



## I

The antiquity of Sri Purushottama Kshetra, the sacred dhama of Darurupi Jagannatha Trinity is still shrouded in mystery though copious sources present the significance of it. Besides Sanskrit Puranas and Sthala Puranas, vernacular Odia texts we have several epigraphic records on it. They are still not sufficient for a comprehensive study on Jagannatha Cult. Anthropological studies are also given importance in this respect. But there is still a scope for a reinterpretation of traditional narratives found to be incorporated in Odia epic of Sarala Das which is Mahabharata. In this article we have directed the attention of the Jagannatha scholars to a fresh study of Vana and Musali



## Yamanika Tirtha and the First Darurupa in Sri Purushottama Kshetra

*Kailash Chandra Dash*

Parvas of Sarola Mahabharata locating the antiquity of Purushottama Kshetra and for interpreting the wooden shape of the Four-fold images (Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana) in the sacred centre of Sri Purushottama.

## II

In the extant text of Sarola Mahabharata (in the edited volumes by Arttaballabh Mohanty the term is Sarola which is also known as Sarala) there is ample scope for a fresh study of the mysterious Jagannatha Cult. (Mohanty,

1970:171-230; 1-120) The poet Sarola Das was a contemporary of the Suryavamshi king Kapilendra Deva who had the reigning period from 1435 to 1470 which is supported from his version in *Sarola Vandana* of Adi Parva. (Mohanty, 1965:4) He had given an elaborate study of the origin and progress of Sri Purushottama Kshetra, the seat of Daru-rupi Jagannatha Trinity on the basis of his thorough knowledge of the traditional local narratives. The first important aspect of the antiquity of Purushottama Kshetra, the so-called Nilasundaragiri on the sea-shore of Utkala according to Sarola Das is Yamanika Tirtha. This



Yamanika Tirtha has been presented both in Vana Parva and Musali Parva of his Mahabharata. According to the poet Yamanika Tirtha was also known as Yameswar Pitha where Yameswar Linga was present. The term Yamanika Tirtha is very significant for the study of the antiquity of Purushottama Dhama which is entirely absent in epigraphic sources and even in several Sthala Puranas like Purushottama Khanda of Skanda Purana where we find only the name Yameswar. First of all Sarola Das in his Vana Parva described the origin of Yamanika Tirtha which contained Purushottama Kshetra or the popular Nilagiri. (Mohanty, 1970:108-109) In this section of Vana Parva Yamanika Tirtha on the sea-shore has also been described as *Yambeswar Mukta Mahalinga*. Yamanika has been described as a son of Brahma and as such a Maharshi. Once this Yamanika using the Marala (Swan) vehicle of Brahma travelled seven earths (Sapta Brahmanda). Brahma wanted his vehicle Swan to visit Heaven and was informed that Yamanika was going to Patala (Low Land) in his Swan vehicle. Brahma who was described as Vedavyas cursed his son not to return and he would stay where he was moving. At that time Yamanika was in the north side of *Baranidhi* (Sea). He remained there as stone like Mahasambhu. Thus there came into being Yamanika Tirtha where Yameswar, son of Brahma was called Yameswar Mahalinga. At the end of this Tirtha was Nilasundaragiri.

This version of Sarola Das indicates a new aspect of Yama. In the Puranas Yama has been described as a son of Surya (Dharma), but Sarola Das accepted him as a son of Brahma. Yamanika Tirtha contains Nilasundaragiri which was also known as Sri Purushottama Kshetra. Yameswar is still popular in Purushottama Kshetra. But Sarola Das who was conscious of

this Saiva centre Yameswar accepted Yamanika as the son of Brahma, the progenitor of the Vedas. Yamanika was not Yama, but a disobedient and cursed child of Brahma in this section of Odia Mahabharata. There is an indirect indication in this story of Yamanika that the centre of Purushottama was earlier famous as a Vajrajani Tantric centre. The peculiar name Yamanika signifies the name of a famous Vajrajana deity called Yamantaka. Yamanika was probably a distorted form of Yamantaka used by the local people who also accepted him as Yameswar which means lord of Yama, a form superior to Yama. In Vajrajani Tantric form of worship Yamantaka was also called Mahakala and destroyer of Death. (Donaldson, 2001:227-230) On the basis of this interpretation we may state here that Sarola Das in this section of Mahabharata presented the fact that Vajrajana as a form of religion was latent in Vedic ideas, but the Buddhists used it differently and the famous Vajrajani deity Yamantaka was worshipped in the seashore of Odisha which is now called Purushottama Kshetra. Even in the border of Puri near Konarka in Kuruma Buddhist Vihara there was the worship of Yamantaka for which the site is also called Yama-dharma Pitha. (Donaldson, 2001:83-84) There is corroborative evidence on the presence of Tantric element in Purushottama Kshetra before it was a full centre of Vishnu. Sakta cult was a predominant aspect of Purushottama Kshetra in the early medieval phase. Sakta influence in the temple ritual of Lord Jagannatha can be clearly traced. (Dash, 1963:281; Mishra, 1991:44-45) In Tantra Chudamani, a tantric text of later date the association of Bhairava-Jagannatha with Goddess Bhairavi-Vimala has been emphasized. It indicates that the main centre of Purushottama was dominated by Bhairava, Vimala for which Vimala was accepted as the Pitheswari of Puri.



Most probably the tantric elements were completely eliminated during the period of Chodaganga who occupied the entire centre of the tantric deities in Purushottama Kshetra for constructing the present huge structure for Vishnu-Purushottama. According to Rajabhoga of Madalapanji, this Ganga king Chodaganga imprisoned the Tantric deities which indicates his interference in the Tantric dominated Purushottama Kshetra. In the Ganga period when Chaturddha-murti (Daru-rupi images) were worshipped in the stupendous temple of Purushottama the Buddhist priests were in large number and they were eliminated in a gradual process during the Ganga-Suryavamshi phase which is supported by the version of Rajabhoga in Madalapanji. Even Sarola Das in the Mahabharata described Jagannatha Trinity as Buddha which indicates the predominance of Tantric Buddhism in that centre before it became known as Purushottama Kshetra. Hence Yamantaka was also a famous deity in that area before it became known as Purushottama Kshetra. In course of time Yamantaka was corrupted as Yamanika and afterwards Yameswar which is still predominant. As Yameswar was a significant part of the Purushottama Kshetra in the medieval phase Puri was also famous as Swarga-dwara. The people call it Swarga-dwara because this centre during the rising phase of Vajrayana-Sahajayana of Buddhism could give considerable attention to the road to salvation. Several Tantric practices with Yamantaka as the chief deity in this centre were forgotten but the idea of salvation persisted in popular memory which made the centre the so called famous Swargadwara. The early Tantric aspect of Yamantaka was deleted from the popular memory and Yameswar remained as a fragmented memory of that grand

phase of Vajrayana-Sahajayana in the centre and dominated Purushottama Kshetra.

### III

A significant aspect of the cult of Jagannatha is the daru-rupa or wooden shape of the deities. Though the famous Jagannatha Trinity and Sudarshana worshipped in the present Purushottama Kshetra were wooden shaped and it was well known from the phase of Anangabhima III, the wooden nature of Sri Purushottama in the pre-Ganga period has not been clearly established. The epigraphic records only mention the worship of Purushottama in the pre-Ganga period on the sea-shore of Odisha called Purushottama Kshetra, but these records are entirely silent on the nature and shape of this image. The existence of a temple for Sri Purushottama on the sea-shore of Utkala in the pre-Ganga phase has been confirmed by several epigraphic and literary texts. The famous Indradyumna traditional narrative only presents a study on the huge temple of Purushottama-Jagannatha and the development of the worship of the wooden images. The Indradyumna tradition as described in Purushottama Kshetra Mahatmya was silent on the worship of Purushottama in a different temple before the construction of a huge temple for the worship of wooden images. Rajabhoga and Deshkhajja of Madalapanji appreciate the authenticity of the Indradyumna legend and present the development of the Kshetra of Purushottama in the post-Indradyumna phase. Indradyumna traditional narrative was invented in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to justify the necessity of the worship of wooden images in the stupendous temple for Vishnu. Despite all contradictions in Madalapanji (both Rajabhoga and Deshkhajja) it refers to the existence of a small temple in Purushottama Kshetra in the 10<sup>th</sup>



to 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. According to this version Yajati Keshari constructed a temple having 38 feet for the gods in Purushottama Kshetra as the temple of Indradyumna was dilapidated and outworn. If the versions of Madalapanji are correct the temple of Yajati Keshari was different from the huge temple now in existence. One can accept the versions of Madalapanji on the small temple of Yajati as invented; but why did the compilers of Madalapanji invented the construction of a small temple by Yajati ? The construction of a huge temple for Purushottama after the old temple was dilapidated is justified and has been accepted on the basis of several authentic documents. The existence of a temple for Vishnu Purushottama between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. has been confirmed by epigraphic and literary sources. Still there is no reference of such a temple for the worship of Vishnu Purushottama in the records of the Bhaumakara and Somavamshi kings. The Somavamshis had no doubt assiduous patronage for Saiva cult but this does not deter them to entirely neglect the worship of Vishnu in their areas. In the Narasimhapur copper plate grant of Udyotakesari of the Somavamshi family there is a reference to Yayati II as a Pratinidhi (Representative) of Vishnu-Madhusudana which indicates that the Somavamshi kings were not indifferent to the worship of Vishnu. With all these arguments we can state that the worship of Vishnu Purushottama was not entirely neglected during the phase of the Somavamshis. But there is no definite evidence on the arrangements for the worship of Vishnu Purushottama during the phase of the Somavamshis as their epigraphic records are silent on this aspect. The phase of Yajati I and Yajati II of the Somavamshi family represented an important stage of state formation and power legitimation through ritual reorganization. This ritual

reorganization for power legitimation required political patronage of religious centres. Hence though the Somavamshi kings were not officially attributed with the religious epithet Parama Vaishnava they might have taken considerable steps for the spread of Vishnu worship by constructing a structure for Vishnu-Purushottama on the sea-shore zone of Odisha which was possibly demanded as a centre of Vishnu in the all India sphere. By way of reference we may state that though the Ganga king Narasimha I was not officially attributed with the title of Parama Saura he could construct a huge structure for Sun in Konarka zone which could also legitimize Ganga rule in Odisha and parts of Bengal (threatened by Muslim rulers). From that point of view the construction of a temple for Vishnu Purushottama on the sea-shore of Puri during the phase of the Somavamshis was almost possible and real. By 11<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of the literary references in Rajamarttanda, Naisadhiya Charita, Prabodha Chandrodaya and Anargha Raghava Nataka the cult and temple of Purushottama were well-known in India. But there was not a huge temple for Purushottama during this phase which is supported by the references in Rajabhoga and Deshkanja sections of Madalapanji.

In the initial stage before the period of the Somavamshi kings the so-called Purushottama Kshetra on the sea-shore zone was purified as a Brahmanic centre of worship which is supported by an analysis of Indradyumna traditional narratives. Again a part of this zone was already covered with sea for centuries and after the sea water receded and was emptied during the post-Gupta phase (as is presented in Deshkanja of Madalapanji) there was an attempt to convert it into a centre of Vishnu-Purushottama as Vishnu



was connected with the sea on the basis of the Puranic sources. In Harsha Charita of Bana Bhatta of 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Purushottama got Lakshmi after the churning of the Ocean and had established his authority over the Ocean which indirectly justified that Purushottama Kshetra became known in all India sphere in 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. But there was no temple for Vishnu then. Only the site was taken as a centre for Vishnu Purushottama. Thus the first temple for Vishnu-Purushottama was constructed in this zone between 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. During this phase this sea zone came under the direct control of the Buddhists who had the experiments of Vajrajana and Sahajajana practices. Also during this phase the Saivas and Saktas became powerful over a part of this Kshetra which prevented Vishnu worship. There is however the possibility that a part of this Kshetra was accepted as the centre of Vishnu Purushottama despite the spread of Tantric sects and Saiva-Sakta cult in a large portion of this centre.

In Odia Sarola Mahabharata (both in Vana and Musali Parvas) the first phase of Purushottama worship in this zone has been presented. In these sections there were constructions on the phase of Purushottama worship before the erection of a huge temple in the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Sarola Das made some revisions in the well-known Indradyumna traditional narrative of the Purushottama Kshetra Mahatmya. According to his version as presented in Musali Parva in the Nilasundara hill included in Yamanika Tirtha Yama had set up the dead body of Krushna. This aspect of the burial of the dead body of Krushna by Yama in the Nilasundaragiri contains an interesting point. It indicates that Yamanika Tirtha was the seat of Krushna worship in early phase. But Sarola Das suggested that the

dead body of Krushna in stone form was worshipped in a temple. The temple was constructed by Galamadhava of Haihaya dynasty. This Haihaya dynasty was also known as Kalachuri dynasty which was also powerful in South Kosala during and after the Somavamshi phase. Hence by using Haihaya king as a builder of the temple for Vishnu Sarola Das possibly indicated that the early temple of Purushottama was constructed by Somavamshi Yajati I who was a contemporary of the Haihaya Kalachuri family having control over South Kosala, though the name of Yajati was not used and the name was Galamadhava. Sarola Das found Galamadhava in the famous Puranic Indradyumna tradition and altered the context in his Musali Parva. In the Puranic tradition Galamadhava occupied the Kshetra when Indradyumna went to heaven to invite Brahma for the inaugural ceremony of the temple. But Sarola Das stated that Galamadhava constructed a temple for the worship of stone image in Nilasundaragiri and also suggested that the burnt body of Krushna in the form of stone was worshipped in the temple of Galamadhava. He also imagined that this stone Madhava (which was the burnt body of Krushna kept by Yama in Nilasundara hill) was earlier worshipped by the Sabaras there. Galamadhava deprived the Sabaras for worshipping the dead body of Krushna by worshipping the image in a temple and consequently their rights over the dead body of Krushna were not accepted. So Lord Madhava cursed Galamadhava for ignoring the claim of the Sabaras there and consequently his clan was extinct and Madhava worship was ended there. After many centuries Indradyumna came and constructed another temple for Krushna which became the centre of the worship of Daru-rupi Chaturddhamurti. This version of Sarola Das indicated that there was a temple for Vishnu



Purushottama on the sea-shore zone of Puri in the pre-Ganga phase. By the time of Sarola Das there was possibly a tradition on the worship of Vishnu in a small temple in Puri before the great temple for Vishnu was constructed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

In Musali Parva Sarola Das presented an interesting fact of the worship of Vishnu which according to his version was earlier worshipped by the Sabaras and which was the deadbody of Krushna set up by Yama. Sarola Das called this image as Pasana Madhava (Madhava in stone form). From the surface one will think that a stone image of Vishnu was worshipped in a small temple in Purushottama Kshetra before the worship of Daru-rupi Chaturddha-murti in a huge temple. But this stone Madhava was nothing but the dead body of Krushna set up by Yama in Nilasundaragiri and it was under the possession of the Sabaras there. This version of Musali Parva requires an explanation. Sarola Das was aware of the worship of wooden gods in Puri and the change of the life-substance at interval of several years which was known as Nabakalevara. In his Musali Parva he stated about the incorporation of the remains of the deadbody of Krushna in a form which was originally stone in the pre-Indradyumna phase, that is, the period of Galamadhava. But he also stated that in the period of Indradyumna the wooden gods were worshipped. In fact on the surface study one will think that there was the worship of a stone image of Vishnu in the pre-Ganga phase in Puri, but the worship of the deadbody of Krushna in a stone form called Madhava was not approved by the Sabaras who were in possession of the deadbody of Krushna before him. Ignoring the claim of the Sabaras on their object of worship by Galamadhava led to the end of his dynasty and

the end of the worship of Madhava. In this episode Sarola Das admitted that Puri was originally a centre of the worship of the Sabaras (Un-Aryan people) and the image in wooden form contains an object which was considered the deadbody of Krushna. Possibly Rajabhoga and Deshkhanja sections of Madalapanji were influenced by this version of Sarola Das. In Deshkhanja and Rajabhoga Yajati recovered the remains of the wooden gods of Puri in Sonapur-Baud area which were hidden there. But Sarola Dasa stated that the remains of the deadbody of Krushna were hidden by Yama in Yamanika Kshetra of Puri near the seashore which were recovered by Galamadhava in pre-Indradyumna phase. The version of Sarola Das indicated that Yamanika Kshetra of Puri was also a centre of the Sabaras who were in control of the deadbody of Krushna which was kept hidden by Yama. Thus Sarola Das presented the unique fact of the worship of the wooden god containing the Brahma or the remains of the deadbody of Krushna in pre-Ganga phase. His primary aim like that of the Purushottama Kshetra Mahatmya's Indradyumna traditional narrative was to deny the worship of stone image of Vishnu in the pre-Ganga and post-Ganga phase. As a matter of fact there was no regard for Vishnu worship of Purushottama Kshetra in Odisha during the two centuries from the phase of Yajati I though in the all India level the centre of Purushottama was well appreciated as is stated in the literary and epigraphic records of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In Odisha there was no reference to the deity Purushottama in the literary and epigraphic records between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Had Purushottama possessed the usual iconography of Vishnu in stone it would have been well appreciated by the people and devotees in Odisha. But it was different and so the centre of



Purushottama was neglected. Purushottama became famous only with the construction of the huge temple in Puri from the reigning phase of Chodaganga. Odisha became famous for Vajrayana and Sahajayana forms of Buddhism during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. while Purushottama Vishnu was neglected. Yajati I of the Somavamshi family in the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. constructed a temple for Vishnu-Purushottama on the sea-shore of Utkala and he possibly allowed the worship of wooden image containing secret object under the possession of the Sabaras (which was popularly called the deadbody of Krushna by Sarola Das). This worship was under the Brahmana priests and even then Buddhists were powerful in that zone. The purpose was to unify both eastern Odisha and Western Odisha by this process of power legitimation and ritual reorganization. From the version of Sarola Das it is clear that the rights of the Sabaras were ignored in this phase as is evident from the rift between the Sabaras and king Galamadhava. It was only when the wooden gods or Chaturddhamurtti incorporating secret elements (Brahma Padartha) were worshipped in the huge temple of Purushottama during the Ganga phase the rights of the Sabaras were duly considered as we find Daitas as the tribal priests were very active in this mode of worship. But in the pre-Ganga phase possibly the claim of the Sabara priests were not properly considered and so ignored. The nature of the image in worship was peculiar to the people and devotees of Vishnu in this phase. Therefore in the Ganga period Indradyumna legend was invented to justify that the wooden gods worshipped in Purushottama Kshetra represented Krushna and his associates. Krushnaization of the wooden deities was necessary for the legitimation of the worship of wooden deities in Puri.

The first centre of Purushottama in Puri, the so called Nilasundaragiri needs a thorough investigation. Most of the writers on the antiquity of Purushottama-Jagannatha consider the present site as the only centre of Purushottama. But a careful study of the version of the Ganga copper plate grants on Chodaganga confirm that in pre-Chodaganga phase Purushottama was worshipped in a site near the seashore and that a different site was utilised by Chodaganga for the construction of a palace for Sri Purushottama. On the basis of this version we presume that the first Purushottama temple was built in a different site connected with the seashore. In all probability this site was the surrounding areas of Gundicha zone in Puri, because in Puranic sources it is described as Adipitha. Several explanations have been given on the meaning of Gundicha, but most of the advanced studies in this respect take "That Gandi" as the meaning. Gundicha was well known in Odisha in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. We are yet to find it in Sanskrit or Odia sources of the 11<sup>th</sup> century 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Most likely Gundicha had another name conveying "that Gandi" in this early phase. In one sense Gundicha mandapa with its connected zone was the centre of worship of Purushottama in the pre-Ganga phase. When the huge temple for Vishnu Purushottama was built during the Ganga phase and wooden gods were worshipped in the new temple, the old site was called Gundicha meaning the centre of the daru image and later on in the Ganga phase Gundicha Jatra was celebrated in the month of Asadha to connect the old site of Vishnu Purushottama (Daru image) with the new site of the Chaturddhamurtti (Four fold wooden deities). This Gundicha zone is also called Sundarajega which reminds us of the existence of Sundaragiri or Nilasundaragiri of Sarola Mahabharata. The entire area covering Gundicha Kshetra to the present Purushottama



Kshetra was described as Nilasundaragiri in Sarola Mahabharata.

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Kailash Chandra Dash, Former Reader in History, BJB Nagar, C-3/2, Bhubaneswar-14.

