



The Lord and His Land

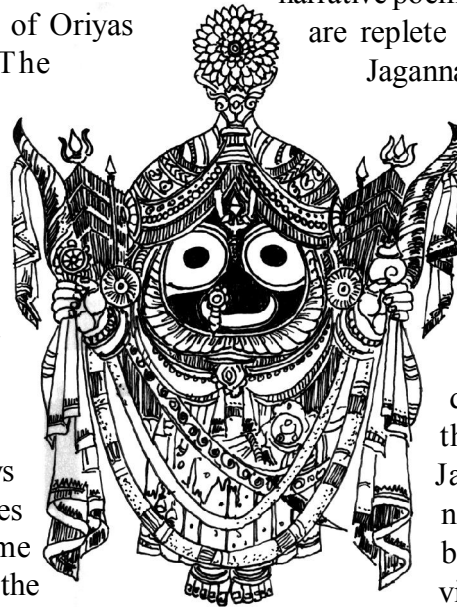
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He is the Lord of Lords. He is Jagannath. He is Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent. He is the only cult, he is the only religion, he is the sole sect. All sects, all 'isms', all beliefs and all religions have mingled in his eternal oblivion. He is Lord Jagannatha. And for Orissa and teeming millions of Oriyas He is the nerve centre. The institution of Jaganatha influences every aspect of the life in Orissa. All spheres of our activities, political, social, cultural, religious and economic are inextricably blended with Lord Jagannatha.

A Political Prodigy :

Lord Jaganatha is always and for all practical proposes deemed to be the supreme monarch of the universe and the Kings of Orissa are regarded as His representatives. In yesteryears when Orissa was sovereign, the kings of the sovereign state had to seek the favour of Lord Jaganatha for their success in administration or participation in war. *Madala Panji* the magnum opus of Orissa in the days of yore, was believed to be compiled for the first time in the late sixteenth

century. In *Rajabhoga* section of *Madala Panji*, Lord Jagannatha has been described as "the king of the kingdom of Orissa", "the master or the lord of the land of Orissa" and "the god of Orissa". Various other scriptures and narrative poems composed by renowned poets are replete with such descriptions where Jagannatha has been described as the sole king of Orissa.



Basically a Hindu deity, Lord Jagannatha had symbolized the empire of Orissa, a collection of heterogeneous forces and factors, the individual or the dynasty of the monarch being the binding force. Thus Lord Jagannatha had become the national deity (*Rastra Devata*) besides being a strong and vivacious force for integrating the Orissan empire. But when the empire collapsed, Lord Jagannatha had been seen symbolizing a seemingly secular force of the Oriya nationalism.

Lord Jagannatha being the real king of Orissa is the richest landlord. He owns vast tracts of land in all parts of India. Hardly there



is any important region in India where the Lord has no land of his own. He is the sole deity in the country in whose favour donations of land have been made not only by the Kings and Monarchs but also by the common people. Apart from the collateral donations, a sort of spiritual dedication of life and property also is offered to Him all over Hindustan.

Humbleness to Lord was not a simple ritual but a political necessity. The roots of Mahatma Gandhi's decision to start his *padayatra* from Puri may be traced in the importance of Jagannath. After formation of Orissa State, K.C. Gajapati Narayan Dev, the Raja of Paralakhemundi, took oath as the first Prime Minister of Orissa in 1936 A.D. One of his first acts was to pay a ceremonial visit to Lord Jagannatha though there was bitter dynastic rivalry existing between the kings of Paralakhemundi and the kings of Puri.

A Symbol of Social Solidarity:

In our social tradition, whatever is done for welfare of the family or the individual is attributed to Lord Jagannatha. This is regarded as a rich social tradition and this tradition exists in the social life of some parts of India in general and Orissa in particular. In the marriage and other religious ceremonies, the house-hold people take it as their prime duty to satisfy their guests with *Mahaprasad* of Jagannath before serving them with other kinds of food. This system has strengthened the bond of fraternity and has helped people in establishing brotherly relationship in their social life. In marriages, the parties come together to take oath before Lord Jagannatha to make their relation firm and permanent. The marriage invitation card is first offered to Jagannatha before being distributed among the kith and kins. Various festivals and ceremonies held in

honour of Jagannath have great influence on the religious and cultural life of the people of Orissa. During the *Sayana Yatra* in the temple of Lord Jagannatha, the Lord goes to sleep. During the period of this *Sayana Yatra* lasting for about 3 months, all ceremonies such as marriage, sacred thread ceremony, the coming of the bride to her father-in-law's place, etc. are all suspended and during the rising ceremony of the Lord (*Devotthana*), all these activities are resumed again. All kinds of trees are planted in various parts of Orissa during the Ratha Yatra festival of the Lord because these days of the festival are considered to be the most auspicious. The first fruit of any crop grown in Orissa is presented to the Lord.

Ratha Yatra a special festival of the Lord is celebrated in every nook and corner of the State and in various places of India and the World with new enthusiasm and spirit. Car festival in U.S.A. and other parts of the World, the Lords chariot-pulling in Gujarat and other States bear the testimony of deep-rooted bond of people in all walks of life with Lord Jagannath. Only in Delhi two Jagannatha temples have been built where the Car festival and the other festivals of Jagannatha are enthusiastically celebrated. Though the foreigners are restricted to enter the Lord's temple at Puri, it seems now that the foreigners are more attracted for *Jagannath Dharma*. At the time of Ratha Yatra every year some of them use to dance with the prayers of the Lord by playing the musical instruments. Baripada's importance for 'Rathayatra' stands next to that of Puri. Since the sixteenth century innumerable pilgrims have been forming the crowd at Baripada of Mayurbhanja district to see Lord Jagannatha on his chariot. Millions of followers of Iskcon throughout the World celebrate the car festival of Lord Jagannath with gait and devotion.



Various legends associated with Lord Jagannatha still occupy a prominent place in religious sentiments among the people of Orissa. The legend of Kanchi invasion of Purusottama Dev, the Lord becoming beggar as described in Laxmipurana, the story of Raghuarakhsita, Balarama Das, Jagannatha Das, Bandhu Mohanty of Jajpur, Dasia Bauri, Poets Salbega, Dinakrushna Das are very popular legends of Orissa which are still fresh in the minds of the people of the State.

A Source of Religious Resurrection :

Jagannath cult is not confined to any particular sect or religion. It is cosmopolitan in nature. It has integrated in its fold all beliefs and practices and become universal. The multiplicity of ritualistic practices in the lord's temple leads us to divergent theories in respect of its origin. But, as far as the religious development is concerned, the historical data from age to age revealed the religious attitude and faith of the people as well as of the rulers operated in evolving the cult of Jagannath. The cult is not derived from any particular religious system, practice or belief, it is a combination of countless religious thoughts

Lords were considered as the supreme head of the state or the state deity. *Jagannatha Dharma* thereby became the mass religion (*Gana Dharma*) of Orissa. Thus, this Dharma embraces all the religions and assimilated them in itself. It however became more popular when it assimilated Buddhism, Saivism, Saktism and finally the *Gaudiya* Vaisnavism. Lord's abode, the Puri Temple is the symbol of the synthesis of the Aryan and the Non-Aryan cultures. Yet, the speciality of the Jagannath Temple and the Jagannath Cult, in this synthesis, is that neither the Aryans have displayed their traditional feeling of aristocratic self-consciousness nor

the non-Aryans evince the spirit of inferiority complex. The Puri Temple, *Sriksetra*, as it is called is the all pervading symbol of equality, fraternity and secular sovereignty.

The sacred food offered to God is rich in quality and content. Therefore, it is popularly called the *Mahaprasad*, the like of which is not found anywhere in India. Food, the first and foremost requirement of human life and existence is not only offered to the deity but is also meant for all the people, irrespective of their caste, creed and position and they satisfy their hunger and religious fasting with utmost comfort. Food is available in the temple always and for all. The Lord of the land sitting in the *Ratnavedi* with ease holds out His hands for giving food to His hungry and devoted millions. All the seasonal foods offered to the deity are also made available to the public. This arrangement is unique in a temple visited by lakhs. In the Lord's eye all are equal. People with varied caste, creed and culture and status take His *Mahaprasad* sitting together in the 'Ananda Bazar' the common dining place inside the temple. One source of administrative discomfort for the British officials was the close relationship existed between the Oriya nationalism and Lord Jagannath in the closing years of the nineteenth century. They believed that only the Oriya employees of the Government were susceptible to the Orissan custom of "*Mahaprasad* brotherhood" formed by sharing the sacred rituals of Lord Jagannath, which was an effective barrier to the smooth functioning of administration. This was so because the *Mahaprasad* brothers are supposed to come to each other's help and assistance under any circumstance ignoring the code of legal and moral principles and even humane feelings. Any deviation from this rule is



considered a worst sin one commits. It is not only a betrayal of a *Mahaprasad* brother but also of Lord Jagannatha himself.

Muktimandapa is the judiciary wing of the temple pertaining to religious matters. Cases involving religious controversies in any part of India particularly Orissa, are referred to the *Muktimandapa*. This *Muktimandapa* is the famous seat of the learned brahmins associated with Jagannath temple and the verdict pronounced by this august assembly of Pandits, is always accepted by the parties with utmost respect. All social customs, cultural activities and religious practices get their prior sanction by reference to what is followed in His temple and the deviations, if any, are also made with humble supplication of His sanction. Thus, for the people, He is the ideal of all ideals.

A Cosmic Cultural Chord :

All greatness is associated and ascribed to Lord Jagannath. He is the greatest of all Gods with all greatness. 'He is the *Bada Thakur*, the Chief among the Gods. His temple is the *Bada Deula*, the chief temple among the temples and the path in front of His temple is the *Bada Danda*, the chief path-way. The sea washing the shores of His *ksetra* is called '*Mahodadhi*' or the great ocean. Even the cremation ground here is named as *Svarga Dvara* or gateway to the Heaven.' All the deities are worshipped if He is worshipped, and visit to His place or *Ksetra* is the culmination of all pilgrimages and one achieves emancipation.. He is the king, the co-subject, the father, the brother and the son in one whole being.

The philosophy and thought of Oriya centre round the philosophy of Lord Jagannath. He is the pivot around which revolves all

cultural connections associated with the people of the State. Volumes of literatures were written to magnify and glorify his greatness. The religious thinkers of Orissa, the five associates, *panca sakha*, as they are popularly known like Jagannatha Dasa, Balarama Dasa, Ananta Dasa, Acyuta Dasa and Yasovanta Dasa composed their respective works highlighting the God's greatness. Lord Jagannath is the epicentre in all their creations. In *Bana Parva* and *Musali Parva* of famous Oriya *Mahabharata* composed by *Sudramuni Sarala Dasa* of Jhankada, the story and the philosophy of Jagannath was the focal point in the theme narrated there.

In the medieval Oriya literature also Lord Jagannath has been associated with the Oriya nationalism. During 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, Lord Jagannath was given prominence in all Oriya literatures. Hardly there was any literary activity where Lord Jagannath was not focussed. There are innumerable mentions of the glory of Lord Jagannath in *Jananas*, *Bhajanas*, *Daskathias*, *Chadheya* Dances and elsewhere. Homage to Lord Jagannath is paid in the prefaces of epics and long narrative poems. Today, scores of literary works on Lord Jagannath written in Oriya and Sanskrit are available making the cult of Jagannath not confined within the State of Orissa but felt through out the Sub-continent. To cite a few, 'the Anargha Raghavam of Murari Misra of Orissa (8th century), *Gitagovindam* of Sri Jayadeva of Kenduvilva (Orissa), *Candrakala Natika* of Mahapatra Visvanatha Kaviraj, *Abhinava Gitagovindam* of King Gajapati Purusottama Deva, *Gopalarcana vidhi* of Gajapati King Purusottama Deva, *Jagannatha Vallabha Natakam* of Raya Ramananda, *Mukti Cintamani* of Kind Purusottama Deva,



Dvadasa Yatra tatva of Raghunandana, Ganga Vamsanucarita campu of Vasudeva Ratha, Gundica campy of Bakravak Cakrapani Pattanayaka, Gundica Vijaya campu of Kaviraja Bhagavan Brahma, the sthala puranas like Vamana Samhita, Niladrimahodayam, Kapil Samhita, kestra Mahatmyam, Madhuranirudha Natakam of Cayani Candrasekhara or Yatra Bhagavatam of Balunki pathi'are the Sanskrit works on Lord Jagannath. Besides these Sanskrit works the Oriya works which glorify the cult of Jagannath are ' Deulatola of Balarama Dasa, Jagannatha caritmrta of Divakar dAsa, Dardhyata Bhakti of Ramadasa, Amarakosa Gita of Balarama Dasa, Bataavakasa of Balarama Dasa, Daru Brahma Gita of Jagannatha Dasa, Oriya Bhagavata of Jagannatha Dasa, Anakara Samhita of Nanda Dasa, Chayalisa Patala of Acyutananda Dasa, Caturdhmurti varnana of Karpasindhy Dasa, Deulatola of Nilambar murti varnana of Krpashindhu Dasa, Deulatola of Nilambar Dasa, Deula tola of Dama Dasa, Deula tola of Sisukrsna Dasa, Jagamohana Chanda of Dinakrsna Dasa, Jagamohana Ramayana of Balarama Dasa, Jagannatha Bhajana of Bhagirathi Dasa, Jagannatha Vandana of Krpasindhu Dasa, Jagannatha Avakasa of Kesava Bhanja, Jagannatha cautisa of Ratnakara Sarma, Ksetramahatmya of Upendra Bhanja, Rasika Haravati of Kavismrat, Upenda Bhanja, Namaratna Gita of Dinakrsna Dasa, Netrotsava Varnana of Sisu Dasa, Niladri cautisa of Upendra Bhanja, Nilasundara Gita of Sekhara Dasa, Niladri Mahotsava of Lokanatha Vidyadhara, Rama bibha of Arjuna Dasa, Nilacala Gupta Jnana of Balarama Dasa, Vedantasara Gupta Gita of Balarama Dasa and in the 20th century Siddhanta Darpana of Samanta Candrasekhara'.

Badadeula, the temple of Lord Jagannath is also a cultural centre besides a profound religious habitat. It is the temple and its priests who decide the rules and regulations governing Hinduism and also prescribing expiation (*prayascitta*) for any sins committed. Only the temple has a final say for any sort of religious dispute. Thus, in the Hindu society throughout the country, the importance of Lord's abode is beyond challenge. Not only in India, but also in other Hindu countries like Nepal, Lord Jagannath rules the religious sentiments of people and the ruler.

Many temples for Lord Jagannath were built after 12th century in various places of Orissa and in different parts of India. Jagannath temple in Suvarnapur of Banki Sub-division of Cuttack district, Jagannatha temple of Jajpur, Baladevaji temple in Kendrapara, Jagannath temple of Katarapa, Jagannath temple in Binika, Jagannath temple at Savakota (Andhra Pradesh), Baladevji temple at Degaon of Dhenkanal District, Jagannath temple in Jagannathapura of Bankura (West Bengal), Jagannatha temple of Dusia, South West of Ranchi (Jharkhand), Jagannath temple of Indupura were some of the temples built during 13th, 14th & 15th century. Many temples of Lord Jagannath were also built during 16th century onwards. Jagannath temple of Patiakilla of Surangarah, Baladevji temple at Keonjhar, Jagannath temple at Agarpada of Balasore District, Jagannath temple Hauzkhas, New Delhi, Jagannath temple of Sabarasrikshetra, Koraput are few examples. Besides these, there are innumerable number of temples dotted all over the state of Orissa and it is quite difficult to date them correctly.

Lord Jagannath was the symbol and the centre of Oriya nationalism and ultimately



of Hindu nationalism in pre-independence period. Indian nationalism was a powerful force during the British rule. With the assimilation of Hindu nationalism with Oriya nationalism, Indian nationalism became a dominant force. There is a strong and binding link between the Oriya nationalism and Jagannath. This will never be snapped rather it is gaining strength day by day. Due to the intimate relationship existing between the Oriyas and Lord Jagannath, only Jagannath occupies a focal position in the nationalistic thought process. This is very clearly reflected in the literary activities of poets and literateurs of Orissa. Poems composed by Nilakantha Das, Purusottama Deva, Mukunda Deva, plays and ballads by Godavarish Misra, Gobinda Bidyadhara, Aswini Kumar Ghose, Mayadhar Mansingh, Kalicharan Pattanayak and Radhamohan Gadanayak were pointers to this direction..At a point of time when Oriya language was in the verge of loosing its identity in the wake of dominant Bengali forces who claimed that Oriya is not a separate language (*Odia ek swatantra bhasa noi*), Satyabadi Group of Writers rose to the occasion and highlighting Lord Jagannath they uphold the Oriya language.

These poets were primarily committed to Oriya nationalism in their heart and soul even after their dedication to the cause of Indian nationalism. Gopabandhu Das in his long poem *Bandira Atmakatha* written in Jail in 1923-24 made a fervent appeal to the people of Orissa not to feel diffident because Lord Jagannath himself is the leader of Utkala.

*"Bisese Utkale nahi prayojana
Utkalara neta nije Narayana"*

The fact that Lord Jagannath continued to occupy the central position in the

nationalistic thought process, is evident from the following incident. Mr. M.S. Das, the "grand old man of Orissa", Utkal gaurav Madhusudan Das While addressing a public meeting in 1928 in the Town-Hall of Cuttack, recited a poem written on the spur of the moment, in which he appealed the millions Oriyas to recite 'Save Us Lord Jagannath' in unison which would bring an end to the enveloping darkness and lead the path to progress and prosperity.

*"Kotie Odia Gotie Swarare daka trahi Jagannatha
Andhara Ghunchiba nischaya dekhiba Jatira Unnati Patha"*

Many more examples can be cited from the literary works tracing the historic tie existing between Lord Jagannath and the Oriyas, the subjects of his land. Lord Jagannath is not a mere deity or a reigning lord but has become a true guide for the teeming millions of Oriyas. He is the bond, He is the binding connection, He is the motivating factor and above all He is an all pervading force engulfing the entire socio-economic, religious and cultural fabric of his land.

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