



The Legend of Raghua, the Fisherman and Sri Jagannath

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Lord Jagannath is Known as a Legendary God. The very genesis of the deity is based on various legends. Since then a lot of legends are found in different scriptures in Odia language. Again a lot of legends yet to find their places in scriptures but alive in the form of story telling from generation to generation. The present presentation of the legend is a finest example of transformation of an ordinary fisherman to a high degree of spiritual personality. This was possible with sheer concentration in meditation, self-

confidence and self-reliance. I often compare this personality with the saint, Dasyu Ratnakar, but fall back in view of the excellency in literary achievement by the latter. But then it is also a unique case where Lord Jagannath left the great and majestic temple shrine and luxury of Chapana Bhog (variety of food items) in order to enjoy whatever food cooked and offered by a dedicated

devotee with utmost love and devotion at his poor thatched house. I personally feel it as a rare achievement so far as spirituality is concerned.

The Bhagabat; after being written in Odia Language by Atibadi Jagannath Dash, the eminent poet and a great devotee of Lord Jagannath of

yester years, geared up a cultural revolution which influenced life of the Odia society in every nooks and corners of the state. Almost all the villages then had a Bhagabat Tungi, suitably



situated for the convenience of the village folk. Every evening a literate man used to read this sacred book aloud in the dim light of a Dipa (An earthen ware then used in every household for the purpose of light in the night by means of a cotton wick immersed in oil, namely Polang oil) and the villagers, mostly agro based class, were



sitting around him to listen for their enlightenment (not for entertainment). The language of the Bhagabat though explicitly written and lucid, for better understanding of the illiterate village folks, the reader used to explain, stanza by stanza, whenever and what ever possible on his part.

Pipili, a village situated on the side of N.H. 203 in between Bhubaneswar and Puri, is now very famous for its appliqué works. The old name of Pipili was Pipirali. In those days Pipirali had also a Bhagabat Tungi. Every evening a villager named Dhukudi Nana used to read Bhagabat and the village folk used to listen him around. Raghu alias Raghua a fisherman of that village was a regular listener amongst others. The day probably arrived on the life of Raghua for a show down of his achievement of enlightenment. He was as usual, very very attentive that day when Dhukudi Nana recited a stanza from Bhagbat, “Manushya dehe Dibya gyana, Dekhi santosh Bhagabana”, and explained in simple but rustic vocabulary that God was pleased to see the wisdom of human being, a race of his own creation. Somehow, this explanation appealed to the inner most self of Raghua and he recited the stanza to himself again and again, while returning to his home. Then suddenly he was struck with a question to himself, what wisdom I have! why should God be satisfied to see me ? As such, being borne in a fisherman family, traditionally my profession is to kill fish every day in order to maintain my family and myself. This question made him restless and Raghua did not get sleep the entire night. The cawing of the crow alarmed him of ushering in the rise of Sun in the eastern horizon. He got up from the bed and sat on his outer veranda in a remorseful mood. His mother was astonished to see him at this hour of the day as this was time for her son to be away to the riverside for netting. She anticipated something wrong with her son to

see him remorse. As usual the inquisitive mother wanted to know if her son was sound physically and if so, why he had not gone for fishing along with other fishermen. Raghua replied that he would not go for fishing any more which is a sinful work. The mother was taken aback on hearing the reply of his only son, the bread earner. Yet she tried to persuade her son by telling that it has been their family profession traditionally transferred to him by his fore fathers and he has been doing it to maintain his family. As such it was not a sinful act on his part. Further, he has been feeding so many persons on his earning. But Raghua did not buzz an inch, with the argument that God would be displeased if he would kill the fish. The mother, thus apprehending a worst future of her life, argued sternly that she gave birth and took pain to rear him only to die wretchedly out of starvation at this fag end of her life.

This discussion between the mother and son was overheard by the wife of Raghua. She lost trust on her husband so far as her maintenance was concerned. So she prepared herself to go away to her parents house. This embarrassed Raghua. Out of disgust he got up and had his net to set out for fishing, telling to himself, that he would go on accumulating sins on him by killing of fish in order to feed the family.

Raghua, while going to the riverside for fishing, was praying Lord Jagannath that let no fish be entangled in his net. On arrival at the riverside he found his co-fishermen were as busy as a bee. Then he put his net disinterestedly in the river came back to sit on the river bank. He sat there the entire day. The red sun was sinking down in the western sky slowly but steadily. At this moment Raghua found a big fish being entangled in his net was trying to escape. This made him puzzled as to should he catch the fish or allow it to escape. If the fish is not caught his family would



starve and if the fish is caught he would displease the God and accumulate more sin. Finally he decided to allow the fish to escape into the deep water of the river. Confirming to his decision he rushed to save the fish from his net. But, as ill luck would have it, the fish succumbed being suffocated while Raghua was trying to release it from the net. It seemed to Raghua that the fish was calling desperately “save Narayan” “save Narayan”. Raghua left the fish in the river. But the fish, instead of swimming away into the deep water of the river, floated. Raghua was shocked and cried like a child and prayed Lord Jagannath for the life of the fish. But nothing happened. Out of despair he took a drastic decision that he would not return to his house until the fish is alive. He immediately took the fish to a nearby forest where there was a fountain. Raghua dug a small pool and filled it with clear and cool water of the fountain and left the fish in the pool to see whether clear water would help the fish to revive, but in vain. Losing all hopes of revival of the fish, Raghua sat for meditation praying Lord Jagannath and continued for two days uninterrupted, without food and water. The family members of Raghua were worried as Raghua did not return to house. So they wanted the help of other fishermen to find him out. Some of the fishermen came to the riverside in search of Raghua but found only his net. They called his name loudly but could not get any response. Raghua was then in deep meditation in the calm and serene spot of the jungle.

Raghua continued his meditation for the third day too, as still as a stone. At this stage of his meditation a Brahmin appeared before him and informed that his family members were searching for him anxiously hither and thither. As such he should immediately go home to relieve the old mother and young wife from their distress. But Raghua was unperturbed in his state of

meditation. This Brahmin was none other than the Lord Jagannath. Now the Lord attempted to convince Raghua that it would go against the law of nature to get back the life to a dead one and was beyond anybody’s capability to do so. Further, this was not the way to get blessings of God. Now Raghua opened his eyes and respectfully requested the Brahmin “Sir, please live me alone and mind your business” and closed his eyes again for meditation. The Lord tested the determination and now was convinced that nothing could abstain Raghua from his state of meditation. Then there was no other go for the Lord than to bless Raghua with his wish. So the disguised Lord shouted “look, the fish is not dead. It is as sound as any thing”. Raghua was thrilled hearing this voice. He opened his eyes and found that the fish was actually playing in the cool, clear but scanty water of the pool. But he was taken aback not to find the Brahmin who was then vanished. Now Raghua realised that the Lord came in the guise of a Brahmin and then cried loudly childlike, for not able to pay due respect. Lord Jagannath now appeared before Raghua. Raghua this time did not lose time and prostrated at the feet of the Lord at once while tears of joy rolled down over his cheeks being overwhelmed with happiness. He wanted to be excused for killing of fish for last several years and sought the blessings so that he could maintain the family without his family profession. Last, but not the least, his prayer was to grant him darshan as and when he would long for it. The Lord vanished in the thin air telling “TATHASTU” meaning Ok.

Raghua had the rare achievement of getting life to the dead one. He carried the fish carefully and let it go into the deep water of the river. Then he returned to his home joyfully singing songs in praise of his Lord all the way. His mother and wife were very happy to see him after three days of absconding. Some villagers were also



happy to see him. Raghua did not go for fishing from that day.

He moved in the villages singing devotional songs in praise of his Lord. Villagers loved to listen his devotional songs and offered alms with pleasure. He used to come back to his house with whatever little or more, thus received, for the just maintenance of his family.

He derived eternal pleasure leading his spiritual life. He also derived pleasure in sharing his meal to entertain stray and needy guests. Since then Raghua was known as Bhakta Raghu. But a few villagers, especially the younger generation, did not appreciate the life style of Raghua who did not do his professional work and getting alms by singing. One day he faced an open challenge on this score. But Bhakta Raghu did not mind to argue. So an arrogant youth struck him hard with a barbed stick on his head. As a result there was bleeding, oozing from the wound, and it was very painful too. But undaunted he continued on his daily job of singing the devotional songs and returned to his home as usual. The boy who struck him, fell down then and there and became unconscious. On getting this shocking news of their son, the parents rushed to the spot. They were appraised all about the incident by other boys of the village. The boy was lifted by the parents, to Bhakta Raghu's house and requested him to do the needful. But a few villagers blamed Bhakta Raghu for the misery of the boy and started abusing him.

Bhakta Raghu on looking to the condition of the boy immediately closed his eyes and started praying Lord Jagannath for the welfare of the boy. Time passed on. There was no change in the condition of the boy. The villagers lost trust on Bhakta Raghu and took it to be a gone case. At such a critical juncture the father of the boy

shouted" Raghu, see my son is moving his hands and legs. He has recovered". All the people present there were surprised to see that the boy, to whom they considered as a gone case only a little while ago, had come to sense. Bhakta Raghu on hearing the halloo of the people opened the eyes and saw the boy had actually come to sense. He patted him and requested with folded hands to the parents to proceed immediately to Purusottam (Puri) for a darshan of Sri Jagannath and to express their gratitude as the life of the boy had been granted by the Lord only. He had no role on this regard. Bhakta Raghu also prostrated before the people present at the spot and requested that he does not harm any body. Even he had given up killing of fish although it was his family profession. As such he may not be ill-treated.

The people present over their shouted in a chorus "Jai Bhakta Raghu, you are indeed a great devotee of Sri Jagannath and enlightened with high spiritual achievement. As such you deserve absolute respect of one and all".

The news of the boy and Bhakta Raghu spread like wild fire to villages far and wide. A gentleman from a far away village heard this news and came to him. He offered Raghua deities of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra to worship. Bhakta Raghu was very happy to accept the offer and enshrined the trinity in a room of his small house. Everyday he offered his diet, whatever was available but cooking carefully and devotionally. He used to distribute the Prasad to others before he took his own meal. Thus he became famous as Raghu Baba.

Lord Jagannath is known for His love for the devotees. The Lord was too much pleased with the devotion of Raghu Baba. Everyday during offerings of his food to the trinity, Sri Jagannath



along with the brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra used to leave the temple to enjoy the food offered by Raghu Baba at his house. As such the Pandas (Sevaks) who used to offer Anna and other varieties of items for the dieties by chanting specific Mantras could not feel the presence of the Trinity. This state of affairs continued next day and on. The matter was informed to Gajapati, the king and the prime Sevaka of Lord Jagannath. The Gajapati immediately appeared before the deities and fell at the feet of the Trinity begging apology if any thing wrong done knowingly or unknowingly by him or by any other Sevaks. The Sevaks also prostrated before the Trinity. Time passed on. Sun set in. The personal securities of the king engaged at four gates of the temple were anxious to know the reason of the unusual delay of the Gajapati inside the temple. Suddenly Gajapati heard a voice from Gambhira "king why are you torturing yourself without food or drink ? Probably you have mistaken our absence in the temple to be our anger. But that is not the fact. We are too much pleased with the devotional offerings of our devotee, Raghu Baba of Pipirali village. If you are actually interested for our return to the temple then bring my dear devotee from the village and place him near the banyan tree."

The king, Gajapati immediately got up from his state of prostration and informed the Sevaks about whereabouts of the Lord Jagannath along with the brother and sister. Next day, early in the morning, Gajapati along with his retinue accompanied by some Sevaks set out on the entourage to Pipirali village.

The villagers were surprised to see Gajapati in their village and followed the party. They were perplexed when Gajapati got down from his horse at the door of Raghu Baba. Gajapati entered into the house of Raghu Baba leaving others outside. While entering, Gajapati

got the usual aroma and flavour of the temple during the process of offering of Anna etc. Raghu Baba was deeply involved in the proceedings of offerings of the food which was prepared carefully and devotionally. Gajapati did not disturb a bit and stood still behind him. At the end of this proceeding Raghu Baba knelt down before the dieties and then stood up to see Gajapati behind him. But he had never seen Gajapati before. As such became inquisitive to know the identity. A sudden thrill engulfed him and he started stammering when Gajapati gave his identity. Immediately Raghu Baba was going to fall flat at the feet of Gajapati. But Gajapati did not allow him to do so and embraced him with soothing words that there was nothing to fear. Gajapati brought him outside, hand in hand. By then the crowd swelled up outside getting the news of arrival of the Gajapati at the house of Raghu Baba. The crowd could not believe to see Gajapati hand in hand with Raghu Baba. Gajapati pronounced before the crowd, "Raghu Baba is not an ordinary person but a great devotee of Lord Jagannath and highly spiritual. By order of Sri Jagannath I have come to welcome him to Sri khetra (Puri) along with his family members so that he would be privileged to have Darshan of the Lord everyday. The maintenance of the entire family would be my responsibility". On hearing the pronouncement of Gajapati the crowd shouted in chorus "Jai Jagannath" "Jai Gajapati", Jai Raghu Baba". Raghu Baba was dressed with gorgeous Pata and an ornamental headgear and was taken to Puri where he was given a warm reception.

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