The Somavamsi ruler Yayati Kesari (Yayati-I) established the first regional kingdom of Orissa. Puri's late 16th century temple chronicles relate construction of the first Jagannath temple and the renewal of the cult after an alleged Yavana invasion of Orissa in the 5th century A.D. He made strenuous efforts to establish Brahmanism in Orissa. He also founded the cultural individuality of Orissa. From his time onwards, Orissa has been a land of Hindus.

The epigraphical evidence in the late 12th and the 13th centuries refers to the existence of a Jagannath temple at Puri before Chodaganga Deva began the construction of the present temple in circa 1135 A.D. In his Dasgoba Copper Plate inscription, Chodaganga's grandson Rajaraja III praised his grandfather for having built the Jagannath temple which had been neglected by previous kings. K.C. Panigrahi suggested that Puri's legendary account of the alleged invasion of Orissa under the Yavana general Raktabahu in the 5th century A.D. during the reign of the legendary king Sovanadeva may well contain a historical reminiscence of the conquest of Orissa by the Rastrakuta King Govinda III during the reign of the Bhuoma-Kara king Subhakaradeva who ruled in coastal Orissa around 800 A.D. And moreover, he pointed out that Jagannath's legendary absence of 146 years in western Orissa (between Raktabahu's invasion and Yayati's 'rediscovery' of Jagannath and reinstallment at Puri) corresponds more or less exactly with the space of time between the historical reigns of Subhakaradeva and Yayati-I.

The historical situation of late 16th century Orissa, particularly the circumstances leading to the downfall of the Gajapati empire in 1568 A.D. the destruction of the 'Darumurti' of Puri's Holy Trinity by Kalapahara, the alleged recovery of its most sacred portion, the Brahma padartha, by Bisar Mahanti, the conquest of Orissa by the Mughal general Mansingh, the rise of a local successor state under Ramachandra Deva of Khurda, his renewal of the images at Khurda in about 1587 and of the Jagannath cult at Puri in 1590/92 and finally his acknowledgement by Akbar in 1592, all these events are to well known that Kalapahara, one of the Afghan generals with a small unit captured Puri, plundered the legendary temple treasure of Jagannath and desecrated, and also damaged the temple with the help of an Oriya, Kalapahara discovered the hidden image of Jagannath and burnt it and afterwards cast it into the sea. According to Oriya chronicle-took it on an elephant to the Ganges and had it burnt there. After its desecration, Puri "the stronghold of Jagannath (was made) into the Home of Islam". According to local tradition an Oriya named Bisar Mohanty had been able to secure the Brahma from the half-burnt image of
Jagannath which Kalapahara had thrown into the Ganga or Sea. He kept it for several years in Kujanga (a place in the Mahanadi delta) till Ramachandra Deva in a dream was ordered by Lord Jagannath Himself to get the Brahma from Kujanga, to set up new images of Holy Trinity and to insert the Brahma into the new image of the Lord. This legend established Ramachandra's claim to act like the former imperial Gajapati under the direct order of Jagannath. The legend also proved the unbroken continuity of the cult which he had reestablished as "second Indradyumna". It explained to Jagannath's devotees that even Kalapahara had actually not been able to destroy more of Jagannath's image than during the Navakalebara rituals is replaced regularly every ten to twelve years. The image which was restored by the "second Indradyumna" was therefore essentially the same as the one which Vishnu Himself had once set up for the mythical "First Indradyumna" in the hoary past. Due to his historical and legendary achievements Ramachandra Deva and his successors were acknowledged throughout Orissa as the new Gajapatis. This thing mentioned in Achuta Sagar Inscription and Achuta Ganga Inscription (The Srijang Inscription of Achyuta Baliarsingh).

It is interesting that no Afghan invader attacked Puri in 1568 A.D. Before this period many Oriya literature like Oriya Mahabharat of Sarala Das, Oriya Bhagabat of Jagannath Das, Oriya (Dandi) Ramayan of Balaram Das, Harivamsa and Sunyasamhita of Achutananda Das, Premabhatti Brahma Gita and Gobinda Chandra Gita of Yasobant Das, Sunya Namadeva and Hetu Udaya Bhagabat of Anant Das etc had been written, but nowhere mentioned regarding the name of Kalapahara and the Afghan invasion of Puri. Many Oriya Vaishnav literature also written after 1568 A.D. are silent on the painful episode of the desecration of Jagannath temple. During the period of Sri Chaitanya, many Bengali Vaishnav literature had been written regarding Lord Jagannath and Jagannath temple which also never mentioned the name of Kalapahara. So it is now the question how king Ramachandra Deva achieved the title Gajapati and also became 'second Indradyumna'? The legend of Yayati Kesari is to be regarded primarily as a construct of late 16th century Orissa for validation and legitimation of priestly and royal authority after the downfall of the imperial Gajapatis. On the one hand the legendary history of Yayati became closely adjusted to the history of Ramachandra and, on the other hand, specified characteristics of the cult hero Yayati were transmitted to Ramachandra. In 1978, H. Von Stietencron pointed out that the author of the Madala Panji may have "transposed (events of the late 16th century) into the remote past to link and equate Yayati's fame as founder of Somavamsi dynasty with that of Ramachandra, the founder of the Khurda dynasty."

(i) The historical interruption of Puri's cult by Kalapahara depicts strange similarities with the account of the legendary "Mughal" invasion by Raktabahu in the 5th century A.D. According to the Madala Panji it was followed by another "Mughal" occupation of Orissa. It lasted 35 years till the rise of Yayati Kesari and thus corresponds nearly exactly with the duration of the historical Afghan-Mughal occupation of Orissa between 1568 and 1592: when Ramachandra Deva was acknowledged by Akbar as local successor of the erstwhile imperial Gajapatis. Like Ramachandra, Yayati Kesari thus brought to an end the time of Arajaka as both "Kingless" periods of foreign rule are called in the chronicle.

(ii) The historical renewal of the Jagannath cult by Ramachandra Deva finds its equivalence in Yayati Kesari's legendary achievements. According to Puri's chronicle, in both cases it took place after the recovery of Jagannath. Whereas Ramachandra recovered Jagannath's most
sacred portion from Kujang where Bisar Mohanty had hidden it after its recovery from the Ganges, Yayati Kesari rediscovered and renewed Jagannath's dilapidated Murti near Sonepur.

(iii) Particularly revealing is the correspondence between the historical and legendary stories of a stepwise renewal of the cult. It took place only several years after both rulers had come to throne, viz., in Ramachandra's 7th and Yayati's 9th regnal years. Moreover in both cases the images were renewed outside Puri. Under Ramachandra Deva this happened in his capital Khurda whereas Yayati Kesari performed the great 'Vanayaga' ritual in the vicinity of his former capital near Sonepur. And most surprisingly, in both cases Jagannath was finally reinstalled on His Simhasana at Puri only two years after the renewal of His murti.

(iv) According to Madala Panji, Ramachandra Deva was recognized by Akbar as successor to the imperial Gajapatis in his 11th regnal year. Yayati Kesari, too installed the images at Puri in his 11th regnal year and thus became the legendary founder of Orissan kingship.

(v) For their great achievements both Ramachandra Deva and Yayati Kesari were hailed as 'Dwitiya or Abhinava' Indradyumna after the mythical founder of the Jagannath Cult at Puri.14

These similarities between legendary accounts and historical events testify to an attempt to validate Ramachandra's still very precarious position by depicting him according to an allegedly already existing model of the cult hero Yayati Kesari. However no such model for Ramachandra Deva seems to have existed. In Puri, too, no pre-sixteenth century sources of the Yayati Kesari legend are known to us. Contemporary facts are fully silent about any activities of the Somavamis at Puri, particularly of Yayati Kesari as builder of the first Jagannath temple at Puri. The silence of early medieval sources would be surprising in view of the many available Somavamsi inscriptions and other literary sources which could have mentioned or even praised Yayati Kesari and his great deeds at Puri. In Purusottama Mahatmya which has contained the Indradyumna legend and the origin of Jagannath's Daru Devata at Puri there is no mention of Yayati Kesari15. Although historians have become reluctant in using an argumentum ex silentio, we are certainly entitled to ask why the author of the Mahatmya should not have at least alluded to mention Yayati Kesari, the "Second Indradyumna", if his great achievements for the Jagannath cult were known to him. There is no name of Yayati Kesari among the 44 Kesari kings and royal patrons of Jagannath temple. The list of Jagannath's landed property contains detailed accounts of the endowments by each king from "Chodagangadeva" onwards up to Mukundadeva, the last imperial ruler before 156816. It is great important that no donation of Yayati Kesari is mentioned in this list. Kesari kings are briefly mentioned as the builders of the Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar.

As long as no new evidence is at our disposal we have therefore to conclude that the Yayati Kesari tradition was not existing in Puri before the re-establishment of the Jagannath cult by Ramachandra Deva of Khurda in the nineties of the 16th century. Two things, however, seem to be clear. The legend was fully developed when the chronicle got its final shape in the 17th century and, as has been shown, it exhibits a striking correspondence with the overall political situation in Orissa in the late 16th century and in particular with Ramachandra Deva's renewal of the Jagannath cult. Not Ramachandra Dev of Khurda was depicted in the light of the cult hero Yayati Kesari but the hero was constructed to validate Ramachandra's claim to the Gajapati throne. The Madala Panji and a few contemporary sources provide evidence of Ramachandra's precarious situation after his successful renewal of the
Jagannath cult at Puri. Although he was acknowledged and hailed by the priests of temple as "Second Indradyumna." 17

In its own way it clearly "proves" that already in the hoary past a temporary interruption of the cult has been successfully overcome by Yayati Kesari, in a similar way as was done by Ramchandra Deva of Khurda in the present time. What Raktabahu had tried in vain, Kalapahara was also unable to accomplish. Buried and recovered in the hoary past near Sonepur and again recovered in the present age in the form of His most sacred Brahma portion, Jagannath survived both attempts to destroy His murti. The most important message of the Bisar Mahanty and Yayati Kesari legends to Jagannath's devotees is proclaimed already in the very beginning of the temple chronicle which commences with the words "Visnu the Lord of deities never abandons Sri Purushottama (Puri) even though crores of Brahma are destroyed."

References:

2. Epigraphia Indica, xxxi p.255
3. Madala Panji, pp.141-152
5. According to the tradition of Bengal, Kalapahara was in his early life a Brahman named Kalachanda Ray. In later period he fell in love with Dulai, a Sultan Lady, by which he became out of Hindu restriction. Then his target was to destroy the Jagannath temple, the chief centre of Hindu religion. Kalapahara, Farmoli Sister's son to Bahlol Lodi, was the Jahangir of the Sarkar of Oudh (E and D): Tarikh-i-sher Shohi. Vol. IV- p. 352). According to (wagiat-i-Mushtugi. P.548) he was called Mian Mahammad Kalapahara.

Barbak Shah after his defeat by Sikander had abandoned Jaunpur and retreated to Mahammad Khan Farmoli who bore the title Kalapahara or Black Mountain.
6. According to N'mat Allah's Makhzan-i-Afghan of the year 1612 A.D, "every Afghan, who took part in campaign, obtained as booty one or two gold images, Kalapahara destroyed the temple of Jagannath at Puri which contained 700 idols made of gold, the biggest of which weighed 30 Mans" (M.A.Rahim, History of Afghan in India, A.D.1545-1631). The Temple Chronicle of Puri speaks of a booty worth of 52 crores (520 millions) rupees.

7. Akbarnama (Eng trans) vol.II. p-140.

Dr. Janmejaya Choudhury is a Lecturer in History, in the Sri Jagannath College, Kaipadar, Dist.- Khurda.