



With the emergence of Sarala Mahabharat in 15<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., Odia literature marched ahead with vigour. From that time onwards Odia literature passed through many experimentations, ups and downs. Sometimes in between during the rules of Turko Afgans, Mughals, Marathas and British, Odia identity was at stake. But Odia literature with its renaissance and resurgence reestablished Odia identity and there was as powerful wave of Odia nationalism, which culminated with the establishment of a separate Odisha Province in 1936. Since then throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Odia literature prospered with mighty hands of accomplished Odia writers. However from 15<sup>th</sup> century to 20<sup>th</sup>

entitled “**Madala Panji**”, which is in fact a Drum chronicle of Palm leaf manuscript. This chronicle is supposed to be started at the command of the first Ganga king Ananta Varman Chodagangadev sometime in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D, Sarala Das, the poet of Odia epic, the Mahabharat flourished during the reign of Kapilendra Dev of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. In the great epic, which saw a lot of difference from the original Sanskrit Mahabharat composed by Vyasadev, Sarala Das eulogized and prayed Lord Jagannath as Srikrishna. This is found in every chapter of this epic work. He also adored Lord Jagannath as the incarnation (Avtar) of Buddha in Madhya Parva of this Mahabharat.

## Sri Jagannath in Odia Literature : A Case Study of Three Historical Novels in Odia

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century the cult of Jagannath has substantially influenced the Odia literature.

Odishan ancient as well as modern literature which have imbibed the great ideals of Jagannath cult of equality and fraternity have enriched spiritual life and culture of the Odias.<sup>1</sup> In tune with the spirit of the Jagannath cult Odia literature have gone ahead of narrow parochialism, racism and casteism.

### **Jagannath cult in ancient and medieval Odia Literature –**

We get some reference about the history, rituals of Lord Jagannath in the temple chronicle

*“Bandai Sri Jagannath Baikuntha Nibas  
Baudha rupe Neelagiri sikhe Achha Basi  
Balabhadra Suvadra Sahite  
Charirupe Bije Neelasundara Parbate.”<sup>2</sup>*

The greatness of this Lord of universe Sri Jagannath also found mention in the lyrical poems of Arjuna Das and Atibadi Jagannath Das and Balaram Das. Arjuna Das composed ‘Ramabibaha’ and ‘Kalpalata’. Balaram Das, famous for his Odia Ramayan, wrote ‘Gupta Geeta’ and Laxmi Purana’ to depict the great ideas related to Jagannath cult.



Atibadi Jagannath Das, the author of famous and popular Odia Bhagabat, composed 'Gundicha Vije' and 'Darubramha Geeta' in praise of Sri Jagannath. Through Verses Jagannath Das depicted the greatness and uniqueness of the Daru Devata (Wooden image of the four Gods – Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana) Atibadi Jagannath Das also composed 'Niladri Satakam' in Sanskrit to show his devotion to this Lord of the universe.

The other Panchasakhas Jasobanta, Ananta and Achyutananda also gave vivid description of Sri Jagannath. Purushottam Das wrote 'Kanchi Kaveri' in which love between Lord Jagannath and Manika (a milkmaid) has been depicted with care. Here Manika somehow resembles Radha the primordial beloved of Lord Krishna. Jagannath cult is also fluent in the devotional songs or Bhajans composed by many Odia poets. Foremost among them are Madhavi Das, Banamali Das, Bhakta Salabeg. Kabisurya Baladev Rath composed a number of lyrical poems in the praise of Sri Jagannath.

In 1880 dramatist Ramashankar Ray published the drama entitled 'Kanchi Kaveri'. In this drama the love of Sri Jagannath to his devotees is depicted. Lokanath Bidyadhar wrote a very interesting poetry known as 'Niladree Mahostav' in which he brought to the limelight various rituals, traditions and festivals relating to the worship of Sri Jagannath. Odia poet Sri Gopinath Singh wrote a Kavya entitled 'Niladri Behari' narrating the glories and grandeurs of different Veshas (Costumes) of Lord Jagannath such as Sunavesha, Bali Baman Vesh, Kaliya Dalana Vesh, Nagarjuna Vesh, Bankachula Vesh etc.

In modern times especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Kalindi Charan Panigrahi composed a famous poem 'Puri Mandir'. The devotional

poems of Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Radhamohan Gadnayak depict the virtue and greatness of Sri Jagannath. From their poems the emotional and spiritual attachment of Odias to the cult of Jagannath are suitably depicted.

### Jagannath cult in Odia historical novels

Different aspects of Jagannath cult and the greatness of Lord Jagannath have found mention in the historical novels of Odisha. In fact the life style of the Odias is very much regulated by the existence of the Universal God. Odia politics, culture, social life were tremendously influenced by the Jagannath cult. Sometimes it was assumed that the identity of the Odias could not be imagined without the great Lord Sri Jagannath. Naturally some of the historical novels in Odia are enriched with the traditions of Jagannath cult. In this small article we shall examine the semblance of Jagannath cult in three of the prominent Odia historical novels like 'Neelasaila', 'Niladri Vijay' and 'Suryavamshi'.

Neelasaila, the magnum opus of Odia literature was first published in the seventh decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its novelist Surendra Mohanty received the coveted Central Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969. At the time of the Award the Central Sahitya Akademi declared. "Neelasaila is a historical novel dealing with the story of the famous temple of Jagannath at Puri. For its catholicity of approach and for its vast galaxy of characters, the work has been hailed as an outstanding contemporary Odia literature."<sup>3</sup> Indian Literature's tribute was more emphatic when it wrote 'It is a historical novel depicting Jagannath culture. Besides Orissa's glorious past the novel successfully presents the conflict of a soul in masterly prose.'<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the novel Jagannath's piety is kept up, which makes him the uncrowned king of the Odias. Having passed through the novel



the readers came out with an awe struck 'Jagannath Sarvamayam' (Sri Jagannath everywhere). The best character of this novel is of course Sri Jagannath himself.

But other characters like Saradei, Ramachandra Dev, Jaguni, Rijia were of importance and able to overcome the hearts of the readers. Saradei had been portrayed as the utmost sensitive women and grieve stricken too. The poor girl dies at the end with an everlasting desire to see Lord Jagannath. But how was she to know that it was the Lord, who came to see her in her inn next door.

In this novel Nilasaila, the fateful wandering life of Sri Jagannath has been carefully depicted. In the introduction, the novelist was of the view that in the spiritual and cultural life of Odisha the place of Sri Jagannath is well acclaimed. Jagannath was not confined to any specific religion, belief or community. All pervading Jagannath cult has identified itself with the blind devotions of a tribal named Biswabashu, the quest of Indradymna, the Buddhist Indrabhuti, Saivite Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Srichaitanya, believer in void Balaram, Jagannath Das and Sikh Guru Nanak. Even Muslim Salabega, Jaban Haridas become emotional devotees of Sri Jagannath.

In this novel Sri Ramachandra Dev, the king of Khorda accepted Islam to save Sri Jagannath from the wrath of the Muslims particularly from the greedy eyes of Taki Khan, the Naib Nazim of Cuttack.

In this novel the adverse effect of the Mogalgola (the disturbances created by the Mughals) on the pilgrims, on the rituals of Sri Jagannath, on the Sevayat (who served in the Jagannath temple in different capacity), on the socio-economic structure of Srikshetra is minutely discussed. The attachment of a Sevayat towards Sri Jagannath is well depicted with the craze of

Sendha Suara for the service of the god. As a whole in the historical novel Nilasaila the novelist took more care to discuss the tradition, rituals, the personalities, the institutions attached to Jagannath cult. Though there were strong characters like Saradei, Ramachandra Dev, Rijia, Sendha Suara, they only revolve round the lord of the universe personified in the unique Sri Jagannath. The ups and downs of Srikshetra is also expressed through the sorrows and sufferings of this great God. In fact this novel Nilasaila has become more proficient to paint itself with various colours of Jagannath cult rather than depicting the historical characters in a historical way. The novel is lavishly concentrated upon the myth and traditions attached to Jagannath cult rather than becoming faithful to history.

The second historical Odia novel in question is "Neeladri Vijaya" by the same novelist, Surendra Mohanty. Sometimes it is considered as a sequel of Nilasaila. It was first published in the year 1980. The novel Nila Saila was concluded with a very tragic note in which Saradei was dead and the images of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra were left out somewhere inside the lake Chilika.

Neeladri Vijaya was a complement to Nilasaila and in this novel Sri Jagannath and other deities were brought back to Srimandir. But Ramachandra Deva who was instrumental to bring these deities lost everything and towards the end of the novel he was lamenting for Rijia and Jaguni. Rijia was the ladylove of Sri Ramachandra Dev alias Hafez Kadir and Jaguni was trusted servant.

Nila Saila was concluded learning the images of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra in the island of Gurubai inside Chilika lake.<sup>5</sup> Ramachandra Dev alias Hafez Kadir had shifted the images of four deities to this area to save them



from the greedy eyes of Taki Khan. When the real deities were deserted inside Chilika, Taki Khan hatched a conspiracy with Lalita Mahadei to organize Nabakalevara and install new deities on Ratnasinghashan. In such a conspiracy Ramachandra Dev becomes disheartened and made genuine effort to bring back the deities and install them on the Ratnasinghashan. In this effort he was successful and that is the subject matter of the novel 'Neeladri Vijaya'.

Ramachandra Dev left Hinduism and became Hafez Kadir to save the deities of Shrimandir from the destructive eyes of Taki Khan. He also married Rijia, the Muslim princess. In Niladri Vijaya the real interest of Ramachandra Dev to bring back the four images (Chaturddhamurati) from Chilika to Srimandir, Rijia also played an important role to bring back the images to Puri safe and sound. But the priests of Srimandir had to purify the temple because both Ramachandra Dev and Rijia entered the temple. Both Rijia and Jaguni disappeared from the scene and the novel ended with the cry of Ramachandra Dev...Rijia...Jaguni.

In the process of description the novelist depicts the love and attachment of the Sevayats to Sri Jagannath. In various ways Jagannath cult overshadowed the characters of the novel. Though in his novel Ramachandra Dev is the main character, most of the times the existence of Jagannath became prominent. Thus in this novel there is proper reflection of Jagannath cult.

The third novel in question is 'Suryavamshi', This novel by Hemanta Kumar Mohapatra was first published in 1999. In this novel a glorious epoch of Odishan history is depicted in style. Basically this novel centres round powerful characters like Suryavamshi Gajapati Kapilendradev and his eldest son Hambira. In this novel the greatness and heroics of Hambira has been treated with care. Purushottam Dev and Rupambika (Padmavati) also have appeared in

this novel as powerful characters. In this novel the connection between the Gajapatis and Sri Jagannath is aptly depicted.<sup>6</sup> In Sri Jagannath Dham nobody is a king, neither any one is a subject. Here the only emperor is Sri Jagannath, who is the controller of the universe. Everyone else is his subject. The Gajapati of Odisha was his main servant.

The dictates of Sri Jagannath was all-pervading. On His instruction Mangula Ray, the youngest son of Kapilendra Dev could become his successor neglecting the claim of Hambira, the eldest child of the king. It was alleged that Mangula Ray who became the king after Kapilendra Dev was the son of a concubine. And for the sake of Lord Jagannath the people of Odisha accepted this injustice.

In this novel one can find the glimpse of Kanchi Abhijan by Purushottam Dev and the story of the milkmaid Manika. The novel was very much influenced by the essence of Jagannath cult and He was the guiding spirit behind this glorious epoch in the history of Odisha as depicted in the novel Suryavamshi.

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