



The Date and Builder of Sri Purusottama Jagannath Temple at Puri

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Puri, the abode of Lord Jagannath is one of the four celebrated religious centres of Hindus, situated on the shores of Bay of Bengal. Sri-Ksetra is not only famous for Sri Purusottama/Jagannath, but also for the great temple, which attracts pilgrims and visitors throughout the world. The Vimana or Garbhagriha is the largest as well as tallest surviving temple of Orissa, raising to a height of 200 feet with all the richness and plasticity of the medieval Kalinga Style of Architecture. The temple has all the four components. i.e. Vimana or Garbhagriha, Mukhasala or Jagamohana, Natamandapa and Bhogamandapa. Bhogamandapa and Natamandapa are the latter additions to the original Vimana and Jagamohana. This paper deals with the Vimana and Jagamohana of Srimandira.

The Vimana is a Pancharatha Rekhadeula, three storied and the thickness of the walls are 5.30 meters. The Jagamohana is a Pancharatha pidha deula. These gigantic structures are standing on an elevated platform of 20 feet height and enclosed by Kurma-Bedha. There are different views on the date and builder of Sri Purusottama/Jagannath Temple (Vimana and Jagamohana)

- i) According to some Puranas (Starting from Skanda Purana) the builder was Indradyumna, the king of Malava.
- ii) The Temple Chronicle, Madala Panji mentions king Yayati to be the builder of a

temple of 38 *Hata* height which became delapidated. The present temple was built by Anangabhima deva in place of delapidated temple of Yayati. According to *Ganga Vamsanucharitam Champu* and *Raja vamsavalis*, Anangabhima II was the builder of this great temple.

iii) With the discovery of Ganga copper plate grants Manmohan Chakraborty, on the basis of a particular verse credited Anantavarmana Chodaganga as the builder of the Vimana and Jagamohana. This view of Mr. Chakraborty is accepted by most of the present day scholars.

iv) Dr. S. N. Rajguru was of the opinion that Chodaganga started the construction of the great temple, but it was completed by Anangabhima II and the temple was consecrated by Anangabhima III.

The present paper differs from the above views on the basis of some newly discovered epigraphic records.

The date of "Skanda Purana" is not yet determined. The account of temple building by Indradyumna is in the chapter of 'Utkal-Khanda'. Some scholars believe that this chapter, 'Utkal Khanda' is a latter addition to the original 'Skanda-Purana', Moreover there is no historicity in the Indradyumna episode as it is full of unrealistic and supernatural stories. The account of Indradyumna is merely a legend than history.



Madala Panjis are believed to be edited during the reign of Ramachandradeva I in the 16th century. According to Madala Panjis Anangabhima II had built the temple in three years. It is beyond the imagination of the present day historians and archaeologists that the construction of the gigantic Vimana was completed in three years. Moreover Ganga stone inscriptions and copper plate grants which are more authentic records do not corroborate the aforesaid view of Madala Panji.

Most of the historians (starting from M.M. Chakraborty) have accepted Chodaganga as the builder of the present Vimana and Jagamohana on the basis of a *Prasasti*-verse of Dasagoba copper plate grant of Rajaraja III (1198 A.D.) The same verse is repeated in all the Ganga grants of his descendants discovered so far.

*"Padau yasya dharantariksam-akilam
nabhisca sarvadisah
srotre netrayugam ravindu-yugalam
murddhapi ca dyaur-asau /
Prasadam purusottamasya nrpatih
Konama karttum Ksamah
tasyatyadi-nrpair-upeksitam-ayam
Cakretha Gangesvarah" //*

The first half of the verse is a simple *prasasti* or adoration of God Purusottama whose feet are the earth, navel the sky, ears the cardinal points, eyes the sun and the moon and head the heaven. The second half is historically important. Scholars including M.M. Chakraborty have interpreted the verse as follows. Previous ruling kings had neglected to construct a suitable palace (temple) for God Purusottama, thinking that who king can be able to do such task ?, which was fulfilled by Chodaganga alias Gangesvara. This interpretation is not proper. In the verse the verb "*cakre*" is used in "*lit-lakara*" (remote past tense), which suggests that the verse was

composed long after the death of Chodaganga in 1147 A.D. The composer had no direct knowledge about the fact mentioned in the verse. He had composed the verse after being heard. In the verse the word "*upeksitam*" (neglected) is not a verb rather an adjective of the temple (the object). The verse under discussion not only admits the existence of God Purusottama, but also the existence of present sky-high Vimana prior to the conquest of Utkal by Chodaganga.

Choudwar copper plate grant of Kamarnava 1147/48 A.D. was discovered in 1993 (published in Jhankar, 1994, November Issue, page 901-915). In Kamarnava's grant neither the aforesaid verse is seen inscribed nor there is any mention about the temple building activity of Chodaganga. A comparison of Kamarnava's grant with Dasagoba grant shows that after fifty years the latter grant had not only followed the writing pattern, but also copied or repeated the laudatory verses from line no 1 to 72 of the former. This is another clear proof that the verse under discussion was composed long after Chodaganga's death and was introduced in the Dasagoba grant in between the accounts of conquest of Utkal and Bengal, copied from Kamarnava's grant.

Kamarnava, the eldest son of Chodaganga was quite adult at the time of the conquest of Utkal by his father. So it was obvious that Kamarnava was the eye-witness to all the achievements of his father. If Chodaganga had built the Purusottama Temple, Kamarnava would have mentioned it in the grant as the most glorious achievement of his father without any hesitation.

The Narasimha Temple is situated at a distance of 65 feet from the gigantic Vimana to its south-east. A series of donatory inscription in Nagari and Telugu were discovered on the walls of Narasimha Temple



after deplastering in 1980. The earliest inscription of 1113 A.D. on the door-jamb of Narasimha Temple admits the existence of Narasimha Temple in 1113 A.D. Chodaganga conquered Utkal in 1108/1112 A.D. If Chodaganga constructed the Vimana after 1113 A.D. then the Narasimha Temple could not have existed at the time of the excavation of the foundation of the Vimana.

In ancient time as the construction of a stupendous temple rose in height, the practice or technical method was to surround the temple with great mound of earth, which acted as a platform from which the work could proceed further. An inclined plane or earthen ramp was then made and along this inclined ramp large block of stones were dragged up for the construction of the upper levels of the temple. If such a practice or a method was followed for the construction of 200 feet high Jagannath Temple, then the surrounding temple area with the Narasimha Temple, which was in existence since 1113 A.D. would have been buried under the mounds of earth for a pretty long time. But the inscriptions of 1113 A.D., 1121 A.D., 1126 A.D., 1131 A.D., 1133 A.D., 1136 A.D., 1150 A.D. found on the Narasimha Temple make us believe that no such construction work of Jagannath Temple was in progress during the reign of Chodaganga. From the construction point of view the present Vimana can not be a subsidiary or latter temple of Narasimha Temple.

Dr. S. N. Rajguru believes that the Narasimha Temple was the early Purusottama Temple built by king Yayati and the Vimana was built in subsequent period. Similarly the consecration of Purusottama (at Varanasi-Kataka) mentioned in the Nagari Copper plate grant of Anangabhima III 1230 A.D. is misinterpreted by Dr. Rajguru as the

consecration of Purusottama/Jagannath Temple of Puri.

In the present context it is needless to explain about the views of Dr. S. N. Rajguru which are based on misinterpretation and hypothesis.

Now the deplastering of Vimana is complete. The art and architecture of Purusottama/Jagannath Temple (Vimana) are seen similar with that of Lingaraj Temple at Bhubaneswar. The only difference is in iconography. The Purusottama/Jagannath Temple is a Vaisnavaite temple whereas the Lingaraj temple is a Saivite temple. Otherwise both temples are prototype and contemporary. The Vimana and Jagamohana of Purusottama Temple was built in Somavamsi rule in Orissa. About the builder nothing can be said at present due to the lack of authentic historical records.

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