



A retrospect of Purusottama-Jagannath

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The Skanda Purana in Utkal Khanda speaks about the worship of Nilamadhava by the Savaras (tribal people) dwelling near the south-sea, after installing the image of the deity secretly in a cave on the mountain called Nilachala. The Purana glorifies the mountain and the banyan tree standing over it and at one place agrees that the mountain was named 'Nila' was not actually looking blue as claimed by certain scholars. Nila mountain is found mentioned along with other 'Kula Parvatas' in several Puranas including Bhagavata and Agni. But the reference to the mountain Nila in connection with the shrine of Sri Purushottama, is found only in Skanda, Brahma, Narada and Padma Puranas, although in real state of affairs one would be astonished, when he does not find the trace of any mountain within a radius of about 50 kms. from the seat of Sri Purushottama Jagannath in Puri. Scholars have not failed to associate the famous Tantric deity Kamakhya of Kamrupa (Assam) with the Sakta culture of Orissa and consequent naming of a small sand-hill in this region as Nilachala. We are inclined to quote here Dr. K.C. Panigrahi, who says "Then the Bhaumas came from Assam in the first part of the eighth century A.D., ruled over Orissa, obtained the shrine from the Savaras, got the temple built on the spot and gave it the name Nilachala, which was the name of the famous shrine of Kamakhya in their homeland of Assam." (History of Orissa - Pp. 338-339).

We do not accept the views of Dr. Panigrahi entirely, since he says that the three images carved represented Buddhist Triratna mainly because the Purana speaks of a single image of Nilamadhava, but not of three images. The wooden altar referred to by Dr. Panigrahi takes its origin to the verses of Mahabharata, which Yudhisthira was advised by sage Lomasa to ride upon, hearing from him that goddess Earth had reappeared here in the form of the said altar. The Bhaumakara kings and queens were not Madhava worshippers, but rather worshippers of Buddha and patrons of Tantric system of worship. Dr. Panigrahi himself admits this while dealing with Viraja, the tutelary deity of modern Jajpur, their capital. In his own words - 'The Sakta shrine Viraja was again influenced by Tantrik Buddhism. We have already observed that the Bhaumas had their capital at Viraja and that the earlier rulers of the dynasty were Buddhists, but the Buddhism of this period as already observed, was a mixed form of religion in which Buddhism, Saivism, Saktism and Tantrism had become strangely amalgamated.' (Ibid p.331).

The shrine of Nilamadhava must have had its origin during the Sailodbhava rule of Kangoda, the kings of which dynasty were the acclaimed worshippers of Madhava. The very fact that as many as three rulers of this dynasty bore the name Madhava, is sufficiently suggestive of the origination of Madhava worship in Puri during their rule and at their instance.



In the words of Dr. H.C. Das - 'The epithet of Madhava adopted by the rulers of Sailodbhava dynasty such as Madhavaraja, Madhavavarman etc. indicate the popularity of the name Madhava and Madhava worship in Orissa.' (Madhava worship and Sri Jagannath - Studies in the cult of Jagannatha P.71). Dr. Dash did not conceive the idea that such popularity could be responsible for establishing a shrine of Madhava by them, especially by Madhavaraja, who compared himself with the greatness of Chakradhara Madhava. The Sailodbhavas, as the name of the dynasty would suggest, were tribals, who lived in the 'Saila' or mountains and their ancestor was one Pulindasena. Pulinda and Savara are synonyms. The Sailodbhavas after establishing the shrine of Madhava, must have entrusted the local Savara chieftain to look after its management and rituals. The name of such a chieftain was Visvavasu, when Vidyapati, the messenger of king Indradyumna arrived in Puri as described in Skanda Purana.

Some Tantric elements must have been introduced in the shrine of Nilamadhava during the Bhauma rule. Besides, a separate shrine for a Tantric goddess called Vimala must have been built during their regime. Establishment of numerous Sakta-Tantric shrines all over their kingdom during the Bhauma period can be suggested from the temples of Viraja at Jajpur, Kapalini and Mohini at Bhubaneswar, Mangala at Kakatpur and may be, at some other parts of Orissa. The earlier rulers of the dynasty were Buddhists and had boldly proclaimed their personal faith in their official charters. By the time Mahayanism in Buddhist order

was quite popular and these Mahayanists encouraged the images of Buddha and Bodhisattvas to be built for the purpose of worship. In the meantime Tantrayana had been introduced in the worship of Mahayana Buddhism, which had given way to such occult doctrines like Sahajayana and Kalachakrayana. Orissa had been a haunting ground of all these 'ism's during the Bhauma rule and it is safe to believe that some of the features of Buddhist Tantras could stealthily enter into the worship of Nilamadhava. It was at this juncture that Sankaracharya visited Puri during the reign of Yayati Keshari, as revealed from Madala Panji. It was his mission to revive the Vedic form of worship to the Indian gods and goddesses eliminating the non-Vedic influence of the Buddhists in the whole of India, for which he had undertaken an extensive tour to all parts of the country. It is in this process that he revived the cult of Vishnu in this holy land. We may believe that Nilamadhava, whatever form he might have assumed in the meantime during the Bhaumakara rule, was renamed as Purusottama and the god continued to bear the same name for a long time. Some scholars presume that the god might have taken the form of Narasingha and might have been installed in a small temple to the north of the banyan tree, which exists even to the date. Several inscriptions incised on the body of the temple not only prove its antiquity, but also the name Purusottama, which the god had assumed at the instance of Sankaracharya.

Skanda Purana however, says that Nrusingha was enshrined on the Nila mountain under an 'aguru' tree, which Indradyumna had visited along with sage Narada, even after the disappearance of



Nilamadhava, suggesting existence of Nilamadhava and Nrusingha simultaneously. The description of Nilamadhava given in Skanda Purana in the mouth of Vidyapati, while narrating his experience before the king is quite suggestive of the iconography of this god. Such description as translated by Dr. G.N. Mohapatra reveals - The sapphire coloured god, the holder of Sankha, Chakra and Gada is lodged on the eastern altar, in the cooling shade of the banyan tree. He sits on a golden lotus, whose size is of eighty-one digits. The lustre of his forehead is brighter than that of the moon in the sky on the eighth day of the fortnight. The beauty of his eyes far excels a blue lotus. His face like the Sun can dispel the three 'Tapa's. The nose of the god can well be compared to the flower 'Tila Puspa'. Although his body is made of stone, a soft smile plays on his lips. The cheeks in the smiling, look very much beautiful. His corners of the mouth are at once beautiful and rightly proportioned. The auspicious radiance flows from his lips that become low when he laughs. The exquisite figure of the god unmistakably bears out the skill of Viswakarma, the carpenter god. The Makarakundala, as his ear-ornament adorns him. A necklace enhances the beauty of his neck. His shoulders are robust and his thighs long. He has four hands. He wears a transparent crystal chain and his chest is ornamented with a gem called 'Kaustubha Mani'. His navel point is very deep and his body grows bright with luxuriant hairs. The chain hangs down to the three fold of the belly (Tribali). The hip chain of valuable gems, together with the Kinkini made of pearls lend beauty to his buttocks. These chains hang down from his buttocks to the thighs. His thighs

resembling pillars grant salvation i.e. Mukti. The god's feet sparkle with a pair of bangles, called 'Balayas'. He remains on the Niladri mountain and wears ornaments like chains, bangles, Keyuras, crown etc. His lotus-like hands embrace Lakshmi, who is seated to his left. She is seen playing the flute and wearing ornaments of all kinds. Her eyes are as beautiful as is the face of 'Bhagavan'. Sudarsana is seen in front of the god, while on his back is seated Garuda, with folded hands (The Land of Vishnu - Pp. 275-76).

Elsewhere in the said Purana too, the iconography of Nilamadhava has been described as seen by the two sinner friends Ambarisa and Pundarika. It is stated, they had darshanas of God, the destroyer of sin, the holder of Sankha, Chakra and Gada. His eyes resembled the lotus and his face was very bright and cheerful. His lotus feet wore slippers, made of gems. He held Lakshmi to his left and offered her the petals of Nagaballi flower (Ibid p. 249). (Note - The last sentence is a wrong translation of the original. It should be - accepted the petals of Nagaballi offered by Lakshmi.) In both the descriptions as above, Nilamadhava is represented by a standing figure of Vishnu and Lakshmi, though there is a small difference in the position of Lakshmi as per both the descriptions. In the Anarghara Raghava drama of Murari Misra, the description of Purushottama is given thus - Bhagavan Purushottama, who was being worshipped in the Tamala forest on the shore of salt-sea and who had the image of a big blue-stone (Nilamani) was the consort of Kamala. She was so close to her husband that the figures of leaves drawn on her pitcher-like



breasts with 'Kasuri' were being painted on his (Purusottama's) chests.

Sankaracharya must have seen the image of Nilamadhava as described in Skanda Purana as above, during his visit to Puri. As stated earlier, he might have called the God in the name of Purusottama, which Murari Misra has referred to in his drama. It is certain that Murari survived in Utkala after the visit of Sankaracharya as there is no basic difference in the iconographic features between Nilamadhava of Skanda Purana and Purusottama of Murari Misra. This image of Madhava-Purusottama is stated in the Skanda Purana to have vanished (buried under sand) owing to a heavy cyclone that swept the region between the periods, when Vidyapati saw Nilamadhava and when king Indradyumna visited the holy place. But the image of Nrusingha was very much in existence during the visit of Indradyumna. Sage Narada is stated to have shown Indradyumna the exact spot where the image of Nilamadhava was lying buried.

Madala Panji narrates that king Yayati Keshari had constructed a small temple for Paramesvara (Purusottama - Jagannath) in this holy city and had installed the wooden images therein. The statement may be incorrect, since by that time the image of Purusottama was not made of wood. This Yayati Keshari, may be Yayati-1 of the Somavamsi dynasty. Sri Sankar Vijaya Makaranda, a compilation of all the Sankara Vijaya works and other biographies of Sankaracharya informs us that the great saviour of Hinduism, after defeating the Buddhists had consecrated the wooden images of Purusottama-Jagannath in Purusottama Kshetra or Puri (U.N. Dhal - Purusottama-Jagannath

Kshetra in Puranas - The Puranas and National Integration. P.43). From the geneology of the Somavamsi rulers prepared by the historians, we come across two Yayatis in the line and the historians differ as to the reigning periods of both Yayatis. Dr. S.N. Rajguru places three kings bearing name Yayati in the geneological table prepared by him. Similarly the date of Sankaracharya (Adi Sankara) is also under controversy. Historians are also not unanimous in their opinion as to which of these Yayatis did really conquer Utkala and become the first king of Utkala as per Madala Panji. Even accepting that Sankaracharya had visited Puri during the reign of any one Yayati of Utkala, there is no probability of the image of Purusottama being made of wood.

According to the Dasgoba Copper plate Inscription of Rajaraja Deva III (1198-1211 A.D.), the first king of Ganga dynasty of Utkala, who has been referred to therein as Gangesvara and who is rightly identified with Chodaganga Deva (1076 - 1147 A.D.) built the present temple of Purusottama-Jagannath, which was lying neglected by the previous kings. In fact there are two verses, which have been included in the panegyric of Chodaganga Deva in all the twelve copper plate inscriptions of the Ganga kings discovered so far. But these two verses are not found in any of the copper plate inscriptions issued by Chodaganga Deva himself.

While the first verse clearly says that, it was Gangesvara, who built the temple of Purusottama, overlooked by the previous kings, the second verse speaks about the happiness experienced by both Purusottama and Laksmi at the



construction of the new temple. We have got two clear indications suggesting completion of the present temple by Chodaganga Deva and consecration of deities in the new temple. The first is 'cakre' in the first verse, which signifies a finite verb in past tense, meaning 'did' or 'accomplished'. The second is the two lines of the second verse. The true and faithful translation of the second verse could be - The ocean is verily, the birth-place of Laksmi. (Since Purusottama had no residence of his own, he had to) stay in the ocean of milk and though (a son-in-law) is honoured in the house of the father-in-law, it was a disgrace to him to stay there permanently. So Purusottama was feeling depressed. (Now on construction of the temple), he was overwhelmed with joy and Laksmi too, while leaving her father's house and residing in her husband's house was greatly pleased for the better prospect she earned.

The clear meaning of the second verse proves beyond doubt that, not only did Chodaganga complete the temple, but he also installed therein the images of Purusottama and Laksmi, which may be no other than the earlier image of Purusottama as described in both Skanda Purana and Anargha Raghava. An assurance given by God Purusottama himself to Indradyumna as mentioned in Skanda Purana to the effect that he would never leave the shrine even in the circumstances of the temple being dilapidated and abandoned, is suggestive of the above interpretation. The views expressed by some scholars saying that Chodaganga also built the present Laksmi temple in the premises of the Jagannath temple, are thus liable to be

discarded. It may be recalled that in Kapila Samhita of a later age, we do not find mention of the separate shrine of goddess Laksmi, although some subsidiary shrines of importance have been described therein. The shrines which have been described in Kapila Samhita within the temple premises include Kalpavata (banyan tree), Bata-mangala (below the tree), Vimala, Kakatirtha (the Rohini Kunda) and Ananta Vasudeva (Purusottama on Ananta serpent). In the said text, Kapila specifically prescribed that while visiting the shrine of Purusottama, one must see the above subsidiary shrines. Had the temple of Laksmi been built there by Chodaganga Deva and had the image of Laksmi been installed therein, it could not have been considered as less important and omitted by the author.

The position of the present temple of Laksmi at the north-western corner reminds us of the temple of Parvati in the great Bhubanesvara (Lingaraja) temple in a similar situation. There is another temple quite adjacent to the former temple, in which a goddess called Gopalinī has been installed. Interestingly she is called Bhubanesvari, while Parvati in the said temple complex referred to above is otherwise known as Annapurna. The position is quite comparable to Annapurna in the Visvanath temple of Benaras. The stone inscription now found in the above Parvati temple belongs to the reigning period of Sri Bhanudeva (i.e. Bhanudeva III-1352-1377 A.D.) and has been issued in 1362-63 A.D. by one Bhimavahika for two pots of cake in favour of Umadevi (Parvati). It can therefore be presumed that the present temple of Parvati was erected sometime in the



beginning of the 14th century and this period may also be ascribed to the present Laksmi temple. The temple must have been erected at the instance of some saint of Ramanuja order belonging to Sri Sampradaya as the paintings in its Jagamohan may indicate.

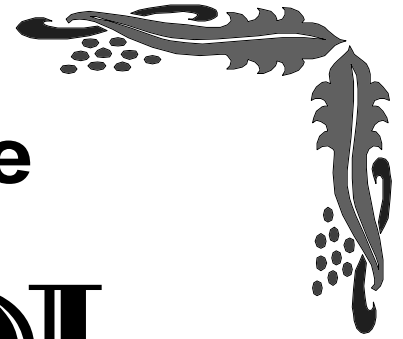
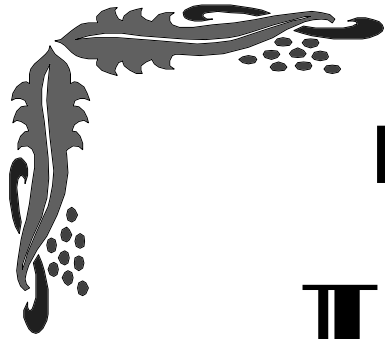
It can also be presumed that the temple of Laksmi was not constructed even at the time of composition of Skanda Purana - Utkala Khanda. In this Purana too, the separate shrine of Laksmi has not been mentioned, although several shrines lying in different parts of the Sankha (Note - Skanda Purana states that the shape of this Kshetra resembles a Sankha - Conch-shell.) have been indicated, Skanda Purana-Utkala khanda was certainly composed by a Vaishnava scholar of Sri-sect, who regarded Subhadra as Laksmi and since that was the religious conception prevalent at that time, hence

no separate shrine for Laksmi was necessary. Subhadra therein has been described as a deity with two hands holding lotus in both of them. Undoubtedly the description confirms to the iconography of Laksmi.

The wooden images of the Trinity must have been installed during the reign of Anangabhima Deva - III (1211-1238 A.D.), whose daughter Candrika or Candra built the present Ananta Vasudeva temple in Ekamra Kshetra. The wooden images of Nilachala Kshetra, were called Daru Brahma, while the stone image of Ekamra were known as Sila Brahma.



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Donate in the

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placed at the Jagamohan of

Shri Jagannath Temple

