



## Buddha - Jagannath in the Evolution Process

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When we look at the history of 'Buddhist Literature' we find that before Buddhism was preached by Gautam Buddha the tribal people of 'Bhasa' and 'Bhana' who were living in *Odrabhumi*<sup>1</sup> of ancient '*Savaristhan*'<sup>2</sup> had accepted 'AHETUBAD' -AKRIYABAD' or 'NATHIKABAD'<sup>3</sup> as their national religion. of '*Odrabhumi*' was considered and demarcated as the connecting link between the Northern and the Southern India as per the history of that time. It can't also be denied that Goutam Buddha went to the coastal region of South India to preach Buddhism, although the truth in this regard is not yet discovered. There is no doubt that the contemporary Odra state started from the boundary line of Magadh. Two merchants of Utkal named 'Tapasu' and 'Vallika' had the good luck to become the Buddha's disciples in the eighth week of his enlightenment. Subsequently the *Bhasa* and *Bhana* communities, then living in Odradesh accepted Buddhism by giving up their own religion: i.e. Ahetubad, Akriyabad, and Nathikabad. In fact

that is considered as the beginning of the preaching and the spread of Buddhism in 'Odra State'. In course of time, Buddhism became the national religion of the whole of 'Odra State' because of Buddha's unique and attractive religious advice and this trend continued till the reign of the Soma dynasty. During that

period the unchallenged influence of

Buddhism was felt all over Utkal,

Kalinga, Toshal, Koshal and

Odra. Mostly the tribal people

like the *Savaras* and others

speaking the Nagavamsi and

Mundari dialect were living in

Utkal at that time.<sup>4</sup> History

of the period also reveals

that Lord Jagannath, the

prime deity of the *Nagas*

and *Savaras* had already

been incarnated and

worshipped by that time.

The great resemblance of

the Lord's face, eyes and

the structure with that of a serpent establishes

the fact that he was the God of the *Nagas* and

the *Savaras*. As a matter of fact the face of the

idol of Lord Jagannath is a reflection of the

face and eyes of a serpent and this practice is

maintained on every *Navakalevara*.<sup>5</sup> the





'Bastupuja' (*Astakula Naga* and *Naguni Puja*) performed at the time of *Navakalevara* further corroborates this fact. A keen observation of the body of Lord Jagannath's face, which resembles with the image of the serpent while the lower part of the idol indicates a *Khamba* or a log, which is being worshipped by the tribals (*Savara*). The so called imagination of *Khamba* or *Sthamba* worship by the *Savaras* alongwith the serpent face of the Nagas gives a clear picture of the unity among the two chief inhabitants Naga and *Savara* of Odra State. Such types of integration of image was possible by the Buddhist. Thus in the form of this image, the Buddhist could combine both the religions and the languages of the *Naga* and *Savara* races.

This type of tremendous discovery could only be possible at the beginning of the civilisation by the Buddhists. This is proved by the fact that the mention of Lord Jagannath is found for the first time in the Buddhist Literature. Indrabhuti, the king of Sambala (AD.717), the famous preacher of Buddhism (Vajrayan) had brought the Lord Jagannath to light. It is described in his *Gnyanasiddhi*.

"Pranipatya Jagannatham Sarvajina bararchitam  
Sarva budha mayam siddhi byapinam gaganopamam."  
(Indrabhuti - Gyana Siddhi, 1st Canto, Sloka No-1)

It is evident from these lines that Indrabhuti tried his best to bring unity and integrity among the *Savaras* and the *Nagas* by such a synthesised image of Lord Jagannath as Buddha for the first time. Because, prior to this we never find the mention of Lord Jagannath in any literature or writing. Therefore, Dr. Benimadhav Padhi described in his book '*Daru Debata*' that the Lord Jagannath has the *Savara* origin. In his opinion it is justified that the Lord Jagannath is neither from

Pali nor Sanskrit, but of *Savara* Origin.<sup>6</sup> An analysis of Indrabhuti's work proves the fact that he struck a balance in the emotional and religious levels of the *Nagas* and the *Savaras* and created an atmosphere of unity among them by the image of the Lord Jagannath. Really the Buddhists and Indrabhuti, the chief proponent of Vajrayan are remembered for using the Lord Jagannath in order to bring co-ordination among *Natha* and *Naga* alongwith *Jagant*, the God of the *Savaras*. This could bring unity of thought and religion among the Oriyas. This unique image of Lord Jagannath and the nomenclature helped the Oriyas to remain united as a race and established the Lord or Buddha as a deity with all pervading power in the world. This recognition was so wide and strong that it could command respect from every corner of the world towards the unity and integrity of Oriyas in the name of Jagannath. The ruling class used the term Jagannath to bring unity among the people and used it to expand their power and authority. This resulted in bringing Lord Jagannath from the forests to the close quarters of the capital by the state power. The synthesized image of Lord Jagannath who was primarily meant to bring both religion and social unity one day, became the medium of strengthening army and influence of different rulers.

It is learnt from the historical facts that being migrated from Sripur region of Mahakosal, the Kings of Soma and Pandu dynasties, at first established their kingdom with capital at Sonepur. They gradually spread their kingdom all over Orissa. By the grace of Lord Jagannath they could win the hearts of the Oriyas. In the contemporary society of Orissa, Lord Jagannath became the only God of the people. It is described in *Kalikapurana* (5th centry AD) that "*Jagannathmodresam*



*tatra Pujayet*".<sup>7</sup> In other words Jagannath is universally accepted and worshipped as the chief of the Gods.

As described in *Madalapanji*, Yajatikeshari searched for Lord Jagannath in order to win the hearts of the people of Orissa just after his coronation as '*Pataraja*' *Madalapanji* records, "Hereafter *Keshari* became *Pataraja*, the first *Pata* was *Yajatikeshari*. This king was very kind and generous. He asked the monks and the Brahmacharins, Brahmins of the whereabouts of Lord Jagannath of Orissa."<sup>8</sup>

According to this description of *Madalapanji* Yajatikeshari brought Jagannath from Jharakhand and worshipped him in a patol (temple) of 38 cubits in the sea-shore. After being transferred from Jharakhand to coastal region Buddha in the guise of Jagannath was worshipped by his original worshippers of Jharakhand. This arrangement was made due to the pressure from people. In spite of new establishment of Lord Jagannath the same old Buddhist tradition was followed while worshipping.

In 300-400 A.D. after the revival of the *Bhagavat Dharma* or *Avatarad* duly patronised by the Gupta dynasty, it influenced the kings of Soma dynasty who had migrated from Sirpur of Chhattishgarh State. After coming from Sirpur they occupied the kingdom of Sonepur and spread the culture of *Bhagavat Dharma* and *Avataravad*. Because of their influence, the people of Orissa started worshipping the Gods Nrusingha and Madhava. Although Lord Jagannath was established in the sea shore of Puri the kings of Soma and Ganga dynasty of later age became partly successful in their efforts in recognising Jagannath as Srikrishna, the

beloved God of *Bhagavat Dharma*. Paying due regards to this event the renowned poet Jayadev (1200 A.D.) composed -

"*Nindasi Yangya bidherahha Sruti Jatam  
Sadaya hrudaya darshita Pashughatam  
Keshav dhruta - Buddhaa Sarira, Jaya Jagadisha Hare*"  
(*Shree Jayadev-Geeta Govindam, Dasavatara stotram*)

In this way Lord Buddha, the beloved God of Buddhists is seen in the guise of Lord Jagannath every where. But this process of co-ordination took a lot of time to emerge to the present state.

In spite of the hard efforts made by the kings of Soma and Ganga dynasties for recognising Buddha in the guise of Jagannath as Krishna the contemporary society could not accept it completely. Therefore, in 1500 A.D. after three hundred years of Jayadev the poet Sarala Das described Buddha as Jagannath.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear from this description of poet Sarala Das that kings of Soma and Ganga dynasties who came from outside tried their best to influence the people of Orissa to accept *Bhagavat Dharma Avatarabad*, but they accepted Jagannath only as Buddha. This sort of people's thought is being reflected in the writings of Sarala Das. That is why Sarala Das is widely known as "Adikavi" of the land of Orissa. It is crystal clear that the people of Orissa worshipped Jagannath as Buddha till the time of Sarala Das (1500 A.D.). In the later age being patronised by the kings, Brahminism became influential, as a result of which '*Bhagavat Dharma*' became more powerful and Buddha in the form of Jagannath was given recognition more as Srikrishna, the devoted God of *Bhagavat Dharma*. In spite of all these events even now the influence of Buddhism is reflected in the way of worshipping Lord Jagannath as usual.



In order to establish unity among different tribes of Orissa so far as thought, religion and society are concerned, the image of Lord Jagannath was used as a symbol. In this synthecised system of controversial thoughts even a sort of integration could be maintained. In the opinion of the historians, all the events of *Mahabharata* War took place in the crisis of *Dwapara* and *Kali* era.

The incarnation of Lord Shrikrishna of the epic *Mahabharata* took place with a specific aim and that is announced by Lord Shrikrishna himself in the *Bhagavat Gita*-

*"Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhabati bharata  
Abhyuthanmadharmasya tadatmanam Srujamyaham  
Paritranyaya Sadhunam binashaya cha duskrutam  
Dharma Sansthanarthaya Sambhabami Yugeyuge".*

It means the main aim of incarnation of Lord Shrikrishna was to get rid of both the vices and the enemies of this earth and to give protection and justice to the saints. On the other hand Lord Buddha preached and spread his religion with an aim to get rid of the fear of old age, disease and death from minds of the men by giving guidance to them. Although we do find diferences in the (incarnation) births and aims of these two great men of *Dwapara* and *Kali*, they made it possible to establish co-ordination through Lord Jagannath. It is the great poet Sarala Das, who made the successful attempt to synthecise the basic thoughts of both *Dwapara* and *Kali* through the medium of Lord Jagannath. This is reflected in different places of his composition.

*Baudha Avatara Abasya biharibu  
Dustajana mari Santhajana pratipalibu" 1531  
(Sarala Mahabharata, Musaliparva, P,109)*

*"Se Jagannatha je Sansara Uddharana  
Mlechwajana Uddharana Se baudha rupena"161  
(Sarala Mahabharata, Adiparva, 2nd pt.P.1056)*

It is no doubt the evolutionary process, the creation of Buddha and God Srikrishna of *Bhagavat Dharma*, was possible only because of the identification of an image and symbol of Buddha in the guise of Jagannath. It is the opinion of most of the research scholars that only one image of Buddha in the form of Jagannath and his *Dharmadanda* or *Chakra* was being worshipped in the beginning. Consequently when the devoted God of Srikrishna of *Bhagavat Dharma* was symbolised as Buddha the images of Balabhadra and Subhadra were being imagined and arrangements were made for the worship of the four images (*Chaturdha murti*).<sup>10</sup> That is why Sarala Das started saying in his *Mahabharata* regarding *Chaturdhamurti* of Lord Jagannath.

Thus the cult of Lord Jagannath is the product of an evolutionary process, it started with the worship of the Serpent God by the *Nagas*, a tribal communities, which was later embodied into the *Khamba* (Log) being worshipped by the *Savaras* belonging to a different tribal community. Later on Lord Buddha, who was the champion of equality and social justice was worshipped in the form of Lord Jagannath. The rulers of the state used every opportunity to use the name of Lord Jagannath to bring unity among the people and it helped them to derive power and authority. The Somavamsi ruler popularised the cult of *Avatarabad* and Lord Shrikrishna was incorporated in the cult of Jagannath in the form of "*Chaturdhamurti*" This has been testified by the great Oriya poet Jayadev and Sarala Das. Thus Lord Jagannath is the original concept of God among the tribal people. In course of time other *Avatars* have appeared in the form of Lord Shrikrishna and Lord



Buddha. But they have been incorporated and worshipped in the form of Lord Jagannath.

The present cult of Jagannath, the Universal God is a product of socio-cultural evolution, which has accommodated various religions and tribal cultures including the concept of social equity preached by Lord Buddha. Subsequently during the reign of Rama Chandra Dev I (1738 AD) the Islamic concepts were also accommodated in the cult of Lord Jagannath (*Patitapabana*). Thus Lord Jagannath does not belong to any particular religion, caste or community. He is unique and Universal. That is why we worship Him as the *Natha* of the Universe-*Jagannath*.

#### Foot Notes:

1. Dash (Dr) Mahesh Prasad-*Sakta Sanskritira Itibruta* in Sakta Culture in Orissa, Orissa Cultural Forum (Edi.) Bhubaneswar, Grantha Mandira Cuttack-2, 1980, Page-57
2. The author says that the combined states of Kalinga, Odra, Prachi, Magadha and Bidaha were known as '*Savaristhan*' it extended from Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha to Sirpur (Sripur), the capital of Kosala and to Prakyotishpur or modern Assam, which was on the north east of Magadha. (Padhi (Dr) Beni madhav- Daru Debata, Cuttack students store, June'1975, P.176 (map).
3. Sahu (Dr.) N.K. *Buddhism in Orissa*, Utkal University, 1958, P.13.
4. Rajaguru (Dr.) S.N. *Naga Itihas*, Part-1, 1958, pp. 58-59.
5. Kanungo (Dr.) H. Muktimandapa : Its Relation with Shree Jagannath Temple - A Historical

Study, Jhankar, 48th year, Car festival Special issue, July, 1996. Prajatantra Press, Cutack , P.407- Kar, (Dr.) Karunakar- *Ascharya Charyachaya* (Ph.D. Thesis), Orissa Sahitya Academy, Bhubaneswar, 1969, P.81.

6. Padhi, (Dr.) B- *Daru Debata*, Cuttack Students Store, 2nd Edn. 1975, P.32.
7. Sahu, (Dr.) N.K. - *Buddhism in Orissa*, Utkal University, 1958, P-38.
8. *Madalapanji (Rajabhoga Itihas)* IInd Edition, 1969, Utkal University, 5 & 6.
9. "*Baud Rupe Bije Shree Neela Kandare Yeka Murti Chaturdha rupa dharichhanti Damadare*" 12131  
(*Sarala Mahabharata, Madhya Prava, 2nd part, P. 836*)  
"*Dwapara ante yethi vije karibe Jagannathe Baudha rupa hoi vije karibe dasa Sahasra Varsa Parijante.*" II 89 I  
(*Sarala Mahabharata, Sabhaparva, 2nd pt., P.51*)  
*Salaral Mahabharata, Virata Parva, P. 454 / Gada Parva, P. 70/ Adi Parva, 2nd Pt. P. 1056.*
10. "*Baudha rupe Vije Srineelakandare Yeka Murty chaturdha rupa dharichhanti Damadare.*" (213)  
(*Sarala Mahabharata - Madhya Parva, 2nd pt. P. 782.*)

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