



Influence of Jagannath Culture on People of Orissa

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Introduction

Culture of a community or a State or a Republic in general and a group of people in particular believe in one aspect of universal truth which is evolved on a specific cult and that cult is invariably based on usage, belief and traditions prevalent for many years or say centuries in a community. The word Jagannath culture and the word people of Orissa connote two distinct aspects; the first one relates to culture of Lord Jagannath and second relates to Orissan people. Orissa as such at present is comprising of 30 districts, but its cultural boundary is bounded by many ancient States speaking common language i.e. Oriya which the historians as well as epigraphers say is evolved from Udrmagadhi. However, the ancient State of Kaling, Utkal, Trikalang, Dakshin Kosala and Kangoda comprise the modern Orissa. The people residing in all the areas are mainly aboriginals i.e. either classes of Sabaras or classes of Gonds and Kandhs. There are many divisions and sub-divisions in these three tribal communities and in course of time many sub-communities have come out their tribal boundaries and have mingled with the on-coming communities namely Kshatriyas and Brahmins as well as business community (Vaishyas) brought in by the ruling dynasty from both/or South and North.

As is known in particular cultural heritage is usually developed around river bank because

of the fact that cultivation and animal husbandry are easily possible for undertaking in the lands which lay on both the banks ever flowing rivers.

To many historians as well as epigraphers and archaeologists, the land of Orissa is very peculiar for the simple reason that even though many tribal communities from the major part of the population, but they almost have a common spiritual belief as a result of which the worships of Lord Jagannath as we all know now has been a evolving synthesis of many people, but with a common stream of thought flowing from pre-Vedic period as is evident from many Purans and comparative study of old civilisation as well as archaeological excavation.

The worship of Lord Jagannath in Orissa, as is described in the preceding paragraph, has led to evolution of distinct culture which is usually described as Jagannath culture. Jagannath culture believes in universality but not in sectarianism. Lord Jagannath as we know now is the God of masses, but not of individuals with individual choice and thus naturally Jagannath culture has been observed as a mass culture. People of diverse faith with their distinct social backgrounds have worshipped Lord Jagannath as their own. From the foot prints of the ageless cultural heritage in India and abroad, we find that tribal (original inhabitant of Orissa), Dravidians, Aryans, Orthodox Hindus, Jains, Buddhist, Sikhs, various



sects of Hinduism i.e. Vaishnavites, Saivites, Ganapatyas, Saurays, Shaktas have reposed their implicit faith in Lord Jagannath according to their belief.

Culture of Lord Jagannath has been an elastic culture. Apart from influencing other culture it has, in course of time and passage of ups and downs, social, political, financial status of the common people which comprise the modern day Orissa, has incorporated in its fold, the various cultures and their salient aspects of various faiths.

Jagannath Mahaprabhu is wooden deity (Saura) without any sense organ. At the same time, he is Dravidian deity with sense organ. He is the Purusottam of the Veda and Darubrahmas of Brahmins. He is the Dakshinkali for the Saktas and Vairaba for the Saivites. He is Mahaganapati for the Ganapatyas and at the same time he is the Suryanarayan for the Sauryas. His festivals are of Puranic origin and rituals are admixture of tribal rituals as well as Sakta's Nyasa and Mudras and many more. His majority of rituals are based on Uddiyan Tantras which are the refined versions of Mahayan Tantras as well as Shabari Tantras which are evolved from Tantrik Buddhism and tribal belief respectively. Of his *mantras* (incantation Oum is Vedic and Hlim, Slim, Klim are Tantrik. His Kaibalya (dried Mahaprasad of rice) is of Jaina origin and Nirmalya of Saivite origin.

His worship, attire, foods rites and rituals are nothing, but a synthesis of various cultures and beliefs. But, at the same time it is free from all types of regional separatism, scriptural exclusiveness and regional narrowness. By its wonderful power of assimilation it has effected the synthesis of all cultural communities, States and universe.

One of the major salient feature of culture of Lord Jagannath is tolerance which is an outstanding human value propagated by culture

of Lord Jagannath which postulates with every way of life as its contribution in its specific way to the human welfare.

The culture of Lord Jagannath stands for religious tolerance, co-existence of all religions communal harmony and international integrations. This has led to the present day situation in which we see that Lord Jagannath is worshipped by all irrespective of castes, creed, colour and community. As a result, the entire universe and inhabitants of universe are part and parcel of the concept of culture of Lord Jagannath.

Influence of culture of Lord Jagannath on people of Orissa

Before we proceed ahead for discussions on the influence of Lord Jagannath on people of Orissa from various angles, it is necessary to analyze the various aspects of culture of Lord Jagannath which are the seeds for germination in respect of Orissan people.

The gap between men and Divine has been bridged in Jagannath culture because Jagannath is a highly humanised Deity. He brushes his teeth, takes bath, changes his cloth, wears out robes and gold ornaments, studded with diamond, sapphires to suit festive occasions and seasons, enjoys 56 varieties of food (Mahaprasad) and 36 categories of servitors pay their "Seva Khatani" according to their "Khatani routine", for the daily duties relating to worship of Lord Jagannath. Jagannath culture does not admit any distinction in between the caste and communities.

Jagannath culture aims at liberating poor and down-trodden for better life for which he is called Patitapaban and for which he observes Ratha Yatra.

Humbleness is a cardinal human value which is amply prevalent in culture of Lord Jagannath. Culture of Lord Jagannath always takes a positive view of the life. It does not attend to



pessimistic thought of grief suffering and death. It recommends strong faith in Divine. It teaches man to strive for perfection of its soul by the sacrifice of his self. Worldly pursuits find no place in culture of Lord Jagannath. Here in concept of Lord Jagannath, the devotees pray for/asks for divine life, but not material gain.

Culture of Lord Jagannath has effected unity in diversity by faith, and integrated human society with the help of human value which are mentioned in the above paragraphs.

Social Influence of Culture of Lord Jagannath on Orissan people.

Darshan and Mahaprasad sevas of Lord Jagannath are the twin desires of each believer of Lord Jagannath. When we as pilgrims devotees or as visitors go to the Lord Jagannath Temple complex, we usually wait for sometime to partake Mahaprasad preferably in Anand Bazar. Anand Bazar which is situated inside the premises of Lord Jagannath Temple, Puri is a place where Mahaprasad in shape cooked rice, dals, curry, sweets and Sukhila Bhog etc. which are offered to Lord Jagannath and reoffered to the presiding Lady Deity of Lord Jagannath i.e. Vimala become Mahaprasad and are sold in Anand Bazar by the Suaras (the cooks of the sacred Mahaprasad). Here in Anand Bazar people of various categories right from Brahmin to Sudras partake Mahaprasad in a common place from a common container. This indicates that there is no sense of segregation between Brahmin and non-Brahmin or between the touchables and non-touchables or between Hindus, Budhists, Jains and Sikhs.

Similarly, there are two kinds of servitors engaged for performance of rituals of Lord Jagannath i.e. Brahmin and non-Brahmin. Sudhasuaras, Paniapata, Mudalies, Daitas, Duttamohapatra, Mahabhoi, Gananamalies, Chapabehera, Muliasuansia and Deulakaran and Tadhaakaran and many more such other servitors

belong to non-Brahmin category and Pujapanda, Pusplok, Pratihari, Khuntia, Patribadu, Saurabadu, Gochhikar, Pati Mohapatra, Taluchha Mohapatra, Chhatisa Nijog-Nayak-Patajosi Mohapatra, Mudirasta, Mekap and such other group or individual belong to Brahmin category and both the Brahmin and non-Brahmin category jointly participate in performance of rituals of Lord Jagannath in a very systematic way as per scriptural instructions.

The above facts pre-supposes the mutual co-existence and equal patronage as well as weightage given and made respectively to various categories of servitors which is based on social equality before the eyes of the Lord Jagannath.

It has been a practice with Orissan people to partake Mahaprasad from a common container jointly in Anand Bazar irrespective of castes, creeds and without any Kuntha (hesitation). It is told and believed that while we are inside the premises of Lord Jagannath Temple, Puri, we use to get the essence of "Baikuntha", which does not exist in void, but exists where there is no hesitation i.e. no Kuntha which leads to Baikuntha (abode of Gods).

The impact of culture of Lord Jagannath in social life of Orissan people is so farfetching and predominating that nobody as such in general can fathom. The simplest example is that major festivals, namely Chandan Yatra, Niladri Mahodaya, Nrusingh Janma, Sital Sasthi, Rajendravisek, Rukmaniharan, Snana Yatra, Netrotsab, Ratha Yatra, Bahuda Yatra, Sayan Ekadasi, Garudasayan Dwadashi, Kartik Sankranti or Dakhinayan Yatra, Chitalagi Amabasya, Jhulan Yatra, Gamha Purnima or Balabhadra Janma, Rahu Rekha Lagi, Krishna Janma, Krishna Lila, Satapuri Amabasya, Ganesh Chaturthi, Rekha Panchami, Radhastami, Parswa Paribartan, Baman Janma, Anant Chaturdasi, Indra Govind Puja, Sahashra Kumbha Abhisekh, Dwitia Osha,



Dasahara, Kumar Purnima, Hari Utthapan Ekadashi, Garud Utthapan Dwadashi, Nobarna, Prathamastami, Ordhansasthi, Bakul Amabasya, Pusyabhisekh, Uttarayan Yatra, Basanta Panchami, Magha Purnima, Siba Ratri, Benta or Sikar, Sola Yatra, Chaitra Gundicha, Ashokastami, Rama Nabami, Damanaka Chori, Mahavisubha Sankrati which have been centreing round various aspects of Lord Jagannath, are intimately woven in the social body fabric of Orissan people. No Oriya people goes without adhering to the social functions either in individual or in group from the examples of the above festivals of Lord Jagannath. In so much so that if any new fruit or vegetable is plucked from the garden of an Orissan native villagers, then the same is offered to Lord Jagannath first as *bhoga*. When a child is born to an Oriya family either during performance of *Ekoisia* (21 days of birth) or in the annual function of birth, Lord Jagannath is invoked to the rituals first. Similarly, when a marriage is solemnized in an Oriya family the first invitation is given to Lord Jagannath and lastly it is a wish of Orissa people to either die in Puri to be cremated in Swarga Dwara at Puri, or be offered Baisnabagni (sacred fire from sacred Rosaghara or sacred Matha) to the pyre of an Oriyan fellow.

From the above surmise, it is crystal clear that the social body fabric of each Oriya people is woven around the culture of Lord Jagannath in varied hue of the excellent synthesized aspect of spiritual ethos of Orissa.

Impact of Culture of Lord Jagannath on Oriya Literature

As has been described in the introduction, the modern day Orissa is comprising of ancient States of Odra (comprising the modern day part of Khurda district, Nayagarh, Dhenkanal, part of Angul), Utkal (comprising Balasore, part of Mayurbhang, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara,

Cuttack, Puri, part of Khurda and Nayagarh), Kalinga (comprising Ganjam, part of Boudh, part of Gajapati, part of Khurda), Kangoda (tracts of areas comprising in between Rusikulya and Mahanadi rivers and in between Salima river (the modern day Salia river which flow in Banapur Tahasil area), Dakshina Kosala (comprising Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Deogarh, part of Nuapada districts) and Trikalanga (comprising Kalahandi, part of Phulbani part of Boudh, part of Nuapada, undivided Koraput and part of Ganjam).

The modern day Oriya script is an evolution of Odramagadhi which is evident very much in presence in the above tracts of areas more concentrated in Dakshina Kosala, Trikalanga, Odra and part of Utkal, Kalinga and Kangoda.

The impact of culture of Lord Jagannath in Oriya literature has been such that it has moulded into a composite literature revolving round the culture of Lord Jagannath. The Oriya script and Oriya literature are nothing, but manifestation of various aspects of Lord Jagannath from the eyes of the Poets and literary Pundits.

As per record, Madalapanji (drum chronicle of palm leaf manuscript) is supposed to have been started at the command of the first king of Ganga dynasty, i.e., Chodaganga Dev during 11-12th centuries AD. This Madalapanji is nothing, but the recorded happenings inside Jagannath Temple, Puri and outside which are directly or indirectly connected with rituals of Lord Jagannath as well as maintenance of Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri and this Madalapanji is written in Oriya script.

Sarala Das, the ancient saint poet of Orissa is treated as the father of modern day Oriya literature first eulogized and prayed Lord Jagannath as Srikrushna. Also he adored Lord Jagannath as "Boudha Abatara".



Prior to Sarala Das and Madalapanji, many Oriya poets who profess Uddiyan Tantras which was dominant in the then Orissa during the period ranging from 7th century AD to 11th century AD believed Lord Jagannath as their master, wrote various scriptures in the shape of "Doha" which are basically nothing, but Oriya script. Lord Jagannath was the central point in that literary works. After Sarala Das, we find descriptions of worships and attires (Vesas) of Lord Jagannath in poetic works of many Oriya poets namely "Rama Bibaha" and Kalpalata of poet Arjun Das, "Gupta Geeta" and Laxmipurana of poet Balaram Das, Niladri Satkam in Oriya script with Sanskrit intonations, Gundicha Bije, Darubrahma Geeta and Oriya Shreemad Bhagabat of Atibadi Jagannath Das, Kanchi Kaberi and Purustoma Das etc. are some of the major contribution of influence and impact of culture of Lord Jagannath on Oriya literature. Similarly, many Ballads and Suangas were written on the theme of love between Lord Jagannath and milkmaid Manik resembling consort Radha. Oriya *bhajan* literature was also highly enriched by the culture of Lord Jagannath through the lyrical devotional songs written by poets Madhabi Das, Banamali Das and poets like Salabega and Kabisurya Baladev Rath.

During 17th century poet Loknath Bidyadhar wrote a very interesting poetry anthology namely Niladri Mahotsab in which he portrayed various rituals and festivals relating to worship of Lord Jagannath. Similarly, in the year 1820 another Oriya poet Gopinath Singh wrote a *kabya* titled Niladribihari narrating the glory and grandeurs of different *veshas* (attires/custumes) of Lord Jagannath.

During 18th and 19th centuries, many celebrated Oriya poets namely Bhima Bhoi, kandha saint of Rairakhol, Dina Krushna Das,

author of Rasakollala, Purusottam Das, poet of Gundicha Vijoy, Yudhistir Das, author of Gundicha Jatra, Baladev Badajena author of Samartarang and Gundichabije enriched Oriya literature.

In 20th century Oriya poet, novelist and dramatists have also been inspired by the culture of Lord Jagannath who have written on the noble ideals of Jagannath culture.

Bhajan, Suanga, Lilas, Yatra and Folk dances have got tremendous impetus and inspiration from many fold splendid legends of the holy triad i.e. Mahaprabhu Jagannath, Mahaprabhu Balabhadra and Maa Subhadra.

Influence of Lord Jagannath on the Political Aspect of Orissan People

The unification of Orissa basing on Oriya language, Orissan sculpture and architecture. Oriya language and unity in diversity of political entities have become possible only for the simple reason that Lord Jagannath happens to be the presiding deity for each devout Oriya people.

In pre-Christian period of 3rd century Maurya emperor Ashok fought with Kalinga people which has been recorded in the stone relics of Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves. The then Orissan people were so strong politically and militarily that nobody ventured to attack the then Orissa. This was for the simple reason that the then Orissa was united under the banner of the conglomerate concept of Lord Jagannath. Of course the Oriyan warriors fought bravely against the army of emperor of Ashok, but ultimately Ashoka with the army of emperor of Ashok looking at the gruesome slaughter of many brave Paikas, were converted to Dharmashok. Similarly, centering round the culture of Lord Jagannath in first century B.C. Maha Meghabahan Kharavela the unconquerable brave Oriya Chief titan ultimately became the king established first kingdom at Sisupalagada near present day capital



city of Bhubaneswar and he fought the enemies and brought back the essence of Lord Jagannath in the shape of Jinasan to Puri and re-established the unparalleled composite concept of Lord Jagannath.

The then Orissa was flourishing in the name and fame of Lord Jagannath through the patronage of reigning king and that continued till 1568 when the mighty king of Ganga dynasty surrendered before Lord Jagannath with royal edict that the entire kingdom of Kaling/Utkal is endowed to the Lord Jagannath is the king of entire Orissa and the king being a simple "Rout" (asistant) of Lord Jagannath. The divisive powers prevalent in Orissa within and outside could not venture to attack the then Orissa. This is the most pertinent aspect of political impact of culture of Lord Jagannath on Orissan people.

Not only this, but also even during the tutelage of Maratha or British administration, unifying heritage of culture of Lord Jagannath could keep the Oriya people in one political entity which resulted into a separate State on the basis of Oriya language in 1936. Even during British rule, the first revolution of Paikas whether in Khurda during 1918 or 1924 or in Sambalpur under the leadership of Surendra Sai during last part of 18th century, are some of the proudest period of Orissan people in the name and fame of Lord Jagannath.

Influence of Culture of Lord Jagannath on Spiritual Life of Orissan People

From time immemorial, Lord Jagannath has been the sustenance of spiritual life of Orissan people. Many sects and their spiritual masters have come to Orissa and have come to Sripurusottam Khetra, Puri, but they have merged with the huge expanse of flexible cultural ethos of Lord Jagannath. Be it Sankaracharya, Madhabacharya, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, all have accepted Lord Jagannath

as their supreme Lord and have gleefully accepted the concept essence of Lord Jagannath. The people of Orissa are, therefore, tolerant to differing opinion so far as spiritual concept is concerned, but accept each and every spiritual master with positive mind keeping Lord Jagannath as supreme head. This has led to establishment of many Jagannath Temples throughout Orissa with the patronage of the then reigning Kings and Zamindars and by far the best people of Orissa are spiritually of high order.

Conclusion

The Jagannath culture from time immemorial preaches the word of love and peaceful co-existence among the human community. The character of culture is generosity and endurance and coordination. No culture or religion in whatsoever manner in whatsoever places is equal to this composite concept of Lord Jagannath. Lord Jagannath is worshipped throughout the world because he is generous and kind to all. He is looking at great and small, rich and poor, ruled and ruler, Brahman and Chandal with an equal eye. In this look, there is no question of caste, creed or religion, no place for egoism, aristocracy nor any place for communalism. Here worshipped and worshipper are equal and as such their separateness vanishes which is symbolized in embracing of Lord Jagannath by a visitor during Ratha Yatra. Lord Jagannath symbolizes universal love and humanism. Myths, history and legends mingled over centuries and have formed a composite culture of Lord Jagannath. He is not only the Lord of Hindu or Indian, but also the God of entire humanity. Let his blessing be endowed to each inhabitants of entire Universe.

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