Antiquities of Madhava Worship in Odisha

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Odisha is a confluence of innumerable religious sects like Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism etc. But the religious life of the people of Odisha has been conspicuously dominated by the cult of Vaishnavism since 4th Century A.D under the royal patronage of the ruling dynasties from time to time. Lord Vishnu, the protective God in the Hindu conception has one thousand significant names of praise of which twenty four are considered to be the most important. The list of twenty four forms of Vishnu is given in the Patalakhanda of Padma-Purana. The Rupamandana furnishes the twenty four names of Vishnu. The Bhagabata also prescribes the twenty four names of Vishnu (Keshava, Narayan, Madhava, Govinda, Vishnu, Madhusudan, Trivikram, Vanama, Sridhara, Hrusikesh, Padmanabha, Damodara, Sankarsana, Vasudev, Pradyumna, Anirudha, Purushottam, Adhokshajna, Narasimha, Achyuta, Janardana, Upendra, Hari and Srikrishna).

The name Madhava is third out of the twenty four names of lord Vishnu. There is a reference to Madhava in Markandeya Purana. The term Ma is Brahmarupini, original Prakriti, Narayani, Sanatani, Visnumaya, Mahalaxmi, Vedamata, Saraswati, Radha, Vasundhara, Ganga and Madhava is their consort. For the first time we get reference to Madhava in the Sruti section of the Brihadaranayaka sruti of the Satapatha Brahman belonging to Sukla Yajurveda and Kanya Sakha. It is noted that the God is realized in the lesson of Madhu for which he is named as Madhava. Another name of Madhava is said to have derived from the meaning Ma or knowledge (vidya) and Dhava (meaning Prabhu). The Utkal Khanda of Skanda Purana refers to the prevalence of Madhava worship in a temple at Neelachala. Madhava Upasana became more popular by great poet Jayadev. The widely celebrated Madhava become the God of his love and admiration. Through his enchanting verses he made the cult of Radha-Madhava more familiar in Prachi valley and also in Odisha. In fact he conceived Madhava in form of Krishna and Radha as his love alliance. He referred to Madhava in different verses.

The Madhava worship is very popular in Odisha. The archaeological evidences suggest its existence from the time of the Matharas, the contemporary of Guptas. The Mathara rulers embraced the Vaishnavite tenants and constructed monuments in honour of Vishnu. The Ningondi copper plate grant of Pravanjan Varma relates that he was a devotee of lord Narayana and the other rulers of the dynasty styled themselves as Parama Bhagavata. One king of this dynasty erected a temple in honour of Vishnu on the
Mahendra Mountain, in the ruins of which is seen a beautiful icon of four armed Vishnu made of chlorite stone. This temple may be identified with the temple recorded in the Ningodi copper plate.\textsuperscript{12}

By the epigraphic sources the Madhava worship was stressed from the time of Sailodbhava rule in the old Ganjam, Phulbani and Puri districts there appear the rulers bearing the name of Madhava. As per genealogy\textsuperscript{13} of this dynasty we get three rulers bearing the name Madhavaraja. The earliest of them was nick named Sainyabita - I who was ruling around 575 A.D. Hence, there must be the presence of a cult deity by the name of Madhava prior to this date for which the rulers of this dynasty were inclined to name themselves or named by their fathers as such by the influence of Bhagavata. Thus, by the middle of the sixth century A.D or at the earliest by the early sixth century A.D the cult of Madhava might be existing. For the first time Madhava Varma describes god Madhava as having disc in his hand, i.e. Chakradhara an iconographic point for his identification. In his khurda plates\textsuperscript{14} he has further observed that in case of all the Madhava images worshipped in Odisha the wheel is hold in the upper right hand.\textsuperscript{15} K.N Mahapatra places this king in the first half of the 7\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.\textsuperscript{16} It indicates the popularity of the name Madhava worship in Odisha. The Dasapalla copper plate\textsuperscript{17} grant of Parama Vaisnava Ranaka Sri Satru Bhanja Deva tribhubana kalasa issued from his capital Bhanjubalka in 812 A.D refers to Santosh Madhava. The location of the shrine has not yet been identified, but it is certain that in the image of Santosh Madhava was worshipped in the village of the same name. According to the Sanakhemundi copper plate grant of Indravarma Deva of the Eastern Ganga dynasty introduced the worship of Lokamadhava and Sanyabhukeswara Siva and donated land to some Brahmins. The Plate records;

\begin{quote}
Ekancha Srilokamadhavaya dattom Aparana ardhansam Bhattacharya Svyambhuvesvaraya dattam Apararn ardhamsam brahmanesbihyah. \textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

In another grant issued in 811 A.D by the queen of Ananta Varman of the Eastern Gangas there is a reference of the installation of Sri Lokamadhava image in a temple in the village Arali located on the bank of Mahendra tanaya of Paralakhemundi. These facts clearly indicate the prevalence of Madhava worship in Ganjam region.\textsuperscript{19}

Chodagangadeva, the founder of imperial Ganga dynasty installed Cholagangamadhava in
Rellivalasa village of Srikakulam district (Andhra Pradesh). This has been referred to in the four pillar inscriptions (issued in 1075 A.D, 1153 A.D, 1159 A.D and 1183 A.D respectively) found in the same village. In one of these pillar inscriptions engagement of priest, Badu and Drummers has been referred to the prevalence of Madhava worship in this region.

**Iconographic features of Madhava Images**

The iconographical features of Madhava which described in various religious texts like *Rupamandana* and *Aparajitapliha* mention the four *ayudhas* in his four hands like back right hand holds *Chakra*, *Sanka* in his left back, front left *Padma* and *Gada* is symbolically represented in his front right hand. The Madhava worship started with a personal favor by the Sailodbhava kings ruling from Kongada, the present Banpur-Puri area between 6th to 7th centuries A.D. So far we have come across three Madhavarajas in this dynasty who could have promoted the worship of this cult in Prachi valley and other areas. The Madhava images of the Sailodbhava Period seem to have egg shaped hollows at their ‘Prabha Mandala’ behind their head. The images of this period seem to be below 4’ in height and 1.6” in breadth.21

The advent of the Somavamsis who ruled Odisha in between 850 A.D to 1108 A.D gave a fresh impetus to the Madhava cult in Odisha. The Madhava images of the Somavamsi period are distinguished by tribhanga torana prabhas, comparatively larger images to that of the Sailodbhava period and enshrined in the brick temple separately built for the purpose. The Madhava images of the Somavamsi period seem to vary in dimension between 4’ x 2’.6” to 5” in height and 2’ to 2’.2” in breadth. The association of *Avatara* images started during this period in the Madhava images along with it separately.22

The Madhava images of the Ganga period (1108-1435 A.D) seem to be of life size, massive and very between 5’ to 6’ in height and 2’.3” to 3” in breadth. Some of the images have decorative ornamentation on the *toranas*, which are found absent in the earlier periods. The temples of the period are usually stone built and beautifully decorated Garuda images are seen placed in front of them.

During the Suryavamsi period the worship of Madhava is rarely found. The Sundara Madhava shrine referred might be an existing earlier one renovated by Purosottamadeva or a rare case of establishment. After the Gajapati rule we do not have any other reference to the
establishment of Madhava images or temples built for them.  

**Madhava images & Temples**

A large number of Madhava Temples and images are spread throughout Odisha particularly on the valley of Mahanadi, Vaitaran, Rusukulya and Prachi. Among them the earliest temple is the Nilamadhava temple one of the twin temples of Gandharadi in the district of Boudh (Fig. 1). The twin temples are dedicated to four-armed Nilamadhava (Fig.2) and Siddheswara Siva. The Vishnu temple contains the customary wheel on the pinnacle and the Siddheswara temple a lingam, a rare feature in the whole architectural gamut of India.

The Nilamadhava temple (Fig.3) at Kantilo on the bank of river Mahanadi is another centre of Madhava worship. The installation of the presiding God Nilamadhava (Fig.4) and Siddheswara Siva is assigned to the Somavamsi period. The temple built by them was ruined and the present temple is of later origin.

Prachi valley which witnessed the rise, spread and amalgamation of important Indian religions, was the greatest centre of Madhava worship in Odisha. The tradition of worship of *Dvadasa Madhava* and *Dvadasasambhu* is still prevalent in the sacred valley. Madhava images are worshipped in the niches of the Mangala temple at Kakatpur, the beautiful Vishnu image worshipped as Mudgala-Madhava at the village Mudgala (Fig. 8), the image inside the Jagamohana of the Someswara temple at Someswara, the Vishnu image worshipped as Madhava in the Viswanatha temple at Krishnaprasadgarh, the Madhava images at Kenduli, Madhava images at Adaspur, the Madhava images at Bolara, the Madhava images worshipped in the village Raghunathpur, P.S-Kakatpur, a Madhava image inside the ruined Siva temple at Gambharipada, and a Madhava image is placed inside the Siva temple at Nasikeswara. Triveni Madhava is worshipped at the confluence of Triveni near Villeswar Temple. The place is popularly known as Manikarnika tirtha and is sanctified for Triveni Madhava. The *Prachi Mahatmya* writes highlighting Triveni and Manikarnika. All the images give a clear picture of the popularity of Madhava cult in the Prachi Valley.
comprises a *Vimana* and a *Jagamohan*. A third stone structure known as *Bhoga Mandapa* is obviously of much later construction. The Madhava temple of Madhava village is one of the great temples of Odisha, the sculptor has retained many older features of style, such as classic poses and very little distortion and contortion occurs on the walls, but he was a master nevertheless and his architectural work equals some of the best temples of Orissa. Here is a temple not only worth visiting, but deserving much greater care in repair and restoration. 

A temple of Sundara Madhava at Purusottampur in the Ganjam District is assigned to the reign of Purusottama Deva (1467-1497 A.D) built by him. Presumably, this is the very Madhava who is being worshipped as Sundaramadhava in the Nandigrama on the river Rushikulya. It is presumed that the image was carved out during Ganga period, where as the dilapidated temple was renovated by Purusottama Gajapati. It is because there is no reference as to the construction of any Madhava temple in the Suryavamsi epoch.

It is said that Lord Jagannatha originated from Nilamadhava. The story of Nilamadhava recorded in the *Utkalakhanda* of *Skandapurana* has great relevance in this context. According to the story, the Nilamadhava worshipped by Viswawasu Sabara on the blue mountain was later on converted to Darurupi Purusottama Jagannatha. The legend has gained wide celebrity and popularity not only in Srikrshtra but in the whole Odisha. On account of the popularity of Nilamadhava legend Vishnu in Odisha came to be known as Madhava.

The antiquity and wide prevalence of Madhava worship in Odisha can be attested by the following *Mangalastaka* of Madhava Chanted in all auspicious occasions:

> "Mangalam Bhagaban Vishnu Mangalam Madhusudanah Mangalam Pundarikaksha Mangalam garudadhvajah".
> "Madhavo Madhavo Vishnu Madhavo Madhavo Harih Smaranti Sadhava nityam Sarvakaryesu Madhavam".
In view of the above discussion, it may conclude that, the worship of Madhava originally branched out from Vaishnavism, spread widely in the sacred land, conspicuously dominant the religious life of the people of Odisha and finally merged in Jagannatha cult like many other cults of Brahmanical religion.

References:

2. Padma-Purana (Sansk.)
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Skanda Purana* (Utkal Khand) 2.4.95.
17. ‘Dasapalla Copper Plate grant of Ranaka Satru Bhanja’ in *OHRJ*, Vol-II.
22. *Ibid*, P.25
23. *Ibid*.

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