Vedic Background of Jagannath Cult

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Preregomenon:

The origin of Jagannath Cult has been traced back to the time of the Veda. The images of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra of the Jagannatha Temple at Puri are made of Daru (Neem Wood) which is specially chosen with its symbols and characteristics. Therefore, Lord Jagannatha is called "Daru-Devata", the deity made of wood. In the Rgveda, we find the mention of Daru floating in the ocean. Prayers are chanted here for taking shelter in the Daru.

The deities of Jagannatha temple of Puri are worshipped with Gayatri Mantra which has its Vedic origin. Lord Jagannath is worshipped according to Dasaksari (ten syllabled) and Astadasaksari (eighteen syllabled) mantras. Balabhadra is worshipped as Vasudeva (the son of Vasudeva) with the twelve-syllabic Vasudeva Mantra. He is worshipped with the hymns of Purusa Sukta since he is treated as Virata. In the worship of goddess Subhadra, Sri and Devi Suktas of the Veda are used. Subhadra is worshipped with monosyllabic, (Ekaksara) Mantra "Hrim".

Every year the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath is held at Puri and other places in India and abroad. The origin of the Ratha (Chariot) has been traced back to the Vedas. The Rgveda mentions the three storyed Rathas drawn by horses. These Rathas, according to Rgveda were moving in the air. As described in the Atharvaveda, the divinities were chariots.

The observance of the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath dates back to the period of the Puranas. Vivid descriptions of this festival are found in Brahma Purana, Padma Purana and Skanda Purana. Kapila Samhita also refers to Ratha Yatra. According to Satapatha Brahmana, Ratha has been originated from one of the broken part of the weapon flung by Indra on the body of the demon Trtrasura during the fight between the two.

From the above considerations, it seems that there exist so many links between Veda and
the Jagannath Cult. In the present paper, it is aimed to investigate the speciality of the stones and metals used in the construction of the temple of Lord Jagannatha at Puri and in the worship of the deities there.

Vedic Stones and Other Building Materials:

Out of the four Vedas, Rg, Yaju, Sama and Atharva, most of the Suktas of the Ṛgveda are connected with religious discourses. The essential feature of the Yajurveda is relevant to the performance of sacrifices. The Samaveda is the foundation for Indian music. The Atharvaveda is noted to be the foundation of the science of Indian medicine. It is also observed that this Veda is the source of the Science of Indian Archery (Dhanurveda). The Vedic hymns contain in them the subject matter of various disciplines of human knowledge: namely religion, art, music, culture, geology, physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, sociology, poetics, agriculture, astronomy, astrology, cosmology, mathematics, literature, language, environment and others; all blended in one. Here we are concerned only with the geological aspects of the Ṛgveda since we are to identify here the stones and metals mentioned in the Vedas. Moreover, there was spectacular advancement in the study of metallurgy during the Vedic period. Later on, this led to the geological foundation of our Hindu religion.

The Yajurveda refers to some inorganic materials like rocks, soil, mountains, hills, sands etc. The rocks take variety of shapes undergoing through severe geological phenomena in nature. For example, the Hindus worship the lingas which are nothing but forms that have been a result of prolonged differential weathering of the ground or rocks. These rock-pieces, however, hold the religious ethos and receive considerable appreciation. In the ancient times, the rocks were the chief building materials of the temples of the Hindus and shrines of the Jainas and Buddhists. Different types of stones have been used in the construction of various temples of our country. The famous Jagannatha temple at Puri is made out of a type of rock called khondolites. The famous Hoysala temples of Karnataka are carved out of steatite; those of Badami are of sandstone; many of the South Indian temples are made of granites, charnockites and similar rocks. The temples of Maharashtra are made of basalt. The famous Ajanta and Ellora cave temples are made of basalt rocks which are highly jointed and can break into angular pieces when even hammer weight is applied. Most of the temples in Gujurat and Rajasthan are made of marble. According to their acoustic property, these rocks have been classified as male, female and hermaphrodite. The rocks which produce bronze sound on the application of hammer weight are called male, those producing a brass sound as female both these as hermaphrodite. In Silpasastra, the male rocks should be used for carving male deities, the female rocks for female deities and the hermaphrodite rocks for making the base and other parts. This attitude of giving religious colour to a geological truth is rooted in the Vedic times.

Vedic metals in the worship of Jagannatha - Triad:

The Yajurveda mentions the metals like gold, silver, iron, lead, tin, copper and steel for the performance of sacrifices. Out of these metals, gold and silver are chosen for making ornaments; and the utensils of the deities are specially made of brass, silver, copper and gold. Bronze and Brass alloys have not been mentioned in the Yajurveda; probably they are later to the Yajurvedic period. The Niladri Mahodayam hints at the ornamental value of the gold.
Vedic soils in Jagannath Temple

The use of earthen pots were there in the ancient times. White, red and black soils have been mentioned in the *Grhyasutras*. The *Niladri Mahodayam* mentions that the red coloured pots are used in the temple of Lord Jagannath for cooking of food, whereas the black coloured pots are not fit for the kitchen. The cracked-pots and the pots having holes were unfit for use.

To sum up, it can be said that Jagannathism totally rests on Vedism in respect of geological components and so many other attributes. Vedic thoughts and pantheons have been reflected here in the Jagannath Cult. The elements of *Daru*-worship, *Ratha Yatra*, mode of worship employing *Gayatri-mantra*, temple architecture with vedic stones, use of utensils made of metals mentioned in the *Vedas* and cooking of food for the deities of Srimandira in the specially designed pots made out of red soil referred in the Vedic hymns, etc. provide evidences of Vedic view of Jagannathism. Further investigations, no doubt, can reveal many more facts regarding Vedic background of the Jagannath Cult.

**References:**

   
    *Skanda Purana*, *Utkala Khanda*, Chs.33-35.
17. *Yajurveda*, IV.5.

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