SAKTI CULT IN WESTERN ODISHA: A STUDY OF SAMALESWARI OF SAMBALPUR

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Abstract:

In Indian context it is not certain, whether the origin of Mother Goddess and Vedic Aryan or non-Vedic or pre-Aryan has been a hotly debated question. The Indus civilization provide earliest positive and somewhat details evidence for the worship of mother goddess in the forms of numerous terracotta female figuring and representation on of seals and ring stones. After the Harapan culture, the mother Goddess is traced continuously to till date. One headless image of mother Goddess was found from Inamgoan near Pune which has been assigned to 12th century B.C.

Sakti cult particularly in the form of Mahisamardini made its appearance in Odisha since very early times. In the beginning of the Christian era, a large number of tribal deities were incorporated in Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. The origin of Sakti Cult in Western Odisha may be traced to the called of fertility has been discussed. The earliest sakta pitha of this origin is Terasinga of Kalahandi District and second to the Viraja Pitha of Jajpur in Odisha.

Samalai or Samaleswari, the presiding Goddess of Sambalpur Kingdom occupies a unique position in the religious life of the people of Western part of Odisha. Samalai or Samaleswari is worshipped beneath a ‘Semul’ Silk cotton tree. Samaleswari temple is the most important one among all Sakta temple Sambalpur. The Samaleswari temple who build by Balaram Dev, the first Chauhan Raja of Sambalpur. It was later on renovated by Chhatra Sai. The temple is dated to the part of 16th Century to be constructed that in 1575 A.D. In this region there are many Saktas centres which have acclaimed eminence due to patronisation of kings, Zamidars, landlords and common people.

Keywords:
Dakshak, Phillic, Tara, Samalai, Gramadevatas, Metakani, Mahantas, Iconography, Nuakhai, Gogadarshan

1. Introduction

The term sakti represent female divinity in general and energining power of some . divinity in particular literary meaning of sakti is power or energy. Sakti as we understand power which is expressed through different phenomena . In the material manifestation, it is the physical ultimates of all forms of matter. But in highest metaphysical form sakti is the cosmetic mother, god in famine form as supreme which create,sustains and destroys the universe.

Saktism which represents the worship of an active female principle as divine mother or supreme brahman is worshipped in various forms and names in different parts of the country. The worship is one of the ancient most and primitive religions in mystery. It cannot however be definitely stated when the sakti called came into existence.
The indus civilization provides the earliest positive and some what detail evidence for the worship of mother goddess in the forms of numerous terracotta, female figurine and representation on seals and ring stones. After the age of Harappan culture, the mother Goddess are traced continously till date. One headless image of mother Goddess was found from inagamgon near pune. Which has been as signed to 12th century B.C. The earliest representation of Mahisamardini form of the Goddess found so for belonging to 1st century B.C. form Nagar in Tope district of Rajasthan. So Sakti cult is the ancient most and popular, which influenced all system of religion life Vaishnavism, Saivism, Buddhism. In system every system we find the important of the female deities.

The epic like Ramayan and Mahabharat mentioned the name of Uma, Girija, Rudrani, In Ramayana is not an independent cult through she holds a vary high position. She is known as Devi revered by all. There is the reference of Goddess Durga in the Mahabharata which throws light on the position of Sakti cult.

The puranic story of Daksha sacrifice proves the intimate relation between Siva and Parvati. Vayu Purana described that Daksha perfomed sacrifice and invited all gods except Lord Siva. Sati daughter of Daksha and consort of Lord Siva came to that place and was shocked at the cool reception of her father as a result she destroyed her body in the sacrificial fire. The death body of Sati moved about the country aimlessly which was a danger to the universe. During that time it is described that lord Vishnu cut the body of Sati in to pieces. The place where is the parts of the body fell was sanctified as a Sakti pitha.

2. Sakti Cult in Odisha Context

Saktism is an important and ancient cult of odisha. It has been discussed by a number of scholars who focused their study on icons, monuments, sub-cults like Saptamatrika and Yogini etc. On the basis of available archeological data we can presume that the powerful religion made its appearance in Odisha two or three century B.C..

In the beginning of the Christian ear, a large number of tribal deities were incorporated in Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. Stambeswari or Khambeswari a tribal deity represented in the form of a pillar was worshipped in certain parts of Odisha. Stambeswari is a saskritised name of an antochthonous and aionic. Goddess Satmbeswari or Khambeswari, the lady of the posts, who was being and is now also worshipped in the form of a wooden posts. The Sulkis of Kodakala Mandala and the Bhanjas of Dhirtpura were the ardent devotees of this deity. D.C Sircar opines that the Goddess was of phallic types but later on took the shape of Siva and Sakti.

Sakti cult particularly in the form of Mahisamardini made its appearance in Odisha since very early times. The earliest representation of the deity is of the two armed Viraja at Jajpur on the river Baitarani has been a place of pilgrimage since the time of Mahabharata and Puranas. The image of Viraja represents the earliest phase of the cult of Odisha.

The Bhaumakara ruler patronised, Tantric Saktism. They constructed many Saiva and Saktta Tample in places like Ranipur-Jharia, Hirapur etc. Both the places has Yogini tamples. During this period Tantraism crapt in to the fold of Saivism. During this period Saktism made its first appearance in Bhubaneswar. The Vaital Tample is the first Saktta shrine of this period. The presiding deity of the tample is Chhamunda. In this tample we find the image of Haraparbati, Arthanariswara, Lokulisa, Vhairava etc.

During this period the concept of female principle dominated the Mahayana Buddhism. Tara the primordial deity of Buddhist pantheon absorbed, with in herself a number of divinities representing different aspect of female principle. From 7th century unwords the influence of Tara in her various manifestations began to felt in the religions system of Odisha.

Saptamatrika representing the Saktis of important deities are found in different parts of Odisha. They are Brahamani, Maheswari, Kumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi and Chamundi. A group of eight Matrikas has been mentioned in Devi-Bhagabat and Linga Purana, Markandaya Purana indicates that the Matrikas helped Ambika to kill the powerful demons Rakтовija, Who was endowed with the quality of multiplying in to demons of his stature and strength from the drops of his blood Oozing from the wounds. It was with the assistance of this Matrikas that Devi could cause death to demon. The Agni Purana and Mstyta Purana deal in detail the iconographic of this Mothers.

3. Sakti Cult in Western Odisha

Western Odisha comprises the districts of Bargarh, Kalahandi, Nua pada, Boudh, Kandhamal, Balangir, Sonepur, Deogarh, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Sundargarhand Athamallik sub division of Anugul district. This tract of land has experienced the rule of various dynasties in different span of time i.e. Nalas, Sarabhapuriyas, Bhanjas, Somavansis, Chindakanagas, Kaluchuris, Gangas, Nagas and Chauhanas. They had ruled successfull from their different head quarters at Subarnnpura, Patna and Sambalpur leaving behind rich legacies of culture.

South Kosala seems to have occurred in ancient literature the Ramayana, Mahabharat and Puranas like Bramanda, Matsya, Vamana and Vayu repeatedly mentioned South Kosala. The Allahabad Pilar inscription is the earliest knows epigraphic reference to South Kosala. In the land of South Kosala of which Western Odisha many religious cults flourished under the patronage of different rules. Among those Sakti cult is most popular.
The origin of Sakti cult in Western Odisha may be traced to the cult of fertility has been discussed. The Debbhogaka khetra in the Tel Velly near the village Terasingha in the Madanpur-Rampur of Kalahandi district, may be taken as the earliest Saka Pitha of this region and second to the Viraja pitha of Jajpur in Odisha.

The Teluguchha king Someswar Deva-ii declared the grant starting on the bank of Chitrotapala (Mahanadi) looking straight to the Lankavarttaka is Lankeswari. Probably the kind issued the grant before the Goddess Lankeswari. So here also Lankeswari may be taken as the protectress deity of Pashima Lanaka i.e. Sonpur. This Goddess is still worshipped by the people and boatman in the form as a low rock very close to the Lankavarttaka in the bed of Mahanadi. A short inscription which may be placed 9th /10th century A.D. On the ground of Palaeography is found in an eroded condition adjacent to the deity. However, there is no image of the Goddess.

In Junagarh, the old capital of Kalahandi state there is a temple of Lankeswari. Lankeswari was the family deity of early Naga Kings of Junagarh. After the transfer of the capital from Junagarh to Bhabanipatna, the Nag rulers accepted Manikyadevi as their presiding deity. However, it is learn from the epigraphs of Chindaka Naga rulers of Chakrakot. It is not known whether the deity had and iconic or uniconic form. The Chindaka Nagas belonged to Naga dynasty. They were worshipping Manikyadevi and using snake banners. The rulers of Kalahandi are also descendant of Naga family. They also used snake banner. So it is appears that the deity Manikyadevi inside have been brought by Nagas and established their family deity as Manikyadevi in Kalahandi state.

Ranipadra identify with modern Ranipur -Jharial in Balangir districts is an important Saka Pitha in this region. J.D. Begeler who first reported the site assigns the construction of the temple to a date of 9th century A.D. But T.E Donaldson assigns the construction in the early part of 10th century A.D. i.e. posterior of Hirapur temple.

There are also different Goddess worshipped in Western Odisha like Patneswari, Ghateswari, Limsarian and so on with the advent of the Chauhan dynasty a number of Saka shrines were build under their Patronage. The Chauhans were noted for the worship of Sakti. The family Goddess of Chauhans of Patna was Patneswari while that of Sambalpur was Samalai. The temple of Samalai are found in large number in Western Odisha.

In this region there are many Saka center which have acclaimed eminence due to Patronisation of kings, Zamindars and Landlords. There are also some lesser known centers, which have no less contribution to the development of Saktism such as Gramadevatas,Ghanteswari,Metakani,Limsarian,Saptamatrikas, Dwarsenni,Dasamata,Bhagabati,Maheswari,Vindhyavasini and Ramachandi and so on.

4. Samalai or Samaleswari of Sambalpur

Samalai, the presiding Goddess of Sambalpur kingdom occupies a unique position in the religion life of the people of Western part of Odisha. In the ancient times Sambalpur was a part of South Kosala, comprising roughly the modern districts of Raipur and Raigarh in Chhattisgarh and the undivided districts of Sambalpur, Bolangir and Sundargarh of Odisha. South Kosala has been one of the most ancient places of human civilization. That a developed civilization existed in Sambalpur region is clearly evident from rock engraving and painting. The Vikram Khol pictograph scripts clearly indicate that a cultured and developed people lived in this region about five thousand years ago.

Samalai is worshipped beneath a semel (Bombay Malavarium) silk cotton tree. Later on the deity was enshrined in the house called temple and regular puja is performed there with Bhubaneswarimana by non-Brahmin priest, called in some places is Jhankan. The Kshetriyas in Sambalpur, Bargarh, Patnagarh, Bikharmur, Paramanpur, Saharas in Bargarh, Arjunka, Podhuma, Gonds in Ambapali, Paharsirigha, Keut in Kuchinda, Pandara in Balangir, Kondh in Themra, Binjhalas in Kangao. Bhaina in Nuagarh became the priest/ Jhankan of the Samalai temple in the particular places which in some places became hereditary and continue the worship. The Jhankan or the principal watchman of the temple became the village priest. Which duties was to propitiate the deity and the aboriginal tribes latter on got an honourable position in the village an enjoy rend free land.

Godness Samalai came in to prominence as the presiding Goddess of Sambalpur after the establishment of the kingdom of Sambalpur by Balaramdev, Younger brother of Narasinghadev of Patnagarh kingdom. The Kosalananda mahakavya by Gangadhar Mishra in 1664 A.D, Chikitsamanjari of Gopinath Sarangi written during Chhatrasinghdev (1657-1695), Jayachandrika by Prahallad Dubey (1781), the copper plate grant of Jayanta Singh dated 28th April 1790 A.D mantation the name Samaleswari. Under the Patronage of Chauhanraja of Sambalpur Bialiard, In Sanskrit language. It is the earliest kavya to deal with the history of the Chauhan rule in Odisha and is the earliest sources to recode the genealogy of Chauhan rulers of Patnagarh and Sambalpur. It mentioned the name Samaleswari, Goddess Samalai as Samaleswari, who was the presiding deity of Sambalpur in the then time.
In A.D 1781 about 120 years after Kosalanand was written, Prahlad Dubey of Sarangarh, located in Chhattisgarh state wrote a Hindi kavya, *Jayachandrika*. Where he describe the establishment of Sambalpur kingdom based on legends.

Balaramdev got his share from his elder brother Narasinghdev and came to Barghar in seeking for a place to establish fort. He establish his camp at Chaupur located on the write bank of river *Mahanadi*. Where is dogs came after rabbit, but the rabbit ran after the dogs. The king was very much astonished on seeing this incident. In that particular night Balaramdev saw a dream. Goddess *Samalai* stood before him and said, "My son, I am *Samalai*, is now at Gumdarha, Take me and construct a temple under the simuli tree on the other side of the river. "Balaram Dev accepted the Goddess Samalai of that area as his tutelary deity and established his fort and kingdom. The legend mentioned in *Jayachandrika* is supported by Siba Prasad Das mentioned that the tribal people like Savara(Sahara),Oram, Mundas, Kondh, Binjal were living in Sambalpur region when Ramaidev established Chauchan kingdom at Patnagarh. It cannot be denied the existence to the tribal people at the Gonds, Saharas, BinjhalS, In some Samalai temple are presently in-charge of worship of the Goddess *Samalai*. They were also engaged in collecting diamond and fishing in river *Mahanadi*. These people established the Goddess on the bank of the river to get blessing for save landing before starting their journey. They were offering fish to the deity which is till now continuing in the *Samalai* temple of Barpali as well as other part of Western Odisha, S.P. Das mentioned Samalai as the deity of aboriginals. A popular legend says that during the demolition of Hindu Gods and Goddessby *Kalapahad*, the pandit of Puri fled with the image of Lord Jagannath and buried it in Sonepur on the bank of *Mahanadi*, to the south of Sambalpur. Kalapahad followed them of to Sambalpur. Goddess *Samalai* is said to have assume the form of a milkmaid and sold milk and curd to the soldiers. Which is turn spread desolation among his army. In panic *Kalapahad* fled away. Learning his war drum, bells etc. Which is now preserved in the temple.

It is heard that in ancient times human sacrifice was offered once in a year, human sacrifice was stopped following miracle of *Maa Samaleswari* with a saint from Amritsar, who became the mahanta of *Gopaljee Math* later on Bhari Das, the first mahanta of *Gopaljee Math* of Sambalpur.

Dr J.K. Sahu is of opinion that the Chauhans( successor of Ramaidev) in Patna, Sambalpur, Sonepur and Khariar made tremendous development in social, political, economic and cultural aspects. They made Aryanisation by accepting the dogmas of the aboriginals of the areas.

S.S. Panda said that the un-iconic form of Goddess *Samalai* at Sambalpur, Barpali and Patnagarh denotes her tribal origin, but the icon of *Samalai* at Sonepur relates her to the supreme Goddess Durga and that of Balangiralso to the great Goddess Mahadevi. Therefore *Maa Durga* is the same deity, which worshipped as *Lankeswari* and also as *Samalai* and has been manifested in the form of Goddess *Subhadra*, the sister of Lord Jagannath in the supreme Jagannath cult.

Dr C. Pasayat mention that Balaramdev has established Sambalpur Rajya. He has exalted the local deity *Samalai* as *Samaleswari* meaning 'iswari' or Sambal/Sambalpur and the king has accepted her as his own tutelary Goddess. This way the local name of the deity i.e. *Samalai* has been hinduised to *Samaleswari*.

From the writing of Ptolemy it has been proved that Sambalpur was existed much before the establishment of Balaramdev, where the then people were engaged in collecting diamonds, available in a small island, presently called *Hirakud*. Barahamihira in his "Brahatsamhita" writes in praise of diamond available in Kosala.

The kingdom of Balaramdev originally extended from the river *Mahanadi* in the North to the river *Ang* and in the South and from the river *Surangi* in Phuljhar in the West to the village Huma on the *Mahanadi* in the East. He extended his kingdom on all sides by war and conquests.

Sambaleswari temple of Sambalpur

*Sambaleswari* temple is the most important one among all *Sakta* temples of Sambalpur. The presiding deity of the temple is Goddess *Samaleswari* which very popular not only in Sambalpur but in the hole Western Odisha. The *Samaleswari* temple was build by Balaramdev, the First Chauhan Raja of Sambalpur. It was later on renovated by Chhatra Sai. The temple is dated to the last part of 16th Century to be constructed that in 1575.

6. Architecture

The temple is constructed North-South and facing the North. It is constructed on a raised platform, the lower portion of which contain numerous niches all round occupied by various *Sakta* Goddess. The temple is made of stone and covered with thick lime plaster. The temple is having the architectural futures like : high platform, *Jangha*, *high Shikhara* and *Mastaka*. It again has a circumambulatory path around the sanctum which is covered. It addition to the inner sanctum of the temple, there is a pillared hall in front. A flight of steps is provided to lead to the upper professional path and the temple. The vimana represent the *tiratha* style of temple architecture having a prominent sikhara raising straight from the plinth in a tapering manner upwards. The vimana has thirteen horizontal mouldings and the pagas on the other hand are carved beautifully. They are characterised by a succession of ascending lotus petals terminating grading *angasikharas*. The *beki* write upon the *gandi*, is surmounted by a big *amalaka*, then the *khapuri*, the gold *kalasa*, a trident as *ayudha* and finally a *dhvaja* or flag. The vertical
segments adorned by the sikhara with miniature temple motifs and ascending successive lotus petal designs presents and architectural grandeur. Some art historians regards this as the style of khajuraha group or the central Indian temple architecture but some other suggest that it is a logical out come of a regional development in the architectural style. These type of temple is also termed by some scholar at the Chauhan style of temple architecture.

7. Parsvadevatas

The garbha griha or the Samaleswari is a dark square chamber enshrining Goddess Samaleswari, iconography of which does not match to any of the iconographical form of Hindu Saka deities. It is a huge block of stone having the middle a projected shape with depressions on both sides which are provided with beaten gold leaves representing eyes. Again under it is a narrow groove which represents as mouth. When properly clothed and bedecked with ornaments, it gives the look of a face of a female deity. It was very likely a tribal deity of the locality and was transformed into a Brahmanical Goddess through the process of accumulation. The roof of the arched pillared circumambulatory path is made of four domes in the four corners supported by pillars. On the outer wall of the garbha griha divinities are enshrined. Among those, four handed Narasimhi, Mahisamardini Durga, ten armed Mangala, four armed Jwalamukhi, ten armed Vana Durga, four handed Varahi, four handed Chhinamasta, four handed Matangi and four handed Ramachandari are enshrined in the niches, three is in the eastern, southern and northernsides respectively. The south-western corner is occupied by Hanuman, while the south-eastern corner is enshrined a four handed Goddess called Ghantasuni. On the two sides of entrance of the sanctum Goddess Kali and four handed Ugratara are found. In the pillared hall, there are images of Vishnu, Varaha, Mahisamardini Durga, Bhairava and Kachchhopa Vishnu, all four handed and Narasimha. Some other sculptures of this temple are an eight handed dancing Goddess, ten handed Ganesa, four handed Ganesa, six armed Mahisamardini Durga etc. Three temples of Vajrangbali, Pitabali and of Bhairavi are found inside the campus.

8. Fair and Festivals

The celebration of various religious festivals reflect the culture of the people of a particular community or area, Varta (vow) Puja (worship of sacred places) Utsava (celebration) entertainment, marry making, group feast with music and dance bind the community in a socio-cultural tie. The celebration of different festivals is the parameter of the society. Member of such celebration are held throughout the year in Samaleswari temple of Sambalpur which are different from other Saka temple of Odisha.

Many festivals are observed in the temple throughout the year with much pomp and ceremony.

1- Jyestha Purnima - Jalasayee of Bhairava Baba
2- Shravana Purnima - Shravanabhishek
3- Bhadraba Sukla Panchami - Nuakhai
4- Bhadraba Krushna Astami - Ambikapuja
5- Aswani Amabasya - Mahalaya, Dhabalamukha and Gangadarshana
6- Aswini Sukla Partipata - Navaratra pujarambha and Dasahara
7- Aswini Purnima - Dhwarajorohana and Raja-Rajeswaribesha
8- Kartike Amabasya - Shyamapuja
9- Pousha Purnima - Poushyabhishek
10- Magha Sukla Panchami - Saraswati Puja
11- Magha purnami - Purnahuti of 24 Prahari Mahamantra Namagagya.
12- Makar Sankranti - Purnahuti of 3days Deepa Mahayagya
13- Falgun Purnima - Gundikhia and Dolapurnima
14- Chaitrasukla Pratipata - Basantika Navaratri Pujarambha
15- Bishuba Sankranti - Sitala Thakurani Puja
16- Akhyayatruitiya - Samaleswari Bhajan Samaroha
On **nuakhai annabhoga**, rice from new peddy is offered to **Maa Samaleswari**. It is the most important mass festival in the western part of the state which is also a government holiday in the state. ²⁹

On **mahalaya** about two lac divotes have a holydevi darshan of **Dhabalamukhibesha**. It is believes that **darshan** of Dhabalamukhi Samaleswari gives the blessing of Ganga Darshan. So it is known as Gangadarshan besha.

**Devi Samaleswari** is worshipped in **Bhubaneswari mantara** by kshyatriya sevayats. They belong to 12 families and uses the surhamee “Rai”. On days of festival like **Nuakhai puja** is offred in total 115 places in the temple premises. No one including pujakas demand money or any thing from the devotees which creates an atmoshphere for comfortable darshan. On the other hand the pujakas, members of Samaleswari yubak Sangha and others organisation as well as the local people co-operate in solving problem of the devotees. ³⁰

During this festival the **akhada ustad** and akhada master display martial art along with their follwers with sticks, words and fire which attracts the people very much Sambalpur is named after Goddess **Samaleswari**. Devotees pilgrims and tourists from all parts of the country come to this place in large number to have a holy **darshan** of Maa Samaleswari, the presiding deity.

9. **Conclusion**

In this region there are many **Saktas** centers which have acclaimeed eminence due to patronization of kings, Zamindars and Landlords. There are also some lesson known centres, which have no less contribution to the development of **Saktism** had been a widely prevalent and acceptable cult among the common men and rural folk of retained its popularity and preponderanch. Originally **Samalai** or **Samaleswari** was the Goddess of a family or tribe, and then became the deity of the clan and other tribes. Gradually her states elevated from **Gramadevatas** to **Nagaradevatas** and subsequently to state deity of Sambalpur Kingdom.

10. **Notes & References**

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