



The Uniqueness of Oḍiā Festivals (Festivals of Odisha): A Cultural and Religious Exploration

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Abstract – Odisha, a state in eastern India, is a land steeped in culture, religion, and tradition. The festivals of Odisha, also known as Oḍiā festivals, reflect the region's rich heritage and spiritual essence. This paper explores the uniqueness of these festivals, examining their cultural significance, religious underpinnings, and the role they play in the social fabric of the state. Through an analysis of major festivals like Rath Yātrā, Durgā Pūjā, and Raja Parba, this study highlights how these celebrations are intertwined with the daily lives of the people, their agricultural practices, and their devotion to the divine. The paper aims to showcase how Oḍiā festivals stand out in the broader context of Indian culture, offering a distinct blend of tradition, devotion, and communal harmony.

Keywords: Odisha, Oḍiā festivals, Ratha Yātrā, Durgā Pūjā, Raja Parba, Makara Saṅkrānti, Nūākhāi, cultural heritage, religious significance, agrarian lifestyle, traditional rituals, community bonding.

1. INTRODUCTION

Odisha, formerly known as Orissa, is a state that boasts a diverse cultural and religious landscape. The festivals celebrated here are not just mere rituals; they are a way of life that binds the community together. The uniqueness of Oḍiā festivals lies in their deep-rooted connections to the region's history, mythology, and agrarian lifestyle. This paper seeks to delve into the distinctive features of these festivals, exploring their origins, significance, and the unique customs associated with them.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF OḍIĀ FESTIVALS

The history of Oḍiā festivals is as ancient as the state itself. Many of these celebrations trace their origins to the early Hindu texts and Purāṇas, while others are linked to the tribal traditions of Odisha. The festivals have evolved over centuries, incorporating elements from various dynasties that ruled the region, including the Kāḷiṅga, Gaṅga, and Marathā rulers. These festivals are a testament to the syncretic culture of Odisha, where different religious and cultural influences have blended seamlessly.

Odisha is one of the most beautiful states in India. Oḍiā is the official language of Odisha. The famous ruler Asoka and the war of Kāḷiṅga all are connected with the state of Odisha. Immerse yourself in the vibrant hues of Odisha's cultural panorama as we embark on a journey through the state's rich tapestry of Odisha festivals. Known for its diverse cultural heritage, Odisha, the soul of India, is a land where festivals are not just celebrations, but a way of life.

Each festival, steeped in ancient traditions and spiritual significance, paints a vivid picture of the state's profound religious faith and communal harmony. From the grand chariot procession of Ratha Yātrā to the unique celebration of womanhood in Raja Parba, the joyous dance of colors during Holi to the reverence of the Sun God in Makara Saṅkrānti, each festival is a world in itself. They offer a glimpse into the state's deep-rooted customs, its love for art and dance, and its undying spirit of celebration. The state

celebrates some of the most interesting festivals like Durgā Pūjā, Raja, Makara Saṅkrānti, Kumāra Pūrṇimā, Dola yātrā, Gaja Lakṣmī Pūjā, Gaṁhā Pūrṇimā etc. Odisha is famous for its religion-spirituality. These are known as Parbas. Odisha is a land of 13 festivals in 12 months. In Odisha people celebrate 13 parbas in 12 months. Odisha is famous for its festivals. Odisha is known for its colorful festivals. The festivals are numerous, spread over all the twelve months of a year. The village life centers round agriculture. So there is an intimate relationship of festivals with agricultural operations. Odishan Festivals are also observed as part of Hindu religious faith. Dates for Odishan festivals are determined by the traditional Hindu calendar. The specialties of most of the Odishan festivals are that, on these occasions, much merry-making is done, new clothes are worn, and special dishes are prepared at home. Odishan cuisine is at its test in these functions. Delicious dishes prepared include small cakes known as Piṭhā and also sweets made from milk. Festivals carry forward people's tradition and culture.

Table -1: Festival Oḍiā Month

SL. No	Oḍiā Month	Festival
1	Vaiśākha (Aril - May)	Paṇā Saṅkrānti (Mahā Viśuva Saṅkrānti)
2	Jyeṣṭha (May - June)	Buddha Pūrṇimā, Akṣaya Tṛtīyā, Sābitrī Brata, Śitala Ṣaṣṭhī
3	Āṣāḍha (June - July)	Raja Parba, Ratha Yātrā
4	Śrābaṇa (July - August)	Gaṁhā Pūrṇimā (Rakṣā Bandhana)
5	Bhādraba (August – September)	Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī, Gaṇeśa Caturthī, Nūākhāi, Suniā
6	Āśvina (September - October)	Viśvakarmā Pūjā, Mahālayā, Durgā Pūjā, Kumāra Pūrṇimā
7	Kārttika (October - November)	Kāī Pūjā, Dīpābālī, Jagaddhātṛī Pūjā, Boita Bandāṇa, Bāli Yātrā
8	Mārgaśira (November – December)	Prathamāṣṭamī, Maṇabasā Gurubāra
9	Pauṣa (January - February)	Dhanu Yātrā, Śāmba Daśamī, Pouṣa Pūrṇimā
10	Māgha (February - March)	Makara Saṅkrānti, Vasant Pañcamī
11	Phālguna/Phaguṇa (March - April)	Mahā Śivarātrī
12	Caitra (April - May)	Holi (Dola Pūrṇimā), Odisha Day (Utkala Divasa)

Odisha, often referred to as the land of “13 festivals in 12 months” (Bāra Māsa re Tera Parba), is a state rich in cultural diversity and tradition, where festivals are celebrated with great enthusiasm and reverence. Each festival reflects the state's deep spiritual roots, agricultural practices, and community life.

3. MAJOR FESTIVALS OF ODISHA

3.1 Ratha Yātrā

The grand chariot festival of Lord Jagannātha in Puri is Odisha's most famous festival. It signifies the annual journey of the deities Jagannātha, Balabhadra, and Subhadra to their garden temple, Gundicha. The festival embodies the concept of universal brotherhood and equality, as people of all castes and



Fig -1: Ratha Yātrā

communities come together to pull the chariots. Scientifically, the construction and movement of the massive chariots reflect ancient engineering skills and precision.

3.2 Makara Saṅkrānti

Celebrated in January, Makara Saṅkrānti marks the transition of the Sun into the zodiac sign Capricorn (Makara). It is an important harvest festival in Odisha, where people offer prayers to the Sun God and prepare special delicacies like 'Makara Cāula' (rice dish). The festival is rooted in the astronomical significance of the Sun's northward journey (Uttarāyaṇa), which is considered auspicious.



Fig -2: Makara Saṅkrānti

3.3 Durgā Pūjā

A major festival across Odisha, Durgā Pūjā celebrates the victory of Goddess Durgā over the demon Mahiṣāsura. The festival, marked by elaborate rituals, artistic decorations, and cultural performances, is a time for social gatherings and community bonding. The scientific significance lies in the seasonal change, as the festival coincides with the post-monsoon period, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil and the onset of autumn.



Fig -3: Durgā Pūjā

3.4 Kumāra Pūrṇimā

Celebrating on the full moon day of the Āśvina month, this festival is dedicated to the worship of the

moon. Young girls observe fast and pray for a good husband, as it is believed that Lord Kārttikeya, the handsome god of war, was born on this day. The festival also coincides with the autumn harvest, linking it to agricultural prosperity.



Fig -4: Kumāra Pūrṇimā

3.5 Raja Parba

This unique festival celebrates womanhood, particularly the menstrual cycle, symbolizing fertility and the earth's rejuvenation. During the three-day festival, women enjoy a break from household chores, and various traditional games, swings, and foods like 'Poḍa Piṭhā' are enjoyed. Raja Parba underscores the respect for natural processes and the cultural significance of feminine energy.



Fig -5: Raja Parba

3.6 Paṇā Saṅkrānti (Mahā Viṣuva Saṅkrānti)

Marking the Oḍiā New Year, this festival involves the preparation of 'paṇā,' a sweet drink, to welcome the new season and seek blessings for a fruitful year. It aligns with the vernal equinox, representing a balance between day and night, and is a time for renewal and hope.



Fig -6: Paṇā Saṅkrānti

3.7 Citālāgi Amāvāsyā

Observed on the new moon day of the Śrāvāṇa month, this festival involves the offering of rice cakes (Citau Piṭhā) to Lord Jagannātha. It is associated with agricultural rituals, where farmers pray for protection against crop failures, highlighting the deep connection between Odisha's festivals and its agrarian lifestyle.



Fig -7: Citālāgi Amāvāsyā

3.8 Boita Bandana

Celebrated on Kārttika Pūrṇimā, Boita Bandāna commemorates Odisha's rich maritime history. People set afloat miniature boats made of banana bark or paper in water bodies, symbolizing the voyages of ancient sailors. It reflects the maritime trade practices and navigational knowledge of ancient Oḍiā traders.



Fig -8: Boita Bandana

3.9 Bāli Yātrā and Kārttika Pūrṇimā

Bāli Yātrā, celebrated on Kārttika Pūrṇimā, commemorates Odisha's rich maritime history. On this day, people set sail miniature boats on rivers and ponds, symbolizing the ancient voyages of Oḍiā traders to Southeast Asia. The festival also features a grand fair along the Mahānadī River in Cuttack, attracting thousands with its vibrant cultural displays and festive spirit. Bāli Yātrā marks the departure of Oḍiā traders (Sādhavas) on their voyages to Southeast Asia. A grand fair is held along the Mahanadi River. It celebrates the tradition of sea navigation and the understanding of seasonal winds and ocean currents.



Fig -9: Bāli Yātrā

3.10 Gaja Lakṣmī Pūjā

Gaja Lakṣmī Pūjā is dedicated to Goddess Lakṣmī, the deity of wealth and prosperity. Celebrated in the month of Aśvina, the festival is particularly significant in Dhenkanal, Odisha, where devotees adorn their homes and temples with lights and decorations, offering prayers to seek the blessings of the goddess for wealth and well-being. Observed to worship Goddess Lakṣmī, it signifies wealth, prosperity, and well-being. The festival is widely celebrated in the coastal regions of Odisha. The festival occurs after the harvest season, emphasizing the importance of wealth distribution and economic stability.



Fig -10: Bāli Yātrā

3.11 Nūākhāi

Nūākhāi is a major harvest festival in Western Odisha, particularly in the Sambalpur region. It is celebrated to welcome the new rice of the season. On this day, families come together to offer the first harvest to the household deity, followed by a communal feast, symbolizing unity, prosperity, and gratitude for the season's bounty. Nūākhāi is a harvest festival primarily celebrated in Western Odisha. Families come together to offer the first grains of the harvest to the deities and elders. It is an acknowledgment of the agricultural cycle and the importance of timely harvesting.



Fig -11: Nūākhāi

3.12 Śītala Ṣaṣṭhī

Śītala Ṣaṣṭhī is a unique festival celebrating the divine marriage of Lord Śiva and Goddess Pārvatī. Observed in the month of Jyeṣṭha, it is marked by vibrant processions and elaborate rituals. The festival is particularly grand in Sambalpur, where the festivities include dramatizations of the wedding and cultural performances. Celebrated as the divine marriage of Lord Śiva and Goddess Pārvatī, Śītala Ṣaṣṭhī marks the beginning of the monsoon season in Odisha. The festival heralds the onset of rains, essential for agriculture, and reflects the connection between nature and rituals.



Fig -12: Śītala Ṣaṣṭhī

3.13 Dhanu Yātrā

Dhanu Yātrā, the world's largest open-air theater, is celebrated in Bargarh, Odisha. The entire town transforms into a stage depicting the mythological story of Lord Kṛṣṇa's battle with the demon king Kāṁsa. The festival lasts for 11 days and involves the participation of the entire community in the enactment of the epic tale. The world's largest open-air theater, Dhanu Yātrā reenacts the story of Lord Kṛṣṇa's visit to Mathurā and the tyrant king Kāṁsa's rule. It is celebrated in Bargarh, Odisha. It emphasizes the victory of good over evil and promotes the moral values of courage and righteousness.



Fig -13: Dhanu Yātrā

3.14 Dola Pūrṇimā and Holi

Dola Pūrṇimā, also known as Holi in Odisha, is a festival of colors celebrated in Phālgunā. The festival begins with the procession of Lord Kṛṣṇa's idol on a palanquin, followed by Holi, where people joyously smear each other with colors, symbolizing the arrival of spring and the victory of good over evil. Dola Pūrṇimā involves the procession of deities in villages, and Holi, the festival of colors, marks the arrival of spring. Holi, with its vibrant colors, is linked to the scientific benefit of balancing seasonal changes and increasing immunity.



Fig -14: Dola Pūrṇimā and Holi

3.15 Mahā Śivarātrī

Mahā Śivarātrī is a significant festival dedicated to Lord Śiva, observed with great fervor across Odisha. Devotees fast and spend the night in prayer and meditation, visiting Śiva temples to offer special rituals. The Liṅgarāja Temple in Bhubaneswar witnesses grand celebrations with elaborate Pūjās and rituals. Mahā Śivarātrī is dedicated to the worship of Lord Śiva. Devotees observe fasting and night-long vigils. The festival occurs during the transition from winter to summer, and fasting is believed to detoxify the body.



Fig -15: Mahā Śivarātrī

3.16 Vasant Pañcamī

Vasant Pañcamī marks the arrival of spring and is celebrated in honor of Goddess Sarasvatī, the deity of knowledge and wisdom. In Odisha, it is an auspicious day for initiating education for children and is observed with the worship of books, pens, and musical instruments, symbolizing the pursuit of learning. Vasant Pañcamī is dedicated to Goddess Sarasvatī, the deity of learning and wisdom. It marks the beginning of the spring season. The festival is celebrated at the onset of spring, symbolizing the renewal of life and knowledge.



Fig -16: Vasant Pañcamī

3.17 Prathamāṣṭamī

Prathamāṣṭamī is a festival that celebrates the well-being and prosperity of the eldest child in the family. On this day, the eldest child is honored with special rituals, and a traditional delicacy called “Eṇḍurī Piṭhā” is prepared. The festival reflects the importance of the firstborn in the family hierarchy. Prathamāṣṭamī is celebrated for the well-being and longevity of the eldest child in the family. The child is honored with new clothes and traditional food. The festival recognizes the social responsibility of the eldest child and reinforces family bonds.



Fig -17: Prathamāṣṭamī

3.18 Dīpāvaḥī

Dīpāvaḥī, or Diwali, is celebrated in Odisha with traditional lighting of lamps, bursting of crackers, and worship of Goddess Lakshmi. The day is also marked by rituals in honor of ancestors, where lamps are floated in rivers and ponds as a symbol of guiding the souls of the departed. Dīpāvaḥī or Diwali is the festival of lights, symbolizing the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. The lighting of lamps is believed to ward off insects and purify the environment.



Fig -18: Dīpāvaḥī

3.19 Kāḥī Pūjā

Kāḥī Pūjā, dedicated to Goddess Kāḥī, is observed on the new moon day of the Hindu month of Kārttika. In Odisha, it is celebrated with grandeur, especially in Cuttack, where pandals (temporary shrines) are set up, and the goddess is worshipped with elaborate rituals, symbolizing the destruction of evil and protection from harm. Kāḥī Pūjā is dedicated to Goddess Kāḥī, representing the destruction of evil forces. It is prominently celebrated in certain parts of Odisha. The festival coincides with Diwali and emphasizes the balance of cosmic forces.

3.20 Māḥavasā Guruvāra

Māḥavasā Guruvāra is a unique festival dedicated to Goddess Lakshmi, celebrated on Thursdays during the month of Mārgaśīra. Women perform rituals and clean their homes to welcome the goddess, believing it will bring prosperity. Traditional rice paste patterns, known as “Jhoṭi,” are drawn on the floors, symbolizing the goddess’s footprints. Celebrated in the month of Mārgaśīra, Māḥavasā Guruvāra is dedicated to Goddess Lakṣmī. Women worship the goddess by drawing traditional “Jhoṭi” designs with rice paste. It reflects the agrarian society’s reverence for the goddess of prosperity during the harvest season.



Fig -19: Māḥavasā Guruvāra

3.21 Akṣaya Tṛtīyā

Akṣaya Tṛtīyā is an auspicious day in Odisha, marking the beginning of the agricultural season. Farmers start sowing seeds on this day, and it is also a popular occasion for initiating new ventures. Devotees believe that any good deed performed on this day will yield lasting benefits. Akṣaya Tṛtīyā is considered an auspicious day for beginning new ventures, purchasing gold, and starting the agricultural season by sowing seeds. The day marks the onset of the agricultural season, emphasizing the importance of timely sowing for a good harvest.



Fig -20: Akṣaya Tṛtīyā

According to the Purāṇas, that this day is again auspicious as the text Mahābhārata was composed between Ṛṣi Vedavyāsa and Lord Gaṇeśa. On this very day the Satyayuga and Tretayā yuga started. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa met his childhood friend and removed his poverty. As per the Śāstras this day was the auspicious day for many historical events. This day is the birth day of Lord Paraśurām, appearance of Mā Annapūrṇā, birth day of Akṣayakumāra the son of Lord Brahmā, the cust Oḍiān of wealth Lord Kuvera received all the secret sources of wealth deposits, Mā Gaṅgā descended on earth, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa offered unending support of cloth for keeping the prestige of Draupadī at the Kurusabhā, king Janaka ploughed the field and and Jānakī emerged from the Earth, the birth day of Bhakta Kavi Śrī Jayadeva, the author of Śrī Gīta Govinda Kāvyaṃ and the famous Candanayātrā takes place at Puri. This yātrā (festival) is being done with grand celebration for 42 days at Puri. From AkṣayaTṛtīyā to Jyeṣṭha Śukla Caturdaśī the 42 days are divided in to two major celebrations (a) first 21 days out side of the temple i.e. at Narendra Pond and (b) 21 days inside the Śrīmandira temple, This yātrā is celebrated throughout Odisha where Śrī Jagannātha temple is there. Cultural Significance: So this day of Akṣaya Tṛtīyā is so popular among the people of Odisha that it is the starting point of many auspicious celebrations of Indians and particularly the people of Odisha.

3.22 Sāvitrī Brata

Sāvitrī Brata is a fasting ritual observed by married women in Odisha for the well-being and long life of their husbands. The festival is inspired by the legend of Sāvitrī and Satyavāna and involves day-long fasting and prayers to Goddess Sāvitrī, symbolizing devotion, fidelity, and marital bliss. Sāvitrī Brata is observed by married women for the well-being and longevity of their husbands, inspired by the devotion of Sāvitrī who brought her husband back from death. The fasting and rituals are believed to promote self-discipline and mental fortitude among women.



Fig -21: Sāvitrī Brata

3.23 Buddha Pūrṇimā

Buddha Pūrṇimā celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and death of Lord Buddha. In Odisha, it is observed with prayers, meditation, and offerings in Buddhist temples and monasteries, particularly in places like Dhauli and Jirang, reflecting the state's ancient Buddhist heritage. Buddha Pūrṇimā celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and death of Lord Buddha. It is a day of reflection and meditation. The festival promotes peace, mindfulness, and the significance of mental well-being.



Fig -22: Buddha Pūrṇimā

3.24 Gaṁhā Pūrṇimā (Rakṣā Bandhana)

Gaṁhā Pūrṇimā, also known as Rakṣā Bandhana, is a festival celebrating the bond between brothers and sisters. It is also linked to the legend of Lord Jagannātha and his sister Subhadrā. The tying of the Rākṣī symbolizes protection, and the festival emphasizes familial bonds and social harmony. Gaṁhā Pūrṇimā coincides with Rakṣā Bandhana and is celebrated in Odisha as a day to honor the bond between brothers and sisters. It also marks the birth of Lord Balabhadra, the elder brother of Lord Jagannātha. The festival is celebrated with rituals and the tying of protective threads (Rākṣīs) by sisters on their brothers' wrists.



Fig -23: Gaṁhā Pūrṇimā

3.25 Viśvakarmā Pūjā

Viśvakarmā Pūjā is dedicated to Lord Viśvakarmā, the divine architect, and is particularly significant for artisans, craftsmen, and workers. In Odisha, workshops, factories, and tools are worshipped, and prayers are offered for skill, success, and the safe functioning of machinery. Viśvakarmā Pūjā honors the divine architect Viśvakarmā, the deity of craftsmanship and engineering. Artisans, craftsmen, and engineers worship their tools on this day. The festival recognizes the importance of technology, craftsmanship, and the need for maintaining tools and equipment.



Fig -24: Viśvakarmā Pūjā

3.26 Mahālayā

Mahālayā marks the beginning of the Durgā Pūjā festival and is observed as the day when Goddess Durgā descends to Earth. In Odisha, it is a time of early morning prayers, listening to the recitation of Mahiṣāsura Mardīnī, and preparing for the grand festivities of Durgā Pūjā. Mahālayā marks the beginning of the Durgā Pūjā festivities. It is the day when the goddess Durgā is believed to descend to earth. The day signals the transition into the autumn season, with changing weather patterns.



Fig -25: Mahālayā

3.27 Śāmba Daśamī

Śāmba daśamī is a unique festival in Odisha where mothers pray for the health and well-being of their children. The festival involves worship of the Sun God and the consumption of special dishes prepared in honor of the deity, symbolizing the nourishment and protection of the family. Śāmba daśamī is observed in honor of Samba, the son of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who was cured of leprosy by the Sun God. Mothers observe fasting for the health and longevity of their children. The worship of the Sun God during this festival highlights the importance of sunlight for health and well-being.



Fig -26: Śāmba Daśamī

3.28 Pauṣa Pūrṇimā

Pauṣa Pūrṇimā marks the culmination of the month-long observance of Pauṣa, a winter festival in Odisha. It is a time for celebrating harvests, with rituals that include offering newly harvested crops to deities and community feasts. The festival also coincides with the celebration of Lord Jagannātha's Boita Bandāṇa in some regions. Pauṣa Pūrṇimā is observed in the month of Pauṣa, marking the end of the harvest season. It is a time for offering thanks to the deities for a bountiful harvest. The festival underscores the completion of the agricultural cycle and the importance of gratitude in sustaining natural resources.

These festivals in Odisha are not just religious observances but also cultural expressions that strengthen social bonds and reflect a deep understanding of nature and the cosmos. They illustrate the blend of spirituality, tradition, and science that has shaped Oḍiā society over centuries. Each of these festivals reflects Odisha's rich cultural heritage, blending tradition, devotion, and community spirit.

3.29 Baḍa Oṣā

Baḍa Oṣā is a significant festival celebrated in Odisha, particularly at the Dhavaleśvara Temple in the Cuttack district. This festival, which is dedicated to Lord Śīva, usually falls on the Kārttika Pūrṇimā, the full moon day of the Hindu month of Kārttika (around October or November). Devotees observe a day-long fast, known as "Haviṣa," which is an integral part of the festival. They take only one meal in the evening



Fig -27: Baḍa Oṣā

after performing rituals. Various rituals and prayers are offered to Lord Śīva throughout the day. The temple is beautifully decorated, and special Pūjās are performed. One of the unique aspects of Baḍa Oṣā is the preparation and offering of "Gaja Bhoga," a special type of prasāda made of rice, coconut, sugar, and ghee. This is considered highly auspicious, and devotees eagerly partake in this prasāda after the Pūjā. Baḍa Oṣā holds great cultural and religious importance in Odisha. It reflects the deep-rooted traditions and devotion of the people of Odisha towards Lord Śīva. In the evening, after the rituals, there is

usually a grand celebration with cultural programs, bhajanas (devotional songs), and the distribution of prasāda to devotees. The festival creates a vibrant atmosphere, drawing a large number of devotees to the temple. Baḍa Oṣā is a beautiful blend of devotion, tradition, and community spirit, making it one of the cherished festivals in Odisha.

3.30 Khudurukuṇī Oṣā/ Bhālukuṇī Oṣā

Khudurukuṇī Oṣā, also known as Bhālukuṇī Oṣā, is a popular festival observed primarily by unmarried girls in Odisha, especially in the coastal regions. The festival is celebrated on Sundays in the month of Bhadrabā (August–September), during the monsoon season. It is dedicated to Goddess Mangala, who is worshiped for the well-being of brothers, prosperity of the family, and future marital bliss.



Fig -28: Khudurukuṇī Oṣā

The festival finds its roots in the deep connection of Odia culture with the maritime history of the region. Khudurukuṇī Oṣā is believed to have originated as a commemoration of the devotion and sacrifice of Odia women, especially maidens, toward their brothers who would embark on long sea voyages as part of Odisha's ancient seafaring tradition. The term "Khudurukuṇī" is derived from the Odia words "khudura" (broken rice) and "kuṇī" (begging), symbolizing the simple yet pure offerings made to the deity during the rituals.

The festival is closely associated with the legend of Ta'apoi, a tale from Odia folklore. Ta'apoi was a young girl who was mistreated by her sisters-in-law while her brothers were away on a long sea voyage. Despite her sufferings, Ta'apoi continued her fast and worship of Goddess Mangala. Upon their return, her brothers discovered her plight, and with the blessings of the goddess, justice was restored. This story highlights the themes of love, devotion, and the sacred bond between brothers and sisters, making the festival a form of cultural expression for these values.

Khudurukuṇī Oṣā reflects the socio-cultural values of Odisha, emphasizing familial bonds, especially the relationship between brothers and sisters, which is a significant aspect of Odia festivals. It also preserves the oral tradition of storytelling through the recitation of the Ta'apoi legend and serves as an occasion to strengthen the community bond among young girls. This festival beautifully blends religious devotion with folk culture, symbolizing the strength and endurance of women and their unwavering commitment to their families.

3.31 Gosāṇī Yātra

Gosāṇī Yātra of Odisha is a unique and vibrant folk festival celebrated primarily in Puri, coinciding with the Dussehra festival. This Yatra is dedicated to the worship of various forms of Goddess Śakti, particularly in the form of Gosāṇī, a fierce manifestation of Goddess Durgā. The festival features large, colorful clay idols of the goddess adorned with weapons, accompanied by representations of demons like Mahiṣāsura,

signifying the triumph of good over evil.

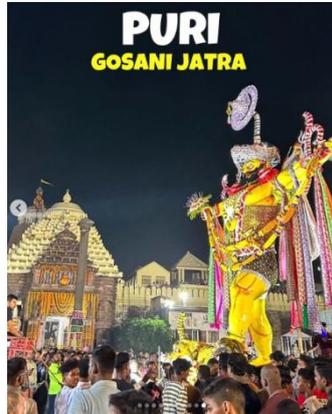


Fig -29: Gosāṇī Yātra

During the Yātra, these idols are taken out in grand processions with much fanfare, including traditional music, dance, and martial displays such as Paikākhēḷa (warrior dance), making it a spectacle of cultural vibrancy. The rituals also involve folk performances, dramatic enactments of mythological stories, and the use of indigenous instruments, maintaining a deep connection with local religious and cultural practices.

The festival reflects the integration of classical religious beliefs with local folk traditions, showcasing Odisha's rich cultural heritage. It is also a symbolic representation of the community's devotion to the goddess and their celebration of her power.

3.32 Bakuḷa Amāvāsyā

Bakuḷa Amāvāsyā is a unique festival observed primarily in Odisha, India. It occurs on the new moon day (Amāvāsyā) in the Hindu month of Māgha (January–February). The festival is named after the Bakuḷa tree (Mimusops elengi), which holds religious and cultural significance.



Fig -30: Bakuḷa Amāvāsyā

On this day, devotees celebrate the blooming of the Bakuḷa flowers and worship Lord Jagannath with a particular focus on his sacred Bakuḷa mālā (garland of Bakuḷa flowers). Traditionally, this festival involves offerings of flowers and prayers for prosperity and happiness. The event symbolizes the close connection between nature and spirituality in Odishan culture, as well as the regional devotion to Lord Jagannath.

It is also a day for honoring ancestors and performing rituals for their peace and well-being, similar to other Amāvāsyā observances in Hindu tradition.

3.33 Rādhāṣṭamī

Rādhāṣṭamī is a significant festival celebrated in Odisha, particularly among the devotees of Lord Krishna. It marks the birth anniversary of Goddess Rādhā, the divine consort of Lord Krishna, on the eighth day (Aṣṭamī) of the bright fortnight (Śukla Pakṣa) in the month of Bhādra (August-September). The festival holds great importance in the Vaishnavite tradition and is observed with much devotion, especially in temples dedicated to Lord Krishna, such as the renowned Jagannath Temple in Puri.



Fig -31: Rādhāṣṭamī

During Rādhāṣṭamī, devotees worship Goddess Rādhā as the embodiment of pure love and devotion towards Krishna. Special rituals and prayers are conducted in temples, accompanied by the singing of bhajans (devotional songs) and chanting of the divine names of Rādhā and Krishna. In some places, grand processions are held, where idols of Rādhā and Krishna are taken out for public viewing.

In Odisha, the festival is not only a spiritual event but also a cultural occasion, where devotees reflect on the eternal love of Rādhā and Krishna, which symbolizes the union of the soul with the Supreme. It complements the celebration of Janmāṣṭamī (the birth of Lord Krishna), highlighting the importance of Rādhā as the inseparable partner of Krishna in devotion and worship.

3.34 Suniā

The Suniā festival of Odisha is a unique and ancient royal tradition celebrated primarily by the Gajapati kings of the state. It marks the occasion when the kings symbolically reaffirm their sovereignty and renew their role as protectors of the land and its people. The festival is observed on Bhādrapada śukla pakṣa aṣṭamī tithi (the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Bhādrapada month), which generally falls in August or September.



Fig -32: Suniā

During Suniā, the king performs rituals to seek blessings for prosperity, good governance, and the well-being of the kingdom. The festival has its roots in the medieval period when Odia rulers would conduct this ritual to mark the peaceful and prosperous reign, symbolically tying their legitimacy to divine forces. It



also involves the ritualistic reading of land grants and other royal decrees, signifying the reaffirmation of the king's commitment to justice and dharma.

Historically, Suniā was a grand event where landlords and feudal lords presented tributes to the king. Even today, the festival reflects the deep cultural heritage and royal customs of Odisha, highlighting the important relationship between rulers and their subjects.

4. CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

Oḍiā festivals are a reflection of the state's diverse cultural tapestry and deep religious faith. These festivals are not just religious observances but are also closely tied to the agrarian lifestyle of the people. They serve as a medium to express gratitude to the gods for a bountiful harvest, seek blessings for future prosperity, and reinforce community bonds. The rituals, music, dance, and food associated with these festivals are integral to the Oḍiā identity and contribute to the preservation of the region's cultural heritage.

5. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

The festivals of Odisha have a significant impact on the social and economic life of the people. They bring communities together, transcending social and economic barriers. The festivals also boost the local economy, as they attract tourists, generate employment, and promote traditional arts and crafts. The Ratha Yātrā, for example, is a major event that draws millions of pilgrims and tourists, contributing to the local economy. Similarly, the demand for traditional Oḍiā handicrafts, textiles, and cuisine during festivals provides a livelihood for many artisans and small businesses.

6. CONCLUSION

The festivals of Odisha are a unique blend of tradition, devotion, and community spirit. They are a celebration of life, nature, and the divine, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the state. The uniqueness of Oḍiā festivals lies in their ability to bring people together, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity. As Odisha continues to evolve, these festivals remain a vital link to its past, preserving its traditions while adapting to contemporary times. This paper has highlighted the distinctive features of major Oḍiā festivals, demonstrating their importance in the cultural and religious landscape of the state.

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