



## Glory of Bharath » Bharath Darshan

Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,

This month our sojourn is to Tara Tarini Temple in Orissa to offer our salutations to the Mother Goddess.

### Tara Tarini



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 or Prakriti under various names of Sati or Devi (Durga / Parvati) as depicted in Purana-etihasa and Tantra literature. Worship of Shakti, as a pan -Indian phenomenon, predates Sanskrit influences of every kind. There are a number of important Shakta centers in India. Among those Orissa has been considered to be one of the most important Shakti centre and Tara-Tarini at Kumari hills on the bank of River Rushikulya near Purushottampur in Ganjam District is one of the most ancient Shakti pithas of Orissa.

Goddesses Tara-Tarini have been regarded as the presiding deity(Ista-Devi)in almost every house in South Orissa. This important and famous ShaktaPitha is situated on a hill top at a distance of 30 Kms towards north of Brahmapur on the south bank of river Rushikulya. The height of the hill is approximately 708ft. and the total area spreading over 180 Acres of land. The hill is popularly known as Tara Tarini Hill (Parvata) and is surrounded by natural beauty. The picturesque scenery of the temple, from the hill top down to the bank of river Rushikulya gives immense pleasure and a thrilling experience of nature and divinity to each pilgrim - visitor and often captivates its mind and soul. There are 999 steps on the front side of the hill leading to the temple and also a pucca road for vehicle on the backside of the hill facilitating devotees to reach at the Pitha.



**Goddess Tara Tarini**

At the hill top is a small but beautiful temple which is the famous Shrine of Tara-Tarini. Worship at this important centre of Shakta cult has been continuing since times immemorial. Two stones anthropomorphized by the addition of gold and silver ornaments and shaped to be seen as human faces are the main Shrine of this temple which represents the Goddesses Tara and Tarini. In between them are placed two fully celebrated and beautiful brass heads as their ChalantiPratima. It has been said that from a tribal cult Tara-Tarini have been transformed into Shakti cult through the process of aryanisation. Of course the name Tara, the Primordial deity of the Mahayana BuddhistPantheon, indicates Buddhist influence of element in the Tara - Tarini worship which seems to suggest the incorporation of a tribal cult and Buddhist influence before its Hinduisation.

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It is believed that by the time Ashoka conquered Kalinga Empire he found it to be a famous centre of Buddhism. Undoubtedly this part of Orissa, particularly Ganjam region on the bank of river Rushikulya was very active in Buddhist pursuits. It is evident from the Special Rock Edit of Ashoka found at Samapa (modern Jaugada), the capital of Southern Kalinga of Ashokan Empire, at a mere distance of 4 Kms from Tara-Tarini Hill. Though the Special Rock Edit of Ashoka at Jaugada has nothing to do with Buddhism as it especially addressed his officials, the propagation of Buddhism in and around this capital city of Ashoka cannot be ruled out. Hence, the probability of worship of Tara, the primordial deity of the Mahayana Buddhist sect at Tara-Tarini Hill and Tara-Tarini as a famous Buddhist Tantra Pitha since this time, can be established on the basis of this hypothesis. Moreover till date it has been considered as one of the most important Tantra Pitha. Interestingly a small image of of Buddha in its meditating sitting posture, present inside the sanctum sanctorum of the main temple corroborates the claim of this site to the ancient centre of Shakta cult.

Besides the worship of Tara by the Buddhist Tantrikas the maritime history of Kalinga also suggest the worship of Tara by the Sadhavas, merchants and sea-men before launching their sea voyage. Once upon a time river Rushikulya was conducive to navigation and probably the worship of Tara has been a practice among the people of this region involved in mari-time activities. Even some ruins of a brick foundation at village Mukundapur on the south bank of river Rushikulya at the bottom of Tara-Tarini Hill and the so called Ganda (deep river) adjacent to this points to some flourishing maritime activities in this region through river Rushikulya. Hence, on the basis of these evidences the worship of Shakti at Tara-Tarini can be traced back to a very old age.



**Gatway to the temple**

There are many interesting stories, myths legends and folklore relating to the origin of the Tara-Tarini Shrine at the hill top. One of the legends of the puranic tradition connects the Shrine to the Daksha Yagya from which the famous Shakta Pitha of Tara-Tarini originated from the limbs of the Corpse of Devi or Sati. According to this legend once Daksha Prajapati the father of Goddess Devi or Sati performed a Yagya to which he deliberately did not invite his daughter and her husband Lord Siva . When Devi knew this from Narada she took the permission of her husband and came to the Yagya site to enquire why her father did not invite her husband Lord Siva to the Yagya. Daksha spoke insulting words to Lord Siva which were not tolerable to Sati. As a result of this she jumped into the Yagya Kunda and sacrificed her life. When Lord Siva knew this he became very angry and taking the dead body of Sati he started tandavanrutya which could have caused Mahapralaya (vast destruction). On the request of the Devas, Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Sani entered the corpse of Sati and disposed it part by part. Consequently Shakta Pithas originated on the places where the organs of Sati had fallen. It is said that the breasts of Sati fell at the Kumari Hills on the bank of river Rushikulya and thus the famous Tara Tarini Shakta Pitha arose at this place.

Some other legends also associate Tara Tarini to their human forms 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 legends 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 Yagya and established the Shrine at the hill top in a temple for daily worship.

**Our sojourn continues next month...Till then Sai Ram**

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