



## Place of Subhadra in Devi Cult

*Durgamadhab Dash*

Lord Jagannath has calmly ensconced Himself on the throne of pearls in His sanctorum in the Grand Temple at Puri. Seated on His right are Subhadra and Balaram. Balaram is worshipped as His elder brother and Subhadra as His younger sister. The images have their respective esoteric significance in Jagannath religion. In the import of a higher spiritual reasoning, the images represent the intricate spiritual branches of the cosmic creation. According to the Vishnavites, Balaram is the mystical guiding force of Jagannath while Subhadra is adored as the embodiment of His enchanting delusion. The Lord is thus fortified with the divine forces on the consecrated alter. He has revealed Himself to the world as the Lord of the Universe, the primal vivacious energy behind the celestial creation. This is the whole truth about the cult of Lord Jagannath, the composite spiritual cascade of all religions, all cults and all faiths of the world. The images of the Jagannath pantheon are shrouded in myriad divine mysteries. Surely to this end, the image of Subhadra is more intimately directed with a divine significance than the other peripheral duties of the Grand Temple.

It needs to be mentioned in this connection that during the period from 7th century AD to 12th century AD, the Hindu scriptures did not have any direct reference to Balabhadra and Subhadra as the co-deities in the Jagannath

pantheon. Jagannath Dham was however described in the scriptures as Purusottam Khetra. The mode of worship over here was entirely dedicated to Lord Jagannath as Purusottam Bhagawan. In 1110 AD, Chodaganga Dev conquered Orissa. After this achievement, his main mission was to revive the dilapidated Grand Temple at Puri. He considered this as a noble work of his career. At last, he constructed a massive temple in the place of the dilapidated shrine. The new temple exhibited the emperor's close affinity with the worship of Lord Jagannath. The king by then had been converted to Vaishnavism by Ramanandacharya. He worshipped Jagannath Mahaprabhu in the divine likeness of Lord Krishna.

During the time of Chodaganga Dev, only Lord Jagannath was being worshipped on the Ratnavedi in the Grand Temple, Puri. There was no mention of other deities sanctified by side of Jagannath Mahaprabhu at that time. This fact had found mention in the royal inscriptions meant to eulogize the achievements of Chodaganga Dev during his reign.

However, we get a reference from the Skanda Purana (Utkal Khanda), written in 14th century AD about the sacred consecration of Balabhadra and Subhadra as the co-deities of the manifold Lord. Subhadra was stated to be no



different from Mahalaxmi in this scripture. However, the popular view in this connection held Subhadra as the sister of Balabhadra and Jagannath. Proponents of the Trimurty Worship are of opinion that, whatever be the viewpoints of others on this score, one thing was clear from the ideology of the Jagannath pantheon that the three images as consecrated on the Ratnavedi were sacramentally adapted, in all probability, to the divine systems of different religions and sects of the world. In this sense, Jagannath cult was adored as a composite spiritual doctrine.

There is another view in this connection. Subhadra, as a divine force of delusion, had secured her place alright in the Hindu pantheon even prior to 14th century AD. She was worshipped prior to this period as the activating esoteric energy of the Supreme Lord, the Eternal Cause of creation, preservation and destruction of the vast universe. In the Grand Temple, she had found her place in the middle of Balabhadra and Jagannath and worshipped in different forms and manners conforming to the divine symbols of different cults and faiths under its composite spiritual system. It is stated in the stone inscriptions of 1225AD that the three deities were being worshipped in the Grand Temple in the divine names of Hali, Chakri and Subhadra. This was during the reign of Ananga Bhima Dev-III. During the rule of Bhanu Dev-I (1264-1378 AD), Basudev Temple (constructed during the 13th century) also contained on its walls the images of Subhadra and her two brothers and admitted the concept of Tridev worship in Orissa.

The images represented then different religions and sects according to the mode of worship carried through different incantations. Hence what was important in the Grand Temple was the mode of worship that took place in the spiritual order of the divine shrine. While the images remained the same, they represented

different religious symbols according to the rendering of Mantras in the procedure of divine adoration even sometime during 13th century AD.

In Adivasi culture too, there were references to Tridev worship. But the deities were known as Jakeri Penu, Tana Penu and Murbi Penu. In the words of Pandit Suryanarayan Dash, the three deities, as the main divine forces, represented the spiritual culture of the Adivasis. Tana Penu was a female deity. She was venerated by the Adivasis as the supreme divine force of prosperity and plentitude on earth. She was also believed as the paramount Yogamaya Sakti, the peerless force of divine delusion in the matter of creation, preservation and devastation of the universe. The deities were worshipped under a roof which too had a religious significance in the procedure of divine adoration. Murabi Penu was worshipped as the brother of Tana Penu. He was placed on the right of Tana Penu. There is a legend in the Adivasi culture that once Tana Penu was cross with human beings in general for their horrific behavior in their usual way of life. Overwhelmed by her outrageous fury, Tana Penu assumed the form of a divine devastator and went on destroying the cosmic creation. The human beings got panicky at her behavior and prayed to her brother, Murbi Penu to disengage her from her divine pastime. Murbi Penu persuaded Tana Penu to abstain from her horrific pastime. Pleased with the submission of her brother, Tana Penu stopped her ferocious hustles but with an assurance by human beings that they would be devoutly disposed to the other creatures of the universe and show kindness to one and all on earth. The human beings agreed to her conditions. At last, Tana Penu was pleased to abstain from her devastating operation. In the words of Pandit Suryanarayan Dash, in a steadily but gradual metamorphic transformation in their mode of worship, Jakeri Penu, Tana Penu and Mubri Penu



might have been worshipped over the time as Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath and the roof of the divine alter might have been adopted at a later period as Sudarsan, the symbol of Chakra by the side of the three deities. Subhadra was thus worshipped as Bhairabi since the time immemorial.

According to Dr. Kanhu Charan Mishra, Adivasis were also worshipping another goddess named, Stambheswari, as their Ista Devi with utmost devotion. Stambeswari, according to Dr. Mishra, was the original form of Subhadra. Be that as it may, Stambeswari was all along being worshipped as a Tantric deity. Even today, she is worshipped in the Tantric order in the western and southern parts of Orissa. In the order of this analogy, Subhadra must have been adopted in the Hindu pantheon as a goddess endowed with the immense power of Maya in her Vidya and Avidya forms. Dr. Mishra further says that in the southern parts of Orissa, Narayan Bhagwan was worshipped in different places in the name of Swayambhu. At a later period, Swayambhu acquired the distinctiveness as Jagannath. Similarly in the middle part of Orissa, Maninageswara was worshipped as a form of Lord Siva. Maninageswara was later worshipped as Balabhadra with all the divine attributes of Lord Siva. This is how a composite form of religion had developed in Orissa by 14th century AD. This was known as Jagannath religion. In the words of Dr. Kanhu Charan Mishra, these faiths actually constituted the cult of Lord Jagannath. Despite myriad divergent factors, the cult of the Lord had developed as a synthetic spiritual faith irrespective of divergent religious beliefs of the people.

According to Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab, the Jagannath pantheon is the spiritual transformation of the Buddhist symbol, namely, Triratna. While Jagannathji is acclaimed as the symbol of Buddha Ratna, Balabhadra and

Subhadra are adored as the spiritual forms of Sangha Ratna and Dharma Ratna respectively. In the belief of Hindu monks, the names, Buddha and Jagannath are no different from each other. In Hindu scriptures, Jagannath is named as Buddha and Buddha is also named as Jagannath

Not only this. In the worshipping process of the Hindu pantheon, Jagannath, worshipped on the Ratnavedi, has all the likeness of Buddha. It is believed in this connection that Buddha as an "Avatar" was born in the human form for the uplift of the spiritually bashful and for restoring righteousness in the society. It needs to be mentioned here that Dharma as adored in Buddhism has a female connotation. In course of time, when Triratna was transformed into three distinct divine symbols and depicted with spiritual significance on a "stupa-like structure", the latter were adopted over the period of time in the forms of Balabhadra, Jagannath and Subhadra. In the words of Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab, the Dharma Ratna of Buddhism having a female connotation was later adopted in the form of Subhadra on the Ratnavedi of the Grand Temple. In the Tantric expositions of Buddhism, like Sambara Mandala, Sadachakra Mandala and Kalachakrabarti Mandala there have been references to goddess Subhadra along with her form, color and inbeing attributes in elaborate details.

In the words of historian like Prabhat Mukharjee and spiritual analyst like Prahallad Pradhan, the 14th century AD was said be a period of visionary confluence of different religions like Buddhism, Vashnavism, Saivism and different Tantra cults of those times. A climax was reached during this period in the order of perfect unity of all those religions and faiths reflecting a new spiritual doctrine known as Jagannath religion. In the Grand Temple, Puri, Jagannath having the likeness of Buddha, Balabhadra having the divine attributes of Siva and Subhadra being Sakti



Swarupa, the three images were mystically consecrated together bringing about a renescent metamorphosis in the spiritual belief and the reasoning of the people.

In 15th century AD, there were many more innovative transformations in the order of worship of the Jagannath pantheon. Subhadra was spiritually endorsed as the replica of Brahma while Balabhadra and Jagannath were worshipped as Siva and Vishnu respectively. This was a new spiritual concept. This highlighted the ideology of Trimurti worship. Sarala Das, in his famous Oriya Mahabharat also made a reference to this order of divine adoration.

The devotee-poet of the Lord, Sri Yosabanta Das has presented in this connection in his “Premabhakti Brahma Gita” that when Brahma was making out a divine plan to create the universe, Mother Earth, the potential force of Yogamaya Shakti, wished to have divine union with him for the above purpose and accordingly approached Brahma with a fervent appeal on this score. Brahma was dismayed at the appeal of Mother Earth. He curtly turned down her offer. After all Goddess Earth, being the replica of Yogamaya Shakti, had the status of divine mother in relation to Brahma. How could he accept such an unusual proposal? The very thinking of a phenomenon like the above was a pernicious sin. However Goddess Earth was cross with Brahma for his avowed denial. She cursed Brahma saying “Oh, the creator of the universe! By disagreeing to a sacred divine cause, you have displayed utmost disrespect to the women-class in general. So, as a consequence of your unwanted action, you would descend in the universe in the form of a woman. Brahma was stupendously flabbergasted. He never expected such a catastrophe to befall him for a rightful action on his part. Lord Vishnu however appeared before him at this stage and said “Hey, Brahma! Your appearance on earth is tethered to a divine

purpose. In Kali Yuga, when I would appear in the form of Jagannath, you would be worshipped by my side as Subhadra. People won't know that you are Brahma in the form of Subhadra. This is the secret about the divine appearance of Subhadra on the Ratnavedi of the Grand Temple.

There is another version about Subhadra having the likeness of Radha according to Gaudiya Vaishnavites. Subhadra is none other than Radha, the “Alhadini Sakti” of Lord Jagannath. In that way, Jagannath Mahaprabhu is the replica of Lord Krishna. The Vaishnavites of Utkal Pradesh however have a different viewpoint in this regard. They accept Subhadra as the sister of Balabhadra and Jagannath. Matta Balaram Das, the leading devotee-poet of the “Utkaliya Vaishnav cult” derives the viewpoints of the Gaudiya Vaishnavites. In his “Bhaba Samudra”, Balaram Das has accused the Lord for having allowed the concretion of Subhadra, His sister in the place of Mahalaxmi, His divine consort.

In the Tantric order of worship, it is believed that Vimala and Subhadra are no different from each other. Their mode of worship is by and large, one and same. Both are worshipped with the same Bijamantra, i.e. “Om Hring”. In some scriptures, Subhadra, like Bimala, is depicted as Mahadevi and Jagannath as Bhairab.

This, in brief, is all about Subhadra we worship in the Grand Temple, Puri. The whole thing speaks of the immanent transcendent nature of the omnipresent Lord both as the Ruler and Darubrahma of the cosmos through the manifestations of Prakriti, his self made delusion. Consecration of Subhadra on the Ratnavedi conveys this ideology in the process of divine adoration.

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