

## **SRI SATHYA SAI ORGANISATION, ODISHA**

### **HUMBLE BEGINNINGS**

History of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation is history of advent of Sri Sathya Sai Avatar and His Divine Love flowing through the Divine Manifestations in all corners of the globe. The main architect and motivator for the formation of any unit of the organisation is Bhagawan Baba Himself.

After the historic announcement of Avatar in October, 1940, the pilgrimage of seekers started towards Puttaparti. The seekers find fulfillment of their journey experiencing 'Sarva Devata Swarupam' in Sri Sathya Sai the seekers are transformed into devotees. Their hearts get thrilled at the heart throbbing bhajans sung by Him. They observe with awe and ecstasy the activities of seva performed there. They come back to their places and try to experience Him by creating a similar atmosphere which thrilled them at Prashanthi Nilayam. So a bhajan group starts followed by nagarsankirtan and narayana seva and that gives birth to a bhajan mandali or seva samithi named after Sri Sathya Sai. Thus in our humble effort of experiencing Sai in our own places and to cultivate nearness with Him by engaging ourselves in activities so dear to Him, an integrated path of sadhana takes birth which we call by the name Sri Sathya Sai Seva organisation.

To carry bhajans in a systematic and regular way Sri Sathya Sai Bhajan Centre was inaugurated for the first time in Prashanthi Nilayam in the Divine presence in March, 1963. Sai Bhajan movement gathered momentum in the following years. In 1965 this movement started spreading in Orissa also along with other states.

The first ever samithi under the name 'Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi' was formed in Bombay as a registered body. Other states soon followed the suit.

In Orissa the first seva samithi was formed in March, 1967 In Jatni Town in the undivided Puri District. Then came the second seva samithi in 1968 in Berhampur Town of Ganjam District. During 1967 to 1970 a few more seva samithis started functioning in the towns of Rourkela, Cuttack, Balasore etc.

## **GLIMPSES OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF ORISSA.**

Each region has its achievements and each people its contributions for the creation of the Indian Civilization. And the better we know these, we know more and more about our national heritage, its wonderful richness, diversity and unity. What are the Orissans and how great were their contributions? The power of ancient Orissa is no longer a secret. In fact, in the past, we had a distinct identity as Kalinga, Odra, Utkal, and Odisha and that identity was established throughout India and abroad. Evidence about Kalinga, in the form of the 13th Rock Edict of Ashoka, comes from distant Afghanistan. The Pasupati temple inscription of Nepal speaks of Kalinga, the Polonaruwa inscription from Sri Lanka speaks of Kalinga's relationship with that country. An inscription from Sahet Mahet in Uttar Pradesh mentions Mahapandita Sakyarakshita of Utkal and his disciple, Vagisvararakshita of the Choda Country. In the accounts of the Muslim writers, as also in an inscription of Hushang Shah of Malwa, this land is known as "Udisha" and it is this name that has continued. As farmers, soldiers, sailors, empire builders or builders of great monuments, our achievements were striking. Our contributions in various fields, especially in arts, are now freely acknowledged.

Orissa is an ancient land. It was inhabited from the prehistoric period when the Early Man used stone tools. It was in 1875 that V. Ball noticed Lower Paleolithic tools in Orissa and since then, in course of survey, tools from paleolithic to Neolithic phase have been discovered revealing man's progress from food gathering stage to food producing stage. By the 3rd Century BC Orissa had progressed from food gathering stage to civilization and its written history began with Ashoka. Kharavela (1st century BC) placed this land on the political map of India in the face of formidable challenges and he is considered to be one of the greatest figures of its history. In subsequent centuries great dynasties such as those of the Bhaumakaras, Somavamsis, Gangas and Gajapatis flourished and ruled the land. Orissa rose to power and glory. Orissa has an extremely rich cultural heritage.

### **Religious Development:**

As a meeting place of the North and the South, Orissa was open to cultural influences from all sides from the beginning of its history. Mahavira came here and preached his doctrines. Jainism had a popular career in Orissa. Buddhism was also popular in Orissa. The first lay disciples of Buddha, Tapusha and Bhallika, were from Orissa. A great Stupa was erected in honor of Buddha's sacred

tooth relic in Orissa. It was in this land of Kalinga that Ashoka was converted to Buddhism after a great war which resulted in death and deportation of innumerable people. From the days of Ashoka, and many centuries afterwards, Buddhism progressed in Orissa with popular support and patronage. In course of time it declined, but did not disappear completely, as in other parts of India: it still lingers in a few villages of Cuttack district. Orissa was known for its Sakta pithas. Viraja (modern Jajpur) was a center of Sakti worship from early times. A typical contribution of Orissa to Sakti worship was the ' Stambheswari" cult with its pillar worship Saivism prospered under Saliodbhavas and the Somavamsis and still there are many Siva temples. Vaisnavism began under the Mathras and the Nalas and gained considerable popularity under the Gangas and the Gajapatis. Orissa welcomed religious preachers of various sects, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Nanak and Shri Chaitanya. This region has had a tradition in religious toleration in keeping with the finest traditions of India. Orissa has four places of pilgrimage connected with Vaisnavism, Saivism, Sun worship and Sakti cult: there are Puri, Bhubaneswar, Konark and Jajpur respectively. In Orissa, under the aegis of Jagannath, a noble attempt was made to achieve a synthesis of all religions, Jagannath is the "Lord of the Universe" and He embodies Universal harmony. No region other than Orissa could have ! produced a God like Jagannath. He is the Supreme deity in whom all religions are represented. He appears before devotees in many guises, as Vishnu, Siva, Buddha, Krishna, Rama and as the Universal God.

One important feature of his worship was the absence of class distinction. Even the author of the Riyazu's

Salatin admitted that here in Purusottam "Hindus unfike their practice elsewhere, eat together with the Muslims and other races; All sorts of cooked food sell in the bazar, and Hindus or Muslims buy them and eat together and drink together." Indeed this is something unique in the annals of religious history.

### **Literature:**

In the sphere of literature, Orissa made significant contributions. The Sanskrit literature was rich and was further enriched by works such as Gita Govinda. Sahitya Darapana, ekavali, Saraswati Vilasa, KapilaSamhita, Harihara Chaturangam and a number of other works which survive as palm leaf manuscripts. It was through the palm leaf manuscripts of Orissa that a complete Samhita of the Atharva Veda, i.e. the Paippenimusalada Samhita was preserved down the centuries. In course of time Oriya language developed through various stages and in various branches. Jagannatha Das

reinterpreted the Bhagavata in the language of common men and even today it has not lost its appeal.

### **Maritime Heritage:**

From the earliest times the great sailors of Kalinga dominated the ocean. Excavations at Sisupalgarh have yielded several Roman objects indicating trade contacts with the Roman Empire. So great was the fame of ancient Kalinga as a maritime power that Kalidasa refers to the king of Kalinga as "Mahodadhipati" or the Lord of the seas. Kalinga had cultural and political relations with Srilanka or Simhala. Vijaya, the first king of Simhala, was from Kalinga. The Dathavamsa reveals that the sacred tooth relic of the Buddha was taken from Dantapur of Kalinga to Simhala, where it is now worshipped in the Tooth Place at Kandy,

The sailors of Kalinga also reached the countries of South-East Asia. Legends of Java relate that 20,000 families were sent to Java by the Prince of King (Kalinga). These people prospered and multiplied. According to the Chinese sources, in AD-795 a Buddhist king of Orissa presented a manuscript of Maharani text to the Chinese emperor Te-Tsong.

### **Art and Architecture:**

Orissa occupies a distinct place in the Indian art history on account of her great monuments and masterpieces of sculpture. For the history of Indian art, few provinces of India are of greater importance than Orissa. All traces of architecture of the early period have vanished or are still lying underground. The excavations at Sisupalgarh and Jaugada have revealed some important evidence about the military architecture of the ancient period. That there was a fortified township with houses, crosstreets and an elaborate gate-way- complex is evident from the excavations at Sisupalgarh.

The caves of Khandagiri-Udayagiri hills are the important architectural remains dating back to about the 1st century BC. The excavation on the top of Udayagiri has also revealed the remains of an apsidal structure, which is one of the earliest of its class. The most important of this group is Ranigumpha in Udayagiri which is a double storied monastery. In the history of rock-cut architecture of India, and especially of Eastern India these caves have a significant place.

Like Jainism, Buddhism also provided inspiration for the development of art and architecture. With the spread of Buddhism, stupas, vihars and terpples sprang up in important centers: many such establishments have crumbled and are now in ruins. In all these centuries, however, architecture in Orissa found its supreme expression in temples. Even now Orissa is a land of temples some of them

being the finest specimens of Indian architecture. "Of these temples, three are famous: the temple of Lingaraja (11th century) at Bhubaneswar, Jagannath temple (12th Century) at Puri and the great Sun temple of Konark (13th century). In the absence of specimens from the Gupta period, the early origin of Orissan temple architecture is till unknown but the extant temples from "one of the most compact and homogenous architectural group in India" and reveal a story of evolution from at least the sixth to the 16th Century. In a broader Indian context they form part of the North Indian Style, but with distinctive features, they constitute a separate style called the Kalinga style of architecture. This style reached its mature phase about the 11th century AD with the erection of

the great Lingaraja temple which embodies all that is best in the developed Orissan style. Often the whole complex is enclosed by high walls but there is no gopuram as in South India. In the next phase during 10th and 11th centuries, temple architecture progressed under the patronage of the Somavamsi Kings of Orissa. The great temple of Lingaraja (11th century AD) at Bhubaneswar not only marks the climax of the Kalinga style, but is undoubtedly one of the splendid temples of India. It represents an elaborate temple complex consisting of deula, Jagamohana, Natamandira and bhogamandapa in one axial alignment and several lesser shrines all around. In contrast to the pyramidal form of the Jagamohana the soaring tower of the deula (45 m. in height), with vertical succession of miniature temple motifs on it, has a unique grandeur and majesty.

The Ganga period (1114-1435), that followed the Somavamsi rule, was a glorious period of architectural activity. The grand temple of Jagannath at Puri, planned on an elaborate scale like that of the Lingaraja, is a worthy monument in honor of the Lord of the universe. It was constructed by Ganga monarch Anantavarman Chodagangadeva when Orissa possessed an empire from the Ganga to the Gautamaganga or the Godavari. The "Black Pagoda" or the celebrated Konark Temple, built by Narasimha Deva (1238-1264) in the best days of political power and economic prosperity, is the greatest of Orissa's monuments. If art is an index of the creative genius of a people, this grand temple is not only the finest articulation of the creative genius of Oriya people, but being a wonderful monument, it is a priceless heritage of all mankind. The conception of the temple, dedicated to the Sun God, in the form of a chariot with twenty four wheels and seven horses is that of a genius and its execution in stone is the most striking achievement of the Orissan temple architecture. Even those whose judgement is critical and who are difficult to please stand astonished at its sight, said Abul Fazl in the 16th Century. The spirit of that art still lingers in the efforts of the people to build temples on the traditional style and in the art of stone carving.

As regards sculpture, Orissa is one of the artistic regions of India where history of sculpture can be studied from the early period. The sculptures of Khandagiri-Udayagiri caves provide the next landmark. On the whole they are simple but show an advance over the art of Bharhut. Besides the art of the Jaina caves a few Yaksha and Naga Images reveal the progress of art and religion in early centuries of the Christian era. In the Barabhuji-gurnpha(cave No 8) at Khadagiri are found all the twenty four Tirthankaras and their respective Sasana- Devis. In Orissa, as in other parts of India, sculpture was linked with temple architecture and passed through the process of evolution like architecture. Some of the finest temple sculptures of Orissa are found at Muketeswar, Rajarani and the Lingaraja. The loving hand of the artist was particularly fond of carving lovely female figures in eternal youth, and often with vivid sensuousness. The Konark Temple is noted for its profusion of sculptures. Even in ruins the temple vibrates with life. The temple walls teem with youthfull forms; delicately modeled and cheerfully smiling, they defy decay and mock at time. A significant feature about the art is the presence of erotic sculptures. Symbolic or ornamental meaningful or purposeless traditional or innovative, such sculptures are seen in plenty.

Orissa produced fine icons in bronze. Buddhist and Jaina centers have yielded bronze images of great iconographic interest while many such icons of the Brahmanical pantheon are still worshipped in temples. The specimens at Kapilas Temple, and Biranchi Narayan Temple at Buguda, also show that Orissan craftsmen excelled in the art of wood-carving.

#### Painting:

Orissa has a line tradition in painting. The great temples and wonderful achievements in sculpture have sofar overshadowed this aspect of Orissan art. Orissan painting covers wider field prehistoric paintings, historical paintings, illustrated palm leaf manuscripts, painted manuscripts on paper, pata paintings etc have added to its richness. The paintings represented by illustrated palm leaf and paper manuscripts are in the indigenous style. The themes are generally drawn from works like the Gita Govinda, the Amarusataka, the Bhagavata Purana, etc. The pata paintings of Puri have a tradition which goes back to an earlier period.

These paintings are so called because they are executed on cloth, but being brightly painted with Jagannath and other icons, with religious, even historical themes, they possess a peculiar charm and originality of their own. They stand quite by themselves and bear no affinity to any other schools of painting either in or outside India.

**Performing Arts:**

Orissa has a rich tradition in dancing. This is revealed through inscriptions, dance sculptures and surviving forms of dancing. Like other forms of art, dancing was an offering to God, and devadasis were employed in temples, and through the language of mudras, poses and postures, they helped to convey the message of the religious mythologies. Dance was not confined to temples, it was even known in Buddhist viharas and patronised in the royal courts. It was not the monopoly of the devadasis or the professional artists: as a source of aesthetic pleasure it was looked on as an essential element of culture and loved by almost all people. The dance art, in course of time developed into a distinctive school which could be termed "Odisi" "one of most perfect classical systems of Indian dancing surviving." The Chhau dance of Orissa presents yet another tradition in dance art: while Odisi is noted for its feminine grace, the Chau is known for its vigorous modes of walk and movement. The Chhau dance has gradually developed combining tribal, folk and classical elements. A special feature of the Mayurbhanj school of Chhau is the absence of mask. The Odisi and the Chhau are the typical contributions of Orissa to the colourful dance forms of India.

**Science and Technology:**

The development of science and technology is a fascinating but yet unexplored aspect of Orissa's culture. The site of Sisupalgarh, near Bhubaneswar, the most planned early historical city of India, with its habitation complex, gateways, watch towers etc, reveals the knowledge of town-planning during the ancient period. The construction of temples, viharas, stupas and forts indicates the engineering skill of Orissan builders. The precise manner in which the construction of temples proceeded and heavy stone blocks were lifted to great heights, it yet to be established with certainty. The Monolithic Navagraha slab placed over the eastern doorway of Konark temple weighed nearly 27 tons. The massive dome, forming the crowning elements of the Jagamohana, is 25 ft in thickness and estimated to weigh not less than 2000 tons. This had to be lifted to a height of about 40 metres above the ground. The iron beams of Konark testify to the metallurgical advancement achieved in the 13th century. These vary in length, the largest one being 35 ft long and 7 1/2 inches square weighing about 6000 lb. The iron of these beams is pure wrought iron. The remarkable corrosion resistance of the beams seems due to the surface which was inert to all electro-chemical reactions involved in corrosion.

The sailors of Orissa were skilled in navigational techniques and could cross the high seas in their simple sailing vessels. Astronomy also made notable progress in Orissa. Even in the last century

Chandrasekhar known in Orissa as Pathani Samanta, started scholars by his astronomical observations. His Siddhanta Darpana is a famous treatise on astronomy.

Thus it will be evident that Orissa has impressive achievements in various fields to her credit. The people have inherited a legacy, great and glorious, and it is to be hoped that it will be further enriched with new achievements.

(Abridged from an article to the Silver Jubilee Journal of Orissa Society of America by K.S. Behera, Professor of History at Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar.)

The end of wisdom is freedom, The end of knowledge is love The end of education is character The end of culture is perfection. -Baba