



Madhava, Nilamadhava and Shree Jagannath

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The term Madhava literally means - related to Madhu which may mean springtime honey or the progenitor of Krishna's own Yadu clan. In the *Gita Govinda* Madhu is used to mean honey springtime and the demon Madhu. In another text, Madhava is depicted as Yaduputra. For observing silence (*mauna*) and prayer he bears the true epithet of Madhava.

There is also reference of Madhava in the *Markandeya Purana*.¹ The *Rupamandana*² furnishes the twenty four names of Vishnu and the corresponding arrangements of the four Ayudhas in the four hands in each case. In case Madhava image, it holds *Chakra* in back right hand, *Sankha* in back left hand, *Padma* in front left hand and *Gada* in the front right hand. It

has been brought to light in the Sri Jagannath Temple after removal of plastering. The illustrations in the temple clearly indicate that the builders and architects were well conversant with the mythological traditions and

have taken utmost care in representing all his incarnations including the image of Madhava in the sculptural art with consummate skill and exquisite workmanship.

The history of Madhava worship in Odisha is traced from the time of spread of Vaishnavism with its various manifestation of



Vishnu. The first epigraphic reference of Madhava Pravritta - Chakrachakradhara eva Bhagavan, Madhava Shree Madhavaraja Kusali we come across in the copper plate grant of Madhavaraj of Sailodbhava dynasty.



In this grant the Mangaladhapati Madhavaraja is compared with the valour and prowess of Bhagavan Madhava. The epithet of Madhava adopted by the rulers of Sailodbhava Dynasty such as Madhavaraj Madhava Varman etc. indicate the popularity of the name of Madhava worship in Odisha.³

Prachi valley which witnessed the rise, spread and amalgamation of important religions, was the great centre of Madhava worship in Odisha. The tradition of worship of Dwadasa Sambhu and Dwadasa Madhava attested by archaeological evidence is still prevalent in the sacred valley. The first among the Dwadasa Madhava is seen in the precinct of Kapileswar Temple. The temple is no longer in existence but the image is kept in a pitiable condition in the Gokarneswar Temple. Triveni Madhava is worshipped at the confluence of Triveni near Villeswar Temple. The place is popularly known as Mani Karnika Tirtha. The Madhava image is worshipped here with Laxmi.

Niali is famous for Sovaneswar Temple (built in 1170 A.D.) and Madhava Temple. In course of time the Madhava Temple was broken down. But extremely beautiful eight hand image of Madhava and one image of Varaha is found in the compound of Sovaneswar Temple. The magnificent temple of Madhavananda and the enchanting enshrined image of Madhava in the village Madhava on Prachi Valley is a marvel of architecture and sculpture. The Madhava here is popularly known as Niali Madhava. Of the other image of Madhava, mention may be made of two beautiful images at Pitapada, Krushnaprasad, Prachi Madhava near Astaranga, images in the temple of Someswar. In the temple of compound of Mangala at Kakatapur, at Nilakanthapur, Modagala Madhava in the

village Mudgala, two images in the Grameswar temple compound of Lataharana and in many other places speak the tradition of Madhava worship in Prachi Valley (8th to 11th century A.D.). To these may be added the beautiful images of Madhava discovered from Kenduli, the birth place of Jayadeva at the time of excavation.

Nilamadhava :

Nilama-dhava (here Nila means blue or black i.e. nothingness, Ma means mother i.e. creative energy and Dhava means white



i.e. the phenomenal universe).⁴ As the myth relates Lord Jagannath is originally worshipped as a 'blue stone' (Maha Nilamani) idol in the cave of *Nilakandara*. Viswavasv, a tribal chief was worshipping this stone with a purpose of increasing fertility to land, offerings to the race, flowers and fruits to the trees and young ones



to the domestic animals. The stone image thus worshipped by Viswavasud was considered to be responsible for pro-creation. We also find similar types of cave worship in the history of different civilisations. The historians opine that the black or blue stone pieces, known as 'Salagrama' and worshipped as Vishnu had its origin in the New Stone Age.⁵ Sir William Jones has indicated that at Kathmandu the capital of Nepal an image of marble is being worshipped.⁶

The literary evidence confirms that before the worship of 'Daru image' of Lord Jagannath, only a blue stone was worshipped. The Utkal Khanda of *Skanda Purana* narrates that a blue stone or Nilakantamani was being worshipped near the *Rohini Kunda*.⁷ It is believed that this black stone is kept inside the wooden image of Jagannath as His *Brahma*. Black stones are also worshipped under the name of Nilamadhava in different parts of Odisha. The aborigines in the Jungles of Pallahara still worship a black stone in the name of Nilamadhava. The Nilamadhava temple, one of the twin temples of Gandharadhi in the district of Phulbani in the earliest century (7th/8th century A.D.) assigned to Vishnu Paramavaishnava Bhanjamala Kulatilaka Satru Bhanja⁸ donated Kurumkela village to Brahmachari Bhattamanoratha for propagation and maintenance of Nilamadhava.

Kantilo on the bank of the river Mahanadi near Khandapada is another centre of Nilamadhava worship. The installation of the presiding deity Nilamadhava and Sidheswar Siva is assigned to the *Somavamsi* period.

The temples built by them were ruined⁹ and the present temples are of later origin. On account of the popularisation of Nilamadhava legend, Vishnu in Odisha came to be known as Madhava. The *Niladri Mahodaya* relates that the *Saptadamurti* worshipped on the *Ratnavedi* of Jagannath Temple comprise Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, Sudarshana, Bhudevi, Sridevi and Madhava.

In the conclusion it can be said that the cult of Madhava originally branched out from Purusottama Jagannath and spread widely in the sacred land and finally merged in Him like many other cults of Brahminical religion.

References :

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6. Sir William Jones - The concept of Gods in Ancient works. P.- 60.
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