

Nilamadhava-cum-Purusottama and Jagannath

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It is an important question which is perplexing many visitors to the Temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri, that why the image is so crippled and disfigured and is not in compliance with the iconographic rules of many Visnu image ? This problem seems to have been addressed in later days, when the 'Madala Panji' was written in Orissa in about 16th century A.D. A story is narrated in it, saying that image was originally worshipped by Visvvasu, a Savara (Adivasi) who lived in a forest with his daughter, Lalita by name. Once a Brahmin named Vidyapati was sent to bring that image by a king named Indradyumna who had built a temple for the installation of the same image, God Nilamadhava in it. Vidyapati went to the forest where he took shelter in the house of the Savara Visvvasu, who secretly kept the God Nilamadhava in the forest' Vidyapati married the Savaras's daughter, Lalita and lived there for some time. Once he asked Lalita to show him the God, Nilamadhava. To oblige him Lalita requested her father to take Vidyapati along with him to the place where he worshipped daily the great God Nilamadhava. Visvvasu agreed to take his son-in-law with him only on one condition, that Vidyapati's two eyes should be blind-folded. Vidyapati agreed to this condition, but played a trick to keep track of the path. He carried some mustard seed in his upper garment so that a small quantity would fall on the ground as he walked in the jungle path. After a few days, the mustard seed grew up into sapplings and the path was readily traced. But the deity, Nilamadhava, disappeared. In the night the great God told Visvvasu to worship

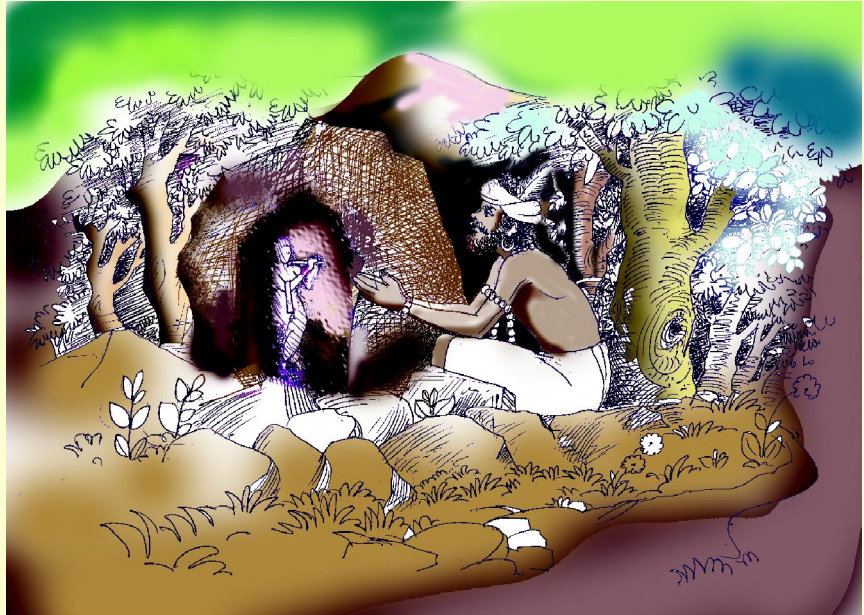


a crippled image and present the same to the king Indradyumna for installation in the temple.

The above story was expressed in different forms by the later writers. But we cannot depend on that fiction because the Sanskrit names like Visvvasu and Lalita were never used by the Adivasi Savara until a separate branch of that aboriginal race had come into being called "Jara Savara".

If the image of the Jara or 'Sudha' Savara was introduced in the SriMandira in a later age. i.e. at end of the 14th century, then what was the form of the previous image called 'Purusottam'? In one of the inscriptions of the Nrsimha Temple of Puri he was named "Kamalaksadeva"(whose eyes were like lotus bud).

'The village named 'Purusapura' was inhabited by some Vedic Brahmanas who had 'Kausika Gotra' as stated in Basubandhu's work. He embraced Buddhism although his ancestors were Vedic Brahmins. Similarly some Brahmins also adopted 'Jaina' religion Manatunga's book named 'Bhaktamala Stotra' is a Jaina literature where the earliest name of Purusottama is written, comparing Him with Buddha or Sankara. The English translation of the passage made by Dr. Maurice Winternitz writes :



"Thou art Buddha, because the Gods praise
The awakening of the mind.
Thou art Samkara, because thou workest out
The salvation of the three worlds Creator art thou,
Because through the doctrine thou hast created
a pathway to salvation;
Thou, 'O' Lord, art Purusottama,
the highest of all the beings".
(History of Indian Literature, Vol, 2) p. 550

Prior to that Purusottama's name was mentioned by Varahamihira in the Vrahat Samhita' alongwith the image of Madhava in the 5th century A.D. Both the figures of Purusottama and Madhava possessed four arms in which they held-Sankha, Chakra, Gada and Padma. Therefore, the 'Nilamadhava' worship was made popular in Odra Desa (Orissa) by the kings of the country. Although the name Nilamadhava was introduced by the ancient 'Bhanja'kings near 'Gandharadi'on the bank of Mahanadi, it was no other than Purusottama Visnu, who was worshipped by the



'Maudgala' kings of that region. Therefore, they named Madhava as the 'Maudgala Madhava'. From these events we have come to the conclusion that Madhava worship was popular throughout India and neighbouring countries. Therefore, a Sailodbhava king gave the name 'Madhavaraja' to his son who ruled in Kangoda country about the 6th century A.D. One of his inscriptions discovered from Ganjam records the date as 'Gupta Sambad 300' corresponding to 720 A.D. The Nilamadhava was worshipped by the Bhanjas at the Gandharadi. In or about the tenth century A.D., the Bhanjas were driven away by the Somavamsi kings while the whole Odra country came to the possession of Yayati Kesari. It is he who is supposed to have built two Visnu temples for worship of 'Nilamadhava' alias Purusottama'. Each temple contained the figures of ten incarnations of Visnu on their walls. One of the temples was at Bhubaneswar and the other was built in Puri just near the present Mukti Mandapa. We have no information so far to know if the deities were called 'Nilamadhava' or 'Purusottama', but the second name was popularly used after Chodagangadeva during his time of reign, in the 12 century A.D. That name and the system of worship as Visnu was continued after the time of Narasimhadev II or his son, Bhanudev II, and during his reign a great fight took place, between him and Giasuddin Toglok. Soon after the Muslim raided against the great temple the figure and the name was changed in the great

temple which was supported by all classes of people, although the iconography of the Hindu Shastras does not agree with the image. The then king of Orissa must have taken advice of his Guru Narahari Tirtha, who was a great learned figure at that time. I need not give any detailed hypothesis about this to explain that great change which must have annoyed the Hindu world.

The figure of Purusottama, Balabhadra and Subhadra were installed in the Nrsimha temple by Chodagangadev who believed that he wanted to have co-operation among the Saivas, Vaisnavas and Saktas. The same principle was adopted by Narahari Tirtha in later age when he wanted to create co-operation between the Adivasi Savaras and also the Buddhists and Jaina monks who lived in this country to propagate the respective religions. If this view is to be accepted, then we can explain about 'Ratha Jatra' with the wooden images or 'Daru Brahma' and also the 'Mahaprasada' which cannot be contaminated by the touch of Shudras and many similar affairs. Therefore, from the time of Chodaganga and onward there was a regular attempt made by the thinking section of Orissa to amalgamate all different religious formalities by introducing them in the temple of the Lord Jagannath.

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