Orissa was a cradle land of Buddhism at least from the day’s of Emperor Asoka in 3rd century B.C. It is a well known fact in the Indian historical science that the great Mauryan Emperor Asoka had undertaken Kalinga War and that became the turning point in his career and embraced Buddhism soon after the war. The remarkable archaeological remains, as we know from the ruins of Dhauli and Jaugada in shape of Asokan edicts and rock-cut elephant (at Dhauli near Bhubaneswar) speaks about the metropolis of Tosali and the people of Kalinga (then known Orissa). Emperor Asoka, made his earnest effort to preach Buddhism in Kalinga. He sent a number of Buddhist scholars for propagation of religion in Kalinga. Tissa, the brother of Asoka did choose Kalinga for his retirement in the Bhojakagiri Vihara along with Dharmarakhita—the great propagator of Buddhism of western India. The Mahasanghika Acharya Mahadeva also made his several visits to Kalinga. Dhatika, the spiritual successor of both Mahayamika and Upagupta popularized the school of Sravastivada, an important sub-sect of Theravada Buddhism in Kalinga. Thus, Buddhism in Kalinga received a new spirit under the rule of Asoka and assumed a pre-eminent position among other religions. Buddhism became state religion from the time of Asoka.

The story of Buddhism continued to be thrived in Kalinga after Asoka up to the late medieval period. The early Buddhist literature suggests that the primary abode of Mahasanghikas in the eastern region was Vaisali. They spread to Magadha and travelled to Andhra regions enroute Kalinga. In course of this migration, they also made their settlements in Kalinga. Archaeological excavations at Salihundam, Sankaram, Ramatirtham (all are now in coastal Andhra) were part of ancient Kalinga shows the Buddhist establishments were started during this period. Recent excavations at Lalitgiri (Cuttack District), Langudi, Kayama, Tarapur, Kankia
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(Udayagiri (Jajpur District), laid bare early Buddhist settlements dating back to 3rd-2nd century B.C and continued to survive with all flourishing manner till 12-13th century A.D. Sadharmapundrika Sutram generally believed as a Mahayana text of early Christian Era speaks about Viraja as a sacred land of Buddha Padmaprabha. Several copper plate grants and inscriptions like Asanpat stone inscriptions, Neulapur copper plate grant, Ratnagiri copper plate grant etc, mention about establishment of Viharas and extended donations to Buddhist establishments during historical period. In one of the copper plate of Gopachandra speaks that the students of Buddhist Monasteries (Viharas) were also practicing the Vedas and Smirit-Sastras apart from the Buddhist philosophy. So it is evident that during 5th-6th centuries A.D, there exists full co-operation, harmony and tolerance among the different groups of preceptors.

Hiuen Tsang—the great Chinese scholar pilgrim visited Orissa in about 639 A.D. His accounts described in Si-Yu-Ki, says that Buddhism was in a flourishing state in the country. He mentions about some hundred Asokan Tope, Sangharama, Puspagiri (Pu-se-po-ki-li), where an Asokan Stupa emits bright light. Puspagiri was a great centre of learning. He also mentions about a city called Che-li-ta-lo which is restored as Caritrapura. This was a sea side place where merchants come and go and stop here on their way. Here are found all sorts of rare and precious articles. Scholars like G.Waddel suggest the word to be Chitotpala. A.Cunningham suggests that Cheli-ta-lo is Caritrapura identified with modern Puri. Rhys Davids and other scholars like K.S Behera also supported this theory. As far as our study goes the Caritrapura must be modern Puri, of course, more serious research is required. Because, number of early historical remains encountered on the coastal line from Manikapatna, Baliharachandi, Puri, Belesvara, Ramachandi, Khalkatapatna, Badatara, Chitreswari, Kuruma, Nariso, Astaranga etc. Here, found the genesis of Buddhism in the tradition of Jagannath.

Buddhism was flourished tremendously under the Bhauma Rule or the Bhaumakara Dynasty (C.736 to 910 A.D). Buddhism got royal patronage and became the state religion during the period. Buddhism was under steady decline during the rule of Somavamsis, Imperial Gangas and Gajapatis (10th century to 16th century A.D), but mingled with prevailing religious trend that is Vaisnavism and Jagannthism. The shadow could be felt even now in the prevailing tradition of Shree Jagannath Cult of Orissa.

In fact, the traditions of Sri Jagannath has its deep root as pre-Aryan or un-Aryan or Tribal features. In the remote past, at the earliest phase, the God represented a simple form of tree worship or it may be that he was worshipped in the form of a wooden deity by aboriginal Savaras in Eastern India. Orissa was continued to be a tribal dominated area for long period at least up to early medieval period. We have references in Emperor Asoka's Edict (3rd C. BC) as well as in various literatures. We believe that there must be somewhere in ancient Orissa, wood or tree worship (Daru) was in vogue at least up to 3rd century A.D. Scholars like B M Padhi, S.N Raiguru (1996) have focused Jagannath’s origin, again, in relation to the Sabara tribes of South Orissa. K C Mishra (1971), A Eschman, (1978), came forward with the discovery of several peculiar relations between Jagannath cult and religious practice of the Sabaras (Tribals) of Orissa. So also the mighty river Mahanadi has provided a link with Rajim and Sirpur, the ancient seat of Vaishnava cult developed under Sarabhapuryias and Panduvamsis whose close link down Sonepur and Boudh area throws some light on it. Here, the King of Sambala, Indrabhuti, the famous preacher of Vajrayana compared Buddha with Lord Jagannath by saluting both the Gods in his Gayanasiddhi—a text of 8th century.
Puri emerges as a *tirtha* having pan-Indian character since early part of 12th century A.D., with the increasing process of ritual royalization of the deity Lord Jagannath. Among the prominent gods extensively portrayed in Puranic mythology as being instrumental in *tirtha* formation were Visnu, Siva and Sakti/Devi. It may be pointed out that Vishnu in his milder and more popular aspects portrayed through his numerous incarnations, particularly those having tribal or pastoral affiliations, such as Narasimha, Krisna, Balarama, Dattatreya, Purusottama, Venkatesvara etc., naturally bore closer affinity to those native groups that originally subscribed to those cults. It was during 12th century A.D. that the temple town Puri might have assumed the greatest prominence under the rule of Imperial Gangas (C.1078-1435 A.D.). The present magnificent temple of Purusottama-Jagannath was constructed during this period. It is mentioned in an inscription in the temple Garttesvara (Siva) at Alagum, about 15 km from Sakhigopal that Chodaganga seems to have invited some selected Brahmana Pandits or Vaisnavas from Kanchi and settled near Puri, for propagation of Dvaita-philosophy.

Sri Jagannath temple was more organized during the rule of Anangabhima III (1211-1238). It was this king who regarded Purusottama as real Emperor, himself being his representative. He used the title Paramabhattaraka, Purusottamaputra, and Durgaputra. *Madalapanji* also states that this king introduced 36 types of duties for Sevakas, known as *Chatisanjyoga*, and Panda system as *tirtha* gurus. The other Ganga kings like Bhanudeva-I, Narasimhadeva-II, Bhanudeva-II had made all efforts to make Puri as chief religious centre. Here again we find Buddha was included in the Dasavatara and the great poet of this time Jayadev describe in *Gita-Govinda* Buddha as Jaganntha which reflected in the temple sculptural description of Jagannath Temple Puri and Madhava temple at Madhav in Prachi valley.

Again, Jagannath consciousness was renewed and reached at its climax particularly Vaisnavism with the Bhakti movement of Sri Chaitanya. Further, on the principle of Prema Bhakti or devotion by love was made only the path to attain Mukti and became the cult of mass and thus the Jagannatha as preceptor of love was spread over Orissa, Bengal and Assam.

From first part of 16th country the pilgrim movement to Puri was grown and it becomes the epi-centre of Vaisnava cult in the whole of eastern India. The rituals like Nagar Kirtan brought the medium for popularization of Jagannath cult and rested deep in to heart and mind of the common people. All along with this movement, again in 16th century the works of Pancha Sakhas like Balaram Das, Ananta Das, Achyuta Nanda Das, Jagannath Das and Jossabanta Das revealed the gospel of devotion based on knowledge and Yoga in preference to the doctrine of emotional love and faith as professed by Gaudiya Vaisnavas. By the way, numerous traditions and cultural synthesis were taken place in the Jagannath cult starting from Vedas, Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism Saktism and finally Vaisnavism. The shadow could be felt on the rituals, traditions, festivals and on the temple art and architecture.

After the death of Buddha the Buddhist followers were divided into broad sections, i.e. the Sthaviras or Theravadins and the Mahasamghikas or Achariyavadins. The Sthaviras were ardent supporters and preachers of Nirvana, faithful followers of Buddha’s teachings, worshippers of Dharma and loyal to the Sangha. *Milinda Panho* dealt with Nirvana. Asvaghosa in his *Saundarananda* compared Nirvana with the putting out of a lamp. But, the new entrants to
the Buddhist religion tried to introduce changes in the food habits, behavioural patterns, morality, marriage laws, etc. in lieu of Nirvana. From this time probably, they took fascination in magical performances.

The Buddhist God Avalokitesvara was conceived as fully compassionate and utterly self-sacrificing. In his attitude developed the eternal forgiveness. He was required to be worshipped as the god embodiment of endless forgiveness and compassion till the world is freed from sorrow. Avlokitesvara decided that he will not attain Nirvana till a single person in the world remained without being freed. It is known from the Karandavyuha that before Avalokitesvara attained Nirvana or mingled with Sunya he intended to impart religious preaching to his worshippers, devotees, admirers, subjects and children in the form of Siva, Ganesa, King, father and mother. The Jagannatha trinity is worshipped in the form of Visnu, Siva, Ganesa, King, etc. on various different occasions. Besides, the Oriya nation considers Jagannatha as its father or guardian. From this it can be felt that this philosophy of Avalokitesvara has been reflected in the Jagannath culture.

The followers of Avalokitesvara or his devotees got themselves prepared for enduring sorrow of the subsequent births till the world is free from sorrow and ignorance. From this point onwards the idea of removing sorrow and ignorance, through a series of births or, so to say, in Navakalevaras occurred in the Buddhist religion. If an analogy is drawn from the Jagannatha cult, we find that Jagannatha comes out each year from his sanctum on his way to Gundichaghara with a view to free the sinner and sufferers of this world devoted to him, particularly. His car (Ratha) journey during Gundicha festival performed after Navakalevara is very likely a symbolic representation of this thought.

The Buddhists who voiced the idea of Mahayana narrated the story of the earlier births of Buddha. In those births Buddha is said to have preached love and affection as a Bodhisattva. In order to remove ignorance from this world he is said to have taken recourse to meditation. Bodhisattva tried to spread religious ideas in this world and for this he had to sacrifice him for the growth of humanity. From this point of view if we look at the system of Lord Jagannatha, then we will find that, He is not like other gods of the Hindu pantheon. He is expressed in a simple and happy form symbolized with austere thoughts and is widely known as Patitapavana, i.e the saviour of the downtrodden. This is the special quality of the Bodhisattva in the Buddhist thought.

In the Mahayanic branch of Buddhism there is a section known as Mantrayana. In the same Mantra, Mudra, Mandala and Dharani or the repeated utterances of mantra alongwith the Vijamantra is included. This is the beginning of the tantric worship in the Buddhist religion. In the worship of Jagannatha Mantra, Mandal, Mudra and Vijamantra are usually used. But the presence of Yoga, Samadhi and Dharani are not to be seen. It may be in a changed state that the worship pattern of Jagannatha has undergone a change. However, the above items go to a certain extent to prove that the Jagannatha probably in the initial stage belonged to the Mahayana cult. Again, according to the nature of the Lord or Bhagavan Sri-kala-cakra developed Vimala-Prabha. The worshipper bows down before the same as the embodiment of sunya. As per their nature, they represented the idea of nothingness. Wherever they appear they cause Sunya to be their prime factor. So there are four stages regarding the appearance of the deities from the Sunya. The first lays stress on the proper realization of Sunya. The second connects the Vijaksara with the same. In the third is the connection of the image. Lastly comes the depiction of the outward appearance of the deity. The Jagannatha and his trinity could
be considered from these points. According to the Pancha-karma, a work attributed to the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna, the Sunya is divided into four sections. These sections are stated as Sunya, Atisunya, Mahasunya and Sarvasunya. Sunya has been described in the Lalita Vistara and Panchakarma as knowledge and woman. Following this it will be proper to consider Subhadra of the Jagannatha cult, as the deity of nothingness or Sunya. Atisunya is taken as the brightness or the abha- mandala. It dazzles like the moon-beam. Further, it is identified with that of upaya, alokabhasa, sunya and atisunya. This is also known as avidya (ajnana), alokapalavdhi and svadhisthana citta. Jagannath may be taken as symbolic representation of this combination. Sarvasunya is itself dazzling. This is suddhajnana (pure knowledge), sesasatya (the ultimate truth), aparivartaniya (un-changing), anakara (formless), advaita (undual), and avyakta (inexpressible). The existence and extinction of this is not known. But sarvasunya is expressed through the presence and absence of its beginning, end, and the middle. There is no demotion or growth in it. It is both saguna (qualitative) and nirguna (non-qualitative). This may have been the representation of Sudarsana of the Jagannatha cult, Thus, the concept of Jagannatha may be taken as symbolic representation as ‘sunya-chetana’ or the concept of nothingness.

According to Yogachara philosophy of Vijnanavada of the Mahayanic Buddhism propounded by Maitreya (C. 3rd Cen. A.D) sunya is attached with a particular consciousness. The Yogachara philosophy came into being from the concept of nothingness or sunya mingled with supreme knowledge or conception of mind or Vijnana. After this the idea of Mahasukha was connected with the same. This was termed as Vajrayana. The Nirvana of Vajrayana appeared from the combination of Sunya, Vijnana and Mahasukha. These three forms of Sunya go by the name of Vajra. The nature of this nothingness, if known as niratma or nairarma. Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra could as well be identified with the shapeless sunya images, i.e, sunya, Vijnana and Mahasukha. Since no proper evidence could be provided for the past and the future as in the case of the present so it may be held that there can be no end to the continuous flow of consciousness and thought process. That is called the indestructible science or supreme knowledge. This philosophy as propounded by Maitreyanatha, probably provided a basis for the thought of a perpetual presence of Jagannatha. For the same, it is said at a later stage that Jagannatha or the embodying image of all pervading thought is endless, and that is unending and much above destruction. It is said in a much later modern version that Jagannatha does not cease to exist on the destruction of the temple and the image.

According to Vajrayana, recitation of Dharanis brings indestructible merit (punya) to a person or he attains a fine personality through it. The sunya of Vajrayana remains far away from the earthly relations. It is un-involved like the ‘soul’ as mentioned in the Gita. In spite of the same the symptoms or the colour in command, the feelings or the sufferings, the supreme knowledge (Vijnana) attributed to five dhyani Buddhas of the Vajrayana cult is found implanted in the Jagannatha cult. Jagannath has the form; the various festivals as functions, etc may be considered to be his feelings and sufferings. He is present in the form of thought and in the worship or purification (sanskara). He is also held as the consciousness (chetana) of all pervading presence. In this consciousness there is accepted widely in the human society. Similarly, in the image concept, purificatory rites (samskara) etc. found related to Jagannatha cult, seem to have been connected with all types of human fascinations.
In the worship pattern of the Vajrayana Buddhists there lays some sort of especially in colours. In the same the white coloured full moon, the colour of the full blown blue lotus and in between then the presence of yellow coloured seeded incarnation (Vijamanka) ‘tam’ and its recitation is found applied to the invocation of Tara. The scholars also hold this that it is the embodiment of the entire Vajrayana worship pattern. In the Jagannath culture the white coloured Balabhadra, yellow coloured Subhadra and the black coloured Jagannath are strikingly similar to these Buddhist symbols.

The theory of Dhyani Buddhas, expounded in Tantric Buddhism, has found a striking exposition in “Visnugarbha Purana” of Chaitanadasa, where it has been given a novel Vaisnavite setting. This great philosopher conceives of six Visnus, one of which known as Nirakar Visnu is characterized as the shapeless and figureless Sunya and hence, is the same as Vajrasattva, while the other five who are emanations of Alekh Purusa, do undoubtedly resemble the five Dhyani Buddhas, i.e., Vairocana, Akssobha, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha and Anoghasiddhi. The tradition about the position of the Panchadhyani Buddhas in the Mandalas and similar mystic diagrams is also found in literature. In the “Visnugarbha Purana” the six Visnus including Nirakar Visnu are given similar positions in Sunya Mandal. Even the colour scheme found in the Buddhist pantheon is not missed and in the manner of six Tathagatas these six Visnus are represented in different colours like white, yellow, saffron, red, blue and green. Moreover as the five Tathagatas have their respective Bodhisattvas, four of these Visnus have four Brahmas of their own, who are credited with the creation of 84 worlds. It may be pointed out that the conception of five tathagatas is present in the Yogic speculation of Jagannath Cult, where five out of the six plexuses (sacakra) of the human body are presided over by five Devas, viz. Ganesh, Kamadeva, Brahma, Visnu and Siva and the sixth one by Anadi, the analogue of Adi Buddha. The noticeable fact is that the five Devas are represented with a number of accessories i.e., the divine Saktis, Vahanas (mounts), Bijamantras, Colours, Karmas (Actions), Pranas and vital winds almost in the manner of five Tathagatas (Dhyani Buddhas); the minor differences existing between the accessorail schemes of the Dhyani Buddhas and the Devas are probably due to the assimilative nature of the Jagannath Cult itself.

The message goes “Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world: through love alone they ceases. This is the eternal law”, reflected in both Jagannathism and Buddhism.

References: