *ekadashi*. Indrasen readily arranged to observe the *ekadashi* and his father attained *mokshya*. Therefore, special prayers are undertaken in the memory of *pitru purushas*.

Papa-ankushna ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of Aswina is Papa ankushna ekadashi. *Papa ankusha* in local language is control of sin. It is called so as the *ekadashi* has the power to control and eradicate sins. Legend has it that a hunter was engaged in all wicked deeds like killing of animals, torturing and thefts. He continued these evil acts till death. At the final moment Yama sent his messengers to bring him. The hunter feared death and approached sage Angira (one of the *sapta rushis*). The sage advised him to observe Papa ankusha ekadashi that was falling next day and worship Vishnu. The hunter followed the advice and attained *mokshya* at the feet of Yama.

Rama ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of Kartika is Rama ekadashi. Rama is another name for Lakshmi. Hence, along with Vishnu, Lakshmi is also worshipped. It is believed that by worshipping both Vishnu and Lakshmi, one is bestowed with all worldly pleasures and ultimately attains *mokshya*. Legend mentions that king Muchkund was a devotee of Vishnu and not only observed all the *ekadashis* but also all his subjects observed them. Thus everybody in the kingdom was happily. Muchkund had a daughter named Chandrabhaga who was married to prince Shovan. Once, Shovan visited his in-laws with his wife. During their stay, Rama ekadashi occurred. As per

the practice, everybody in the kingdom observed it. Shovan had never remained without food and asked his wife for it. Chandrabhaga expressed that no food would be available on the *ekadashi* day and he had to wait till next day. Unable to bear the hunger, Shovan died. Chandrabhaga decided to commit *sati* but was stopped by her father and started living with him. By virtue of unknowingly keeping the *upabasha* on Rama ekadashi, Shovan was born as a king. One day a *brahmin* visited him and recognized him as the husband of Chandrabhaga. He asked him how he got the kingdom and why he did not live with his wife. Shovan replied that his life and kingdom were temporary as he had not observed Rama ekadashi in true sense. He did not like his wife to be sad again. The *brahmin* went back and narrated the incident to Chandrabhaga. He told her that her husband's life was a result of unknowingly observing Rama ekadashi and to make it permanent she should give up the virtue attained by regularly observing it. Chandrabhaga dedicated all the virtues acquired for observing the *ekadashi* to Shovan. As a result, his life and the kingdom became permanent and they lived happily ruling the kingdom.

Deba uthapana ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of Kartika is known as Deba uthapana or Probhodhini ekadashi. . It is one of the four *bada ekadashis*. It is said that on this day Vishnu gets up after four months slumber thereby marking the end of *chaturmasa*. In Badadeula at Puri, lord Jagannatha is dressed in Lakshmi-Narayana besha. Legend mentions that Lakshmi was not happy with Vishnu taking a four month slumber. Further many gods such as Brahma, Shiva etc. were forced to wait for meeting him. The *asuras* took advantage of it and started spreading *adharma* (irreligion). Meanwhile, an *asura* named Sankhayana forcibly took away the Vedas from the *debatas*. Learning this, Vishnu got up from his slumber. He promised *debatas*

to get back the Vedas and stop spreading of *adharma*. After fighting for several days, he brought back the Vedas.

Utparnna ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of the Margasira is Utparnna or Utpati ekadashi. *Utparnna* is a Sanskrit word meaning 'to begin or appear'. As *ekadashis* began on this day with the appearance of Ekadashi mata, it is called Utparnna ekadashi.

Vaikuntha ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *sukla pakshya* of Margasira is Vaikuntha ekadashi. *Vaishnavites* believe that the door to Baikuntha is opened on this day. It is therefore called Baikuntha or Mokshada ekadashi since one can hope to go to Baikuntha and thus attain *mokshya*.

Safala ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of Pausa is Safala ekadashi. Safala in local language means success. Therefore, it is observed to attain success in life. Legend has it that one of the sons of a king was always questioning the authority of Vishnu. For this, the king exiled him. However, he continued with his nature and started plundering the wealth of poor. Once on a Safala ekadashi he fell very ill and did not eat the whole day and stayed awake in the night. Thus unknowingly he observed the *ekadashi*. Next morning he felt good and realised that it was all due to unknowingly observing the *ekadashi* and thus worshipping Vishnu. Realising mistakes, he returned to his father who accepted him.

Putrada ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of Pausa is Putrada ekadashi. It is also known as Pausha Putrada ekadashi to differentiate it from the *ekadashi* of the same name in Shravana. *Putrada* means giver of son. As the name suggests, it bestows child to childless couple. It is therefore an important *ekadashi* observed mostly by childless couple aspiring for a child. Legend has it that king Bhadravati and

his queen were grieved by the absence of a progeny. The couple were worried as there would be none to perform their *shradha*. Frustrated the king left the kingdom and wandered in the forests and reached the *ashram* (abode of sages) of a sage. That day was an *ekadashi*. The sage advised him to observe the *ekadashi* to beget a son. The king complied and returned to his kingdom. Soon he was blessed with a son.

Shat-tila ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of Magha is called Shat-tila ekadashi. The name Shat-Tila has been derived from *tila* or sesame seed. The observers also consider it highly auspicious to take bath in water mixed with *tila*. They also perform *tila tarpana* for their *pitru purushas*. The *ekadashi* is observed for redeeming one's sin. An interesting story surrounds the significance the importance of this *ekadashi*. A religious and devoted rich woman performed all *ekadashis*. She gave generous donations like clothes, jewellery and other items to *brahmins* and the poor but never food or grains. Once on this *ekadashi*, Krishna appeared disguised as a poor mendicant wearing torn clothes begging for food. The woman agreed to give food but only after the mendicant mentioned his *gotra* (religious clan). But the mendicant continued to beg for food without disclosing it. Angrily the woman placed a ball of clay in his begging bowl. The mendicant blessed and left. When she went indoors to have food, to her surprise she found all her food had turned into clay. Thus, she remained hungry and started turning pale over the days and years. She grew weaker and weaker. With all the wealth in her hand, she could not get food for herself. She began praying Krishna who appeared in her dreams and told her that the biggest *dana* is *anna dana* (donation of food) that she had been ignoring. He further informed that by performing Shat-tila ekadashi, she would be relieved of her all miseries. While performing this ritual, she donated *tila* to all the poor and hungry that arrived at

her door. Eventually, all the food items turned back to their original forms. Thereafter, the woman kept her doorways open for any hungry passerby.

Bhaumi ekadashi: - It is the *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of lunar month Magha. It is also known as Bhishma ekadashi and is one of the *bada ekadashis*. Legends say that Bhishma pitamaha lying on *sara sajya* chose this day to relieve his body and rise for heavenly abode. Therefore, some perform *ekodistha shradha* which is prescribed for those who have lost their father. But many believe that the *shradha* can be performed by all irrespective of their father being alive.

Utpanna ekadashi: - This is the *ekadashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of lunar month Phalguna. Utpanna means to originate. As mentioned before, the *ekadashis* originated with Vishnu blessing his feminine energy and naming her Ekadashi. It is thus believed that observers of this *ekadashi* receive special favours of Vishnu.

Amloki ekadashi: - The *ekadashi* on the *shukla pakshya* of lunar month Phalguna is Amloki ekadashi. On this day *aonla* (Indian gooseberry) tree is worshipped. The veneration of *aonla* tree is on the belief that Vishnu resides in it. As narrated by sage Vasistha in Brahmanda purana, king Chaitraratha of Vidisa and his subjects were blessed with riches due to the worship of Vishnu. Once, on an Amloki ekadashi, Chaitraratha and his subjects worshiped Vishnu and the *aonla* tree near a Vishnu temple. They kept *upabasha* and remained awake the whole night, singing *bhajans* in praise of Vishnu. A hungry hunter joined them and observed the *ekadashi* inadvertently. As a result, after his death he was reborn as a king. The moral is that those who observe Amloki ekadashi with pure devotion and without any desire receive the grace of Vishnu.

Papamochini ekadashi: - This is the *ekadashis* on the *krushna pakshya* of lunar month Chaitra. The term is derived from two words - *papa* meaning sin and *mochini* meaning to word off. Thus, the *ekadashi* words off sins. Its legend revolves round sage Medhavi who was an ardent Shiva devotee. He was meditating in a forest that was visited by *debatas* and *apsaras*. Often the *apsaras* and heavenly damsels attempted to disrupt his meditation but in vain. Eventually, an *apsara* named Manju lured him to marry her. After leading a married life for several years, Manju lost interest in the sage and decided to disown him. The sage regained his senses and realised that he was tricked. Annoyed he cursed Manju and turned her into a witch. Depressed and saddened, the sage returned to his father sage Chayana and narrated the whole episode. Chayana advised him to observe this *ekadashi* which would relieve his sins. As advised, Madhavi observed this *ekadashi* and was freed of his sins. He then asked Manju to observe this *ekadashi* to get rid of his curse. She too was relieved and regained her original form.

Kamada ekadashi: - It is the last *ekadashi* of the year observed on the *shukla pakshya* in lunar month Chaitra. Kamada in local dialect is one which fulfils desire. As the name suggests, it fulfils one's desires. The significance of observing the *ekadashi* was narrated by Krishna to Pandava king Yudhistira in Varaha purana. According to it, once a *gandharva* (celestial musician) couple, Lalit and Lalita were living in Ratnapura ruled by king Pundarika. Lalit was a court singer while Lalita was a court dancer. Once, while Lalit was singing, his attention shifted from the song to his wife who was absent. He thus missed few beats. The courtiers brought this to the knowledge of the king and incited him saying that Lalit considered his wife more important than the king. This infuriated the king who cursed Lalit to become a monstrous cannibal. The greatly distressed Lalita wondered around

the forest with her monstrous husband who led a miserable life. While wondering around Vindhya forests, Lalita came across sage Shringi. Paying her respects, she appealed to the sage to provide relief. Sage advised her to observe Kamada ekadashi to free her husband of the curse. Lalita followed the advice and as a reward Lalit regained his original *gandharva* form. It is thus believed that the *ekadashi* fulfils desires of even the most heinous ones and frees the observer and his family members of all curses.

Besides these twenty-four *ekadashis*, two more *ekadashis* - Parama and Padmini ekadashis are observed during *adhik* or *mala* masa (extra month) of a year. Since, there is no fixed month for *adhik masas*; there is no definite month for them.

3.

BRATAS AND OSHAS

The terms *bratas* and *oshas* seem to be synonymous. Both are observed to worship a god or goddess for fulfilment of desires and well beings of the family. Though *upabasha* (fast) is prescribed for both and other rituals are similar, there are subtle differences. The dictionary meaning of *brata* is a solemn promise or vow before a god or goddess in return for favours. However, similar vow is not taken in an *osha*. Therefore *bratas* are more austere than *oshas*. Contrary to *bratas* that are observed by both men and women, *oshas* are observed mostly by women. Further, in many *bratas*, the *bratinis* (women observers of *brata*) wear a wish thread round their right arm colloquially called “*brata*”. It is not so in *oshas*. One of the striking features of the *bratas* and *oshas* is that no priest or *brahmin* is required in performing them. The *bratinis* perform themselves under the guidance and supervision of an elderly woman or following instructions in the *kathas* (books or treatises). This testifies simplicity of procedure and personal involvement of the observers.

Their origin of *bratas* and *oshas* go back to *puranic* eras. Many are directly derived from *puranas*. Gods, like Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha and goddesses like Lakshmi, Durga, Kali, Mangala, and celestial bodies like Surya, Chandra, Budhha and Sani etc. were worshipped for fulfilment of desires and for the well being of the family.

*Bratas*³² and *oshas* are observed in Odiya homes throughout the year. They are *tithi* (lunar date), *bara* (day) or *masa* (lunar month) based as per the *panji* (almanac). Few are observed more than once in a year e.g. Sudasha and Rabinarayana bratas etc. Some have specific requirements. In the *bratas* and *oshas* dedicated to Vishnu, *panchamruta* (mixture of five sacred items - milk, curd, honey, ghee and jaggery with *tulashi* leaves) are a must. In the *bratas* and *oshas* dedicated to Shiva, *bela* (wood apple) leaves, *gayasha* and *dhatura* flowers are essential. Likewise, those dedicated to Durga, Kali and Magala etc. red *mandara* flowers, *sindura*, are required. Sani is worshipped with iron nails and *tila* oil. Some have specific items for *bhoga*. In Savitri brata, nine types of fruits are offered. In Ananta and Sudasha bratas, *manda pithas* (type of cakes) are offered.

Bratas and *oshas* were highly religious and constituted the essence of Odiya life. Compared to men, women observed them with sincerity. They were observed either individually at homes or collectively as a religious congregation at a place called *kothis*. The blowing of *sankha* (conch), and sounding of *ghanta* (bell) and *hulahuli* (auspicious sound made by women with rolling of tongue) during their observation rent the surroundings. Various types of *pithas* and *panas* prepared for the occasions are offered as *bhoga* (food offered to gods). People gathered in numbers to watch the function. The get-together and exchange of *bhogas* amongst friends and neighbours promoted social harmony and good relationship in the community.

However, with passage of time, many have lost their earlier charms and are less lively. Many of them are not observed and find mention only in the pages of *panjis*. People might not be aware of their names and associated

32 Traditional *brata* is different from *brata upanayona* or thread ceremony prevalent amongst Brahmins.

rituals. Along with the fading of *bratas* and *oshas* many typical food items offered as *bhoga* have also disappeared. *Chunchipatra*, *dudha gainthala*, *muga manda* and *muga paiti* etc. are recipes of the past.

Some of the *pujas* are also observed as *bratas* and *oshas* according to local customs and practices. Many consider *ekadashis* as *bratas*. Therefore, while describing *bratas* and *oshas*, some of them are mentioned in ‘Important pujas’.

Important bratas

Sudasha brata: - The *brata* revived by saint poet Balarama Das some four hundred years back is observed when *shukla pakshya dashami* in a lunar month falls on a Gurubara (Thursday). Thus, the *brata* is observed more than once in a year. *Sudasha* is a compound word made of two words - ‘*su*’ meaning ‘good’ and ‘*dasha*’ meaning ‘luck’. Together it means ‘good luck’. Therefore, it is enthusiastically observed by married women for good luck, prosperity and well being of their family. The *bratinis* themselves prepare the *brata* tying together ten blades of *duba* (grass), ten leaves of *barakoli* (Indian berry) leaves and ten grains of raw rice in ten folds of thread making ten knots. While making the knots, names of Lakshmi are chanted either mentally or loudly. Lakshmi is worshipped before the *mana pedi*. Ten *manda pithas* are offered as *bhoga*. After *puja* and offering of *bhoga*, *Sudasha brata katha* is read and the *brata* is worn round the arm until the next *brata* when it is cast off and a new one is worn. The loss of the *brata* is considered to bring bad luck.

Sankati chaturthi and Binayak chaturthi bratas: - Sankati chaturthi and Binayak chaturthi bratas are observed by both men and women every month on *chaturthis* of *krushna* and *shukla pakshyas* respectively. Ganesha is worshipped. *Sankata* literally means peril or danger and

Ganesha being *bighna vinashak* (destroyer of obstacles) is believed to ward off peril of observers of this *brata*. The observers keep *upabasha* and towards the evening when Chandra appears worship Ganesha. If a Sankata chaturthi brata falls on a Mangalabara (Tuesday) it is called Angarki Sankata chaturthi brata. It had a special significance. Like *angara* (ember) burning away anything that comes in its contact, the observance of the *brata* burns away any danger that comes on the way of the observers. Except Binayaka chaturthi brata on Ganesh puja, Sankata chaturthi or other Binayak chaturthi bratas are not observed by many.

Shiva pradosha brata: - Shiva pradosha brata is observed every lunar month on the *trayodasi* of *krishna* and *shukla pakshyas*. However, the *trayodashi* and *chaturdashi* on the *krushna pakshya* of lunar month Phalguna in most important and is known Maha Shivaratri or Maha Pradosha brata. *Pradosha* literally means evening. An hour and half before and after moonrise is known as *prodosha kala*. It is the moment when *dwadasi* ends and *trayodasi* begins and is considered most auspicious for the worship of Shiva and Parvati. The *brata* is highly lauded in scriptures and is of great importance to devotees of Shiva. Observance of it destroys all sins and bestows bountiful blessings of Shiva. It is believed to grant victory and success in all ventures and fulfils one's desires. Like any *brata*, the observers keep *upabasha* and worship Shiva during *pradosh kala*. They keep vigil during the night and recite Maha mrutyuanja mantra. On these days, the Shiva temples are flooded with devotees. Like Sankati chaturthi brata, this *brata* is not much observed now a day. Only devout Shiva devotees observe it. However, Maha Shivaratri is religiously observed by many. (More about Maha Shivaratri is described in "Important Pujas").

Rabinarayana brata: - Rabinarayan brata is observed when an *ekadashi* falls on a Rabibara (Sunday). As the

name suggests, Rabi (Surya) is worshipped. Mainly women observe it and wear a *brata* made of seven blades of *duba* grass, seven *barakoli* leaves and seven grains of raw rice tied together in seven folds of thread. After bath, they offer *arghya* (water) to Surya and worship with seven types of flowers and seven types of fruits. Rabinarayana brata khata is read. Barren women observe it for progeny.

Baisakha brata: - Baisakha, Magha and Kartika are the three favourite lunar months of Vishnu. Therefore people (married women and widows) observe the *brata* during these months. Baisakha brata is observed throughout the lunar month Baisakha. *Bratinis* lead an austere life and keep *upabasha*. They take one meal of *havishanna* or *kechudi* towards the evening after worshipping Vishnu or visiting Vishnu temples and reading Vishnu purana. No formal *brata* is worn.

Savitri brata: - Savitri puja falling on the *amabasya* of lunar month Jyestha is also observed as a *brata* by many. As the name indicates it is dedicated to Savitri who brought back her dead husband from the clutches of Yama (god of Death). Married women (whose husbands are alive) observe it for the longevity of their husbands. Usually two or more women get-together and observe at a common place. They keep *upabasha* and worship a *silapua* (grinding stone) representing Savitri with nine types of flowers and fruits³³. After finishing reading Savitri brata katha, they go to their homes and take the blessings of elders and husbands. Thereafter the *brata* ends and they break the *upabasha* sharing *bhoga* with other family members. Many wear a red thread as *brata*. (More about Savitri brata is described in “Important pujas”).

33 Generally, the nine type seasonal flowers and fruits are offered. Seasonal fruits are coconut, mango, lichi, banana, jackfruit, palm, date palm, melon, cucumber and kendu,

Tarini brata: - Tarini brata is observed on *shukla pakshya chaturthi* in the lunar month Ashada. Tarini is one of the embodiments of Shakti. Though she is worshipped at many places, her main *pitha* (shrine) is at Ghatagaon in Keonjhar district. People have great faith in her divinity and apart of worshipping her on Mangalabaras (Tuesdays) and Sanibaras (Saturdays), women observe the *brata* to get rid of any troubles and fulfilment of their desires. They observe *upabasha* and worship the goddess. Some tie a red thread on the arm. The *brata* is a regional *brata* and is observed at places of Tarini temples.

Mangala Gauri (Srabani) brata: - Mangala Gauri or Srabani brata is observed from *krushna pakshya pratipada* in the lunar month Srabana on all Mangalabaras. Gauri (Parvati) is worshipped. Married and newly married woman observe it. Like any *brata*, they keep *upabasha* and worship an idol or image of Parvati wrapped in a red cloth and placed on a wooden *pidha* (pedestal). Varieties of fruits and *pithas* are offered as *bhoga*.

Ananta brata: - An important *brata* observed on Ananta chaturdashi i.e. *shukla pakshya chaturdashi* in the lunar month Bhadrav is Ananta brata. *Ananta* refers to Vishnu. Married women observe it for fourteen years invoking the blessings of Vishnu for the welfare of their husbands and children. Every year a new *brata* is worn and the old one is cast off in water bodies like a nearby river or pond. Not all married woman can observe it. The luckier ones who find a *brata* cast off by another can observe it.

The *brata* is a festive event in the family. The *bratinis* after their bath etc. keep *upabasha*. They mark fourteen *tilakas* (dots in *sindura*) on a wooden plank. Fourteen *puris* and fourteen *manda pithas* are placed on these *tilakas* as

bhoga. A bowl containing *panchamruta*³⁴ symbolizing *khira sagar* (ocean of milk) is placed on the plank. The *brata* consisting of a tread having fourteen knots wrapped around a cucumber is swirled five times in the *panchamruta*. Vishnu is worshipped and the *bhoga* is offered. An elderly woman reads out the *brata katha* and the family members listen. The *brata* is then worn on the arm throughout the year until next *brata*. Later the *bhoga* is shared amongst relatives and friends.

Krishna janmastami brata: - Krishna janmashtami or Gokulastami is the annual celebration of the birthday of Krishna. It is observed all over the country on the *krushna pakshya astami* in the lunar month Bhadrava. At Mathura and Vrindavana where Krishna was born and spent his childhood, it is celebrated in a grand scale. *Rasha leela* (love scenes of Krishna with *gopis*) or *Krushna leela* (story of Krishna) are enacted to recreate his love towards *gopis* and incidents from his life. In Odisha, Janmastami is celebrated as a *brata* (though no formal *brata* is worn) in some homes and in temples with the devotees keeping *upabasha* and remaining awake until midnight when Krishna was born. The following day is Nanda utshaba. People break their *upabasha* and rejoice the birth of Krishna. (More about Janmastami and Nanda utshaba is described in “Important pujas”.)

Guru panchami brata: - Guru panchami brata is observed on the *shukla pakshya panchami* in the lunar month Bhadrava i.e. day after Ganesh chaturthi and Binayaka brata. In olden days, when there were *gurukula ashramas* (residential schools of *gurus*), the day was dedicated to *guru* (preachers) and the *brata* was observed by the disciples. With the disappearance of *ashramas*, the *brata* is no longer observed and has become extinct.

34 A mixture of milk, honey, ghee, curd and jaggery.

The *brata* was also once observed by married women who kept *upabasha* and paid obeisance to *sapta rishis* (seven sages) to get rid of *rajaswala dosha* - the *taboo* during the menstrual period when the women are believed to be contaminated and are not allowed to worship, enter the kitchen or touch any members of the family. Observing the *brata* is said to get rid of these *doshas*. With changes in the concept, the *brata* is no longer observed.

Radhastami brata: - The birthday of Radha, the lover consort of Krishna is celebrated after a fortnight on the *shukla pakshya astami* in the lunar month Bhadrav. Many women observe it as a *brata* though no formal *brata* is worn. In Krishna temples, the idols of Radha and Krishna are traditionally dressed in flowers. They are flooded with devotees who keep *upabasha* and sing devotional songs in praise of divine couple. The *upabasha* is broken towards midday when they take *prasada* (cooked food offered to gods) in the temples. Radhastami is celebrated in a big way at Mathura and Vrindabana. Incidentally, as per north Indian tradition, it is the only day in a year when the devotees can view the feet of Radha (Radha pada darshana). On all other days, they remain covered. (However, in Odisha, particularly in the Sakhigopal temple, Radha pada darshana is held on Aonla navami i.e. on *shukla pakshya navami* in the lunar month Kartika.)

Somnath and Kukkuti brata: - Somnath brata is observed from Bhadrava *shukla pakshya sathi* till Aswina *shukla pakshya dashami* i.e. Vijaya dashami day. Shiva and Parbati are worshipped. Mainly, women observe it for fulfilment of their desires and well beings of the family. On these days, getting up early in the morning, they wash their teeth ten times and take bath ten times. They keep *upabasha* and break it after visiting Shiva temples and worshipping Shiva. On the last day, after bath etc. they gather at a common place

and prepare the *brata* in ten strands of thread with ten knots remembering or chanting ten names of Shiva while making each knot. Towards the midday, the *brata* along with a *linga* made of clay is worshipped. Ten types of *pithas* are offered as *bhoga*. The Somnath bratha katha is read out by an elderly woman and all *bratinis* listen. They then wear the *brata* and return to their homes sharing the *bhoga*. As celebration of Vijaya dashami dominates, observance of this *brata* is subdued. Kukuti brata is observed on the second day of Somnatha brata.

Bajra Mahakali brata: - Bajra Mahakali brata is observed on the *amabasya* of lunar month Aswina. Kali is worshipped by married woman for fulfilment of their wishes. Barren woman observe it for a child. As customary in any *brata*, women keep *upabasha* and clean the house and mop it with cow dung solution. They worship Kali with varieties of *pithas*. Bajra Mahakali brata katha is read and the *brata* ends. The brata is not observed by many now.

Juaentia bratas: - Juaentia bratas are observed in every village and towns of western Odisha in the lunar month Aswina. It is not observed in other parts of the State. There are two types of Juaentia brata - (i) Pua juaentia observed by mothers to invoke the grace of Dutibahana for the long life and prosperity of their children on the *krushna pakshya astami* and (ii) Bhai juaentia by the sisters invoking Durga for the prosperity of their brothers a fortnight later on the *shukla pakshya astami*.

Pua in local dialect is son and *juaentia* is a lace made of cotton thread. As mothers tie a *juaentia* on the wrists of their sons, it is called Pua juaentia. The *brata* is dedicated to Sasthi who is worshipped as Dutibahana (born from a Brahmin woman) for the long life and prosperity of their sons. He is also believed to cure children of all diseases. Mothers

keep *upabasha* and worship Dutibahana in an open space specially decorated with flowers and mango leaves. The worship includes offering of one hundred and eight blades of *duba* grass, one hundred and eight grains of unbroken raw rice and a *juaentia* wrapped in a fresh *sal* leaf. *Jugara* (made of puffed rice) and *tikhiri* (made of *moong dal*) are offered as *bhoga*. Next day, they break *upabasha* after bath and tie the *juaentia* in the wrists of their sons. They prepare curry out of twenty-one types of vegetables, *suji manda* and *kheeri* and offer to Dutibahana and distribute amongst relatives and friends.

In other parts of the state, Dutibahana puja is known as Duitiya osha is held on krushna pakshya astami in the lunar month Aswina. Twenty-one types of seasonal vegetables offered to Dutibahana are later cooked to a mixed curry known as ghanta tarkari which is a popular Odiya delicacy. Along with ghanta tarkari, suji manda and kheeri are also offered.

Bhai in local dialect is brother. As the sisters tie *juaentia* on their brothers, it is called Bhai *juaentia*. The rituals are similar to Pua *juaentia*. As the *brata* falls on the *astami* during *saradiya* Durga puja, Durga is worshipped towards the evening in an open place decorated with flowers and mango leaves. The sisters keep *upabasha*. Like Pua *juaentia*, they make bundles of one hundred and eight blades of *duba* grass, one hundred and eight grains of unbroken rice and a *juaentia* wrapped in a freshly plucked *sal* leaf for each brother and offer them to the goddess. *Jugara* and *tikhiri* are offered as *bhoga*. Following day, they get up early in the morning and take bath and perform the traditional rituals at the water body by offering slices of cucumber and chopped *sal* sticks and return home. The brothers are given new clothes and made to sit on a *pidha* or *asana*. They perform *bandapana* (special adoration with lighted lamp) and tie the

juaentia on their wrists touching their feet and wishing them long life. Thereafter the *upabasha* is broken and the sisters and brothers share the *bhoga* of *jugara* and *tikhiri* along with other preparations at home.

Since Bhai *juaentia* is observed during Durga puja, the homes are crowded with brothers and sisters. It is thus an annual occasion of family get-together. Married women look forward to visit their paternal homes to tie *juaentia* on their brothers. Sisters and brothers exchange gifts. It thus expresses the love between brothers and sisters. (Bhai *juaentia* is similar to Rakhya bandhan.)

Mahastami brata: - Mahastami brata is observed on the *shukla pakshya astami* in the lunar month Aswina (during *saradiya* Durga puja). It is an important *brata* observed by married woman. They keep *upabasha* and worship a *brata* before Durga along with varieties of fruits. Later they wear the *brata*. Many read Durgastami brata katha.

Kartika or Rai Damodara brata: - As mentioned before, Baisakha, Kartika and Magha are the favourite lunar months of Vishnu. Of them Kartika is considered most auspicious. Kartika or Rai Damodara brata is widely observed by married women particularly widows during the entire month of Kartika. According to a legend, Rai, the daughter of a *panda* (servitor of lord Jagannatha) of Bada deula at Puri, was married to the lord Jagannatha and was thus deified. However, this did not enrage Lakshmi. She gave her a boon, saying that she would be worshipped along with her. Hence, the *brata* is known as Rai Damodara brata.

The *bratinis* lead a very austere life during this period. Puri is the most favoured place to observe the *brata*. The *dharamsalas* (charitable lodging house for pilgrims), lodges and hotels get over crowded with *bratanis*. They get up

early in the morning and after bath (preferably in the sea) visit Badadeula for viewing *mangala arati* (first *arati* in the day). For their convenience, the *darshana* (view) timings are extended during the month. They worship Damodara (lord Jagannatha) along with Lakshmi and Rai and take *habishanna* or *mahaprasada* once a day. Large quantities of *mahaprasada* (cooked food offered to lord Jagannatha) are prepared to cater to the requirements of *bratinis*.

The last five days of the month is called *panchuka*. Those who cannot observe the *brata* for the whole month observe the last five days. During this period even married women observe the *brata* worshipping Brundabati (*tulashi* plant) in addition to Damodara, Lakshmi and Rai. Tulashi vivaha is performed on the *dwadashi* and the *tulashi chaunras* are decorated with *muraja*.

Kedara brata: - The *brata* is observed on the *puṇnima* of lunar month Kartika. It is mainly observed by devotees of Shiva. Kedarnath (Shiva) is worshipped with twenty-one wild flowers and twenty-one *guas* (betel nuts). It is observed to get back lost properties. It is said that sage Namisa advised Kunti to observe it to get back her lost kingdom.

Magha brata: - Like Baisakha and Kartika bratas, many particularly widows observe Magha brata during the entire lunar month Magha. They keep *upabasha* and eat one meal a day preferably *havishanna*. On the Magha saptami, many visit river Chandrabhaga near Konark and take holy bath and worship Surya. It is said that Samba, son of Krishana was cured of leprosy due to a curse by his father by taking bath in the river and worshipping Surya. A *mela* known as Chandrabhaga mela is held at the banks of the river.

Dhana Manakia or Margasira Gurubara brata: - Dhana manakia or Margasira Gurubara is one of the important

events in any Odiya home and is celebrated on all Gurubaras (Thursdays) in the lunar month Margasira. Many observe it as a *brata*. As described before, Lakshmi is worshipped on several occasions but her most important worships are Gaja Lakshmi and Margasira Gurubara pujas. It is believed that the goddess visits the houses of her devotees on these days and bestows her blessings. *Mana*³⁵ a measuring device for paddy is worshipped as the replica of Lakshmi. (More about Dhana manakia or Margasira gurubara puja is described in “Important pujas”.)

Ashoka ashtami brata: - The *brata* was once observed by married women on the *shukla pakshya ashtami* in the lunar month Chaitra to propiate Surya for the well being of their children. It is no longer observed. However, Ashoka astami is observed as the Ratha yatra of Lingaraja in Bhubaneswar known as Rukuna ratha and few Shiva temples elsewhere as a *yatra*. The *yatra* attracts many local crowds. (More about Ashoka astami Ratha yatra is described in “Important yatras”).

Skandha sasthi brata: - Skandha sasthi brata is observed on the *krushna pakshya sasthi* in the lunar month Chaitra. Kartikeya is worshipped. Though many *panjis* mention it, it is not observed in the State. It is observed in a big way in south Indian states.

Important oshas

Sani or Tota osha: - Sani is both a malefic and a beneficial *graha*. As people dread Sani, the *osha* is observed in a Sani temple or in a nearby *amba tota* (mango grove) to prevent his entry into the houses. It is therefore called Tota osha.

35 In ancient time when measuring scales were not introduced, paddy was measured in a cane or bamboo basket called *mana*. Some used brass or bronze *mana*. It was a volume measurement. Even now, *mana* is used at some places.

There is no specific period of worship. People can observe the *osha* on any Sanibaras (Saturdays) for a definite period as mentally promised to ward off his evil effects particularly during Sani dasa or Sade sani that are considered malefic periods. During these periods they keep *upabasha* and worship Sani on all Sanibaras. They provide him a black cloth, *tila* oil and *biri* (black gram) *khichidi*. At the end of the promised period, *udyapana*³⁶ is performed on the last Sanibara to formally end the *osha*.

Sita navami osha: - Sita navami osha is celebrated on the *shukla pakshya navami* in the lunar month Baisakha³⁷. It is the birth anniversary of Sita. Married women observed it and worshipped Sita for the longevity of their husbands and to be *ahi-sulakhini* (die before their husband's death). Along with Sita, Rama and Lakshmana are also worshipped. Special *puja* and *arati* are offered in Rama temples.

As Savitri brata is observed for similar purpose, Sita navami osha is not much observed these days.

Rambha trutiya osha: - Rambha trutiya osha is observed on the *shukla pakshya trutiya* in the lunar month Jyestha. The *osha* is dedicated to Rambha - an *apsara* (fairy) who emerged from *khira sagar* (ocean of milk) during *samudra manthana* (churning of ocean). According to some *puranas*, Parvati observed it to get Shiva as her husband. Married women observed it for the marital harmony and to dispel disharmony. A pair of bangles symbolising Rambha and Lakshmi was worshipped. It is not much observed now and finds mention only in the *panjis*.

36 *Udyapana* in the special rituals observed on the conclusion of a *brata* or *osha* to formally declare its end. Apart from special *pujas* and *bhogas*, friends and neighbours are invited to witness and take *prasada*.

37 Coincidentally Rama was also born on the same *pakshya* and *tithi* in the lunar month Chaitra.

Naga (Mansa) panchami and Nagala chaturthi osha:

- There are innumerable instances of *naga* (cobra snake) occupying significant roles in Hindu religion. Vishnu slept on Seshanaga. *Samudra manthan* was performed with Basuki (a *naga*) as the rope. *Naga* adorns the neck of Shiva. So also it surrounds the Shiva linga. *Naga* provided protection to infant Krishna on his way to Gopapura on the stormy night. The carvings of *nagas* are found in many ancient temples.

Naga panchami is observed on the *shukla pakshya panchami* in the lunar month Sravana and Nagla chaturthi on the *shukla pakshys chaturthi* in the lunar month Kartik. Both are for the traditional worship of Naga devata. They are observed by married woman for the welfare of their children and to prevent snake bite. Barren women also observe it for begetting an issue. They keep *upabasha* and worship live *naga* or their idols made of copper or bronze with flowers, *dipa* and offer milk and rice etc. at a snake pit. Alongside *naga*, Mansa Devi - the goddess of snakes - is also worshipped. Generally, she is worshipped without an image. A branch of a tree, an earthen pot or an earthen snake is worshipped. The worship of Mansa Devi is more wide spread in the neighbouring state Bengal.

Mahabharata mentions that Janmejaya, son of Parikshita, was performing *sarpa yajna* to kill all snakes to avenge the death of his father who died bitten by snake king Takshaka. The *yajna* (sacrifice) was so powerful that it caused all the snakes to fall into the *yajna kunda* except Takshaka who had taken shelter coiling around the throne of Indra in the Indraloka. When this was noticed, the priests increased the tone of chanting *mantras* (hymns) to bring Takshaka to the *yajna kunda*. Along with him Indra was also dragged. Panicked Indra approached Mansa Devi to come to his rescue. Manasa Devi asked her son Astika to go to *yajna* and appeal to Janmejaya to stop it. Impressed with the knowledge

of Astika on *sastras* (divine knowledge), Janmejaya granted him a boon. It was then Astika requested Janamejeya to end the *yajna* and spare the life of Takshaka and other snakes. Since Janmejeya had never refused anybody, the *yajna* was stopped in spite of protests from the priests. Thus, the life of Indra and Takshaka and other snakes were spared. That day, according to *panji* (almanac) was *shukla pakshya panchami* (fifth day of bright fortnight) in the lunar month Shravana and the day is observed as Naga panchami. According to Garuda purana, worshipping and offering prayers to snakes on this day is auspicious and ushers good fortune. The snake charmers move from door to door in villages and cities carrying live snakes in baskets for the people to worship. They earn good money for their services.

Janhi osha: - As a prelude to Kumara purnima, the month long Janhi osha starting from the *purnima* of the lunar month Bhadrava was observed by unmarried girls. Every evening, the young girls gathered around the *tulashi chownra* and decorated it with *janhi* (ridge gourd) flowers that bloom in plenty during this period. They made different patterns according to the waxing and waning of the Moon. The origin of the *osha* and its significance are not known. It is a form of Tulashi puja. With passage of time, it has faded or might be observed in few homes.

Budhei osha: - Budhei osha is observed on every Budhabara (Wednesday) in the lunar month of Bhadrava. Budhei Bamana is worshipped. It is observed for the good health of the children. Barren woman aspiring for a child observe it. Budhei is believed to be Mangala and Bamana is lord Jagannatha. But according to some Budhei is the feminine form of Budha graha. They are worshipped by women as *sila* and *silapua* (mortar and pestle). The *sila* and *silapua* are bathed in *haldi* (turmeric) or *aonla* (Indian gooseberry) water and are adorned with *sindura* (vermilion) and *kajwala*

(collyrium). A new red sari is wrapped around them. The worship is performed with five types of flowers and fruits. A coconut offered on the first Budhabara is broken on the last Budhabara and offered to deities. Varieties of *pithas* are prepared and offered as *bhoga*. On every Budhabara, a chapter of the *katha* is read. Budhei osha is still observed at many places. In addition to this *osha*, many reform *pujas* (worship) to Budha on all Budhabaras during the year.

Khudurikuni osha (Bhalukuni puja): - A popular *osha* observed in coastal areas on all Rabibaras (Sundays) in the lunar month Bhadrav is Khudurikuni osha. It is unique to the State and is not observed elsewhere. Bhalukuni or Mangala is worshipped on these days. The *osha* is observed by girls in the memory of a *sadhava* (seafaring merchant) girl Taapoi and depicts the love between brothers and sisters. (More about Khudurikuni osha is described under “Important pujas”.)

Bali trutiya osha: - Bali trutiya osha is observed on the *shukla pakshya trutiya* in the lunar month Bhadrava. It is dedicated to Shiva and Parvati. Married women observe it for marital bliss. They make images of divine couple in *bali* (sand) and worship. Hence it is named so. As per Padma purana, Parvati observed the *osha* by making an image of Shiva in *bali* to get him as her husband. The intense *tapas* (penance to burn away past *karma* - evil deeds) performed by her softened the heart of Shiva who was in terrible state of anger after the death of Sati. Another popular legend associated with it is Rama worshipped Shiva and Parvati in images made in *bali* and sought their blessings before invasion of Lanka.

In a unique practice of the day, people beat the roofs of their houses and removed stone steps in front to get rid of curses by people. It is believed that curses hurdled on this day becomes blessings.

Nisa Mangalbara osha: - The *osha* is observed by some on all Mangalabaras (Tuesdays) and others on the last Mangalabara in the lunar month Aswina. Married women observe it in the night. Hence, it is known as Nisa mangalbar osha. On this occasion, a sketch of goddess Durga is drawn with the rice powder and cooked food is offered. A cock is sacrificed. The goddess is invoked to overcome all calamities in life.

Alana osha: - A lesser known *osha* observed is Alana osha. It was observed in the lunar month Aswina. Surya is worshipped by married women. As the name suggests, no salt is added in the *bhogas* that are generally fruits and sweets.

Dwitiya osha: - Dwitiya osha is popularly observed in the coastal areas of the State on the *krushna pakshya astami (mulastami)* in the lunar month Aswina. Dwitibabana said to be the son of Surya through a *brahmin* widow is worshipped making effigies in sand of a fox and kite. Women keep *upabasha* and observe the *osha* for the long life of their children. Barren women or women whose child does not survive observe it aspiring for an offspring. Twenty-one varieties of seasonal vegetables covered with an *aparamanga* leaf are offered as *bhoga*. Later, these vegetables are cooked to make a mixed curry known as *ghanta tarkari* which is an Odiya delicacy. Dwitiya osha is a great occasion in every home. The get together and the exchange of *ghanta tarkari* add fervour to the *osha*.

Bada osha: - Bada osha is celebrated on the *shukla pakshya trayodashi* or *chaturdashi* in the lunar month Kartika. It is mainly observed in Dhabaleswar and adjoining areas. According to Padma purana, on this day Indra took bath in the in the water of river Mahanadi at Dhabaleswar Mahadeva mandira and worshipped Shiva in the temple to get rid of

the curse by Brahma. Therefore it is observed in a big way at Dhabaleswar Mahadev mandira. It is a popular *osha* observed by Shiva devotees. All Shiva temples are crowded with devotees. The important ritual of the *osha* is *upabasha* that is usually kept by men and broken towards midnight after *bada singhara besha* of the idol, lighting of *mahajyoti* (great lamp) and offering of special types of *boghas* known as *gaja bhoga* and *atakali*. (*Gaja* is made out of raw rice dough rolled into balls and filled with sweetened coconut stuffing and steamed. Being steamed it retains its white colour. *Atakali* is similar to *kheeri* made of wheat flour.)

It is not clear why the *osha* is called Bada osha. Since amongst Trinity, Mahadeva is considered the supreme it is perhaps called so being dedicated to him. The *osha* is exclusive to Ciuttack and adjoining areas.

Prathamastami osha: - Prathamastami osha observed on the *krushna pakshya astami* in the lunar month Margasira is one of the popular *oshas* in the State. Sasthi who protects the children from all kinds of ills is worshipped. On this occasion, the eldest child of the family is honoured. He or she is given new clothes and made to sit on a *pidha* (wooden pedestal) in front of a *kalasha* (earthen pitcher filled with water crowned with five mango leaves and a tender coconut - embodiment of all gods and goddess). Mother or an elderly woman performs *bandapana* and wishes him/her long life praying Sasthi. A special type of *pitha* known as *enduri pitha* or *haladi patra pitha* and *kheeri* are the specialty of the occasion and is offered as *bhoga*. (Enduri pitha is not prepared at other time of the year.) Traditionally, *mamu* (maternal uncle) sends the clothing and other items for the worship.

In the Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar, Chandrashekara - the representative idol of Lingaraja is taken out of the temple to Papanasini tank situated behind the temple.

Kanji aonla osha: - Towards the evening on the Prathamastami osha, Sasthi is again worshipped. An image of Sasthi placed with seven *sukua* (dried fish) and decorated with *sindura*, *kajwala* and wrapped in a yellow cloth is worshipped. *Kanji* (a type of soup prepared from fermented rice gruel), *aonla* and *sukua* is offered as *bhoga*. It is thus known as Kanji aonla osha.

Pandu osha: - Another *osha* once observed on the *pu'nima* of lunar month Margasira is Pandu osha. Some say that the *osha* is dedicated to Yudhistara, the eldest amongst the Pandava brothers. Others say it to be dedicated to Pandu the father of Pandavas. No matter to whom it is dedicated, observing the *osha* is believed to bring good luck. Generally, young girls observed it for the welfare of their brothers. They begin sweeping the roads and from this day and continue till next month. The *osha* or the sweeping of the roads and streets is not observed now.

In Badadeula at Puri, lord Jagannatha performs *shradha* for his parents in Krishna and Rama incarnations. He dons white *Shradha besha* on this day. Devotees gather to have the *darshana* of Lord Jagannatha in this *besha*.

Bata or Danda pahara osha: - Another *osha* closely following Pandu osha is Bata or Danda pahara osha observed on the *krushna pakshya dwitiya* in the lunar month Pausha. *Bata* is local dialect is streets and *pahara* is sweeping. As the young girls swept the roads and streets during the previous month, it is called Bata or Danda pahara osha. Women worship Yama for the welfare of their husbands and children. As Yama is dreaded, he is not allowed to enter into the houses and is worshipped at *danda* (outside) at crossroads. The *bhoga* covered with a branch of *bajramuli* tree is offered. The *osha* is still observed at many places though sweeping of roads and streets is discontinued.

Sambara or Samba dashami osha: - Samba Dashami is a unique *osha* observed on the *shukla pakshya dashami* in the month Pausa mainly in the coastal districts of the State. Once it was held in a big way. On this day, the women particularly mothers worship Surya for the welfare and well beings of their children. For each child in the family, a particular item is offered to Surya on the first Samba dashami after the birth (colloquially known as *badha*). Thus, depending on the number of family members, a large number of *bhogas* are made and offered. These include fruits, sweets and cooked items.

The women of the family get up early before the sunrise. After purification bath they keep *upabasha* and prepare varieties of food and *pitha* items in the name of each member of the family. Towards the midday, all these items are taken to the *tulashi chounra* and served on banana leaves. The female head of the family worships Surya and offers these items looking at the image of Surya on a bowl of *haldi pani*. She prays Surya for the wellbeing of the whole family. Then, the Samba dashami osha katha is read out and all present listen. After the end of *puja*, the *bhoga* is shared by the family members.

The significance of Samba dashami surrounds Samba, the son of Krishna. Samba was handsome and looked almost like Krishna. But he was notorious. He used his look to fool his stepmothers and play pranks with them in the absence of his father. Krishna bore it with patience as he did not like to hurt him. One day, Samba teased sage Narada for his looks. The sage who was not good looking felt humiliated and was infuriated. He decided to teach Samba a lesson. He lured Samba to the private bathing pool where his stepmothers were taking bath. Finding intrusion on their privacy, they all complained to Krishna. Narada also added fuel to the fire. Krishna was mortified to learn that his son was a ‘peeping

tom' and cursed him to suffer from leprosy. Samba pleaded his innocence and expressed that he was misled by Narada. Krishna found it to be true and repented for his action in haste. As the curse cannot be revoked, he advised Samba to pray Surya who alone can cure him of the deadly disease. Samba prayed for twelve years and was advised by Surya to bathe in river Chandrabhaga near the Sun Temple, Konark. The holy water of the river cured him on the *shukla pakshya dashami* in the month of Pausa. Since then, Samba dashami is observed in every Odiya family.

Towards the evening or late night another *puja* is observed as a part of Samba dashami. It is known as Mahakala puja. *Budha chakuli* and *ghadghadia tarkari* (an item prepared with fish, variety of *dal* and other vegetables) are offered to Yama.

Chaita Mangalbara osha: - Chaita Mangalbara osha is an important *osha* observed on all Mangalabaras in the lunar month Chaitra. Mangala is worshipped for the well being of the family. The worshippers mostly married women join together and observe it outside under the shade of a tree. They make the idol of Mangala on sand or earth and decorate it with new cloth and flowers etc. Towards midday, they worship the goddess and offer *bhoga* that consists of seasonal fruits and *pana*. Then the sky is rent with the blowing of *sankha*, *ghanta* and *hulahuli* etc.

In course of time, many of the traditional oshas have lost their importance, and few new bratas and oshas have come into existence. One amongst them is Santoshi maa brata or osha.

Weekly oshas: - In addition to the *oshas* mentioned above, each day of the week is dedicated to a particular god or goddess. Many, mostly women, observe them as *osha* and

worship the dedicated deities. Such worships have become progressively rare.

Rabibara: - Rabibara is dedicated to Surya. It is believed that worshipping Surya and keeping *upabasha* fulfils one's desires. People keep *upabasha* take one meal in the day towards the evening. It is customary to provide alms to the poor.

Somabara: - Somabara (Monday) is dedicated to Shiva. The worshippers of Shiva keep *upabasha* and visit Shiva temples towards the evening and pour water or milk on the head of Shiva or *linga*. All Shiva temples are crowded with devotees on this day. If an *amabasya* falls on a Somabara, it is known as Sombati amabasya and is considered highly beneficial. Unmarried women observe the day as a *brata* to get good husbands. Others observe it for a happy and prosperous life.

Somabaras of lunar month Sravana are considered highly auspicious for the worship of Shiva particularly in north India and Rajasthan. Many (known as *kawadia*) walk barefoot carrying water from holy rivers to pour on Shiva or *linga*. The practice is now followed in the State.

Mangalabara: - Mangalabara is dedicated to Hanumana. It also derives its name from Mangala (planet Mars) one of the *grahas* in *nabagraha* concept who is considered to be a trouble maker. It is believed that Hanumana helps in overcoming the malefic activities of Mangala. The devotees keep *upabasha* and visit Rama and Hanumana temples and spend the day reciting Hanumana chalisa.

Budhabara: - Budhabara is dedicated to Budha (planet Mercury) as well as Ganesha. Budha is believed to bestow intellect and proficient in sciences. He is therefore worshipped for good intelligence, education and success in business etc. Mothers observe Budhei osha on Budhabaras for the well being of their children.

Gurubara: - Gurubara is dedicated to Lakshmi, Vishnu and their incarnations. Special worship to Lakshmi is offered. It is believed that those worshipping Lakshmi on the Gurubaras are blessed with plenty. The Gurubaras of the lunar month Margasira is particularly important when Manabasa gurubara puja is observed.

Sukrabara: - Sukrabara (Friday) is dedicated to the worship of Shakti e.g. Durga, Kali and their incarnations. They are worshipped for many benefits that include removal of obstacles, a happy child, a happy family life etc. Of late, worship of Santoshi maa has become popular and many observe it on Sukrabaras. Usually, it is observed for sixteen Sukrabaras for fulfilment of one's desires.

Sanibara: - Sanibara is dedicated to Sani (planet Saturn). Sani is dreaded for his malefic activities and many worship him on Sanibaras to appease him. They observe Sani puja for a definite period and also worship Hanumana as it is believed that devotees of Hanumana are spared by Sani. Legend has it that Hanumana rescued Sani from the clutches of Ravana during the burning of Lanka. Sani then promised that he would not harm the devotees of Hanumana. Generally, people worship Sani in Sani temples or outside in mango groves as his visit to home is unwelcome. They keep *upabasha* and take black gram *kechidi* mixed with *tila* seeds.

4.

IMPORTANT PUJAS, FESTIVALS, YATRAS AND MELAS

Besides daily worship in individual homes, the people worship many gods and goddesses on different times of the year as daily, weekly, seasonal and annual events. They are festive events and are popularly known as *pujas*, *festivals*, *yatras* and *melas* etc. Like *sankrantis*, *amabasyas*, *purnimas*, *ekadashis*, *bratas* and *oshas* described before, they are the joyous moments and observed individually or as *sarbasanina* (community) events. As the rural people are more conservative, they consider them sacred.

Important pujas

Puja is a Sanskrit word meaning a form of worship of one or more gods or goddesses. In Hindu religion, *puja* is performed on a variety of occasions. They include daily *puja* at homes and in temples, and ceremonial and *sarbajanina pujas* on particular days. The latter were more elaborate and participated by the community. The *bhajans* (group prayers), *kirtans* (*bhajan* with music), and *sankirtana* (*kirtana* with movements) and partaking of *bhogas* (food offered to gods) add charms to the occasions. During *pujas* idols or icons of god and goddess become a means of gaining access to the divinity and communicating

with them for material benefits as they are believed to be filled up with the cosmic energies.

Tulashi puja: - Tulashi is a sacred plant worshipped daily in Hindu homes. Besides being a sacred plant, it a goddess personified. Devi Bhagabata purana describes Tulashi as the manifestation of Lakshmi. As mentioned before, Basundhara theki is provided over the plant on Mesha sankranti to provide shade during summer. Young girls performed Tulashi puja during Janhi osha.

In ancient Odisha there was not a single house where the plant was not worshipped in a *chaunra* (a temple shaped flower pot). Many religious functions took place around *tulashi chaunra*. Traditionally, the plant is regarded as a women's deity and a symbol of ideal wifhood and motherhood. Its daily worship and care is the responsibility of the women of the household. The plant is often worshipped twice in a day - morning and evening, when a *dipa* is lit at its base. Worshippers pray and go round it chanting hymns..

Tulashi leaves are an essential item in the worship of Vishnu. Its water is given to a dying man to raise the soul to Vaikuntha. In Hindu homes, the plant accompanies a dead man for cremation. A person cremated with its twigs in funeral pyre gains *moksha*. Such are the importance of *tulashi*. -

There are several stories about the origin and worship of *tulashi*. Padma Purana mentions that Tulashi was a *sati* (chaste woman) named Brunda who was the wife of a demon king Jalandhara. Due to her *satitwa* (chastity), piety and devotion to Vishnu, Jalandhara became invincible. He started torturing and tormenting the residents of the three worlds. Troubled and harassed by him, *debatas* approached Shiva to destroy him. But due to the *sati* powers of Brunda,

Shiva could not harm him. Disappointed Shiva approached Vishnu to find a solution. Vishnu thought that the only way to destroy Jalandhara was to destroy the chastity of Brunda. One day, Vishnu disguised as Jalandhara approached Brunda. Taking him as her husband, she accepted Vishnu and thus her chastity was defiled. Soon Shiva killed Jalandhar. While mourning over the death of her husband, Brunda could not know the ploy. She cursed Vishnu to turn into a stone and be separated from his consort Lakshmi for cheating and defiling her chastity. Brinda then immolated herself on the funeral pyre of Jalandhara. On Brunda's death, Vishnu sat in gloom before her ashes admiring her piety and chastity. He promised her ashes that he would marry her in her next birth. The curse of Brunda took effect. Vishnu turned into a black pebble (salagrama) and Brunda was born as Tulashi plant. (Thus, Tulashi is known as Brundabati). As per the divine promise, Vishnu as salagrama married Tulashi on Probodhini ekadashi. Hence, salagrama is worshipped as Vishnu and Brinda as Tulashi plant. The worship of Vishnu is incomplete without *tulashi* leaves.

Remembering this incident, Tulshi vivaha is celebrated on the *shukla pakshya dwadashi* in the lunar month Kartika. On this day *tulashi* plants are beautifully decorated as a bride and worshipped. People prepare various sweet dishes and offer as *bhoga*. The ceremony is generally held towards the evening.

Hanumana jayanti: - Hanumana is an ardent devotee of Rama and is adored for his unflinching devotion to him. He is also the symbol of strength and energy and is regarded as a deity having supernatural powers and ability to conquer evil spirits. Hanumana is worshipped on all Tuesdays but his birthday, known as Hanumana jayanti, is celebrated on the *sankranti* of solar month Mesha. On this day, devotees visit Hanumana temples from early morning till evening to worship him. They

apply *sindura* (vermilion) taken from the idol of Hanumana on their foreheads and recite Hanumana chalisa or Sankata Mochani Hanumana Chalisa offering *bhoga*.

There is an interesting legend why *sindura* is applied on Hanumana. Once, Sita was applying *sindura* on the parting of her hair. Hanumana who was looking at her, asked why she was doing so. Sita said that it pleases Rama. Listening this, Hanuman disappeared and returned covering his boy with *sindura*. When Rama saw Hanumana covered with *sindura*, he asked him the reason. Hanumana said that it was to please him (Rama). Then Rama gave a boon that all those who apply *sindura* on Hanuman will always be happy.

Baseli puja: - Baseli (mare headed goddess) is the established deity of the *keuta* or *kaibarta* (fishermen) community. The month long Baseli *puja* is held from the Chaitra purnima to Baisakha purnima. Baseli is a form of Shakti (divine Mother - cosmic feminine energy) in *tantra* cult (esoteric practices of worship of Shakti). She is taken to be a manifestation of Durga and is one of the sixty-four Yoginis. The worship has a wide distribution throughout the State particularly in the coastal and southern districts.

There are few folktales about the origin of Baseli. One such story mentions that when the universe was in great deluge, Vishnu could not find a place to rest. By his power, he reduced his form and slept on a floating leaf. As the leaf was always quivering by the stormy waves, he created a man and asked him to hold the leaf still and went into slumber. In the meantime a demon in the form a fish swallowed the man. The leaf started quivering again. This disturbed Vishnu, who could know everything. He killed the demon and rescued the man. Pleased with his devotion, he created the *keuta* community and crowned the man as its king. As he was swallowed by a fish, Vishnu ordained him to kill fish

and live trading on those. In order to help him in fishing, he asked Vishwakarma to build a boat. He transformed the leaf into a mare and named it Baseli and asked her to protect the man and the community. Since then Baseli is worshipped by the community as their established deity.

The man sailed to Simhala and ruled there by catching and trading fish in the sea around. In course of time Baseli died. After her death, Baseli distributed her limbs amongst *keutas*, *gudias* (confectioners), *telis* (oil extractors) and *mochis* (cobblers). They worshipped the individual limbs. Later an idea struck them to assemble the limbs and worship the full form of the mare. This went on for some time but the *keutas* and *gudias* vied with each other and a communal fight ensued. *Gudias* being rich and powerful locked the mare god in a room and thus deprived the *keutas* from the worship. The helpless *keutas* earnestly prayed to the mare god for her return. Moved by their prayer, the mare god broke open the walls and escaped as a young damsel with a mare head. Finding this, the *gudias* severed the head but the head lived to accept the worship and offerings of *keutas*. Hence the *keutas* worship the head as goddess Baseli.

In temples and places of worship, Baseli is seated on an earthen pedestal. She wears a blood red cloth in her full feminine form with a garland of red *mandara* flower around her neck. She is worshipped throughout the year on each Mangalabaras (Tuesdays) and Sanibaras (Saturdays). During the month-long *puja*, if there is no Baseli temple around, the wooden head of the mare is worshipped at a *dhenkisala* (place for pounding paddy). It is so because of the subsidiary profession of the *keuta* is to make and sell *chuda* (pressed rice) and *muri* (puffed rice). Associated with Baseli puja are the Chaiti ghodi yatra and Bagha nacha yatra. (More about Chaiti Ghodi yatra and Bagha nacha yatra are described in “Important yatras”.)

Anusuya jayanti: - The birthday of Anusuya is observed on **the** *krushna pakshya trutiya* in the lunar month Baisakha as Anusuya jayanti. Anusuya was the wife of sage Atri (one of the *sapta rishis*) and lived with her husband in Chitrakuta forest³⁸. Once sage Narada praised her *satitwa* (chastity) before the wives of Trinity making them jealous. They pressed their husbands to test her *satitwa* and defile it. The Trinity approached Anusuya as mendicants when her husband was away and asked her to feed them with milk from her breast as *bhiksha* (donation). Anusuya was in the midst of a crisis. She could not refuse and at the same time comply with their demands. She remembered her husband and prayed him to come to her rescue. Taking a little *charana paduka* (water used for washing feet) of her husband she sprinkled on them. Soon they were turned into three babies and her breast was full of milk. Sitting naked, she fed them one by one as her own baby and made them to sleep in a cradle. Finding delay in the return of their husbands the goddesses visited Anusuya's *ashram* and enquired about their husbands. Anusuya pointed at the three sleeping babies. They were astonished to find their husbands turned into babies through the *sati* power of Anusuya. When sage Atri returned, he found the three goddesses at his *ashram* (abode of sages). Anusuya narrated all that had happened and placed the three babies at his feet. Sage Atri embraced them together. At this, they became one with two feet, one trunk, six hands and three heads. He named them Dattatreya. The goddesses admired her *satitwa* and begged her to bring back their husbands to original forms. Anusuya then sprinkled a little *charana paduka* on the babies and they got back into their original forms. Then the goddesses offered her to ask for a boon. Anusuya desired that as the Trinity was reborn in her *ashrama*, they be worshipped in the form of Dattatreya. The goddesses granted her the wish.

38 Even today an Anusuya ashram exists in Chitrakuta hills.

That is how Dattatreya was created and now worshipped as embodiment of Trinity.

Women looked upon Anusuya as the epitome of *satitwa* and worshiped her with devotion on her birthday. With passage of time, Anusuya jayanti is not observed by many.

Parsurama jayanti: - The birthday of Parsurama, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, is observed on the *shukla pakshya trutiya* in the lunar month Baisakha as Parsurama jayanti. Parsurama is known for his devotion towards parents. Once his father Jamadagni got angry with his mother Renuka and asked him to kill her. Parsurama obeyed him and killed his mother. Pleased with his acts, Jamadagni blessed him and asked him to ask for whatever he wanted. Parsurama requested his father to bring back his mother's life. Thus Parsurama proved his devotion towards his father and mother. Many keep *upabasha* (fast) and worship Parsurama aspiring to be blessed with a son as devoted as Parsurama. Like Anusuya jayanti, Parsurama jayanti is not observed by many.

Niladri mohodaya puja: - The worship of Niladri mohodaya, the holy book containing the daily rituals and festivals of lord Jagannatha at Badadeula at Puri, is held on the Baisakha *shukla pakshya astami*. Special *puja* is performed with one hundred and eight pots of consecrated water to the Chaturdhamurti (Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshanachakra) and other *nitis* (rituals) are performed. Devotees visit the temple to witness the *puja*. The *puja* is special to Badadeula at Puri and is not observed in other temples or at homes.

Savitri puja: - As already described the worship of Savitri who brought back her dead husband from the clutches of Yama is celebrated on the *amabasya* of lunar month Jyestha.

It is one of the important *pujas* for the married women whose husbands are alive. Some observe it as a *brata*. Usually, two or more women join together and observe it at a common place with great devotion for the longevity and well beings of their husbands. On this day, they take early morning bath and wear a new sari, red bangles on hand, *alata* on the feet and *sindura* in the parting of hairs and on the forehead. These are the signs of a married woman whose husband is alive. They keep *upabasha* and towards the noon, assemble at somebody's *tulashi chaura*. There, each individual worships Savitri with nine types of flowers and offer nine types of fruits as *bhoga*. The Savitri brata katha is read out by one of the worshippers and others listen. When the rituals are over, they return to their respective homes and pay respect to their elders and husbands seeking their blessings. They then break the *upabasa* taking the *bhoga*. Thereafter, the day spent in social calling and get-togethers. Some, particularly in Nepal and north India, observe it as a *brata* and tie a red thread round their arms.

Importance of Savitri puja: - The importance of Savitri puja is described in the Mahabharata (Vana parba). Once Yudhisthira, the eldest Pandava asked sage Markandeya if there had been any other woman who matched Draupadi in devotion towards her husband. Sage mentioned the name of Savitri narrating the following episode.

King Aswapati of Madradesha was issueless. For begetting a child, he prayed Savitr³⁹ (solar deity in Rigveda) for several years. Pleased by his prayers, Savitr blessed him to have a daughter. After some time a daughter was born to him and the king affectionately named her Savitri after the deity Savitr. Savitri grew up in the palace. She was so beautiful and pure that she bewitched all men in the kingdom. When she reached the age of marriage, no young men dared

39 One of the offspring of sage Aditi

to ask her hand. Her father suggested her to find a groom for herself. She went out on a pilgrimage for this purpose and selected Satyavana; the son of blind king Dyumatsena, who having lost everything including his eye sight was living in exile in the forest. When Savitri returned to disclose her choice to her father, sage Narada was present. On hearing about her selection the sage was happy and mentioned that Savitri had made the right choice. But soon retracted and stated that Satyavana, though perfect in every way is destined to die after a year from that day i.e. Jyestha amabasya. The king advised Savitri to choose another groom. In response, Savitri stated that a woman chooses her husband only once and was firm to marry Satyavana. Her contention appealed to both the sage and the king. Narada announced his approval and Ashwapati acquiesced. Savitri and Satyavana were duly married. Immediately after the marriage, Savitri donned the clothes of an ascetic and lived in perfect obedience to her parents-in-law and husband in the forest.

Time passed. Soon the year came to an end. Three days before *amabasya*, Savitri took a vow of fasting and vigil. Her father-in-law, who felt that she had taken a tough regimen refrained her from doing so. But Savitri was determined and mentioned that she had taken a vow to perform austerities. On the *amabasya*, Savitri sought permission of her father-in-law to accompany Satyavana to the forest. Since she had never asked anything during the entire year she spent at the hermitage, Dyumatsena granted her wish and Savitri accompanied Satyavana to forest. The inauspicious hour came. Satyavana while splitting wood suddenly felt sick. He lay on the lap of Savitri and became unconscious. Soon Savitri found Yama appearing to take away the soul of Satyavana. Deeply hurt, Savitri pleaded Yama not to separate her from her husband or take her life along with him. Or else, she would follow him wherever Satryvana is taken. Yama contended that only Satyavana's life had come to an end and

that he cannot take away her life prematurely. Saying this, Yama carried the soul of Satyavana and Savitri followed him pleading either to spare the life of Satyavana or take her life. Yama consoled her in many ways in his attempts to dissuade her following him. But she was undeterred and followed Yama explaining the *dharma* (divine duties) between husband and wife. She bowed before Yama as the protector of *dharma* and implored not to separate her from her husband. Impressed with her noble ideas, Yama praised her and offered any boon except the life of Satyavana. Savitri asked for the eyesight and the restoration of the kingdom to her father-in-law. Yama granted these. But found her following him. Yama offered another boon to dissuade her. This time, she asked hundred sons for her father. Yama granted this too but found her still following him. Then Yama granted the third boon. This time, she pleaded to be the mother of hundred sons. In haste, Yama granted this. Savitri then prayed how this would be possible without Satyavana. Being a *sati*, she cannot accept another husband. Yama was outwitted and soon realised his mistake. He found himself in a dilemma as it would amount to giving back the life to Satyavana. However, impressed by her devotion and chastity, Yama returned the life of Satyavana and blessed Savitri for eternal happiness.

Satyavana got up as if he had been in a deep sleep and returned to his parents with Savitri. Meanwhile Dyumatsena had regained his eyesight. Since he did not know how this happened, Savitri narrated her encounter with Yama. Then Dyumatsena's earlier ministers arrived with news of the death of the usurper. Joyfully the king and his entourage returned to their kingdom and reigned. In due course of time, Savitri gave birth to hundred sons.

Savitri was thus immortalised. Yudhistira was pleased hearing the episode of Savitri bringing back her husband from the clutches of Yama which was next to impossible. He

admitted that the devotion of Savitri was much greater than that of Draupadi. Following the episode, all married women in the State and many other parts of the country observe Savitri brata and worship Savitri for the long life of their husbands.

Vishwakarma puja: - Vishwakarma is the established deity of the tradesmen. He is described as the divine carpenter. His *puja* is celebrated on Karkata sankranti with much enthusiasm in all industrial establishments, factories and also by individual tradesmen and artisans. The day is observed as a holiday in all factories and workers and tradesmen participate in the *puja*.

On the day of the *puja*, the factory premises and the place of worship are cleaned and decorated with buntings and festoons. The idol or photo of Vishwakarma is installed on a pedestal. A priest performs the *puja* as per the *muhurta* in the *panji* (usually noon) and all the workers and artisans participate. All machinery and tools are also worshipped. After conclusion of *puja*, all present offer *pushpanjali* and *prasada* is distributed. Usually, a community feast is arranged after the *puja* for the staff and workers.

In the evening, *arati* (worship with lamp) is performed and the *dipa* (lamp) is taken to the rooms having machinery and tools. It is kept burning throughout the night and a person is detailed to fill oil from time to time. The following day, the priest performs *bisharjana* and the idol is taken in a procession to the nearby water body for immersion.

Jagulai puja: - Jagulai or Jagrata Gauri puja is observed on the *krushna pakshya panchami* in the lunar month Sravana. It is confined to few places in the State. Jagulai is one of the incarnations of Parvati (Gauri). She is called Jagrata Gauri as she is ever awake and her shrine remains always open. Jagulai puja is a big function in the *sasana* villages of Puri.

There are several *pithas* of Jagulai. Maa Jageswari temple in village Belda in Bhadrak is one of her main *pithas*. The origin of this temple is legendary. The village elders say that the idol was found in the bed of nearby river Salandi and they installed her in a temple started worshipping. The age old rituals are performed daily towards the evening. Goats or hens are sacrificed to appease the goddess as it is believed that the best way to worship her is through animal sacrifice. On the Jagulai panchami the *bije pratima* (representative idol) of the goddess Jagulai is taken out in a procession. The goddess enters the spirit of a devotee and talks to the villagers through him about the wellbeing of the village.

Bhalukuni (Khudurukuni) puja: - Bhalukuni puja is observed by unmarried young girls on all Rabibaras (Sundays) in the lunar month Bhadrava. It is observed as a community festival in somebody's *dhenkisala* (place for pounding paddy) as Taapoi (legendary *sadhaba* girl in whose memory the *puja* is held) was made to live there. The evening before each Rabibara, the place is cleaned and mopped with cow dung solution. Various types of *jhotis* and *chittas* are drawn on the floor. As Taapoi was provided to eat only *khuda* (left out particles of rice after sieving of rice), *khuda* or its preparations are the items of *bhoga*. Hence the *osha* is known as Khudurukuni - (*khuda rukuni* - meaning one who craves for *khuda*).

In the early morning the girls go out for collecting flowers for the *puja*. They collect seasonal flowers and leave from nearby gardens and keep them at the place of worship. Then they go to nearby river or pond for bath and after bath they make tiny mounds of sand or earth for worship of Mangala. Paying obeisance to the goddess they return to their respective homes where they take two and half mouthfuls

of boiled rice mixed with water without salt⁴⁰. Thereafter, the day is spent in decorating the place of *puja* and making garlands for the idol of the goddess. The *puja* starts towards the evening. The girls assemble with *bhogas* that consist of some *khuda* preparations⁴¹ and place them before the idol. An elderly woman performs the *puja* and offers the *bhoga*. One of the girls reads out the story of the *osha* and all present listen. The girls then offer *puspaanjuli* (offering of flowers with palms folded) and the *osha* for that Rabibara ends. In this way the *oshas* for all other Rabibaras are observed.

Fable of Taapoi: - The *katha* of the *osha* is divided into two episodes. The first episode describes the story of Durga killing Mahisasura who after receiving the boon of Brahma terrorized *debata* (gods and demigods). All *debatas* appealed to Durga to save them from his tyranny. The goddess assuming the form of a good looking woman went to Vindhya ranges where Mahisasura was living and meditated there. Mahisasura while out on hunting saw her and proposed to marry. The goddess answered him that she would marry a man who has the ability to defeat her. Mahisasura being over confident of his ability agreed for a fight. A fierce duel took place between them. Finally, the goddess with her sharp lance pierced his chest and killed him. Thus, Durga saved the universe from the atrocities of Mahisasura. It is believed that the girls who worship Durga are protected from all evil forces.

The second episode narrates the fable of Taapoi who suffered in the hands of her sister-in-laws when her brothers

40 It is not known why saltless rice is eaten. Since Taapoi was living on plain *khuda* and was not provided salt, the old tradition is maintained.

41 Different preparations of *khuda* are offered on each **Sunday**. The first Sunday is only *muri* (puffed rice). The second *khai* (puffed paddy). Third *muri muas* and likewise

had gone on maritime trading to Indonesian archipelagos. It also reminds of the maritime glory of ancient Odisha.

Taapoi was the only sister of seven prosperous *sadhaba* (seafaring merchants) brothers and was also the youngest. Being the youngest, she received their love and affection. All her demands and wishes were immediately fulfilled. One day Taapoi was playing with her friends with a bamboo winnow. A wicked *brahmin* woman noticed it and scoffed at her for playing with a bamboo winnow when she could afford a gold one. She asked for it from her brothers who immediately provided one. On another occasion, she demanded a gold moon. When it was half made her father expired and when it was completed her mother also expired. By then, the family had become poor. The brothers went out on voyage to distant islands for trading leaving their sister in the care of their wives giving instructions to take special care of her. Soon after the brothers left, the sisters-in-law fell into the wicked counsel of the *brahmin* woman who filled their ears that the cause of their misery was Taapoi whom they were so fond of. This changed their mind towards her except the youngest. But she could not do much because of others. She was not given good food or clothes and made to live on *khuda* in the *dhenkisala*. She was asked to graze goats in the forest. Once, while grazing the goat, the pet goat of eldest sister in law went missing. The sisters-in-law beat her and drove her out of the house. She went to the forest and lived there. Amidst sufferings, Taapoi held her morale high and waited for her brothers to return. Once, she found some girls performing *puja*. She enquired from them what it was all about and learnt that they were worshipping Mangala who grants whatever one desires. She joined them praying the goddess for the early return of her brothers. As she had nothing except *khuda*, she offered it as *bhoga*. Soon her fervent prayer was answered and the brothers landed at the shore near the forest. At night, while resting in their boats,

they heard the wailing of a girl. Being curious, they searched the area and to their dismay found that it was their dear sister who was crying. Seeing her brothers, her joy knew no bounds. The brothers learnt all about her plights and decided to teach their wives a lesson. They brought Taapoi home and asked their wives about her who gave evasive replies. Then they showed Taapoi and told them that they have learnt all about their treatments to her. To punish them, they asked Taapoi to sever their noses except of the youngest. Reluctantly Taapoi did so but prayed the goddess to restore. They got back their noses and all lived happily.

Rekha panchami puja: - Rekha panchami or Rakshya panchami puja is observed on *krishna pakshya panchami* in the lunar month Bhadrava. The *puja* is dedicated to Batuk Bhairava who is an incarnation of Shiva. People draw the picture of Batuk Bhairava on their rear doors in black paint or charcoal. A prayer to Shiva written in palm leaf is also hung on the top of the door. Along with it, a few blades of *kusha* (type of grass) and a small satchel containing rice are also hung. The main reason of these is protection from wild animals.

At Badadeula at Puri, the ritual Rahu Rekha Lagi is celebrated. *Subarna rahu rekha* is an ornament like *chitta* worn on the foreheads by Triad. It is removed on Snanna purnima during sacred bath and is reworn on this day.

Ganesh puja: - The worship of Ganesh is celebrated on the *shukla pakshya chaturthi* in the lunar month Bhadrava, otherwise known as Ganesha chaturthi. Ganesha is the lord of intellect and wisdom. Hence, the student community in particular worship him on this *chaturthi*. It is an important *puja* in all educational institutions where *sarbajanina pujas* are organised. Beautiful stages are erected in the institution premises where large size clay idols of Ganesha

are worshipped. The students decorate these with leaves, flowers and coloured papers. They keep *upabasha* and worship towards midday. Generally, a priest performs the *puja*. Interesting part is breaking of coconuts by students coming in line. Students use all their strengths to break the coconut at one strike because it is believed that those who fail would fail in the examination. In the evening after *arati*, community feasts are organised where teachers and students sit together and eat. In some institutions, variety programmes for entertainment are also organised. The students and teachers take part in them. The idol is worshipped for a day or two and then immersed in nearby river or pond.

Apart from *sarbajanina pujas* in educational institutions, *pujas* are also held at individual homes. Ganesha is also known as *vigna binasaka* (destroyer of obstacles). Therefore, he is first worshipped at the beginning of any *puja* or auspicious work. Many women observe Vinayaka brata dedicated to Ganesha. Alongside the worship of Ganesha, the *brata* is also worshipped and.

There are several stories about the birth of Ganesha. Parvati created an idol out of the sandal wood paste that she anointed before bath and breathed life into it. She asked him to guard the door and prevent entry to anyone while she bathed. Unfortunately Shiva came before completion of her bath and wanted entry. Ganesha prevented his entry as he did not know him. Shiva became furious and asked his *ganas*⁴² (celestial beings, attendants of Shiva) to teach him manners. Ganesha was very powerful being born of Parvati - the embodiment of Shakti. He defeated them and declared that nobody was allowed to enter while his mother was bathing. The sages of heaven sensed a growing turmoil and went to appease Ganesha but with no results. Enraged

⁴² Shiva chose Ganesha to be the lord of *ganas*. Hence, he is also known as Ganesha.

Indra attacked him with his entire army but he even did not succeed. After *debatas* were defeated, the Trinity launched an attack on Ganesha. Amidst the fighting, Shiva severed his head. Finding her son dead, Parvati revealed her true self as the Adishakti, (prime energy). Taking a terrible form, she vowed to destroy the universe. The gods prostrated before her and Shiva promised that her son would be revived. The Trinity hunted the world for a head and came across elephant Airabati mourning her dead baby. They consoled her and fixed the head of the dead baby elephant on Ganesha and blew life into it. That is how in Ganesha is depicted with an elephant head. Shiva named him Ganesha (*Gana isha*), or Ganapati (lord of the *ganas*).

Janmashtami (Gokulastami) puja: - The birth day of Krishna is observed all over the country on the *krushna pakshya astami* in the lunar month Bhadrava. It is celebrated in a grand scale at Mathura, Gokul and Vrindavana where Krishna was born and spent his childhood. Devotees keep *upabasha* and remain awake till midnight when Krishna was born. All Krishna temples are gaily decorated and illuminated. Rasha leela (love scenes of Krishna with *gopis*) or Krushna leela (life story of Krishna) are enacted to recreate incidents from his life and to depict his love towards *gopis*. After midnight, the idol of baby Krishna placed in a cradle is swung amidst chanting of devotional songs.

Another interesting event during the *puja* is the breaking of *dahi-handi* (pot of buttermilk) which is held as a competition in Maharastra and north India.. The episode is based on the childhood prank of Krishna stealing buttermilk hung by his mother in an urn. It involves making a human pyramid and breaking a high hanging earthen urn filled with buttermilk. The topmost person tries to break the urn with a blunt object. With the breaking of the urn, the buttermilk is spilled which is taken as a *prasada*.

The following day is Nandotsava. Devotees herald the birth of Krishna and break their *upabasha*. At homes and temples varieties of items are prepared and offered to Krishna and later taken as *prasada*.

Saradiya Durga puja (Dashahara): - There are endless instances of worship of Durga in the *puranas*. The mythological reason of worshipping her is traced from the episode of demon Mahishasura who dethroned Indra and created panic amongst the gods and demigods. Then, Parvati emerged with the combined energies of the Trinity to vanquish him. She is thus known as Mahisasura mardini Durga (Durga, the destroyer of Mahisasura).

As per Markendeya purana, the right time for invoking the goddess is in the *basanta rutu* (spring season) in the lunar month Chaitra. Being celebrated in the *basanta rutu*, it is called *basanti* Durga puja. It is not much celebrated in the State and the Durga puja in the *sarata rutu* (autumn season) in lunar month Aswina is celebrated as *saradiya* Durga puja. The *puja* is associated with Rama invoking the goddess before invasion of Lanka. As it was not the right time for her worship, it is known as *akala bodhana* (untimely awakening)⁴³.

In the past, the goddess was worshipped at homes and in temples and *sarbajanina* (community) *puja* as it is now held was not prevalent. In homes, it was generally celebrated for five days from the *sasthi* to *dashami* and in temples for three to sixteen days⁴⁴. In some families of martial races, there was also the tradition of *ayadha* or *sastra puja* (worship of

43 Refer Krutibasa Ramayana

44 Tri-dinamataka for three days from Maha-astami to Vijaya Dashami, Pancha-dinamataka for five days from Sasthi to Vijaya Dashami, Naba-dinamataka for nine days from Dwitiya to Vijaya Dashami and Shoda-dinamataka for sixteen days from Mula-astami to Vijaya Dashami.

weapons) on these days. The rituals of Durga puja being elaborate and complicated, to perform them rightly priests knowing the various *mantras*, *mudras* and *nyasas* (rites and rituals) are required. It is believed that any departure in the *puja* procedure would incur the wrath of the goddess. Not many such priests are available now. Therefore, the number of *pujas* at home has decreased and *sarbajanina pujas* have emerged.

The present form of *saradiya sarbajanina puja* in the State is out of the influence of similar *pujas* celebrated in the neighbouring state Bengal. It is said that following the celebrations in Bengal, the family of one Ghosh Mahasaya who came with Todarmal and settled in village Rameswarpur near Bhadrak in the 16th century CE started *saradiya* Durga puja as community worship. It is also said that in the year 1512 CE, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu started worship of Durga as a community worship in Binode Bihari temple at Cuttack. No matter what ever may be its origin, it is one of the important festivals all over the State and has now acquired a socio-religious character.

Large size clay idols of Mahisasura mardini Durga along with Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartikeya, Ganesha and the Mahisasura are worshipped in beautifully decorated stages. The preparations for making the idols start on an auspicious day after Janmastami with the collection of a special type of clay known as *patu mati* from the river bed. After the prescribed rituals, the clay is transported to the place of making the idols. There is a tradition of adding a little *punya mati* [soil from the door steps of *besyas* (prostitutes)] to it. It is said that when a person visits a *besyas*, Lakshmi gets down at the doorstep. Thus, the soil at the door steps of a *besyas* is sanctified with the *pada dhuli* (dust from the feet) of Lakshmi. After collection of clay, the *kumbharas* (clay artisans) get busy in making the idols. The goddess is depicted

in her semi-fearsome mood with soothing eyes and ten arms each holding different kinds of weapons (e.g. sword, sphere, discus, bow, arrows, shield, rosary, conch, bell, and wine goblet etc.). Her face is usually golden yellow and her black hair is dressed up in *karanda-mukuta* (knot hanging down in long luxuriant tresses). She rides a lion which gives her the name Simha vahini and is shown killing the Mahisasura with a spear that assigns her name as Mahisasura mardini Durga. Along her side are the idols of Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartikeya and Ganesha on their respective mounts.

The *kumbharas* have a time bound programme to complete the idols by Mahalaya amabasya which is also known as Khalilagi amabasya as on this day *khali* (chalk paste) is applied as primer coat on the idols. There after regular colours are applied and the idols are made ready for the *puja*. Traditionally, all these are carried out behind a screen and nobody other than the *kumbharas* and *chitrakaras* (painters) are allowed inside. During these periods they maintain austerity and do not take non-vegetarian food, consume alcoholic beverages or even smoke.

As the idols are getting ready, the organisers start selecting places of worship and decorating the stages. Now a day, the places of worship are generally preselected and permanent or semi permanent stages are built. These are repaired and cleaned. In earlier days, the backdrops known as *medha* were made of split bamboos frames ornamented with colored papers, mica sheets and natural and artificial flowers and leaves. Now a day, thermo-cole boards and different coloured lamps are used in making the *medha*. With substantial increase in funding, *chandi* (silver) and *sunu* (gold) *medhas* have come up at some places particularly in Cuttack town. Undoubtedly, they add grace and charm while displaying opulence and pride of the *sahis* (localities in towns and villages). One of the major attractions of the

puja is the illumination and the decorations of the stages and the *medhas*. As the *puja* day nears, the festive mood builds up. It is the time for the people to go on their annual *puja* shopping. Mostly the *puja* shopping is done by the women while men accompany to pay. The traders and shopkeepers decorate their shops and stock new and fresh items. Several temporary shops selling household articles and commodities crop up. The villages, towns and cities get a new look with beautifully decorated stages and loud speakers announcing festival offers.

As mentioned, the worship follows the traditions and practices in Bengal. It is believed that goddess comes down from her husband's home in Mt. Kailash to her parent's home in the Himalayas for three days from *mahasaptami* to *mahanavami*. She is therefore worshiped especially on these days. The *puja* begins in full splendour from the evening of *sasthi* with *belbarana*. It is believed that the goddess on arrival on this day and stays on the branches of *bela* (wood apple) tree. Therefore, branches of the *bela* tree are worshipped in the evening to welcome her with *arati* amidst beating of *dhaka*, (traditional drum) *ghanta* (bell) and blowing of *sankha* (conchshell) etc. The main *pujas* on *mahasaptami*, *mahastami*, *mahanavami* start thereafter.

Mahasaptami is the first day of the *puja*. The day dawns with *Chandi patha* (recital of Chandi purana). Just as the first ray of sun strikes the earth, *nabapatrika puja* is performed. It is an important ritual of the *puja*. In Sanskrit, “*naba*” means nine and “*patrika*” means leaves. The saplings or leaves of nine type plants⁴⁵ representing the goddess are worshipped. These are then taken to the nearby river or pond for bath. A stem of the banana sapling is draped in a new red and

45 Nine sapplings are *kadali pua* (banana sapling), *haldi* (turmeric), *saru* (arum), branches of *bela* (wood apple), *dalimba* (pomegranate), *ashoka*, *jayantri*, *harida* and spikes of *dhana* (paddy).

white sari. A brief *puja* is performed at the river bank and the banana sapling and other leaves tied in a white *aparajita* creeper are brought back in a procession and are placed near the idol of Ganesha on the stage. Once this is over *chakshu unmochana* (opening of eyes) and *prana prastista* (invoking life into the idols) are performed amidst chanting of *slokas*, *mantras* and *homa* etc. This is done by the priest behind a screen and the public is not allowed to view till completion. The entire atmosphere gets charged with religious fervor with the smokes from the *homa*, beating of *dhaka*, *ghanta* and blowing of *sankha* etc. The *saptami puja* continues till midday and sometimes thereafter. Worshippers throng in numbers to participate in the rituals.

Mahastami is the most important day out of the five days. The rituals on *mahastami* are more elaborate than the *mahasaptami*. The day begins with *Chandi patha*. The surroundings reverberate with the sounds from *dhaka*, *ghanta*, *sankha* etc. and the smokes from the *homa* and *dhupas* envelope the atmosphere. The worshippers keep *upabasha* and come in numbers to participate in the *puja*. They bring with them their *bhogas* and keep them at the assigned place for the priest to offer. After *puspanjali* and witnessing *arati* they break their *upabasha* and take *bhoga*. Many women keep Mahastami brata.

As the day proceeds, it is time for the *sandhi puja*. It is the *shakta* ways of worshipping the goddess. Literally *sandhi* means a juncture. It thus marks the interlinking of the *mahashtami* and *mahanavami* and is performed between twenty-four minutes before expiry of *astami* and twenty-four minutes after starting of *navami*. Usually, this happens towards the dead of the night. Worshippers believe that during this period, goddess assumed her most fearsome form and vanquished the demons Chando and Mundo, the commanders of Mahisasura. It is said that when the goddess

was engaged in a fierce battle with Mahiasura, Chando and Mundo attacked her from behind. Then the goddess in the form of brightly glowing woman with eyes red in anger and tongue hanging out holding a shield and falcon killed them. She is thus worshipped as Chamunda. It is customary to sacrifice a buffalo to appease the goddess that in recent time is substituted a *boitia kakharu* (pumpkin) or a *lau* (gourd) at many places. *Sandhi puja* during Durga puja is an important ritual. Though late in the night, devotees come in numbers to witness. As the *puja* proceeds, the entire surrounding rents with the sounds from *dhaka*, *ghanta* and blowing of *sankha* and smoke from the *homa* and *dhupa*.

Mahanavami is the third and final day of Durga puja. It starts after *sandhi puja*. The goddess is worshipped as Mahisasura mardini. The usual *homa* and *puja* are performed. Worshippers gather around to witness the rituals. Some keep *navami upabasha*. The *mahanavami bhoga* is offered and taken of as *prasada*.

One of the spectacular scenes during the *pujas* is the morning and evening *aratis* on all the three days. The priest is seen dancing to the tune of *dhaka*, *ghanta* and *sankha* performing various poses and *nyasas* directing the flame or the smoke towards the idols. People come in numbers to witness the *arati*.

Dasami marks the end of Durga puja. On this day, the goddess goes back to her husband's home after spending three days in her parent's home. After *shami* and *aparajita pujas*, the priest performs the *bisarjana pujas* thus marking the end of the festival and bidding farewell to the goddess. A tearful send-off is given to her as if a daughter is leaving her parent's home to her in-law's home. Married women bid farewell to the goddess through various rituals entreating her to come every year. Following the practice in Bengal, they

offer her *dahi pakhala*, fish fry and varieties of *pithas* and sweets. The playful ritual of *sindura khela* is observed by some Bengali and Odiya families in which *sindura* is smeared on each other's face and head as gestures of goodwill.

The *dasami* is also known as Dashahara or Vijaya dasami which are derived from the Sanskrit. The term *Dashahara* is a combined word - *dasha* meaning ten referring to Ravana who has ten heads and *hara* meaning his defeat. Thus, Dashahara means defeat of Ravana. Vijaya dasami is also compound word. *Vijay* means victory and *dashami* is the tenth day. Since Rama was victorious in his battle with Ravana on the *dashami* of the *shukla pakshya* in the lunar month Aswina, it is called Vijaya dashami.

On conclusion of *bisarjana puja*, the idols are taken for immersion in nearby rivers or water bodies which in local dialect is known as Bhasani yatra. Bhasani yatra is a colourful event. The procession is accompanied with sounding of drums, pipe instruments and fanfare by people accompany in numbers. As the processions pass by, people come out of their houses to witness. Married women take a little *sindura* from the forehead of the goddess and apply on theirs. The little that remains on their finger is smeared on their bangles. At places where large number of *pujas* is held, specific times are allotted for the processions and elaborate police arrangements are made to maintain law and order. That is why, at some places the Bhasani yatras are delayed by a day or two.

Nabaratri and Kumari puja: - Associated with Durga puja is Nabaratri, literally meaning nine nights. In many parts of the country, Nabaratri is observed as part of Durga puja. Nine manifestations of the goddess are worshipped from *pratipada* till *mahanavami*. The observers keep *upabasha* and perform nightlong *puja* for nine nights known as *jagarana*. On

conclusion of Navaratri, *kumari puja* is performed in which nine *kumaris* (small girls) are worshipped with *arati* as it is believed that the goddess incarnates in the body of *kumaris*. They are fed and given gifts in cash or kind. It is not a traditional practice in Odisha but is now observed following north Indian practice..

Ravana podi: - Another festival associated with Durga puja is Ravana podi or burning the effigy of Ravana. It is also not a traditional festival in Odisha and is a recent introduction influenced by the north Indian migrants. Ramayana describes that Rama killed Ravana on the *sandhikala* i.e. the adjunct period between *mahashtami* and *mahanavami* and he was cremated on the *dashami*. Therefore, people burn the effigy of Ravana on the *dashami* to celebrate his killing. Giant size effigies of Ravana filled with fireworks are erected in open grounds. Towards the evening, it is set on fire. Ravana podi attracts large crowd from all communities.

Sarbajanina Durga puja has gone far beyond religious milieu. It is now one of the biggest festivals in the State like Chandana yatra and Ratha yatra of lord Jagannatha. The entertainment programmes with musical evenings, melody, and folk dances have overtaken the religious celebrations. Money spent on such programmes often overrides the expenses on actual *puja*. Preponderances of architectural models are displayed in the *puja* pandals. There are also competition of decorations and illuminations. People come from far and near to witness the decorations of the stages and the idols. Makeshift markets and pleasure parks come up around *puja* arenas. Sheer joy, mad ecstasy and wondrous celebrations remain the mood of the days. It is because Durga Puja is much more than a religious festival.

Gosani yatra of Puri: - It may be interesting to mention that before *sarbajanina* Durga puja started in Odisha, the

worship of Mahishasura mardini Durga known as Gosani existed at Puri since the days of Chodagangadeva and still exists. It is locally known as Gosani puja. Every year, during Saradiya Durga puja, several clay idols representing the goddess and known as Kakudikhai, Janhimundia, Sunagosani, Hadabai⁴⁶ and theo-morphic form of the demons (head of a buffalo and body of a human being), and gigantic figure of Naga (cobra snake) are worshipped. It is not clear why the goddess is called by these names, but the faces of these models are so depicted to give an impression that the goddess is watching Mahisaura and is engaged in a fierce fight with him.

On the concluding day of the *puja* i.e. Dashahara or Vijaya dashami, the Gosanis from all the *sahis* come in a procession to the Badadeula to pay homage to lord Jagannatha. Huge crowds from Puri and nearby villages gather at the Simhadwara to witness the Bhasani yatra. Towards the late night, the idols are taken to nearby rivers and sea for *bisarjana*.

Durga puja at Cuttack: - People of Cuttack deeply venerate Maa Cuttack Chandi as the living goddess and their established deity. During *saradiya* as well as *basanti* Durga pujas, she is worshipped in *sodasha avatara* (sixteen forms). The temple gets extra crowded with devotees.

Though *sarbajanina* Durga pujas are now celebrated at all most all places in the State, until recently the *puja* at Cuttack was recognised as the best. The decorations, lighting and the arrangements are none to beat. These attracted crowds from nearby places who not only came to witness the *puja* but also for their annual *puja* shopping. Earlier, the *pujas* were limited to Chandinichowk, Chaudhuribazar, Buxibazar, Balubazar and Seikhbazar. Now every *sahi* celebrates *puja*

46 These are the names of some Durga temples in Puri.

in a small or big ways. As brought out, at many places the *chandi* or *suna medhas* add glamour to the *puja*.

Gaja Lakshmi puja: - The worship of Gaja Lakshmi is performed on the *pujima* of lunar month Aswina (after Chandra puja by young girls). In Odiya homes goddess is worshipped daily but special focus is given for her worship on the Aswina *pujima* as the day is believed to be her birthday. It is also said that on the night of the *pujima* the goddess goes round the houses to find out who all are awake and worshipping her so that she can bestow prosperity to them. It is for this reason that many worship her in the evening after worship of Chandra and keep vigil whole night waiting for her visit. Significantly, she has chosen an owl as her mount that can see in the darkness.

The rituals of Gaja Lakshmi puja are simple. Men and women performing *puja* get up early in the morning and after cleaning the houses and taking bath keep partial *upabasa*. They remain away from solids and take only fluids like *pana*, *paida pani* or simply plain water. Some observe *nirjala upabasa* i.e. without drinking water. The day is spent in meditation reciting thousand names of Lakshmi or reading Lakshmi purana. All these are to keep the mind and body pure and devoid of any evil thoughts. Towards the evening, the *puja* place is washed and cleaned. In olden days when the houses had mud floors, the floors were swept with cowdung water or paste. The floor and the walls are decorated with *chitta*, *jhota* or *muruja* (artistic designs in coloured powder and rice paste). There are set designs and patterns of these for the Lakshmi puja. A small *bedi* (wooden pedestal or altar) decorated with flowers, leaves and coloured paper is placed towards the wall. The family idol or the photo of Lakshmi is placed on the *bedi*. She is offered new clothes and ornamented with *sindura*, *chandana* and fresh flowers. The entire family sits facing the goddess and the head of the

family performs the *puja*. Relevant *kathas* from the Lakshmi purana are recited and everybody listens with attention. Varieties of fruits and sweets are offered as *bhoga* which are taken by family members and the *puja* ends. Some engage the services of a priest to perform the *puja*.

The family members keep awake whole night praying for the visit of the goddess. Symbolically, the front entrance door is kept open and a pair of *kalasha* (earthen pitcher filled with water over which five mango leaves and a tender coconut are kept) is placed on its either side as a sign of respect and welcome to the goddess. As it is a full moon night of the onset of *sarata rutu* (autumn season), the climate is pleasant and the worshippers enjoy the night discussing religious matters amongst themselves. This continues till dawn.

Apart from the worship at individual homes, Gaja Lakshmi puja has now assumed *sarbajanina* stature mainly organised by business communities. Large size earthen idols of Lakshmi flanked by a pair of elephants are installed in beautifully decorated stages and worshipped for three to seven days. Temporary shops selling eatables and household items crop up around the *puja* arena. Amateur artists perform night long drama or variety entertainment programmes. On conclusion of *puja*, the idols are immersed in nearby rivers or ponds with much fanfare. The devotees and the residents of the *sahi* accompany the immersion procession. The *pujas* in Dhenkanal and Kendrapara towns are more elaborate and attract large audience.

There are several stories and legends about the worship of Lakshmi and her notional visit. Lakshmi purana narrates the story of Shreeya - the *chandaluni*.

Story of Shreeya - the chandaluni: - Shreeya was a poor woman belonging to *chandaluni* (one of the lower castes)

clan. She was living in the outskirts of the town being an untouchable. Once, Lakshmi decided to go out of her abode on the night of her birthday (i.e. Aswina purnima) in search of houses where she was worshipped. She sought the permission of Jagannatha which was accorded.

In the guise of an old *brahmin* woman, she first visited the house of a *saudagara* (merchant) and noticed no sign of her worship. She enquired about it to the *saudagara*'s wife who replied that they were waiting for the ship bringing merchandise and thus have no time for worshipping Lakshmi. She then visited few other houses and observed likewise. The householders or their family members were busy in the mundane affairs and had no time for worshipping her. In the course of her peregrination, she passed by the hut of Shreeya who had got up early in the morning and after cleaning her hut and sanctifying herself was worshipping Lakshmi. She was about to offer a lotus flower and praying the goddess to accept it when Lakshmi reached her doorstep. The goddess was mighty pleased with her devotion and could not ignore her prayers. She stepped in and appeared in her Gaja Lakshmi form and accepted the flower and graced a boon to Shreeya. Shreeya asked for thousand cows, wealth befitting Kubera, gold and silver ornaments on her arms and leg, and a son in her lap and immortality. Goddess granted all except immortality.

At that time Jagannatha along with his elder brother Balabhadra was passing by Shreeya's hut and they noticed Lakshmi inside. Balabhadra did not approve the entry of his sister-in-law in the house of a *chandaluni*. He advised Jagannatha to disown Lakshmi and drive her out of Badadeula as she was unfit to stay in a temple having visited the house of a *chandaluni*. He felt that the sanctity of Badadeula would be defiled with her stay. Jagannatha pleaded to excuse her assuring that he would not allow Lakshmi to repeat it.

But Balabhadra was adamant. So discussing, the brothers returned to Badadeula.

After some time when Lakshmi returned, she found the brothers sitting at the doorstep and denying her entry. As she attempted to enter, Jagannatha with the instruction of Balabhadra told her that as she had entered the hut of a *chandaluni*, he would discard her and would not let her to live with him in Badadeula. Lakshmi gracefully submitted that she had done no wrong by visiting the hut of a *chandaluni* who was one of her devotees. She reminded Jagannatha that in his birth as Krishna, he lived in the houses of cowherds and ate the left over berries of Jara sabara who was also of low caste. She also reminded that while accepting her as his wife after *samudra manthana*, he had promised her father to excuse ten of her transgressions. But Jagannatha remained firm and obeyed elder brother's instructions.

Thereafter, Lakshmi left Badadeula returning the ornaments and clothes that she was wearing. While leaving she cursed the brothers that for twelve years they would wonder like destitutes and shall famish without food and water. Only when they eat the food served by a *chandaluni*, the curse would end.

So saying Lakshmi left to live in a golden palace by the sea shore. She ordered the *asta betalas* (celestial messengers used to take revenge) to ransack Badadeula and its kitchen and bring every thing to her. When *betalas* expressed apprehension of facing Jagannatha or Balabhadra, she asked Nidra (goddess of Sleep) to put the brothers to deep sleep till next day. *Betalas* then brought every thing from Badadeula. When she noticed that the *ratna palankas* (jewelled bedsteads) on which the brothers were sleeping were not brought, she got angry and asked *betalas* to bring those too making the brothers to sleep on the floor. She then asked

Saraswati to go to every house and inform the householders not to provide any food or water to the brothers.

When Jagannatha and Balabhadra got up in the morning, they found the temple empty and every thing had vanished. They went to the kitchen and found there no food. Jagannatha lamented and uttered in despair that this is what happens when Lakshmi departs. But Balabhadra consoled saying not to worry and every thing would be all right. To satiate hunger by drinking water, they went to the Indraduyma tank and found it dry. Having spent the day without food and water, the brothers decided to go out begging for food wearing torn clothes. No body gave them any food as instructed by Saraswati. At some place a *brahmini* woman took pity and wanted to give them some food. But the pot containing food disappeared. At another place they were served some parched rice. But Bayu (god of Wind) blew it away. Out of hunger, the brothers decided to enter into a pond and eat *padma munda* (lotus roots). As soon as they entered water in the pond turned muddy. In this manner twelve years passed and the brothers spent miserable times enduring the curse.

Disappointed and starving for food, the brothers went to the sea shore in search of Lakshmi. There they noticed her golden palace with Shreeya sweeping the floor. When Shreeya saw them and came out. They begged her some food. Finding them wearing *paita* (sacred thread), Shreeya took them as *brahmins* and mentioned that they would not possibly take food served by her being a woman from low caste. They then requested her to provide utensils and provisions and they would cook themselves. She obliged them. As they were about to light the hearth, Agni (god of Fire) would not come. Thus they could not cook any food. Finally, the brothers agreed to eat food cooked and served by her even though she was from low caste. She welcomed them and served them a hearty meal. Lakshmi was quietly watching these. After they

finished the meal, she asked Shreya to enquire from them if they were married. Jagannatha answered in affirmative and mentioned that he had sent away his wife and had thus become a destitute. Lakshmi, (through Shreya), then asked how a person can become a destitute by simply discarding his wife. Both brothers said in unision that it is the wife that brings fortune to a man.

Lakshmi then appeared before the brothers. She bowed before them and washed their feet. She sipped a little water thus sanctified by the washing of feet like any devoted Odiya wife. With a mischivious smile and joy in her face, she told them that she was discarded and driven away as she entered into the house of a *chandaluni*. It was the same *chandaluni* from whose hands they had now taken food. Hence, both have lost their caste. She then asked if they want to say any thing further. Balabhadra then asked Jagannatha to hold the hands of Lakshmi and escort her to Badadeula mentioning that it was all due to a misconception for which they had suffered enough and wondered around like destitutes. He promised that hence forth there would be no distintion of caste in Badadeula and both *brahmins* and *chandals* would have free access to the temple and eat *mahaprasada* together.

Gaja Lakshmi puja is thus an important *puja* in Odisha. Since it is held after the harvesting season, people have plenty to spend and enjoy.

Dhanwantari jayanti or Yama dipabali: - Two days before the *amabasya* of lunar month Kartika i.e on *krushna pakshya troyodashi* is Dhanawantri jayanti or Yama dipabali. The *puja* is observed in the memory of Dhanawantri - the carrier of the pot of *amruta* during *samudra manthana* and founder of *ayurveda* science. The day is also called Yama dipabali as Yama had suggested the worship of Dhanwantari to ward off untimely death. Dhanawantri jayanti is a traditional event of

the State but not much observed now. In its place Dhanteras is observed by many.

Kartikeshwar puja: - Kartikeshwar puja is observed for five days from the *puṇnima* of lunar month Kartika as *sarbajanina puja* known as Kartikeswar medha. It is said to be his birthday. Large size earthen idol of Kartikeswar is worshipped in beautifully decorated stages at many places all over the State. Like many other *sarbajanina pujas*, entertainment programmes are also organised.

There are several versions in *vedas* and *puranas* and also in Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava* about the birth of Kartikeya. *Atharvaveda* describes him as Agni bhuta or son of Agni since he was born out of fire. In various *puranas* he is described as son of Shiva but not through any union with a woman.

According to one, Sati the daughter of Dakshya and consort of Shiva immolated herself in the *Dakshya yajna* (sacrifice in fire by Dakshya) as Shiva was not invited. Dejected Shiva withdrew from the universe and engaged himself in *yogic* practices (meditations) in the Himalayas. In the mean time, Tarakasura ravaged the universe and tormented gods and human beings. It was realised by the gods that only a son born to Shiva could kill Tadakasura and relieve their sufferings. They plotted with Kamadeva (god of Love) to persuade Shiva to marry. Kamadeva shot the *kama bana* (arrow of love) at Shiva to make him fall in love with Sati (reborn as Parvati - the daughter of Himalaya). This disturbed Shiva who opened his third eye and instantly Kamadeva was burnt to ashes. But as the effect of the arrow, Shiva married Parvati. Once while they were enjoying an intimate moment, a little bit of Shiva's vital fluid fell on the ground. Tremendous heat generated by it threatened to engulf the whole universe in flames. Instructed by Vishnu

and Brahma, Agni went in the disguise of a mendicant and swallowed the fluid. Parvati felt insulted. She cursed Agni that the fluid shall cause an unbearable inflammation in him. Instantly Agni felt unbearable heat in his body. He prayed Shiva to relieve him from the agony. Shiva said that he would be relieved only when he transfers the vital fluid into the womb of a suitable woman.

Agni retired to a desolate place waiting for the arrival of a suitable woman. He found six Krutika sisters shivering from cold. He transferred the vital fluid into their wombs and they became pregnant. Coming to know of it, their husbands cursed them and turned them to *nakshatrays* (stars)⁴⁷ in the sky. But before their transformations, they aborted their foetuses on the Himalayas. After some time river Ganga carried them to Saravana (forest of Arrows) where they were born and Parvati adopted them as her children combining them into one albeit with six heads and naming him Kartikeya. Gods took him as the son of Shiva. Later Kartikeya vanquished Tadakasura.

Kartikeya is worshipped in great divinity in south India where he is addressed in different names e.g. Murgan, Subramaniyam etc.. His symbols are based on *bhala* (spear or lance) and his mount peacock. Though said to have six heads (the six heads represent six *siddhis*), he is depicted as an epitome of good look. This is the reason why many unmarried girls aspire to marry a groom with Kartikeya's look and valour and significantly observe Kumara purnima as described above. Astonishingly Kartikeya is a bachelor.

Dhana manikia or Manabasha gurubara puja: - **Dhana manikia or Manabasha gurubara** is another important *puja* in the State. It is observed by all Odiya families on all Gurubaras in the lunar month Margasira. Lakshmi is worshipped as *mana* - an ancient measuring device for paddy. On the eves

47 Constellation Krutika in the zodiac sign of Brusha (Tarus)

of these days, the women of the household clean⁴⁸ the house and decorate the walls and floors drawing *chitas* or *jhotis* in rice paste or solution. It is believed that the goddess does not enter an untidy house. Hence, special care is taken to keep the house clean. On the following day, they keep *upabasha* and towards the midday worship the *manas* filled with paddy and blackgram and break the *upabasha*.

The procedure is more elaborate on the last Gurubara of the month. The entire house is cleaned and mopped in cow dung solution. Various designs of *chittas* and *jhotis* are drawn on the floors and walls of the room for worship. Miniature foot marks from the entrance door to the room of worship are drawn on the floor. In short, the house is made ready to welcome and worship the goddess.

Two *manas* one large and the other small are decorated with *jhotis* and flowers. The bigger *mana* is filled up to the brim with freshly harvested *dhana* (paddy) and often heaped above it. Likewise the smaller *mana* is filled with *mooga* (blackgram). (Usually the *manas* worshipped earlier are worshipped). A pair of *nali chudis*, three *guas* washed in *haladi pani*, few *cowries*⁴⁹ (molluscs), *sindura* and flowers etc. are placed on the *manas*. They are then kept on a *pidha* over the central *jhoti*. It is usual to cover the *pidha* with a piece of red cloth. Many place an idol or image of Lakshmi on the *pidha* by the side of *manas*. Towards, midday, the *manas* representing the goddess are worshipped in *pancha upachara* (*dipa*, *dhupa*, *argha*, *puspha* and *naibedyā*). Varieties of *pithas*, *kheeri* and *fruits* are offered as *bhoga*. After all these are over, an elderly woman recites Lakshmi purana or Manabasa gurubara katha and family members

48 It might be of academic interest that in the olden days when the houses were made of mud, it was rendered a wash with cow dung solution or paste and *chittas* and *jhotis* of many ornamental patterns were drawn on the walls and floors.

49 Used as coins in ancient Odisha.

listen attentively. The *katha* amongst other things describes the story of Shreya - a *chandaluni* who received the blessings of goddess by worshipping her on this day (already described in Gaja Lakshmi puja). Thereafter, the *upabasha* is broken and all take the *bhoga* and the *puja* comes to an end. Later, the *dhana* and *mooga* in the *manas* are threshed into *chaula* and *jai* and *gheuti* or *jau* (overcooked *khechidi*) is made out of them. It is eaten by all family members as Lakshmi *prasada*.

The *puja* has association with cultivation and harvesting which is the main profession of the people of the State. Around this time, the farmers and cultivators fill their reeks and barns with freshly harvested paddy after toiling hard in the fields for the past few months. They consider this is due to the grace and blessing of Lakshmi and worship her on all Thursdays of the month.

With people resorting to professions other than cultivation, the importance of the *puja* seems to be gradually fading. Still, in many homes particularly in villages and amongst some established families in towns and cities Manabasha gurabara is an important event and still observed with earlier tradition.

Saraswati puja: - Saraswati puja is celebrated on the *shukla pakshya panchami* in the lunar month Magha. In Rigveda, Saraswati is a river as well as the personification of the goddess of Learning. In the post Vedic periods, she began to lose her status as a river and became increasingly associated with bestowal of knowledge. She is worshipped not only for academic pursuit, but also for divine knowledge essential to achieve *moksha*.

The worship of Saraswati is prevalent since the age of the Vedas. During the *puranic* age, the worship became more established and she was adored with a number of names. At this stage her form was conceived and accordingly images

were built. Clad in white, she rides a white swan while playing a veena and carrying a book and a stylus. White is the sign of her purity. She is the goddess of music, poetry, learning and eloquenc. She is seated on a lotus which signifies beauty and heavenly origin.

Saraswati puja is a big event amongst the student community and the learneds who follow the rituals to worship her. Boys and girls are seen moving together and enjoying the *puja*. Besides *sarbajanina pujas* in the schools, it is also held in many homes and temples. A day before the *puja*, stages are erected in the school premises that are beautifully decorated by the students. On the day of *puja*, they take early morning bath and keep *upabasa*. Then, they go to collect flowers and leaves for decorating the stage and also for the *puja* proper. It is a fun and competition for them to steal or collect as much flowers as they can from the nearby public gardens or houses. A clay idol of the goddess is installed on the stage and decorated with flowers and festoons. Some books and study materials are also kept by the side of the idol. Towards the midday, the priest performs the *puja* with proper rituals and *homa* in which the teachers and students take part. *Bhoga* is offered and the *puja* ends with offering of *pushpanjali* and *arati*. The students break their *upabasha* taking the *bhoga*. In many schools, community feasts and musical programs are organized in the evening as the goddess is a patron of music. The *puja* concludes the following day with *bisarjana*. The clay idols are taken in a procession for immersion in the nearby rivers or ponds and the celebration ends until next year. At some places, the *bisarjana* takes place on the third, fifth or seventh day of the worship and the immersion is held accordingly.

Now a day, the tone and tenor of Saraswati puja is much subdued. The earlier fervors are not seen in many schools and

institutions. Only the small school going children observe it on the street corners collecting a little donations from the nearby residents.

The festival is observed differently in the Badadeula at Puri. As it marks the advent of *basanta rutu* with *sarata rutu* receding, the warm clothings of the deities are removed and they are clad in light saffron colour clothes. Saraswati puja is also known as Basanta panchami. A special variety of *pitha* is offered to the Trimurtis which is known as *basanta-pistaka* (cake of the spring). Thereafter, a peculiar festival known as Benta bihara or Sara yatra begins and continues till Dola purnami. The *bije pratima* of lord Jagannath goes out on hunting. Symbolically, he carries a bow and an arrow made of split bamboos and goes to Benta pokhari (a pond) situated in the premises of the Jagannath Ballav matha, close to the temple. There the *sebayatas* shoot arrows to a bundle of coconuts which represent deers.

Bhishmastami puja: - Bhishmashtami is observed on the *shukla pakshya astami* in the lunar month Magha; the day Bhishma the grandfather of Pandava and Kauraba left the mortal world. As per Mahabharata, Bhishma (*nee* Devabrata) is the youngest surviving son of king Santanu and Ganga. Ganga agreed to marry Santanu on condition that he would never question her actions. But when she drowned seven of their sons⁵⁰, and was about to drown the eighth one, Santanu out of agony asked her the reason. Since he questioned her action breaking the promise, Ganga left him sparing Bhishma. As Bhishma grew up, Ganga took him to *daityaguru* (teacher of demons) Sukracharya for teaching him all the skills where he learnt the art of warfare and earned the distinction of never getting defeated. As time passed, Santanu was charmed by Satyabati - a fisherman's daughter who agreed to marry on

50 They were *vasus* who had incurred the curse of sage Vasista for stealing his cow.

condition that her progeny would be the future kings and not Bhishma. Santanu was in a fix but Bhishma came to his rescue and promised not to claim the throne. Satyabati was not satisfied with this and said that Bhishma's offspring might claim the throne. To this Bhishma made a promise that he would not marry and thus would not have any offspring to claim the throne. This he maintained throughout his life⁵¹ and remained as a bachelor. Because of his loyalty and devotion to his father, he was granted the boon *ichha mrutyu* i.e. to choose the time of his death.

During the Mahabharata war, Bhishma chose to take the side of Kauraba and decided to fight against his will with Pandavas. Krishna employed the ploy of putting Srikhanda (a eunuch) against him. As Bhishma had pledged not fight against a eunuch, he gave up fighting and was confined to *sara sajya* (bed of arrows) being greivously injured. and decided not to leave his body as per the boon. waiting for an auspicious moment to leave the mortal world. When Surya made *uttarayana yatra* in the lunar month Magha, he chose to end his life on *shukla pakshya astami*. The day is thus known as Bhishastami.

Bhishmastami is not a popular *puja* in the State. It is believed that seeking the blessings of Bhishma wards off *putra dosha* (barreness). The childless and newly married couples consider the day auspicious and observe it. They take *astami snana* in nearby rivers and ponds and keep *upabasha*. Performing *tarpana* is considered offering peace to ascestor's soul. Though not observed in Odisha it coincides with Chandrabhaga mela (described in Melas).

Maha Shivaratri (Jagara) puja: - Maha Shivaratri literally means the 'Great night of Shiva' is celebrated on the midnight of *krushnapakshya trayodashi* and *chaturdashi* in the lunar

51 Termed as Bshama prtignya

month Phalguna. There are several folktales and legends surrounding it. According to one of the most popular legends mentioned in Shiva purana, it marks the marriage of Shiva and Parvati. Some scriptures describe that it was on this auspicious night Shiva performed the *tandava nrutya* - the dance of primal creation, preservation and destruction. Linga purana describes that it was on this night Shiva manifested himself in the form of Linga. Sage Markendeya mentions:-

“That night when many splendor Shiva-lingas dazzled the world with their appearance was Maha Shivaratri - the Great night of Shiva. Maharishi Narada advised the mankind to fast on this night and pray to the all-powerful Shiva so that all the sins that are committed in the past three lives are pardoned with his kindness.”

This explanation by Markendeya sounds logical for the worship of Shiva in the form of *linga*⁵² started from this night and symbolises the power behind its creation.

According to another scripture, Parvati performed *tapas* (intense prayers) on this night to ward off any evils that may

52 It may be relevant to mention that there are twelve Jyotir lingas at different places. It is believed that all these Jyotir lingas are *swambhus* meaning that they originated by themselves. Every Hindu aspires to visit them at least once in his lifetime when he would be absolved of all his sins.

*Saurashtre Somanatham Cha Sree Saile Mallikarjunam
Ujjayinyam Mahaakaalam Omkaare Mamaleswaram
Himalaye to Kedaram Daakinyaam Bhimashankaram
Vaaranaasyaam cha Viswesam Trayambakam Gowtameethate
Paralyaam Vaidyanaatham cha Naagesam Daarukaavane
Setubandhe Ramesham Grushnesam cha Shivaalaye ||*

Somnatha in Sourashtra, (ii) Shri Shaillyam at Mallikarjun near Kurnol, (iii) Mahakaleshwar in Ujjain, (iv) Omkarnath near Indore, (v) Baidyanath near Ambejogni in Beed, (vi) Bhimashanker near Pune, (vii) Rameshwar at Rameswaram, (viii) Nageswara in Dwaraka, (ix) Ghrishankar near Elora, (x) Vishwanath at Benares, (xi) Kedarnath in Uttarakhand, (xii) Trimbakeshwar near Nasik.

befall to Shiva. Since then, began the custom of wives praying for the well being of their husbands on Maha Shivaratri.

(Rightly or wrongly, in the sasana villages of Puri and in Sambalpur town, Sitala sasthi on *shukla pakshya sasthi* in the lunar month Jyestha is observed as the marriage of Shiva and Parvati in a humanized form. No matter whatever may be the origin of Maha Shivaratri, it is considered extremely auspicious and celebrated with much religious fervor by devotees of Shiva.

As the name suggests, the rituals of Maha Shivaratri are performed at night. Devotees keep *upabasha* the whole day and keep vigil throughout the night. Because of this, it is known as Jagara. They wait for the lighting of Maha dipa (Great lamp) on the pinnacle of the temples after which they break their *upabasha*. Special type of *bhoga* known as *gaja pitha* is offered to the Shiva.

According to Shiva purana, *avisekha* of Shiva linga is performed with six different *dravyas* (items). The first *avisekha* starts at sunset and the remaining five at an hour intervals. The last one ends at midnight when Maha dipa is lighted. In the first *avisekha*, the Linga is anointed with milk, in the second, with yoghurt, in the third, with ghee, in the fourth with honey and in the fifth with *bilwa* or *bela* (wood apple) leaves. (These leaves are exceedingly favorites of Shiva). Finally, from the midnight till following sunrise, *jala* is poured over the Linga with chanting of *panchaakshari mantra* consisting of the five-syllables: “Na” “Ma” “Shi” “Vaa” “Ya” (*Om Namah Shivaaya*) and *Maha Mrutuyanajaya strotra*. The devotees keep *upabasha* and keep vigil throughout the night worshipping Shiva.

In Odisha, Maha Shivaratri is celebrated in all Shiva temples. They all bear festive look. Thousands of devotees

visit the temples from the early morning for worship. Most of them keep daylong *upabasha* and remain awake the whole night praying Shiva. They wait for the lighting of Maha dipa at the pinnacle of the temples after which they break *upabasha*.

Maha Shivaratri is celebrated in all Shiva temples. Thousands of devotees flock to the temples from the early morning for the worship. The celebrations in the Dhabeleswar temple at Cuttack, Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar, Lokanath temple at Puri, Chandrashekar temple at Kapilash at Dhenkanal, Gupteswar temple at Koraput and Harishankar temple at Bolangir are more known and attract large devotees. In some places big fairs are arranged where large varieties of items are bought and sold.

Several fables and folktales mention the benefits of observing Maha Shivaratri. As mentioned before, Maharishi Narada advised the mankind to fast on this night and worship all powerful Shiva so that the sins that are committed in the past three lives are pardoned with his kindness. Another fable describes the episode of king Chitrabhanu. It is said that in his previous birth, he was a hunter and was living by hunting birds and animals. On a Maha Shivaratri day, he killed an animal but could not carry it as he was overtaken by darkness of the night. To save himself from wild animals, he climbed a *bilwa* tree but could not sleep due to hunger. While keeping awake, he plucked the leaves from the tree and threw them one by one on the ground. They fell on a Linga beneath about which he had no knowledge. When the day dawned, he carried the carcass of the animal and went home. Because of the worship of the Linga even unknowingly, the messengers of Shiva came at the time of his death and carried his soul to the *Shivalok* (abode of Shiva). After enjoying the divine bliss, he was reborn as king Chitrabanu of Jambudwipa.

Annapurna puja: - Annapurna is worshipped on the *shukla pakshya astami* in the lunar month Chaitra. The goddess is said to be the manifestation of the primeval energy of the *Adishakti* (prime power). She is depicted as a fair woman standing on a lotus or sitting on a throne. In one hand she holds a golden rice bowl and in the other a ladle for stirring rice when it is cooked. Legend mentions that her sincere worshippers would never starve or be want of food. Her worship is not common in the State now.

Basanti Durga puja: - *Basanti* Durga puja is held from the *shukla pakshya sasthi* to *dashami* in the lunar month Chaitra. The rituals are similar to *saradiya* Durga puja described before. It is not celebrated in a big way like *Saradiya* Durga puja or *Dusahara*. Only in the *Badadeula* at *Puri*, other Durga temples and in some houses special *pujas* are performed.

Rama navami puja: - *Rama Navami* is celebrated on the *shukla pakshya navami* in the lunar month Chaitra. It commemorates the birth of *Rama*. Celebrations begin early in the morning. All *Rama* temples are beautifully decorated and special worships are offered to the deities. The devotees throng to the temples to participate in the *puja*. *Ramayana* and *Ramacharita manasa* are recited throughout the day. At many places *Ramaleela* (depicting the life story of *Rama*) is held for nine days concluding on *Basanti navaratri*.

Like *Dusshera*, many, particularly in north India, observe *Nabaratri* from the *amabasya* of lunar month Chaitra. During these nine days, they keep *upabasha* and worship *Durga* and her manifestations.

Ashoka astami puja: - *Ashoka astami puja* held in on Chaitra *shukla pakshya astami*. The term *ashoka* means devoid of sorrow and *astami* is the eighth day. As *Rama's* sorrow for separation from *Sita* was removed on this day, it is called *Ashokastami*. Legend has it that when *Rama's*

efforts to annihilate Ravana and recover Sita failed as Ravana was protected by Durga, Bivishana (younger brother of Ravana) advised him to propitiate before Durga. Rama did so and on the eighth day, the goddess pleased with his prayers withdrew her support. Thereafter, Rama killed Ravana. To celebrate it, Rama took out Shiva and Durga in a chariot in a grand procession.

Ashokastami Rata yatra (Rukuna Ratha yatra) is an important yatra in the State particularly in Bhubaneswar. On this day, the car festival of Lingaraja known as Rukuna ratha is held. (More about Rukuna Ratha yatra is described in “Important yatras”).

Satyanarayana puja: - Satyanarayan puja is performed to worship Satya-pir (Hindu god Satyanarayana and Moslem god Pir). It can be performed any day during the year or on some important events like birthdays or fulfilment of one’s desire. However, *pujnas* and *sankrantis* are considered more auspicious. Mornings and evenings are ideal but evenings are more suitable. It is advisable to perform *puja* once in a year for the general harmony, happiness and prosperity of self and family.

It is one of the simplest *pujnas* to invoke the blessings of Vishnu. No elaborate arrangements are necessary. Presence of a priest is also not essential though many engage one. All that are required is (i) a place large enough for the participants to sit and worship, (ii) a pedestal for installing Satyanarayana, Ganesha, Gouri, Varua and Nabagrahas. The latter are represented as *guas* placed over *pana*, (iii) items for the worship in *pancha upachara* and (iv) *bhoga* (usually *sirini* - a typical preparation from rice or atta powder, mashed banana, coconut gratings, sugar or jagery and milk).

After bath in the morning, the *karta* (performer of puja - usually the head of the family) keeps *upabasha*. The place

for *puja* and the pedestal are cleaned and sanctified by sprinkling cow dung water and *ganga jala*. The pedestal is often decorated with *muruja* and banana saplings are tied around its four corners. Before the *puja*, the idol or image of Vishnu (Satyanarayana), Ganesha, Gouri, Varua and Nabagrahas (in the form of *guas* on *paana* are installed on the pedestal. They are adorned with new clothes and fresh flowers. Those worshipping Salagram (icon of Vishnu) install it on the pedestal.

The *puja* starts with the installation of *kalasa* which is the embodiment of all gods and goddesses. Thereafter, Ganesha, Gouri, Varuna and Nabagrahas are worshipped. Ganesha is invoked to remove obstacles that may occur during the *puja* and also for removing any inadequacy in it.

The rest of the *puja* consists of worship of Satyanārāṇaya. Names of Satyanārāṇaya are chanted along with offering of *panchamruta*. *Sirini* is offered as *bhoga*. After all these are over, the Satyanarayana brata katha is read out and all present listen. Usually, the *katha* is narrated in the form of *pala* when the *gayaka* and the *palias* narrate the episodes in a verse form. The *puja* ends with *pushpanjali* and *arati*. All present are given a *panchamruta* and *bhoga*.

Santoshi maa puja: - The worship of Santoshi maa is relatively new in the State. Santoshi maa is believed to be the *manasa kanya* (daughter born out of mind) of Ganesha and believed to possess the wisdom of Ganesha and the powers of Parvati and Lakshmi. She is considered as the “Mother of Satisfaction”. Both men and women worship her for fulfilment of their desires and to tide over any misfortunes. There is no fixed date for her *puja* which can be started any time during the year. Generally, she is worshipped for sixteen continuous Sukrabaras or until one’s vow is fulfilled. It is thus known as Shola Shukrabara brata. The worshippers keep *upabasha* and

worship her offering raw sugar candy and roasted chickpea (*gur-chana*). Eating or touching any thing bitter or sour is strictly forbidden. On conclusion of the sixteen Sukrabaras or the period of vow, *udyapana* is done when eight children are fed and offered new cloithes and money.

Alakshmi puja: - Little is known about the worship of Alakshmi, the elder sister of Lakshmi as she not generally worshipped. Some invoke her outside their house during Lakshmi puja on Dipabali mainly to prevent her entry. She is known as the goddess of adversity. When Alakshmi emerged during the *samudra manthana*, her colour was black and she wore black garments and ornaments made of steel. She carried a broomstick in her hand and rode an ass. Neither the *debatas* nor the *asuras* accepted her. At last Brahma allowed her to reside in a *peepal* tree where she flutters as leaves as the wind blows.

Pitru puja (Shradha): - Hinduism is a way of life - path of eternal spiritual discipline. Recognising the needs of human beings, ancient sages have suggested fourfold ideal to be practiced by every members of the society. They are (i) debt to the gods (*deva runa*) (ii) debt to the sages (*rishi runa*) (iii) debt to the ancestors (*pitru runa*) and (iv) debt to the society. These debts, to some extent, are repaid through *bhava* (spiritual emotions and feelings). Among these, Rig veda gives importance to the first three ideals that are called *runa trayo*. The first type is repaid by performing *yajnas* or *vedic* sacrifices to gods, second by study of scriptures and Vedas and the third by raising family whose progeny should perform *pitru puja* to the *pitru purushas* (ancestors).

Pitru puja is performed to repay *pitru runa*. It is one of the sacred *pujas* in one's life. *Shradha* (rites in in memory of *pitru purushas*) is one of the means to repay *pitru runa*. It seems that the concept of *shradha* was conceived by sage

Atri - one of the *sapta rushis*. He was the first to perform *shradha*. He narrated the rituals to his grandson Nimi (son of Ikshbaku) that established the rituals that are practiced today. Garuda purana mentions that a householder should remember his *pitru purushas*. Markendeya purana adds that if *pitru purushas* are remembered they bestow health, wealth, knowledge and longevity and ultimately *mokshya*. According to Ramayana, when Bharata met Rama, Lakshmana and Sita during exile and mentioned about the death of Dadharatha, Rama performed *shradha* for his deceased father. Now also, in the Badadeula at Puri, lord Jagannatha performs the *shradha* of his ancestors.

Manu sastra prescribes the following types of *shradhas*: -

- (i) Sapindakarana shradha
- (ii) Parbana (Sambastarika Barsika or Annual) shradha
- (iii) Pitrupakshya and Mahalaya shradha
- (iv) Paya shradha
- (v) Gaya shradha
- (vi) Brahmakapali shradha
- (vii) Nandimukhi shradha
- (viii) Nitya shradha

Sapandikarana shradha: - Sapandikarana shradha is the first *shradha* after a year of death. According to Garuda purana, when a man dies, its mortal remains gets freed from the body after the *dasha kriya* (tenth day rites after death) and starts journey to *pitru loka* and takes twelve months to reach there. During these periods, it has no access to food and water. After Sapandikarana shradha, his hunger and thirst are satisfied and the soul is elevated to *pitru loka* and categorised as *parbana*. It authorises descendants to perform *sambastarika* or *barsika* and *parbana shradhas*. Sapandikarana shradha is

an important event usually performed in a big way a year after the death by feeding *brahmins*, relations and friends in the memory of the deceased.

Sambastarika or Barsika shradha: - It is said that a day in *pitru loka* is equivalent to a year in *martya loka* (mundane world). Hence, Sambastarika or Barsika shradha is observed on the following years after Sapandikarana shradha on the day and month of death. It is thus an annual ritual.

Parbana, Pitrupakshya or Mahalaya shradha: - The fortnight commencing from the *punnima* of lunar montha Bhadrava and ending on Mahalaya amabasya in the lunar month Aswina is lknown as *pitru pakshya*. According to scriptures, during this fortnight *pitru purushas* leave *pitru loka* to reside with their descendants in *martya loka*. Hence, their descendants propitiate and perform *shradha* known as Parbana, Pitrupakshya or Mahalaya shradha. Parbana shradha can be performed daily throughout the fortnight or on any one of the days. The last day of the fortnight i.e. Mahalaya amabasya is considered most auspicious and many prefer to perform *shradha* on this day.

Parbana shradha has the association with the renowned Mahabhatara hero Karna who was a great philanthropist and never said no to anyone who asked him for anything. He was a great donor and gave unlimited gold and silver in charity but never food items. Because of his good deeds and charities, he ascended to Baikuntha where he found himself amidst gold and silver but no food. He then realised that though he had made all kinds of charities, he had never donated food. He prayed the gods to send him back to the earth for a fortnight so that he can make up the deficiency. In this fortnight he fed the *brahmins* and the poor with all kinds of food items and returned to Baikuntha on the Mahalaya amabasya. Thereafter, he was offered plenty of food to eat.

Paya or Badabadua shradha: - Paya shradha is performed on the evening of Dipabali amabasya. It is believed that *pitru purushas* who had come during *pitru pakshya* finally leave for *pitru loka* on this evening. In their memories, their descendants perform *shradha*. Towards the evening the family members assemble in the courtyard where a figure of a large sail boat is drawn in *muruja* (coloured powder) Usually, the boat has seven chambers in the north for seers and sages, ten chambers in the east for the gods and the central chamber for the *pitru purushas*. On these chambers, items like cotton, mustard seed, turmeric, vegetables and sweets etc. are placed. On the central chamber a bundle of *kaunria kathis* (dry jute stems) with wick cloth around their ends are placed. They are lit at the beginning of the function. Each member of the family holds a lighted *kathi* and pointing it towards the sky bade adieu to the *pitru purushas* reciting “*Bada badia ho, andhara re asa, aluaa re jao, Baisi pahacha re gadagadu thao*” (meaning “Oh! Our ancestors, you had come on the dark fortnight of Mahalaya, now it is time for you to depart for the heaven. We are showing you the light so that you will have a safe journey to *Baisipahacha* - the abode of lord Jagannatha). Besides the the various items on the boat, a *sila and silapua* (mortar and pestle) and a *hala* (plough) are also kept and worshipped. Various kinds of *pithas* (cakes) are offered to the *pitru purushas* and then eaten by the family members. Badabadua shradha is not now observed in its earlier forms. It is symbolically observed in some homes by lighting *kaunria kathis*.

Associated with Paya shradha is the tradition of Akasha dipa. In olden days - (in some places even now) earthen pots with a small window or a hole and containing a lighted *dipa* are hung on a long bamboo pole in front of the houses. These, known as Akasha dipas, were symbolic of illuminating the dark path that the *pitru purushas* followed while returning to Baikuntha - their abode after *pitru pakshya*.

Gaya shradha: - Besides above *shradhas*, special *shradha* is performed at Gaya on the banks of river Falgu for the *mokshya* of *pitru puusha*. It can be performed by any of the ancestors and at any time of the year after Sapandikarana shradha preferably during *pitru pakshya* and after *asthi bisarjana* (immersion of mortal remains) in Ganges at Triveni. It is believed that after Gaya shradha *pitru purushas* attain *mokshya* and are freed for ever and find place in Baikintha.

Gaya derives its name from mythological *asura* Gayasura who received a boon from Shiva to be invincible. Puffed up with pride, he started tormenting and torturing *debatas* who approached Vishnu to save them from his menace. Vishnu found that the only way to kill him was to crush him to *patala* (under earth). He approached the demon and desired to perform *yajna* on his back and asked him to remain still during the *yajna*. The demon readily agreed taking it as a divine blessing. Thereafter, Vishnu performed the *yajna* and despite intense heat from the holy fire, the demon remained motionless. At the end of *yajna*, Vishnu killed him by crushing him under his feet and sent him to *patala*. But impressed by his devotion and act to remain still, Vishnu gave him salvation and offered him a boon. Gayasuara prayed that whoever performs *shradha* on his back his *pitru purushas* would attain *mokshya* and be freed from the mundane world. Vishnu granted the boon. Therefore, it is believed that *pitru purushas* attain *mokshya* after Gaya shradha.

Gaya shradha vs. Barsika shradha: - Many believe that after Gaya shradha, there is no need to perform Barsika shradha and thus discontinue it. This seems to be based on the premise that *pitru purushas* attain *mokshya* after Gaya shradha. As *shradha* by very definition is remembrance or paying obeisance to *pitru purushas*, Gaya shradha in no way has any relevance to Barsika shradha. All Odiya

panjis prescribe Barsika shradha even though Gaya shradha was performed. Further, it is important to mention that in Badadeula at Puri, lord Jagannatha, (as incarnation of Rama), performs Barsika shradha for Dasharatha even though Rama had performed Gaya shradha. In the light of above, Barsika shradha should not be done away even though Gaya shradha was performed.

Brahmakapala shradha: - Brahmakapala is place on the banks of river Alaknanda at Badrinath in Uttarakhand. *Shradha* at this place is believed to render similar benefits like Gaya shradha. Therefore, pilgrims to Badrinatha invariably perform it.

Nandi shradha: - This is a special *shradha* performed by the bride just before the wedding. It is said that after marriage, the bride adopts the *gotra* (clan) of her husband and thus becomes a member of another family. She is thus debarred from performing the *shradha* of his paternal *pitru purushas*. Therefore, before leaving her parent's home, she performs Nandi shradha remembering her paternal *pitru purushas*.

Nitya shradha: - In addition to above *shradhas*, some remember their *pitru purushas* daily and offer *tarpana*. Standing in knee deep water after morning bath, they remember their *pitru purushas* and offer *arghya* and *tila* as *tarpana*.

The above are brief information about the worship of *pitru purushas* and *shradhas*. Of late, the solemn sentiments behind them are fading away. Many are not observing Barsika shradha on the wrong premise of performing Gaya shradha. It is reiterated that *shradha* in any form is an occasion to remember the *pitru purushas* and repay *pitru runa*. The argument that what would happen if *shradha* is not performed or *pitru purushas* really exist are irrelevant. It is more for self-realisation.

Important festivals

Festivals are festive occasions associated with religious events. They are mostly observed as community celebrations. People young and old take part in them and enjoy. Besides the traditional festivals, there are many regional and tribal festivals. Few of the important festivals are described below: -

Akshya trutiya and Muthi anumula: - Akshya trutiya on the *shukla pakshya trutiya* in the lunar month Baisakha is widely observed as a festival. The term 'akshya' in Sanskrit means 'the one that never diminishes'. Therefore, the day is considered auspicious to start any new venture like constructing new house etc. It is an important day as the constructions of *rathas* for the Ratha yatra of lord Jagannatha and his three weeks Bahara Chandana yatra begins on this day. The day is exclusively an agri-based festival. Farmers irrespective of their caste religiously observe it. They start broadcasting paddy seeds in the fields on this day. It is therefore called Muthi anumula or Muthi chhuan. Taking early morning bath, they wear new clothes and carry the paddy seeds in new baskets to their fields. There they worship Lakshmi and broadcast the seeds ceremoniously praying the goddess for a rich harvest. In the evening many delicacies are prepared in respective homes and eaten by family members and shared with relations and friends.

Of late, the day is observed for buying long term assets like land, gold and silver etc. as it is believed that they shall grow with time. Jeweller's shops are crowded with buyers. This was not a traditional practice in the State and is recently introduced following their north Indian friends.

Raja parba: - Raja festival is celebrated on the *sankranti* of solar month Mithuna corresponding to lunar month Jyestha.

It is observed mainly in Cuttack and districts surrounding it. Though basically it is a festival of young girls, it is also an agro-based festival. During the previous summer months, the parched fields were ploughed making use of occasional summer showers and paddy seeds were broadcast. This *sankranti*, heralds the *barsha rutu* (rainy season). To celebrate the advent of rains, this joyous festival is observed for four consecutive days.

According to a popular belief, as the women menstruates showing sign of fertility, so also Basumati or Bhu-devi (mother Earth) menstruates for three days. As in traditional Odiya homes, menstruating women do not touch anything and take rest, likewise Bhu-devi is not touched and allowed to take rest during these days. All agricultural activities are suspended and resumes only after the fourth day observed as Basumati snanna like human beings.

Significantly Raja is a festival for unmarried girls. Just as the Bhu-devi prepares to quench her thirst with the oncoming rains, the unmarried girls groom themselves for their impending matrimony. They observe the festival for three consecutive days. On the first day known as Pahali raja, they get up before dawn, anoint bodies with turmeric paste and oil, take purification bath in nearby rivers or ponds, coiffure their hair with coloured ribbons and tassels and wear colourful new clothes. Thereafter, they do not take bath for the next two days i.e. Raja and Basi raja. They do not touch⁵³ the ground and do any work like cutting, grinding or cooking during these days; notionally signifying the menstruating cycle of Bhu-devi. They spend time in festive mood moving around in groups and socialising with friends and relations. They eat pre-cooked food of hard varieties like

53 In my childhood, when leather or plastic sleepers were not available, girls wore improvised sleepers made of *gua bakula* (betlenut tree barks).

podo pitha, *arisha* and *muan* etc. that remain unspoilt for several days.

One of the main attractions of Raja festival is *doli* (swing). Because of this, it is also called swing festival. *Dolis* are fixed to the branches of mango or banyan trees and are decorated with flower garlands. They are of different types e.g. *Ram doli*, *Charki doli* *Pata doli* and *Dandi doli* etc. to name a few, depending upon their construction and seating arrangements. The village belles including the recently married ones gather around them and enjoy swinging up and down renting the sky with chorus of joyous Raja ballads. Such ballads, often composed extempore, are full of joyful spirits of girlhood days. Some of them through sheer grace of diction and sentiment have earned prominence in Odiya folk songs. Another attraction of Raja is *puchi khela* - a kind of outdoor games played in open ground around the *dolis*. The girls move in a rhythmic movement on their feet with knees flexed singing Raja ballads. People watch and enjoy it standing at distance. It is strenuous and perhaps meant to tone up their abdomen muscles and the ovary for ease of child birth in their later life.

While the unmarried and recently married ones scatter beauty, grace and music all around, the womenfolk get some relief from their household chores since no cooking or other jobs are to be performed. They assemble at friends or relatives houses and spend the days gossiping and playing indoor games like ludo and cards. Rolling different kinds of *paana* (betel) during such gossips is a favourite pastime. The boys and young men keep themselves engaged in more strenuous activities like playing *guli danda* and *bagudi* (*kabbadi*) etc. They also organise night long dramas or *yatras*.

The festival had a unifying impact in the society. The get-together of the men, women and children and the exchange

of *raja pithas* amongst friends and neighbours contributed to a harmonious living and removed misunderstandings. With changing time, the festivities during Raja festival are progressively fading. Like many other Odiya festivals, it is not observed in same spirit and enthusiasm. Rarely one finds the village belles in their colourful dresses and coiffure around the *dolis* renting the sky with Raja ballads or playing *puchi*. May be in some villages, the festivity might be observed with its earlier tempo.

Rakshya bandhana: - Rakshya bandhana or Rakhi is celebrated on the *puṇnima* of lunar month Sravana. It is the sacred practice of sisters tying *rakhi* (sacred thread) around the wrists of their brothers as a symbol of protecting them. The *puṇnima* is thus known as Rakhi *puṇnima*. To some extent, it is similar to *Khudurikuni osha* which young girls observe seeking protection by their brothers. Rakhi is not a traditional festival of the State but is now observed.

There are several stories about the origin of *rakhi*. In the Vedic and *puranic* periods, the *debatas* and the *asuras* were fighting amongst themselves. Unfortunately the *asuras* were in a stronger position. Indra, the king of the *debatas*, was much worried. His wife Indrani could not see him in this state. With her religious power she prepared a *kabacha* (amulet) and tied it around his wrist to safeguard him from the attack by the *asuras*. She proved right, as on that day (Sravana *puṇnima*), the *debatas* won the battle and Indra was unhurt. As the *kabacha* had the power of protecting the person wearing it, it came to be known as *raksha sutra* or *rakhi* and the ceremony of tying it was called Raksha bandhan. Thereafter, it became a tradition for the wives to tie *rakhi* on their husbands' wrist on the Shravan *puṇnima*. With time, it became tying *rakhi* by sisters on brothers rather than between husbands and wives.

According to another story Bali was a great devotee of Vishnu. It seemed Bali would soon rule over the three worlds (Swarga, Martya and Patala). This made Indra insecure who worshipped Vishnu and asked his help to save his throne. Vishnu accepted his prayer and overthrew Bali. Later, he granted the boon of immortality to Bali and promised to take care of his kingdom. To keep his promise, Vishnu left Baikunta, and went to safeguard Bali's kingdom leaving Lakshmi alone. Lakshmi went to Bali, as a poor *brahmin* woman and asked for shelter. She regarded Bali as her brother and tied a *rakhi* round his wrist. She asked Bali to relieve Vishnu from watching his kingdom and send him back to Baikunta. In compliance of his *rakhi* sister's request, Bali immediately asked Vishnu to leave his kingdom and go back to Baikunta and live with Lakshmi. This happened on the Shraavan purnima.

Another story from the mythology tells about Yami, the sister of Yama tying a *rakhya sutra* around her brother's wrist on every Shraavan purnima. Following this, it became a tradition for sisters to tie *rakhi* on their brother's wrist. In return, the brothers bestow blessings and promise to protect them from all the problems and difficulties that they might ever face.

But the more reasonable explanation of its present origin seems to be based on the medieval history of Rajasthan. When Mewar was threatened by Bahadur Shah of Gujrat, maharani Karnawati sent a *rakhi* to Mogul emperor Humayun asking for help. Humayun realising the importance of *rakhi* immediately came to protect her. That day was Shravana purnima. Since then, girls in Mewar started observing the day as Rakhi purnima. It was observed all over Rajasthan and later all over India as a sacred bond between brothers and sisters.

On this day, the brothers invariably visit their sisters who tie colourful *rakhis* on their wrists applying *tika* (sandlewood paste or vermilion marks on forehead) and performing *bandapana*. Usually, brothers offer some gifts in return. The day is spent in festivity between sisters and brothers. Sisters also send *rakhi* by post to brothers unable to visit them. This way, the bonds between sisters and brothers are depicted.

Nuakhai: - Nuakhai also known as Nabanna is an agri-based festival observed on *sukla pakshya panchami* in the lunar month Bhadrava i.e. day after Ganesha chaturthi. It is observed to welcome the harvest of new paddy. In local language ‘*nua*’ means new and ‘*khai*’ means to eat. It thus implies to eat the newly harvested paddy. Though observed throughout the State to welcome the harvesting of new paddy, it is more fervently observed to in western Odisha as a community festival. People worship Lakshmi with *nua* or new paddy obtained from their fields.

According to some, origin of Nuakhai can be traced to Vedic era when the *rishis* talked of *pancha yajna* - the five important activities in the annual calendar of an agrarian society. They are *sita yajna* (tilling of land), *pravapana yajna* (sowing of seeds), *pralambana yajna* (cutting of crops), *khala yajna* (harvesting of grains) and *prayayana yajna* (preservation of produce). Nuakhai may be seen evolved out of the third activity, namely *pralambana yajna*, which involves cutting the first crop and reverently offering it to presiding deity.

There could be some reason for observing the festival in Bhadrava month even though the *karif* (autumn) crop may not be ready for harvesting. The idea is to offer it to the presiding deity before any birds or animals peck or eat it. Previously no date was fixed and it depended on the day the crop started ripening. The village elders got together and discussed with

village priests the *tithi* and *lagna* (the auspicious day and time) when the *nua* was to be harvested. Thus, the day of festival varied from place to place. However, in 1991 CE, the present date was decided for observing throughout the State. The government has also declared the day as a State holiday.

Nuakhai is celebrated both as a community festival and also at homes. People wear new clothes and worship Lakshmi with *nua*. Later, the *nua* is cooked as a *jau* (salted porridge) or *kheeri* (sweet porridge) in a new utensil and offered to the goddess. Along with *jau* or *kheer*, *arisa pitha* made of *nua* is also offered. The eldest of the family then distributes these to other members. After taking the *nua* preparations, the youngsters offer respect to the elders and seek their blessings. Thereafter follows the *nuakhai juhara* which is the exchange of greetings between friends and relations. In some places, community feasts and entertainment programmes are organised. Thus, Nuakhai is observed with gaiety.

At Badadeula in Puri, Nabanna is also observed and lord Jagannatha is offered newly harvested rice.

Sunia parba: - Sunia parba falls on the *shukla pakshya dwadashi* in the lunar month Bhadrava which symbolises the beginning of traditional Odiya New Year. It reckons the reigning year of Gajapati Maharaja of Puri in *anka*⁵⁴ which the *panjis* and *jatakas* (horoscopes) follow in addition to other details. The day is also the birthday of Bamana and some say it to be the birthday of legendfary king Indradyumna.

Previously, the *rajas* and *zamindars* of erstwhile princely states and estaters observed the day for renewing the lease

54 Anka was once used to reckon year in Odisha. The famous famine of 1866 CE that occiured in the Na-anka of the then Gajapati king of Puri is still known as Na-anka durbhikha.

of land and for collecting the revenues from *ryotas* (farmers and cultivators) who paid in cash or kind. This was known as Sunia veti. With the abolition of *zamindari* system, it has no relevance now and is not observed.

Kumara utshaba: - Kumara utshaba is celebrated on the *pujurnima* of lunar month Aswina. The festival is dedicated to Kumara (Kartikeya). It is observed throughout the State with regional variations. Like Raja festival, it is essentially a festival of unmarried girls though youngmen and community participate.

As a prelude to Kumara *pujurnima*, the month long Janhi osha is observed by unmarried girls. Starting from Bhadrava *pujurnima*, they gather at the *tulashi chownra* every evening and decorate it with *janhi* (ridge gourd) flowers that bloom during this time. The origin of this *osha* and its significance are not much known. It seems to be a form of Tulashi puja. With passage of time, it has almost faded or observed at very few places.

On the *pujurnima* day, the unmarried girls worship Surya, Chandra and Kumara in the hope of getting a groom as beautiful and chivalrous as Kumara. They take bath early in the morning and observe fast. Wearing new clothes, they offer *anjali* (offerings with palms folded) of *khai* or *lia* (puffed rice paddy) to Surya. Thereafter till evening they spend the day in leisure playing *puchi* or *chatta* and other indoor games. Towards the evening, they prepare *chanda* by mixing the *khai* (offered in *anjuli*) with *chhena* (cottage cheese) and *guda* (jaggery) giving it a flat round or creasant shape as that of Chandra. Some add pieces of *kakudi* (cucumber), *akhu* (sugar cane) and *nadia* (coconut) etc. to make it tastier. When Chandra appears, they carry the *chanda* to a nearby waterbody like a river or a pond and looking at the reflection of Chandra on the water offer it to him while praying to bless

them with a handsome husband like Kumara. Then all take a portion of *chanda*.

In the bright moonlight, the girls dance and sing folksongs⁵⁵. The young men also join them. The atmosphere becomes so addicted that anybody would be delighted to witness and listen. The festival is mainly for the enjoyment of unmarried girls. It offers opportunities for the young men and the girls to mix freely.

Agni utshaba: - Agni utshaba is held on the *purnima* of lunar month Magha known as Agira purnima. Preparations for the Agni utshaba start well in advance. The whole community gets involved in it. A week before the *purnima*, the girls start sweeping the village roads and collect refuse at a place. The womenfolk start cleaning their respective houses. The men start collecting *kuta* (hay) and firewood for the occasion. The entire village is thus cleaned before the *utshava*. On the day of *purnima*, the *kuta* and firewood collected by each family is stacked at a central place making a huge pile. As the evening sets in and the moon appears, the community gathers around and ignite it. Prayers are offered to Agni and *bhoga* is offered. Usually, people offer vegetables like sweet potatoes and brinjals which they eat after they are roasted. Since the month of *Magha* is the peak of winter, people enjoy the evening with the warmth of the bonfire and welcome the coming autumn.

Agni utshava holds special significance to the farmers who believe that direction of the inferno predicts the yield of crops in the coming year. An eastward tilt reflects high tides and entry of saline water into the fields whereas a westward tilt predicts floods. Only a tilt towards north-east means a good crop. The direction of inferno is carefully watched and people rejoice if it is towards north-east predicting good crops.

55 *Kumara punei Jhana go phula bauna beni. Kumari jhianka apurva ananda puchi khelibaku mana go phula baula beni*

Dipabali: - Dipabali or the Festival of Light is celebrated on the Kartika amabasya. The *amabasya* is associated with the following festivals that precede or follow the Dipabali.

Dhanwantari jayanti or Yama dipabali: - Two days before the Dipabali is Dhanawantri jayanti or Yama dipabali (already described in “Important pujas”). It is not much observed now. In its place Dhanteras is observed by many.

Dhanteras: - Dhanteras is a north Indian festival. Literally *dhana* means wealth and *teras* means thirteen as it is the thirteenth day. On this day, the shops and business houses are decorated with tiny lamps and *rangoli*. It is customary to add gold or silver to the family wealth to celebrate the event. People rush to jewellers shop to buy them.

Naraka chaturdashi: - The day after Dhanteras or the day preceding Dipabali is Naraka chaturdashi. It marks vanquishing of demon Naraka by Krushna. It is not much observed in individual homes but is observed in Badadeula at Puri. However, being preparatory to Dipabali, people start cleaning and decorating their homes. Many homes are illuminated and fire crackers are burst.

Dipabali: - The most important and colourful festival on the *amabasya* is Dipabali. Literally, *dipa* means lamps and *avali* is row. True to its meaning, people decorate their houses with rows of lamps or candles and burst crackers. They also exchange sweets and gifts as expressions of friendship, goodwill and joy.

Dipabali is associated with the story of Vishnu who in Vamana incarnation vanquished Bali and banished him to Patala (Hell). However, he was allowed to return to Prithivi once in a year on the Kartika amabasya to light millions of lamp to dispel darkness.

An important *puja* associated with *dipabali* is Lakshmi puja. It was not a traditional *puja* in the State but is now celebrated by many following the practices in Gujrat, Maharastra and other states. After illuminations and bursting of crackers, the goddess is worshipped in her most benevolent mood. The family assemble at a place and worships the goddess. According to Gujrati, Maharastrian and Rajasthani belief, the worship is associated with her marriage with Vishnu and her visits every home during the night. Therefore, after worshipping her, people brightly illuminate their homes with doors and windows kept open. People also indulge in fun gambling linked to Parvati playing dice with Shiva and her pronouncement that whosoever gambled on Dipabali night would prosper through out the ensuing year.

Historically, the origin of Dipabali can be traced back to the ancient India. It was possibly a harvest festival since it falls immediately after reaping of crops. There are various folktales surrounding it. No matter whatever may be the origin of Dipabali, it is certainly the grandest festival in the State. It not only illuminates the homes but also the hearts and minds of the people of all races and religions

Chhota dipabali: - The day following Dipabali is Chhota dipabali. Though, Govardhan Annakuta mohoustaba is observed in Badadeula at Puri, no functions as such is held at individual homes. However many illuminate thir homes and burst crackers extending the festive mood.

Bhatru dwitiya or Bhaidooj: - After the colourful celebrations of Dipabali and Chhota dipabali, sisters get ready for Bhatru dwitiya or Bhaidooj on *shukla pakshya dwitiya* of lunar month Kartika. The term *bhai* means brother and *dwitiya* or *doooj* means the second day. On this day, the sisters ceremonise their love towards brother by putting *tika*

and perform *arati*. Like Rakhi, brothers visit their sisters to celebrate the occasion.

The day is also called Yama dwitiya as it is believed that on this day, Yama visited his sister Yami who put *tika* and prayed his well being. Thus it is held that any one who receives *tika* from his sister would never be hurled to hell. Except in some places in western Odisha and in Badadeula at Puri, Bhaidooj or Yama dwitya was not observed in the State. Following the practice in other states, it is now observed in some homes.

Boita bandana utshaba: - Boita Bandana utshaba is celebrated on the early morning of the *puṇnima* in the lunar month Kartika. Early in the early morning on the *puṇnima*, people gather in numbers at sea shore, riverbanks and waterbodies to float miniature replicas of boats to commemorate the ancient maritime trade and pay ovation to the *sadhabas* (maritime traders) who once sailed to far away archipelagos for trading. Those days, the marine engineering had not developed as it is now. They used to navigate the *boitas* taking advantage of the direction of wind with manipulations of *ajhala* (large fabric sails). During the lunar months Aswina to Margasira (September to December), the sea was generally tranquil and the wind blew in north easterly direction. Taking advantage of the wind, they were setting sails of their *boitas* towards these archipelagos. Again from lunar months Pausa to Baisakha (January to March) the wind blew in the reverse direction and these were the times for their return voyage. Thereafter the sea became turbulent due to the onset of south eastern monsoon and the voyages were suspended.

As Kartika puṇnima was an auspicious day, the *sadhabas* chose it for starting their outward voyages. They carried in their boats the local merchandise like paddy, betel and betel

nuts for trading and brought spices and other local produce in return. For their journey, the *sadhaba bohush* (wives and womenfolk of the *sadhabas*) assembled on the sea shores to give emotional send offs for the safe and pleasant voyage of their husbands. They articulated the folk limerick “*Aa-Ka-Ma-Bai* which is the acronym of the four lunar months (*Aa - Aswina, Ka - Kartika, Maa - Margasira* and *Bai -Baisakah*) signifying that these months were safe for their voyages. Then the sea shore reverberated with sounds from blowing of *sankha ghanta, hulahuli* and lights from *dipas* as the *sadhaba bohush* gave emotional send offs to the crews and their boats. These send off has culminated in the *Boita bandana utshaba* of today.

The maritime trade by the *sadhabas* is now a by gone history. But the ancient ritual is still alive in a symbolic form. After early morning bath on the *pujnama*, people (old, young and children), sail miniature replicas of *boitas* made of banana barks or *solo* (pith) in nearby rivers, ponds or water bodies placing on them a little rice, betel leaves and nuts (symbolic of merchandise) and a tiny lamps as nostalgic reminder of send off uttering the old limerick “*Aa, Ka, Ma, Bai. Pana gua thoi. Pana gua tora. Masaka dharma mora*”. The water body is illuminated with the lights from the tiny *dipas* in the miniature *boitas* and and sounds from blowing of *shanka* and *ghanta* etc. and presents a spectacular scene. In some traditional Odiya homes in rural areas, an image of a large *boita* is drawn on the courtyards in *muruja* and paddy and other merchandises placed on it and are worshipped on the eve of the *pujnama* as symbolic celebration of the maritime legacy. Perhaps, this practice has faded with time.

[*Boita bandana* can be associated with the legend of *Taapoi* of *Khudurikuni osha* (described in “*Osha*” also in “*Important pujas*”) observed by unmarried girls on all Sundays of lunar

month Bhadrava. It speaks of the travail of a young Odiya girl for the safe return of her seafaring brothers.]

To revive the memories maritime glory of the State, a cruise was organized in 1992 on the Kartika purnima. History was recreated when a seven member crew on board of a yacht INS Samudra sailed for Indonesian island Bali from Paradeep port retracing the ancient trade route highlighting the glorious trans-oceanic voyage of Kalingans.

Important yatras

Yatras literally mean journeys. In our context, they are the journeys of a god or goddess and are socio-religious festivals held during their worships. It differs from traditional *pujas* as the festivity elements predominate. They are thus the periods of celebration and enjoyment. The cultures behind these *yatras* have their roots in the age old traditions. People participate in in large numbers without distinction of class and caste. Temporary shops and markets come up and religious programmes are organised for the education and entertainment of the people. Though many of them have lost their significances in the changed circumstances, still they have a definite role in the society.

Danda and Jhamu yatra: - Danda and Jhamu yatras are dedicated to Shiva. It commences thirteen days before Mesha sankranti and ends on the *sankranti*. Though generally observed for thirteen days, it is also observed for seven, eighteen and twenty-one days as mentally promised by the participants. Accordingly they start the *yatra* to end on the *sankranti*. It is believed that this period is most auspicious for the worship of Shiva. Many religious treatises indicate that if Shiva is invoked during this period, the earth is blessed with good harvest, increase of wealth and all round prosperity.

The term *danda* in local dialect has many connotations. Mainly it means punishment and also a staff, stick, pole or sceptre. The participants undertake self-inflicted punishment carrying a staff.

There are several stories about the origin of the *danda yatra*. Because of vigorous movement during *yatra*, it is associated with Tandava nrutya of Shiva. It is said that once Ganesha while learning Tandava nrutya from Shiva thumped on the dais and the sound “*dan*” emanated. Simultaneously one of his *ghoonguras* (brass trinket) snapped from its chain and fell on the *mrudanga* (a percussion instrument) emanating another sound as “*da*”. Together, the word *danda* evolved and the dance received the blessings of Shiva associating with *udanda* (vigorous) movements of *Tandava nrutya*. There is another story which relates to Parvati. Finding that Vishnu had many festivals associated with his *leelas*, she became jealous and felt that some festival for the amusement of Shiva should also be observed by his devotees. She desired that the devotees of Shiva should perform Danda nata similar to the Tandava nrutya for the amusement of Shiva.

The *yatra* is held in two forms - atonement and festive. In the atonement form the participants worship Shiva and Kali with self-inflicted injuries making secret vows. In the festivity form, they move from village to village performing *nata* (street drama) for the entertainment of people.

The participants of the *yatra* are called *danduas* or *bhoktas*. They divide themselves into small groups. Usually, there are not more than thirteen⁵⁶ *danduas* in a group. The head of the group is called *pata dandua*. There is no caste

56 No 13 is generally associated with bad omen. It is not so in Danda yatra. The *yatra* is held for thirteen days. The number of *danduas* in a group is thirteen. The staff worshipped has thirteen knots.

distinction and whosoever desires can participate and join but women are not permitted. During the *yatra* period, they lead a pious life following certain strict regimen and keep partial *upabasha* living on a simple vegetarian meal (preferably *habishanna*) which they cook themselves and eat towards the evenings at a place away from habitations. Sound of any human voice brings an abrupt end to their eating. That is why at some places a *dhola* keeps on beating till the eating is over. During the day, they take only liquids like *pana* or *paida pani*. They do not chew *paana*, or consume tobacco and any alcoholic beverages or indulge in sex.

The *yatra* starts on the morning of the scheduled day. The *danduas*, after bath and purification rites, keep *upabasha* and meditate in a Shiva temple or in the Kaamana ghara⁵⁷. Towards the evening under the leadership of *pata dandua*, they perform customary *puja* and obtain the *agya mala* (garland of consent) of Shiva. They put it on the Gauri beta⁵⁸ that they carry. Then they proceed to *jalaghata* (nearby river of pond) to collect water for the Kaamana ghata⁵⁹. There they wear a *brata*. Men, women and children gather in number to witness the scene. The surroundings reverberate with the beating of *dhola*, blowing of *sankha* and *hulah*. The filled *ghata* is first worshipped under a banyan tree where the *homa* (worship with fire) and *jibanyasa* (giving life) are performed. The fire from the *homa* is used to ignite the Agni

57 In every village where the *yatra* is held, a hut or a room in the premise of a Shiva temple or in front of it is permanently built or earmarked for the worship and stay of the *danduas* during the period of *yatra*.

58 They are a pair of cane stick about two feet long covered with strips of black cloth or sari and red bangles. They represent Hara and Gauri whom *danduas* worship.

59 *Ghata* is an earthen pitcher worshipped in any worship. In Danda *yatra* it is called Kamana ghata. (*Kamana* meaning desire). Worship of the *ghata* signifies its blessings for fulfilment of desire.

danda⁶⁰. Then they go out in a procession through the village visiting different temples and place the Kaamana ghata in Kaamana ghara. The Gauri betas, Kaamana danda and Agni dandas are also placed by its side and worshipped. They are worshipped and *bhoga* is offered which they take. After this, they rest for the night.

The following days, they get up early morning and keep *upabasha*. In the afternoons, they roll on the hot ground which is known as Dhuli danda. After few rounds of rolling on the ground they go to the nearby river or pond carrying the Gauri betas and the Kaamana danda. There they perform various types of aquatic sports which are called Pani danda or Jala danda. After this, they return to the Kaamana ghara where *puja* like previous night is performed and *bhoga* is offered which they take.

In the night after the *puja* and completion of rituals the *danduas* led by *pata dandua* go in a procession on village peregrination. They carry with them the Gauri beta and the Kaamana danda. The Agni danda is used as a *mashala* (torch) to illuminate the procession. As the procession passes through the various *sahis* (localities), the householders welcome them and offer *bhoga*. After the village peregrination, they assemble at a common place usually in front of the house of an influential or well to do person who invites or sponsors their *yatra*. Usually he arranges lighting and a small *bedi* (altar) to place the Gauri beta. A *dandua* in rotation stands by its side holding the Kaamana danda. Others perform *nata*. The presentation of the *nata* is absolutely simple. It does not require a stage. Only an open space is used. A narrow path amongst the surrounding onlookers wends its way to

60 A hollow funnel shaped baked clay pot of length about a foot and a half and diameter two to three inches used to carry ignited *atta* (straw rope) during various rituals. And is also used as a *mashala* (torch)

a makeshift green room. Short stories from the mythology are enacted to the accompaniment of musical instruments like *dhola*, *mrudanga*, *jodi-nagra*, *mohuri* and *kahali*. These are often explained with *suanga* (graceful humour). Many amateur artistes also take part in the *nata*. While performing various acts the *danduas* carry the Kaamana danda. That is why, it is called Danda nata.

The performances go on till early hours of the morning after which *danduas* retire to the Kaamana ghara and take rest. In this manner the entire period of the *yatra* is spent visting and performing in neighboring villages. The villagers come in number to witness the *nata*. This is the festive form of the *yatra*. However, there are variations depending on local customs and rites.

The grand finale of the *yatra* is Jhamu yatra held on the *sankranti*. It is the most difficult and spectraluar event of the *yatra*. A *nian-gada*⁶¹ (fire pit) is dug in front of the temple of goddess Mangala or Hingula which is filled with red hot embers. The embers are kept burning by occasional sprinkling of *jhuna* (rosin). The *pata dandua* followed by other *danduas* walk bare foot over the burning embers in the *nian-gada*. Before doing so, they dip their feet in a ditch filled with milk. After crossing, they dip their feet in another ditch filled with turmeric water. All these are done to exhibit their purity and penance. They believe that performing these would lessen their sins. So great is their belief that nothing happens to their feet or body.

There are regional variations to Jhamu yatra that are known in different names. At some places the *danduas* walk on a pit filled with thorns or on sharp edged swords. At other places, two bent nails tied with threads are pierced

61 A fire pit of length about twenty-one cubits, width about three cubits and depth about cubits.

into the back of their skin before the deity. In that state, they move from village to village. They also roll on hot sand and perform many physical feats without caring for their bodily discomfort. What concerns them most is to appease the god and goddess to reduce their sufferings. They believe that performing these *dandas* would reduce their sins and generate happiness. The aim is atonement by self-inflicted injury.

Jhamu yatra in Mangala temple at Kakatpur of district Puri is famous all over the State. Thousands of onlookers visit the temple to witness the *danduas* walking on fire. The other important places are Galeri, Nuagaon, Kutagada in district Ganjam and Odagaon, Khandapara, Ranpur in district Nayagarh where over thousands of *danduas* participate.

The day after the Jhamu yatra or the conclusion of Danda yatra, the *danduas* follow the ritual of *manima suddhi*. They go in a procession carrying the Kaamana ghata, Gauri betas, Kamana danda and Agni danda to the river or pond from where they had initially brought the water. There after taking bath they immerse the Kamana ghata and the *brata*. Then they return to the *Kamana ghara* with the Kaamana danda, Gauri betas and the Agni dandas where they are stored. *Pana*, fruits and cakes of black gram are offered as *bhoga*. In some places a goat is sacrificed. This brings the *yatra* to an end.

Odisha has been a seat of shakti cult since time immemorial. Lord Jagannatha is said to be Dakshina Kalika. Shakti is believed to be the primordial cosmic energy that manifests in powerful goddesses in various names like Durga, Kali, Bimala, Sarala and Mangala etc. representing the creative powers in puranas and agamas. Therefore apart from Danda yatra, other yatras in the honour of shakti are held at various places. Two of such yatras are Patua and Hingula yatras. It is believed that these yatras originated out

of the mass religious feelings during the 10th or 11th century CE when shakti cult was prevalent. Apart from religious importances, they are the popular form of entertainment. Men and women gather and enjoyed the yatras.

Patua yatra: - Most of the festivals observed by low caste Hindus are associated with the worship of Shakti and Shiva. One such festival is Patua yatra. Throughout the lunar month Chaitra, the streets and lanes in the villages reverberate with sounds from *ghanta* (brass bell) and *dhola* (country drum) in the worship of goddesses Sarala, Hingula, Charchika, Bhagabati, Mangala and Chandi by their servitors. There is a popular belief amongst the rural people that on the day of Maha visubha sankranti goddesses appear and worshipping them removes evil forces. They are thus worshipped in the village streets on their notional visits to the village.

The worshippers known as *patuas* or *ghanta patua* belong to lower castes e.g, *bauri*, *kandara* and *pana* etc. They keep *upabasha* and move from villages to village in groups of two or four dressing themselves as women and holding a bunch of peacock feathers. A sacred pitcher symbolising the goddess or an idol of the goddess is carried on their head in a bamboo or cane basket. The religious procession is always accompanied by singing and dancing. The *patua* who dances with the holy pitcher on his head wears a black skirt, red blouse and a long piece of black cloth tightly covering the head having both sides to flow in equal length. While dancing, he holds both ends of the cloth and moves artistically with stretched arms in perfect harmony to the sounds from *ghanta* and *dhola*. Sometimes he dances on stilts and performs difficult acrobatic tricks. Men, women and children gather to worship the goddess. The surrounding also reverberates with auspicious *hulahuli* (a shrill sound made by women by rolling the tongue inside the mouth). They (mostly women) worship the goddess with

flowers and *dipas* offering new clothes, *pana* and *dakshina* (cash donations) to the *patuas* for their services.

Hingula yatra: - In addition to the Patua yatra, another *yatra* known as Hingula yatra specially dedicated to goddess Hingula is held every year during the lunar month Chaitra for nine days at Gopalprasad garh (about fourteen kilometers from Talcher). A weeklong fair known as Lok mohostava is also held. Temporary makeshift markets are established where people sell and buy household items. Cultural programmes are organized to make the fair attractive and add grandeur to the *yatra*. People attend in numbers to worship the goddess and witness the *yatra*.

Goddess Hingula is believed to be *agni* (fire) in the kitchen of Badadeula at Puri where she is worshipped every day before the fire in the *chulis* (hearth) is lit for cooking *mahaprasada*. It is mentioned in Mahabharata that king Nala of Vidarva was worshipping Hingula. It was by her grace that Nala was able to prepare *gauri-sauri paka* (cooked *bogas* of various curries and *dal* varieties). Thus the name of the goddess is associated with cooking. When king Indradyumna thought of introducing cooked *bhoga* for lord Jagannatha, he sought the permission of the lord and received orders in his dream to worship Hingula for the smooth conduct of cooking. Indradyumna then went to Vidarva and with the help of Nala brought the goddess in the form of fire to Puri. But a strange thing happened on the way when the kings were taking rest on the bank of river Singhada at Gopalprasad garh. The goddess suddenly disappeared and an astral voice announced that Gopalprasad garh would be her *peetha* (holy place). The voice further announced that her place of action will be the kitchen at Badadeula. Since that date, Gopalprasad garh has been the Hingula *peetha* where she is worshipped with much devotion.

On the *shukla pakshya chaturdashi* in the lunar month Chaitra, the goddess leaves the kitchen at Badadeula and gives *darshan* to the devotees in the form of a burning fire at Gopalaprasad garh. A few days before the *chaturdashi*, she enters the body of a *patiara* (one of the servitors) and indicates the direction of her appearance. Towards the midnight of the same day, the *dehuri* (head servitor) goes towards that direction to locate the exact the place of her appearance. On locating, he pacifies the goddess by making a fire of coal. A canopy given by the *raja* of Talcher is hung above the fire. Everyday during the *yatra* period more coal is added to increase the flame. Surprisingly, the canopy does not catch fire. Devotees gather in numbers to worship her and offer clothes, flowers and *bhogas* like coconut, bananas and sweets. They partake the *bhoga* without distinction of caste. The *yatra* ends on the ninth day when *sitala puja* is performed at the spot by the *raja* and the *dehuri*. The goddess then returns to the temple during the midnight. The fire is put off and the canopy is removed.

On this occasion, many perform the *mundan* ceremony of their children who sit in tandem while the barbers shave their head and offer the hair to appease the goddess. In the past, animal sacrifice was held which has now stopped. Only vegetable and sweets are offered as offerings. The worship represents a mixture of tribal worship and Sakta cult.

Chaiti ghodi yatra: - Associated with Baseli puja (described in “Important pujas”) is the month long celebration known as Chaiti ghodi nacha or Dummy mare dance. It is an important *yatra* in southern Odisha and mostly observed by the *keuta* community for the veneration of Baseli. On the Chaitra purnima, the *keuta* community worship a bamboo smeared with *sindura* and tied with a red cloth. It is then ceremonially split into several pieces out of which only twelve pieces are taken for preparation of the frame of the

mare. The frame after being dyed with red clay is covered with a *pata* (indigenous silk cloth). A colourfully painted mare head is fixed to the frame and a garland of *mandara* flowers is placed around her neck. The completed frame with mare head is worshipped till Baikasha *krishna pakshya astami* and then taken out for the dance.

A man clad with colourful costume enters through the hole behind its neck and hangs the frame on his shoulder. He then makes the Chaita ghodi to move with his steps to the rhythm of *dhola* and *mahuri* and associated folk lyrics. The event is usually held towards the evenings in a designated open ground in a village or in a group of adjoining villages. Generally the performance consists of a pair of Chaita ghoda and ghodi with two dancers - a male and a female (usually a male in female costume), a drummer and a piper. On rare occasions, the main dancer gets possessed and falls into a trance. Then somebody else replaces him. During the *nacha*, other characters also dance with folk songs based on different mythological episodes. In such *nachas*, the frames of Chaita ghoda and ghodi are ceremonially placed at their centre and they dance circling them with the audience sitting or standing all around and enjoying. Chaita ghodi *nacha* continues for a month until Baisakha purnima. After the festival, the heads are carefully taken out of the wooden frame and preserved in the local temples for use in the following year.

The origin of the Chaita ghodi *nacha* dates back to the horary past. It is one of the popular folk dances of the State and attracts both domestic and foreign audiences. The *keuta* community of coastal Odisha observe it with great devotion and austerity. Some scholars opine that in the past the freedom fighters through this festival mobilised the *keuta* community of Kujanga area as a means of freedom movement against the autocratic British administration.

Bagha nacha: - Another *yatra* associated with Baseli puja is the Bagha nacha (Tiger dance). It is performed to appease the goddess. After elaborate prayers, the body of the dancers are painted with black and yellow stripes resembling the coat of a tiger. The dancers, wearing tiger's masks and tails dance in the streets in the scorching heat of the Sun with typical movements of their hands and body to the rhythmic of beating of drums. The dance is usually performed in fulfilment of a vow. People gather in numbers to watch the dance and offer donations in cash and kind.

[Bagha nachha is exclusive to Baseli and Thakurani puja yatra. Impressed by it, noted film director *cum* producer Budhdeb Dasgupta produced the film Bag Bahadur that received the National Award some time back. In the film a man is driven to the brink of sanity by the tyranny of theart he practiced.]

Rukmini harana and Champak dwadashi yatra: - These two *yatras* are held exclusively in Badadeula at Puri and at few Jagannatha temples and in *sasana* villages of Puri on *shukla pakshya ekadashi* and *dwadashi* respectively in the lunar month Jyestha.

Rukmini is believed to be the incarnation of Lakshmi. During Dwaparayuga she took birth as the daughter of king Bhisma of Vidarva. She fell in love with Krishna and desired to marry him. But her elder brother Rukma hated Krishna and wanted her to marry Chedi king Sisupala. Rukmini sent a secret message to Krishna informing about it and requesting him to abduct her and marry. Krishna agreed and abducted Rukmini. When Sisupala⁶² came with his party to marry Rukmini, he was disappointed with Rukmini absence. This mythological event is enacted in Badadeula at

62 In local dialect, the term Sisipala is humorously used for any disappointment.

Puri when the servitors bring Madana mohana (*bije pratima* of lord Jagannatha) to Rukmini temple and temporally remove the idol of Rukmini as notional abduction. Number of devotees gathers in the temple to witness the scene.

The following day is Champaka dwadashi. Lord Jagannatha is worshipped with huge quantities of Champa flowers and leaves. Devotees visit the temple to see lord Jagannatha adorned with Champa flowers.

Dhanu yatra of Bargarh: - Mythology mentions that Kansa invited Krishna to a *yatra* in the solar month Dhanu with the clandestine intension of killing him. The theatrical representation of the *puranic* myth of Krushna leela is enacted in the eleven days Dhanu yatra of Bargarh between Dhanu and Makara sankrantis. Various events right from the wedding of Devaki to the fatal killing of Kansa as described in the scriptures are enacted in different location of the town to bring the ancient myths alive. In short the Krishna cult that influenced many form folk theatre in different parts of the country is seen in it. The Bargarh town and its neighbouring village Ambapalli become more or less the puranic sites Mathura and Gopapura respectively. A huge stage erected at the centre of the town becomes the *darbar* of Kansa. River Jira bordering the town becomes river Yamuna. The nearby mango grove and the pond serve as Brindabana and Kalini sorovara. The various scenes of Krushna *leela* are enacted at these places.

The most striking feature of the *yatra* is its largest cast and people's participation. The lead characters like Kansa, Ugrasena, Devaki, Basudeva, Krushna and Balarama are selected from amongst the local artist. The feminine roles are performed by males. The local residents as well as the visitors are also taken as characters. Everyone has a job to perform and everyone has a role to do. They all participate without any preparations and invitations.

The other important aspect of the *yatra* is its style of dialogue and delivery. There are no written scripts or specific dialogues for any scene. The theme provide an overall content and the particulars are filled up by the performers. In keeping with the episode, they deliver the dialogue extempore without much rehearsal or preparations. This freedom allowed to the performers gives rise to a series of imaginative compositions and interesting styles. The performances are so energetic and lively that the district administration plays a passive role at the back stage. It appears that the rules of Kansha prevail in the town in those days. However, discipline and decorum are maintained. General public enjoy his order as if he is the de-facto administrator of the town.

The *yatra* is held from the afternoons till the evenings. The scenes and action are held at different locations at Bargarh and Ambapali that fit into the episodes. The actors and the audience move from place to place to witness the scenes. The various cultural programmes for the entertainment of visitors continue thereafter till early hours of the morning. The *yatra* ends after eleven days with the notional killing of Kansa. His large size effigy is taken out on the streets and burnt marking the end of his tyrannical rule. Though the makebelieve scenes disappear and the town returns to normalcy, the cynical laughters of Kansha reverberate in the minds of the people until the *yatra* next year.

As per the tradition, the artist performing the role of Kansa visits Puri after the *yatra* to wash away the sins committed during it. He takes holy dip in the Mahodadhi (sea) and then visits lord Jagannath temple to beg apology for his character. He seeks blessings and forgiveness of lord Jagannatha for all his unholy utterances against Krishna and Balaram.

Dhanu yatras are also held at other places in western Odisha. But the *yatra* of Bargarh has become one of

worldwide carnivals. Like Ratha yatra at Puri and Bali yatra at Cuttack, it attracts global attention. To be in Bargarh during the *yatra* is a life time experience.

Chandana yatra: - The forty-two days long Chandana yatra is held from Baisakha *krushna pakshya trutiya* till Jyestha *shukla pakshya chaturdashi*. It marks the beginning of festivals of lord Jagannatha and the longest festival of the year in Puri. The *yatra* is divided into two phases of twenty-one days each (a) Bahara Chandana yatra and (b) Bhitara Chandana yatra.

In Bahara Chandana yatra, the *bije pratimas* (representative idols) of lord Jagannatha accompanied by Lakshmi, Bhu-devi and Ramakrishna alongwith Pancha Shivas are taken out every afternoon in a grand procession to the Narendra sorobara for *jalakrida* (aquatic frolic) and worshipped. There they cruise or circumnavigate the whole night in two beautifully decorated *chapas* (barges). People gather in numbers and watch the deities in the *chapas*.

The Bhitara Chandana yatra is held at Jalakrida mandapa inside Badadeula where the *Bije pratimas* are bathed and kept immersed in the water in a tub filled with water scented with *chandana*, *karpura* and fragrant flowers to get relief from the summer heat. The priests and *sebayats* perform special *pujas*. Devotee and general public do not participate in it. However, some watch from a distance.

*(Chandana yatra is described in detail in the book
"Saga of Jagannatha and Badedeula" by the author)*

Snanna yatra: - Snanna yatra of lord Jagannatha is held on the *puṇnima* of lunar month Jeystha known as Debasnanna or Snanna puṇnima. It is the annual sacred bath ceremony of Chaturdhamurtis. The idols are taken out in grand procession

from the *garva gruha* (sanctum sanctorium) of Badadeula to the Snanna mandapa where they are bathed with sanctified water. The rituals take place from the morning till evening after which lord Jagannatha dons Gajanana (Hati) besha. Snana yatra is exclusive to Badadeula at Puri. In other Jagannatha temples, special *pujas* are offered. Myriads of pilgrims and devotees from all over the places visit Puri to witness the festival.

As after effects of the sacred bath, the Chaturdhamurtis fall notionally sick. Like any sick person, they discontinue their daily routine and undergo convalescence. Therefore, instead of returning to *garva gruha*, they remain under treatment at Anbasara pindi (a temporary enclosure made of bamboo flats outside *garva gruha*) for a fortnight. During these days, the ailing deities are kept away from public *darshana*. Then the devotees go to Alaranath temple at Brahmagiri (a village about twenty kilometres from Puri) to worship Alaranath following the example of Chatinya Mahaprabhu who worshipped Alaranath as Jagannatha finding Badadeula closed.

The *anabasara* period is utilised for the annual repair and repainting of the wooden idols of the deities who are shifted to *garva gruha* on the last day of the fortnight. The following day, after *netra utshaba* (*chakshu unmochana* - opening of the eyes), the freshly painted deities give *darshana* to the devotees from *ratna simhasana* (jewelled throne) and then from the *rathas*.

*(Snanna yatra is described in detail in the book
"Saga of Jagannatha and Badedeula" by the author.)*

Sitala sasthi yatra: - *Shukla pakshya sasthi* in the lunar month Jyestha marks the end of the celebration of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati. It is perhaps a unique event

when the divine marriage takes place in a humanised form. All the local customs and traditions of a marriage like *prastaba* (proposal), *nirbandha* (betrothal), *nimantran* (invitation) and *vibhaghara* (marriage proper) etc. are all observed and performed religiously by a priest. The *yatra* was once confined to the *sasana* villages of Puri where it is still observed. It is now observed at many places. But the *yatra* in Sambalpur town is celebrated with much fan fare.

It is said that some four hundred years ago, the then raja Baliar Singh (1660 - 90 CE) of Sambalpur visited Puri on a pilgrimage. There, he was impressed with celebration of Sitala sasthi by the *brahmins* of *sasana* village and wished that similar festival should also be observed in his state. On his request, the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri deputed few *brahmin* families from the *sasana* villages to Sambalpur. The Raja settled them in different locations. These *brahmin* families were celebrating Sitala sasthi *yatra* in their native villages and started it in Samia gudi (Somnath temple) inside Sambalpur fort. Later during the reign of raja Ajit Singh (1725 - 76 CE), it received royal patronage. Since then the *yatra* is one of the important events in Sambalpur town. To start with, the *yatra* was observed in Jaruapada, Modipada and Nandapada where the *sasana brahmins* were settled. Now it is celebrated in other *padas* (hamlets) also. The celebrations in all *padas* are similar.

The host parents of Parvati are decided some time before the *yatra*. A notable family of the *pada* is selected or nominated. As Shiva is *swambhu* (self incarnated), the priest of the designated temple acts as his parent. To start with, the first *niti* (ritual) is *Ganthali hita*^{*63}. It literally means untying the knot. It breaks the relationship between the previous host parents of Parvati and establishes the new relationship with the host parents for the year. A couple of days later the idol of Parvati is brought from the temple to the house of host

63 Local dialect

parent and worshipped there. On an auspicious day before marriage, the host father of Parvati sends an emissary to the priest of the designated temple (host father of Shiva) with the marriage proposal. Traditionally, he presents a bundle of *sal* leaves to the priest or a proposal written on a palm leaf scroll. This is known as *Pathar pendi* in local dialect. The priest of the temple receives it and gives his consent. It is followed by *nirbandha* in which host father of Parvati and the priest as father of Shiva make divine promises to solemnise the marriage. The priest also presents bangles, vermilion and saris etc. for Parvati. Few local people are invited to witness and entertained with *prasada*. This is an important event in any Odiya marriage as after this the marriage is considered fixed and any violation is a crime before the divine. It is followed by *nimantrana* (invitation) known as *gua-gunda* in local dialect. It is generally done a day or two before the day of marriage (*panchami*) through formal cards or voice usually the later. All gods and goddesses of the nearby temples and the local people are invited.

Towards the evening on the day of marriage, i.e on *panchami*, the marriage procession starts from the designated temple to the house of host parent of Parvati with the *bije pratimas* (representative idols) of Shiva and other gods and goddesses in beautifully decorated palanquins with beautiful *medhas* (backdrops). Two men in the garb of Hanumana and Nrusingha take charge and lead the procession. The procession goes through various *padas* and people come out of their houses and worship. It reaches the house of the host parents of Parvati where the family receives the *bara-yatris* (groom's party) and entertains them with lavish meal. The *bije pratimas* of Shiva and Parvati are kept on a beautifully decorated *bedi* (altar). A priest performs the marriage and the host father of the bride performs *kanyadana*. Towards midnight after the marriage, Shiva and Parvati return to the

designated temple in a procession. It is the grand finale of the *yatra* that continues for more than ten to twelve hours. Traditionally, it is believed that after marriage Shiva and Parvati had gone for an earth tour. Earlier, the procession was confined to Sana and Bada sadaks as they were believed to be the limits of earth. Tyese days, it goes round the town. The procession is accompanied with the beating of drums, cymbals and bells. The processions of all *padas* congregate at a common place (usually Badabazar) where folk dances and martial arts are displayed. Sambalpur town becomes lively and bears a festive look. Roads and streets are decorated with flags and buntings. People from distance places visit the town to witness the *yatra*. Thereafter, the processions head for respective temples and the festivity for the year ends.

It is not clear why the celebration is called Sitala sasthi. *Sitala* in local language is cool and *sasthi* is the sixth day. Baisakha and Jeystha are the summer months in Odisha particularly in Sambalpur town where the heat is severe. Towards mid Jyestha (i.e after Sitala sasthi) pre monsoon showers start bringing down the temperature. Because of the onset of cooler period it might be called so. Coincidentally, it is observed that during Sitala sasthi, invariably there is light shower or drizzle.

Origin of Sitala sasthi: -Shiva purana mentions that when the demon Tarakasura was causing terror and devastation all over the three worlds (Swarga, Martya and Patala), the *devatas* approached Vishnu for relief. Vishnu expressed helplessness as Tarakasura had received a boon from Brahma that only a son born to Shiva could kill him. However, after the death of Sati, Shiva renounced the world and was leading the life of austerity. Further he was always in deep meditation. Hence, he could never have a son unless marries. Vishnu suggested that all *devatas* should approach Shakti and request her to take birth as Parvati and marry Shiva. At the request

of *devatas*, Shakti incarnated as Parvati - the daughter of Himalayas. She sat in meditation to seduce Shiva but even after ages, Shiva would not get up from his meditation. The *devatas* again approached Vishnu for a solution. Suggested by Vishnu, Kamadeva (Cupid) took his bow and shot the *kamabana* (arrow of love) at Shiva. Shiva's meditation was broken and he opened his third eye. Kamadeva was immediately burnt to ashes; but the prayers of Parvati were answered. Shiva agreed to marry Parvati and the marriage was solemnised on the *shukla pakshya panchami* of lunar month Jyestha.

Ratha yatra: - The biggest festival of the year in the State is Ratha yatra of lord Jagannatha at Puri. It attracts large number of devotees from all over the country and also from abroad.

All through the year, lord Jagannatha is worshipped inside the *garva gruha* of Badadeula. Once a year during Ratha yatra or chariot festival, he comes out of the *garva gruha* and gives *darshana* (view) to millions of his devotees from the *rathas*. The *yatra* is held on the *shukla pakshya dwitiya* in the lunar month Asadha. It commemorates the sojourn of Chaturdha murtis to the house of their notional aunt Gundicha in Gundicha mandira. There they stay for a week before returning back to Badadeula. Their return journey is known as Bahuda yatra.

The origin of Ratha yatra is rather obscure. History mentions that Ashoka, the emperor of Magadha carried away the idol of Kalinga jeena or Adi Jagannatha as war trophy after his conquest of Odisha. It was later brought back by Karabela, the mighty emperor of Odisha when it was carried in a *ratha* followed by a pompous pageantry. It later transformed into the annual Ratha yatra. It is said that earlier there were two sets of *rathas* and the deities were

ferried across a small stream (river Malini) in *chapas* to the Gundicha mandira. In course of time the stream got filled up and now the *rathas* go right upto the Gundicha mandira.

The *yatra* is one of the festive events at Puri. Millions of devotees congregate to witness Ratha yatra. The *dharamsalas*, lodges and hotels get filled with devotees from outside. Railways run special trains for the occasion. The frequency of bus services also increases. The State government makes elaborate arrangements for the control of the crowd and to provide facilities of the pilgrims. On the day of *yatra*, the Chaturdha murtis are brought onto the beautifully decorated chariots in special movements known as *pahandi*. Gajapati Maharaja of Puri performs *cherapahara* with a gold handle broom. Devotees pull the three chariots to the Gundicha temple where they spend the next seven days. During these days, the Badadeula remains closed and worships and rituals are performed in Gundicha temple (also known as Mausimaa mandira or Adapa mandira) and devotees visit there in numbers.

Naba kalebara: - Related to the Ratha yatra is an important festival known as Naba Kalebara held once in every twelve or nineteen years according to the calculation. The principle adopted to fix the year is the lunar year having two *purnimas* in a lunar month Ashada; a phenomina known as *joda ashada*.

When the auspicious day is fixed for the festival, Gajapati Maharajah of Puri issues a proclamation to the Daitapatis, Daitas and others to go in search of the trees that would provide wood for making the new idols. Generally this proclamation is issued on the *shukla pakshya dashami* of lunar month Chaitra. After the mid-day rituals in Badadeula, the Daitapati receives the *agya mala* (garland of consent) of lord Jagannatha to go in search. Daitapati carries the

agya mala along with others to the Anabasara pindi where they are given new clothes. From there they go to the Jagannath math, the place of starting their journey. Daitapati, accompanied by Daitas, Deulakarana, Lenka and Maharanas etc. proceed to the temple of Mangala at Kakatpur which is about forty kilometres from Puri. There the Daitapati lie prostrate before the goddess without food and water till he receives instructions through dreams from the goddess about the locations of the sacred trees. (This practice is known as *adhia* in local dialect). On receipt of the directions about the sacred trees, they go in batches in search of them.

There are strict specifications for the sacred trees. They must be of *neemba*. They should have four branches and must be in near a burial ground or a waterbody. They should not have any cut marks. Snake pits at their roots are auspicious signs. With these stipulations, the trees are searched and when found the Daitapati places the *agya malas* on them. The area around them is then cleaned. A platform is erected for performing *bana-yanga* and the Daitapati sits in meditation. After this, the Daitapati marks the tree with a golden axe and the Maharanas begin to cut them into logs. The sacred logs are carried in four wheeled carts newly built for the purpose. They are not pulled by animals but by the *sevakas* and the people. The sacred logs are taken into the temple compound through the northern gate and are placed in the Koili Baikuntha. On the day of Snana purnima they are bathed along with the old deities. They are then taken to Darughara and the *brahmins* perform the ritual after which the carving of the idols begins by a group of Maharanas. During this period nobody is allowed to visit the place. After completion of the idols, they are painted with respective colours by the traditional *chitrakars*. The new idols are then circumbulated around Badadeula three times and brought to the Anabasara pindi for transfer

of *brahma* from the old to the new. The senior most among the Pata Mahapatras performs this at the dead hour of the night. Blind folded with hands wrapped in cloth (in order that he cannot see or feel), he shifts the *brahmas* from the naval zones of old idols and places them in the same position in the new. The old idols are then carried and buried at in Koili Baikuntha. For this act, they observe mourning for ten days as is commonly done at the death in a Hindu family. After this, the idols are shifted to *ratna simhasana* and give *darshana* to the devotees; which is known as *naba jibana darshana*. Thousands of devotees gather in the temple to get a glimpse of new idols.

(Ratha yatra and Nabakalebara are described in detail in the book "Saga of Jagannatha and Badadeula at Puri" by the Author).

Jhulana yatra: - Jhulana yatra is held starting from the *shukla pakshya dashami* in the lunar month Sravana and ending on the *puṇnima* of lunar month Bhadrava. On these days, the idols of Radha and Krishna are swung in beautifully decorated *jhula* (swing) in all Krishna temples. The areas around it are decorated with festoons and fancy lights. Nightlong *bhajan*s and *kirtan*s are held. At many places temporary shops selling eatables come up and entertainment programmes are held. These attract large crowd who not only took part in the *bhajan*s and *kirtan*s but also get relief from their daily chores.

In the Badadeula at Puri, Jhulana yatra is another important festival. It was first initiated by the Gajapati king Dibyasingha Dev-II (1793-1798 CE). Lord Jagannatha is no other than Krishna. For seven days starting from the *dashami* the idols of Madanmohan⁶⁴ alongwith Lakshmi and Bhudevi are placed on a *jhula* decorated with flowers, garlands

64 *Bije pratima* (representative idol) of lord Jagannatha.

and streamers etc. in the Jhulana mandapa. The devotees and worshippers get an opportunity to swing the idols. The swinging is accompanied by *bhajan*s and *kirtan*s that continues whole night until *pahada* and resumes in the afternoon next day. It is also symbolic of providing cool breeze to the idols through *jhulana* (to and fro motion of the *jhula*); as during this period the air is heavy with stillness and humidity. Often, cold scented water directed toward the idol is sprayed. Traditionally, the idols wear different types of *besh*a (clothing) everyday.

Bali yatra: - Bali yatra, special to Cuttack town, is held on the *purnima* of lunar month Kartika. It is a large open air carnival held in an open ground adjoining Barabati fort by the side of river Mahanadi at Gadgadiaghat.

There are several explanations of calling it Bali yatra. Bali yatra literally means journey to Bali islands that the ancient *sadhabas* (maritime traders) undertook for trade on this *purnima*. Hence the *yatra* seems to be named so. It seems to be associated with the famous 15th century *vaishnavite* saint Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, who on his journey to Jagannatha Puri, landed at Gadgadia ghat on the Kartika *purnima* with a large contingent of followers. The day being auspicious, they performed *sankirtan* in the *bali* (sand) bed of the river. In commemoration of it, the *yatra* is probably called Bali yatra and held every year at this place. *Yatra* also means a fair or festival. As the *yatra* was held on the sand bed of the river, it was called Bali yatra. No matter whatever may be the origin of its name, it is a time honoured *yatra* of Odisha held at Cuttack only. Recounting the episode of Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, its origin can be traced to 15th century CE or to an earlier period when the maritime trade was flourishing.

About half a century back, there were not many avenues of enjoyment for the residents of Cuttack city. The *yatra*

was then a source of entertainment and provided relief from the humdrum routine life. Residents visited in numbers and enjoyed the pre-winter evening in the bright moonlit night. It was then held for a day in the afternoon and continued till late night. The *yatra* provided opportunities to the local artisans and craftsmen to display and sell their products. Varieties of household articles and daily need items like *kula* (winnow) *pachia* (bamboo or cane baskets) *handi* (earthen pots) and toys made of cotton, clay and papier mache etc. which were not generally available during the year were sold and purchased. There were also open air entertainment programmes like display of martial arts, folk dances and folk songs and variety entertainment programmes - all by amateur artists. For the children, there were the magic shows, snake, and monkey and bear charmers displaying the acrobatic tricks of their animals.

The speciality of *yatra* was the food stalls. The freshly fried *thunkapuris* (puffed *puris*) and the hot *chena tarkari* (cottage cheese curry) were the favourites. In the morning the visitors after sailing the miniature boats and taking bath (*Kartika snana or buda*) rushed to the food stalls for these mouth-watering savouries. Along with the *thunkapuris* and *chena tarkari*, there were the also the giant size sweets. One could buy a *rosogolla* or a *gulab jamun* as big as a tennis ball or a *laddu* as big as a football.

Till mid-sixties, the *yatra* was confined to a day only. With popular demand it was increased to three days. Now it is held for a week. With time, it has undergone many changes. An imposing gate paying tribute to the cultural heritage of the State has been erected. The arena has increased manifold. So is the number of shops. Varieties of article right from a needle to an automobile are available. In short it is now mega market. Visitors flock not only for the sale/purchase but also

for the various cultural and entertainment programmes; some on payment and others free.

With changes, one no longer finds the *thunka puris* and *chena tarkari* with their traditional taste. So are the giant size *rosogollas* and *gulab jamuns*. Their places have been taken over by the fast foods like mutton or chicken curries, *roomali rotis*, *biriyanis* and junk foods like pizzas, noodles and rolls. The places of magicians and snake charmers are taken over by video games. The traditional earthen, papier mache and cotton toys skilfully made by the local artisans are no longer available. Many of the traditional household items like *kula*, *pachia*, *mati handis* and other items of daily needs which were exclusive to this *yatra* are replaced by electrical and electronic gadgets signifying rural-urban continuum. With modernisation, the Bali *yatra* has not lost its earlier charms. People come from far and near to the *yatra*. There is always a mad rush and every road leads to Bali *yatra* during these seven days.

Since past several years, similar *yatras* are also held at Paradip and Gopalpur ports with great fanfare. They are known as Boita bandana utsava or the Festival of Boats. But the Bali *yatra* of Cuttack is unique.

Dolo yatra: - Dolo *yatra* commences ten days before Phalguna purnima on Fagu dashami (*dasa dola*) or on the *purnama* (*pancha dola*) and ends after five days after *purnima*. Dolo in local dialect means *doli* - swing. On these days towards the evenings, the idols of Radha and Krishna are taken out in *vimanas* amidst beating of drums and blowing of conch shell around the village streets and then swung on a beautifully decorated *doli* as reminiscent of Krishna's childhood days. The procession stops in front of each house where the householders (mostly women) worship with *dipa* and offer tender mangoes, coconuts and other

homemade sweets as *bhoga*. They smear *abhira* (coloured powder) on the idols and also amongst themselves. This in local dialect is known as *thakura bhoga khai*. Usually, the *vimana* carriers are the *gaudas* (milkman) to whose clan Krishna belonged.

On the concluding day, the *vivanas* from the surrounding villages assemble at a common place (usually an open ground) where a number of *dolis* are fixed. This, in local dialect, is known as *melana*. The idols are swung in the *dolis* to the accompaniment of *bhajanas* and musical instruments like *dhola*, *jhanja*, *karatala* and *ghanta* etc. The *bhoga* prepared in large quantities is distributed amongst the accompanying devotees and people present. The festivities continue till late in the night and sometimes till dawn after which the idols return to their respective temples.

In Badadeula at Puri, the Dolo yatra is an important event. The *bije pratimas* of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra are carried in a *vimana* to Dolo mandapa where they are swung in the *doli*. Devotees in large numbers participate in the function and smear *abhira* on the idols and also amongst themselves. The new Odiya *panji*, which is ready by then, is worshipped at Dolo mandapa.

Dolo is another important festival of the State. In the past, it was usual for the people working outside the State to visit their homes during Holi and spend a few days with family.

Holika podi: - The festival following Dolo yatra is Holi named after Holika - the sister of demon king Hirunyakashypa who had received boon from Shiva that she would never die of burning and drowning. Hirunyakashypa was so egoistic that he commanded everybody in his kingdom to obey and worship him but his son Prahalada

was a Vishnu devotee and refused to obey him and always worshipped Vishnu. Hirunyakashypa tried several means to dissuade him from worshipping Vishnu but failed. Finally, he thought of burning him alive. He arranged a big fire and asked his sister Holika to sit on it carrying Prahlada in her lap. Surprisingly, Prahlada emerged unhurt and Holika was burnt to ashes. Remembering this incident, the effigy of Holika is burnt at many places after *melana*. At some places, burning of a straw hut known as Mendha podi is organised. Legend has it that a demon known as Mendha was torturing the gods and human beings. They prayed to Krishna to rescue them. Krishna killed the demon and burnt him.

Holi: - The day following Dolo purnima is Holi - the Festival of Colours. People, young and old, go out and smear *abhira* and *gulal* on each other and exchange greetings. Colours fill the sky as people throw *abhira* and *gulal* at each other sharing joy heralding spring. They sing and dance to the accompaniment of country drum. The countryside rents with the shouting of '*holi hai*'. The festivity ends towards the midday when people take bath and eat varieties of food preparations made at home. Children take special delight during this festival. Now a days, along with *abhira* and *gulal*, water colours are used. Often the festival takes ugly turns with people vandalising and misbehaving. Some consume *bhanga pana* and alcoholic beverages. The festival of colour knows no bar and everybody has the right to enjoy.

Rukuna Ratha yatra: - The Ratha yatra of Lingaraja at Bhubaneswar is held on *shukla pakshya astami* in the lunar month Chaitra coinciding with Basanti Durga puja. On this day the *mangala arati* in the Lingaraja temple is performed very early in the morning. Around noon, the bronze idols (*bije pratimas*) of Chandrashekar, Rukmini (Rukuna) and

Basudev are taken out in *pahandi* to a beautifully decorated thirty-feet, four wheeled *ratha* amidst chanting of hymns and *mantras*. The *ratha* is pulled by thousands of devotee amidst beating of drums and cymbals to the Rameswar temple known as Mausi-maa mandira. There they stay for five days and are worshipped. On the night of third day, Parvati comes to express her anger since she was not taken. She breaks a little of the *ratha* and returns to the temple (similar to Hera panchami during Rathya yatra of lord Jagannatha). On the midnight of fourth day special puja is performed and the Marichakunda *pani* of Lingaraj temple is auctioned. It is believed that if barren women take bath in this water, they would be blessed with children. The return journey or the Bahuda yatra is held on the fifth day. The uniqueness of the Bahuda yatra is that the *ratha* is pulled from behind without reversing. Only the altar of the idols is turned about. Hence, the saying in Odiya “*Rukuna ratha ana leuta*” since it is not turned about. Thousands of devotees take part in the Bahuda yatra. Many keep *upabasha* on the *astami* and break it towards the evening after the *ratha* reaches Mausi-maa mandira.

Thakurani yatra: - Thakurani yatra is an important *yatra* in southern Odisha particularly in the silk city Berhampur. It is held bi-annually (once in two years) during the lunar month Chaitra in the honour of Budhi Thakurani the *istadevi* (principal deity) of *dera* (weaver) community. The community migrated to Mahuri⁶⁵ at the invitation of Raja of Mahuri to start their hereditary profession of weaving *tussar* and *pata matha* and started the yatra to highlight the divinity of the goddess.

The temple of Budhi Thakurani is located near the Badabazar area of Berhampur city. The idol, a piece of stone cut in a crude manner is smeared with *sindura*. Her visit out

65 An estate near Bearhampur in Ganjam district.

of the temple is celebrated as a *yatra*. The legend associates that the goddess after marriage visits her notional father Desi-behera once after every two years. She stays there during the entire month. Her presence in her paternal home is celebrated as a *yatra*. During the *yatra*, the goddess is worshipped in the form of *ghata* (urn). Along with her, Kali and her seven sisters are also worshipped. In all nine *ghatas* are worshipped. Though her main *peetha* (place of worship) is in the house of Desi-behera, the *ghatas* are worshipped in a temporary *mandapa* (shed) in front of his house for convenience of devotees. Once the date of the *yatra* is decided, the family of Desi-behera requests the Jhami pujari of the Aga street to erect the *subha khunta* (holy pillar)⁶⁶ in the *mandapa*. A *puja* is performed and the *subha khunta* is taken in a procession to the temple of Budhi Thakurani to invite the goddess. As her symbolic consent, a red *mandara* garland is obtained from her idol and the *subha khunta* is erected in front of the *mandapa*. Like the *subha khunta*, another pillar known as *dharma jhanda* (holy flag)⁶⁷ is fixed at the *mandapa*. It is believed that the *dharma jhanda* flying at a height creates a religious fervour in the city. Devotees worship it before entering the *mandapa*. Women devotees sprinkle *haladi pani* at the *dharma jhanda*. It is only after fixing of the *dharma jhanda*, the construction of *ratha* and *kalakunjas* starts.

The chief attractions of the *yatra* are the giant images of goddesses and mythological characters displayed in decorated *rathas*. The *rathas* carrying the *thakuranis* are taken on *sahi bhramana* (street perigrination). Alongside the *rathas* are the *kalakunjas* - the exhibits depicting mythological scenes. People come in numbers and worship

66 A nine feet tall bamboo pillar with nine knots painted red with *geru* (red earth).

67 A long wooden post carrying a red and black flag and a branch of neem tree

them with flowers, *dipa* offering *pana* and fruits. Some even offer silver eyes and tongues and black saris as per their *manasika* (mental wish). During the *yatra*, the devotees put on different kinds of *beshas* and dress themselves in attires starting from animals to characters in mythology. These are the funniest part of the *yatra*.

The concluding day of the *yatra* involves elaborate rituals. A special *sahasra-akhi ghata* (an earthen urn with numerous holes) is worshiped at *mandapa* from the midday. Married women who wish to accompany the procession keep *upabasha* and install *ghatas* before their family deity in their homes and worship from the noon. All the *ghatas* following the procession are taken to BudhiThakurani temple and broken there.

Thakurani Yatra is a unique experience for the residents of the city who are observing it for the past two hundred and forty years. They feel secure under the blessings of the goddess and believe that she is their *surakha kabacha* (safety amulet).

The *yatra* is not merely a religious event but a month long social enjoyment. Many established families of the town invite their married daughters to stay during the *yatra*.

Tara-Tarini yatra: - Another *yatra* held in Berhampur city on the Tuesdays of lunar month Chaitra is Tara-Tarini yatra or Chaitra parba or *mela*. The temple of Tara-Tarini is situated about thirty-two kilometres from the Berhampur town on the Kumahari hills (also known as Tara-Tarini hill) on the bank of the river Rushikulya. About thousand steps and also a *pucca* road lead to the temple. A small market complex sells items of *puja* and *archana*.

The place is said to be another *shakti peetha*⁶⁸. The goddesses Tara and Tarini are represented by two stone idols adorned with gold and silver ornaments. Two brass heads, known as their *chalanti pratima* (representative idols) are placed between them. On the *yatra* days, the temple remains open from the midnight of Monday until midnight of the Tuesday. The midday *pahada* (siesta) of the goddesses is suspended. Lakhs of devotees come to worship the goddesses on fulfilment of their *manasika* (mental vow). Many perform the *mundan* of their children and offer a lock of hair to the goddesses.

There are many myths and stories about the goddesses. According to one, once Adi Shakti appeared as two sisters (Tara and Tarini) in the house of one Basu Praharaj of nearby village who was a great devotee of Adi Shakti. The couple being childless looked after them as their own daughters. After living in their house for a few years, the sisters suddenly disappeared. Praharaj searched for them but could not find. Then one night they appeared in his dream and said that they were not his daughters but Adi Shakti -Tara and Tarini. They asked him to renovate the temple on the top of Kumahari hills and establish them. Praharaj located the dilapidated temple and established them after repairs. Since then, they are worshipped there and the *yatra* is held every year.

Olasuni or Gumphya yatra: - Olasuni hill stands on the border of Cuttack and Jajpur districts adjacent to Daitari - Paradip express highway. It is dotted with a number of temples

68 Mythology mentions that fifty-six *Shakti peethas* emerged from the falling limbs of Sati's body when lord Shiva carried it and wondered. Four of them are major Shakti peethas as mentioned in Astashakti and Kalika puranas as follows:

“*Bimala pada khandacha, Sthana khandacha Tarini (Tara Tarini), Kamakshya yoni khandacha, Mukha khandacha Kalika (Dakshina Kalika)*”. Regarding Tara-Tarini, Brihat samhita gives location as follows: “*Rushikulya tate devi Taraka mahagiri, tashya shrunga stitha Tara.*”

amongst which the temple of goddess Olasuni is famous. About two hundred years ago, a person named Balabhadra born in the royal family of Badakhemundi in Ganjam district renounced the world at an early age. Travelling widely, he finally chose a cave in the hill by the side of river Gobri for meditation (where Olasuni is now worshipped) till he attained *samadhi*. At that time it was a dense forest and people hardly visited fearing the virago Olasuni⁶⁹. He was named Arakhita by a widow who mistook him to be a thief when he was collecting banana leaves for worship. After his death in 1833 CE, his disciples built a small temple on the top of the hill. Every year, on the *ekadashi* of lunar month Magha, the sleepy hill wakes up to the delight of his devotees who throng there to witness the nine days long Olasuni or Gumpha yatra commemorating the death anniversary of the saint and to obtain his blessings. *Podopitha*, *sukhua* (dry fish) and *taddy* (country liquor) are offered as *samarpana bhoga* for fulfilment of the wishes. *Kanji pani* (a kind of soup made from rice gruel) is also offered as *bhoga* and the visitors take a little as it is believed to have curative properties.

Although the traditional festival is held for a day, the *yatra* continues for nine days with temporary markets selling their items. For the conveniences of the visitors, the State government sets up temporary rest sheds with power and water supply. However, the *yatra* is losing its earlier charm. Modern melodies and operas have taken over the traditional *bhajans* and *kirtans* that once rented the hill. The *yatra* is now a commercial fair.

Biraja Ratha yatra: - Biraja kshetra in Jajpur is one of the Shakti peethas. Here the naval remain of Sati is believed to have fallen. Durga is worshipped in the temple. The main festival in the temple is *saradiya* Durga puja.

69 Legend has it that Arakhita Das by his spiritual powers ousted the virago who moved to live at the foot of the hill.

Like Ratha yatra of lord Jagannatha, the nine days long Ratha yatra of Biraja is held from *shukla pakha pratipada* till *navami* in the lunar month Aswina. The *yatra* peaks up on the *maha astami* and *maha navami* days and attracts large crowd and the devotees. On these days, the *bije pratimas* of the goddess is taken out round the *mandira* through *bedha* (boundary around the temple) in a beautifully decorated *ratha* named Singhadhwaja as it has *simha*, *gaja* and *ashwa* in the front with Chaturamukha Brahma as the *sarathi*.

Important melas

Mela is a Sanskrit word meaning a gathering. In Odisha, it is a gathering of people for religious purposes. Some are traditional and are observed through out the State and others are regional. The traditional ones are organised by an individual or a group of individuals to invoke a particular god for fulfilment of their vows or promises and the community participates. They can be held any time of the year but particular *baras* (days) are prescribed for some of them. The regional ones are held in temples on *tithis* (dates) as annual function. Unlike *bratas* and *osas*, the *melas* are attended by both men and women. The main traditional *melas* are (a) Trinatha mela, (b) Akhamandalamani or Astashambu mela, (c) Nabagraha mela (d) Sani mela, (e) Hanumana mela and (g) Tarini mela. Some of the regional ones are (a) Chadak mela at Chandaneswar (b) Magha or Chandrabhaga mela at Konark, (c) Mahima mela at Joranda.

Trinatha mela: - Trinatha mela is held to propiate Trinity -Brahma, Bishnu and Shiva. of whom Shiva is supreme. The mela can be held any time during the year preferably on a Monday evening in the presence of family members, friends and other worshippers. The Trinity is represented by three *guas* placed on three *paana patras*. A *chillum* (clay pipe)

containing *ganja* (marijuana) is the main item of *bhoga*. Along with *ganja*, other items e.g. fruits etc. are also offered. The worship is performed by a traditional priest. The Trinatha mela katha is read out by the priest or the head of the family amidst *bhajan*s and *kirtan*s.. At the end the worshipped *chillum* is passed around the men worshippers to smoke and the *paana patras* and *guas* are distributed amongst women worshippers as *bhoga*.

Panchanana, Akhamandalamani or Asta Sambhu mela⁷⁰:

- Shiva occupies a prominent place in Hinduism. He is also known as *panchanana* as in iconography, he is depicted as a five faced deity. He is not only worshipped by *saivites* but also by all Hindus. Apart from worshipping him in temples, the worshippers organise *melas*.

The Panchanana, Akhandalamani⁷¹ or Asta Sambhu melas are organised by worshippers of Shiva for fulfilment of their desires or vow. Usually, those are organised on a Monday evening in a Shiva temple or at a common place. Friends, relatives and the neighbours are invited to participate. Besides Bhajan and Kirtan, *mela kathas* are recited in verse forms amidst beating of drums and cymbals and all present listen. Some times, they are recited through *pala* or *dashkathia*. Varieties of fruits, sweets and a *chillums* filled with *ganjei* are offered as *bhogas*. At the end the *chillums* are passed round the worshippers to smoke. The fruits and sweets are distributed.

Hanumana mela: - Hanumana is a divine disciple and devotee of Rama. He is also known as Sankata Mochana. People worship him to get over the obstacles. Mela is organised by devotees of Hanumana to worship him. Generally, it is

70 The rituals of all melas are similar. Only the respective *kathas* are recited in different *melas*.

71 Akhandalamani is temple located at village Aradi about forty-two kilometers from Bhadrak. He is treated to be the incarnation of Shiva.

held in Hanumana temples on a Tues day or a Saturday. The devotees gather in the temple and recite Hanumana chalisa or Sankata Mochana Hanumana chalisa.

Magha (Chandrbhaga) mela: - Starting from Magha *sukla pakshya saptami* the annual *mela* known as Magha mela is held at the site of river Chandabhaga near Konark and continues for a week. The place otherwise deserted through out the year, becomes lively with devotees. Temporary shops and markets come up during the *mela* days.

The *mela* is held to honour Surya who is said to have cured Krishna's son Shambhu from leprosy. It is therefore believed that whoever takes a bath in the river on these days will be cured of leprosy. The *mela* attracts large number of devotees from all over the place. It is interesting to see the devotees getting into the water and waiting for the Surya to rise. The moment Surya appears, they take the holy dip and chant prayers for the fulfilment of their desires.

Those who are unable to visit the *mela* site, worship Surya by drawing his image in *rongoli* in front of their houses. It is mentioned in the Lanka kanda of Ramayana that Surya has the power to grant good health. When Rama was extremely tired of fighting with Ravana, sage Agasti advised him to worship Surya and chant Surya mantra that rejuvenated him.

Mahima mela: - Another annual *mela* held in the lunar month Magha is the Magha mela of Mahima cult at Joranda. It is also called Joranda mela being held at Joranda. Joranda is a small village in district Dhenkanal (about twenty-four kilometres from district headquarters) where Mahima Gosain, the spiritual head of Mahima cult, attained salvation in 1874 CE. It houses the *samadhi* of Mahima Gosain and is the seat of Mahima cult. The other

religious institutions there are Sunya mandira, Dhuni mandira and Gadi mandira.

The *mela* is held on the *puṛnima* in the lunar month Magha and continues for three days. It reflects the ideals of Mahama Gosain who envisioned a classless society free of exploitation of the weak and the poor by powerfuls. Thousands of *sadhus*, *sanyasins* and devotees of the cult and visitors pour forth in numbers to witness the *mela*. They commemorate the salvation day of their *guru* Mahima Gosain. According to the devotees, they pray together to their God reciting Alekh Brahma and burn ghee in the *yajna kund* to bring peace to the earth. They believe that their devotion would provide pureness to the earth and fulfil all the basic needs of the people in their day-to-day life.

Alongside the Joranda *mela*, another *mela* is organised by the followers of Mahima cult at Khaliapali (about twenty-five kilometres from Sonapur) on the *sukla paksha chaturdashi* (fourteenth day of the bright fortnight) of the lunar month Magha. Mortal remains of the celebrated saint poet and a preacher of this cult Bhima Bhoi, is interred here. After his death, his followers built his *samadhi* and made Khaliapali as one of their religious centres. The *mela* is attended by a number *sanyasis* and followers of the cult.

During the *mela* Joranda and Khaliapali, otherwise quiet nondescript villages become alive bursting with activities. Temporary stalls and shops selling daily need articles and eatables come up around the *mela* site. People indulge in a bit of trading that normally takes place at any fair or festival.

5.

PALA AND DASAKATHIA

Pala and dasakhatia are two unique folk arts of the State closely associated with many religious festivals. They are essentially musical elucidations of mythological or religious episodes drawn from Ramayana, Mahabharata and other *puranic* texts.

Pala: - *Pala*, in Odiya language, means in turn. It is thus a musical narrative with explanations punctuated by wits and humours performed by a *gayaka* (singer) accompanied by three to four others known as *palias* playing musical instruments like *mridanga* and *jhanja*. The *gayaka*, dressed in a glittering robe and an ornate headgear holds a *chamara* (yak tail whisk) and begins the performance by invoking the blessings of a deity and introduces the theme in Sanskrit or Odiya verse. He explains the passages that are difficult to understand in simple dialect turning them into literary discourses. While doing so, he moves around in simple rhythmic steps waving the *chamara* sometimes as a fan and at other times as a weapon or wand according to the need. As he continues, *palias* add rejoinders or enter in to rudimentary dialogues at appropriate moments to elucidate the theme; intermittently dancing and playing the musical instruments with great élan. One of the *palias* acts as *bidushaka* (jester) and in between cracks a joke for the entertainment of the audience.

Palas are of three types - *Baithaki*, *thia* and *badi*. In *baithaki pala*, the performers sit on the ground or on an improvised altar or platform and narrate the theme while in *thia pala*, the *gayaka* and the *palias* dressed in royal attire narrate and recite the theme standing and moving around. In the third type known as *badi pala*, two or more groups of *thia pala* performers compete with each other for excellence and the audience decides whose performance is better. This is the most entertaining as there is an element of competition.

Dasakathia: - It owes its name to a unique and indigenous type of musical instrument made of a pair of flat wooden *kathis* (straight castanets) which is played in a rhythm during the performance. The *kathis* are held one above the other with the index finger inserted in between in one of the palms. When their ends are hit by the fingers of the other palm, a rhythmic sound is produced. Some use *ramkathi* which is similar to *dasakathi* but has brass *ghungrus* (trinkets) fixed to it. The player holds a pair of *Ramkathi* in both palms. As the palms are opened and closed, the *ramkathi* with its *ghungurus* emanate pleasant sounds. *Dasakathi* is performed by two artists - *gayaka*, the main singer and his partner *palia*. The *gayaka* wears a long silken coat and *ghungru* round his ankle. The *palia* plays the second fiddle to the *gayaka*. The *gayaka* begins by invoking the blessings of a deity. Like *Pala*, the themes in *Dasakathia* are usually the expositions of a narrative verse from the *Ramayana* or religious texts. As the narration goes, the *dasakathis* are played to the rhythm. Special sequences are described in a dialogue form with the *gayaka* and the *palia* interchanging their roles. It is interspersed with wits and humours.

Pala and *dashkathia* are usually performed during *Satyanayayana puja*, *Trinatha mela* etc. when the *kathas* (stories) are enacted and explained in verse forms. Generally they start towards late evening and continue till midnight.

They need no stage or green room or elaborate lighting arrangements but a central area to perform. The audience stand or sit around watching the performance. Earlier, Pala and Dasakathia were patronised by Rajas and *zamindars* for entertainment of their subject. With their extinction and with availability of modern modes of entertainment, there are few takers for these folk arts.

Chita, jhoti and muruja

Chita, *jhoti* and *muruja*, though not religious festivals, are closely associated with them. They are the traditional Odiya folkarts on the floors and walls around the place of *puja* and are drawn not only with the intention of decorating the place but also to establish a relation between the mystical and the material

The main ingredient for *chitas* or *jhotis* is *pithou* (rice paste or solution). Raw rice is soaked in water for a long time and then pestle to make *pitchout*. Women dip their fingers in it to draw intricate and beautiful designs and patterns. Sometimes, a twig with a small piece cloth or rag wrapped round its end is used as a brush. At times, the *pitchout* is sprinkled on the walls with delicate swirls of fingers. A red earth known as *daub* is smeared on the walls or floors as background. For each occasion, set motifs are prescribed. For Lakshmi puja for instance, a stack of paddy or *sishas* structured like a pyramid is drawn on the walls. Small footmarks are drawn on the floor to symbolically well come the goddess.

Chita and *jhoti* are different from *muruja* or *rangoli*. While in *chita*, *pithou* is used; in *muruja* coloured powders are used. The coloured powder is held between the tip of thumb and forefinger and allowed to fall delicately to form patterns. Some use flower petals. It is already mentioned that

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during Janhi osha, the girls used to make beautiful patterns using *janhi phulas* (flowers of ridge gourd). It needs lot of skill, imagination and practice to draw *chita*, *jhoti* and *muruja*. The art was passed down the generations. The modern era sees a diminishing trend of this traditional folk art.

GLOSSARY

Many words and phrases from the local dialects are used in the book. Their meanings cannot be precisely translated into English. However, the nuance and senses they convey are given alongside in brackets. A consolidated list is given below for ready reference.

A

Abhira - coloured powder used during Holi

Adharma - irreligion

Adhik masa - extra month in a lunar year

Adi shakti - prime power, supreme power

Agira - pertaining to fire

Agni - fire, also god of Fire

Agya mala - garland of consent from gods

Ahi sulakhani - woman who dies before the death of her husband

Akala bodhana - untimely awakening

Akasha - astral plane, sky

Akhu - sugar cane

Akshya - one that never diminishes

Alana - without salt

Alata - red dye applied by women on feet

Amabasya - new moon day, fifteenth day of lunar month in krushna pakshya

Amruta - nectar

Anabasara - convalescent period of idols in Badadeula at Puri

Anabasara pindi - special enclosure in sanctum sanctorum in Badadeula where idols convalescent obstacles. Ganesha after sacred bath on Sananna purnima

- Ananda* - pleasure, happiness
Ananta - endless referring to Vishnu and Sudarshanachakra
Angara - burning ember
Anjali - offerings with folded palms
Anka - reigning year of Gajapati Maharaja of Puri
Anna dana - donation of rice - food
Aonla - Indian gooseberry tree, its fruits
Apara pakshya - fortnight when ancestors visit their descendants
Apsara - fairy, female sprits in the heaven
Arati - worship with lamp
Archana - rite during worship
Arghya - water
Arisha - a type of fried cake made of rice flour and jiggery
Ashada - third month of lunar year
Ashrama - hermitage, abode of sages and preachers
Astami - eighth day of lunar month
Asura - demon
Aswina - sixth month of lunar year
Avali - row
Avatara - incarnation
Avisekha - special worship
Ayudha - weapon

B

- Bahara* - outdoors, outside
Bahuda yatra - return journey of Ratha yatra
Baikuntha - heaven, abode of gods
Baisakha - first month of lunar year
Bakula - mango blossom
Bali - sand also an Indonesian island
Bandapana - worship with lighted lamp
Bara yatra - people accompanying the groom for marriage

Glossary

- Basanta rutu* - spring season
Basanti - pertaining to spring season
Basi - next day
Bedi - raised platform, altar
Bela - wood apple, its leaves and fruit
Betala - celestial messengers
Bhadrava - fifth month of lunar year
Bhai - brother
Bhajana - group prayers
Bhala - lance, spear
Bhasani - immersion
Bhatru - brother
Bhava - spiritual emotions or feelings
Bhitara - indoors, inside
Bhoga - food offerings to gods
Bhu-devi - mother Earth
Bighna vinashak - destroyer of
Bije pratima - representative idol
Bilwa - wood apple, its leaves
Biriyani - a rice and meat preparation
Bisarjana - immersion
Boita - large sail boat, argosy
Boita kakharu - pumpkin
Brahma - divine energy, soul also refers to one of the
Trinities
Brahma muhurta - divine moment, dawn
Brahmana - member of the highest caste in society
according to Veda
Brahmanda - entire universe
Brata - solemn promise or vow before god, also a wish
tread worn round the arm
Bratini - woman observer of *brata*
Brundabati - another name for tulashi plant

Buddhi - intellect

Budha - planet Mercury

Budhabara - Wednesday

C

Chadakhai - day after Kartika purnima when people start taking non-vegetarian food after abstaining during the month

Chaitnya - divine consciousness

Chaitra - twelfth month of lunar year

Chamundia - shed made of leaves

Chand - Moon.

Chandala - men of lower caste who cremate dead bodies

Chandaluni - woman of lower caste

Chandana - sandalwood paste used in worship

Chanddra - Moon

Chandi - silver

Chapa - barge, large boat

Charana padula - water used for washing feet

Chaturdashi - fourteenth day of lunar month

Chaturdhamurti - idols of Jagannatha Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshanachakra in Badadeula at Puri, also similar idols in other temples

Chaturmasa - four months-of rainy season

Chaura - a temple shaped flowerpot for planting and worshipping tulasi plant in courtyard or front of house

Chena - cottage cheese

Chena tarkari - cottage cheese curry

Cherapahara - sweeping around chariots by Gajapati Maharaja during Ratha yatra

Chitrakara - painter

Chitta - an emerald locket worn by lord Jagannatha. also motif drawn on walls and floors in rice paste on religious occasions

Chota - small

Chuda - pressed rice

Cowries - mollusks - once used as coin

D

Daitya - demon

Daityaguru - teacher of demons

Dakshina - cash donations or offerings

Dakshinayana yatras - Sun's journey (transit) to southern hemisphere

Dana - donations in charity

Danda - staff, stick or pole, also punishment, chastisement

Darshana - view of deities

Dasha - bad or evil period

Dasha kriya - tenth day rites after death

Dashahara - tenth day of Durga puja

Dashami - tenth day of lunar month

Deba - god

Deba dipabali - festival of light of gods

Debatas - gods and demigods

Dhaka - country drum

Dhana - rice paddy, wealth

Dharamsalas - free lodging house

Dharma - divine laws, religion,

Dhenkisala - place for pounding paddy

Dhola - country drum

Dina - day

Dipa - lighted lamp

Dipabali - festival of light

Doli - swing

Dooj - second day

Dwadashi - twelfth day of lunar month

Dwitiya - second day of lunar month

E

Ekadashi - eleventh day of lunar fortnight

G

Gaja - elephant, also type of cake

Ganas - celestial, beings attendants of Chaturthi - fourth day of lunar month Shiva

Gandhava - celestial musician

Ganga sagara - confluence of river Ganges with ocean (Bay of Bengal)

Garva dharana or Garvana - carry in womb or pregnant

Garva gruha - sanctum sanctorum

Genda - snail

Ghadaghadia tarkari - fish curry with pulses and vegetables

Ghanta - bell used in religious events

Ghanta tarkari - mixed curry

Ghata - pitcher, urn, a container of water

Ghoonguru - brass trinket tied in ankles

Go mata - cow or cattle

Gouda - clan that looks after cows

Grahana - lunar eclipse

Grahas - planets

Grasha - devour, swallow

Grishma rutu - summer season

Gua - betel nut

Guda - jaggery

Gudia - confectioner

Gulab jamun - a sweet made of cottage Cheese

Guru - spiritual preacher

Gurubara - Thursday

Gurubhai - community of preachers

Gurukula asrama - abode of spiritual preachers, residential schools of *gurus*

H

Habishanna - bland food made of rice and pulses boiled together

Haldi - turmeric

Haldi pani - turmeric water

Handi - earthen pot for cooking

Hemanta rutu - late autumn season

Homa - worship before fire

Hulahuli - auspicious sound made women by rolling of tongue

I

Ichhya mrutyu - death by will

J

Jala - water

Jala krida - aquatic frolic

Jalaghata - waterbody

Janha - Moon

Janhi phula - ridge gourd flower

Jau - salted porridge

Jayanti - birthday, anniversary

Jhanjha - cymbal, a musical instrument

Jhooti - motif in coloured or rice powder

Jhula - swing

Jhulana - swinging

Jibanyasa - giving life

Joda ashada - two Ashada months in a lunar year

Juaentia - lace or ribbon worn in *brata*

Jugara - savory made of puffed rice.

Jyestha - second month of lunar year also eldest in family

K

Kaanji - soup made of fermented rice gruel

Kabacha - amulet, talisman

Kadali - banana

Kaibarta - community of fishermen

Kalasha - pitcher filled with water placed during worship,
embodiment of all gods and goddesses

Kama bana - arrow of love

Kamadeva - god of Love

Kamana - desire

Kanta - thorn, nail

Kanya - daughter

Kanya dana - donating daughter to groom during marriage

Kara - shrub with anti-insecticidal properties

Karanda mukuta - hair tied in a knot

Karif - autumn crop

Kartika - seventh month of lunar year

Katha - book or story relating to *bratas* and *oshas*

Ketu - shadow planet, descending node of moon

Keuta - community of fishermen

Khaai - to eat

Khadi or khali - chalk paste used as primer before painting

Khai - puffed paddy rice

Khechudi - over cooked rice and lintel

Kheeri - sweet porridge

Khira sagara - ocean of milk

Khuda - sieved particles of rice, small grains of rice

Kirtana - bhajana with music

Kothi - a common house for community worship

Krishna leela - life story of Krishna

Krushna - dark, black

Krushna pakshya - dark fortnight

Kula - winnow

Kumari puja - worship of young girls

Kumharas - clay artisans who make idols, potters

Kusha - type of grass used in religious rites

Kuta - straw, hay

L

Laddu - sweet made of gram flour and rolled into the shape of ball

Langar - community kitchen

Lau - gourd (vegetable)

Leelas - playful activities of gods and goddesses

Linga - phallus - icon of Shiva

M

Magha - tenth month of lunar year

Maha astami - eighth day during Durga puja

Maha dipa - great lamp

Maha navami - ninth day during Durga puja

Maha prasada - the food offerings in Badadeula

Maha saptami - seventh day during Durga puja

Maha shivaratri - great night of Shiva

Maharani - principal queen

Mala masa - extra month in a lunar year

Mamu - maternal uncle

Mana - cane, bamboo or metal container once used as a means of measurement of paddy

Manaba - human beings

Mandapa - open or covered platform in religious events

Mandara - hibiscus flower

Mangala arati - first *arati* in the morning considered most auspicious

Mangalabara - Tuesday

Mantra - divine hymn

Margasira - eighth month of lunar year

Martya - mundane world

Masa - month

Mausi maa - maternal aunt

Medha - back drops

Mela - fair

Melana - assembly of *vimanas*

Meru - equator

Mishri - sugar candy

Mochi - community of cobblers

Mohoutshaba - great festival associated with feast

Mokshya - salvation, release

Mrudanga - a percussion musical instrument

Mrutyua - death

Muan - a kind of sweets made of puffed

Mudra - posture during worship

Muhurta - auspicious moment

Muruja - patterns drawn on rice or coloured powder on religious events

Muthi anukula - broadcasting paddy seed first time

Muthi chuan - touching paddy seed for broadcasting first time

N

Naba - nine, new

Naba kalebara - new idol of Jagannatha. Usually once in twelve years

Naba patrika - leaves from nine type of trees

Naba ratri - nine nights of worship of Durga

Nabagraha - nine planets

Nabanna - new rice. Festival of its eating

Nadia - coconut

Naga - cobra snake

Nakshaytra - constellations of zodiac

Nali chudis - red bangles

Narka - hell

Nata - street drama

Navami - ninth day of lunar month

Glossary

- Nayak* - supreme leader,
Nian gada - fire pit
Nimantrana - invitation
Nimba - neem, margosa tree
Nirbandha - promise to solemnize marriage
Nirjala - without water
Nisha - darknight
Nitis - religious rites and rituals
Nua - new
Nua khai - a ceremony to eat new paddy
Nua khai juhara - exchange of greetings on Nua khai

P

- Paana* - betel
Pachia - cane or bamboo basket
Padma - lotus flower
Padma munda - lotus roots
Pahali - first, first day
Pahali raja - first day of Raja
Pahandi - typical steps of moving the idols during Ratha yatra
Paida pani - tender coconut water
Paita - sacred thread worn by *Brahmin*
Pakshya - lunar fortnight
Pana - sweetened water, water mixed with mishri, guda or other items
Panchakshri - hymn in five
Panchami - fifth day of lunar month
Panchamruta - mixture of milk, curd, jaggery, honey and ghee used in worship (notanally five kind of *amrutas*)
Panchuka - five days before Kartik purnima
Panda - servitor of lord Jagannatha
Papa - sin, vice

Paraga - solar eclipse

Parswa paribartana - turning side while sleeping referring to lord Jagannatha (Vishnu)

Pata - indigenous silk cloth

Patala - hell, under world

Patu mati - alluvial soil in river bed

Peetha - seat of goddess

Phalguna - eleventh month of lunar year

Pidha - small wooden pedestal

Pitha - cakes and savories either steamed or fried

Pitru - relating to ancestors

Pitru loka - abode of ancestors in astral plane

Pitru pakshya - fortnight of ancestors

Pitru purusha - ancestors

Pitru runa - debts to ancestors

Poda pitha - a type of baked cake

Pousha - ninth month of lunar year

Prabhata - morning

Prahara - unit of time equal to one eighth of a day or four hours

Prakruti - nature, material world, universe

Prana pratistha - invoking life into idols

Prasada - cooked food offered to gods

Prastaba - proposal referring to marriage

Pratipada - first day of lunar fortnight

Prithivi - earth

Prodosha - evening, one and half hour before and after moon rise

Puja - worship

Purnima - full moon day, fifteenth day of lunar month in *Shukla pakshya*

Pushpa - flowers

Pushpanjali - offering of flowers with palms folded during worship

Glossary

Pushyavisekha - *avisekha* with flowers)

Putra - son

R

Rabi - Sun

Rabibara - Sunday

Rahu - shadow planet, ascending node of Moon

Raja - menstrual cycle of women, king,

Rajaswala - menstrual period

Rakhi - protection thread

Rakshya - protection, shelter

Rama leela - story of Rama

Ranappa - stilt

Rani - queen

Rasha leela - love story of Krishna with *gopis*

Rashis - constellations in zodiac

Rasogolla - sweet made of cottage cheese

Ratha - chariot

Rati - night

Rayata - tenant

Runa - debt

Rutu - season

S

Sadhaba - ancient maritime traders

Sadhaba bohu - wife of *sadhaba*

Sahanamela - time for public viewing in Badadeula at Puri

Sahi - localities in towns and villages

Samudra manthana - churning of ocean

Sandhi - juncture

Sani - planet Saturn

Sanibara - Saturday

Sankha - conch, its sound

- Sankirtana* - kirtana in group
Sankranti - first day of solar month
Sankranti buda - bath on *sankranti*
Sapta rushi - seven sages
Saptami - seventh day of lunar month
Sara bana - forest of thorns
Sara sajjya - bed of arrows
Saradiya - pertaining to autumn season
Sarata rutu - winter season
Sarathi - charioteer
Sarbajanina - for all, community
Sarpa - snake
Sasthi - sixth day of lunar month, also goddess Sasthi
Sastra - weapon
Sati - chaste woman.
Satitwa - chastity
Satyabadi - speaker of truth
Sebaka - worshipper, survivor
Shakti - divine Mother, worship of cosmic feminine energy
Shiva linga - icon of Shiva
Shiva loka - abode of Shiva
Shradha - annual rituals after death.
Shukla - bright, white
Shukla pakshya - bright fortnight
Siddhi - attaining wisdom
Sila and silapua - mortar and pestle, grinding stone
Simha bahini - rider of lion
Sindura - vermilion
Sishsas - rice kernels
Sishyas - disciples
Sitala - cool referring to season
Snanna - bath
Somabara - Monday

Glossary

Sparsha - touch, beginning of eclipse

Sravana - fourth month of lunar year

Sudarshana chakra - Vishnu's discus

Sudasha - good luck or fortune

Sukrabara - Friday

Suna - gold

Surya - Sun

Swambhu - self incarnated

Swarga - heaven

T

Tantra cult - estoric practices of worship of Shakti

Tapa - prayers with chastisement

Tarpana - offering to the ancestors

Teli - community of oil extractors

Terasha - thirteenth day

Thikiri - savory made with moong dal

Thunka puri - puffed puris made of wheat flour

Tika - marking of *chandana* or *sindura* on forehead as sign of respect

Tila - sesame seed

Tilaka - *chandana* or *sindura* applied on forehead or surface

Tirthas - holy places

Tithis - lunar days

Tota - grove

Trinity - Brahma, Bishnu and Shiva

Trutiya - third day of lunar month

Tulashi - basil plant worshipped

U

Udanda - vigorous movements

Uddyapana - conclusion rites of a *brata* or *osha*.

Upabasha - fast or abstinence from food

Upachara - kinds, types

Upagraha - satellite

Uthapana - getting up

Utparna - generate, origin

Utshaba - religious fest

Uttarayana yatra - Sun's journey (transit) to northern hemisphere

V

Vaishanaba - devotees of Vishnu

Vibhaghara - marriage

Vibsubha rekha - equator

Vighna - obstacles

Vigna binashaka - destroyer of obstacles, Ganesha

Vimana - palanquin

Y

Yajnas - sacrifice before fire

Yama - god of Death

Yatra - journey, transit and also a religious fair

Yoga - meditation

Yogini - incarnations of Shakti - divine Mother

Z

Zamindar - landlord