

A STUDY ON LAXMI PURANA: VISUAL MYTHOLOGICAL FOLKLORE OF ODISHA

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ABSTRACT: Laxmi Purana is an ancient text written by Odia poet Balarama Das. It has become one of the most famous folklores in Odisha read and sung in every household in the month of Margashira that falls between November and December. The folklore talks about Goddess Laxmi and her worship in the abovesaid month. With passage of time, the visual version of the folklore has gained more prominence over the textual version. This article discusses the significance of the folklore, the story, the prominence and advantages of the visual adaptation of the folklore.

KEYWORDS: Folklore, Odisha, Laxmi Purana, Visual adaptation

INTRODUCTION: The ancient text Laxmi Purana, written by Balarama Das, is one of the most celebrated folklores of Odisha. In Odia culture, the Thursdays in the month of Margashira are considered very auspicious and the favourite days of Goddess Laxmi and women of every household celebrate it with great pomp and show but in accordance with all rituals and regulations to earn the blessings of Maa Laxmi who signifies wealth and prosperity. The text is considered ecclesiastical in Odia households. It highlights society's yardsticks to analyse social and gender related rules and regulations. It deals with social strata, caste differences, gender differences and many other social issues. In the contemporary scenario, the visual adaptation of the text has earned more prominence among the young and old due to its various advantages over the textual version. The upcoming sections are going to discuss the significance of the folklore, development of the narrative, and how the visual adaptations are achieving prominence in the contemporary period.

DISCUSSION: Though composed in ancient times, Laxmi Purana can be considered as a forerunner of feminism and social equality: revolutions for these issues came into existence centuries later. The story revolves around Laxmi Devi's expeditions on her favorite days, issues in her family because of those expeditions and consequences faced by her husband for disrespecting her and ends with resolution of various social issues. The story starts with Laxmi Devi consulting her husband regarding her expedition on the same day. When her husband nodded she went to visit her devotees living in every nook and corner of the world. She meets

a rich trader's wife and explains her the rules and regulations of the worship, the importance of cleanliness and many other things.

She moves forward scanning every house but does not get impressed by any of them. Finally she reaches at the entrance of the house of an outcast woman and gets impressed by the arrangements and purity of her devotion. She steps into her house and grants her many boons. This information reaches and upsets her husband Jagannath's elder brother Balaram. Balaram asks Jagannath to oust Laxmi from the palace as she visited the house of an untouchable. When Laxmi returns, she has an intense discussion with her husband who is adamant that he will have to follow his brother's orders while Laxmi tries to reason with him reminding how many times in the past both the brothers had done the same thing and how everything changes when the matter is about her. However, her husband gets angry and disrespects her. She decides to leave and before doing so she curses that her husband and his brother will yearn for food and water. She goes to the seashore and invokes Vishwakarma to build a house for her. Then she summons Nidravati and asks to make both the brothers sleep till the next afternoon and then, summons the asta-betalas and asks them to bring everything from the palace starting from grains to jewellery and jewel decked beds in order to make the brothers poor. Everything goes according to Laxmi's plan and the next day when the brothers wake up they do not get a single grain of food or drop of water. They suffer a lot even while begging as Laxmi makes proper arrangement so that in no way they can get food or water. Finally, a person gives them directions to go to the house near seashore where they can get food. Laxmi makes their journey to reach the house even more difficult by asking Surya to heat the sands of shore. When they reach there with a great difficulty, she asks the maids to inform them that she is an outcast and to ask whether they being brahmins eat food in her house. They try to get things from the house to cook their own food which becomes futile, thanks to Laxmi. Finally, unable to control hunger anymore they decide to eat in her house. When they learn that Laxmi is the owner of the house, Balaram realises his mistake and asks Jagannath to convince Laxmi to return to their palace. However, Laxmi has her own terms and conditions. She asks some promises from Jagannath that symbolises women empowerment, social equality and community mobilisation. People in Odisha who perform this puja believes if they perform it properly and earn Laxmi's blessings, their house will always bloom with wealth, abundance, happiness, and prosperity and there won't be any scarcity of money, food or happiness.

Earlier women used to read the Laxmi Purana book every Thursday during Margashira month but with advancement of technology various visual adaptations have made their way in the lives of contemporary people. Now-a-days, people watch the visual adaptation where two singers sing the lyrics and actors enact the scene. Earlier such visual adaptations were only available on TV during morning and evening on every Margashira thursdays but with the advent of internet, various versions of visual adaptations are now freely available in Youtube. All these reasons have made the visual adaptations more prominent and common among the contemporary masses. Earlier since the text was only available in book form only the married women who conducted the puja read it, but with the entry of the visual adaptations each and every person in such households watch with a lot of interest the story of Laxmi Purana.

CONCLUSION: Thus, the visual adaptation reaches a greater number of masses of every gender and every age-group. It also helps to disseminate, more effectively, the messages that

Laxmi Purana contains- women empowerment, removing caste discrimination, establishing social equality and enhancing community mobilisation. Hence we can see how digitalisation of folklore helps to preserve our culture and enriches it in the contemporary world.

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