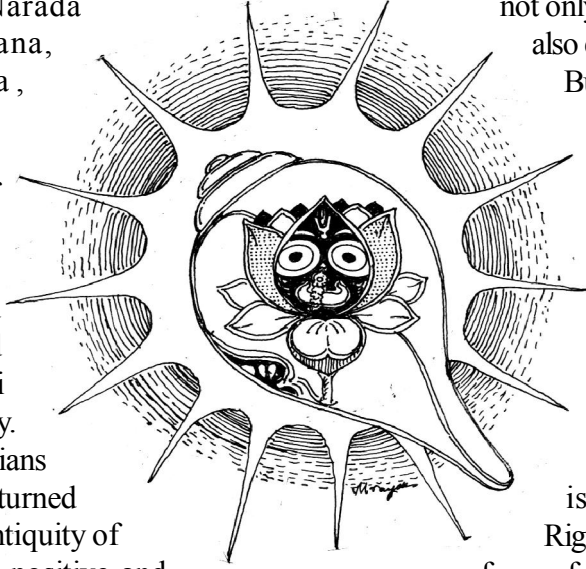




## Purusottama – Jagannath

*Kalyan Kumar Panda*

Lord Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe, has taken his abode at Puri. The sacred temple of Lord Jagannath stands on the hillock “Blue-mountain in the heart of Puri which represents a lovely picturesque panorama of great Orissan Architecture. Various Sanskrit works like Padma Purana, Narada Purana, Skanda Purana, Niladrimahodaya, Bamadeva Samhita etc. have thrown ample light on the sacred abode of Lord Jagannath at Purusottama Kshetra, Puri. The origin and antiquity of Lord Jagannath worship at Puri is still shrouded in mystery. Many scholars and historians have also left no stone unturned to trace the origin and antiquity of Lord Jagannath, but no positive and commonly acceptable evidence have come to light so far to unveil as to how and when this concept has come into existence in Puri and also became one of the prominent deities of Hindu Pantheon. It is also not clear whether Lord Jagannath originally is a Hindu Aryan deity or tribal deity. Mystery is still wrapped behind the cult of Lord Jagannath.



The earliest references about Lord Jagannath are found in the various Puranas and other literatures of India. There are several copper plate inscriptions which established the idea of Lord Jagannath as a paramount deity of the entire country. The concept of Jagannath is not only confined to Hinduism but also extends to both Jainism and Buddhism. Pandit Nilakantha Das has suggested that Jagannath cult is primarily a Jaina cult. He is of the opinion that the three images of Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath collectively stand for the Jaina-Trinity (Tri-Ratna). There are other scholars who suggest that Jagannath is of Vedic origin. The Rigveda and Atharvaveda have few references about the divine “Daru”, which has been identified in course of time with Jagannath. But these references are not sufficient enough to prove Jagannath as a Vedic deity.

In the different traditions that have evolved about the deity, the name of Indradyumna is common. Indradyumna was a king of Avanti in



the Satya Yuga. Orissan literature particularly, Sisukrishna Das's "Deulatola" accepted him as a great votary of Lord Vishnu. He sent Vidyapati, the brother of his family priest to Odradesa to locate the exact place where Lord Nilamadhava (Vishnu) was worshipped secretly. Coming to Odradesa Vidyapati took shelter in a Sabara village very near to the "Blue Mountain" (Nilasaila). Vidyapati made friendship with the family of the Sabara chief Visvvasu concealing his identity and motive of coming to that place. He married his daughter Lalita and with her help Vidyapati was able to see Lord Nilamadhava. On seeing the image of Nilamadhava his eyes glittered. After tracing the route to the shrine he returned to Avanti and informed Indradyumna the whereabouts of Lord Nilamadhava. King Indradyumna with his forces, accompanied by Narad, set out in his journey to Odradesa. No sooner the king reached the boundary of Odradesa, than he came to know about the miraculous disappearance of the shrine. Narada, however, assured that the Lord would appear in the form of "Daru" (sacred wood). After a few days, Lord Nilamadhava made his appearance in a dream to the king Indradyumna.

As directed by Nilamadhava in the dream, Indradyumna brought the 'Daru' from the sea-shore and ordered for fashioning beautiful images out of the sacred 'Daru'. Accordingly, Indradyumna got the images Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra and Chakra Sudarshan made out of the sacred 'Daru'. The story was very interesting that Indradyumna was also advised by Narada to invite Brahma to construct a temple as a sign of dignity. There was some delay in Brahma's coming and mean-while ages had passed and Galamadhava became the king of Orissa and claimed the temple as his own. Legendary account further continues that the

dispute between Indradyumna and Galamadhava was amicably settled and full credit of building the temple was given to Indradyumna.

Very interestingly, this Indradyumna legend associating the Sabaras with the Lord Nilamadhava (Jagannath) is also supported by epigraphic and historical evidences. The Sabaras, who belonged to the proto-Austroloid tribe were the worshippers of tree in the Mahendragiri from the ancient times which was replaced by the "Sthanumurti" worship in course of time. Later on this "Sthanumurti" worship seems to have mingled with the worship of the God Purusottama-Vishnu.

Purusottama-Vishnu is also known as Purusottama-Jagannath. Purusottama-Jagannath cult is a resultant composite of many divine concepts and gods. Starting from a local deity of an unknown tribe, Jagannath manifested himself as one of the greatest religious centres of the whole world. He is not meant only for any sect or tribe, in course of time, He has become universal. An analysis of the history of Jagannath indicates that Saivism had rendered remarkable contribution to the evolution of Jagannath cult. In the early medieval period, during the rule of the Bhaumakaras, Orissa was a great centre of tantric Saivism. In several tantric works of the medieval period, Jagannath is described as the tantric god of Odradesa. *Tantrayamala* describes the wooden image of Jagannath as the presiding deity of Srikshetra in Utkal. In various other tantric texts, Vimala, the Pitheswari of Puri is described as Bhairavi and Jagannath as Bhairava. Rice offering in the temple is first given to Vimala and then only it becomes Mahaprasad. Jagannath is also worshipped in the Bhairava Mantra.

The seat of Purusottama-Jagannath had attained celebrity as a tantric centre during the



rule of the Somavamsis. In Orissa, we find three aspects of Bhairava, i.e, Ekapada Bhairava, Ugra Bhairava and Virabhadra. Historians like Henry Stietencron draws our attention to the similarity of the image of Ekapada Bhairava with the image of Jagannath, sculptured along with Sivalinga and Mahisamardini (Durga) in one of the panels of the Konark temple. Here Jagannath appears as the cardinal deity, surrounded by Siva, Durga and other Hindu gods and goddesses. This indicates strong Saivite influence over the cult of Jagannath. The archaeological evidence of the Jagannath temple corroborate this view. There is an image of Siva on a bull, installed on the Bhogamandapa of Jagannath temple. In the same shrine there are also stone images of Jagannath, Siva and Durga together and an eight-armed Nataraja image with snake over its head which may be assigned to the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. We also know that Sankaracharya came to Puri in the 9th century A.D. and introduced Saivite form of worship in the Jagannath temple.

During the Ganga period Vaishnavite tradition developed round the cult of Jagannath. Ramanuja emphasized Lord Krishna's relation with his sister Ekanamsa and brother Balarama-Samkarshana. Ekanamsa was interpreted as a form of Durga and Balarama as a form of Siva. In Ramanuja's Pancharatra rites, Siva came to be known as Balabhadra. So the Jagannath cult brought the synthesis of three main cults of Hinduism, Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism in its final phase. Anangabhimadeva III (1225 AD) mentions in his Puri inscription about Halin, Chakrin and Subhadra, who are no other than Balabhadra, Jagannath and Subhadra. Another strong evidence of this synthesis is seen in one of the sculptures of the Konark temple in which it is seen that Narasimhadev-I is worshipping a Linga (Siva), Purusottama (Vishnu) and Durga trinity. Thus, according to some scholars Jagannath Nilamadhava was primarily a Siva Linga. In this

connection the Purusottama Mahatmya also gives great importance to Siva worship. Originally, the so-called "Blue-Mountain" (Nilasaila) was nothing more than a Sivalinga, the symbol of creativity.

In the ancient period the Savaras of Orissa were worshipping a Lingam at Mahendragiri region, which was most probably an imaginary replica of the famous Sivalingam at Sri Sailam in Andhra Pradesh. The Savaras of Orissa were very much influenced by the Deity and began worshipping as Nilamadhava. Later on the Matharas took possession of the Deity. Then the early Gangas worshipped the deity as Gokarneswar. In a complex and mysterious manner, in due course this process was transferred to Puri. This deity was no other than Nilamadhava or Srikrishna, initially identified as a Siva linga. Thus, through a slow and gradual process the present Jagannath has emerged from the concept of Siva.

In this connection, archaeological evidences reveal that Puri was a Saiva Kshetra on the basis of the prevalence of the Pancha Mahadevas, i.e, Markandeya, Yameswar, Kapalamochana, Lokanatha and Nilakantheswar in Puri town and the Isaneswar, Pataleswar, Kshetrapala Siva temples etc. inside the Jagannath temple campus. These observations lead us to conclude that the basic lay out of the Puri town consists of one temple on a hill near the sea-shore, with the Siva temples built on the foot of the hill and these Siva temples are of considerable antiquity. In fact, Saivism was the dominant Hindu religion of Orissa throughout the period, during which the Hinduisation of the wooden God must have taken place.

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