



Tribal Origin of Holy Triad

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No human society exists without the belief in supernatural entities like gods, spirits and the like. The consideration of such powers invokes the study of religion, which includes other aspects like rituals, ceremonies and crisis situations in a society. The religious phenomena are deep-rooted in each and every known human society /

community on this earth. In this sphere of life, man interacts with the supernatural beings. Scholars have tried to conceptualize the religious phenomena in order to understand the intricacies between

the religious beliefs and practices on the one hand and the style of life on the other, prevailing in a particular society. Needless to say, religion takes into consideration three aspects, namely (a) beliefs in the supernatural entities, (b) specialists who creates such beliefs, and (c) deities who receive it in various forms. In India, there are people belonging to different religious faiths like Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jainas and innumerable tribes. They are maintaining their own religious

identity. Though there are differences between these religious faiths, they are not a mere collection of people belonging to diverse faiths. There has been continuous borrowing and imitation of elements among themselves due to co-existence over the years. Also, there is an inner force to maintain the distinctiveness

among them. In other words, changes are obvious and found in social life. It is more visible in a progressive society because of the continuous actions and reactions of different forces and factors both internal



as well as external. In all probability, our religious concept is receiving a new dimension taking into consideration the present need and dynamic situation due to influence of the age/time. The concept of Jagannath is mysterious and the present paper is an humble attempt to bring to light the tribal aspect of the deity. In other words, in the present paper, our emphasis is to understand the Jagannath cult from tribal perspective. The present study suggests that in the evolution of the cult of Jagannath, the



importance and significance of the tribal principle cannot be ignored if noticed minutely. Now, we have two main tasks: to say whatever is known about Jagannath in Orissa from tribal perspective and to trace primitive survivals as the contribution of pre-history to modern Oriya society. The origin and antiquity of the concept of Jagannath is shrouded in considerable mystery. There is no positive evidence to know how and when this concept has come into existence particularly in Puri and Jagannath has come to be worshipped there and also has become one of the prominent deities of the Hindu pantheon. It is not easy to understand whether Jagannath was a Hindu deity or a tribal deity later on converted/transformed into a Hindu deity. This process of change may be understood through processes like Tribalisation / Sanskritisation / Hinduisation / Aryanisation etc.

The literary meaning of Jagannath (Jagat+Nath) is the Lord of the Universe. He is called Devadhideva (Lord of Lords), Rajadhiraj (King of Kings) and Purushottam (Purusa+Uttama i.e. the Supreme Purusa). Puri is known as Jagannath Puri that is the abode of the Lord of the Universe. In fact, Puri is synonymous with Lord Jagannath and *vice versa*. At times, it is popularly known as *Sri-kshetra*, *Sankha-kshetra*, *Purushottam-kshetra*, *Nilachala* and *Niladri*. This pitha finds mention in the ancient Puranic literatures namely *Vishnu Purana*, *Agni Purana*, *Brahma Purana*, *Padma Purana*, *Naradiya Purana*, *Bhagavat Purana*, *Skanda Purana*, *Kapila Purana* or *Kapila Samhita*, *Kalika Purana* etc. Also, in other ancient Hindu religious scriptures like *Tantra Jamala*, *Rudra Jamala*, *Bamadev Samhita*, *Niladri Mahodaya* etc. one finds the references of this religious *pitha*. In the Sanskrit *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* though there are no clear and specific references to this *pitha*

or deity, for some scholars the word Jagannath has been found mentioned in some places. For instance, Ramachandra had once advised Bibhisana to worship Jagannath. Some scholars opine that the *vedi* or *antarvedi* as referred to in the *Mahabharata* is nothing but the *ratnavedi* i.e. raised stone platform or pedestal on which the deities are seated in Puri temple. Jagannath is also known as *Daru Brahma* or the prime soul enshrined in wood. Some scholars co-relate this *Daru* with that of *Apurusham Daru* mentioned in the *Rig Veda* (X.155.3) and hold the view that worship of Lord Jagannath started well before the Christian era. In this context, it may be mentioned that for the first time Jagannath has been cited in a religious text titled *Gyanasiddhi* (Vajrayana treatise) authored by Raja Indrabhuti of Sambala/Sambalpur who was a great devotee of Lord Jagannath in the eighth century AD. Also, the *Niladri Mahodaya* narrates in detail the rituals and customs of the deities in the Puri temple. The most famous Oriya work of Adikavi Sarala Das is *Oriya Mahabharata* that belonged to the 15th century AD. Therein, the poet has lucidly narrated in detail the legendary origin of Lord Jagannath. Besides, a good number of inscriptional references testifying to the popularity of Jagannath are found in and outside Orissa. In this connection, mention may be made of Neulapur inscription of Subhakar Dev of 780-800 AD, Baramdeo Temple inscription of 840-1088 AD, Satana (Madhya Pradesh) inscription of 10th century AD, Nagpur stone inscription of 1104 AD, Govindpur inscription of 1137 AD, Nrusimha, Markandeswara and Pataleswara temple inscriptions at Puri of 1113 AD-1238 AD, Dasagova Copper Plates of 1192 AD-1211 AD, Nagari Copper Plates of King Anangabhima Dev III of 1230 AD, Lingaraj temple inscription of 1230-38 AD,



Kapilas inscription of Narasimha Dev of 1238-64 AD, Srikurmam temple inscription of Bhanu Dev II of 1310 AD, Simanchalam temple inscription of 1319 AD. Thus, researches clearly indicate and substantiate that this *pitha* has a hoary antiquity.

According to the most popular legend, the *Savaras* in the hill tracts of Orissa worshipped the deity originally enshrined in the Puri temple. It is mentioned in the *Utkala Khanda* of the *Skanda Purana* that one Vidyapati was instrumental in locating Nilamadhaha, the predecessor of Lord Jagannath. As per this tradition, there was a ruler named Indradyumna in Avanti *rajya* (kingdom) in the *Satya Yuga*. He was a great votary of Lord Vishnu. He sent one Vidyapati, the younger brother of his *Kulaguru* (family priest) to *Odradesa/Udradesa* to find out the exact place where a tribal chief called Viswabasu was worshipping Lord Vishnu in the name of Nilamadhaha secretly. Coming to Odradesa, Vidyapati took shelter in a *Savara* hamlet situated very near to the *Nilasaila* or *Nilagiri* (Blue Mountain). He concealed his identity and motive of coming to that place. He tried his best, but could not locate the place of worship. Somehow he could manage to marry a tribal maiden called Lalita, the only beautiful daughter of Viswabasu and motivated her. In response to the repeated request made by Lalita, finally Viswabasu took his son-in-law blind-folded to a cave wherein Lord Nilamadhaha was being worshipped. Vidyapati was a very intelligent man. He dropped mustard seeds on the ground on his way. After a few days, the seeds germinated which helped Vidyapati to trace out the secret cave wherein the deity was being worshipped. Thus, winning over the friendship of the Savara chief and subsequently marrying his only daughter the willful young Brahmin was able to have a

darsan of Lord Nilamadhaha. Tracing the route to the shrine of Nilamadhaha, he returned to Avanti and informed Raja Indradyumna the whereabouts of Lord Nilamadhaha. The king accompanied by Narada, set out for *Odradesa* to pay homage to the deity. But at the boundary of the country he came to know about the miraculous disappearance of the deity. He became extremely sad. Narada consoled him by saying that the deity would appear in the form of a *daru* i.e. sacred wood. After few days, Lord Nilamadhaha appeared in a dream of *Raja* Indradyumna and as per his instructions, *Raja* and his attendants brought the *daru* from the seashore next day and placed in on the Mahavedi with respect. As directed by the Lord in the dream, *Raja* Indradyumna ordered for fashioning beautiful images out of the *daru*. But strangely enough, no carpenter was available for the purpose. At last, Viswakarma (the Divine Builder) appeared in the guise of an old *Maharana* (carpenter) and agreed to take up the work on the condition that he would be allowed to remain isolated and undisturbed inside the temple for twenty-one days. *Raja* agreed to his condition but after few days when the sound of the *Maharana's* (carpenter's) tools became thinner and one day no sound was heard, *Rani* Gundicha became curious and impatient to open the doors. She insisted the *Raja* and when the doors of the temple were opened, the *Maharana* (carpenter) was not found inside the temple rather the images of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra were found incomplete. This legend with slight variations is also mentioned in the *Brahma Purana* and in the *Oriya Mahabharata* of *Adi-kavi* Sarala Das.

Various epigraphic and historical evidences also attest this legend, which associates the *Savaras* with Lord Nilamadhaha. It speaks of the immigration of Hindus into



the tribal hinterlands of Orissa and Hinduisation of a tribal deity. Perhaps, this was due to the migration of the Vedic Brahmins from north and central India to eastern parts of the country like Orissa and consequential spread of the Brahmanic/Hindu culture. In due course of time, the tribal deity of Orissa has passed through the process of Hinduisation. In this process of Hinduisation and royal patronage extended to the tribal deity, the Brahmins played the most significant role. They defined and codified the duties of the original worshippers i.e. tribal people / *Savaras* in the Hindu system of worship i.e. temple worship at Puri. *Raja* also felt the necessity of their *seva* (services), particularly in arduous nature of *seva* during *Anasara / Anavasara, Ratha yatra, Pahandi, Nabakalebara* etc. Their services were essential for the promotion and extension of Jagannath cult in and outside the State. Needless to say, out of various agencies responsible for changing the religious canvas of Indian tribes, Hindus would perhaps claim to be the oldest dating back to many centuries. They had set an example of high-spirited religious reform or conversion which was later followed/adopted by many others including Christian missionaries in various parts of India particularly during second half of the 18th century. There is no denying the fact that for several centuries the tribes in some parts of India lived in remote hills and forests, almost uninfluenced by the main currents of history and cut off from the mainstream of social, economic, political, religious and cultural life of Indian society. In this background, it was initially the entry and working of particularly Brahmins into the tribal areas that the *Rajas*, emperors and different Governments in different period of historical development started paying attention to them. It would not be out of place to mention that tribal

populations constitute a sizeable section of the total population in Orissa. Their population is roughly 23 per cent of the total population of the State. Orissa occupies a unique position in the ethnographic map of India for having the largest number of tribal communities. Being one of the fascinating ethnographic States of the country, it has been the homeland of as many as 62 tribes numbering about 81.45 lakhs populations as per 2001 census. The tribal population of Orissa constitutes about 22.13 per cent of the total population of the State and about 9.66 per cent of the total tribal population of India. Among the various factors that contributed to the evolution of Jagannath cult in Orissa, primitive tree worship of the aboriginals formed an important aspect. The deities of Puri, which are made of log, generate an immediate impression and give an indication that they might have been aboriginal in character and origin. In course of time, the native hill tribes of Orissa came in gradual contact with the Hindus. As a result of this, there was a continuous interaction of two forces leading to a synthesis of religious beliefs that characterized the growth and development of Jagannath cult in ancient Orissa. Though at present Orissa contains substantially a large and varied tribal population, only the *Savaras* and Gonds figure in the epigraphic records. Mahendragiri mountain range in south Orissa was a stronghold of aboriginals like the *Pulindas* and the *Savaras*.

The *Pulindas* believed in the tree worship, which is said to be a pre-Aryan concept. The *Savaras* belong to the Proto-Austroloid tribe who were also originally worshippers of tree. In the subsequent history of tree worship, this assumed the shape/form of *linga* worship. In other words, in course of time, they became worshippers of *Sivalinga* whom they adored as *Sihanu* or branchless



trunk. Thus, the *Pulindas* and the *Savaras* are believed to be the worshippers of tree in the Vindhya and Mahendragiri mountain ranges from the earliest times. The *Skanda Purana* reveals that the worship of *Sivalinga* emerged out of tree worship, which was the faith of the aboriginal people of Kalinga. This was widely prevalent among the aboriginals of ancient Kalinga. The tree worship was later on transformed into Siva worship where the tree or log of wood represented *linga*. It is believed that the *Pulindas* and the *Sailajas* emerged as the *Sailodbhavas*. In other words, *Sailodbhavas* originated from the tribal stock of the *Pulindas* and the *Sailajas*. Under the influence of the Brahmanical school, the *Sailodbhavas* called Lord Siva as *Sthanu* as mentioned above. It may be surmised that they were the worshippers of the *Sthanumurti*, which, in course of time, replaced the primitive tree worship. Thus, the *Savaras* and the *Pulindas*, who were the traditional worshippers of Siva, seemed to have been gradually Hinduised under the influence of the Brahmanical school and absorbed the Vedic concepts in their socio-religious system. In this process of development, the tree worship of the tribal people got itself assimilated in the Vedic worship of Rudra. In this context, influence of Mattamayura School may be worth mentioning. Under the influence of the Saivite teachers of this School the *Sailodbhavas* became devout worshippers of Uma-Mahesvara. They propitiated and also popularized the cult of Madhava (Nilamadhava) in Orissa, which was considered part and parcel of the Jagannath cult.

Later on, worship of this *Sthanumurti* seems to have mingled with the worship of Lord Purushottama Vishnu. In the *Rigveda*, there is a passage that refers to the Lord of

daru (*Ado Yad Daru Plavate Sindhoh Pare Apurusam, Tada Rabhasva DurhanoTena Gachha Parastaram - Rig Veda, X.155.3*). According to the 14th century Vedic commentator Sayana (1300-1380 AD), this *daru* represents the wooden image of Lord Purushottama. This view is also attributed by a 15th century tradition as recorded in the Kondavidu copper plate grant of Ganadeva of the time of Gajapati Kapilendradeva. This tradition attests that Jagannath resembles the log of wood as spoken of in the *Sruti* (*Sa Bhagavan Srutyukta Daru Akrtih*). It is believed that the *Savaras* worshipped a deity named *Kitung* who had ten synonyms. One of the familiar synonyms was *Jaganta* or *Jaganelo*. In south Orissa, particularly among the *Savaras* inhabiting the Mahendragiri region, the deities are made of wood. It is widely believed that, even to-day the savaras worship a log of wood that they adore as *Jaganta* or *Jagannalo*. The resemblance of the names Jagannath and *Jaganta* and the log of wood as the common medium of worship for both the deities very well indicates the significance of the tree worship as a common religious practice among the aboriginals in Orissa which has subsequently mingled in the Purushottama Jagannath cult of the Hindus at Puri. According to another tradition recorded in the *Skanda Purana*, the *Savaras* who were the original worshippers of *Jaganta* made of wood, were also devout worshippers of Madhava i.e. Nilamadhava, the predecessor of Lord Jagannath. The legendary association of the *Savaras* with Nilamadhava, the predecessor of Purushottam Jagannath, as narrated in the *Skanda Purana* lends support to this presumption. This suggests us to believe that *Jaganta* of the *Savaras* had been transformed/converted into the Hindu god Jagannatha, who is no other than Madhava or Krishna. With



gradual process of Hinduisation, the *Savaras* were influenced by the Brahmanical form of Hinduism and incorporated the Brahmanical principles in their socio-religious life. The Hindu invaders who had settled amidst the tribal people, in course of time, adopted and worshipped this tribal deity in order to enjoy their confidence and seek the cooperation of the latter in their settlements. So much so, gradually the deity was Hinduised being transformed from a formidable tribal cult into Jagannath cult and worshipped both by the tribal people as well as the non-tribal people. Over the years, this aboriginal deity originally worshipped by the *Savaras* of Orissa has played an important role in the folk religion and the regional cultural tradition of Orissa.

In this context, there is an interesting tradition recorded in the Vizagapatnam plates of Anantavarman Chodagangadeva of the year 1119 AD. This tradition reveals that *Raja* Kamarnava conquered the Mahendragiri region towards the close of the fifth century AD, acknowledged a tribal deity of the *Savara* tribe as Siva-Gokarneswara and worshipped as his *Ista Devata* i.e. the tutelary deity of his family. Bestowed with grace by the deity, *Raja* Kamarnava climbed down the mountain, killed the *Savara* chief and conquered Kalinga. This attests to the fact that historical processes have always affected the nature of beliefs in Indian population. Invaders, who settled as rulers, had always played significant role in this regard. Generally, the rulers had a strong role of reinforcing a particular faith. Besides, ruler's religion used to fetch privileges while that of other's subjected to oppression and suppression. It would not be out of place to mention that a verse in the *Bhagavata Purana* informs us that the *Kiratas*, the *Hunas*, the *Pulindas*, the *Abhiras* and other tribal people were influenced by the worship of Lord Vishnu.

This process of interaction and intermingling of the tribal and non-tribal cultures led to Hinduisation of many tribal deities in the *Oriya* society. As discussed earlier, the *Pulindas* and the *Savaras* were beyond the pale of Hindu civilization in the proto-historic period in different parts of Orissa. But in course of the Hinduisation, the Brahmanical form of Hinduism deeply influenced their life and thought.

Some scholars have suggested that Saktism in Orissa has also incorporated the principle of tree worship of the hill tribes into its fold. They opine that the figure of Khambeswari resembles the figure of Subhadra of the holy triad (Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra) at Puri temple because both are similar in their iconography as well as iconology. It is pertinent to note here that the worship of Khambeswari is known since the fifth or the sixth century AD and it is believed that her Hinduised iconography might be taken as the prototype for the development, which led to the Subhadra figure at Puri temple. Stambheswari, the goddess of the post / pillar, was originally an aboriginal goddess worshipped by the tribal people and their rulers in west Orissa and Ghumsar region of the Ganjam district of Orissa. Among the Mother Goddesses/Sakti she was in the past one of the important deities, who was patronized and supported by many royal dynasties and the people at large. Under the influence of the Brahmanical school, the aboriginals identified the *Stambha* with the mother goddess. The hill tribes who believed in matriarchy were generally worshippers of Sakti. The worship of Sakti or the female principle is the primordial factor in the creation and reproduction of the Universe. It occupies a unique position in the religious system of India. As a result of the fusion of the Vedic concept of Uma with the



cult of *Stambha*, there emerged the worship of Stambheswari (Mother Goddess) in tribal surroundings. The earliest reference to Stambheswari is found in the Teresingha copper plate of king Tustikara. Paleographically, it is assigned to the fourth / fifth century AD. Tustikara ruled over Kalahandi, Boudh, Sonapur / Suvarnapur and Ghumsar regions during that period and Stambheswari was popular atleast from the time of Tustikara, who had styled himself as *Stambheswari Padabhakta*. This copper plate reveals that *Raja* Tustikara in order to cure his ailing mother worshipped the feet of Goddess Stambheswari, the *Ista Devi* of his family.

In course of time, this cult became very popular among some ruling families of the early medieval period in Orissa. For instance, the Bhanjas of Khinjilimandala and the Sulkis of Kodalakamandala had recorded in their charters that they achieved success and prosperity by the grace of Stambheswari/ Khambeswari. She was the tutelary deity of the Sulki royal family (600-800 AD) of Kodalakamandala (Dhenkanal-Talcher region) and the Bhanja kings (9th century AD) of Khinjilimandala (Sonapur/Subarnapur, Boudh and Ghumsur region). Under the royal patronage of the Bhanjas the worship of Khambeswari became very popular in the Ghumsur region as revealed by their inscriptions. In the 17th century AD, the Bhanja kings regarded Khambeswari at Aska as the presiding deity of the *Dakshina dwara* (south gate) of their kingdom. The Somavamsis were also influenced by this cult. As revealed from the Muranjamura charter, Panchambari Bhadrabika was the tutelary deity of the Somavamsis. They identified this deity Bhadrabika with Stambheswari when they came in contact with the worship of the log of wood as Stambheswari. Most probably, this fusion of the Stambheswari cult and

Bhadrabika contributed to the evolution of Subhadra, the central wooden image in the Jagannath triad. Very recently, the noted scholar Sasanka S.Panda has opined that Samlei of Sambalpur, Lankeswari of Suvarnapur, Subhadra of Puri and Panchambari Bhadrabika might be the same goddess. Thus, in course of time, Stambheswari was given a prominent place in the Hindu pantheon. She was adopted and worshipped by the Hindu invaders who had settled amidst the tribal people in Orissa. Summararily, the aboriginal deity Stambheswari has been acknowledged as member of the documented theology of the Oriya society due to their constant contact with the tribal people. At present, such goddess is worshipped at Suvarnapur, Balangir, Sambalpur and Aska etc. as an important deity. Originated directly from the primitive background Stambheswari or Khambeswari gradually crept into the mainstream of Jagannath cult as Subhadra.

It is also very interesting to mention the similarities between the renewal of tribal ritual of the post, representing Stambheswari or Khambeswari and the *Nabakalebara* ritual of deities at Puri. According to the tradition followed in the Jagannath temple at Puri during *Nabakalebara*, the *Patimahapatra* leads the party of *Daitas* to find out the *daru* for the four deities and goes to the *Saktipitha* (Mangala) at Kakatpur. There he is told in a dream by goddess Mangala the exact location and appearance of *daru*. It is believed that two groups of the *sevakas* (servitors) of the Puri temple originated from the *Savaras*. In this context, mention may be made of *Patimahapatra* and *Daita*. As per the available tradition narrated earlier, *Patimahapatra* is the descendant of Vidyapati (Brahmin) and Lalita (*Savara*). Thus, he may be called the head of the half-*Savara* Brahmins. *Daitas* are the descendants of *Savara* chief Viswabasu and



they are a special section or group of non-Brahmin priests in Puri temple. In case of the renewal of the tribal deity Stambheswari, the goddess herself appears in a dream through the medium of the priest called Bhejini and indicates the spot where the tree is to be found. The tree to be selected must display certain features, which are similar in both the cases. In case of the tribal custom the new tree is worshipped with the sacrifice of a sheep or a goat before being cut off. The chief priest of the tribal deity called *dehuri* always performs the first stroke on the tree. In case of the *daru* of the deities also the sacrificial ritual is symbolically performed/observed and the chief priest called *acharya* makes the first stroke. In both the cases the tree should fall to the east and should not touch the ground in any case. The tradition that the logs should be carried in a special hand-made wooden cart exclusively pulled by human hands and should not touch the ground is followed in both the cases. The *Maharanas* (carpenters) in a closed room do the carvings of the images of deities secretly. Nobody except the *Daitas* and the *Patimahapatra* are allowed to enter the place where the figures are being carved. The *Maharanas* are to lead a pure life i.e. purity of mind and body and also observe certain *nisthas* or principles during this period. In case of tribal custom also, the carpenter is to abstain himself from drinks, drugs and sex and to lead a pure life. Just as the sacred *Brahma* is inserted into the images at Jagannath temple, Puri before their consecration, five metals namely gold, silver, iron, copper and brass are inserted into the post of the tribal people before it is consecrated. The images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsan at Puri temple are crude and have an aboriginal look. Similarly, the post representing Stambheswari is also crude and sometimes the figure of Narasimha (an aspect of Jagannath) is carved on the post in a very crude form. It would not

be out of place to mention that the Sirpur stone inscription of *Rani Vasata* refers to Narasimha, an incarnation of Vishnu as Purushottama who emerged out of a *Stambha* (pillar).

All these similarities between the *Nabakalebara* ritual of Lord Jagannath and that of the tribal deity Stambheswari suggest us to believe that there is a close link between the Hindu deities of Puri temple and the tribal deity Khambeswari. It would not be out of context to mention that the *Savaras* i.e. *Daitas* also play a distinct role in the daily worship of Lord Jagannath in Puri temple. As noted earlier, they are the descendants of the *Savara* chief Viswabasu who was the first worshipper of Jagannath in the form of Nilamadhava in the hoary past. *Daitas* are known as the close relatives of Lord Jagannath and entrusted with certain important *seva* (services). During the *anavasara* ceremony of the deities, it is not the Brahmins but the *Daitas* who perform the worship. *Anavasara* refers to sickness of the deities. During this period of seclusion, the Vedic offerings and rituals are not performed and the deities are placed in a place called *anasara pindi*. They remain there secluded and unexposed to public view for a period of fifteen days. During this period, *Daitas* perform certain secret rituals of the deities. These rituals are known as *anasara nitis*, which no one is allowed to witness. Obviously the deities would like to see their close relatives at the time of sickness. Since the *Daitas* claim Jagannath as a member of their family, they sit together with the deities and take the *gnyatisara* (the dishes taken by members of the same family together). They also play significant roles at the outset of the *Ratha Yatra* i.e. car festival. During this period the deities are not worshipped in the Vedic line but in the tribal line. Even the deities are dressed in the *Savara* costume. The deities move towards the *Rathas* (chariots) in north-west direction whereas in



Hindu process, the procession moves towards eastern direction. Hence, it is believed that the northwest movement of the deities towards the *Rathas* indicates the impact of the *Savara* convention / tradition on the *Ratha Yatra*.

After the *Nabakalebara* ceremony, the *Daitas* as descendants of Lord Jagannath claim on the articles used by the deceased Jagannath. After disposing of the old figures/images of the deities in the *Koilibaikuntha*, situated on the northwest side of the temple the *Daitas* take bath and observe mourning because of the death of one of their clan. They weep and cry for the death of Jagannath and for ten days they remain in a state of ritual impurity observing all sorts of obsequies prescribed in the Hindu *dharmasastras*. On the tenth day, they cut their hairs and nails and shave their body and take purificatory bath in the *Markandeya puskarini* (tank) of Puri. The fact that the *Daitas* (*Savaras*) even today consider Lord Jagannath as a member of their clan and observe all sorts of obsequies is a clear indication of the tribal origin of Lord Jagannath. In other words, tradition as well as present practices clearly points to the tribal origin of Lord Jagannath. But how the tribal deity Nilamadhava has come to Puri to be worshipped as Jagannath is a mystery, which is yet to be solved. With the older mode there would always remains older beliefs and ways of life. It becomes difficult to say precisely when a given stage passed and another took over. Needless to say, Lord Jagannath is a synthesis between the Hindu and non-Hindu tribal culture. The process of interaction was mutual. Not only did Hindus (immigrants) influence aboriginals in Orissa but also the newcomers took over some indigenous and even aboriginal beliefs and customs. To day, it is practically difficult to believe that *Daitas* belong to the *Savara* tribe, however loosely defined the term tribe may be. It is also ridiculous to speak of a *Daita* tribe with no

reference of ethnic unity with *Savara* tribe. The present generation of some *Daitas* prefer to establish marital relationship with the Karanas of the Oriya society, apparently with a view to making their tribal origin less known and thereby have elevated their social status in the overall social hierarchy in Oriya society. In a traditional Oriya society, the so-called Brahmins do not partake food if touched by the low caste people. Usually persons of all castes are seen enjoying *Mahaprasad* sitting in one place in a row. It is the established practice that the moment *Mahaprasad* is served, no Hindu of the so-called high castes objects to partake it even from the same plate with any person of the so-called low castes. All the devotees irrespective of castes accept the vegetarian food (*bhoga*) offered by the *Daitas*. They are one of the dominant classes of non-Brahmin *sevakas* of the temple at Puri. They have emerged as a pressure group to fight for their rights and exert tremendous pressure on the temple administration and even dictate terms and conditions at times. However, as an important aspect of Oriya culture, Jagannath is indispensably associated with the social life of the Oriya people from birth to death.

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