



Laxmi-Narayan Discord in Jagannath Religion

Durga Madhab Dash

The cult of Lord Jagannatha is an eclectic system. It has assimilated in its fold divergent religions. It is also inclusive of myriad creeds and manifold sects of the world. Jagannatha in this sense is not a sectarian deity. The images of the Jagannatha triad do not approximate to the divine forms of any known gods and

goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Yet in the common belief of the devotees, Lord Jagannatha is identified by the name of Narayan and His chief consort by the name of Mahalaxmi. Like the enormity of the Jagannatha cult, His

temple is also known by different names like 'Badadeula', 'Nilachala', 'Srimandir' and so on. Every name, for all practical purposes, has a significance of its own. Of these names, the name of the temple as Srimandir is most popular among the devotees of the Almighty Lord. In this sense, Mahalaxmi is adored as the divine proprietress of the sacred temple.

As described in 'Durga Saptasati', Mahalaxmi is worshipped as the goddess of

wealth. She is the symbol of affluence and prosperity of the universe. Having adopted in herself all the mystic powers of Mahakali and Mahasaraswati, she is venerated in the temple as the primordial divine force. In the belief of the devout Vaishnavites, the main protagonists of the Jagannatha religion, Mahalaxmi is the

primary divine force of the cosmic creation and therefore she is worshipped as one of the principal images in the Jagannatha temple.

A number of festivals where Mahalaxmi is

primarily involved are celebrated in the temple of Lord Jagannatha. One such festival is the car festival of the Lords. The car festival, following the universal import of Jagannatha cult, is not merely a function of the Hindus. It transcends all barriers of space and belief. It involves multidimensional activities linked to many other rituals of the temple. Every such ritual is the expression of common human behaviour in our day-to-day life. The Laxmi-Narayan discord is one such function arising





out of the famous car festival of the Lords. This is observed in the temple on the twelfth day of the car festival. The discord is related to a dialogue between Mahalaxmi and Jagannatha. Countless devotees enjoy the ritual at the time of Lord's entry into the temple after the Bahuda Yatra. As the ritual ensues, Mahalaxmi does not open the doors of the temple at the Jay -Vijaya entrance. Jagannatha, as a result, is stranded outside. Balabhadra is however taken inside the temple. He is as usual seated on the Ratnavedi, the divine platform of Jewel. It is said, Mahalaxmi stoops to this action out of awful anguish. Her anger is caused due to the fact that she was not allowed to accompany Jagannatha during the Gundicha Yatra, although the Lord took his sister, Subhadra in pomp and ceremony. Stranded outside, Jagannatha entreats Mahalaxmi to open the door of the entrance. He gives out several explanations in the forms of insistent appeals. The flared outburst of Mahalaxmi and the humble appeals of Jagannatha Mahapravu thus constitute the Laxmi Narayan dialogue. This is an important ritual of the Temple. The dialogue is contained in verse form. The ritual pertaining to the dialogue is celebrated in the temple for about an hour. Thereafter, with Mahalaxmi's permission, the doors of the temple are made ajar and the Lord is taken inside in a grand procession to adorn his seat on the divine platform. This is the mystic background of the famous Laxmi-Narayan dialogue.

The purpose of this endeavor is to make a realistic study on this dialogue. An attempt is made here to present the gist of the dialogue in a prosaic order. Mahalaxmi flares her violent outbursts like an angry wife neglected by her husband. However harsh and rasping her outbursts may appear, they are symbolic of an

endearing appeal to Lord Jagannatha. This is most common in the case of a wife in her loving and dutiful behaviour towards her husband. The display of her passionate conduct is all a fuss. In the end, it ultimately turns out as much ado about nothing. The disharmony at last dissipates like the transient morning dew in the usual passage of time. Mahalaxmi adapts herself to the ongoing situation and finally wins over her husband. This is wife and husband relationship in the usual go of life. This spirit is depicted in a picturesque way in the famous Laxmi-Narayan dialogue, full of realities in filial behavior. The general theme of the dialogue, as followed in different parts of India, is almost the same. But the style and rhythm of the dialogue are different in different parts where the car festival is celebrated. The dialogue was once prevalent only in Oriya. But as things now prevail, the dialogue is written in different languages. In some places, the ritual of Laxmi-Narayan dialogue is not at all observed. The images, after the Bahuda Yatra, are straightway taken to the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. The Laxmi-Narayan dialogue where it is in vogue, has been, by and large, formulated conforming to the themes and contents of 'Deulatola' of Sisu Krushna Das, 'Bramha Puran' and 'Skanda Puran', the sacred treatises on Jagannatha religion. In some places, the dialogue as published by Hari Arjun Company is also ceremoniously followed for observance of the ritual. The dialogue is always recited in verse form. But, the Ragas followed are different in different parts of Orissa.

In the expressions of some devout poets of Jagannatha religion, the Lord's attitudinal disposition is not to the liking of the common people of the society. How can he neglect Mahalaxmi, his chief consort while moving out on the divine sojourn ? The poets say,



Mahalaxmi's presence in the Lord's chariot would have added to the glamour of the car festival.

In Jagamohan Ramayan, Matta Balam Das, the eldest of the five illustrious devotees of the Panchasakha Age, describes this mystic sequence from the point of view of a common man's feelings. He says in a common man's voice, "Hay, Hari ! You didn't take Mahalaxmi while going on the divine sojourn. Instead, you let your sister follow your gracious company. How could you do this, Oh, the most adored Lord ! Didn't you thereby ? dishonour your consort ? You appeared with Subhadra on the stone platform of Gundicha Ghar braving an unusual custom. Didn't you, my supreme Lord"?

In Nila Sundar Gita, the devout poet, Sekhar Das while presenting the cosmic pastime of the Lord in Kaliyug has depicted the theme of the dialogue with a similar accusation through Arjun, the illustrious companion of the Lord in answer to several questions, brought forth by the latter in his perennial anxiety of gathering wisdom. One such question pertains to the Lord's neglect of Mahalaxmi, which from a common man's viewpoint, is avowedly disheartening. Arjun says to Bhagawan, "Hey, Natabar ! My illustrious companion ! Are you aware of the general reaction of the people around you ? They disapprove your sojourn with Subhadra on the occasion of the car festival. Your consorts, Sridevi and Bhudevi, detest your action. Which also stands less prudent to my own conscience and to the conscience of your devotees." Arjun speaks out in this way disapproving the Lord's boisterous sojourn.

In the poetic work known as "Laxmi Naraya Kali" by Kali Charan Kabisurya of

Digapahandhi, district, Ganjam (Orissa), Jagannath proffers a fitting explanation in this regard. The Lord says to Mahalaxmi, "Hey, Devi ! Isn't it the fact that you are the divine proprietress of the temple ? In fact, you look after the routine rites of the peripheral deities of the temple. If you go out, the rites of the temple will be in an awful shambles. How can then you move with me ? Hey, Devi ! You are Chanchala in your action and usual behaviour. Think for a while; can you remain with me in the Adap for so many days at a stretch ?

Indeed a very cogent and incontrovertible explanation ! Mahalaxmi has all knowledge about the rationale of the Lord's explanation. But she is not prepared to admit it as a justifiable reasoning. After all, she is the Lordly consort of Jagannatha and, for that reason; she is to exert her domineering control on her beloved Lord ! This is the spirit of the entire altercation in the Laxmi-Narayan discord. The devout poets of Jagannatha religion have viewed this episode from their own visionary appreciations. But everywhere in Orissa, where the car festival is observed, the theme of the episode is one and the same.

Thus, the Lord, unmindful of other people's reactions, is bent upon his own decision. And the Lord finally goes out in his divine mission as per his own plan. It is in this background of facts that the car festival begins.

The Lord at last reaches the Gundicha Temple, accompanied by his elder brother, Balabhadra, his sister Subhadra and the cosmic weapon, "Sudarsan". The images are then taken from the chariots in a divine procession and finally alighted on the stone platform of the Gundicha temple. The festival continues here for a period of long seven days.



On the Herapanchami day, Mahalaxmi after paying her obeisance to Nilamadhava, the moving idol of Lord Jagannatha, leaves the massive temple and proceeds to Gundicha Mandir to have the 'darshan' of the Lords on the stone platform. However, her main purpose is to invite Jagannatha Mahaprabhu back to his divine abode soon. Mahalaxmi travels in a palanquin in a grand procession. As she reaches the place where "Nandighosa", the chariot of the Lord, is parked, some Servitor-Daitapatis come along from the Gundicha Temple to the palanquin of Mahalaxmi in a similar grand procession and offer their scared obeisance while receiving Mahalaxmi on her way. The servitors perform this ritual as the emissaries of the Lord. Mahalaxmi is thus taken into the temple where the Lords are worshipped. Thereafter, a different rite takes place in Gundicha Temple. Mahalaxmi's palanquin is brought near the Gundicha pillar in front of the main entrance of the temple. Here, goddess Mahalaxmi, after paying her obeisance, invites the Lords to come back to their divine abode. In a Sanskrit verse of Kali Charan Kabi surya, Mahalaxmi's invitation to the Lords is nicely depicted. Mahalaxmi says, "Oh, the great Lord ! The four armed cosmic Divine ! Be gracious enough to come back to the grand temple with your worshipful elder brother and loving sister. You have stayed away from the temple for a long time. I have personally come over here to extend my warm invitation. In your absence, the temple looks vacant."

As the ritual next follows, Lord Jagannatha, having gracefully acknowledged the invitation, sends out through his servitors one of the garlands adorning his exalted self. Mahalaxmi receives the garland known as "Ajnya Mala" of the Lord in expression of her deep love and profound graciousness. Just

thereafter, the ritual of offering "prasada" is celebrated. The servitors now fasten the holy cloth known as 'Tera' on the entrance of the Temple. Gratified with the Lords' fabulous large heartedness, Mahalaxmi returns to the temple through Hera Gouri Street. This is how the ritual of Hera Panchami is performed in the Gundicha Temple during the car festival period.

On the ninth day, the Lords resume their back journey to the main temple. This is known as Bahuda Yatra of Lord Jagannatha. When the three chariots are halfway through, Mahalaxmi, extraordinarily euphoric, appears on the Bhog Mandap of the main temple and steals a glance of the chariots moving along towards the grand temple. In the process of this ritual, the idol of Mahalaxmi is taken out in a procession, conducted by Gajapati Maharaj, to the chariot of the Lord Jagannatha. Here again, she welcomes the Lords. Jagannatha as usual offers her a garland- "Ajnya Mala" -as a mark of his earnest concern. After the sacred observance of the ritual, Mahalaxmi moves back to the temple. As the three chariots in the usual process reach the Lions Gate of the temple, Mahalaxmi again appears on the 'Chahani Mandap' to confirm that the Lords have arrived near the entrance of the massive temple. Everything is alright so far. Having reached the Lion's Gate, the Lords give their audience to the eager devotees. The servitors perform some more rites over here, while the Lords and Subhadra are still seated in their respective chariots. The ritual of Sayana Ekadasi is observed during this period. The Lords and Subhadra are then taken to the temple. Mahalaxmi's expectations are outraged during this period. She expected the Lords back to the sanctum sanctorum soon after their arrival at the Lion's gate. The delay caused in



the process of various ritualistic observances is unbearable to the self-conceited and impatient Mahalaxmi. So she denies the entry of the Jagannatha Mahaprabhu in to the sanctum sanctorum out of anguish as narrated above. The Lord, by now, is quite aware of his own slip-ups. He explains his predicament and the circumstances leading to the delay in his arrival in the temple.

According to the dialogue prevalent in North Orissa, Mahalaxmi, hearing the voice of Jagannatha, orders her maidservant to close the door of the entrance at the Jaya-Vijaya gate. She orders "Hey, Sakhi !, listen. I hear the voice of the Lord outside. It appears, he has arrived in the temple now. You move forth and close the door of the entrance. The Lord should not be allowed to enter the sanctum sanctorum. Let him remain outside.

However, Mahalaxmi before giving this order allows Badathakur to enter the sanctum of the temple. After all, he is her elder brother-in-law. How can she disrespect his elderly self ? This sequence has been beautifully described in the Laxmi-Narayan dialogue published by Hari Arjuna Company. As per the relevant verse on this score, Mahalaxmi says to her maid servant, "Listen Sakhi ! Let my elder brother-in-law enter the temple. But the black hued Lord should stand outside and get drenched in rain".

Hearing all this, the Lord, stands outside like an unfortunate offender. To appease her infuriated consort, the Lord speaks in the next verse of the same dialogue, "Oh, the lotus eyed, the daughter of the ocean, open the door of the entrance; I am immensely distressed. Show me your splendourous face and mitigate my distress. I have brought for you this gorgeous piece of chitrameghi silk. This, I believe, will best suit

your fair complexion. Mahalaxmi is least moved by his cajolery words. She replies saying, "I do not like to hear your words of encomium. Hey, Niladribihari, go away from the temple now; go away with your loving sister. If you leave the daughter of Nandaraj alone, she will be forlorn and greatly distressed. See the face of your incorrigible sister; she has no mark of honour in her face. Don't you know, how she moved out first and mounted the chariot on her own? She is like a way-ward cow entirely unmanageable. She cannot correct her behaviour even if she is admonished for her aberrant ways."

Subhadra does not mind the piercing words of her self-conceited sister-in-law. After all, she is like her own mother in the line of respectable relationship ? But lo ! To the Lord himself, all those were serious aspersions.

Mahalaxmi again says, "Oh, Lord! The way you behave is your strange style of mannerism. I know, you cannot mend your manners. This is what your caste has actually taught you over all these years. Having stayed in Gopapura for long, you have picked up many unusual habits and the one, you exhibit now, is the display of your obsessive mind".

The Lord still maintains his calm. He swallows all her aspersions without a word of reaction. He does not mind what his consort says. In defence he only proffers his explanation cozily trying to convince Mahalaxmi on the points of his own submission.

In the words of the devotee-poet, Sridhar Das, this is be the go of life in the dealings between a husband and his wife. The quality of adaptability is the sine-qua-non of a happy married life in household relationship. When the wife is intransigent, the husband should be



flexible and calm going and adjust himself to the disparaging situation.

Now, undisturbed despite the continuing acrimony, the Lord as depicted in the Brahma Puran, makes an appeal to Mahalaxmi, "Hey, Devi ! As you know, in Satya Yuga, Indrayumna built the temple. He was the fifth descendant of Lord Bhama. He consecrated our images on the Ratna Vedi in all devotion. His queen Gundicha was no less a devotee of mine. Satisfied with their devotion, I called upon them to ask for a boon each. You know very well, Indradyumna initially did not ask for any boon. After all he was an invincible emperor. He was not in want of anything in his world. Why should he need a boon from me ? However, when I persisted in my wishful blessings, the king said that if I still insisted, the boon should be such that, after him, there should be no survivor in his dynasty to claim the temple as his own. Indeed ! A stupendous boon ! The queen was flabbergasted at the king's flamboyance. She had no other alternative. And so, adopting me as his son, she wanted me to make a commitment, that I should, once in a year, visit, her place and this visit shall, in future, be known as Gundicha Yatra after her name. In compliance of her wish, I am committed to visit Gundicha Temple once in every year as you know very well. So, Oh, Devi ! You should not misunderstand me for my car festival, which is sacredly tied to a divine commitment. This version is also included in the Deula Tola of Sisu Krishna Das.

Now, the Lord's submission to Mahalaxmi, as described in the lyric is of some Bachanikas prevailing in the ex-zamidari areas of Ganjam district is considerably overwhelming. The Lord says, "Hey, Devi ! have I ever deviated from my words of

commitment since then? Why then you pointlessly exhibit your fury on the flimsiest grounds ? While moving along in my usual elegance in the divine procession of the festival, I admit, I might have delayed in going to the temple. But I confess my embarrassing indiscretion. So now be pleased to open the door and I enter sanctum sanctorum without any further fuss in the continuing misunderstanding.

In the same lyrical presentation, the Lord continues, "Hey, Indirey ! My beloved, the divine benefactress of all devotees in this world, irrespective of caste, creed and religion; you visit the places of your devotees with a spirit of enormous compassion. In the same spirit, I set off on my divine sojourn only once in a year to give audience to my devotees and to avenge their sorrows and atone their sins. Hey, Indirey ! My divine sojourn is not for any other reason. Still, if you do not open the door, I shall go back to Adap (Gundicha Temple) and live there forever."

Mahalaxmi knows very well that the Lord cannot leave the temple under any circumstance. He has a bigger commitment to live here and give his audience to the demigods and his devotees every day. She is aware of all the divine responsibilities of the Lord in his own temple. So, she least bothers about his cautionary remarks. Feigning her indignation further, she continues to say, "It is alright that you set off on your divine mission. But why did you leave me alone ? You may or may not say; but I know the reason. In the name of the festival, you went out to meet the cowherd women with whom, as the world says, you are in deep love in actual dispensation.

A strange accusation ! She dubs the Lord as immoral in his disposition. In fact, this is



the type of accusation, a wife usually hurls at her husband when there is slightest misunderstanding in the heedful attention of the latter. Mahalaxmi reflects a common women's sentiment. Whatever be the religious implication of the Laxmi-Narayan dialogue, it is the mirror of a common women's usual reaction to her husband when there is slightest neglect on the part of the latter. The accusation of the wife may appear to be harsh and damaging. But one thing is sure that, in every such accusation, the wife has the flair to highlight the enormity of her husband's greatness. This is romanticism in the meaningful layout of a negative disposition.

As depicted in the dialogue prevalent in some places, Mahalaxmi says to Jagannatha, "Oh, the crown potentate of deceivers and tricksters, go back to the cowherd women of Gopapura; they may be waiting for you. If you hold up, they may be angry with you. Hey, Muralidhar ! You have looted their love; you have looted their all with the captivating note of your magic flute. How winsome your potent fluit is ! Even Brahma and Siva are captivated by its wondrous sound. You have brought for me many gifts, as you say. Give them to Radha; She will be very happy to receive them from your divine self".

Having exhausted all her anguish through several blames, Mahalaxmi gradually calms down. As described in the dialogue published by Hari Arjun Campany, Badathakur at last

intervenes in the divine altercation. He speaks out to Mahalaxmi, while enjoying the transcendental situation, "Hey Bhadre ! if my brother, Jagannatha is a wrongdoer for lapses, if any, I too am not free from your accusation. Our darling Subhadra accompanied us because of the candid wish of both the brothers and not of Jagannatha alone. Subhadra cannot remain without her brothers. And so, you were left in the temple for the genuine reason best known to you. After all, you are the divine proprietress of the grand temple. Mind not my brother's mistake, if any. Now open the door and let my brother enter the sanctum of the temple." With these words of Badathakura, the arrogance of Mahalaxmi breaks down like bubbles on the surface of water. Mahalaxmi now comes forward and offers the sacred light to her Lord. She finally receives the Lord at the Jaya-Vijaya Gate. And all the images are at last seated on the Ratna Vedi, the platform of Jewel as before.

Now, there is ululation all around in the temple. The devotees say "Haribole" at the pitch of their voice. In the midst of drums, cymbals and other musical instruments blowing, the ritual of Laxmi Narayan Bachanika is ceremoniously concluded.

Durga Madhab Dash lives at C-80, Palasapalli, Bhubaneswar.

