



BALI YATRA: SYMBOLIZING THE GLORIOUS PAST OF ODISHA - BALI CONNECTION

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

1. The celebration of the Bali Yatra takes us back to remember our ancestral cultural heritage and marine legacy. Discuss India's cultural contribution to world and its marine legacy.
2. Discuss about Kalinga maritime relationship.

Odisha is witnessing Bali Yatra, one of Asia's largest open-air trade fares, spanning across seven days, which symbolizes strong historical ties between Odisha and Southeast Asia.

The festival is similar to the 'Masakapan Ke Tukad' festival of Bali.

Odisha played a significant role in the evolution of Hindu culture in Bali.

Our Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is in Bali for the G-20 summit. Meanwhile, Odisha is witnessing Bali Yatra, one of Asia's largest open-air trade fares on the Mahanadi banks in Cuttack city.

The celebration of the Bali Yatra takes us back to remember our ancestral cultural heritage and marine legacy. This seven-day fest onset from Kartika Purnima symbolizes strong historical ties between Odisha and Southeast Asia.

The Odisha province, known as Kalinga in ancient times, was commanded by a very high position in the maritime activities of India in the past. The heroic and ever-agile merchants of the ancient Kalinga kingdom were making daring voyages to different far-off lands of the world and had maritime contacts with Roman Empire, Africa, the Persian coast, Arabian countries in the west, and China, Japan, Siam, Champa, Burma, Ceylon, etc. in the East.

Besides, the countries with which the people of Kalinga maintained enduring commercial and cultural relationships between the islands of Java, Sumatra, Bali, and Borneo, collectively known as Suvarnavdipa or Modern Indonesia.



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Odisha's glorious maritime past has been proven from the excavated materials like Roman coins, Kushan coins, and Chinese ceramic sherds found in different parts of Odisha in the recent past. Great was the fame of Kalinga as a maritime power in ancient times that "Kalidas" in his Raghuvamsa (around 5th century CE) referred to the king of Kalinga as the "The Lord of the Sea" (Mahodadhipati). During the ceremony of Karttika Purnima, Odia netizens dressed up in traditional costumes launch tiny boats made of cork, coloured paper, and banana tree barks in the river or water tanks with lighted lamps inside, and Odia women perform the rite of 'Boita Bandāçna'.

An Odia lyric is usually recited i.e. 'Aa-Ka-Ma-Bai, Pana-Gua-Thoi'. Aa-Ka-Ma-Bai connotes the month of Aaha, Karttika, Magha, and Baisakha of the Odia calendar. While the period from Aaha to Karttika (July- September) was the season of the outgoing voyage and Magha to Baisakha (February-April) was considered to be the season of the return trek.

The festival is similar to the 'Masakapan Ke Tukad' festival of Bali, the 'Loi Krathong' festival of Thailand (ritualistic floating of model boats), the 'Bon Om Touk' Water Festival of Cambodia, and the 'That Luang' Festival of Laos all of which involve around the same time of the year.

Adequate agricultural production combined with a flourishing maritime trade contributed to the flowering of Odishan arts and crafts, especially textiles. Numerous communities of weavers and dyers became active throughout the state, perfecting techniques like the weaving of fine muslin, Ikat, Sambalpuri, and bomkai silks and cotton, applique, and embroidery. Odisha was also known for its brass and bell metalwork, lacquered boxes and toys, intricate ivory, wood, and stone carvings, Patta painting and palm leaf engraving, basket weaving, and numerous other colourful crafts. Often, decorative techniques relied on folk idioms, as in the painted, circular playing cards known as Ganjifas.

Kalinga was also famous for its elephants, for which it found a market in Southeast Asia, along with precious stones, ivory, pepper, and betel nuts. In return, Kalinga imported pearls and silver from abroad. Corn and rice were also exported. Traders imported spices and sandalwood from the east. A boat depicted in the Sun Temple of Konarak in the 13th century contains a giraffe, indicating trade with Africa.

The geographical position of Kalinga, with several rivers, sheltered ports, and the ocean by its sides, provided an ideal environment for sea voyages. The famous ports of Kalinga were Tamralipti, Palur, Pithunda, Chelitalo, Manikpatna, etc.



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Tamralipti (Modern Tamluk in the Midnapore district of West Bengal) served as the main gateway for ancient Kalingan sea-going traders and travellers, where the royal household was of the Kaibarta caste. The Greek geographer Ptolemy in the second century A.D. called it Tamailitis. Fa - Hien in the fifth century A.D. saw it as a strong maritime settlement of the Buddhists and left for Ceylon from this port.

Another important port was Palur which is identified with the modern village of Palur on the coast of the Bay of Bengal in the Ganjam district, Odisha. Dantapura, mentioned in the Buddhist and Jain text, is perhaps the same as Palur since 'Palla' and 'Ur' are the two terms in Tamil that indicate the meaning of tooth (Danta) and city (Pura). Gerini, the researcher on Ptolemy's geography further refers to this port, from where ships sailed to 'Suvarnabhumi' (Burma) and 'Suvarnadvipa' (Indonesia).

Pithunda was the next important port of Kalinga. The Jain text Uttaradhyana Sutra mentions that being a famous centre during the day of Mahavir, merchants from Champa used to come to this place for trade. Kharavela's Hatigumpha inscription mentions Pithunda as a metropolis of Kalinga. Che-li-ta-lo (Chhatra) as described by famous Chinese Pilgrim Hiuen - Tsang was another port town situated on the sea-coast of Odradesha (North Odisha). Manikapatna, located close to the present mouth of Chilika is regarded as a sheltered port of ancient Odisha.

The discovery of celadon ware and a coin of Sahasamalla, king of Sri Lanka shows trade relations with China and Sri Lanka in the early mediaeval period. Undoubtedly Manikapatna had an important role in the east-west maritime trade. Abul Fazl, the court historian of Akbar, mentions Manikapatna as a large port where salt dues were collected during his time.

Odisha played a significant role in the evolution of Hindu culture in Bali. A section of Brahmanas in the Karangasem district of Bali styled themselves as Brahmana - Bouddha - Kalinga. It seems very likely that their ancestors were immigrants from Kalinga. In this context, it is worthwhile to mention that some words and usages concerning vocabulary, crafts, religious practices, forms of worship, food habits, and manners prevalent in Bali are indubitable of Odia in origin. There are linguistic parallels between Odisha and the island of Bali. For example, in the coastal districts of Odisha, the mother is addressed as bou and the father as bapa and in Bali, the former is called bu (boo) and the latter as bapa.



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Cina/China is the Balinese word for groundnut, while in Odia, it is china or chinabadam. Both Balinese, as well as Odias, used to call uncooked rice made out of part-boiled (or sun-dried) paddy as arua. The plow is called lengallo in Bali while the Odias used the term langala for the same. Another very interesting example is the use of the word peja or pejo; both in Odisha and Bali it denoted the thick fluid which is separated from cooked rice before serving it. The Brahmin priest in Odisha is generally known as Panda whereas in Balinese temples he is called Padanda.

Both the Balinese and the Odias' food habits seem to have some common likes and dislikes. Both are fond of eating saga, especially sajana saga (young green leaves of the drumstick tree). Other favourite vegetables common to both include banana flowers (bhanda) and core stem (manja) of the banana plant. The Balinese also liked to have their food on banana leaves as in Odisha and Bengal. Similarly, cakes made out of rice flour known as manda and enduripitha are also favourite dishes of both. The habit of chewing betel and keeping the ingredients in a wooden box is found in both regions.

The similarity in some other social patterns of both Odisha and Bali provides tangible proof of maritime contact between the two places. The youngsters, while passing along elders sitting or standing on the way, bend down, separating themselves by stretching down their right hands towards the ground. Raising folded hands, as a common form of greeting, is a practice in both Odisha and Bali.

Like Odisha, on the island of Bali, if a guest comes to a family, he is first treated with a betel leaf and a nut. On auspicious occasions like marriage, the Balinese invite relatives to their house by sending betel leaves and nuts as it is in practice in the coastal districts of Odisha. Rounding of hair by women in a typical bun is alike in the villages of Odisha and Bali. The form of dance and music on the island of Bali also bear many similarities with that of Odisha.

In Bali, during the marriage ceremony, the bride and the groom wear a type of headdress (mukuta), which is very much like the headdress used in marriage ceremonies in Odisha. Besides, different types of ornaments used by women in Odisha almost half a century ago are still in use in the remote villages of Bali and Java. Last but not the least, the worship of three deities in Bali, represented by masks, very much resembling the trinity, Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra in Odisha.

Source: India Today