

## Creating a *kshetra*: Goddess Tarini of Ghatgaon and her Development from a Forest Goddess to Pan-Orissan Deity

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### INTRODUCTION

The goddess Tarini of Ghatgaon in Keonjhar is one of the most important and best-known goddesses throughout Orissa. She is famous for receiving thousands of coconuts every day. Whenever friends learned that we planned to visit her temple, they approached us with one request: "Can you take this coconut for Tarini and offer it in my name?" We therefore started the journey to Ghatgaon, her main centre of worship, with ten coconuts in our luggage.<sup>1</sup>

At the present time of worldwide communications, one can acquire all the necessary information about the temple on the Internet from a well-constructed homepage ([www.maatarini.com](http://www.maatarini.com)) welcoming the visitors with spirited songs in praise of Tarini's greatness. The website gives information about "How to reach", "festivals", "her greatness", "history", "photo gallery", "visitors view", but there is also a page entitled "Share your feelings", all of which can be read by those eager to know more about the "Holy abode of Maa Tarini".<sup>2</sup> The website aims to be a "humble attempt for all Bhaktas (devotees) across the continent to come together and pray to MAA, the symbol of Love, Devotion, Patience, Truth, Peace and Prosperity. MAA is the eternal truth, the deepness of ocean, the vastness of sky. There is no place, happiness, security, prosperity and truth other than MAA. She will hold our hands and protect us from all unhappiness, sorrows, and hurdles of life. MAA is Laxmi (wealth), Saraswati (wisdom), Shakti (strength)... she is the originator of us. Nothing is, was will be hidden from eyes of MAA...MAA is the port, destination of our lives, let's surrender ourselves to MAA".<sup>3</sup>

To her devotees, the name Tarini indicates that she helps to cross all difficulties and dangers.<sup>4</sup> To win her favour, the bhakta must offer her a coconut: "There is a saying and it has even been proved also, whoever has prayed Maa and offered here a coconut on Tuesday or Saturday, Maa will fulfill the desire of her Devotees".<sup>5</sup>

### A VISIT TO GHATGAON

Ghatgaon is a small village in Keonjhar District, about 48 km from Keonjhar, near the main road from Anandapur.<sup>6</sup> Today a wide road leads into the village, which consists mainly of the temple complex and its various buildings and shops, which flank both sides of the road. Numerous stalls offer all manner of things that are said to please the goddess. We decide not to enter the huge temple area with empty hands and, being outsiders, follow the recommendation of one of the many shopkeepers, specialists concerning Tarini's favourite offerings. Being female, she is fond of anything that enhances her beauty. The stall-owner offers three types of baskets of various sizes. We buy the largest for Rs. 68, filled with all the things she likes: a coconut, bananas, a small piece of material (*sari*), a conch (*samkha*), an armllet (*bahuti*), bracelett (*chudi*), red vermilion, a small crown, honey, rice (*chaula*), chignon (*chuda*), small bottles of *kajala*, incense sticks, betel nuts, camphor, a small bottle of *ganga* water, a mirror, a comb and a small lamp. We wonder why all the small bottles, boxes etc. looked quite used, but later we learned that they are reused: there is a contract between the shopkeeper and the priest by which the latter get their share, while the devotees keep their part of the *prasad*. Today Ghatgaon is a very busy place, a well organized centre of worship, with thousands of visitors coming every day to take a look at, or have *darshan* of, the goddess .

### FROM JUNGLE SHRINE TO ALL-ORISSA CENTRE OF WORSHIP

For us, it is hard to believe that only thirty years ago the temple was in the middle of the jungle and attracted only a few worshippers. People who lived there vividly remember that time, like Prof. S.K. Panda who grew up in Ghatgaon. He tells us that when he was a young man they regularly went to the jungle shrine, but never alone, out of fear of dangerous animals like the

tiger, Tarini's favourite mount, who roams around her shrine. People were much afraid that the Thakurani in form of a tiger will eat them (*Thakurani khai jiba*). Small children were not allowed to go there. In those days there was no road, only a jungle path, which led to the lonely open place within the forest which sheltered the small black stone image of goddess Tarini under a tree. She was worshipped as village goddess (*gramdevi*) and the priest was possessed by her. The upper part – her face – is coloured red with *sindur*, while the lower part – her body – is dressed in a piece of cloth. That days she had no crown like today. The shrine was very simple. Various types and sizes of terracotta horses, donated by devotees, form the enclosure. For them the goddess needs these horses to go riding at night and to take care of and protect the village and her people.<sup>7</sup> In its style and decoration the shrine resembled the open shrines of the local deities, which can be found all over Keonjhar District even today.<sup>8</sup> In the early days no more than five to six people would come on a non-festival day. Prof. Panda is happy and proud of the growth of this jungle shrine into a huge centre of Tarini worship attracting thousands of visitors daily. For him this proves her immense power, her *shakti*.

The fame of Tarini increases day by day, when somewhere in Orissa a devotee starts a new place for her worship, often no more than her photograph under a tree laden with coconuts, or a stone copy in the style of the stone *murti* of Tarini at Ghatgaon. All these newly created centers claim to be vested with the same power of the goddess as her main centre of worship at Ghatgaon. For them Ma's power is universal, it can appear everywhere, though this claim is not supported by the temple management at Ghatgaon.<sup>9</sup>

The pictures for sale do not show a photograph of the *murti* of Tarini, only a painting highlighting her characteristic marks: a pair of large white staring eyes, *bindi* on her forehead, which is also painted with red *sindur*, the egg-shaped body covered with a sari, jewellery, flower chains and a golden crown giving her a royal appearance. Looking at these impressive paintings, that are sold in various sizes and forms, we became keen to see her *murti* in the temple.

#### THE TEMPLE OF GODDESS TARINI

The visitors enter the huge, newly constructed temple complex, finished in 1995,

through an impressive gate built in the style of a chariot driven by the sun god and his seven horses. In style it follows the chariot model of the famous sun temple of Konarak. On both sides of the colourful and richly carved entrance gate, our eyes were struck by a pale blue painted giant supporting on his broad back a rearing white horse mounted by a warrior. Dressed in royal style, with a silver crown and a dangerous sword in his right hand, this fighter resembles the fearless King Gobinda Bhanja, who is said to have brought the goddess Tarini from Kanchi in South India after defeating the Kanchi king in 1475. Those visitors who do not want to pay for a ticket to have their coconuts offered to Tarini within the temple enclosure can throw them into one of the two giant stomach holes, the *nadia hundi*.

Before entering, devotees can purchase tickets to have various sorts of *puja* performed, ranging from offering a coconut (Rs. 0.25), worshipping a photograph (Rs. 0.50), donating a mud horse (Rs. 2) etc. Every type of *puja* is listed with its fixed price: there should be no bargaining or demands made on either side, either the priest or the devotees. A huge donation box in the form of an open lotus flower receives the visitor in the centre of the way into the inner richly carved and decorated open enclosure. Within this open space, a structure with a temple tower houses the small *murti* of the goddess. As a goddess of the jungle, she demands to be worshipped in the open, not in the dark cell of an enclosed shrine. Every day hundreds of visitors gather in front of her with great discipline to have the *darshan* of the goddess. Her small decorated stone *murti* is laden with flower *malas*, and to one side of this inner complex the priests crack one coconut after the other in the middle of a lake of coconut water. Although the space is filled with various activities, it is a place for reflection and meditation. The devotees concentrate on the goddess, searching for eye contact, and start their short but intense communication with the goddess to seek her help and advice, the aim of a long and often tiring journey. Their belief in her assistance is imperturbably strong.

#### THE TEMPLE COMPUND AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TARINI TEMPLE

We leave this place to meet Mr. Guru Charan Singh, Secretary of the Temple Trustees. On the way to his office, we pass the other temples in

the large sacred compound. Just recently, in 1990, a temple for Ghatakesvar Shiva, named after the village of Ghatgaon, was constructed. Here the priest is a Brahman, whereas in the main temple priests from the Kondh tribe, called *dehuri*, do the *puja*. The Brahman explains to us the need for the new temple: "Because wherever we find our mother we think that our father should also be there". In front of the temple is a small hall (*mandap*) for the goddess Dvarsuni, represented by a number of red stones. Dvarsuni is considered to be the watchman and protector of the goddess, and formerly all the devotees had to pass her shrine before going to the Tarini shrine deep in the forest. Nowadays, after the new construction of the Tarini temple, the main entrance has changed, and only a few pilgrims pass by to visit Dvarsuni.

The new office of the temple management is part of a building which also houses the VIP guestrooms, which are exclusively and elegantly furnished with a marble bath and are intended for those devotees who need a silent and comfortable atmosphere. As the fame of Tarini spreads rapidly all over the country, more and more important people, among them many politicians, are coming to have *Darshan*, and they need an appropriate place to stay. We have a meeting with Trustee Secretary Mr. Guru Charan Singh, who belongs to the Kondh *dehuri* priest family. By listening to his never-ending activities and commitment, we feel his deep devotion to Tarini, which is compelling him to make her name well known not only in Orissa, but all over India. The new office building and the VIP rooms are his latest projects since taking over as Secretary of the Trustees in 1969. His story of the growth of Tarini's fame from a jungle shrine to an all-Orissa centre of worship sounds impressive. In 1969 the management of the temple was taken over by the Orissa Government (Orissa Debottara Hindubihaga). They formed a trust with ten members, headed by Maguni Charan Dehuri as Managing Trustee and Guru Charan Singh as Secretary.<sup>10</sup> Before 1969 the temple was controlled by a committee that had been set up in 1937 by the king and local people. When Mr Singh assumed responsibility as secretary, the yearly income was around Rs. 4000, which was spent mainly on festivals. After his appointment in 1969 it increased already the next year to Rs. 12 000, out of which they spent Rs. 5000 on festivals, and the rest on new staff members and

savings. One year later the income reached Rs. 40 000, and a start was made with the development of the area, such as arranging water facilities, buildings for offices and houses for the priests, though the main emphasis was on the construction of a good road. Until then, only a foodpath led from the main road to the jungle shrine. The temple's income increased every year. In 1978 the present management started with *anna bhoga*, various types of food offerings to Tarini during the day, and the distribution of *prasad*. Until then she was only offered fruits and coconuts, not cooked food. At that time there were no festivals in her name, but nowadays there are three major festivals, at *makara sankranti* (January 14–16), *maha visubha sankranti* (April 14–16) and *raja sankranti* (June 14–16), which attract thousands of devotees to the place. Due to the increasing number of devotees the temple has been enlarged. In 1971, a pillar-type cement hall was constructed over the main image to give room for five hundred people to stand, this being enlarged in 1977 and a small temple tower added. As it is the deity's wish to be in the open, the construction has open walls. Recently, due to the rapid growth of visitors, it has been necessary to enlarge the area again. Today, following the completion of the new construction in 1995, more than 100 000 people can gather in the temple's inner enclosure.

Today the earlier blood sacrifices have ceased entirely, but until 1975 the goddess received blood sacrifices near her *murti*, in former times including buffaloes, but later only goats. Now the priest takes a drop of blood from the ear of the sacrificial animal, then it is given back to the donor.

As an additional service to devotees, marriage stages have been constructed. Today around forty weddings can be performed daily, which are officially recorded in a register. The official rate for the performance of the wedding rituals is only Rs. 300. According to Mr Singh the Tarini temple is open to all, there are no caste distinctions, and even Muslims and Christians are welcome. To prevent priests from exploiting visitors, each type of *puja* has its fixed price, and the list of services is long. Many devotees come to get their vehicle, a cycle rickshaw, a two-wheeler, car or even a bus blessed by the Devi.

Every year the quantity of coconuts given to Tarini increases, and at present every day around 6000 coconuts are brought by trucks and buses,

having been given to the drivers by devotees, and more than 5000 coconuts are offered by the visitors in the temple. The coconuts are a major source of income, being sold by the temple management to local people for Rs. 2 each. The Ghatgaon area is famous for a kind of sweet called *nadia kora* made out of coconuts. In addition to this, as Tarini's fame spreads, every year the temple receives also around Rs. 2 lakh<sup>11</sup> of rupees in donations; people further send money orders, in return being sent a photo, *prasad* and *sindur*. Until today the temple management has spent a lot of money in developing the area and the festivals of the temple: for Mr Singh the most urgent project is a permanent queue-line for the visitors to see the Devi. The trust members closely monitor the management of the money and the organization of the temple, with its more than thirty priests, who have fixed days and hours of worship.

#### THE PRIEST OF GODDESS TARINI

The main priests are not Brahmans, but Raj Kondh *dehuris*, as Tarini is considered a tribal goddess and therefore only accepts a tribal priest. Originally the Kondh *dehuris* worshipped her in the tantric fashion, with *sabarika mantras*, but today they use a mixed type of tantric and mantric worship. According to the main priest, one reason for this change is that the tantric *puja* is a silent form of worship: since the devotees could not follow the *puja*, spoken *mantras* have been introduced so that they can participate. The other reason is that the tantric *puja* is very dangerous if not properly performed, and a lot of restrictions are imposed on the priest, which cannot be followed today.<sup>12</sup> Formerly the goddess also possessed the priest in order for him to become her representative (*kalesi*) on earth. Nowadays this tradition has also ceased. But still the enormous power of Tarini has its roots in tantra: as a tantric goddess she performs all types of miracles. But the Brahmans also play an important role within the priesthood, their help being needed for various *pujas* and rituals, such as the wedding and thread ceremonies. When the temple management started food offerings (*anna bhoga*) in 1975, the Brahmans were placed in charge of the kitchen to prepare the various dishes for the goddess and provide *prasad*. The history of Tarini is closely linked with the family of Secretary Guru Charan Singh. According to

their family genealogy the first priest was Sandha Dehuri, who was appointed by Gobinda Bhanja in 1480, who also granted 10 acres of land to him. Therefore his family claims the right to do the *puja*.

#### THE HISTORY OF GODDESS TARINI: RAJA GOVINDA BHANJA AND THE KANCHI WAR

In looking at old photographs showing the shrine in the early 1980s, the setting resembles the traditional pattern of local goddess shrines, many of which are of tribal origin of this area. Thus the *murti* is a small decorated stone slab under a tree, and numerous terracotta horses surrounding the sacred centre have been given in thanksgiving.

But the main myth about Tarini's place of origin goes right down into South India, to the kingdom of Kanchi. According to the myth told by the priests, but also printed in small booklets composed by various authors and sold on the temple stalls,<sup>13</sup> Tarini is a local goddess from Pahadapuram in South India, her coming to Orissa being the outcome of the famous Kanchi war between Gajapati Purusottama Dev (1467–97), son of the famous Gajapati Kapilendra Dev (1435–66), and the king of Kanchipuram at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The legend states that in her real form Tarini is Ma Bhagavati Durga and that she was once worshipped by Kondho people and fostered by the Kanchi king. The title *dehuri* came from the king. He also appointed Brahmans to do the *anna bhoga*, *homa* and *jagyam*. Thanks to Tarini's power, the Kanchi king became invincible and started defeating all the neighbouring kings. The Kanchi king had a beautiful daughter called Padmavati, and within the Gajapati Purusottama Dev arose a desire to marry her. But when Padmavati's father learned that the king of Puri performs a sweeping ritual (*chhera pahamra*) of the chariot of Jagannath every year during the annual chariot festival (*ratha jatra*) for Jagannath,<sup>15</sup> the king of Kanchipuram, being a Shaivaite, refused to give his daughter in marriage to a "sweeper". Deeply offended, Gajapati Purusottama Dev went to war against Kanchi, but was defeated. Back in Puri he asked Jagannath for victory or death, and in a dream Jagannath assured him that he would win on a second expedition. As Senapati

(commander-in-chief) he appointed Gobinda Bhanja, the son of Trilochan Bhanja, king of Keonjhar, who at that time was living in Puri. He moved towards Kanchi with his soldiers, but suddenly near Pahadapuram his horses refused to go any further, and he noticed the shrine of a goddess. Inquiring about her, he was informed that without the help of the goddess, Tarini, no one could win any war. Then he prayed to her and received her blessing. With the help of Tarini and the god Jagannath, as well as of Senapati Gobinda Bhanja, in 1475 the Gajapati Purusottama Dev defeated the Kanchi king,<sup>16</sup> thus winning his daughter Padmavati as his wife. After the war Gobinda Bhanja wanted to take back some deities, and he asked the Gajapati for permission to do so. This was granted and Gobinda Bhanja asked the god Ganpati, the *istadeva* of the Kanchi king, Madan Mohan, Raghunnath and Ma Tarini to come with him back to Puri. When his father Trilochan Bhanja died in 1480, he went back to Keonjhar to become the new ruler. As a reward the Gajapati allowed Gobinda Bhanja to transfer Ma Tarini and the statues of the other gods he had brought from Kanchi to his new kingdom of Keonjhar. Tarini agreed to follow him under the condition that he should not look behind. She would follow him on a horse, her presence being indicated by the ringing of her anklet bells, but if he broke his promises she would turn into stone and her horse change into a mud horse. But when they reached Ghatgaon the sound of Tarini's anklet bells ceased, whereupon Gobinda Bhanj Deo looked back and Tarini turned into stone.<sup>17</sup> She told the king that she wanted to stay here forever and henceforth should be worshipped in the jungle by her own Kondh priests from Kanchi.<sup>18</sup> The king made all arrangements and constructed a place for the *dehuris* to stay. But to have the goddess close to him always, he installed her *murti* in a palace temple.

The pamphlets also give the origin of the name "Ghatgaon", which is derived from a pitcher filled with cow *ghee* (*ghee-ghat*). On one occasion, Tarini told the Bhanja king in a dream that he should hang a pitcher full of *ghee* in the branches of a tree. Whenever the *dehuris* become impure because of something happening in their family, they can use the *ghee* and thus become pure again.

### THE ENCOUNTER OF GODDESS TARINI WITH RAMCHANDRA AND THE SABARAS

Besides the main version linking Tarini with the Kanchi king, there are other stories linking her with Ramchandra. In this story the Kondh play an important role, not the king. Once while in the jungle Ramchandra prayed to Mahasakti Ma Bhagabati Durga that she may appear. She granted him his wish but under the condition that he should not look at her, in which case she would turn into stone. Ramchandra could not suppress his desire to look at her and that moment she changed into stone at the place of the present shrine. Seeking for a priest he found a Kondh and handed him the task of taking care of her with meat offerings. Then Ramchandra gave her the name Tarini, as Ma Bhagavati prevents all difficulties (*tarana karanti je*).

In another myth Tarini is linked with the Sabar (Saora) tribe. One day a Sabar and his two sons were out hunting and saw a *kusum* tree laden with fruit, which they desired to eat. The Sabar father climbed up the tree, not knowing that Tarini's abode was at the foot of it. It was only because of her power that the *kusum* tree bore this lovely fruit. The Sabar sitting in the branches threw all the leftovers of the fruit down on Tarini's head. Furious at this, she changed into a snake and started eating one of his sons. When the Sabar saw the snake he hit its head with his axe, thus cutting it into two pieces, and blood dripped out. When he came down from the tree he saw the real form of Tarini and apologized, requesting that the life of his son be saved. But Tarini decided to keep the father and the two sons always at her side since they had seen her real form, and she changed them into three stones. For the devotees the three stones near Tarini's *murti* in the temple are the three Sabaras. As the Sabar hit Tarini's head, a crown covers this spot on her present-day stone *murti*.

### GODDESS TARINI AND THE KING OF KEONJHAR

All over Orissa there are goddesses whose origin is deep in the forest, and who appeared to the human world in the form of an often bleeding stone. In many cases their hidden power is discovered by a tribe seeking food or a hunter,



Fig. 1. Paintings of goddess Tarini for sale Ghatgaon, spring 2002 (Photo: C. Mallebrein)



Fig. 2. A priest of Goddess Tarini performing puja, to the right the stone murti of the goddess. Ghatgaon, 1971  
(Photo: Hermann Kulke)

often a king. In course of time the deity acquires more and more significance with the help of the local ruler, who adopts her as his *istadeva* and thus starts promoting her cult.<sup>19</sup> With the help of court Brahmans she enters the realm of Hinduism, often identified as one of the many forms of the goddess Durga.<sup>20</sup> The goddess Tarini, whose place of worship was once in the deep jungle and was worshipped by tribes, can be included in this category of Hinduised tribal goddesses whose cult rose to supra-regional significance under royal influence. Thus the question arises of her origin and the relationship between the royal family of Keonjhar, the tribes and the goddess. Let us therefore take a fresh look at the goddess Tarini.

As already noted, the relationship between the tribes and the goddess Tarini is very close. Keonjhar District is widely populated by tribes, the main ones being the Bhuiya and Juang. The name Tarini is also given to other tribal goddesses, and the Juang worship a goddess named Phulbania Tarini, who is responsible for the welfare of their children and agricultural development.

Tarini of Ghatgaon is mainly worshipped by Raj Kondh *dehuris*, not Brahmans. In Keonjhar District the Kondh are not very dominant: their main place of settlement is in the Phulbani area, but the Kondh are famous for their tantric power and knowledge and thus have a reputation all over Orissa as priests for tribal goddesses who are considered very powerful and dangerous. As the official legend traces the origin of Tarini far away to South India, the present Kondh priests, the *dehuris*, claim to originate from the south, an area where Kondh do not normally live. On the contrary, the family speaks of family links with the Kondh of the Phulbani area, the homeland of the Kondh.

The relationship between Tarini and the royal house of Keonjhar is of later date. Before Tarini became their *istadevi* it was Andhari Thakurani of the village Jyotipur who enjoyed this status.<sup>21</sup> Jyotipur is named after Jyoti Bhanja, the son of the Mayurbhanj king, who, according to the Keonjhar family chronicle, was stolen as a child by the Bhuiya to be installed as their leader and king.<sup>22</sup> In the old palace in Keonjhar there is still a shrine to Andhari Thakurani. Formerly the kings went regularly to Jyotipur to visit her shrine. According to Madan Mohan Mishra, it was Raja

Gobinda Bhanja who brought a replica of the goddess Tarini from Ghatgaon to the old palace in 1480 and placed her in the family shrine in the north-east corner (*oishanya kona*) of the palace as his *istadevi*, thus replacing the former *istadevi* Andhari. The goddess Andhari was transferred to a temple on a hill near the old palace, and visits to her main shrine in Jyotipur ceased. But another famous goddess entered the palace, Dandani, a tantric deity, represented by a *yantra* given to Raja Narayan Bhanja in the seventeenth century by a Dandi Sanyasi and considered to be the *kuladevata* of the royal family. The royal family had a very close relationship with tantric worship, which is said to be very effective in endowing the ruler with immense power to kill his enemies. The *istadevi* and *kuladevata* are both tantric goddesses.

In the nineteenth century, Keonjhar State was marked by a wave of new constructions and enlargements of temples, the State being under the control of the British, who interfered in succession disputes. In 1868 they supported the installation of the young prince Dhanurjaya Bhanja as king of Keonjhar. The coronation ritual was performed by a Bhuiyan Sadar. The ambitious young Raja then started to reconstruct and enlarge the old palace. During his time the Bhuiyan twice broke into rebellion. He died in 1905 and was succeeded by Gopinath Narayan Bhanja, a very religious ruler who is said to have spent more time at worship than in administration. He ruled for only one year, after which he devoted all his life to the god, leaving the administration of his country from 1907 to 1928 in the hands of the Diwan D. A. Macmillan. The last ruler of Keonjhar was Balabhadra Narayan Bhanja, who was installed as Raja in 1929. He too was a very religious-minded king, and under him the temples of the gods Ragunnath at Bira Gobindapur and Baladev at Rajanagar were constructed. They all promoted the cult of Tarini, but she was only one among many other deities who enjoyed royal patronage.

The relationship between Tarini and the kings of Keonjhar and thus her origin leaves many questions open, which it is the task of future research to answer. According to Senapati, Raja Gobinda Bhanja ruled not in the fifteenth century but the seventeenth.<sup>23</sup> This would mean that his rule was more than hundred years later than Gajapati Purusottama Dev and that Gobinda



Bhanja was not the Senapati of the Gajapati king during his Kanchi war. Does this mean that the legend of Tarini and her encounter with Gobinda Bhanja at Pahadapuram in South India is a later fabrication<sup>24</sup>

As an *istadevi* of the royal family of Keonjhar the goddess Tarini had an important strategic value. During the time of Raja Gobinda Bhanja the territory comprising Anandapur subdivision was conquered and incorporated into the kingdom of Kendujhar.<sup>25</sup> The location of Ghatgaon is just at the meeting point between upper and lower Keonjhar. Tarini, the king's *istadevi*, thus unites the two regions, in the same way that the king holds sway over her.

Legends related to the history of Tarini reveal strong local links of the goddess with Keonjhar. The close relationship between Tarini and the tribes of this area is reflected in the two stories told in connection with her history: the three tribal Sabaras whom she changed into stones and who remain by her side till today, and the story of Ramachandra, who installed the Kondh as her priests. Govinda Bhanja is known to have been a very devout devotee of Rama, and he constructed a famous Rama temple at Bira Gobindapur, which may be the source for the story of the encounter of Ramachandra with Tarini.

The question arises when the legend of Gobinda Bhanja, the Kanchi war and Tarini came into prominence. Especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> many royal family chronicles (*rajavamsavalis*) were compiled by genealogists of the royal court to prove their ancient claim to British administrators. In linking the goddess Tarini of Ghatgaon with the famous Kanchi war, the compilers of the myths managed to increase her fame, no longer as a jungle deity from Keonjhar, but as a deity originating in a village in South India. She has nothing to do with any tribal local goddess, but is a form of the pan-Indian Bhagavati Durga being worshipped as tutelary deity of the famous Kanchi king. Although her priests belong to the Kondh tribes, they are not related to the primitive Kondh who have stayed in the remote and underdeveloped Phulbani region. If properly worshipped her power is so great that she can cause even the defeat of mighty rulers like the Kanchi king.

With the creation of this myth Tarini leaves her tribal abode, now becoming one with the powerful destructive goddess Durga and she enters the puranic heaven, thus protecting the ruler of her worldly realm, the king, whenever he

needs her help. The nineteenth-century rulers of Keonjhar, threatened by tribal dissatisfaction and uprisings as well as British pressure, can rely on their powerful *istadevi*, the goddess from outside, who therefore has more than just local power. When in 1969 the new temple management started with its campaign to promote the fame of goddess Tarini, the Kanchi war legend and her origin from South India became the official version, undisputed till today in its various elaborated form<sup>26</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

The growth of the Tarini temple from a small forest shrine into a famous centre of worship is based on many factors, mainly the better communications of modern times. With the opening of a new road, and the improvement of transport facilities such as buses, taxis and private cars, her shrine became accessible to a wider public. Pilgrim lodges offer accommodation overnight, and halls for marriages and thread ceremonies attract more and more people. Nowadays a visit to Tarini means more than having *Darshan*, it is entertainment. Music fills the streets, the various shops offer all kinds of things for purchase, splendid festivals do their best to satisfy the visitors, and the colourful and highly impressive new temple buildings dating from 1995 support the greatness and power of the goddess. With the new website she has opened her shrine to pilgrims all over the world.

Tarini has left the jungle to conquer her devotees in the human world. "No one has come empty handed from Maa's temple. Maa has always answered the prayers of her devotees... she needs nothing from her devotees except a few things like dedication, pureness and love".<sup>27</sup>

**KEYWORDS** Tarini; hinduised goddess; Raja of Keonjhar; Orissa history; sacred centre, temple; worship.

**ABSTRACT** Every year the number of devotees who visit the Devi's her impressive temple complex in Ghatgaon, Keonjhar district, grows. She is one of the most important and best-known goddesses throughout Orissa. It is striking to see the development from her jungle shrine into a huge centre of worship within the last thirty years. Various legends are linked with goddess Tarini whose place of origin is said to be far away in South India. She is closely linked with the royal family of Keonjhar and considered as their *istadevi*. A fascinating goddess who has left the jungle to conquer her devotees in this world.

## NOTES

- 1 The field work on Tarini was carried out within as part of a project on the Hinduised tribal deities of Orissa in 2002. The author expresses her thanks to the German Research Council (DFG), who made the research possible. Furthermore I also acknowledge with gratitude the support and the suggestions I received from my research assistant, Mr. Dillip Sethi (M.A.), Mr. Kabiraj Behera (M.A.) and Mr. Prabin Tripathi (M.A.). My thanks further goes also go to the Secretary, Mr. Guru Charan Singh, and the main priests of the Tarini temple, who assisted my work in all possible ways. I further like to express my thanks to Prof. Dr. Heinrich von Stietencron for his valuable comments and Prof. Dr. Herman Kulke for giving us the permission to publish his photo of the Tarini temple taken in the year 1971.
- 2 For all those who want to go on an all- India Website tour, links are given to the homepages of other famous Devi centers in India.
- 3 www.maatarini.com (greatness of Maa).
- 4 There are various interpretations of her name.
- 5 www.maatarini.com (greatness of Maa).
- 6 N 21° 23.36602', E 085°53.44741'.
- 7 On this, topic c.f. L. Icke- Schwalbe 1973.
- 8 For example, Ma Thakurani in the village of Khireitangiri. She is represented by a small red stone pebble under a small stone boulder surrounded by earthen elephants and horses. The whole enclosure of the sacred space, under a tree, is filled with numerous horses of various sizes.
- 9 The Tarini temple at Suakati village near Keonjhar (N 21°36.31514, E 085.31.24404) has a story that in the year 1996 a girl from of the Gauda caste (milk men) of in the village got had a dream that Tarini does did not want to stay in Ghatgaon and she demanded to being worshipped in her own village. They have formed a Tarini Development Committee has been formed to promote her cult. First the shrine was looked after by a *dehuri* priest from Ghatgaon, but later he had to stop cease his priestly functions on the advice of the Ghatgaon temple management. This committee also takes also care of the Kalapathara Tarini shrine, which had come up near the Kanjipani *ghati*, near the Bhuiya village of Tentulikhandi.
- 10 Besides the Managing Trustee and Secretary, the Trust Board consists of five Trustees, the Tahsildar, the M.L.A. and the person in charge of the police.
- 11 One Lakh consists of 100 000 Rupees, e.g. about Euros 2300,- at the time of writing. Furthermore the temple gets a good income from the various puja fees and the selling of the thousands of coconuts
- 12 Due to the strict purity rules for the *dehuri* priests, it is the rule is that the Brahmins take food from them, but the *dehuris* do not take food from the Brahmins.
- 13 For example, J. Simha; B.B.Das 1977.
- 14 The Kanchi Kaveri tradition is a much discussed topic in the Orissan history and a very well known legend myth.; for more information c.f. G. Berkemer 1993: 202--6, G.N. Dash 1978: 212--19, H. Kulke 1978: 206--8; 1979: 73--4.; P. Mukherjee 1953: 48--63, Katarajavamsavali, in Tripathi and Kulke (eds). 1987: 81,85--8. There are various versions of this legend.; c.f. B. Schnepel 1997: 141-142.
- 15 During the *chhera pahamra* -ritual the Gajapati sprinkles water on the chariot of Jagannath and then he cleans the steps with a golden brush.
- 16 On the historicity of this legend and the various datings of this incident, see c.f. S. K. Panda 1999: 224-22--5. According to some scholars, the Kanchi Kkaveri tradition was a creation of later times, by the priests, in order to glorify the *chhera-pahamra* (sweeping before the idol of Jagannath);. c.f. S.K. Panda 1999: 225.
- 17 This type of story is well known also from other deities not only in Orissa, but all over India. In Orissa it might have its origin in the legend of Sakhi Gopal a religious centre around 25 km away from Puri. According to a legend, Lord Krishna came to this place as a witness or sakhii to sort out a dispute of two Brahmans, than he stayed there and a life size image of the child Krishna commemorates this legendary incident. I would like to thank H.v. Stietencron for this reference.
- 18 The traditionally home of the Kondh are the Kondhmal mountains in Orissa, not Kanchi in South India.
- 19 For more information on this, see c.f. H. Kulke 1992.
- 20 On this, see topic c.f. A. Eschmann 1978.; and C. Mallebrein 1999.; 2001.
- 21 The following information is based on the history of M. M. Mishra 1974: 64ff.
- 22 For more information, see c.f. N. Senapati (1986); 44.
- 23 The successors of Jyoti Bhanja till the time of Gobinda Bhanja, are known to us only by their names;., c.f. N. Senapati 1986: 45. They are known from the records of the royal family as well as the drama "*Bhanja Mahodayam*" of by Narasingh Misha (17th century.). According to Senapati (1986: 46): "The time of Gobinda Bhanaja cannot be as early as that of the Gajapati Purusottam Deva (1467-1497 A.D.)... his date can more correctly be ascertained from the drama "*Bhanja Mahodayam*" written by Narasingh Mishra, the court poet of king Sivanarayan Bhanja of Kendujhar, the son of Gobinda Bhanja. It is known from this work that the drama was staged at Puri (Sripurusottam Khetra) and was witnessed by the Gajapati King Balabhadra Deva and King Sibanarayan Bhanja of Kendujhar. Thus Balabhadra Deva who ruled from 1648-1659 A.D. was a contemporary of Sibanarayan Bhanja of Kendujhar...Very likely, Purusottam Deva (1600-1621 A.D.), the ruler of Khurda kingdom, has been confounded with the great Purusottam Deva (1467-1497 A.D.) who fought the battle of Kanchi Kaveri. The date of Gobinda Bhanja may, tentatively, be assigned to the first quarter of the 17th century A.D.".
- 24 Senapati (1986: 44), suggests that the family history which traces the origin of the Bhanja family back to the Kachua Rajput from Rajasthan got took shape during the later part of the 19th nineteenth

- century. Cf. on this, see topic S. Sinha 1962.  
 25 C.f. F. N. Senapati 1986: 46. He tentatively assigns his time as a ruler in the 17th c.  
 26 Informants who were grown up in Ghatgaon told that the relationship between the royal family and the goddess was not so close, they rarely came to the small jungle shrine of Tarini in Ghatgaon. Before the enlargement of her shrine she was more considered a powerful village goddess, not so much an *istadevi* of the king.  
 27 www.maatarini.com

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