Manifestation of Odia Nationalism in Jagannath Philosophy: A Mythological Study

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Down the ages, Lord Jagannath has emerged as a symbol of Odia Nationalism. The image of this nationalistic consciousness can be realized by understanding how the aboriginal tribes, deities or harbinger of ostrich culture known as Jagannath has been recognized as Maha Boudha, Maha Jaina and Lord of Brahmanistic Hinduism through cataclysm of history. In different branches and sub-branches of Brahmanism, such as Saiva, Shakta, Vaisnavism and Tantrik philosophy, we find Lord Jagannath occupying a pioneering place. One can realize the entire universe by seeing Lord Jagannath and Lord’s existence can be realised within the vast universe. In fact in the entire universe, there is one Lord in Whom the soul of entire unitary universe is epitomized.

The culture of Lord Jagannath originated during the period of primitive communism, which is called as the early civilization of human race by the social scientists. Later on, the Lord was perceived as belonging to different religions, different culture and different philosophies. If one analyses that colour scientifically, it appears that Lord Jagannath is the God of the entire Universe. One cannot understanding the Jagannath consciousness or Jagannath itself by understand mere devotion or mere mythology. One cannot catch the point where national integration or human integration is how embedded in the Jagannath cult by adopting this attitude. For that we have to leave the unquestionable devotion of the mythology. In this regard, the writer of communism Sri Guru Charan Pattanaik said “generally mythology” is written by the Brahman Purohits. Whatever may be the difference regarding the time of writing the Puranas, there is no divergent opinion regarding the fact that it is a matter of history. Human faith is shattered by consciousness so also the sanctity of mythology is broken by the question of history. So both science and mythology are antithetic to religion and live side.

We understand the origin of Lord Jagannath and its evolution by interpretation of the mythology but we never question the authenticity or logic behind the mythological events. Religion stipulates that mythology should be heard without questioning its authenticity. So also for realizing Lord Jagannath, interpretation of mythology is also similarly essential. Because by removing blind belief from one’s mind one can realise the feeling of Lord Jagannath. Dr. R.C. Hajra in his book has mentioned the origin of mythology and history under the title “Study of Puranic Record on Hindu Rites and Customs”. From all these, he comes to the conclusion that all the mythology is created after the birth of Jesus Christ.
Lord Jagannath establishes that the spirit of nationalism is above the limitation of time, space and object of human being. Its land and geographical limits are of no value in the cataclysm of time. Realisation of Lord Jagannath has great feeling, the time is super time and limits are unlimited. The culture of Odisha and the tradition of literature have its importance on this beginning from the Mahabharata of Sarala Das or Deula Tola of Nilambara Das till the devotional lyric of Bhima Bhoi or modern poet Madhusudan that great feeling and consciousness are being realised. If we interpret evolution of society, it will appear that Jagannath consciousness is quite old. Sri G.C. Pattanaik adopts a new attitude while discussing this aspect of Lord Jagannath, “the division of class emerged at the time of development of Sindh civilization, so it has come after the Jagannath Cult development. From the point of view of social evolution, Jagannath society is ancestral to Hindu Dharma development on the remnance of Indus Valley Civilization. So also both Indus Valley Civilization has developed on the remnance of Jagannath Culture or developed on the remnance of old communist society. These two civilizations are two stages of social evolution. Former or later, they admit the inevitable consequences of social evolution.

Jagannath consciousness gradually emerged with national feeling and national integrity at the time of king Ananga Bhima Deva and it attended its complete form at the time of king Kapilendra Deva, who belongs to Solar Dynasty. Ananga Bhima Deva was a popular administrator among the Gajapati kings. During his time, the boundary of Odisha was extended from Kanga Banga to river Doreibudi. This has been mentioned in Madala Panji. Similarly as per Madala Panji, in the west it was extended from Bhinnagar Dandapati to Sonepur. From the vast territory of Odisha, i.e. Utkal at that time, revenue to the tune of Rs.20 lakhs (Madha of Gold) was collected. Ananga Bhima Dev prepared necessary plan for incurring proper expenditure of these collected gold. Addressing his successor monarch, he has mentioned that if any of the kings makes any exception to the arrangement he has made for expenditure of this treasure, he will be a culprit in the eye of Lord Jagannath. By this, the king has his loyalty to the estate. Madala panji records how the income and expenditure has been projected by the king for the nation as well as the Lord of the nation. During the time of Ananga Bhima Deva, Lord Jagannath has already attained the status of State Deity, i.e., Rashtra Devata.

During the time of Gajapati Ananga Bhima Deva, Jagannath temple was not only constructed, it was working as a promoter of unity in political, social and cultural consciousness of Odisha. After Ananga Bhima Deva, many legends, folklores and stories concerning Lord Jagannath is being heard. If we interpret and analyse these legends, we can realise how cultural and spiritual unity is embedded in those stories. It may be noted that there may not be historical truth behind these stories, but this contribution for maintaining the integration and integrity of Odias could not be denied. As a result, though not supported by history, these hearing and folktales have been able to unveil the greater truth behind the history. Not only history and legends have been created to establish the supernatural power of Lord Jagannath, but also the blessings of Lord Jagannath had been sought for maintaining political stability of Odisha. Again for administration of Odisha and selection of different Gajapati Kings, blessings of Lord Jagannath had been sought. One Mattabhanu Deva, who was having no children, prayed the Lord to know, who will be his successor after him, Lord informed him in his dream that “tomorrow while
worshipping Goddess Bimla, you will find a beggar eating the Prasad from a broken earthen pot and running away on seeing you, he will be your successor”. And Kapilendra Deva, who was doing this work, became the successor of Mattabhanu Deva. Similarly, on 35th years of his reign, King Kapilendra Deva sought blessings of Lord Jagannath and prayed to know his successor. That night, he was informed in his dream that Purusottam Deva will be the next successor, Kapilendra Deva was surprised.

The Gajapati kings of Odisha are the servants of the people as well as Lord Jagannath. So his pride is a pride of entire Odias. To keep up that pride, Lord Jagannath and Balabhadra have gone to the war field riding white and black horse. He sweeps at the time of car festival as servant of Sri Jagannath. The ego of monarchy is sacrificed when he works like a common sweeper. The idealism in loss of kingly pride and ego can be observed here. The King of Kanchi saw this sweeping in a different way and he refused to give his daughter Padmavati into marriage with Purusottama Deva. As a result, Purusottama Deva started his campaign against Kanchi being assisted by Lord Jagannath and Lord Balabhadra and the kingdom of Kanchi was defeated. While going on Kanchi campaign, on the way the Lords took curd from one milkmaid, namely Manika to quench their hunger and thirst and gave their diamond rings to her. The king later while going for Kanchi Abhijan could saw the diamond ring and got confirmed about the blessings of the Lords. This is a story which has tremendous impact on the mind of the people of Odisha. From this story, how Lord has come down to common man and takes revenge on the insult flattered to his devotee is clearly depicted. In old mythology “Chakoda Pothi” this story is described in a different manner. Purusottam Das has written a lyric, namely Kanchi-Kaveri, where this has been described beautifully, so also in the writings of Utkalamani Gopabandhu Dash. This has also been described in various literature of Odisha, some of which are Kanchi-Kaveri of Ramasankar Roy, Purusottama Deva of Godabarish Mishra, Abhijana by Kalicharan Pattanaik. These dramas had a great role in controlling the national life of Odias.

Prataparudra Deva succeeded Purusottama Deva to become the Gajapati king. During his time Lord Chaitanya came to Odisha and the spirit of Vaisnavites cult prevailed. The Pancha Sakha played a pioneering role in spreading devotional cult of Lord Jagannath. All their writings hovered round Lord Jagannath. The concept of Gyana Bhakti and Prema Bhakti became integrated in the soil of Odisha. When Prataprudra Deva during his 17th years of reign was in a sojourn to south India, the Moguls from Gouda kingdom attacked Odisha during this time, taking advantage of absence of the king. The servitors saved Lord Jagannath by secretly carrying the Lords to Chadheiguha hill in boat. Getting information, Prataparudra Deva came from South and removed Moguls from Odisha. But one Gobinda Bidyadhar taking the advantage of the volatile political situation killed 32 sons of Purusottama Deva and adorned the throne. But he could not live in peace. Thereafter continuously Odisha became victims of the attack of Moguls, Marathas, Afghans and Britishers.

During the period of despair and distress in the lives of Odia nation, Lord Jagannath has become a symbol of national unity and security. Hence, attempt was made to plunder the ornaments of the temple and to remove the idols inside and destroy them. But despite that, attempt was foiled by the Odias. Many a times the Moguls, Afghans, Muslims have attempted to ransack the temple and the Lords. During British time also
they tried to establish their suzerainty over the temple. But in course of time all these attempts have become futile. Jagannath consciousness and national integrity of Odias have remained unbeaten during the period of such national disaster and distress. The flag Neela Chakra is flying as usual and spreading the eternal message of unity and integrity.

During the time of Mukunda Deva, the king, Kalapahada attacked the temple. The king hid the Lord to save from aggression. But Kalapahada could detect the Lord and carried on the back of the elephant. The Madala Panji records this incident like this: “During this time Divyasingha Pattanaik hid the Lord at Chhapali Sathi Pada. But Kalapahada detected and crossed the river confluence (Muhana), carried away the Lord on the back of elephant and ransacked the temple, carried the Lord to the bank of river Ganga and burnt the wooden idol in fire. During that time, the body of Kalapahada broke into pieces. Hearing this, the son of Kalapahada threw the remnants to the river Ganga. When remnants of Daru was floating on the river, one Dhibara took it as a piece of fire wood and threw in his court yard. While taking the Lord, Biswar Mohanty was with him. For eight months, he stayed there, performed musical and lyrical activities, had kirtan and brought back the Daru inside his Mridanga, came to Kujangagada, hid both the Lords inside the paddy pot.

The book Madala Panji contains a clear testimony of attempts made by outsiders during foreign rule. After Odisha lost its independence, Mansingh, the lieutenant of Akbar helped to make Ram Chandra Deva, the Gajapati king of Odisha. He brought the sacred Brahma from Biswar Mohanty and constructed the idol of Lord Jagannath to be installed in the temple. History corroborates that the 2nd Ramachandra Deva in order to save Jagannath from the invader Taki Khan adopted Islam religion and was named as Hafiz Quadir Beg and married the sister of Taki Khan Razia. Hence, Lord Jagannath has irresistible influence over the religious feelings of Odia and had also saved Odias during national crisis and disaster. During 19th Century, when British Government wanted to establish rights by sending Ramachandra Deva in exile, advocate Madhusudan Das being invited by the queen Suryamani Pattamahadei studied the Madala Panji and other religious literature preserved in the palace and fully realised that the British Government cannot take over the management of the temple (Books & Books – page – 131 written by Dr.Baisnab Charan Samal).

The dance and music of Shree Mandir has greatly influenced the religious consciousness and musical tradition of India. Specially the beautiful songs of Geeta Gobinda written by Odia poet Jayadev contains patriotic ethos of indianism. His poetic talent had completely overshadowed the civic life of Indian populace. His lyricism and poetic eminence extended from Gujurat to Bihar, Kerala to Nepal. In the procedure of worship, Geeta Gobinda has been expected as an inseparable element. In all Jagannath Temple of India, this procedure has been recognized. In the 12th Century, the book Sadukti Karnamruta and in 14th Century, the book Rasika Priya Tika of Rana Kumbha of Gujurat also contains citation from Geeta Gobinda. The citations rituals of Jagannath temple, where Geeta Gobinda is not only sung, but also exhibited in dance form has enriched the dance tradition of India such as Manipuri, Kathakali, Bharata Natyam and Odissi. No dance programme can be complete without
Geeta Gobinda. This is a clear example of national integration. The symbol of Odia integration and nationalism has also become a symbol of Pan-Indian consciousness. The great poet Pandit Gopabandhu Das has written in his poem “no work is stopped in the absence of a leader; the boat of religion moves with the influence of religion. There is no need of leader in Great Utkal; as Lord Jagannath is the leader of the land”.

The researcher, Dr. Shubhakanta Behera has commented on Lord Jagannath that “as we saw, the Jagannath cult has a mythic past constructed in the legend of its origin; it is highly eclectic, able to accommodate all Hindu faiths and traditions, even Buddhism and Jainism and it has had a long history of the God-Kings relationship. In consequence, Vishnu/Purusottama was transformed from Pan-Hindu deity to an Odia deity called Jagannath, although His Pan-Hindu character was retained. He came to assume the meaning of unifying force of common religious experience of the people inhabiting in the region. So it may be argued that these aspects of the Jagannath cult, namely, a constructed if mythic past, eclecticism and king cult nexus gave to Lord Jagannath, a new meaning of collective consciousness (Construction of an Identity Discourse – Page – 42-43; Dr. S. Behera, M.M. Publisher Pvt.Ltd.-2002).

Jagannath is not the Lord of the soil of Odisha. He is the promoter of the thought and consciousness of Pan-Indian feeling and the symbol of universal unitarism. His philosophy is the philosophy of the universe and His existence is embedded in various philosophies of the world. The critic Guru Charan Pattanaik has rightly said "ethics, justice, integrity and principle are the basic things. Those are elements of humanity. Man is striving relentlessly to acquire those idealism. But he has no balance to measure. In that society, man expresses humanitarian by nature. Similarly Jagannath expresses His greatness when Lord Jagannath in every society uses its greatness, man also loses humanitarian ties. Hence, men become Jagannath and Jagannath transcend to men. Men attain salvation by realising Lord Jagannath, similarly Lord Jagannath also gets salvation by dissolving himself in the vast humanitarian humanitarianism (Book Jagannath Darshanare-Jagata by Guru Charan Pattanaik, Odisha Book Store-1998 Page-353).

The Jagannath consciousness is embedded in the universal consciousness and has a great mantra of humanitarianism. Down the ages it has given a clarion call of mingling with the soul of universe. This Jagannath philosophy, which has given shape and colour to universal life contains and manifests truth down the ages that promotes Odia nationalism and integration, complements and supplements pan-Indian nationalism and correlates the feeling of unity and integrity all over the world.

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