

Oral Tradition and Performative World of Ramlila in Odisha

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ABSTRACT

Ramlila is an age old oral tradition of India. It is a dramatic representation of deeds of lord Rama in the form of plays and procession. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed that the tradition of Ramlila is a masterpiece of oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2005. In Ramlila, the basic essence of the story remains the same, but the manner in which it is being performed may vary from place to place. Each style has its own idiosyncratic features developed over a period of time by the impact of various factors like, migration, local culture, religious belief, geographical conditions, flora-fauna, etc. During Shardiya *Navaratri* (September- October) the streets of north Indian cities transformed into a dramatic stage. But in Odisha, Ramlila is being played in the month of *Chaitra* (March- April). Present paper would give an ethnographic account of Ramlila in Odisha. Boudh, Puri and Daspalla Ramlilas would be discussed in the present paper. These are the representative Ramlila style of Odisha. It is observed with religious fervour and; with great pomp and show for eight to thirty days at different temples – streets. It is called Sri Kshetra yatra or Sahi Jatra in Puri, Mahavir Khetra in Daspalla and Ramlila Naatya in Boudh. One can feel religiosity and the experience of the divine in the performative world of Ramlila tradition.

Every Ramlila style differs from one another in execution, staging, costume, make-up, acting style and to see community participation would be important in the multicultural society of Odisha. Although there are some broad similarities in all styles of Ramlila being played in Odisha.

Keywords: Ramlila, Oral Tradition, Navaratri, Sri Kshetra yatra, community participation