

Entry of only Hindus Inside the Jagannath Temple at Puri

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Puri for over two millennia has commanded the reverence of the Hindus as “The realm established by the God” and “The land that take away sin.” Pertinent here is quote Hunter who says that Puri is the religion of pilgrimage beloved of Vishnu, known to every hamlet of India and to every civilized nation on earth, as the abode of Jagannath, the Lord of world..... This country is no fit subject for conquest, or for schemes of human ambitions. Exclaimed the victorious general of Akbar. It belongs to the God and from end to end is one region of pilgrimage. Hunter continues, this national reverence for holy places has been for ages concentrated on the city of Puri, sacred to Vishnu under this title of Jagannath....., Hindu religion and Hindu superstition have stood at bay for eighteen centuries against the world. Here is the national temple whither the people flock to worship from every province of India. Here is the Swarga-Dwara, the gate of heaven, whither thousands of pilgrims come to die, lulled to their last sleep by the roar of the eternal ocean. (Sir



William Wilson Hunter, Orissa: or the Vicissitudes of an Indian province under native and British rule, the Annals of Rural Bengal, 1872, Calcutta).

Oldest among the cities of Odisha from the historical point of view, Puri has the unique distinction of being a Kshetraraja (matchless centre as the seat of Vishnu who prefers it to Baikuntha) and a Tirtharaja (on the sacred Mahodadhi). Brihaspati Suri (Vide Laxmidhara, Suddhi Kalpataru. P.169) that there exists no barrier of caste during pilgrimage and Yatras (religious festivals). Perhaps this aimed at universalisation of religion. This applies to the Car-festival of the Deities, in conformity with Parameswara Samhita's (22, 129ff) prescription of an annual Parikrama of Deity to a Bithika (garden) for the longest period away from home that can be of 7 or 9 or 10 or 15 or 30 days.

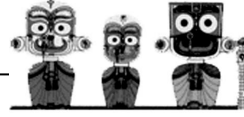
The culture of a people is the blood of its being. Culture is the quintessence and expression of the finer aspects of the life style of a group. It is



the short hand version of the rules and guide the way of life of the people or members of a society. It is a product and vehicle of values. The key to motivation lies in the realm of values. During the last 5000 years there has been an evolution of consciousness as for what Kant would prefer to describe as purposiveness without a purpose. Today, regardless of chronological, generic and ideological considerations, there have been conceptual modifications in changed material milieu. Interest is going beyond the usual reactive and linear model of thinking to a more creative and intuitive mode of thinking. Jagannath Dharma, the representative cultural continuum of Sanatana Dharma over a cycle of centuries, has to be studied in this context. Odishan culture offers a unique picture in the sense that since the culture of Odisha is synonymous with the culture of Jagannath, the later has determined the travail of evolution of Odishan civilization. The antiquity of Purusottam- Jagannath tradition has helped foster a 'volksgeist', a manifest in the supreme faith of its people in something higher and nobler which political power deemed necessary to encourage and support. From the oblique Rg. Vedic mention as also interpreted by Sayanacharya to the specific glorification of Jagannath in the Mahabharata and Puranas, from Indrabhuti's Jnanasiddhi (717AD) making the first historical mention of 'Jagannath' to Krishna Misra's 'Prabodha Chandrodaya Natakam' (1078AD) mentioning about the great temple (Devayatana) from the intense monistic deification of Jagannath by Adissankara to Murari Mishra's Anargha Raghav being enacted at the time of the annual Rath Yatra, from Siddhasena Divakara's (C.9th century) mention of the immense popularity of Jagannath well before the 9th century to Purusottam Deva's "Trikanthesha" that identifies Jagannath as Vishnu, from Tribhuvana Mahadevi's title of 'Paramavaisnavi' in spite of Harsha's

patronage of Buddhism to the copper plate grants of Nagari and Maihar, from the Nagpur stone inscription (1104) to Satananda's work in Puri from Laxmibhatta's "Tirtha Khanda" of "Kriya Kalpataru" of 1112A.D to the Vishaladev 'Raso' of Narapati Nalha (C.12th) in Hindi, from the Visistha dvaita deification of the triad at Puri by Ramanuja as a gleaned from Anantacharya's Prapannamruta' among others to Chand Baradai's famous work 'Prithiviraj Raso' and the Jain hema Chandra's 'Abhidhana Chintamani' – would reveal a glorious cavalcade substantiating to the historical authenticity of Jagannath Dharma, to describe which as a cult as per common parlance, is philosophically sacrilegious. The 'Gazetteer of Orissa' (Vol.ii, p.16) speaks of the worship of the deity during pre-Christian era, Mahamahopadhyaya Sadasiva Mishra identifies its antiquity in rich Vedantic tradition.

From tribal origin of the process of Sanskritisation Jagannath Dharma has passed through many vicissitudes, "A great peculiarity of India is that everything endures while everything changes. The importance of myths in this socio-cultural context is immense, "to justify an existing system and account of traditional rites and customs" (Robert Graves in P. Masson et.al.ed) Larousse Encyclopedia of mythology, Batch worth press, London 1959, pVIII). Indian myth is highly complex and swings from gross physical abandon to rigorous and easily misread, since Myth is a dramatic short-hand record of matters mostly pertaining to social reforms " , superimposed by the orthodoxy" which is "a possession of the priestly class" (ibid, p.391). A juxtaposition of the definite conditions that relate to the specificities of Jagannath-culture with the real needs of the people, there own values and potentialities is deemed incumbent. Jagannath Dharma is a quaint amalgam of the two divergent



streams of Tantircrites and Sanskritised tradition. Odisha as Uddiyanapitha was the most conspicuous centre of Trantricism in India. As such, tantric works like Rudrayamala, Shayarchana Taranga, Kalika Purana, Brihad Nila Tantra, Vimala Kalpa, Brahmamala, Trantrayamala, Pujakalpa, Jnanarnava Tantra works of the Natha-cult of Odisha and many Mahamantras. On the other hand there is a religious syncretism as a product of Sanskritisation. Jagannath, as Vishnu, is a manifestation of the sun as Sipi Vista clothed with rays of light, as per Rg. Veda (Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, P. 108) He was the epitome of energy (for the higher classes of Aryans) and fertility. This heliolatry (H.C. Rayachaudhury, Early History of Vaisnava Sect, 2nd edn., P.90) is traceable from the Ganga-rule in Odisha, or even earlier as Ganguly says (M.M. Ganguly, Orissa and Her Remains, p.365). The Konark sculptural piece depicting a combination of Surya and Siva, the only one of its kind in India (ARAS, Eastern Circle, 1906-07, p.13) is but one of the innumerable specimens of Siva-Shakti being very well synchronised in Jagannath Dharma. Interestingly the three images (on the interior wall of Konark) as depicted would imply Durga as the Shakti of Lord Jagannath that Siva, since the stands to the left of Jagannath. This is of great historical significance. Panini makes mention of 'Vasudevaka' community, traces of which can be found in the Prachi valley where Vasudeva and Madhava become as co-relative as Nilamadhava of Gandharadi and Kantilo, Chakramadhava of the Sailodbhavas and Savari Narayana (daru) etc. As per the 6th Century inscription of Hastivarman, Narayanan and Vishnu were deemed identical in Odisha. Indica of Meghasthenes (c.4th Century B.C says that Heracles (Krisna) was worshipped as God (Vasudeva-Krisna) vide R.G. Bhandarkar) in Klesobora (Krsnapur) and Methora (Mathura).

Taittiriya Aranyaka (c.3rd B.C.) speaks of Vasudev and Vishnu as identical (vide, Mc Crindle, Ptolemy, P. 121). Patanjali's Mahabhasya mentions Vasudeva as God, commanding reverence till Magadh. Yajñashree's inscription (173 B.C.) indicates that such worship was prevalent in the Krishnavalley. It is obvious to infer that the buffer that was Odisha must also have come under this spell. Some like Prabhat Mukharjee (The History of Medieval Vaisnavism in Orissa, pp 5-7) contend that Jagannath was the climax of such a process. The Sridharan Rat Copperplate (7th Century A.D.) speaks of Purusottama, which must be of Puri as D.C Sircar contends, during this time the Nauda Kings of western Orissa revered Vishnu as Purusha. From the travel accounts of Yuan Chwang it is apparent that in those days Jainism was more dominant than Buddhism and that the Jainas worshipped Jagannath as Purisatta or Purusottama. The early-Ganga ruler Devadra Verma donated a village in Purushavana (Purusottama Kshetra) to the Brahmins. The apotheosis is reached through Adisankara who identified the Purusottama of Puri and of the Gita as one and same. This has been stretched from Adisankar's Sri Jagannathastakam to Salabega's Patitapanastakam in and through a host of other works. The imperial Gazetteer of India says Jagannath "is Vishnu.... The worship of Jagannath aims at a Catholicism which embraces every form of Indian belief, and every Indian conception of the deity." The Prologue comes through Jagannath Chartamruta (Ch.VII., Lines 29-30) and Premabhakti Brahma Gita of Yosobanta Das that Puri is the epitome of all holy places. It is an affirmation of human epistemological finitude before the Ultimate.

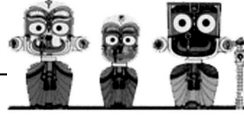
A proper investigation into the accepts of entry of only Hindus inside the temple premises has to take into consideration several aspects. Any



religious institutions vertical growth is proportionate to its horizontal expanse. Jagannath's origin as a tribal God was limited in expanse but the meteoric rise in the popularity of this institution within a short span was due to what is popularly called as the process of Sanskritisation that was stated in Puri by Adishankar. By the time of Ramanuja, Jagannath had become famous throughout the country. There was a proper philosophical balance between the Tantric and Bhagabat streams. Odisha was not only the sprouting ground of Tantric Philosophy but also was must plausibly the place where the fundamental work on Pancharatna mode of worship, i.e. Sattvata Samhita, was written. So what Ramanuja did at Puri was to introduce the tradition of 'Pancharatraagama' after properly balancing the Vishishthaadvaita philosophy with Jagannathic philosophy which, till then, was an amalgam of tantricism and popular tradition. Tantric impact had limited the access to Jagannath during particular occasions. Only the tribal relations enjoyed the monopoly. Sanskritised impact opened up such access to the higher castes who were regarded as pure and austere. The so called 'Sudras', deemed to be devoid of it because of the then social habits, were prohibited entry. This was however a social discrimination not of the 'Sudras' in general but of those of them who continued their traditional functions and life style. Odisha has never been a region of strong caste-bias. Those of the so called 'dalits' who were known to austere and pure lifestyle were not discriminated against. As per Sattvata Samhita, Brahmanah Kshayatriya Vaishnab Sudra Yoshita eba cha Bhaktiyuktah Swavabena Kurjyaddevashya Pujanam" (3/29-30). To repeat the purified Sudras were never isolated. Ramanuja himself deeply imbued with Jagannath consciousness and thereby introducing the Pancharatragama mode of worship in the temple,

also admitted the 'purified Sudra' as his disciples. the pancharatra mode not only in corporate the 'ekaayana vidya' of Narada and Sandilya (Vide K.K. Srivastaba, Ahirbuddhnya Samhita, 1993) but also the 'Bhagabat' concept. Another significant novelty of the period was the introduction of the institution of Devadasis and Maharis (virgins consecrated to the deities). Their status was independent of the caste structure. And in spite of increasing tempo of Brahminical influence in this biggest temple of India (G.S. Ghurye, Religious consciousness, 1965, Bombay, pp-333-337) since the Somavansi rule, there was an equally proportionate growth of the Daitas' role in the temple rituals and 'they are regarded as an equal in rank to other high castes with whom they occasionally inter-marry" (Gazetteer of India, 1977, Puri, p-132). Kabir and Nanak attached prime importance at Puri and elsewhere to equality and moral action, like Ramananda and Gorakhnath. The Chhera Panhara seva of the king on the chariots annually not only alludes to 'the legitimacy of the kings overlordship of the mode of worship in spite of the priests (H.S Pattanaik, Jagannath : His temple, cult and festivals, 1994, New Delhi, P-45) but also to no low estimate of such a service.

Equally significant as a pointer against caste-bias was the institution of Chhatisha Niyoga by Anangabhimadev. It consists of 35 categories (now more than 200) of a equally indispensable servitors below the Adya Sevak (the king) for services at / of the temple but on compounded their number to 9000 and called them Brahmins. Its caste transcending specifications of division of labour subsumes and transcends till today the non Vedic hurdles of caste for a pragmatic contemporaneous relevance that was conspicuously missed by Ambedkar and Gandhi. One instance of it is that the Brahmin servitors

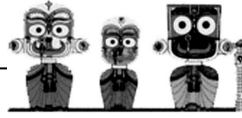


receive water brought by Sudra servitors to the temple for temple services before handling it over to other servitors. The monasteries at Puri also reflect an anti caste and non communal through obviously certain faculty of mind. Set up, with royal permission and land grants (Amruta Manohi), by various servants and Dharmacharyas for purposes of education, charity and sectarian fellow feeling, each of these Math's catered to the religious as well as secular needs of times-though with the primary objective of exclusive deification of Jagannath or itself. According to Shree Martya Baikuntha (Bansidhar Mohanty, op.cit., P-45) there were 12 Andhrapanthi, 8 Dravidapanthi, 20 Maharashtrapanthi, 5 Kanoujapanthi, 5 Goudiya Maths, there is nothing to indicate that these only catered to their higher caste followers.

Right from the days of Ramanuja's stint in Puri, the social structure was not intensely ridden with caste bias against the Dalits. Not only Ramanuj's Premium on 'purified Sudra's' gained credence through the writings of Sudramuni Sarala Das, the tempo was sustained by Ramananda, the Panchasakha and later, the Mahima cult. The tragedy of the Panchasakha movement was that, though they strove to drive home the point of Bhakti that belied that nothing need stand between soul and God, their writings became intensely popular while the core message of it all remained only in theory and was seldom translated to practice. Balaram Dasa's Laxmi Purana is a glaring testimony to it. A stone inscription of one Govinda Senapati registers land grant to the Sudras for rendering daily services to temple, like sweeping, lime, washing and supplying earthen pots. (OHRJ), Vol.II, os.3/4, P.-46-48). One remarkable feature of medieval-Odishan society was the upward mobility of the Sudras. Their rise in socio-economic status was in spite of the

various disabilities imposed on them by the Smrti literature. The Mahimaities, later, performed in no substantially successful manner in this regard, primarily because they were suspected to be anti-Jagannathities.

When Gandhiji and Vinoba wanted to enter inside the temple along with the Dalitas, Muslims and Christians in 1934, he was denied entry. A furious Gandhiji vented his anger on Kasturaba and Mahadev Desai for visiting the temple during the Beraboi Session of the Congress. It is said that R.N. Tagore was denied entry on caste consideration. Buddhists like Ambedkar and the queen of Thailand were denied entry in 1945 and 2005 respectively. Similar was the fate of Swami Prabhupada and his Iskconite disciples in 1977. Permission was granted by the Muktimandap on Puri Sankaracharya's recommendation, to the American Dayamata alias F. Rite in 1958 to go inside the temple. Officially this is the only instance of the entry of a Christian inside the temple. Similar permission was not granted to the Swiss devotee Elizabeth Ziggler who even donated over one and half corers of rupees to the temple. The plausible reason for such discrimination might be that non-Hindus, turned-Hindus by decree of recognized custodians of Hinduism can gain entry; this in spite of the fact that no non-Hindu can become a Hindu because of the non-missionary nature of Hinduism. Permission for entry was not given to Indira Gandhi (1984) and Mrs. Hidayatullah as they were wives of Non-Hindus. However, Biswanath Das, H.K. Mahatab and others strongly argued in favour of the entry of Dalits that was legally achieved after independence. The argument of J.B. Patanaik for Iskconites and Pyari Mohan Mohapatra's individual opinion to open the temple for larger interest of tourism have evoked mixed response to the later contention appears to be rationally spineless.



Puri's Sankaracharya views tourism linked Dharma as ludicrous, while the Gajapati feels that such change can not be brought about on suggestion of any Tom, Dick or Harry.

With the fall of medieval Hindu Kingdom of Odisha in 1568, management of Jagannath temple fell out of royal supervision and into alien hands. The Afghan Period (1568-90) saw the Bhoi Dynasty in power at Khurda whose scion, Rama Chandra Dev – I was proclaimed as their sovereign by the people. The Superintendence of Jagannath temple was vested in him in 1592 by Mansingh who wrested Odisha from the Afghans. A tolerant Akbar and an enamoured Mansingh adopted a liberal pro-Hindu stand towards Jagannath. It was, perhaps from now on that Muslims came to gain entry inside the temple, imbued with a sense of humanism and egalitarianism of Jagannath Dharma as was also reflected in the Mahaprasad Brotherhood. Haft Iqlim (authored by Amin Ahmedji) mentions that there was no bar on Muslims entering into the temple of Jagannath. Abul Fazl was a great admirer of the Rath-yatra. An interesting account of the Car festival of 1626 comes from the Persian traveller Mahammad Bin Amir Alli. He was one of the 5000 strong devotees coming to Puri from Midnapore, chanting Haribol and taking austere food all the way on foot to Puri. He reached the Puri on 26th May and visited the temple and had the privilege to behold the triad in the calm and tranquil environment. He left for Konark in early June to return to Puri again a month, to participate in the Rath Yatra. His accounts speak of his gratification. This illustrates that there was, till then no restrictions of the Muslims to visit the temple. Such a tradition perhaps continued, till the end of

the rule of Shah Jahan who was favourably disposed towards Odisha for obvious reasons. This must have stopped during the fastidious reign of Aurangzeb who was a rabid Muslim. Some suggest that Muslims were denied entry due to the frequent episodes of their plunder of the temple. The priests of the temple were too weak to prevent the marauders, who were branded by them as terrorist invaders; from Aurangzeb's time entry of Muslims has been discontinued. The Muslims are ever since synonymous with 'Atatayees'. Considerations of security and safety of the temple had prompted their exclusion and even the British realized it during their stint. So it is generally felt that people of alien religious faiths who have deep devotion for Lord Jagannath can fulfill their cherished desire to behold the Lord during His annual Ratha Yatra.

From the religious point of view only the Sankaracharya of Puri, the Gajapati Maharaja and the Chhatisha Niyoga can decide on any modification or change in the set-up of the temple. The role of the Government in this regard is advisory at the most. The Vatican and the Macca are not open to tourists but the surrounding areas around these are thronged always by tourists. Tourism can be much more lucrative with opening of hundreds of other avenues other than throwing open the Jagannath Temple to Non-Hindus. Puri is the Lord Land of God not meant "For Schemes of Human ambition" said Mansing. Let us behave like Mansingh, not like Todarmal's son.

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