

## Tara Tarini Temple: An Ancient Sakti Pitha of South Odisha

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### Abstract

Maa Tara Tarini Sakti Pitha situated in south Odisha is one of the ancient and famous sakti pithas of India. The tradition of Shakti worship in India can be traced back to the period of antiquity. Shakti is the mother of universe the highest primal power transferred to powerful Goddess representing the creative force, matrika, later developed to Shakti under various names of Shakti as depicted in Tantra literature. There are many interesting stories, Myths, Legends and Folklore relating to the origin of the Tara Tarini shrine at the Hill Top. However some mythological work and local legends are available to throw adequate light on this Sakta Pitha i.e. the Tara Tarini pitha. The mythological sources are Siva Purana, Kalika Purana, Tarini Kalpa and Tara Mahatya etc.

**Key Words: Ancient, Sakti Pitha, Mythological, Sources, Legends.**

### Introduction

Tara Tarini temple is situated at 708 feet on top of the Kumari hills, popularly called as Tara Tarini Hill, on the banks of the Rushikulya River near Purushottampur in the Ganjam District of Odisha. Like The Goddess Kamakhya of Assam, Maa Tara Tarini has mixed sources of origin that have all contributed to the development of the tribal goddess that is worshipped as the presiding deity of every home in south Odisha today. Alongside the story of the origin of the Saktipithas, Tara Tarini's mythological background can be traced in the Raghunatha Kirtana, the Tantra Sashttra, Tantra-Rajatantra, and a number of Buddhist texts. The Hindu tradition attributes Tara with much more than the mere dropping of her name Hymn. The one

mother goddess of which she is Tarini her second form who serves as the starting point for the development of wisdom and pure consciousness.

According to some historians, Tara was the name associated with the Buddhist tradition while Tarini was the name of the Hindu deity and through long assimilation of the communities the goddess came to be known as Tara Tarini with a merged identity that was gradually accepted as the principal deity of the Sakti cult in Hinduism. The word Tarini denotes a boat while also meaning saviour in Sanskrit. In the hymn of the Mahabharata, “the primal form of Tara or Bhavatarini is hailed as “bhaya-haarini bhava-tarini” and is therefore seen as the goddess who rescues devotees, bringing them across physical waters to literal shores of liberation. These conceptual ideologies were able to spread by way of the Rushikulya River’s sacred path of communication and maritime trade activities.

### **Saktipithas in India**

The story of the Saktipithas has adopted a number of varying traditions. Some texts claim there are 51 *pithas*, others claim 52, some say 108, and others proclaim four as being the main parts of the Goddess. It is said that Durga, a name for the overall concept of the Goddess, has 1008 forms each with a different name derived from a specific aspect, physical form, or accomplishment of Her infinite character.<sup>i</sup> Each *pitha* is classified by the name of the Goddess, the body part that fell, the Bhairava consort form, and the specific location based on natural land formation and name of town, state, or district. The four main Saktipithas are considered to be the following: the *Pada Khanda* (feet) of Shakti *Vimala* found in Puri, Odisha; the *Mukha Khanda* (mouth or head) of Shakti *Dakshina Kalika* in Kolkata, West

Bengal; the *Sthana Khanda* (breasts) of Shakti *Taratarini* near Purushottampur, Odisha; and the *Yoni Khanda* (female reproductive organ) of Shakti *Kamakhya* in Guwahati, Assam.

### ***Maa Tara Tarini- Temple History***

Much of Tara Tarini's past has been undocumented, but it can be inferred that She has been receiving salutation since the time of the *Mahabharata* because Arjuna's hymn to Durga as provoked by Lord Krishna hails the name Tarini (Tara Tarini). The Hindu tradition attributes Tara with much more than the mere dropping of her name in hymn, however, her powers can be noticed in the *dasamahavidya* or ten incarnations of the One Mother Goddess of which she is Tara in her second form who serves as the starting point for the development of wisdom and pure consciousness. Her name in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition is revealed in texts of the 1<sup>st</sup> CE after the acceptance of idol and goddess worship was introduced by Buddhist Tantric texts that worshipped Tara Tarini as the Tantric deity Buddha Tara.

Before the establishment of a physical temple, people used to worship the entire vastness of the mountain as the shrine of the Goddess, viewing the neighbouring mountain as the land of the Goddess's consort Bhairava. The two adjacent mountains were worshipped for centuries as the *sthana pitha* as the breasts of the Goddess sati fell here as per a tradition. These mountains also appear as such because of their natural shape and the ancient association of the Mother as the pervasive energy of the land. Eventually a temple was built upon this land solidifying the tradition of the tribal people, but "it is known from the available sources that until 17<sup>th</sup> century this place was out of the sight of the common people".

Tara and Tarini are also worshipped as natural stone formations, but these two slabs have been shaped to look like human faces and have been decorated with gold and silver ornaments. In between the representations of Tara and Tarini are two brass heads that serve as their movable forms mounted, displayed, or paraded during special puja ceremonies.

Tara Tarini is not the only godly figure at this site. In fact, there are many Hindu god and goddess power groups represented in various spots that all serve to assist the primary deity of the temple while also providing a visual sensation of the Infinite Oneness in the Ultimate form of the Mother Goddess that is all other forms at the same time. Three assistants to the Goddess who destroy evil and carry out orders for the fulfillment of desires and the preservation of balance can be found on each side of the temple walls. These three powers are aspects of the *saptamatrikas* or the seven mothers and they are named *Chamunda* (associated with Kali), *Barahi* (boar-headed female form of Vishnu avatar), and *Narasinghi* (lion-headed female form of Vishnu avatar).

Aspects of the *saptamatrika* are present alongside the entirety of the *dasamahavidya* towards the back of the temple serving as the backbone of Tara's manifestation. As if there were not already enough deities, the Taratarini temple also includes representation of the five deity tradition which is often manifested as Tantric worship of Shiva, Ganesha, *Narayani* (Vishnu), *Surya* (sun god), and Shakti. In this tradition known as *panchayatana puja*, one of these five deities is given the centre position (Shakti) while the others become the surrounding deities that serve as principles of veneration and evolution. The small temple of Taratarini

exemplifies the multiplicity of the universe through the many forms of a singular all-pervading reality found amidst the *dasamahavidya*, *saptamatrika*, *panchayatana puja*, and the nine *grahas* posted above the entrance.

### **The Legends**

There are many interesting stories, myths, legends and folklore relating to the origin of the Tara Tarini shrine at the hill top. However historical evidences are not available and so any conclusive judgment on the origin of Tara Tarini is not possible. But some mythological works as well as some local legends are available to put a beam of light on this “Sakta Pitha”. The mythological sources are Siva Purana , Kalika Purana, Chudamani tantra, Tarini kalpa, kumara sambhaya, Tara mahatma etc.

Interesting among them was the Goddess in human form as two beautiful girls who used to live sometime with their devotees (who later became their priests). They caused miracles to make the devotees feel their presence and take steps for their worship. One of such legend reveal that Vasu Praharaja , a learned Brahmin of Kharida Vira Jagannathpur Sasan near Purushotampur had the opportunity to be the foster father of the two sisters Tara Tarini who in due course of time by the divine order of Tara Tarini did the needful to perform *Yagyan* and established the Shrine at the hill top in a temple for daily worship.

### **Maa Tara Tarini – Worship Practices at the Temple**

In order to realize the ritual practices taking place at the Tara Tarini temple, exclusively information is supplied on the temple website. Personal interviews conducted in the process of research with various authorities also

added information of the subject. On the basis of these sources it can be said that the Chaitra month of the Hindu calendar correlating with March and April on the Roman calendar is a very important time for the worship of Tara Tarini and massive influxes of devotees swarm the temple side on each Tuesday during this month, which is designated as the day of the Goddess. During this festival season, a number of traditional rituals are practiced with great vigour. One of these rituals of these is heavily Tantric and is often done in secret due to its roots in a compulsory nature. This is known as panchamakara puja and it encourages participation in the potent five “m’s” mantra, mudra, madya (alcohol), matsaya (fish), and maithuna (symbolic sex). Because Tara Tarini is considered to be a vegetarian goddess and because time is transient and steeped in societal perception, many of these “M’s” are now practiced symbolically so as to lessen the compulsory nature of the acts.

According to the Indian calendar, there is one day in each month named Sankranti that always falls in the middle of the month based on the transition of the sun. This day is considered as an auspicious day and is observed as especially auspicious on Makarsankranthi and Bisuvasankranti. January’s Sankranti is important because of its ties with tribal worship and April’s is celebrated because of the transition of the sun across the equator signifying the start of spring when the days start getting longer. This also correlates with the Kali Puja.

### **Development of Tara Tarini temple**

On an elevation of about 65ft above the hill top thus the temple can be viewed from all places around. The whole construction is made in the

Rekha style of structure with standstone. The newer developments for the facility of tourists include the construction of shopping complex to provide puja materials to devotees at reasonable rate, construction of toilet complex on the hill top outside temple premises, development of temple garden, modern parking facility for vehicles, construction of a rope way downhill to the top hill to provide joy ride for the public in general and a very convenient mode of transport for the old aged and the children in particular. Improvement of the stair way from the downhill to the top hill and low elevation steps with rest sheds at regular intervals along with architectural designs provide pleasant and natural surroundings to the devotees visiting the temple. Drinking water facilities all along the road side are available. Construction of vantage point on the hill top to give a panoramic view of the surrounding is an added attraction. The developments in plan for future include the construction of large size multipurpose Kalyana Mandap that can accommodate 3-4 functions such as marriage, thread ceremony etc. It will also house a Yagnya sala to perform the puja in a large scale. Apart from the above the Temple Trust/ Tara Tarini Development Board has plans to develop the river bed for water sports. The first inclined car of Odisha made by Ropeway Reports Pvt. Kolkata at their own cost is taking the visitors up and down hill. 150 visitors can travel per hour at a cost of Rs.15 per head for to and pro travel. The company has to pay Rs.1 per ticket to temple trust.

**Maa Tara Tarini puja Bidhi and Seva:**

The following are some important rituals disserved relating to daily Puja of the deities in the temple:

**Marjana:** Marjana is conducted twice a day once in the morning and again in the evening.

**Mangala alati, Sandhya Alati and Pahili Bhoga:**

Mangala alati, sandhya alti and pahili Bhoga are offered simultaneously. Khechidi is the main Bhogo offered in the pahili Bhogo.

**Raj Bhogo and Ratri Bhogo:** During the day items such as khechidi, dal, curry, khata and different sweets are offered to the goddess. The bhog is made available to the public after offering to the deities.

**Pahand:** It is observed twice daily once during the day time from 12.35p.m to 2.15p.m and again at 9.45p.m to 5 a.m. Night pahand is observed during specially occasions.

**Nitya Bhogos:** This provision has been added recently to the daily bhogs offered to Sri Maa Tara Tarini.

**Archana:**This is also specially added to the daily Seva puja of Sri Maa Tara Tarini. The devotee offering Rs. 5000 to Rs. 11000 to the Tara Tarini development Board can avail this opportunity.

**Hair offering:** Devotees come to Tara Tarini temple for the first tonsuring of new-borns. On normal days the temple barbers conduct the tonsuring of the children. Ticket for tonsuring is made available on payments of Rs. 10 per head in the Trust Board Office. 175 barbers with licence are engaged at the hill top and downhill for this purpose.

**Private bhoga:** Devotees can have bhogo from the temple. Beyond the fixed quantity Bhogo made in the temple, devotees can avail extra Bhoga on prior

payment of cost of the Bhoga. These facilities can be availed on contact before at least two days of the date of the Bhoga.

**Temple's social services:** After the formation of Tara Tarini Development Board/Trust, different Social Welfare Programmes have been launched in association with ECOS eye hospital, a voluntary organization and eye camps and dental care camp are being organised on each Sankranti day to help poor and rural people irrespective of caste creed and religion. Now Tara Tarini Development Board has provided a glimmer of hope into eyes of the rural folk's with its Social Service activities.

### **Fairs and festivals:**

A fine blending of different shades of culture is noticeable from the festivals observed in the temple and throughout the Ganjam district. A number of fairs and festivals are observed in the District notable among which are enumerated below.

### **Tara Tarini Mela:**

The Tara Tarini Mela, one of the biggest fairs of Odisha, takes place on each Tuesday in the month of Chaitra i.e., from around mid March to mid-April at Tara Tarini Pitha. Thousands of devotees come from every corner of the district as well as from outside the State in order to have darshan of Goddess Tara Tarini and perform their Manasika after fulfilment of their desire.

### **Sum-up**

To sum up, the Tara Tarini Temple, besides being a Sakti Peetha, the area is surrounded by natural beauty. The picturesque scenery of the shrine

from the hilltop down to the bank of river Rishikulya gives a thrilling experience of nature and divinity to the visitors and often captivates the mind and soul of the visitors. Thus the spot has become famous as a pilgrim centre as well as a tourist spot in the District of Ganjam. The tradition of Shakti worship in India can be traced back to the period of antiquity. Goddess Tara Tarini have been regarded as the presiding deity in almost every house in south Odisha.

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