

(Abstract)

## ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPT TRADITION OF ORISSA: AN APPRAISAL

Dr. Subash Chandra Dash  
Utkal University, Orissa

Orissa has a rich treasure of manuscripts (mss) containing texts in sanskrit and oriya literature written mainly in oriya script. In sanskrit language and oriya script, the mss cover almost every branch of literature starting from the Vedas to classical poetry, and from grammar to science, philosophy and tantra. Similarly, in the mss written in oriya language we find oriya versions of the great epics and poetical, scientific and philosophical works. Major collections are housed in the Orissa State Museum, in various universities in Orissa and in numerous private collections.

A major attraction of these collections in public and private custody consists of a large number of illustrated mss. Some of them contain only quick sketches, others have highly remarkable and exquisite pieces of art. The orissan mss in these collections are mainly on palm leaf. A very lively tradition of producing palm leaf mss and writing on them continued to the nineteenth century and marginally even till today as some Jyotiṣis still use it to write down their horoscopes. Etching and painting on palm leaf is an ancient art of which we do not know the early history. However, at around the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was at a high level of excellence. Themes connected with *bhakti* as represented for instance in the Gītagovinda of Jayadeva (ca. 1200) and purāṇic and epic themes from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata are important subjects of the artistic expressions. Another line of themes for artistic expression in illustrated mss derives from the songs in praise of the ten divine *avatāras* (Daśāvatāra), for which Orissa has developed a characteristic style. In addition, illustrations are found in works on erotics (Kokamañjarī, Ratibandhakāvya; including a vernacular work such as Cauṣaṭhi ratibandha and in scientific works (mathematics, astronomy).

In this lecture several of these types of illustrated manuscript will be shown (through slides) and discussed. An attempt will be made to determine

distinctive features of illustrated mss in oriya script: what makes them different from illustrated mss from neighbouring traditions such as those in Bengal and in Andhra and from other traditions in India. On the basis of our research on this topic, we will try to go beyond available publications such as the excellent studies made by Subas Pani (Bhubaneswar, 1984) and D.P. Patnaik (New Delhi, 1989). I will try to contribute to the determination of sub-traditions (for instance, Ganjam which was part of the Madras constituency of the British compared to Khurda and Puri), and of the cultural and political context of these sub-traditions.

Dr. Subash Chandra Dash  
Department of Sanskrit  
Utkal University, Vani Vihar,  
Bhubaneswar-751004  
ORISSA [INDIA]