

Rasagola belongs to Odisha. There's no doubt about it. There're lots of information and evidence to support this claim. It is one of the traditional food offerings made to Lord Jagannath. As part of the last ritual of Rath Yatra, known as 'Niladri Bijē' (Lord Jagannath's return to his abode after nine days), it is offered to goddess Lakshmi on behalf of Lord Jagannath. Lord Jagannath had gone to visit his birth place accompanied by His brother and sister for nine days, and that had made his wife, Goddess Lakshmi angry. It is, however, unfortunate that West Bengal has claimed itself to be the place of origin of *rasagola* as well as of the word 'rasagola'.



through providing sufficient evidence in the form of arguments and establish logically the claim of Odisha.

Rasagola: The Ritual Offering of Odisha

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Rasagola is a soft, small-sized sweet. Its shape could be bigger than a tiny ball and smaller than a hand bomb. And yet, a 'sweet war' has commenced between two neighbouring states, Odisha and West Bengal, over it. Odisha has retorted strongly by celebrating the Rasagola Day for the first time on 30th July 2015. However, one may create certain amount of public awareness through celebrating such a day once a year, but that cannot be the valid evidence on the basis of which it can be said rasagola belongs to Odisha. **If one wants to claim that 'rasagola belongs to Odisha' and that 'rasagola is part of the ritual food offering at Lord Jagannath temple', one has to reject Bengal's claim**

In the middle of 2015, Government of Odisha started the procedure to acquire the Geographic Indications (GI) status for rasagola prepared in Pahala, a place situated on the NH5 between Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. The specialty of GI status is this: it is an identity marker for a particular product or commodity originating from a particular place. The Odishan products which have acquired the GI status include Kotapada handloom sari and ikat, the stone sculpture of Konark, patta chitra and appliqué of Pipili, khandua sari, Sambalpuri handloom saris, Bomkai sari and clothes, Berhampur silk sari and clothes, Gopalpur tussar weaves, *kia* flower and its essence from Ganjam, curtains and

handlooms of Dhala Pathara and Odisha Pattachitra (logo). All these have been registered with special GI status. There had been no controversy in the process of acquiring GI status for all these products. However, the claim rasagola belongs to Odisha has stirred a long dormant dispute between West Bengal and Odisha.

People of Bengal were startled and claimed loudly 'rasagola belongs to us'. The people of Odisha did no less. There were heated discussions, debates in newspapers, journals, magazines, and also on television channels. This issue was also raised in the Odisha State Assembly. As a result, Government of Odisha formed three committees under the supervision of the Department of Science and Technology on 22nd September, 2015. The objectives of these committees were:

1. To collect sufficient data and evidence, and apply for rasogolla's GI status or patent at the Registrar of Intellectual Property Rights, Government of India
2. To prove wrong the baseless claims of Bengal that rasagola belongs to Bengal
3. To place a demand to disrespect Bengal's claim and approve Odisha's.

In the mean time, a few GI authorities have stated that it is not viable to claim GI status for a food product like rasagola. It may be mentioned here the GI status has been conferred on food products like *ladoo* of Tirupati, *ratlami seo* of Madhya Pradesh, *peda* of Dharwad, *halim* of Hyderabad, and *muan* of Joynagar (West Bengal). So, why isn't it justified to demand a GI status for rasagola of Odisha? Odisha has a number of infallible weapons, too.

When and where exactly the preparation of rasagola started remains unknown. However,

those who say that it originated in Bengal have stories to offer.

The Cornwallis Story¹

According to one such story, when Lord Cornwallis was the Governor General of India, he wanted to please the landlords in order to get more levy from them. A large banquet was arranged for the landlords. As it was customary, the important guests were offered pudding as dessert at such banquets. But the regular Bengali cook who prepared pudding suddenly fell ill that day; as a result, the responsibility fell on another cook. He did not know how to prepare pudding. The milk meant for preparing pudding could not be processed properly and it curdled. As the man did not know what to do with the *chhena* (cottage cheese) thus formed out of it, he put all of it in a piece of cloth and tied it into a bundle and hung it. But no one knew how, the knot opened and the cottage cheese fell into a large pan full of sugar syrup. Next morning, it was found that the cottage cheese was floating in the syrup. He tasted a bit out of it and found it delicious. None of the guests had ever tasted such a delicious sweet before. Everybody started praising it effusively. According to this story, it was the initial form of rasagola.

Hence, according to this story, rasagola was first prepared in Bengal towards the end of eighteenth century. But the information provided by Bengalis themselves is that rasogolla was prepared in 1868.

Rasogolla, which enthralls all

No sooner than the debate got stirred whether rasogolla belonged to Odisha or Bengal, Haripada Bhowmik, a Bengali scholar who researches on culture, wrote a book really fast, *Rasogolla Banglar Jagatmatano Abiskar* (Rasogolla which enthralls all is an invention of

Bengal) and published it in August 2015. It has been published by Gangchil, Kolkata².

Kshiramohan and Kshiragolak

He has written in the introduction of the book, “All of a sudden it is demanded by Odisha that rasogolla’s place of origin is Puri, and that it was initially known as *kshiramohan*. It was clear from the name that it is actually *kshiragolak*. The real rasogolla is never prepared from milk. Rasogolla is prepared from *chhena* processed from curdled milk. Some of the Odia researchers term rasogolla as *chhena ra kshiramohan*. *Chhena* and *Kshira*—both are formed out of milk. If hot milk is curdled, *chhena* (cottage cheese) is formed, and if milk is boiled and thickened, it becomes condensed milk, *kshira*. So *kshira* is never referred to as *chhena*. Hence, ‘*chhena ra kshiramohan*’ phrase is like a stone bowl of gold.”

Chhena exclusively belongs to Bengal ?

Haripada Bhowmik has made a laughable claim regarding *chhena* in his book: The word *chhena* was prevalent in Bengal. This word does not exist in Sanskrit literature or dictionaries. In them the spoilt substance (which is prepared by curdling milk) is known as ‘amiksha’, ‘kilata’, and ‘dudhakurchika’. From Sanskrit ‘chhinna’ ‘chhana’ or ‘chhena’ has come. This word is originally a Bangla word.”³ But the word ‘chhena’ and the delicacies made from it are widely mentioned in the *Mahabharata* by Sarala Das, the *Ramayana* of Balaram Das and other such Odia works belonging to fifteenth century.

Sarala Das is known as the ‘adikabi’ (first poet) of Odisha. According to the description in his *Mahabharata*’s ‘Madhya Parva’, during the planning of dharma yajna, Arjuna brought Sri Krishna to Barunabanta. Mother Kunti served

them many delicacies. Among these were *chhena* and delicacies made of *chhena*. To describe it, Sarala Das has written:

*Chakuli chhunchi patara chhena manohara
Kshiri kshirisa sakara sakala drabya sara.*⁴

Balaram Das’s Odia *Ramayana* is known as *Dandi Ramayana* or *Jagamohana Ramayana*. There are ample descriptions of *chhena* and *chhena* products in it. Pundit Govinda Rath was the first scholar to edit and publish it. He was born in the Patapur (Padmanavapur) sasan in Banki in 1848. He did a lot of work for Odia language and literature and died on 19th May 1918. He sourced, edited and written more than two hundred books. He had established a press, Ratha Press in Cuttack and published books of medieval poets such as Abhimanyu Samantasinhara, Upendra Bhanja, Baladev Rath along with the works of the pioneer of modern Odia literature: Fakir Mohan Senapati. The *Dandi Balmiki Ramayana* published by him is worth mentioning.⁵ Its first edition is available at the centuries old literary institution of Odisha, Utkal Sahitya Samaja; Cuttack.⁶ There is the mention of rasagola in it.

According to the description in Balaram Das’ *Ramayana*, in ‘Ajodhya Kanda’, after Rama left for forest, Bharat and Satrugna went to bring him back and accepted the hospitality of sage Bharadwaj. Sage Bharadwaj served them and their followers all kinds of food and delicacies which included *dudha chhena* (cottage cheese prepared from milk). And the products from *chhena* that he had served included *chhena puri*, *chhena ladu*, *rasogolla*, and *rasabali*.

Bhowmik has made a ludicrous attempt in his book and tried to prove that the origin of rasogolla is Bengal. However, the description of

chhena and rasagola and such terms in the above-mentioned works of Sarala Das, Balaram Das, Brajanath Badajena and Abhimanyu Samanta Simhara show this claim to be of no consequence. The reason according to researchers is that Sarala Das belonged to the period of reign of the Gajapati king of Odisha, Kapilendra Dev (1435-68) and his son Purusottam Dev (1468-97) of sun dynasty. Balaram Das lived during 1472-1550, his time coinciding with the reign of Purusottam Dev and Prataprudra Dev. Brajanath Badajena's time belonged to 1730-1800 and Abhimanyu Samantasimhara belonged to 1760-1806. All of them belonged to a much earlier period than the so-called time of invention of 'rasogolla' by Navin Chandra Dash in 1868.

The Accusation of *Amiksha*

Now, let us discuss Bhowmik's accusation of *amiksha* in this topic. He has said in his book, "there's no word *chhena* in Sanskrit literature or dictionaries; but there is a word *amiksha*." But is not *amiksha* same as *chhena*? It may be noted here that Amar Singh has mentioned *amiksha* in his *Amara Kosha* which he wrote during the Gupta era in 400 AD.

It has been claimed that *rasogolla* was prepared in 1868 in Bengal. Coincidentally, an Odia dictionary named *Utkal Bhasha Arthabhidhana*⁷ edited by Reverend W. Miller and Raghunath Mishra was published in Odisha in the same year. In this dictionary, the page number 80 has an entry of the word *chhena*. As its synonym and meaning 'amiksha' and 'dugdha ra bikara' are also mentioned. It is obvious 'amiksha' and 'chhena' both are the same thing. The use of the word Chhena also quite prevalent in Odisha much before the invention of Rasogolla in Bengal.

Chhena is the dead form of Milk!

There is no doubt about the fact that *chhena* has its root in the Sanskrit word 'chhina' (literally, which has been cut). In Odia, the phrase used for this is, 'chhena chhindiba'. Pundit Gopinath Nandasharma⁸ has also said that *chhena* is derived from the word *chhinna*. In his view, it is an aberration of milk. On the other hand, Bhowmik has used it in a negative sense. The apt meaning of 'bikara' is transformation. In that sense, yoghurt, butter, clarified butter—all these are new forms of milk. So, the way Bhowmik has made out such a perverted meaning of *chhena* on the basis of the word 'chhinna' is completely meaningless. He has said that *chhena* (cottage cheese) is prepared by curdling milk. Since it is made by curdling milk with the help of an acidic substance it is almost like a murder!, in a complex web of puritanical practices, it becomes na-paka, (something impure and hence not to be eaten) by the non-Bengali Indians. That is why the main ingredient of sweets is milk all over India except Bengal. Bengal has not kept 'chhena' aside as impure. On the other hand, it has prepared a variety of sweets using *chhena*. Bhowmik has not restrained himself saying this. He has gone a step ahead and also said, 'chhena was regarded as a dead substance'. 'Chhena is dead milk—and hence, it is discarded as a dead form.'

Chhena is prohibited at temples!

Bhowmik also mentioned in his book⁹ since *chhena* is a perverted form of milk it is not worthy of gods, that is why it is prohibited at temples. He has taken the Achaya side. However, many delicacies prepared from *chhena* are made as food offerings not only at Lord Jagannath temple, Puri, but at numberless temples since time immemorial. In Lord Jagannatha's 'anasara' (when Lord Jagannath falls ill) and 'maha anasara' during the

‘nabakalebara’ (the year in which Lord Jagannath takes a new wooden form), *chhena* is part of many food delicacies at these secret rituals. Besides, *chhena* is a main ingredient during the car festival, at Mausima temple’s *podapitha* (pancake made by roasting a batter of rice and black gram mixed with *chhena* and grated coconut), and in other such pancakes during the Chandan festival.

Even in the mid-day offering, *chhena* is put in condensed milk. Therefore, it is absolutely clear that Indians knew the preparation of cottage cheese even before the Portuguese or the French arrived in India. In any other part of India, it may be regarded as a ‘perverted form of milk’ and not offered at temples, but it was not prohibited in temples in Odisha. Especially, it was used in the preparation of various food offerings at Lord Jagannath temple since time immemorial. In *Srimandira Sattwalipi* (Record of Rites, Lord Jagannath Temple, Puri), many delicacies made with *chhena* have been mentioned.

Sri Chaitanya and Sri Prataprudra Theory

Despite the presence of *chhena* and products made with *chhena* at Lord Jagannath temple, Puri, Bhowmik has introduced a number of fictional account regarding *chhena* bhoga in his book. In the chapter ‘Chhena in Puri’¹⁰ a section called ‘Puri mandira ra Rajabhoga’ is provided. In this section, he has said, ‘The food offering made by the king’s palace is known as ‘rajabhoga’. When King Prataparudra (reign 1491-1540) came to Puri, he got information regarding ‘rajabhoga’ at Lord Jagannath temple from the court preceptor Kashi Mishra.’ In this context, Bhowmik has not been reluctant to show King Prataparudradev in a poor light through citing some books on Sri Chaitanya. He has depicted Lord Jagannath as inferior to Sri Chaitanya. He

has referred to Sri Chaitanya as ‘Mahaprabhu’ (Lord of Lords) and Jagannath as ‘Jagannath Dev’. More so, he has not bothered to put the reverential prefix ‘Sri’ before Lord Jagannath. He writes, ‘When the king heard that Mahaprabhu would come to Puri, he travelled from Cuttack to Puri. However, even though he travelled this far, he didn’t get a chance to meet him. The king requested Sarbabhoumya Bhattacharya and other devotees to help him get a glimpse of Sri Chaitanya. They devotees advised the king that when Mahaprabhu would dance in ecstasy while the chanting of the name of Lord Hari, he could see him from a distance.

King Prataparudra Dev had a glimpse of Sri Chaitanya in this manner. By that time, the king was almost drooling, his body smeared with dust. However, his heart was not content. Who did he glimpse? Whom—whom everybody called god! When the king went to touch Lord Jagannath in his dream, Jagannath Dev told the king — ‘Your body smeared with camphor, musk, sandalwood is not worthy to touch my body smeared with dust and sweat.’ At that time, the king could see Sri Chaitanya Dev on the jeweled throne of Lord Jagannath and tried to touch him. Mahaprabhu Chaitanya told King Prataprudra Dev, ‘When you don’t love me, why do you want to touch me?’

When the king awoke from his sleep, he felt guilty remembering the dream. He understood that Lord Jagannath Dev and Srikrishna Chaitanya were one and the same.

The only objective behind Bhowmik’s long narration of Sri Chaitanya, King Prataprudra Dev, and Lord Jagannath is that the presence of *chhena* in the food offerings of Lord Jagannath at the temple has its root in Bengal. Therefore, he has stretched this story a bit far. That is why another topic in his book is: ‘Nilachale Maha Prabhura Prabhab’ (The impact of Chaitanya in Puri).

Sri Chaitanya: 'Living Brahma'?

It is universally acknowledged and granted by scriptures that Lord Jagannath is the 'Daru Brahma,' Brahma residing in a wooden frame. Even the representative of Lord Jagannath, 'Pati Dian' during the *anasara* is referred to as 'Pati Brahma' of *Niladri Mahodaya*.¹¹ But is Sri Chaitanya 'Living Brahma'? No one will answer this in affirmative. And yet, Bhowmik has said this in the chapter titled, 'Nilachale Mahaprabhu ra prabhava'. Again, in chapter 'Bhagabaner bhog'¹² (The offering to the Lord), he has mentioned how Chaitanya, an incarnation of Lord became the Lord himself.

In this context, it may be mentioned that the first *nabakalebar* of Lord Jagannath took place during the Gajapati King Ramachandra Dev I, as per historical evidence. This happened after emperor of Delhi, Akbar's chief courtier, Man Singh made Ramachandra Dev the king. At the same time, the 'Sri Sri Purushottama Jagannatha Mandira Sebaka Khatani Nijoga Karmangi' was prescribed in the presence of the Shankaracharya of Puri, other heads of mutts, the chief servitors of the temple, and the representatives of the king. This old manual of Jagannath Temple has been edited and published in *Anama-19*.¹³ It is known from this manual that even though Odisha was under the Mogul rule in 1568, Janardan Bidyadhar's son, Ramei Routara got the *jagir* of Khurda under the Bhoi dynasty and was recognized as the Gajapati king Ramachandra Dev I. He brought over the *Brahmabastu* from Bishara Mohanty in Kujangagada and got a *nabakalebara* done and established him in 1575 in the Puri temple and began offering *Anna Mahaprasad* (Rice offering) as before. Gobardhan Dora's *Orissa: An Encyclopedia of Events* specifically mentions that this event took place on 17th July, 1578.¹⁴ On this occasion, there

was the need for the manual 'Sri Purusottama Jagannatha Mandira Sebaka Khatani Nijoga Karmangi'. All the servitors, preceptor to the king, sages, mahantas, sat in front of the Garuda Pillar, and it was approved in that year in the month of Kartik on the sixth day of Libra, on a Friday. Again, on the 7th day of Capricorn in the month of Magha, it was legitimately approved at such a meeting in front of the Garuda Pillar. Therefore, it is a historical document regarding the service at Lord Jagannath Temple. The 82nd service is relating to the service by the Gajapati king. In the *Karmangi*, this has been referred to as 'Mahashrama Rajanijoga'.¹⁵ According to the description, the first preceptor to the family of Gajapati king was the Shankaracharya of Govardhana mutt (one of the four monasteries established by the Adi Shankar), Shankar Gosain (a monk of *dandi* order; the *dandi* monks customarily carried a staff). He was followed by the Gosain of Emar mutt. Sri Srinivas, belonging to Nityananda descendant and a friend of Sri Chaitanya, was the guru of Sri Prataprudra Dev. In this context, a sculpture on Sun temple, Konark acquires great significance. That sculptor depicts Shiva and Durga along with Lord Jagannath as well as King LangulaNarsingh Dev in the presence of his guru, a *dandi* monk.¹⁶ Thus, Sri Chaitanya was never a preceptor of Prataprudra Dev, and therefore it will be a historical blunder to depict him as such the preceptor of Prataprudra Dev.

The Episode of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda

Another example found in the book of Haripada Bhowmik shows to which level the researcher could stoop to prove the 'rasogolla' belongs to Bengal. According to the description on its page 87-88, "a devotee invited Sri Sri Thakur Ramakrishna Paramahansa on behalf of Sri Sabai Chaitanya to the inaugural festival of a

religious gathering at Konnagar. After the completion of the meeting and the devotional songs, while having food, Sri Sri Thakur bit a piece of rasogolla. The moment a few drops of the syrup of rasogolla entered his throat, he went into a trance. After he came out of the trance, he was asked why such a thing happened. He said that when a few drops of syrup from the sweet entered his throat, he experienced bliss and went into a trance.'

Alas, the great spiritual practitioner, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa's spiritual attainments could be linked to a few drops of syrup from rasogolla!

Similarly, there is also a story about Swami Vivekananda in the book. In page number 88, it is written, 'Ramachandra Dutta of Simla had taken Naren (Vivekananda) to Dakshineswar by the lure of rasogolla.' Again, 'He was not agreeing to come to Dakshineswar and meet Sri Ramakrishna. Ramachandra could persuade him by the lure of rasogolla.'

It is unnecessary to point out how Bhowmik has tried to demean the spiritual attainments of Sri Ramakrishna and belittle the personality of Swami Vivekananda in order to make Navin Chandra Das's sponge rasogolla appear big!

The Evolution of Rasagola from *Chhena*

It is clear from the discussion of earlier topics, the impure *chhena* did not become pure because of Sri Chaitanya nor did it come to Odisha from Bengal courtesy. *Chhena* was always a favourite delicacy in Odisha and it has been regarded as a pure ingredient in food offerings made to deities.

It is an interesting history in itself—how *chhena* become *gola* (balls of cottage cheese)

and acquired *rasa* (syrup) and became *rasagola* (balls of cottage cheese put in syrup). A number of imaginary stories have been put forth to prove the *chhena* product, *rasagola* belongs to Bengal in the similar manner.

The Story of *Dela* (which is like a slab of earth) Rasogolla

It is clear from the above-mentioned stories that be it Phulia or Shantipur or Baghbazaar, the *rasogolla* produced during that time was known as *dela rasogolla*. Because, it was not soft like it is now. It was crude as a slab of earth. Later, Navin Chandra Das, who had started his career as an apprentice at Kali Indra shop, gave this hard sweet its present soft form. That is referred to as 'Sponge Rasogolla' in Kolkata.

The Columbus of Rasogolla!

The Bengalis, who are known for their love for sweets, have hailed Navin Chandra Das for giving a new form to the existing crude *rasogolla*. He has been hailed as the 'Columbus of *rasogolla*.'¹⁷ Because, he gave a new characteristic to the already prevalent *dela rasogolla* and *danadar rasogolla*. Then, according to another source of information, Braja Moyra, who was an ancestor of Dinu Mayara, an inhabitant of Sitanath Ghosh Street of Beniatola, Kolkata, had started a shop near Kolkata High Court and discovered how to prepare *rasogolla*. This has been described in Bhowmik's book. Therefore, many give credit to Braja Moyra as the pioneer of first good quality *rasogolla* in Kolkata.

However, it is known from descriptions on Navin Chandra Das that he had started his career as an apprentice at the Kali Indra Shop and went on to open a separate shop with Kali Indra at Bhaguali. Later on, he opened an independent

sweet shop near Jorasanko as advised by his mother. Initially, though he prepared different varieties of *sandesh*, he gained fame for rasogolla. It is said that he started preparing rasogolla during 1868. Since it was soft like sponge and had a rounded form, it was referred to as *sponge rasogolla*. To magnify its significance, Bhowmik has said—‘America was full of aboriginal tribes. Later, it was discovered by Columbus. Similarly, there was *delia rasogolla*; Navin Chandra Das gave it a new form and presented it to the world. That’s why people started calling him ‘Rasogollar Columbus / Baghbazarer Nabin Das (Columbus of rasogolla, Navin Das of Baghbazaar) out of love. However, it has come to knowledge that Gopal Moyra and others also prepared rasogolla in the manner of Navin Chandra.

Gopalgola, Jatingola and Bhabanigola

The Bengalis view that there are mentions of many other rasogollas in the history of sweets in Bengal apart from Navin Das’s rasogolla. Their ‘pages from past’ say, Bipradas Mukhopadhyay had first written about the preparation method of rasogolla in a book title *Mistanna Paka*.¹⁸ It has been mentioned in the *Oxford Companion to Sugar and Sweets*¹⁹ that the second edition of this book was published in 1906. According to it, Gopal Moyra had prepared a sweet similar to rasogolla in Vardhaman. Its name was *Gopalgola*. According to another magazine *Mistikatha*,²⁰ published by the West Bengal Sweets Traders’ Association, similar kind of sweets were prepared during the same period of time. Those were known as *Jatingola*, *Bhabanigola*, *Rasugola*.

To acknowledge Navin Chandra Das as the pioneer in making rasogolla seems unjustified from this perspective.

Chhena Bara: Chhena Jhilli

There is a story prevalent in Kolkata that *Chhena bada* is the ancestral form of rasogolla. From the description of its recipe found in books on food in Bengal, it can be compared with *Chhenajhilli* of Nimapada or *Rasabali* of Kendrapada, Odisha. It is also a sweet like rasogolla. It is one of the items in the *chhapan bhog* (fifty-six items of food) at Lord Jagannath temple, Puri. There is no doubt about the fact that *jhilli* or *rasabali* was prevalent much before *Chhena-bara* of Kolkata.

So, if Chhena-bada of Bengal is an older form of rasogolla, the same variety of sweets such as chhena jhilli and Rasabali of Odisha are even much older forms of Rasogolla. In this context, it can be mentioned that there is a long tradition of preparing another sweet of same variety called *rasabara* which found in western Odisha. The *Purnachandra Odia Bhasakosa* confirms it as a sweet of Odisha.²¹

Rasakora: Rasagola

The sweetmeat called *Rasakora* was prevalent in Odisha for several centuries. In Odisha ‘kora’ usually refers to grated coconut mixed with thick sugar syrup and made into balls. The prevalence of this sweet is known from ancient Odia dictionaries. Christian missionary Reverend Amos Sutton has mentioned it in his Odia-English dictionary published in 1843. In his dictionary, *An Oriya and English Dictionary*,²² *rasakora* is explained as a kind of sweetmeat; savoury, liquefied.²³ This alludes to rasagola. Similarly, in William Brooks’ dictionary, *An Oriya and English dictionary* published in 1847, this has been explained as a sweet of a rounded shape.²⁴ Therefore *rasakora* may be said to be a synonym of rasagola. These two

dictionaries were published much before the so-called invention of rasagola by Navin Chandra Das.

Guda or Gouda vs. the City of Sugar

Haripada Bhowmik has said that since Bengal was famous for guda (jaggery), it is known as 'Goudadesha' (place of guda). But historically, Odisha was famous for sugar in India. The first sugar factory of Asia was established in 1824 in Aska, Odisha. However, Ulbe Bosma has written a research-based book *The Sugar Plantation in India and Indonesia: Industrial production, 1770-2010*.²⁵ Its page 83 has a passage which says, a man called John Binni, who belonged to the Binni family that lived in Madras since 1840, has established the sugar factory in Aska. It was named as 'The Aska Sugar Works and Distillery Ltd.' One of the shareholders of the factory was Fredrick James Vivien Minchin. After thirty years, he married an Odia woman and settled in Aska. He brought over modern machines from Germany and made the sugar factory so advanced that it gained unparalleled popularity in sugar trade in India.'

However, a slightly different version of the story says, Minichin had bought the factory in 1856 and gave it a new form. He had exported machines from Germany by a ship. The fifteenth century *Gangabansanucharita Champu*²⁶ mentions about the naval route. A Report prepared by Nabakrushna Chaudhury Centre for Development Studies, Bhubaneswar, has briefly mentioned this and has written about Fredrik Minchin and Sona Minchin in its seventh chapter titled 'Transport and Communication'. It may be specially mentioned that at that time a bronze statue of Minchin Saheb, and another marble statue of his Odia wife, Suna (Sona Madam/Emily Sona Minchin) were established. Though the bronze statue of Fredrick Minichin was later

stolen, the marble statue of Sona Minchin is preserved at the State Museum. Both the mementos of Fredrick James Vivian Minchin and Emily Sona Minchin are still there at the Odisha State museum.

This episode is significant in rasagola context—during that time Aska sugar factory was popular all over India and abroad for its advanced sugar technology. It was the first sugar factory in Asia. Aska was known as the City of Sugar. This indicates that sugar was more easily available to Odias who prepared rasagola than people in Bengal. But the temples used a kind of sweetener distilled from jaggery through the use of purely country method. This sweetener was well-known as *nabata*. The Purnachandra Odia Bhasakosha says it as *kanda*, *nabata*, and *guda bikara*. In temple's parlance, it is known as *khandasara*.²⁷

The Rasagola of Dandi Ramayana

Jaggery was the sweetener used in rasagola before the use of sugar. In this context, we have mentioned the existence of words such as *rasakora*, *chhena-bada* in the *Purnachandra Odia Bhasakosa*. But all these similar-sounding words don't guarantee confirmation in favour of rasagola. The *Dandi Ramayana* offers confirmation in this regard. In Pundit Surjya Narayan Das' Central Sahitya Akademi award-winning book *Odia Sahitya Itihaasa* (History of Odia Literature) Part I,²⁸ it is written that there is the mention of rasagola in Balaram Das' *Dandi Ramayana*.

Another eminent researcher of Odia Literature, Bholanath Rout has also written that there is mention of the word *Rasagola* in *Dandi Ramayana* in his Ph.D. thesis titled 'Dandi Ramayanare Odisha ra loka sanksruti'.²⁹

Another example is the book *Typical Selections from Odia Literature* edited by Bijay

Chandra Majumdar and published by Calcutta University in 1921.³⁰ This had been published with the financial assistance of King Biramitrodaya Singhdeo. In its first part, there is an excerpt from Balaram Das's *Ramayana* in the section on ancient Odia poets. This excerpt also contains the words: chhena, chhena products and rasagola.³¹ Its facsimile is available on World e-book library.³² Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, the then Vice-chancellor of Calcutta University has written a foreword to it. There is a description of ancient Odia poets in the long introduction.³³ In the discussion on Balaram Das, his relationship with Sri Chaitanya has been indicated. It has been clearly stated that Balaram Das's time coincided with the time of gajapati kings, Purusottam Dev and Prataprudra Dev. Balaram Das had completed writing the *Ramayana* by the time he was thirty-two. It was the time of gajapati king Purusottam Dev (1467-1497). Hence by the time Sri Chaitanya came to Odisha, Balaram Das was already very old. This was half a century before Sri Chaitanya came to Odisha and before nearly 350 years of the so-called invention of modern rasogolla in 1868.

Calicut Melana vs. Cuttack Bali Jatra

It has been indicated from the earlier discussion that rasagola was prevalent in Odisha since fifteenth-sixteenth century. But then, a few recent evidence may also be provided in this discussion. Haripada Bhowmik has included a poem 'Rasogolla ra staba (Praises to rasogolla)' in his book. As indicated in the book, this poem written by Rakhal Das Adhikari in *amitrakshar* rhyme was first published in the magazine *Rasikata*, part I, on page 30 in 1896.³⁴ It is clear from this that Bhowmik has not found any other example relating to rasogolla in Bengali literature written earlier than that. But in Odia poetry, there is another informative and interesting poem. This

poem is written by famous writer belonging to a royal dynasty, Damodar Pattanayak. In 1893, December 14, he had written a poem titled, 'Bali Jatra' in the weekly *Indradhanu*. It was a first-hand account of Cuttack's famous Bali Jatra.³⁵ He has written:

The sweetmeat's shop glitters
It showcases laddoo, rasagola, barphi, jalpi
and tejapatra podapistaka.
It also has kanchagola, Sarapuli, puli
malapua, mohan bhoga and lalmohana.
How much I can narrate,
If one does not eat after seeing all this
My tongue already drools
The sweetmeat's wife, a skimmer in hand
fries puri and kachuri with care.

It clearly shows that a few poets of Kolkata (then Calcutta) might have been impressed by the taste of rasogolla and poems written on it, but by that time rasagola was already a much-relished sweet in the huge fair, Bali Jatra. Again, the 'kanchagola' mentioned here is not name-centric like Kolkata's Jatin-gola, Gopalgola, Bhabanigola; its name indicates its quality.

Rasogolla in Bengali Encyclopedia

In this context, another solid evidence is the *Bangla Biswakosa* by Nagendranath Basu (1866-1936). It is the first encyclopedia in Bengali. After a long arduous labour for twenty-seven years, Nagendranath Basu could publish 24 parts of it, the last part was published by him in 1911. In that he has said rasogolla as a 'desaja' (country) word. There is no explanation that it is a Bengali word or sweet invented in Bengal. Similarly, there is no mention that it is a Bengali word in the *Bongiya Sabdakosa* (Bengali Dictionary) edited by Haricharan Bandhopadhyaya and published by Sahitya Akademi.³⁶ The word rasogolla is also not included in another important

dictionary *Bangla bhasar abhidan* (1998) published by Sishu sahitya sansad.³⁷

In this context, eminent historian as well as scholar on nineteenth century Odisha, Kailash Chandra Dash has raised a pertinent question in his research-based essay, 'Fresh Light on Rasogolla' as to why in a Bengali encyclopedia of nineteenth century 'rasogolla' has been described as a 'deshaja' (country word)? Why is 'rasogolla' not mentioned as an invention of Bengal? Is there any written evidence to establish that rasogolla was invented in Kolkata in 1868?³⁸

It is time Bengal answers all these questions.

The Hindi 'Rasogulla' of Nagendranath Basu

Nagendranath Basu was not only the compiler of *Bangla Biswakosa*, he was also the editor of the *Hindi Bishwakosa* included in the *Encyclopedia Indica*.³⁹ This Hindi encyclopedia published in 1919 has a word *rasogolla* and Nagendranath Basu has described it as a Hindi word.⁴⁰ This clearly indicates that Nagendranath Basu had doubts over the word *rasogolla* as a Bengali word and the fact that this sweet prepared with chhena was an invention of Bengal.

Odisha's Rasagola

There's no dearth of lore, memoirs and stories centering on rasagola in Odisha. But unlike in Bengal, literature on rasagola has not been compiled systematically in Odisha. Starting from *Sarala Mahabharata* to *Dandi Ramayana*, *Ambika Bilasa*, and *Bidagdha Chintamani*, Odishan food culture is amply described in all these books. In this context, especially notable is in *Purnachandra Odia Bhasakosa*, there is a line 'Sankalpara manda hela satya rasagola' under the entry, rasagola. In the description, it is mentioned 'Chintamani.'⁴¹ In the July issue of

Pourusha, Tulasi Ojha, an eminent scholar, has written in an essay, 'Odishara loka sahityare chhena rasagolara ullekha' (The mention of chhena rasagola in Odisha's Folk literature) that there is a great deal of similarity between *suklamanda* (delicacy prepared with steamed rice balls with chhena and grated coconut stuffing) and white rasagola (cottage cheese balls dropped in a light sugar syrup) in the traditional brata in Odisha, Sudasha brata.⁴² Sudasha brata is a worship offered to and fast observed by Odia women to appease goddess Lakshmi on a Thursday. According to traditional rules of osha bratas, it is customary to offer goddess Lakshmi balls of chhena mixed with jaggery on this day. According to Ojha, as chhena-manda and chhena gula offering are very dear to goddess Lakshmi, Lord Jagannath brings rasagola with him to appease an angry Lakshmi on the day he returns to his abode on the last day of the car festival.

However, there's no systematic research on rasagola in Odisha or on the prevalent tradition of rasagola as a ritual offering. The available information on this topic has not been compiled yet. Eminent playwright of Odisha, Gopal Chhotray has written a chapter titled 'Rasagola of Cuttack and Rasagola of Kolkata' in his memoir *Pathika*.⁴³ In this chapter, there is a comparative analysis between Odisha's rasagola and rasogolla of Kolkata,⁴⁴ and the superiority of rasagola of Odisha has been established.

Everybody in Odisha knows that Bhairaba Chandra Mohanty is an unforgettable personality in the history of Odishan sports. Gopal Chhotray describes: 'Once two couple from Kolkata came and became his guests. That day Bhairab babu told Gopal babu: 'they have come from Kolkata. Their rasagola is not only popular in Kolkata but outside the country as well. You live in Balu bazaar area—please advise me from which shop should

we bring good quality sweets and offer them. Tell me, which sweets should we offer to them.'

Gopalbabu said, 'It is true that rasagola of Kolkata is very popular. But we have Banchha Sahu's shop at college square; rasagola, kshiramohana or rajabhaga of Rangia shop in Balu bazaar, and sponge rasagola of Govind Sahoo's shop near High court: I am sure your guests have never had a chance to relish such sweets. Let me make a list. You go and bring these sweets from Rangia's shop.'

Bhairaba babu followed his words. Later, when he met Gopal Chhotray, Bhairaba babu said in a relaxed manner: "you're absolutely right. They have profusely praised our sweets made with chhena, particularly rasagola and rajabhaga." After describing this in his memoir, Chhotray has concluded: "From his words I gathered they preferred our rasagola over rasagola of Kolkata."

Nirad C. Choudhury is an eminent Indian-born English writer. Once he had written an essay in the renowned English weekly *The Illustrated weekly of India* on Indian food.⁴⁵ He had also given the credit to Bengal for sweets made with chhena and milk like food expert, K T Achaya. Gopal Chhotray has referred to this essay and said—"pity, Odisha, the neighbouring state of Bengal, is famous as a centre for making sweets with chhena and milk products, especially the coastal areas like Cuttack, Puri and Balasore, why this is not mentioned in Nirad Choudhury's essay?"⁴⁶

Such biased opinions are not confined to Nirad C. Choudhury or south Indian food historian K.T. Achaya—many others have done this too. Nevertheless, Odisha is the origin of rasagola burns like an inextinguishable flame from under the debris of such misinformation. There are many

Bengali, Indian and foreign food scholars who have defended for Odisha.

Then Odisha or Bengal—where was the origin of Rasagola? An episode relating to Madhu Sudan Das, the pride of Odisha, is significant in this context.

In 1951, a book titled 'Utkal Gouraba Madhusudan' was published by Utkal University. It was written by Naba Kishore Das.⁴⁷ At that time, he had a wish to write a biography of Madhu Sudan Das, but Madhu babu did not show any inclination.

After Madhu babu's death, he wrote the biography, *Utkal Gouraba Madhusudan*. In that he has indicated: "whatever is written in this book is based on archival papers etc. there's very little which is gathered from hearsay. The book has a foreword by Chintamani Acharya. In this book an episode from Madhu babu's life as a lawyer has been described. On its basis, Dash Benhur, the Odia writer, wrote a column, titled 'Mitharu Luna jaye' (From Sweets to Salt) in the daily *Sambad*.⁴⁸ Later, it has been included as a chapter in his fictionalized bio-novel of Madhusudan Das, *Pagadi Purusha*.⁴⁹ In that there is a description of a court case that Madhusudan Das had fought. The case was fought in 1901-02. There is a description of Madhu babu questioning a man of 'Madhu-baishya' (Sweet Confectioner) caste. The description is as follows:

"Madhusudan asked—'Brother, what's your name? I just forgot it.'

Witness—Barajananda Sahoo.

Madhusudan—'Sahu' means?

Witness—our caste is 'madhubaishya'.

Madhusudan: Now I understand you belong to the family of renowned sweet confectioner Kangali Sahu.

The witness looked at Madhusudan excitedly. Madhusudan knew this was the right chance: ‘Look brother, you prepare sweets, rasagola, mohanbhoga since time immemorial and sweeten the mouth of people, that’s why Odias and Bengalis speak such sweet words; why don’t you utter a sweet word?’

The witness lowered his face. After that whatever Madhusudan asked him, he burst out all truths happily. The judge too seemed amused. Madhusudan won the case.”

This case was most probably in 1901-02, but the tradition of preparing rasagola in the ‘Madhu-baishya’ family goes back to his grandparents’ days. If that was calculated as 70-80 years, then rasagola was prepared by that family fifty years earlier than Navin Chandra Das.

Further, eminent journalist Subhash Chandra Pattnaik has indicated in a post on his web journal (ORISSAMATTERS.COM) on 31 July 2015, on the basis of several archival data, a family belonging to Bandal of Banki in Odisha has been preparing rasagola for seven generations. On the other hand, it is found that Navin Chandra Das’s family has been engaged in preparing rasagola for the last three generations only. It is gathered that the family in Banki had offered rasagola to the king and the king, impressed by the sweet, had granted them seven acres of levy-free land.

And then, it’s not that only writers and researchers of Odisha claim rasagola belongs to Odisha; many writers and researchers from Bengal also support this claim without hesitation.

A great evidence is found in the popular weekly *Bartamana*, issue April 2011.⁵⁰ There is an article by Samrat Nandi in this issue. In a section, ‘Ektu Janun, ektu bhabun’ (Know a little,

Think a little), he has provided an interesting description:

“Rasogolla. As soon as one hears this word, one’s tongue drools. This sweet is regarded as an identity marker of Bengalis. And yet, no matter how strongly the Bengalis claim rasagola to be their own, one must feel surprised that its origin was in Odisha. It is a sweet prepared in Odisha for ages and ages. Even this sweet is offered to Lord Jagannath and Sri Lakshmi at Lord Jagannath temple, Puri. In the mid-nineteenth century, many Brahmin cooks came to Bengal from Odisha in search of work. Incidentally, many varieties of recipes, including rasagola, must have come to Bengal with them. Nonetheless, here rasagola was popularized by a sweet vendor called Navin Chandra Dash. After him his son KC Dash has managed the business. By his effort, rasagola got to be exported abroad.” This passage clearly indicates that rasagola became popular after it was brought from Odisha.

Another recent supporter of this view is a journalist from Bengal, Biswabijaya Mitra. On 6th July 2015, one of his articles was titled, ‘Who was the inventor of Rasagola?’⁵¹ In this article he has mentioned about the dispute between Odisha and Bengal over the origin of rasagola and gone on to say how it has been prevalent in Jagannath temple, Puri since a very long time. In addition, he has quoted another food researcher, Pritha Sen, who has researched on the food preferences of Bengalis—”In the mid-18th century, many cooks employed in large Bengali homes were Odias. It is possible they brought the rasagulla with them.”

On 24 August 2015, the New Indian Express had organized a literary festival in Bhubaneswar. In one of the sessions, the topic of discussion was, ‘Why was there so much trash in Indian food?’ In this Professor Puspesh Panth

had taken part and repeated his opinion. In that festival, the renowned film-maker, Imtiaz Ali, had said since the quality of Odishan rasagola is far superior to the Bengal rasagola, it could surely be originated in Odisha. In that festival in another session, the detective Bengali writer, Sovan Choudhury had made a humorous remark in this context. He said: Once the Bengalis were proud of Satyajit Ray and Rabindranath Tagore. But not it seems there have no one to be proud of, and that is why they seem to be saying to Odias, 'Please don't take away rasagola from us. You have temples of Puri and Konark to be proud of, what do we have to be proud of now?'

In this context, Professor Utpal Roy Choudhury's remark is mention worthy. In the first week of August 2011, he had been invited as a guest by a trust formed in memory of Bikalananda Kar, a prominent rasagola trader of Odisha. Dr. Roy Choudhury is a professor at the department of Food Technology and Bio-chemical Engineering, Jadavpur University. In that gathering he had said—Rasagola is offered as a food at Puri temple in Odisha since thirteenth century, for nearly seven hundred years. Reports on this meeting were published in the famous English daily *Pioneer* on 5th August, 2011 and other media.⁵² Besides, eminent Television journalist Alokanda Mukherjee, scholar Dipti Roy, food researcher, food specialist Charmin O'Brien, S.M Guni have opined that Odisha was the place of origin of rasagola.

Charmin O'Brien's famous book, *The Penguin Food Guide to India* has one chapter title, 'Odisha: Feeding the Divine'⁵³. He has written: "One food item that is the subject of dispute between the two states is the chhena based rasagulla... The most likely story is that the rasagulla came into Bengal from Odisha but was commercially produced and popularized in

Calcutta.⁵⁴ Similarly, Shamsuddin Mohummden Gani was not only a director at the Tourism department under Government of India, but was a former principal at Kolkata Institute of Hotel Management. In this, S M Gunni has placed chhena poda pitha, chhena jhilli and rasagola among the sweets prepared with milk products in an article in *Imaging Odisha*, two-volume coffee table books on Odishan history and culture.⁵⁵

The food offerings mentioned in the *Swattwalipi* of Lord Jagannath temple

Rasagola has been offered to appease goddess Lakshmi on the day of Niladri Bijie for several centuries at Lord Jagannath temple, Puri. But many argue that the use of *rasagola* is not mentioned in *Sattwalipi* (*Record of Rites of, Lord Jagannath Temple, Puri*). But then, even if there is no mention of rasagola in particular, there is mention of 'bhoga bidhi' (manual for food offerings) in the *Sattwalipi*. Earlier, this ritual was celebrated on the twelfth day of full moon phase of the month Aashadh. Therefore, the procedure has been mentioned in the context of 'Dwadasi-Niladri Bijie'. In this, it is written "Bada Thakur and Subhadra are brought to the throne. While they were brought, at the Suasari temple, Pati Mohapatra offer worship to them. In Jagamohan the Holy Dieties are also offered worship."⁵⁶

Similarly, it is written in the context of Lord Jagannath's 'Niladri Bijie': When the door opens, and Lord Jagannath arrives near the place where Lakshmi is already waiting, Bhitarchha Mohapatra Sevak unties the knot of the ritual of marriage. They are offered worship. After this, Lord Jagannath sits on his throne."

The significance of this procedure is that when Balabhadra and Subhadra are offered different delicacies at this time, Lord Jagannath is

offered rasagola. Though there is no specific mention of the food offering made here, it can be said without doubt that it is rasagola. Traditionally Bhitarchha Mohapatra prepares the rasagola in a sattvik manner at his home, and offers that to Lakshmi on behalf of Lord Jagannath.

In the Bhitarchha practice code in *Sattwalipi*, this finds a particular mention.⁵⁷ Regarding the 'Bhitarchha seva' on the day of 'Niladri bje', it has been mentioned that 'this servitor offers light *manohi* at the meeting altar, makes light offering to garuda, while Lord Jagannath descends from the chariot and goes to sit on the jeweled throne. While the knot of the marriage to Rukmini is untied he is offered dahi pati, ghasa, bidia manohi and Bhog offering. Since only rasagola is offered by Bhitarchha Mohapatra for ages, even though it is not written specifically, it is 'rasagola.' There is no mention of any other food offering nor has any other sweet ever been seen to be offered.

Rasagola offering by Monasteries

Not only this, the mutts involved in Lord Jagannath's seva and worshipping such as Bada Odia mutt, Radhaballav mutt, Cuttaki mutt, Newla Das mutt and Radhashyam mutt make rasagola offering since the last hundred to three hundred years. In this context, eminent scholar on the tradition of 'Puri mutts', Bhaskar Mishra makes special mention of Raghav Das mutt. He had made an elaborate discussion on this in the journal *Pourusha*,⁵⁸. He says, 'This is the only mutt which brings rasagola to offer to Lord Jagannath. A servitor offers it to Lord Jagannath after the Rukmini marriage knot is untied on behalf of the mutt. This tradition is of about three hundred years.' An important piece of information regarding this is, while Bhowmik claims that the chhena offering was first made to Lord Jagannath after king Prataprudra Dev came under the

influence of Sri Chaitanya, no such offering is made at Sri Chaitanya Goudiya mutt in Puri on that day. Similarly, at the time of *anasara* of Lord Jagannath (when he's down with fever), Sri Chaitanya didn't get to have a glimpse of Lord Jagannath and went to have a glimpse of Sri Alarnath at the Alarnathpith nearby, but there is no practice of making rasagola offering there. The favourite offering is kshiri (little amount of boiled rice added to sweetened and condensed milk).⁵⁹ On the other hand, Bansidhar Goswami, the head of the Bada Odia mutt established by Jagannath Das in Baseli Sahi of Puri, says: According to the daily and annual procedure and manual of the mutt, rasagola is offered as *bhoga* at least more than three hundred years in the mutt."⁶⁰

The Evidence from *Madalapanji* and *Desha Khanja*

The question arises, while Anangabhim Dev introduced new food offerings at Lord Jagannath Temple, did rasagola find a place in it? In this regard, we can take the help of *Madalapanji*. In the hand-written manuscript of *Madalapanji* which is preserved in Odisha State Archives, there is the description regarding the food offering made during the reign of Anangabhim Dev—"In the morning offering... the food will form a mountain... pancakes such as kakara, arisa, pili, apamala, ghola, badanadi, tipuri are decorated as trees, sara papudi, gotika, rasakora become like flowers. **Chhena manda**, ripe banana, baby coconut all this will be decorated as fruits. The servitor will offer these to Lord Jagannath."

In *Pourusha*, year 50, issue I, July 2016, Sunil Rath, a scholar, has made an elaborate discussion on this.⁶¹ In this issue, in another article, the Pratihari servitor of Puri temple, Purnachandra

Gochhikara has discussed many ancillary procedures followed at the temple in this context. To provide milk and milk products, he has mentioned there are many procedures such as Mahabhoi seva, dudhaghara seva, Baragotha Palei sevak seva and gauda nijoga seva.⁶²

In the book *Jagannath and the Gajapati Kings of Orissa*, edited by Dr. Gaganendra Nath Dash, eminent scholar of Odia literature and Jagannath consciousness, there is mention of food offerings of Lord Jagannath quoted from ancient pothis, 'Desha Khanja', 'Sevaka bhiana o Seva bibarana'. In this it has been mentioned that rasakora, Chhena laddoo, o chhena manda are mentioned in the morning offering, noon dhup, evening dhupa.⁶³ Later, all these bhogas are mentioned in the *Srimandira Swattwalipi*.⁶⁴ It may be said that all these are earlier form of rasagola. Rasagola is apparently *chhena laddoo* or *ball of cottage-cheese*. The only difference is balls of chhena are boiled in sugar syrup to prepare rasagola. Rasagola is boiled in sugar syrup whereas 'chhena manda' is prepared by steaming balls of boiled rice flour stuffed with chhena.

The Rasagola of Niladri Bijē

Rasagola has been traditionally used as a ritual offering on the last day of car festival at the time of Niladri Bijē (Lord Jagannath's return to his abode). Jagabandhu Padhi, eminent scholar on Jagannath cult, views the tradition to be at least six hundred years; others say this must be at least three hundred years.⁶⁵

In this context, we can illustrate this point with an example from a book by poet Lokanath Vidyadhara, who belonged to post seventeenth century. His book has been published under the series, Utkaliya Prachya Granthamala (ancient books of Odisha) by Directorate of Culture, Odisha in 1991. In this book, the first chapter is

Mangala Charan (Obeisance to lords), and second chapter to twenty-fifth chapter describe different rituals of Lord Jagannath between Snana Yatra to Chandan Yatra. The last chapter depicts the daily rituals at Lord Jagannath temple. The seventeenth chapter of this book describes Lord Jagannath's return to abode, known as the Niladri bijē.⁶⁶

According to customs, after Sri Balabhadra and goddess Subhadra enter the temple, the aides close the entrance door at goddess Lakshmi's order. As he cannot enter the temple, Lord Jagannath sends message through goddess Lakshmi's aides. After this, goddess Lakshmi tells her aides to open the door. According to 'Niladri Mahotsaba' after the aides and attendants tell her about Lord Jagannath's sweet words and humble requests, Lakshmi gives up her affected anger and orders them to open the door in an elated mood. Lokanath Vidyadhara describes the episode:

And then the aides go quickly and tell Lakshmi happily.

Lord Jagannath who had been away for nine days
Appear at the goddess's door, you hear!
We have closed the doors
Outside, lord is waiting.
And he is requesting me and you
How much I cannot say.
Hearing such nectar words
Goddess is elated and happy
She's never one hard-hearted
She is innocent, chaste and calm.
So unable to hold anger in her heart
She orders her aides
To open the doors
And let the Lord come inside.⁶⁷

According to the custom of Niladri Bijē, after this the servitors role-playing as aides go

and open the doors and the lord walks into the temple. In front of the bhandara room, Lakshmi and Nayarana meet and the marriage-knot (gainthala) is untied and at the time of this divine meeting, Lord Jagannath offers Rasagola to Lakshmi to appease her.

One of the important aspects of this 'gainthala' knot is on the eleventh day of the full moon phase in the month of Jyestha (lunar month corresponding approximately to 15 March-15 April), the wedding ceremony takes place after the abduction of Rukmini. Immediately after that Lord Jagannath joins the Snana yatra (bathing festival) and after the bath got down with fever. And once he recovers from fever, he gives a glimpse of his new vigour (nabajoubana) to devotees and goes out on a chariot accompanied by his brother and sister. That's why the wedding knot tied earlier had not been untied. That gets untied on the day of 'Niladri Bijē', the day he returns to his abode. The year *nabakalebara* falls, there's one specialty, the knot is tied to the old wooden Brahman, but the knot is untied from the new form.

Why there is no particular mention of traditional rasagola offering in the manual, we find a clue to this question in a further description of Lokanath Vidyadhar's 'Niladri Mahostaba'. It has been described in this manner:

So the aides went hurriedly and opened the doors

To the lord.

The lord comes inside

and arrives at the entrance of bhandara.

Sister, here he meets Lakshmi

That moment is divine

And so I am not describing it here.

Those who have seen it know

The daughter of the ocean-god

Lakshmi knows this, he's her husband.⁶⁸

It means, this divine, intimate ritual can only be witnessed, it can be experienced, but it is not describable. Only the devotees present there get to experience the divine feeling. Therefore, though traditionally rasagola is made as a food offering for centuries, there's hardly any literary work in Odia which mentions this. Bhitarchha Mohapatra, the servitor, prepares this offering at his house in a pure way. The prominent mutts too offer rasagola to Lord Jagannath on the chariot.

It is evident from all this that rasagola was popular in Odisha much before Navin Chandra Das prepared and popularized it in Bengal. Later, Kelu Behera of Pahala village situated on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar and Bikalananda Kar of Salepur played a key role in popularizing it. In memory of Kelu Behera, there is a huge rasagola market in Pahala, and there is a society called Kelu Behera Sweet Traders' Association. Like the huge business of rasagola by Navin Chandra Das's family and his son KC Das and Dhiman Das, Bikalananda Kar's son Prashant Kar has a huge business of rasagola, too.

The history of rasagola in Odisha is at least five hundred years, and so many varieties and innovativeness are found in this. In 2015, on the occasion of Niladri Bijē in the *nabakalebara* year, there was an interesting incident following the celebration of Rasagola day. To the plain rasagola were added different flavours and colours: spinach, mint, papaya, carrot, basil, mango, pineapple, orange, jaggery, chocolate, saffron, cashew, two-in-one, lichi and coconut. All such varieties of rasagola of many hues created an attractive ambience.⁶⁹

It is not always possible to fix a specific date to a traditional ritual which started many centuries ago. From this perspective, though the specific time when rasagola was used on Niladri

Bije, it can be said it was prevalent in Puri between three hundred years to seven hundred years. The mention of rasagola in *Dandi Ramayana* shows it is prevalent in Odisha for at least five hundred years. **And the *Srimandira Swattwalipi* supports that it is offered on the day of Niladri Bije. This clearly proves that Odisha is the place of origin of Rasagola and it is the traditional ritual offering when Lord Jagannath returns to his abode.**

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