

Exploring the Elements of Spirituality in the Folklore of Odisha: A Select Study

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Abstract: Odisha is a state in eastern India known for its rich cultural heritage. It is a repository of invaluable folklore traditions, including stories, myths, riddles, proverbs, arts, crafts, sculptures, dance, music and other cultural expressions. These rituals and traditions offer deep insights into the Odia people's heritage, customs, ceremonies, indigeneity and ways of life. While these folklore elements are often regarded as forms of entertainment, they hold profound cultural and spiritual significance. This research explores selected folklore elements of Odisha, including traditions and rituals associated with Jagannath culture (such as *Rath Yatra*, *Snana Yatra*, *Chandan Yatra*, and *Nabakalebara*); seasonal and agrarian festivals like *Raja Parba*, *Nuakhai*, *Kartik Purnima*, *Jhamu Yatra*, *Chaitra Amavasya*, and *Bakula Amavasya*; folk performances such as *Pala*, *Danda Nata*, *Ravana Chhaya*, and *Ramlila*; visual arts like *Pattachitra* and *Jhoti Chitra*; and folk narratives like the story of Mangala and the tale of Hanuman and the Sanjeevani Hill. The study examines how these folklore elements are interwoven with spirituality and how experiencing them helps people feel connected to the divine. It further motivates the people of Odisha to preserve and celebrate their cultural traditions. The study contributes to the fields of folklore studies, cultural anthropology and heritage preservation.

Keywords: Odisha, folklore, rituals and traditions, performances, art, spirituality, cultural identity, folklore studies, heritage preservation

INTRODUCTION

Odisha is a state in eastern India known for its rich cultural heritage. The state is the repository of invaluable folklore collections, such as stories, myths, riddles, proverbs, arts, crafts, sculptures, dance, music and other cultural expressions passed down through generations. This cultural repository provides information regarding the Odia people's culture, legacy, rituals, traditions, ceremonies, customs, indigeneity, conduct, etc. While primarily recognized for its entertainment value, folklore also serves other essential societal functions, such as its spiritual dimension. The spiritual essence of Odisha constitutes a significant aspect of its cultural identity, and it exerts a profound influence on the lives of its inhabitants. Many temples and sacred places are located throughout the state, including the well-known Jagannath temple in Puri. The stories, myths, customs, traditions, rituals, beliefs, etc., associated with the Lord Jagannath and his temple provide a profound sense of connection with the divine that helps devotees to cultivate love, kindness and compassion, which are integral to the concept of spirituality. In the worship of Lord Jagannath, different rituals such as *Rath Yatra*¹, *Chandan Yatra*², and *Nabakalevara*³ are observed and performed, which help devotees attain salvation by connecting with the spiritual light. In addition, the people of Odisha celebrate many other religious rituals, festivals and traditions deeply associated with the concept of spirituality. Some religious ways and practices considered to be means of attaining spirituality are *Jhamu Yatra*, *Chitalagi Amavasya*, *Chaitra Amavasya*, *Bakula Amavasya*, *Raja Parba*,⁴ etc. Odisha's folk music and dance, such as *Pala and Danda Nata*, which are fundamental to its cultural identity, also exude spirituality. The moral teachings embedded within many folk tales, including the story of Mangala, Hanuman and Sanjeevani Hill highlight virtues such as compassion, generosity and dedication, which are intrinsically linked to the essence of spirituality.

This paper aims to delve into and illuminate the spiritual significance inherent in a myriad of folk traditions and rituals prevalent in Odisha. These include the rituals associated with the Jagannath cult and other customary practices, traditional dances, melodic songs and captivating folk tales. We aim to showcase the rich cultural heritage of Odisha and how these folklore traditions contribute to the spiritual growth and attainment of the people in their divine journey. Through our efforts, we aim to inspire and motivate the people of Odisha, especially the younger generation, to practice, promote and preserve their cultural traditions actively.

METHODOLOGY

The folklore collections of Odisha are extensive and diverse. Approximately 70 percent of Odisha's population comprises tribal communities, whose

indigenous folklore differs significantly from that of non-tribal groups. The folk traditions and practices of the eastern coastal region are predominantly influenced by Hindu mythologies, while those of western Odisha are deeply rooted in tribal culture. Additionally, many of Odisha's folklore elements bear cultural influences from neighboring states such as Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh. Given Odisha's cultural breadth and complexity, it is not feasible to discuss all folklore elements within a single paper. Therefore, this study focuses on selected folklore elements, including traditions and rituals associated with the Jagannath culture⁵ such as *Rath Yatra*, *Snana Yatra*, *Chandan Yatra*, and *Nabakalebara*; seasonal and agrarian festivals like *Raja Parba*, *Nuakhai*, *Kartika Purnima*, *Jhamu Yatra*, *Chaitra Amavasya*, and *Bakula Amavasya*; folk performances such as *Pala*, *Danda Nata*, *Ravana Chhaya*, and *Ramlila*; visual arts like *Pattachitra* and *Jhoti Chitra* and folk tales of Goddess Mangala. The data on this selected folklore has been primarily collected from secondary sources, including books and research papers such as Das and Mahapatra (1979), Dash (2022), and Panigrahi (2018). Additionally, the first author being a native of Odisha and having grown up closely observing these cultural practices has enriched the study with her own lived experiences. To ensure the authenticity and reliability of the data collected from the secondary sources, informal interviews were conducted with 10 elderly individuals (6 women and 4 men), aged between 60 and 85 years, from rural areas of Odisha, specifically from the regions of Puri, Bhubaneswar, Kani and Nilagiri. All participants are native to Odisha, born and raised in the state, and possess knowledge of its cultural and spiritual heritage. During the interviews, general open-ended questions were asked in Odia language to gather basic information about the selected folklore and their perceived spiritual significance. Examples of questions included: “ରଜ ପର୍ବ, ବକୁଳ ଅମାବାସ୍ୟା, ଚୈତ୍ର ଅମାବାସ୍ୟା, ଚିତଲାଗି ଅମାବାସ୍ୟା, ଝାମୁ ଯାତ୍ରା, ମକର ସଂକ୍ରାନ୍ତି ଓ ନୂଆଖାଇ ପର୍ବଗୁଡ଼ିକ କିପରି ପରିବାର ସହିତ ଭଲ୍ଲାସରେ ପାଳନ କରାଯାଏ ବୋଲି ଆପଣ କହିପାରିବେ କି? ଆପଣଙ୍କ ମତରେ, ଏହି ପର୍ବମାନଙ୍କର ଆଧ୍ୟାତ୍ମିକ ମୂଲ୍ୟବୋଧ ଓ ଗୁରୁତ୍ୱ କଣ?” (“Can you talk about how festivals like *Raja Parba*, *Bakula Amavasya*, *Chaitra Amavasya*, *Chitalagi Amavasya*, *Jhamu Yatra*, *Makar Sankranti*, and *Nuakhai* are celebrated with family? In your opinion, what are the spiritual values and significance of these festivals?”)

The responses were recorded via phone. First, the responses were transcribed in the original Odia language and then translated into English. For the analysis of the data taken from primary and secondary sources, we have applied a qualitative thematic analysis approach. We have examined each selected folklore and manually identified recurring spiritual themes and symbolic patterns embedded within them. This approach enables us to uncover the cultural meanings, values, and spiritual significance that these traditions hold within Odia communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To the best of our knowledge, no existing literature on Odisha's folklore has specifically explored its spiritual elements. While several academic works have examined other dimensions of folklore such as social, cultural and linguistic aspects, this area remains underexplored. In this section, we first provide an overview of the history of folklore research in Odisha, followed by a review of recent works that highlight various facets of Odia folk traditions and festivals.

Das and Mahapatra (1979) and Panigrahi (2018) provide a complete overview of the work pursued on the folklore of Odisha during the pre- and post-independence periods. During the pre-independence era, John Beames and T. E. Revenshaw were among the first to take an active interest in the history and background of Odisha's folklore. Other researchers, such as Seikh Abdul Mazid, Nilamani Vidyaratna, Chandrasekhara Bahinipati, and Pandit Raghabananda Nayak, also collected folk materials related to farming. Gopal Chandra Praharaj, a connoisseur of Odia's comprehensive lexicon, collected folk tales and published the volume "*Utkala Kahani*", which remains popular today. Laxminarayan Sahu, a *Bharata Sevaka Samaj* member, collected songs, tales and other cultural aspects from various ethnic groups in Odisha, published in 1942 as "*The Hill Tribes of Jeypure*". He also studied *Danda Nata*⁶, a dance drama of Odisha. Sahu's contributions have helped preserve and showcase the region's cultural traditions for future generations.

Moving into the post-independence period, Verrier Elwin, Chakradhar Mahapatra, Kunja Bihari Das, Dr. K. C. Behera and Dr. Natabar Samantray were among the valuable authors whose works were significant. Dr. Bhabagrahi Mishra completed his PhD thesis on Verrier Elwin under the supervision of the well-known American folklorist Richard M. Dorson. In addition to several papers, Dr. Prasanna Kumar Mishra, Aurobinda Pattanaik, Hemanta Kumar Das, Dr. Shyam Sundar Mohapatra, and Dr. Kailash Pattanaik all made noteworthy contributions to the study of folklore during this period.

Dr. Kunjabihari Das gained widespread recognition for his book "*A Study of Orissan Folklore*", written in English in 1953. Dr. Kunjabihari Das and Professor L. K. Mahapatra wrote a book titled "*Folklore of Orissa*", which was published in 1979. Dr. K. B. Das wrote many papers on Orissan folklore in English and Oriya and collected a vast collection of folk songs and tales. Dr. Das's dedication and long-term commitment to his work were responsible for his success in collecting such a large corpus of materials. In addition, he contributed to the prevailing trend in the study of folklore by dedicating a chapter in his thesis to the "motifs" of Odishan folktales.

Dr. Mahendra Kuma Mishra's various publications, such as "*Lok Sanskrutibit Nilakantha*" (1990) and "*Oral Epics of Kalahandi*" (2008), are noteworthy. The curiosity and rapidly developing interest in the study of folklore in Odisha is also evident, with the subject being taught as an additional paper in the

M. A. Oriya curriculum. The Academy of Tribal Dialect and Culture in Bhubaneswar, headed by Dr. Khageswar Mohapatra, made commendable efforts to collect, study and publish works on tribal folklore.

Recently, many researchers have tried to work on the priceless collections of folklore of Odisha. Mohanty (2005) discusses the rich cultural heritage of Odisha, focusing on the spiritual belief and worship of Lord Jagannath as a unifying factor among the people of the state. The author emphasizes that the Jagannath culture embodies the principle of universality, making it a mass culture accessible to all. The paper delves into the influence of Jagannath culture on various aspects of society, such as its impact on the state's literature, the spiritual lives of its people, and its social influence. The author highlights how the culture of Lord Jagannath has played a significant role in shaping the identity and culture of Odisha and its people. Furthermore, the author discusses the various religious practices and rituals associated with Lord Jagannath, viz., the annual *Rath Yatra* festival, which attracts millions of devotees from all over India and the world. The author also explores the role of literature in promoting and preserving the Jagannath culture, including the significant contributions made by poets and writers in the region.

Das (2011) discusses the rich spiritual culture of Odisha and emphasizes how the socio-cultural consciousness of the state's people is imbued with a deep love and devotion for Lord Jagannath. The author believes this consciousness is rooted in a perfect blending of religion and ethics, forming the bedrock of the state's socio-cultural values. The author explores the significance of the folk dance form of *Pala* in the context of the state's cultural traditions. *Pala* is a source of entertainment and inspires people to be more religious, moral, truthful and spiritual. Furthermore, the paper provides an in-depth analysis of how the *Pala* dance form is directly concerned with the life of people and how it serves as a powerful tool for promoting spiritual and moral values. The author highlights the various religious and moral themes portrayed in the dance form, such as the triumph of good over evil, the importance of truthfulness and the virtues of love and devotion.

Patnaik (2017) highlights how the traditional aspects of folklore are disappearing due to rapid technological advancements, migration and the adaptation of new traditions. The continuous changes in our society and people's way of life are negatively affecting the practice and preservation of folklore. The author emphasizes the need to rediscover and preserve our rich cultural heritage by documenting folklore. This documentation aids in visualizing the richness and diversity of the folklore, which can be helpful in its revival and promotion.

Mahapatra and Samantray (2017) highlight the significance of Jagannath consciousness in the literature of Odisha. They emphasize how the concept of inner peace is well established in the spiritual beliefs of the people of Odisha and how it has been reflected in their literature. They explain how the literature

of Odisha presents Jagannath consciousness as a way to attain world peace through inner peace. The authors further discuss the various aspects of spirituality and inner peace and how they differ from person to person. They note that spirituality is a subjective experience that can manifest differently for different individuals. They also highlight how inner peace is essential to achieving a peaceful world, as it promotes a sense of harmony and balance within oneself.

Panigrahi (2018) discusses how Odisha has many rural villages with a strong cultural heritage, including folklore. This folklore has been passed down for many generations and has been a part of Odisha's culture for centuries. The author refers to prevalent literary works and discusses the different types of folklore, such as the age-old customs, folktales, ballads or chants, beliefs and rituals etc.

Dash (2022) underlines the significance of evaluating traditional Odia oral literature's socio-cultural and literary potential. The author discusses popular folk stories and poetic plays in the context of their familiarity and popularity, emphasizing themes such as eco-consciousness, socio-cultural bonds, spiritualism and moral values. Additionally, the work delves into the rich history and tradition of oral narratives in Odia literature, deciphering its various forms and styles. In doing so, the writer sheds light on these age-old traditions' cultural and literary significance, highlighting the need for their preservation and promotion.

Malaya and Das (2022) highlight how rich folklore traditions risk disappearing due to the effects of urbanization and globalization. They express concern over how the authenticity of age-old folk traditions is gradually getting lost in the digital age. The authors emphasize the need to preserve traditional forms of literature in the face of rapid technological advancement. They acknowledge that technology is a crucial aspect of modern-day life, and one cannot survive without it. However, they also believe it is possible to incorporate traditional folklore and folk traditions into modern technology to ensure their preservation and longevity.

Dash (2022) evaluates the sociological, cultural and literary significance of the popular Odia oral literature. This oral literature includes many elements, including lullabies, folk tales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles and more. Dash explores the potential of this rich cultural tradition to contribute to the social and literary landscape of Odisha. The evaluation findings reveal that these oral traditions are deeply intertwined with the region's socio-cultural fabric and serve as a vital source of identity and continuity for the Odia people. Furthermore, Dash's evaluation highlights the literary potential of these oral traditions. The use of metaphors, allegories, and other literary devices in these tales demonstrates the richness and complexity of Odia oral literature. The study also reveals that these traditions offer a unique insight into the Odia people's worldview, beliefs, and values.

According to Satpathy (2021), the unique grand embodiment rituals of the wooden deities that are of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra take place every 8-19 years in a proper sacred setting. In the article, the author has well explained the different phases such as locating the “*daru-brahma*”⁷ that are the neem trees showing divine signs, the midnight “*brahma-padartha*”⁸ or the spiritual transfer of the deity’s life essence and the eventual burial of the old wooden idols. The author further elaborates on the exclusivity of *Nabakalebara* to Puri that has been well explained with reference to the Hindu rebirth rituals and beliefs, showcasing the secrecy of the traditions and the devotees’ faith in spirituality.

Pattanayak (2016) discusses in their work how the renowned Jagannath culture empowers the marginalized communities and gives the oppressed their voice via the concept of *Patitapabana*⁹. The author states that the Jagannath culture represents devotion and dedication towards the deity amongst the common people and people of all social classes that transcends the modern ideas of globalisation. The author also explains that the Jagannath culture has eclectic dimensions of Lord Jagannath through elements such as the folk legends, songs and rituals showing how the tradition instills communal harmony and a shared spiritual experience. Additionally, he states that the rituals and practices of *Nabakalebara*¹⁰ symbolise the rejuvenation of the gathered moral and ethical principles in today’s world.

In another work by Bhuyan and Pattnaik (2025) the Jagannath culture explores the deep interconnection between folklore and the socio-cultural framework of Odisha. The authors express that whether it is through the oral traditions, customs and rituals, they all serve as a reflection of the shared human experiences and the cultural values. According to the authors, the Jagannath culture transcends religious boundaries and embodies the spirit of Indian cultural heritage. They also believe that the festivals and rituals of the Jagannath culture foster togetherness and communal harmony by uniting people across all social strata.

Krishna (2013) explains how the astronomy-based rituals and festivals in Odisha play a pivotal role in maintaining social harmony in a highly modernized world. The work focuses on the fact that even while the 21st century has brought along a lot of technological and scientific conveniences, it has also led to the decline in traditions and values. In order to support the above sentence, the author explains how the traditional festivals and rituals, such as *Kartika Purnima*¹¹, *Chaitra Amavasya*¹², *Bakula Amavasya*¹³ act as strong cultural custodians in the state. According to the author, the agrarian festivals in Odisha mark the significant events in farming and agriculture while also portraying the importance of spirituality.

Majhi (2025) explains that the festivals in Odisha are unique due to the seamless fusion of religious significance, regional folklore, artistic expressions and community participation. The work further explains that the celebrations

such as *Raja Parba*¹⁴, *Nuakhai*¹⁵, *Kartika Purnima*, *Chaitra Amavasya*, and *Bakula Amavasya* showcase the religious and spiritual versatility of the state. The author states that the festivals range from agrarian festivals to cultural festivals, each of them holding significance in the way they are celebrated and for the purpose they are celebrated. The author also highlights that such festivals and traditions reinforce social solidarity across all castes and classes.

Das (2022) underlines the importance of the celebrations in mid-June in Odisha called *Raja Parba* that is dedicated towards honouring menstruation, both biologically and ecologically. The author states that the celebration goes on for three consecutive days during the onset of monsoon, temporarily pausing agricultural work in order to offer rest to Mother Earth. In addition to this, the author states that the women are barred from any kind of physical activities, chores at home and instead are asked to indulge in pampering themselves, wearing new clothes and singing folk songs.

Pasaya (2011) discusses the festival of *Nuakhai* which celebrates the new fruit of the season in Odisha. The author states that this has been the cause of the integration and the unity of the tribal and non-tribal people in Odisha. He further highlights that the concept of the festival originated with the cause of appreciation for the growth of rice, which is symbolic of life.

Dash (2017) states that one of the most unique socio-cultural events in Odisha is the *Kartika Purnima* that brings around the *Baliyatra* on the banks of the Mahanadi River. The author states that the festival is reminiscent of the ancient Odisha overseas businesses with far-off lands. The author believes that the trade and commerce fair called *Baliyatra*¹⁶ is symbolic of reverence for the *Sadhabas* or the sea traders sailing off to Bali.

In the words of Dash and Dambhare (2016), Odisha celebrates a wide range of festivals throughout the year that are closely associated with agricultural cycles. The author discusses that the traditions such as *Makar Sankranti*¹⁷, *Raja Parba*, *Rath Yatra*¹⁸, and *Kartika Purnima* are not merely spiritual observations, but also bring in joy and communal harmony. The work shows that delicacies like pitha or rice cakes, milk-based sweets are an essential component of the traditions.

Kumari et al. (2022) discuss in their work that Odia delicacies such as *aarisa pitha*, *kakara pitha*, *manda pitha*, and *chakuli pitha*¹⁹ prepared in most households during festivities symbolise devotion, culinary wisdom and the cultural heritage of Odisha. The authors state that these homemade dishes also carry nutritional and nutraceutical properties. To explain it further, the authors discuss how some of the delicacies even have anti-inflammatory properties because of the use of natural turmeric in them. The work highlights that due to fast-paced modernization, these cultural delicacies are starting to lose their significance which is why it is necessary to spread awareness, document the process of making them and incorporate these dishes into contemporary cuisines.

Biswal and Dash (2020) discuss how the folk traditions of Odisha, art forms like *Jhoti*²⁰ and *Pattachitra*²¹ have major cultural relevance in the state. The authors explain how these art forms are not just restricted to their looks, but they show cultural relevance and artistic significance in the state of Odisha. According to them, these practices of *Jhoti* and *Pattachitra* are closely linked with traditions and agrarian lives, and they represent harmony between man, nature and the divine. The authors believe that the art forms are losing their authenticity and charm because of the fast-paced urbanization of the world, which is why it is necessary to preserve them by greater awareness, documentation and promotion of the art forms.

THE CONCEPT OF FOLKLORE

The term “folklore”, formed by combining “folk” and “lore”, was introduced in 1846 by William Thoms. He created this word to substitute for the phrases “popular antiquities” or “popular literature”. The origin of the second part, “lore”, can be traced back to Old English “lār”, meaning “instruction” (Wikipedia). Folklore refers to the entire collection of oral traditions that are shared within a specific group, culture, or subculture. This encompassing term includes a wide array of elements, such as tales, myths, legends, proverbs, poems, jokes and various other forms of oral heritage. Additionally, folklore includes customary practices that align with folk beliefs, as well as the patterns and ceremonies associated with celebrations like Christmas, weddings, folk dances and initiation rites. Unlike subjects commonly taught within formal educational systems or explored in the realm of fine arts, folklore is not typically acquired through traditional curriculum or academic study. Instead, these traditions are informally transmitted from one individual to another, either through spoken guidance or practical demonstration. According to Dundes (1965: 3)

folklore includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, oaths, insults, retorts, taunts, teases, toasts, tongue-twisters, and greeting and leave-taking formulas...It also includes folk costume, folk dance, folk drama, (and mime), folk art, folk belief (or superstition), folk medicine, folk instrumental music (e.g., fiddle tunes), folksongs (e.g., lullabies, ballads), folk speech (e.g., slang), folk similes (e.g., as blind as a bat), folk metaphors (e.g., to paint the town red), and names (e.g., nicknames and place names) ... oral epics, autograph-book verse, epitaphs, latrinalia (writings on the walls of public bathrooms), limericks, ballbouncing rhymes, jump-rope rhymes, finger and toe rhymes, dandling rhymes (to bounce the children on the knee), counting-out rhymes (to determine who will be “it” in games), and nursery rhymes ... games; gestures; symbols; prayers (e.g. graces); practical jokes; folk etymologies; food recipes;

quilt and embroidery designs; house, barn and fence types; street vendor's cries; and even traditional conventional sounds used to summon animals to give them commands; ... mnemonic devices (e.g. the name Roy G. Biv to remember the colors of the spectrum in order), envelope sealers (e.g. SWAK – Sealed With A Kiss), and the traditional comments made after body emissions (e.g., after burps and sneezes), ... festivals and special day (or holiday) customs (e.g., Christmas, Halloween, and birthday).

The above definitions imply that folklore encapsulates a wide range of components. It encompasses everything that a community of people creates and passes down through generations, reflecting their collective identity, values, experiences and creativity. It is a living repository of the customs, stories, arts, beliefs, rituals and expressions that define a particular group's cultural heritage. Folklore holds significant importance within a society. It serves many functions, offering both entertainment and educational value. It plays a pivotal role in shaping and moulding the societal norms and moral codes, offering guidance and entertainment. Moreover, folklore acts as a cultural archive, providing insights into historical events, cultural practices and the ways in which humans have interpreted the world around them. Studying folklore allows us as learners and researchers to gain a deeper sense of understanding of diverse and varied cultures. Folklore serves the purpose of building a bridge between generations.

In this study, the term “folklore” is used to encompass a broad spectrum of oral traditions, ritual practices, performative arts and visual culture which are deeply embedded in the spiritual and cultural heritage of Odisha.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUALITY

Exploring the concept of spirituality, Taggart (2001: 325) opines that “...it is in the nature of spirituality to be elusive. Whilst some ... want to be clearer on what it is, ... others strongly resist giving it a definition at all, knowing the tyrannical, restrictive power of definitions”. Similarly, Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram (2008) state that no universally accepted way to define spirituality has been agreed upon by either the spiritual or scientific community. Zohar (2000) also argues that defining spirituality may be nearly impossible. While many agree that defining spirituality is a challenging task, some researchers still attempt to explain this complex concept. Hodge (2010), drawing on the works of Carroll (1997), Sermabeikian (1994) and Spero (1990) explains spirituality as a bond with a Transcendent Being or Ultimate shaped by a particular spiritual tradition. This bond nurtures a sense of sanctity, destination and meaning in life, which gives rise to virtues such as altruism, love and forgiveness. These virtues, in turn, influence one's connection with the creation, self,

others and the Ultimate. Hodge (2010) also notes that spirituality is shaped by a particular social context and while religion is one form of spiritual tradition, there are other non-institutionalized spiritual beliefs and practices.

Furthermore, specific activities associated with a particular spiritual tradition can indicate spirituality. According to Muldoon and King (1995: 336), spirituality is “the way in which people understand and live their lives in view of their ultimate meaning and value”. Vaughan (1991: 105) describes spirituality as “a subjective experience of the sacred”, while Murray and Zenter (1989) characterize it as “a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation, that strives for inspirations, reverence, awe, meaning and purpose, even in those who do not believe in any god” (cited in de Jager Meezenbroek et al. 2012: 338). De Jager Meezenbroek et al. (2012: 142) defines spirituality as “‘one’s striving for and experience of connection with the essence of life’, which encompasses three main dimensions: connectedness with oneself, connectedness with others and nature, and connectedness with the transcendent”. Numerous research studies emphasize the significance of connectedness concerning spirituality. There are different facets of connectedness, such as “authenticity, inner harmony/inner peace, consciousness, self-awareness and the search for the meaning of life”, which are demonstrated differently in humanity (Hedstrom et al. 1988; Young-Eisendrath & Miller 2000, cited in de Jager Meezenbroek et al. 2012: 339). Additionally, “compassion, caring, gratitude and wonder” are facets of connectedness to others and nature (de Jager Meezenbroek et al. 2012: 339). “Connectedness to the transcendent refers to connecting to something” or a being not of the Earth, such as the universe or higher powers, like God (Ibid.)

Diving deep into the concept of spirituality, Bennet and Bennet (2007) come up with the following 13 dimensions of spirituality: “Aliveness, Caring, Compassion, Eagerness, Empathy, Expectancy, Harmony, Joy, Love, Respect, Sensitivity, Tolerance and Willingness”. According to Mahoney and Graci (1999), “spirituality seemed to include the following attributes: charity (a sense of giving, service), community (a sense of connection, relationship), compassion, forgiveness (and peace), hope, learning opportunities, meaning (purpose), and morality (a sensitivity to right and wrong)”.

After going through the previous definitions of spirituality, our understanding of spirituality is that it is a multifaceted concept that involves a feeling of connectedness with oneself, others, nature, and the transcendent. It is an individual’s subjective experience of the sacred and their ultimate meaning and value in life. Some spiritual beliefs may be based on religious or philosophical traditions, while others may stem from personal experiences or intuitions. It also discusses our connection with nature, mystical experiences and the belief in spirit communication. This connectedness can happen through various means, such as meditation, prayer, yoga, psychic practices, religion, rituals, nature walks, environmental activism, a ritual honouring nature, etc.

Spirituality may be a source of solace, motivation, and development for many individuals.

THE SPIRITUALITY EMBEDDED IN THE FOLKLORE OF ODISHA

Spirituality is deeply ingrained in India's glory, culture, tradition and customs. Sages and saints have spoken about the wisdom of spirituality for ages. There are plenty of references to spirituality in terms of removing pain and misery from human life. Throughout different centuries, different cultures have taken a resort to spirituality and tried to achieve sublime peace through spirituality and pass on the same practice to the newer generation. Odisha is one such state that could be considered the treasure trove of the origins and stories of spiritual practices. Odisha's spirituality is firmly established in its extensive cultural history and traditions. Many temples and sacred places are located throughout the state, including the well-known Jagannath temple in Puri. Meditation, yoga, and *ayurveda*²² are other widely-practised spiritual disciplines in the state. The spirituality of Odisha constitutes a significant aspect of its cultural identity, and it exerts a profound influence on the lives of its inhabitants. The deep-rooted belief in the spirituality of the people of Odisha is also reflected in its folklore collections, such as folk religion, rituals, traditions, beliefs, practices, songs, dance, folk tales etc. Although the folk religion in Odisha combines various religious beliefs, including *Hinduism*, *Buddhism*, *Jainism*, and tribal religions, the focus of the religious rituals and festivals discussed in this paper is primarily based on the Hindu religion, which is the dominant religion in the state. These rituals and festivals are deeply imbued with a sense of spirituality and reflect the strong faith of the people of Odisha in their religious traditions. Odisha's folk music and dance are fundamental to its cultural identity and also exude spirituality. The moral precepts of many folktales emphasize the value of traits like compassion, generosity and dedication.

Furthermore, some folktales deal with the theme of *karma*, signifying the importance of right deeds over wrong ones. The following section is divided into three parts, aiming to explore the profound theme of spirituality woven within the elements of Odisha's folklore. The first part explores how spirituality is reflected in the rituals of the Jagannath cult, while the next section examines the spirituality of other religious traditions in Odisha. The last section focuses on how spirituality is reflected in other components of Odisha's folklore, such as dance, song, art etc.

THE MANIFESTATION OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE VARIOUS RITUALS AND TRADITIONS OF THE JAGANNATH CULT

Odisha is renowned for its sacred pilgrimage, Puri, home to the world-famous Jagannath temple. The Jagannath cult's evolution, temple, and diverse rituals

and traditions manifest a fusion of varied religious doctrines, including tribal beliefs, *Brahminism*, *Vaishnavism*, *Saivism*, *Shaktism*, *Tantricism*, *Buddhism*, and *Jainism*²³. The inception of the Jagannath cult in Puri remains a mystery, as Tripathy (2012) and Pradhan (2004) pointed out. The rich tapestry of legends surrounding the origin and development of the Jagannath cult are found in sacred Hindu texts such as the “*Skanda Purana*”, Sarala Dasa’s “*Mahabharata*”, “*Madala Panji*”, “*Deola Tola*”, “*Brahma Purana*”, “*Padma Purana*”, “*Kapila Samhita*”, “*Niladri Mahodaya*” and the “*Bamadeva Samhita*²⁴” etc. Numerous scholars like B. M. Padhil, G. C. Tripathy, A. Eschmann, H. Kulke, B. Mohanty, N. K. Sahu, K. C. Mishra, S. Mohanty, and G. N. Mohapatra have dedicated their research and exploration to delve into the origins of the Jagannath cult. While variations exist among the legends and the study conducted by historians and anthropologists, a common thread that emerges in these narratives is the close association of the tribal people, known as Savaras, with Lord Jagannath as well as the connection of Lord Vishnu or Krishna with the deity.

The legend mentioned in the “*Purusottama Mahatmya*” of the “*Skanda Purana*” holds special significance among the various tales about the origins of the Jagannath cult. This particular legend is widely accepted and believed by the Jagannath temple of Puri. As per the story, King Indradyumna, who was believed to be a great devotee of Vishnu, was a king of *Satya Yug*. Once, the king learned about the God Nilamadhab, who was in Nilachal (blue hill) worshipped by the tribal community *Savaras*²⁵. Vidyapati, the trusted minister of Indradyumna, was sent to collect information on Nilamadhab. Vidyapati went to Nilamadhab with the help of Viswavasas, who was believed to be the king of the tribal community. After being informed about the place by Vidyapati, when the king reached there, to his surprise, nothing was visible to him. In his dream, he saw a wood log coming from the Svetadipa, where God Vishnu appeared in blue form. Subsequently, a wooden record appeared with the signs of Vishnu floating in the sea to the shore.

Sarala Das, in his “*Mahabharata*”, shows the connection of Krishna with Lord Jagannath. In the *Vana Parva* and *Musali Parva*²⁶, he shows Lord Jagannath’s appearance after Krishna’s death. When Arjuna, with the help of *Savara* Jara, who had killed Krishna, tried to burn the corpse of Krishna, only the palms, legs and nose were burnt, not the whole body. Then a divine sound was heard “Fire cannot devour this body. It will be worshipped for a long time on the *Nilasundar*²⁷ hill. Put out the fire. Remove the body and set it afloat on the sea” (Das 1969: 52). Accordingly, Arjun placed the body in the sea, gave the charge of the body to Jara and returned to Dwaraka. After some time, Krishna appeared in Jara’s dream, and on his awakening, he found an image of Vishnu beside him and started worshipping God, hiding it beneath a tree on *Dhauli*²⁸ Hill. Many years later, King Gala Madhaba, who was devoted to Vishnu, brought the Vishnu image to Nilgiri since God was unwilling to stay in *Savara* village as King Gala Madhav massacred it.

Meanwhile, Jara looked for Krishna's body near Konark. Indradyumna, upon hearing that God would reside in Nilgiri, built a temple with the help of Viswavasnu. Krishna appeared to Jara and revealed his wish to appear as Buddha temporarily. Krishna transformed into a wooden log in the Rohini Kunda, and Jara, Indradyumna, and Vasudeva retrieved it. With Viswakarma's assistance, Jara carved the wooden log into the images of Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Jagannath. To hide the wooden form of Jagannath, Jara applied resin from the *Sal* tree. This way, the images of Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Jagannath were revealed.

The ancient Sanskrit text "*Niladri Mahoday*" also tells a similar story with slight variations, revealing a deep connection between Krishna and Jagannath. The narrative tells of a moment when Krishna rested under a tree in a forest near Nilgiri. Tragically, the hunter Jara Savara mistakenly perceived Krishna's feet as those of a deer and inadvertently caused his demise. When Jara tried to cremate the body, only certain parts were burnt, for it was the divine form of Lord Vishnu himself. Consequently, he left the remaining body near the sea of Puri, known as *Banki Muhan*²⁹. Many centuries later, King Indradymna dreamt about the wooden log of Krishna's divine which remained at *Banki Muhan*. Acting upon this vision, he carved an image from the log and enshrined it in the magnificent Jagannath temple. This act marked the foundation of the revered deity's worship. The story of Krishna's death in the story also aligns with the narratives mentioned in the concluding part of the Mahabharata. In this episode, Krishna informs Arjuna that now that the war is over, he will retreat to a distant forest of creepers, where he will eventually meet his end near the sacred site of Jagannath Puri. The two stories parallel each other, affirming the link between Krishna's demise and his connection to Jagannath Puri (Khuntia 2009).

After considering the above legends, it becomes evident that Lord Jagannath is a revered deity among tribal and Hindu communities. However, certain scholars propose an alternative perspective, suggesting a possible Buddhist origin of the Jagannath cult and its temple. According to this viewpoint, the image of Jagannath is believed to house the tooth relic of Buddha, and rituals such as the *Snan yatra* (Bathing ceremony) and *Rath yatra* (chariot festival)³⁰ are thought to have connections to Buddhist practices. In addition, the practice of sharing *Kaivalya*³¹ (sacred food) equally among all castes is seen as having been influenced by Buddhism (Pradhan 2004). Jayadev, a Vaishnavite poet from the 20th century, acknowledged Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Krishna and Vishnu. Similarly, in his "*Mahabharata*", Sarala Das considered Jagannath to embody both Krishna and Buddha.

While there are varying opinions on the deity's original identity, accepting Jagannath's evolution into a representation of Vishnu or Krishna is widespread. Many scholars agree that in its earliest form, Jagannath was called Purushottama. The name Purushottama, deeply rooted in Vaishnavism, further

strengthens the bond between Jagannath and the tradition of Hindu worship. This connection between Purushottama and Jagannath is mentioned in several Hindu texts, such as *Vishnudharma Purana*, *Vaman Puran* and *Anargharaghava Natakam* by Murari Mishra (Pradhan 2004). According to Sahoo (2021), the evolution of *Vaishnavism* in Odisha can be traced back to the worship of Nilamadhab at *Nilachala*, even before the emergence of the Jagannath trinity in the form of *Darubrahma* during the reign of Indradyumna. The legend of *Vaishnavism*'s evolution is mentioned in various ancient texts, including the *Purusottama Kshetra Mahatmya* of "Skanda Purana", *Musaliparva* of Sarala "Mahabharata", "Deulatola" of Sisu Krishna Das. Nilambar Das, K. C. Das also references these accounts, pinpointing Nilagiri as the place where *Vaishnavism* originated (Sahoo 2021). Initially, it was part of the *Savara* land under the guidance of Viswavasus.

However, later, it transformed into a centre for Vishnu worship, becoming an institutionalized religion embraced by various communities in Odisha. Various ancient sources such as "Silpa texts", "Mahabharata", "Manusmriti", and "Ramayana" offer ample evidence of the evolution of *Vaishnavism* and its diverse influences on its growth. With time, *Vaishnavism* received momentum under royal patronage. During the Ganga and Suryavamsi dynasties, the belief in *Vaishnavism* reached its height. Throughout history, various scholars and saints of *Vaishnavism*, such as Ramanujacharya, Nimbarkacharya, Madhvacharya, Vallabhacharya and the celebrated poet Jayadev, have made significant contributions to the spiritual landscape of Puri and its devotion to Purushottam-Jagannath. Jayadev's "Gita Govinda" masterpiece was pivotal in *Vaishnavism*. This poetic composition beautifully portrayed the passionate and divine relationship between Radha and Krishna, which added a new perspective to Eastern *Vaishnavism*.

"Gita Govinda" was incorporated into the temple's worship and rituals, which firmly entwines the concepts of Radha-Krishna devotion and the Jagannath culture in the tapestry of East Indian *Vaishnavism*. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a revered saint and spiritual leader, forged a strong connection between Gaudiya *Vaishnavism* and Jagannath culture. Throughout his lifetime, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu resided in Puri for 20 years, and through his teachings and spiritual enthusiasm, he inspired numerous individuals. His influence led them to cultivate a profound connection with Lord Jagannath, and they started incorporating Jagannath worship into their practice of Gaudiya *Vaishnavism*. This fusion of traditions resulted in a unique blend of devotion, wherein the love for Lord Krishna and Jagannath intertwined. Thus, the veneration of Lord Jagannath became an integral part of Gaudiya *Vaishnavism*, especially among Bengalis who embraced this combined expression of devotion. Khuntia (2009) highlights that *Vaishnavism*'s core principles resonate strongly with the beliefs and practices of Jagannath culture. A true *Vaishnavite* is a devoted servant who selflessly surrenders to the almighty before taking any action, relying not on

personal strength or worldly possessions but on divine guidance. They view the world and the physical body as comprising *Achetana* and *Chetana*³² – the transient and the awareness of the Supreme Divine Being within. In the context of the Jagannath temple and its rituals, devotees wholeheartedly embrace the concept of surrender to the divine will. Their actions are guided by a deep sense of devotion and humility, seeking to establish a direct connection with the invisible God residing within them. By recognizing the impermanence of the physical body (*Achetana*) and acknowledging the significance of the inner Divine (*Chetana*), Jagannath's followers strive to transcend the limitations of the material world. The fundamental essence of *Vaishnavism*, which focuses on selflessness, devotion and a profound connection with the divine, perfectly aligns with the beliefs and values upheld in Jagannath culture. By incorporating these principles into their lives, devotees of Jagannath embark on a spiritual journey, seeking to strengthen their bond with the almighty and attain spiritual fulfillment and inner peace. Thus, the connection between *Vaishnavism* and Jagannath culture reinforces the profound significance of surrendering to the divine will and nurturing a deep, soulful connection with the Supreme Being.

In addition to its strong association with *Vaishnavite* beliefs, the Jagannath deity encompasses the essence of *Saivism*, the worship of Lord Shiva, and *Shaktism*, the worship of the divine feminine energy. Scholars have observed that the image of Lord Jagannath shares similarities with Ekapada Bhairava, a form of Lord Shiva, showing the coexistence of *Saivism* within the tradition (Pradhan 2004). This association is particularly prominent during the annual *Rath Yatra* festival, where Lord Jagannath's chariot is accompanied by images of Shiva and other deities, symbolizing their interconnectedness. Moreover, the rituals and practices at the Jagannath temple in Puri often exhibit elements of both *Vaishnavism* and *Shaivism*. The temple's daily routines include offering flowers, water and other sacred items to the deities, standard practices in both *Vaishnavite* and *Shaivite* traditions. Additionally, some scholars suggest that the "*Nilachala Purana*", an ancient text related to the Jagannath cult, references *Shaivite* practices and beliefs.

*Purusottama Kshetra*³³ is also notable as a *Shakti pitha* (*paada pitha*)³⁴, where Sati's foot is believed to have fallen, as per the *Daksha Yajna* story. The site has deep-rooted connections with *Shaktism* in India, evident in various literary, traditional and archaeological references. The "*Matsya Purana*" identifies *Purushottama Kshetra* as a *Shakti pitha*, with the presiding goddess Vimala. The "*Kalika Purana*" refers to *Odrapitha* as a renowned *Shakti Pitha*, associated with worshipping goddess Katyayani and Lord Jagannath. In tantric lore such as "*Rudra Yamala*", "*Tantra Yamala*", Lord Jagannath is revered as Bhairava, and Vimala is worshipped as Mahadevi. The *Devi Bhagavata* designates Vimala as the *Kshetra Shakti* (Pradhan 2004; Mallik 2022; Prabhas 2005).

Subhadra's image, known as Ekanamsa, is considered the embodiment of Durga or Katyayani and the sister of Krishna and Baladeva. Her association

with Durga is evident during the *Rath Yatra*. Her chariot, *Devdalan*, is adorned with nine representations of goddesses, which are either aspects of Durga or her incarnation Navadurgas, represented by Harachandi, Bhadrakali, Barahi, Katyayani, Mangala, Vimala, Uma, Ramachandi, and Aghora. Jayadurga and Tripursundari serve as the deities of the flag and protectors of the chariot. The “*Niladri Mahoday*” describes Devi Subhadra as the incarnation of various divine forms, including Vaishnavi, Brahmani, Shiva, Rudrani, Kalaratri, Mahalaxmi and Jagadamba. She is worshipped with the Bhubaneswari mantra, signifying her role as the *gnana*³⁵ (knowledge) ‘Sakti of Lord Jagannath’. Many experts believe that how Subhadra is depicted in religious art resembles the Goddess Khambesvari. This similarity indicates that Subhadra might have been a part of the Jagannath triad during the Somavamsi period (Mallik 2022; Pradhan 2004). The *Durga Madhava Rath Yatra*, also known as *Sakta Gundicha Rath Yatra*, is a festival representing the interconnectedness between *Vaishnavism* and *Shaktism* very strongly. This festival takes place in September–October. Durga, a Sakta deity and Madhava, a *Vaishnavite* deity, are worshipped in this festival (Mallick 2005).

The stories, myths, customs, traditions, rituals, beliefs etc., associated with the Lord Jagannath and his temple provide a profound sense of connection with the divine and help devotees to cultivate love, kindness and compassion, which are integral to the concept of spirituality. The Jagannath culture emphasizes the value of togetherness and harmony. The temple is open to individuals of all castes and creeds, and it is managed by a group of priests from various castes who cooperate to maintain the temple’s efficient operation. Devotion, service and community define the spirituality of the Odia Jagannath culture. With its message of love, compassion and unity, the culture has significantly impacted the advancement of the state’s religious and cultural recognition. It continues to motivate millions of people worldwide. The idea of *seva*, or service, is at the heart of the Jagannath culture’s spirituality. Lord Jagannath’s followers feel as though they are serving the Lord by taking part in the rituals and festivities held at the temple. The worship of the Lord is the centre of the temple’s daily activities, and thousands of devotees come there each day to pray and seek blessings. Lord Jagannath is not regarded merely as a physical entity but as a manifestation of the divine energy permeating the universe. The people’s devotion, belief and conviction in God are so profound that they transcend the physical realm and touch the spiritual plane.

Lord Jagannath is a divine entity that embodies both spiritual and material aspects, simultaneously representing physical, metaphysical and abstract experiences. He is both a seeker and a giver, symbolizing various divine personalities such as Krishna, Rudra, Brahma, Kali, Daga, Kshma and Sat-Chitta-Ananda, signifying the existence of truth, consciousness and bliss. He represents the essence of universalism, humanism and integration and is a profound and mysterious entity (Mahapatra 2020). Lord Jagannath’s vibrant and dynamic

culture is associated with the concept of spirituality in many ways. First of all, Lord Jagannath is revered as a divine incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Every year millions of devotees assemble at Puri to offer their prayers to God. In the worship of Lord Jagannath, different rituals, practices, beliefs and traditions are observed and performed, which help devotees attain salvation by connecting with the spiritual light. A deep spiritual significance is attached to all these rituals. The most famous festival of the temple is the *Rath Yatra*.

The historical origins of *Rath Yatra*, the grand chariot festival, continue to be shrouded in mystery despite extensive research by scholars. References and narratives about *Rath Yatra* are strewn across Hindu epics, mythologies and ancient texts. Choudhary (2016) and Mahapatra (1987) have delved into these references, shedding light on the *Raths*' enduring presence in ancient literature. The "*Rig Veda*", one of the oldest sacred texts in Hinduism, alludes to *Raths* moving through the skies, symbolizing celestial chariots with three storeys and drawn by horses. Panini, a renowned grammarian and philosopher, makes mention of *Ratha* while analyzing the terms '*Rathastha*, *Rathaganak*'³⁶, and others, providing linguistic evidence of the significance of chariots in ancient society. In the *Ramayana*, an epic attributed to Sage Valmiki, there is a distinction between the *Pusya Ratha* used in games and the divine *Marut Ratha* employed by celestial beings.

Similarly, references to *Ratha* can be found in other revered texts such as the "*Bhagwat*", "*Mahabharata*", "*Vishnu Purana*", Kautilya's "*Arthashastra*" and "*Sukra Niti*", further highlighting its pervasive importance in ancient Indian literature. The "*Brahma Purana*" provides a detailed account of the *Yatra*, while the "*Padma Purana*" and the "*Skanda Purana*" offer vivid descriptions of the festive celebrations. Additionally, the "*Kapila Samhita*" also contains references to the revered *Ratha Yatra*. Fascinatingly, even Buddhist literature, such as the "*Lalita Vistara*" and "*Buddha Carita*", refers to *Ratha*, showcasing its presence in diverse religious and philosophical traditions.

Das (2016) also mentions that the motif of the *Rath* as a carrier for gods finds its roots in ancient Hindu texts. The "*Rig Veda*" beautifully symbolizes the hymn as the chariot that connects humans to the divine, bridging the gap between mortals and gods. Moreover, the seers who composed the Vedic verses are revered as the creators of such divine chariots. Further exploration in the "*Taitreeya Brahmana*" reveals the personification of Prajapathi attributing the chariot's components to various aspects of Vedic poetry. Metres are likened to the chariot itself, Gayatri and Jagati become its sides, and Usnil and Tristubh take the role of side horses. Anustubh and Pankti are the yoke horses, and Brahti is the seat. This symbolic association demonstrates the profound significance of chariots in Vedic literature. Even in the Upanishads, the metaphor of the chariot and its rider represents the relationship between the body and the *Atman*. This analogy further emphasizes the spiritual journey where the *Atman* navigates the chariot of the body through life's experiences.

The origins of *Rath Yatra* are intertwined with several mythical stories reflecting the people's beliefs in the region. One story narrates how Lord Krishna and Balaram were invited to Mathura by their wicked uncle, Kansa. They left for Mathura on a chariot, which devotees now celebrate as *Rath Yatra*. Another tale commemorates the day Krishna defeated Kansa and gave darshan to euphoric devotees in Mathura while riding a chariot with Balaram. Devotees in Dwarka celebrate the day Krishna and Balaram took Subhadra for a chariot ride, showcasing the city's splendour. The story of Vrajkatha explains how Krishna, Balaram and Subhadra are believed to forever reside in the Puri temple of Lord Jagannath due to a boon granted by Narad.

Moreover, the story of Krishna becoming the charioteer of Arjuna during the *Mahabharata* battle is celebrated. After Krishna's cremation, King Indradyumna of Jagannath Puri dreamt of sanctifying wooden statues of Krishna, Balaram and Subhadra in a temple. The statues, pulled in majestic processions during *Rath Yatra*, are changed every 12 years, and the Jagannath Puri temple stands as one of India's four most sacred temples. It remains a unique temple housing sibling deities – Lord Krishna, Balaram and Subhadra – drawing devotees from around the world to celebrate the divine journey of *Rath Yatra*.

This festival takes place on the second day of the bright fortnight in the month of *Ashadha*³⁷. A sea of devotees assembles at Puri to witness this holy festival. This festival involves removing the deities of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra from their temples and placing them on a giant chariot. Countless devotees join together to pull the *rathas* through the city's streets while chanting the sacred name Hari. The festival is marked by a series of rituals that require extensive preparation and effort. The chariots are embellished with floral decorations and paintings, and music, dance, hymns, chants etc, accompany the celebration. The *Ratha Yatra* festival holds deep spiritual significance, as described in many ancient texts and scriptures.

With the chariot symbolizing the human body and the Marathi symbolic of God, the festival symbolizes the soul's journey towards enlightenment. The owner of the chariot, who represents the soul, travels with the Marathi, who represents God, to their final destination – the abode of the Lord. The chariot's wheels signify perseverance and determination, while the horses represent the senses. The ground on which the chariot rides stands for the virtues necessary for spiritual development, such as vitality, tolerance, self-control, charity and discrimination. The horses' reins stand for attributes like sympathy, composure and forgiveness, which are necessary for successfully navigating life's journey. Therefore, to attain spiritual fulfilment, one must surrender unconditionally to the supreme Marathi, God or a God-realized soul, and embark on the journey towards transcendence from the material world. In essence, the *Ratha Yatra* festival serves as a reminder of the spiritual journey that every individual must undertake to attain liberation from the cycle of material existence. It emphasizes the importance of surrendering to a higher power and embodying

virtues such as perseverance, self-discipline and compassion to traverse life's journey successfully. In addition, the pulling of the chariots during the *Rath Yatra* event holds enormous spiritual importance. Through this sacred act, people render selfless service to the divine by purifying their souls and body and, thus, getting closer to the divine light. It represents the journey of the soul towards transcendence and spiritual growth.

The *snana yatra* or the bathing ceremony is another significant ritual at the temple. Traditionally, this festival occurs on the full moon day in the month of *Jyestha*, considered Lord Jagannath's birthday. The deities are taken in procession from the Jagannath temple to the *Snana Bedi*³⁸ during this event. They are bathed with 108 water pots and ornamented for public view. On this occasion, hundreds of thousands of devotees visit the temple. According to the *Skanda Purana* and the legends, King Indradyumna was the first person to have organized this ceremony for the first time when the idols of the deities were initially built. This ceremony is believed to represent the purification and renewal of spiritual energy. The devotees of Lord Jagannath believe that if they visit the temple on this auspicious day, they will be cleansed of all their sins. Another important festival celebrated once every 12 to 19 years is *Nabakalebara*, or the New Body festival. In this festival, the old wooden idols of the deities are replaced with new idols that are carved from a sacred neem tree. In this festival, devotees prepare food for God with great care and devotion and the ritual in which the food is offered to God is called *Bhoga Mandap*³⁹. This ritual is also practised with the belief that it purifies and renews the spiritual energy of God. This festival is the onset of the annual *Ratha Yatra* celebration. In this festival, devotees try to embellish chariots with new clothes and flowers to prepare them for the yearly *Ratha yatra* festival with utmost devotion and surrendering to God.

Chandan Yatra, or the Sandalwood festival, is another important ritual which evokes the theme of purification and devotion. The ceremony involves the anointing of the deities of Lord Jagannath with *chandan*⁴⁰ (sandal). In this festival also, the devotees offer their *seva*⁴¹, or selfless service. The deities are taken in a procession to the *Narendra* pond, where they are given baths and decorated with new clothes and jewellery. The procession is accompanied by musicians, dancers and devotees who offer their prayers and perform acts of service and devotion.

In all these rituals, devotees undertake a spiritual journey by offering selfless service, devotion and dedication and surrendering to God. Devotees forget about all human worries and frustrations by offering prayers, fasting, working day and night and preparing Prasad for God. They thus are motivated and inspired by their 'guru' Lord Jagannath, who acts as a spiritual guide or protector. 'Seva' is a spiritual practice and discipline which is an integral part of the daily ritual at the temple where devotees perform various services to the deities, such as cleaning, cooking, offering food, assisting people, spreading knowledge about Lord Jagannath and Jagannath culture.

Dharma, *Karma* and *Moksha*⁴², three essential aspects connected with spirituality, are also greatly emphasized in the lesson of Lord Jagannath. *Dharma* refers to doing the right thing and having good morals, *Karma* is the idea that our actions have consequences, and *Moksha* means breaking the cycle of birth and death. The temple has traditions such as offering food to the deities and giving visitors *Prasad*⁴³ to promote kindness and selflessness. Doing good things and giving to others can create cheerful *Karma* and lead to spiritual growth. Devotees aim to achieve *Moksha* by meditating and praying.

THE MANIFESTATION OF SPIRITUALITY IN OTHER RITUALS AND TRADITIONS OF ODISHA

Some other religious rituals and traditions considered to be means of attaining spirituality are *Jhamu Yatra*, *Chitalagi Amavasya*, *Chaitra Amavasya*, *Bakula Amavasya*, *Raja Parba* etc.

The *Jhamu Yatra* is an important festival celebrated every year in the Puri district of Odisha. The festival is known for its unique and awe-inspiring rituals, with the fire walk being among the most prominent. This ritual is believed to have spiritual significance for the participants, as it is viewed as a form of devotion and a way to connect with a higher power. During the fire walk, participants are said to be possessed by deities or a higher force, which enables them to overcome the pain of walking on hot coals with their bare feet. They believe their bodies are being controlled by the divine, and this possession allows them to perform miraculous feats that would otherwise be impossible. Walking on hot coals is also seen as a form of penance or purification, with participants seeking to rid themselves of their sins or negative energies. By undergoing this physical trial, they hope to achieve a state of spiritual purity and renewal. The water pots carried on their heads during the fire walk are believed to symbolize water's cleansing and purifying power, further emphasizing the spiritual significance of the ritual.

The celebration of *Amavasyas* is a cultural practice of Odisha with deep spiritual significance. The *Chitalagi Amavasya* or *Chitou Amavasya* festival is an example of the intersection between spirituality and agriculture. This festival is primarily celebrated in rural areas and is considered to be an important event for farmers who depend on the land for their livelihood. The festival begins with farmers purifying themselves through a bath in a river or other water body. This act of purification is believed to cleanse the body and mind of impurities, preparing the farmers for the ritual of offering prayers to their paddy fields. Once they are cleansed, the farmers offer prayers to the gods and goddesses associated with agriculture, seeking blessings for a bountiful harvest and protection from pests and other destructive forces. The prayers and offerings made during the *Chitalagi Amavasya* festival are believed to establish a spiritual connection between the farmers and the land they cultivate.

The significance of *Chaitra Amavasya* lies in its spiritual energy, as it is believed to be an auspicious day for performing *pitra dosha* puja. According to Hindu mythology, *pitra dosha* refers to the sins and negative karma accumulated by one's ancestors that may affect their present life. Performing *pitra dosha*⁴⁴ puja on *Chaitra Amavasya* is believed to help liberate oneself from these karmic debts and pave the way for a brighter future. The ritual involves bathing in a water body before offering prayers and donating to the poor and needy. This act of charity is considered a way of seeking forgiveness for the sins of one's ancestors and balancing their negative karma. The donations can be in food, clothes, or money and are given to the underprivileged to help alleviate their suffering. Taking a dip is said to wash away one's sins and prepare them for the spiritual journey ahead.

Bakula Amavasya is another significant festival that falls under the category of *amavasyas*. This festival typically falls during May or June when the mango trees blossom across the state. During *Bakula Amavasya*, the mango trees are worshipped, and people string garlands around them to symbolize their reverence. *Pithas*⁴⁵, a sweet dish made from rice flour and jaggery, are also offered to the trees as a form of thanksgiving. The festival is important for farmers and mango cultivators who rely on trees for their livelihood. The spiritual significance of *Bakula Amavasya* is rooted in the belief that performing certain rituals can help ward off negative energies and promote positive growth. In Hindu mythology, *shani dosha* and *pitra dosha* refer to negative karmic points affecting one's life and well-being. It is believed that performing specific rituals during *Bakula Amavasya* can help counteract these negative energies and promote positivity and growth.

Raja Parba or *Raja Festival* is an important festival celebrated for three days, usually in June. The festival is mainly celebrated by young girls and women, who consider it a celebration of fertility and womanhood. The festival has a deep spiritual significance and is associated with the worship of Mother Earth, considered the giver of life and fertility. On the first day of the festival, the female members, particularly young unmarried girls and mothers-to-be in the families, wake up before dawn and take a purificatory bath in a river or any other water body after lathering their bodies with turmeric paste and oil. This bath is believed to purify the mind, body and soul, and it is a symbol of cleansing and rejuvenation. Traditionally, bathing is prohibited on the remaining two days of the festival, and women are not supposed to walk barefoot, grind, cut or cook or do any household chores. They wear *Alta* and a lot of jewellery and dress in new clothes. During all three consecutive days, women eat *pithas* at their houses and their friends' houses, move up and down on *jhulas*⁴⁶ (swings), and sing merry *Raja Odia* songs. The festival celebrates womanhood and the happiness of the earth being fertile. It is celebrated for women and *Bhudevi*⁴⁷, the earth. In Odisha, it is believed that the divine wife of Lord Jagannath is *Bhudevi*, who undergoes her menstrual cycle during this period before the onset of

rain. Spiritually, the festival is considered significant because the whole point revolves around doing festivities for the women of the state. Women are supposed to take care of themselves and pamper themselves. They are expected to let go of all their chores and only rest for those consecutive days. The festival symbolizes the earth preparing itself to get washed off in the first rains so that old memories wash away and new ones set in, inducing the spirit of rejuvenation. The Raja festival celebrates the power of the feminine and the earth's fertility, emphasizing the importance of rest, rejuvenation and the renewal of the self. It reminds people of the need to care for the earth, the women in their lives and themselves. The festival's spiritual significance lies in how it celebrates life and the beauty of nature, encouraging people to embrace the divine feminine and the rejuvenating power of the earth.

Kartika Purnima, also known as *Boita Bandana* or *Panchuka*⁴⁸, is a significant festival celebrated in the state of Odisha. This festival is observed in the month of *Kartika* (October–November) as per the Hindu calendar. According to Das and Mahapatra (1979), *Kartika Purnima* stems from the historic yearly departure of trading expeditions on boats to the far-off Southeast Asian mainland and islands from the shores of ancient Odisha when maritime trade was at its best. The people of Odisha, actively engaged in maritime trade during ancient times, used to worship the sea god Varuna and seek his blessings for a safe journey during the monsoon season. The spiritual significance of *Kartika Purnima* lies in its association with Lord Vishnu and his incarnations. This day is considered auspicious for spiritual pursuits, especially for those seeking enlightenment and liberation. The day is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, and devotees offer prayers and perform special rituals to seek his blessings. *Kartika Purnima* is also a day for expressing gratitude and seeking forgiveness. During this festival, some people choose to fast; some people prefer to eat only vegetarian food during that particular period. Elderly people acquire the habit of consuming *habisa*⁴⁹ and rice, and they believe that all of this is a process to make themselves feel complete in context to their religious and spiritual beliefs. As the sacred month nears its end, people prepare for *Chaadakhai*⁵⁰, celebrated the day after the full moon. Today, people indulge in non-vegetarian dishes, a release from the religious taboo of withholding the desire to eat non-vegetarian dishes.

Samba Dashami, also known as *Surya Puja*, is a significant festival celebrated in Odisha. It is observed in the Hindu calendar on the 10th day of the *Shukla Paksha* (bright fortnight) in the month of *Margashirsha* (November–December). The festival is dedicated to Lord Surya, the Hindu sun god. The spiritual significance of *Samba Dashami* lies in its association with the mythology of the Mahabharata. According to legend, Samba, the son of Lord Krishna, was cursed with leprosy by Saint *Durvasa*. Samba and his wife and children worshipped Lord Surya and were blessed with a cure for his illness. The day is believed to be when Samba was cured of his disease, and it is observed as a day of gratitude and devotion towards Lord Surya. The festival also holds great importance for

women who pray to Lord Surya for their husbands' well-being and long life. Married women observe a fast on this day and deliver water to Lord Surya during sunrise. The water is believed to have healing properties and is said to cure various illnesses. *Samba Dashami*⁵¹ is a day for seeking blessings and expressing gratitude towards the sun god. It is believed that one can attain good health, prosperity, and success by worshipping Lord Surya on this day. The festival also promotes the values of family and togetherness, as families come together to offer prayers and celebrate the day with traditional rituals and customs.

THE MANIFESTATION OF SPIRITUALITY IN FOLK PERFORMANCES, FOLK TALES, FOLK ARTS AND CRAFTS

Pala is a unique form of folk performance art in Odisha, India, blending classical Odia music, theatre and poetry in Odia and Sanskrit. Its cultural and spiritual significance can be traced back to the 16th century during the Mughal era when it was created to promote Hindu-Muslim unity. This traditional art form is an expression of communal harmony and has evolved to become an essential part of Odisha's cultural heritage. A typical *Pala* group comprises 5 to 7 members, with the leader known as *Mukhia* or *Mukhya Gayak*⁵². The *Mukhya Gayak* is distinguished by unique ornaments, large earrings, necklaces, and carries a whisk and a pen or stick while singing. The *Sri Palia*⁵³ supports the leader by repeating stanzas, and the *Bayak*⁵⁴ plays the drum called *Mrudanga*⁵⁵. The remaining members, known as *Palia* or the chorus, repeat the songs and stanzas along with the leader and *Sri Palia*. The *Mukhya Gayak* does not play any musical instrument; the *Bayak* plays the *Mrudangam*, and all others play the cymbals called *Jhanja*⁵⁶. This combination of instruments creates a rhythmic and melodious backdrop for the performance. *Pala* performances often draw inspiration from episodes in the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Stories like Laba and Kusha singing Ramayana in Rama's court or Nachiketa singing Vedas at the door of Yamraj find representation in *Palas*. *Pala* is considered a medium to connect with the divine, and the performers view themselves as mediums to communicate with the gods through their art. During the performance, the artists believe that they attain a heightened state of consciousness, allowing them to transcend their physical and material limitations and connect with the divine realm.

Among the folk performances of Odisha, *Gotipua* dance stands out as a profound expression of devotional art. Performed by young boys dressed as women, this tradition is believed to have originated in the 16th century during the reign of the Bhoi dynasty, particularly as a response to the decline of the *Mahari* dance tradition. *Mahari* was performed by female dancers as a ritual offering to deities within the temples of Odisha. As this sacred practice began to fade due to shifting social and religious dynamics, *Gotipua* emerged to carry forward its spiritual legacy – now performed in more public and accessible

spaces. The young male performers, initiated into temple service at a tender age, underwent rigorous training to enact divine narratives through expressive movements and acrobatic postures. Typically centered on Radha-Krishna lore, *Gotipua* dance is far more than entertainment; it is a manifestation of devotional surrender that establishes a spiritual connection between the performers and the audience. The spiritual depth and artistic vocabulary of *Gotipua* later influenced the development of *Odissi* dance. Today, *Odissi* is recognized as one of India's classical dance forms. It is widely believed to have evolved from both *Mahari* and *Gotipua* traditions, and it continues to be an integral part of Odisha's cultural identity. According to Pradhan (2016), Jayadev's *Gita Govinda* is regarded as "a Bible of an Odissi dancer" and has profoundly shaped the form's thematic and aesthetic framework. With its graceful postures, intricate hand gestures, expressive storytelling, and rhythmic footwork, *Odissi* stands out as a refined and spiritually resonant art form. Its performances convey intense devotion and emotion through exquisite artistry.

*Ramlila*⁵⁷ is a dramatic folk representation of the life of Rama, the seventh *Avatara* of the Hindu deity Vishnu and the central figure of the epic "*Ramayana*". The "*Ramayana*" and its associated literature, like the "*Ramacharita Manas*" written by Tulsi Das, serve as the foundation for these theatrical performances. Tulsi Das composed this sacred text in the sixteenth century, written in Hindi, to make the Sanskrit epic accessible to all. It is devoted to the glory of Rama, the heroic figure of the *Ramayana*. *Ramlila* refers to the grand millennium celebration of Rama, featuring melodramatic plays and dance episodes. In the state of Odisha, there is a rich tradition of *Ramlila*. The main highlight of this performance tradition is the *Dussehra* celebration. The demon Ravana is traditionally burnt in this celebration, often with fireworks. This ritual is known as *Ravana Podi*⁵⁸. In Odisha, *Ramlila* is known by various names, such as *Asureswara Yatra*, *Lankapodi Yatra*, and *Sahi Yatra*. Unlike its north Indian counterpart, the Odia *Ramlila* takes place in March-April, known as *Chaitra* in the Odia calendar. It coincides with *Ramanavami*, the celebration of Rama's birthday. The performances usually span ten to fifteen nights and are based on regional renditions of the Rama story, passed down through oral and written traditions (Dash 2018).

Ramlila is not just a theatrical performance or a folklore event; it also carries profound spiritual significance for the participants and the audience. Through the enactment of life and the divine incarnation of Lord Rama, the audience gets the opportunity to witness and connect with the divine play (*Lila*) of the Supreme Being. The battle between Rama and Ravana symbolizes the eternal struggle between good and evil forces. This portrayal serves as a reminder of the constant battle within oneself to overcome negative tendencies and embrace virtuous qualities. In addition, the *Ramlila* stories are rich in moral and ethical teachings. The actions and decisions of the characters in the play offer valuable lessons on dharma (righteousness), devotion, sacrifice and compassion,

inspiring the audience to follow a virtuous path in life. *Ramlila* often includes devotional songs and hymns dedicated to Lord Rama, fostering an atmosphere of *bhakti* (devotion) among the participants and spectators.

Furthermore, *Ramlila* is a community event that brings people from diverse backgrounds together to celebrate a shared cultural and spiritual heritage. It promotes unity, brotherhood and communal harmony, transcending social barriers. This performance serves as a medium to connect with the divine and imbibe moral and spiritual values. It is a cultural tradition that has entertained generations and played a significant role in promoting spiritual growth and awakening among individuals and communities.

Shadow puppetry is one of the oldest forms of puppetry, which is performed in many states of India like West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh etc. In Odisha, shadow puppetry is known as *Ravana Chhaya*⁵⁹. However, there are many explanations behind this nomenclature. Pani (1978) states that Lord Rama, an incarnation of God Vishnu, is a radiant and luminous being, meaning he does not cast a shadow (cited in Singh 2020). Considering this belief, combining the word “shadow” with his name would seem inappropriate. However, it is ironic that the puppet of Rama in the performance does cast a shadow on the screen, despite this notion.

Additionally, the depiction of Rama in the puppet form is designed in stark contrast to Ravana’s towering and striking figure (Singh 2020). According to a myth recounted by the artists, the origin of the term “*Ravana Chhaya*” is associated with a fascinating incident after Rama, Lakshmana and Sita returned to Ayodhya from their exile in the forest. Upon their return, Sita’s palace companions requested that she sketch an image of Ravana. They were intrigued because Sita mentioned that she never saw Ravana during captivity. She recounted that they travelled in a magical flying chariot called the *Pushpak Viman* during her abduction by Ravana. During this frightening journey, she caught a glimpse of Ravana’s shadow on the water below. From that moment on, this story of the shadow on the water became known as the origin of the term “*Ravana Chhaya*”. The puppets used in the *Ravana Chhaya* performance are crafted from deerskin and stand at a maximum height of 2 feet. With their tribal appearance, they possess a unique charm and simplicity. Unlike other puppets, they lack separate body parts, giving them a distinctive, cohesive form. The inspiration for their performance comes from the oral storytelling of the “*Bichitra Ramayana*”, a captivating literary masterpiece written by Vishwanath Khuntia. Through these enchanting puppets, the timeless tale of Ramayana comes to life, mesmerizing audiences with its cultural significance and artistic beauty. The narratives portrayed in *Ravana Chhaya* usually include vital episodes from the Ramayana, such as Sita’s abduction, Rama’s search for Sita, Hanuman’s journey to Lanka, and the epic battle between Rama and Ravana.

Ravana Chhaya carries profound spiritual themes that resonate with the audience and convey spiritual messages through artistic expression. Some of

the key spiritual themes of *Ravana Chhaya* are that *Chhaya* often portrays the eternal conflict between good and evil, represented by Lord Rama and Ravana, respectively. The story of Rama's adherence to *dharma* and Ravana's pursuit of *dharma* serves as a spiritual lesson about the importance of upholding moral values and the consequences of deviating from them. Lord Rama's victory over the powerful demon king Ravana symbolizes the ultimate victory of virtue and righteousness over vice and wickedness, as a spiritual reminder that goodness will prevail in the end. Rama's unwavering devotion to truth, duty and righteousness and his complete surrender to the divine will, exemplify the path of *bhakti* (devotion) and *vairagya* (detachment).⁶⁰ This theme emphasizes the importance of surrendering to a higher power and seeking inner transformation through spiritual devotion. The character of Sita in the Ramayana embodies purity, patience and resilience in the face of adversity. Her unwavering faith in her husband Rama and her steadfastness through trials and tribulations inspire the audience to cultivate virtues like patience and faith in their lives.

*Pattachitra*⁶¹ paintings are a traditional art form of Odisha inspired by Hindu mythology, particularly Jagannath and *Vaishnavite* traditions. The paintings are created using natural colours and are traditionally made by *Chitrakaras* or Odia painters. *Pattachitra* is derived from the Sanskrit words *patta*, meaning canvas, and *chitra*, meaning picture. Puri, Raghurajpur, Paralakhemundi, Chikiti and Sonepur are some places where this ancient art form is still practised. *Pattachitra* paintings are highly revered by people worldwide, and it is believed that a journey to Puri is complete with taking back some *Yatiripatis* of Lord Jagannath. These exquisite paintings narrate mystical stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the divine Lord Jagannath. The most beloved and captivating theme is that of Lord Krishna, who embodies love, compassion and playful divinity.

The paintings showcase Krishna's birth in Mathura's prison, his miraculous childhood in Gokul, and his playful adventures with cowherd friends. As Bala Gopala, young Krishna's radiant smile lights up the canvas. His joyous escapades with the Gopis, stealing butter from pots, and playing enchanting tunes on his flute resonate with splendour. Also, the *Chitrakars* bring to life Krishna's role as a protector and warrior in the Mahabharata. Scenes of him guiding Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra as a charioteer and narrating the sacred "*Bhagavad Gita*" are portrayed with great reverence and brilliance. *Pattachitra* paintings also narrate stories from Lord Jagannath's legendary history and the temple's rich heritage. *Pattachitra* paintings vividly capture the essence of Lord Jagannath's divine grace, mythical tales and significance in the hearts of millions of devotees. *Pattachitra* paintings are deeply embedded in spirituality as they have their roots in religion and are considered replacements for deities' idols. The intricate and detailed depictions of deities, scenes from mythology and spiritual symbols are believed to have the power to inspire, uplift and transform the viewer's consciousness. They are seen as an embod-

iment of divine energy and are considered a way of connecting with the divine source. *Pattachitra* paintings are also believed to be a form of meditation and a way of invoking the divine presence within oneself. Creating the paintings is a meditative experience, where artists channel their creative energy towards creating a spiritual masterpiece. When viewed with reverence and devotion, the paintings are believed to have the power to transmit positive energy and create a spiritual atmosphere in the surroundings.

*Jhoti Chitra*⁶², also known as *Chita*, is a traditional art form of Odisha where beautiful and intricate designs are drawn on the floor and walls of homes using rice paste. The *Jhoti* or *Chita* are not just made to decorate the house, but they are also symbolic and meaningful. The designs are usually drawn during auspicious occasions such as weddings, births, festivals etc. On several occasions, figures and patterns are manually drawn on the houses' floors and walls. One of the prominent examples is that of the time during Lakshmi Puja. Small red dots with white dots are made on the surfaces as the combination of red and white signifies the worship of Shiva and Shakti. Despite urbanization, this conventional tradition continues in the families of Orissa. *Jhoti* is considered a means to attract goddess Lakshmi, hence prosperity into homes. The spiritual significance of *Jhoti Chitra* lies in its connection with the Hindu concept of purity and sanctity. Drawing *Jhoti Chitra* is seen as a way of purifying and sanctifying the home and the surrounding environment. The intricate designs and patterns are believed to be a symbolic representation of divine energy and are used to invoke the blessings of the deities. Moreover, drawing *Jhoti Chitra* is considered a form of meditation, where the artist focuses on the task and enters a state of concentration and mindfulness. Drawing the designs is a form of devotion and connecting with the divine source. The positive energy generated by drawing *Jhoti Chitra* is believed to purify the mind and soul, thus leading to spiritual upliftment.

Mangala is a popular folk goddess worshipped in Odisha, India. The story of Mangala is based on a local legend that revolves around a woman named Mangala, who was born into a low-caste family. She was a devout devotee of Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Puri, and would regularly visit the temple to offer her prayers. One day, Mangala was on her way to the temple when a group of high-caste Brahmins stopped her. They told her that she was not allowed to enter the temple premises as a low-caste person. Mangala was heartbroken but refused to give up her devotion to Lord Jagannath. Instead, she decided to build her temple for the deity. Mangala went to a nearby forest and started collecting wood to build the temple. However, she was soon faced with another challenge. The forest was inhabited by a demon who did not want the temple to be built. The demon tried to scare Mangala away by making loud noises and creating havoc in the forest. But Mangala was not deterred. She prayed to Lord Jagannath for help and was blessed with divine powers that helped her defeat the demon. The story of Mangala is spiritually significant to the people of Odisha

because it represents the triumph of good over evil and the power of devotion and faith. The story teaches that even in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles and challenges, the power of devotion and faith can overcome them. Mangala's unwavering belief in Lord Shiva and her willingness to undergo various hardships to please him inspire many devotees. Moreover, the story highlights the significance of the Hindu concept of karma, where Mangala is rewarded for her good deeds and punished for her evil deeds. It also emphasizes the importance of dharma, or righteous conduct, as Mangala is portrayed as a virtuous and pious woman dedicated to serving her family and community.

Another popular story widely read in the households of Odisha, taken from the Ramayana, is the tale of Lord Hanuman and the *Sanjeevani*⁶³ Hill. Dated back to the time when Lord Rama and Lord Lakshmana were in a battle with Indrajit and his troops in Sri Lanka, there had come a situation when Indrajit fought Lord Lakshmana and was severely injured. Since Lord Lakshmana had fallen to the ground and could not fight any further, Lord Hanuman was informed about the life-restoring herb, *Sanjeevani*, that grew and thrived only on the *Dronagiri* mountain in the Himalayas. Meanwhile, Ravana had tried to distract Lord Hanuman so that he could not find the herb and bring it to Lord Rama and Lakshmana.

Nevertheless, as determined and dedicated to Lord Rama and Lakshman, Lord Hanuman fought the obstacles and headed out for the *Sanjeevani* herb. As it became dark, Lord Hanuman found it challenging to find the herb, and eventually, he picked up the entire hill on his shoulders and left for Sri Lanka. Later, the herb paste was made and applied to Lord Lakshmana's wounds and everyone else injured in the war. Lord Lakshmana felt good, and both he and Lord Rama thanked Lord Hanuman for the devotion he showed through his actions. The story highlights Lord Hanuman's unwavering faith and devotion towards Lord Rama. He remains dedicated to his Lord's well-being despite facing challenges and obstacles. This unwavering faith symbolizes the deep spiritual connection and surrender to a higher power, often seen as a central aspect of spirituality. Lord Hanuman's willingness to risk his life and carry the entire hill to retrieve the life-restoring herb shows his selflessness and willingness to sacrifice for the well-being of others. Selfless service and sacrifice are considered essential aspects of spiritual growth and development.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion reflects that Odisha's different elements of folklore, viz rituals, dance, song, tales, art and craft, create a strong connection between human beings and spirituality. The people of Odisha communicate important spiritual messages through their folklore, including the importance of devotion, faith and the pursuit of a higher purpose. Various rituals, practices and traditions associated with the worship of Lord Jagannath, such as *Rath Yatra*,

Chandan Yatra, and *Nabakalabara* help devotees attain salvation by connecting them with the spiritual light. Besides these, the people of Odisha observe many other religious rituals and festivals that are deeply connected to spirituality. Rituals like *Jhamu Yatra*, *Chitalagi Amavasya*, *Chaitra Amavasya*, *Bakula Amavasya* and *Raja Parba*, etc. are considered means of attaining spirituality. Other folk practices and traditions such as *pala*, *danda nata*, *Ravana Chhaya*, *Ramlila*, and *pattachitra*, etc. are fundamental to its cultural identity and exude spirituality. Many folk tales of Odisha, such as the tales of Mangala, emphasize the value of traits like compassion, generosity and dedication. By examining Odisha's diverse traditions, rituals, dances, songs, arts, and tales, this paper showcases the richness and beauty of the cultural heritage of this region. Thus, it serves as a source of inspiration and motivation for the people of Odisha, particularly the younger generation, to actively participate in the practice, promotion and preservation of their invaluable folklore collections to safeguard the indigeneity of Odia people.

However, it is essential to mention that this paper has considered only some of Odisha's famous rituals, tales, dances, songs, and arts and crafts from the vast and diverse folklore of Odisha, and there is much more to explore. Future works could explore each folklore component in greater detail and examine how they contribute to the spiritual message of Odisha.

NOTES

- 1 *Rath Yatra* – Chariot Festival.
- 2 *Chandan Yatra* – Sandal Festival.
- 3 *Nabakalebara* – the festival of the replenishing of the idols of the Lord Jagannath temple of Puri.
- 4 *Jhamu Yatra* – is known as the "fire-walking festival".
Chitalagi Amavasya – is known as the *Chitou amavasya*, *amavasya* being a full moon day.
Chaitra Amavasya – is known as the full moon day in the first lunar month.
Bakula Amavasya – is known as *Bakula Lagi* or the festival of offering mango flowers to the deities in temples.
Raja Parba is also referred to as the *Mithun Sankranti*.
- 5 Given that Odisha is widely regarded as the Land of Jagannath and Jagannath culture holds an important place in shaping the region's cultural and spiritual identity, this study includes the rituals of Jagannath culture as components of Odisha's folklore.
- 6 *Danda Nata* means punishment drama and is a festival celebrated in Odisha.
- 7 *Daru Brahma* – representation of Lord Jagannath in form of the wooden idol.
- 8 *Brahma Padartha* – sacred substance believed to be the life source of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra.
- 9 *Patitapabana* – Sanskrit term meaning saviour.
- 10 *Nabakalebara* – re-embodiment of the deities at Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri.
- 11 *Kartika Purnima* – Hindu festival celebrated on the full moon day of lunar month or Kartika month.
- 12 *Chaitra Amavasya* – Hindu festival celebrated on a new moon day during the Chaitra month.

- 13 *Bakula Amavasya* – Hindu festival celebrated on the new moon day of the Pausha or December-January month.
- 14 *Raja Parba* – the Hindu festival dedicated towards celebrating womanhood.
- 15 *Nuakhai* – Hindu agrarian festival.
- 16 *Balijatra* – the Hindu fair of trade and commerce.
- 17 *Makar Sankranti* – Hindu festival also known as the new year for Odia households.
- 18 *Rath Yatra* – the renowned chariot festival celebrated across the world.
- 19 *Aarisa pitha, kakara pitha, manda pitha, chakuli pitha* – different kinds of Odia delicacies made out of rice powder and water dough and stuffed with ingredients like jaggery, coconut and nuts.
- 20 *Jhoti* – hand drawn murals made with a runny mixture of rice and water in Odia households.
- 21 *Pattachitra* – the renowned folk art in Raghurajpur, Puri, Odisha renowned over the world.
- 22 *Ayurveda* – alternative herbal medicine system with historical roots in the Indian subcontinent.
- 23 Various kinds of sub-religions of Hinduism.
- 24 Names of certain epics and books.
- 25 *Savaras* – tribal community.
- 26 *Vana Parva* is also called the book of the forest. *Musali Parva* – is also known as the book of the fight.
- 27 *Nilasundar* – is the name of a hill.
- 28 *Dhauri* is the name of a hill.
- 29 *Banki Muhan* is an estuary and is otherwise known as the Ramachandi temple.
- 30 *Snan yatra* is known as the bathing ceremony and *Rath yatra* is known as the chariot festival.
- 31 *Kaivalya* means a state of liberation and it is the sacred food offered to the deities.
- 32 *Achetna* and *Chetna* – the states of unconsciousness and consciousness.
- 33 *Purusottama Kshetra* – Puri.
- 34 *Shakti Pitha (paada pitha)* – sacred place of eternal power.
- 35 *Gnana* means knowledge.
- 36 *Rathastha, Rathaganak* are synonyms for *Ratha* or the Chariot.
- 37 *Asadha* – it is the month of June to July in the Odia calendar.
- 38 *Snana Bedi* is the place that is secured for the bathing of the deities.
- 39 *Bhoga Mandap* denotes the offering hall in the temple.
- 40 *Chandan* means sandalwood.
- 41 *Seva* means the service.
- 42 *Dharma, Karma* and *Moksha* – *Dharma* means religion, *Karma* means the work one does and *Moksha* means the salvation.
- 43 *Prasad* refers to the offerings or the *bhoga* made to the deities that is later served to the people.
- 44 *Pitra dosha* – the bad karma created by the ancestors with their wrongdoing when living in the past.
- 45 *Pitha* – sweet pancake and crepe-like dishes.
- 46 *Jhula* – swings.
- 47 *Bhudevi- Bhumi* or Goddess Earth.
- 48 *Kartika Purnima, Boita Bandana* or *Panchuka* refer to the same festival of boats. *Boita Bandana* means the festival of the floating boats.
- 49 *Habisa* – special traditional recipe of Odisha prepared during the month of *Kartik*.
- 50 *Chaadakhai* – consumption of non-vegetarian food after a month's time.
- 51 *Samba Dasami* refers to the festival of the worshipping of the Sun.

- 52 *Mukhiya* or *Mukhya Gayak* – the prime or lead singers in the troops of *Pala*.
- 53 *Sri Palia* – singer in a *Pala*.
- 54 *Bayak* – drummer in a *Pala*.
- 55 *Mrudangam* – musical instrument used for *Pala* and other folk music.
- 56 *Jhanja* – cymbals used for *Pala* and other folk music.
- 57 *Ramlila* – *Rama's* play is a performance of the *Ramayan* epic.
- 58 *Ravana Podi* – a festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil.
- 59 *Ravana Chhaya* – Shadow Puppetry.
- 60 *Bhakti* and *Vairagya* – devotion and detachment.
- 61 *Pattachitra* – *Patta* means cloth and *Chitra* means painting. It means the art or the painting made on a piece of cloth.
- 62 *Jhoti Chitra* – *Jhoti* means rice paste and *Chitra* means painting. It means the traditional Odia white painting made from rice paste.
- 63 *Sanjeevani* means someone or something that infuses life.

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