

6. Legends, Context and Sacred Geography of “Shraddha” in Puri

Dr. Sushree Sangeeta Sarap

*Faculty, Department of Anthropology
Government Autonomous College, Sundargarh, Odisha*

Abstract

Jagannath Puri is a place of immense cultural, historical, architectural, philosophical, and spiritual significance, being the abode of Lord Jagannath, revered as the living God in Martiapuri. Devotees from across the world aspire to visit Puri at least once in their lifetime, and during such visits, many undertake various rituals at the sacred sites of the city. Among these, Shraddha or Pinda Daan holds a place of particular importance, performed for the liberation (Mukti/Mokhya) of departed souls and to seek the blessings of ancestors for the wellbeing of the family.

Aims: *The study aims to explore the significance, practice, and belief systems associated with the performance of Shraddha or Pinda Daan at the sacred sites of Jagannath Puri, and to understand its role in the socio-religious life of devotees and pilgrims.*

Method: *The study adopted observation, interview, and case study methods to gather data. Primary information was collected through interactions with Brahmin priests and devotees from across the world who visited Puri specifically to perform the Shraddha ritual, while secondary information was gathered from ancient scriptures and texts referred to by the practitioners themselves.*

Result: *The findings reveal that Swargadwara and the Panchatirtha (the five sacred sites of Puri) hold deep significance in relation to Preta Karma and Pitru Karma. The ritual system is closely tied not only to the journey of the departed soul toward Mukti or Mokhya, but also serves as an expression of love, respect, and gratitude toward ancestors for their contribution to the lives of their descendants. The performance of Shraddha was also found to provide a sense of inner peace and emotional fulfilment to those who observe it.*

Keywords: *Sacred Geography, Shraddha, Pinda Daan, Hindu Rites, Beliefs and Practices*

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Introduction

In the Hindu belief system, it is believed that after death, the soul of human being still remains in this materialistic world. Just because of losing the body, it does not indicate the salvation of soul. The pull of love, kindness, affection for family, friends, relatives and the affinity for the materialistic world are the major barriers for the soul to go for the extreme and ultimate departure.

The barriers are extreme, in the case of unnatural death of a person because the soul has many unfulfilled desires and she try to fulfil them, However, being a bodiless state, soul neither achieved her desires nor the salvation.

According to the Hindu Culture it is believe that '*Pinda Daan*' is a ritual which provides an ultimate relief, love and a respectful good bye to the **departed soul** which strengthens them in the journey to the *Mukti*. Due to its Cultural believe and practices for a soul journey it is continues from the ages.

During Ramayana ram offered pinda daan to his father dasharath and in Dwapara Yug during the war with jawawan Lord Krisha instruct his son to perform *Shraddha* if he would not return for long time. In Kaliyuga it found that the living Lord, Jagannath observing *Shraddha* for his parents, Nanda-Jasoda, Dasharatha-Kousalya and Basudev-Debaki, and offers lamps there is a special festival known as Deba Dipabali it continues for 3 days. For this festival Jagannath has a Special *Besha* (dress and ornaments) that is known as *Shraddha Besha*. It is also found in many puranas of Hindus.

According to the Kurma Purana, performing Pinda Daan at Gaya holds immense spiritual significance for the salvation of departed souls. It is believed that once these rituals are properly conducted at Gaya, the soul (Atma) of the deceased attains salvation and free from the cycle of rebirth (samsara).

Famous places for *Shraddha* in India

There are many pilgrimage sites are famous for the performance of *Shraddha* or *Pinda Daan* for ancestors across India. However Hari-dwar, Badri-nath, Prayagraj/Varanasi, Kurukshetra, Pushkar, Siddhpur, Ayodhya, Mathura, Avantika, Dwarka, Gaya and Jagannath Puri are famous for *Shraddha* and Pinda dana.

Legends, Context, and Sacred Geography of “Shraddha” in Puri

There are many places are famous for *Shraddha* observance in Odisha are The Biraja Temple, or Girija Kshetra, Nrusinghanath Temple Bargarh, Lingaraj Temple Bhubaneswar (Bindu Sagar)

Purusottam Kshetra, **Puri** is situated along the shores of the Bay of Bengal in Odisha. It is one of the four sacred *Dhams* (*Char Dham*) of India. It attracts lakhs of devotees and pilgrims who visit for *darshan of Lord Jagannath*, rituals, and religious observances. Jagannath Puri, it self highly rich with cultural significance, historical, architecute, science, philosophy, dicipline and many more. It is the place of Lord Jagannath who is the living God in the Martyapuri.

In Puri many places are famous for many reasons with attached several historical and mythological stories. Swargadwara, pancha tirtha and Baisi pahacha are famous for *preta* and *Pitru Karma* in Puri.

Swargadwara

Swargadwara is the cremation ground of Hindus. Hence, cremation at this site is considered highly sacred, as it is believed that the soul directly attains Swarga. The word ‘Swarga’ means heaven and ‘dwara’ means gateway, so literary Swargadwara is consider as the ‘Gateway to Heaven’.

Swargadwara is the cremation ground of Hindus. ‘Swarga’ means heaven and ‘dwara’ means gateway, so literary Swargadwara is consider as the ‘Gateway to Heaven’. General beliefs support the idea among Hindus to end their life in this holy place of Puri to get the accessibility to heaven for liberating their Soul and ultimately Salvation. Swargadwara, is in the sandy beach towards the South western corner of the town. On this holy site situated the temple of Goddess Smasana Kali. Goddess Kali act as the guard of Swargadwara and stand as the proof for all Heaven going Soul.

The ghat itself appears like a small realm of darkness and silence amidst the constant bustle of worldly life. The only lights visible here are from the slow-burning funeral pyres, creating a deeply solemn and spiritual atmosphere. The Burning Funeral fire never deemedout in any season though it is heavy rain or Shivering Cold.

Myths and Stories of Swargadwara

Many popular stories and beliefs are associated with Swargadwara. One such belief is that Swargadwar serves as a gateway to heaven.

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It is said that on every *Amavasya* (new moon day), Lord Narayana visits Samudra Dev (Lord of Sea), regarded as his father-in-law, by passing through this sacred gateway. According to this tradition, people believe that this place is directly connected to Haven.

One popular belief narrates that Indra Dev, once came to have darshan of Lord Jagannath. While returning, a sebayat (temple servitor) followed him, but Indra suddenly disappeared at Swargadwara. This incident led people to believe that, this place serves as a direct path to heaven.

Another myth is associated with Ravana, who is believed to have attempted to construct steps leading to heaven from this very place. However, he could not complete them. These incomplete steps are said to still exist near Bauli Matha, and from this legend, the place came to be known as Swargadwara.

Another sacred narrative connects Swargadwara with the Last time of Lord Krishna. After his death, the Pandavas are believed to have performed his *Antim Sanskar* and immersed *bisarjan* the Sudarshana Chakra at Chakra Tirtha. Thereafter, they came to Swargadwara to return back to haven. After death of lord Krishna Pandabas came and did *Antim Sanskar* and then *bisarjan* Sudarshana at chakra tirtha and came to Swarga dwara, from that place they return to Swarga or haven so the place name became Swarga dwara.

This Swargadwara Ghat also has its own special identity with several legends, myths and believes. One common believe is that the sacred Brahmadaru, (the divine wood) from which the idols of three deities of Jagannath Temple were carved that Brahmadaru once floated to the shore at Swargadwar beach.

Another popular legends is associated with Chaitanya Mahaprabhu that, he have bathed daily at the Swargadwar beach before *darshan* of Lord Jagannath., once he entered the sea for bathing and he got the chance to real Darshan of lord Jagannath and ultimately merged into the *Parambrahma*.

Panchatirtha

Pancha tirtha are the five sacred places of purity. It is believed that the visit to Puri is incomplete till the ceremony of Pancha Tirtha is not performed.

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According to Acharya S.N (2011) an edited book, he discuss about Pancha tirtha sloka which is mention in Purana

Markandeyabatakrushna Rohini ch Mahodadhi

Indradymna sarah snayi punarjanma na lavyate

Meaning is that Markandeya (tank), Bata Krushna (sacred Banyan Tree), Rohini (Kunda), Mahodadhi (sea), Indradymna (Tank), are five sacred *tirtha* of Puri, if a person takes a ritual bath in these five holy *tirthas*, he/she will be freed from the cycle of rebirth and will attain salvation (*moksha*).

Sabuta Nijoga is the association Purohitas, who are only performing *Preta karma* and *Pitru karma* at these five sacred places. According to a Purohita from **Sabuta Nijoga**, the five tirtha of Puri is Indradymna Tank, Markandeya Tank, Swetaganga, Sea and Chakratirth.

Indradymna

It is located on the north western part of the Gundicha temple. It is 396 feet wide and 485 feet long, and covers an area of four and a half acres. It is believed that at this place the 'Ashwamedha Yagnya' was arranged by the king Indradymna and constructed by Brahma.

Swetaganga

Swetaganga is a small sacred pond situated to the west of the main Jagannath Temple. The Swetaganga is situated in between Lions gate and Swargadwar. On the bank of this pond are two small temples, dedicated to Sweta Madhava and Matsya Madhava. Before visiting Lord Jagannath the pilgrims after bathed in Sea again takes a bath at Swetaganga and visits to Lord Jagannath. It is believed that there is an internal connection between Swetaganga and the river Ganga.

The term *Sweta* is white, on the day of *Magha Sukla Saptami* the water of the pond became whitish colour like milk for a while or pure as Ganga. That's why the name of this pond is Swetaganga.

One of the respondent grandfather, who was a Purohita of Pancha Tirtha has seen this event and also collect the water but after some time the milky whitish water go back to its original form.

Mahatmya of Swetaganga

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According to the story, a group of elderly women once planned to travel to Ganga to take a holy bath. Among them was a poor woman who did not afford the visit expenses. While her friends left for the Ganga visit, she went to the pond of Swetaganga and prayed sincerely to Lord Jagannath and dip into water when she rise from water she found herself with her friends at Ganga River bathing together.

Everyone became surprise and asked her back your planned was not to visit to Ganga for holy birth then how you reached here. Everyone shocked by this miracle, the woman again dip in water and when she rise up she found herself at Swetaganga. Therefore people believed that it has a link with river Ganga.

Another believe is that the water of the Swetaganga is comes from river Ganga itself with a secret tunnel.

Rohini Kunda

Rohini Kunda is located and in front of Goddess Vimala temple inside Jagannath temple. On the holy spot there is a symbol of Wheel and a Crow of four hands. It is believed that the spiritual water where the entire creation originated is called as 'Karana Water'. This water is secretly stored in Rohini Kunda. Therefore it has a very spiritual importance. According to one Servitor this Kunda is *mokhya Kunda*. Once a crow fall in the water and he got *mokhya*. Many popular stories are also present about the crow, king Indradumna with King Galamadhava.

However people believed that the current Rohini Kunda is a smaller part only for warship however the original Rohini Kunda is hidden by everyone.

Markandeya

Markandheya ponds has very spiritual part of puri. Many ouspicious occasion related to Jgannath-Nabakalebara, Sebaka and sebayata are performed here. It is believed that this place is associate with the Markanda rushi. The believe is like that God saved him from a severe danger and then Markanda meditate at this place for ling time. Here he god many ideas of the spiritual texts. He also arranged a *Yangya* at this place and then constructed a Shiva temple. Many local people and pilgrims take a holy birth at this place.

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Mahodadhi or Sea

The greatest attraction of Puri for travellers and pilgrims is its long sandy Sea Beach. The Sea beach of Puri is one of the best beaches in India for both tourists and religious point of view. Out of the five great holy ponds of Puri, Sea is the greatest and holist for travellers.

Chakra Tirtha

Chakra Tirtha is situated on beach of Puri. People believed that it is the place where the 1st Daru (sacred wood from deities constructed) of deities stored. Here the Chakra Narayan God is worship.

Story of Chakra Tirtha

After death of lord Krishna Pandabas came to puri and did *Antim Sanskar* of lord krishan and then *bisarjan* Sudarshana chakra in sea at this place. Therefore it believed that Sudarshanda Chakra also living at that place therefore it became famous chakra tirtha.

Nabakalebara (The renewal of deities) in Jagannath Temple and Death Ritual perform by Daitapatis

According to Dash (2013), Nabakalebara is an important ritual of the Jagannath Temple, symbolizing the new embodiment of the deities. It usually occurs in a year with double Ashadha and takes place at intervals of about 9–19 years. whole ceremony consist of certain process like selection of Daru (neem tree/wood for deities), collection of Daru, construction of the body of Deities, the most important ritual is *Brahma Paribartana* or *Ghata Paribartana*. After transferred of *Brahma Padartha* from the old idols to the new one idols the the old idols are considered as dead and are ritually buried.

After this, the Daitapati servitors observe mourning rituals similar to *Shraddha* for ten days, treating the deities as their own family members. They remain in ritual impurity, keep their hair unshaven, and perform purification rites. On the tenth day, they purify themselves with rituals near Mukti Mandap and proceed for Dasha Karma at Markandeya. On the twelfth day, they offer a feast to the temple servitors. Thus, the Daitapatis perform funerary rites resembling *Shraddha*, highlighting the belief that the deities undergo a symbolic death and rebirth during Nabakalebara

Baisi Pahacha: A sacred place for performing *Shraddha* for decades in recent past

Baisi Pahacha (the Twenty-Two Steps) of the Jagannath Temple is one of the holiest sacred spaces associated with the temple and has traditionally been a site for performing *Shraddha* rituals from

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decades. However, the performance of Shraddha rituals at Baisi Pahacha has been discontinued since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

Jagannath Puri attracts lakhs of devotees and pilgrims who visit for Jagannath *darshan*, perform various rituals, and many religious observances and *Shraddha* is one of them. Both Swargadwara and panchatirth (5 sacred places of Puri) are highly significant with the preta and pitru karma. The believed system not only associate with departed soul, its journey and getting Mukti or Mokhya but also its indicate to show love, care, respect and gratitude towards the observance ancestors and their contribution in the decedent life. Performance of *Shraddha* is also providing an internal peace to the observer.

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