



ICONOGRAPHY OF JAGANNATH

● Janmejay Choudhury

Orissa is called Bhagabat Desh and Puri is called the Purusottam Kshetra or in brief Purustam. Orissa is therefore, called the land of Purusottam or Jagannath Desh. History does not speak of any other state in the world whose sovereign is the Lord of the Universe save that of Orissa. Purushottam Kshetra has assumed prominence gradually. It had enjoyed a hoary antiquity in tradition; in the apurusa daru of Rig Veda, Atharva Veda and in many other ancient texts. By seventh century Bhagavan Purusottam had appeared in Kailan copper plate inscription and by eighth century Jagannath found place in Jnanasidhi of Indrabuti, king of Uddiyana. The Anargha Raghava of Murari Misra (9th century), Trikandasesa of Purusottam Deva (9th century) mentioned Jagannath. Similarly Matsya Purana (400-1250 A.D.), Skanda Purana (700-1300 A.D.), Agni Purana (900 A.D.), Brahma Purana (900-1500), Padma Purana (950-1400 A.D.), Kalika Purana (11th century), Ratnamala of Satananda (11th century) mentioned variously about Purushottam Kshetra/ Nilagiri/Darumurti/Balabhadra/Jagannath etc. The Kalidindi grant (1031 A.D.) of Chalukya king Rajaraj and the inscription of Kalchuri king Gopal Dev at the Boran Deo temple (1033 A.D.) also mentioned about Purushottam Deva and Purushottam Kshetra.

Rig veda has a reference to Daru in one Sukta (X.155.3) and also to the deity of Purushottam on the sea-coast. In

Atharva Veda we know about Daru and sea-shore (Paippalada Samhita, VI 8.7.). In Purushottam Tattwa (Jiv. 11, 563), Raghunandan explains the verse from both Rigveda and Atharva Veda with reference to Purushottam Jagannath of Puri.

Lord Jagannath is known as Purusottam and is made of Daru (Log of sacred wood). According to Sayana, there are three Suktas in Rigveda which indicate that Daru was regarded as the symbol of Brahman. "The immutable aspect of Brahma as different from the mutable aspect is compared with a tree containing many branches which in its aspects of unity is the absolute, the motionless and the eternal one." Sayana suggests by interpreting these Suktas that the tree which is the most ancient and imperishable is Brahman himself. On the basis of Sayana conception, Brahma can be symbolised as a tree and the Pranava is the symbol of Brahman. The four Mantras of Pranava may correspond to the four Padas of Brahman and the four forms were carved to translate Brahman worship into Pranava worship. The Pranava worship later took the Tantric form and subsequently the Puranic form and in this way the worship of Daru Brahman and Pranava have been transformed into the worship of Balabhadra, Subhadra, Jagannath and Sudarshan. This constitutes the basic tradition of the worship of Jagannath, the Daru Brahman. The Swetaswar Upanisad and the Kaivalya Upanisad



describe Purusa, the creator of the universe, (the Brahman) as one who possesses neither hands nor legs, who has no eyes but sees everything, no ears but hears all and who though unknowable knows everything. This description of Purusa explains the peculiarity of the form of Purushottam of Puri. The Niladrimahodaya enumerates the seven fold images of Purushottam Jagannath as Sri, Pusti, Bhu, Madhava, Chakra, Chakri, Avanibrut (Ananta-Balabhadra), Bhdra (Subhadra) and describes the colour of Jagannath as sky-blue and of Balabhadra white, with two of their four hands concealed. The colour of Subhadra is yellow with no visible hands being stretched down. Sudarshan is described as having pillar shape and Jitendriya (controller of senses). The Lord, in company of other three deities remains central to all faiths, rituals and activities in his mysterious forms and symbols through the ages. The Daru form continue to exist since its very inception and neither metal nor stone could replace the content of the form. Some scholars like Pandit Nailakantha Das etc. say that the three images collectively stand for the Jaina trinity of Samyak Jnana, Samyak Charitra and Samyak Drusti. Dr. H.K. Mohtab and other say that the three images in Puri temple are of Buddhist origin representing Jagannath as Buddha, Subhadra as Dharma (as Dharma in Buddhism is believed to be a female) and Balabhadra as Sangh (monastic order where the relationship between monks and nuns is designed as that of brother and sister).

Lord Jagannath is the confluence of all religions. All literatures refer to three names in their text - Indradyumna, Viswavasu (the son of Jara Savara) and

Viswakarma connected with Lord Jagannath. There are various legends associated with these celebrated names. Sarala Das's (15th century A.D.) Mahabharata, Nilamber Das's Deulatola, Kanhei Khuntia's Mahabhava Prakasa, Sanatan Goswami's Bruhat-Bhagavatamruta, Sisukrushna Das's Deulatola, Jagannath Das's Darubrahmagita, etc. have identified the Daru with the half burnt body of Lord Srikrishna and established the uninterrupted connection of Jagannath of Kaliyuga with Krushna of Dwapar Yuga in the line of Vishnu Purana.

But the images of the Lord are made of Nima Daru (Neem wood). Bhabhisya Purana says that Nimba wood is the most auspicious material for making the images of Vishnu. Neem is auspicious for all castes and the sight of other wood is not auspicious for all. Even sandal wood is not auspicious for Kshatriyas and Sudras. According to Vaikhanasagama, Neem is a male variety, and therefore, it is suitable for Vishnu. The Bruhat-Samhita says that if Lord is worshiped in the form of Daru, all the four aspirations of man - namely Ayu (longevity), Sri (wealth), Vala (Strength) and Jaya (victory) are fulfilled, but on worship of the Lord in other metals or materials men may get one or two of these benefits. Kasyapasilpa, Vishnu Samhita etc. confirm this argument. The images are Chalachala (movable immovable) as they go out of the Ratnavedi only twice a year - during Snana Yatra and Ratha Yatra. The eyes of the Lord Jagannath are round and called Chakadola, whereas the eyes of Balabhadra and Subhadra are like human eyes. The concept of Chakadola comes from the description that the eyes of



Vishnu are like the Sun and Moon. The roundness and circular shape depicts the limitlessness. Similarly, the fingers and legs are concealed, which indicate that He can catch with invisible hands and move unseen. There are no eye brows which explain the expansiveness of his round eyes to infinity. The Lord is in all embracing and welcoming posture. That is the climax of his grace and symbol of his love.

The image of Lord Jagannath, the Chakradhari is made according to Chakrayantra. The wood used for making the image should be divided into two parts having 14 Bhagas (8 parts) above and 18 Bhagas below, while the Jamyabhaga (central portion) shall be 10 1/2 Pavas (one Pava is about an inch). Each of the lotus feet is 15- 10/16 Pavas and the remaining 14 Bhagas consisting of 50- 12/16 Pavas make 84 Pavas in height. Lord Jagannath is 84 Pavas in height. Both the arms are divided into 12 Bhagas each and the concealed portion of the arm is 28 Pavas. The side arm which is visible is of 8 Pavas, the portion of the nose 1/10 of the side arms (i.e. 8/10 Pavas) and the lower portion of the nose is 12 Pavas. The circumference of the face is 30 Pavas. At the heart portion 4 Pavas are left to instal the Brahman. The image of Balabhadra is based on Sankhayantra. The colour of Balabhadra is that of Sankha (conch shell), namely white. The image of Balabhadra is of 85 Pavas in height. The wood is divided into 32 Bhagas (parts), face covers 31 Pavas, upper portion of the face 5, shoulders 11, heart 9, central portion of heart for Brahman 10, lower

portion 18, each arm 24, two Phalas (sections) shining above the shoulders 2 each, nose 1/2. Each arm and area of the face 21, above portion above the nose 18, below the nose 8, forehead, the head portion 5 Pavas. The image of Subhadra is based on Padmayantra and the colour is yellow it rises up to 52 Pavas. The face is 17 Pavas, the area of the face 15, central portion 12, lotus feet which are concealed 17, each arm which is concealed 15 and the side arm 17. The arms raised upward are joined with the hip. The image of Sudarshan is based on Gudaa Yantra and its height is 84 Pavas with a circumference of 21 Pavas.

From the beginning of Ganga rule the shrine of Jagannath had became famous, Yayati 1 (885-925 A.D.) of Somavamsi dynasty and Chodaganga Deva (1077-1147 A.D.) had built the magnificent temple in the shrine which gradually became famous as a great religious centre. The political condition of India in 12th century after Turkish invasion also enhanced its sacredness. The cult of Lord Jagannath not only influenced Orissa but also the Buddhist people of Java, Bali, Siam, Burma, where the term Sriksheeta was used and stories of similar nature were in circulation. However, the images worshipped today have enjoyed continuity of tradition and permanence.



*Lecturer in History
Sri Jagannath College
kaipadar, Khurda (Orissa)*