



Balabhadra Upasana and Tulasi Kshetra

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On the full-moon day in the month of *Shrabana*, the birth day of Balabhadra is celebrated by performing special Nitis. Lord Baladeva (Balabhadra) is the presiding deity in the Baladeva Jew Temple at Kendrapara in the heart of Tulasi Kshetra although the three deities Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath are enshrined in the Baladeva Jew temple. The name of the temple is said so as the temple Jagannatha at Puri is named after Lord Jagannath. According to Prof. Prabhat Mukherjee, in about 5th century A.D., Sankarasana and Vasudeva came to be known as Jagannatha and Balarama in Orissa.¹ *Brihat Samhita* of Varahamihira (6th century A.D) enjoins to place Ekanamsa between Baladeva and Krshna.

Meghasthenes, the Greek ambassador in the court of the Maurya Emperor Chandragupta also refers to the *satvatas* and the worship of Vasudev-Krshna. Historian R.G.Bhandarkar observes thus, " If the Vasudev-Krshna worship prevailed in the time of the first Maurya, it must have originated long before the establishment of Maurya dynasty, and my assertion that it owes its origin to the stream of thought which began with *Upanishads* and culminated in the east in Buddhism and Jainism and arose about the time of the latter, is conformed."² So we find that the cult of Vasudev-Krshna and Sankarshan

(Basudeva) came into being long before 4th Century B.C

Ghusundi inscription mentions '*Pujasila Prakaro narayanavatica*' which has been translated as " enclosing wall of the stone(Object) of worship called Narayana Vatika (compound)"³ and dedicating the same to gods Sankarsana Baladeva, who was Lord of all. Hence we notice that only two forms: (or *Vyuhas*) Sankarsana and Vasudev and not the four (Sankarsana, Vasudev, Pradyumna and Aniruddha) have developed by this time. Moreover Sankarsana has been mentioned first and evidently been given a prior position (cf. *Sankarsana-Vasudevabhyam*). Above place Ghosundi which is near to Nagari in the Chitorgarh district of Rajasthan (Rajputana) was also a seat of the Bhagavat religion. A stone image of Balarama⁴ which is now preserved in Lucknow Provincial Museum is a sure proof that his worship was prevalent in Mathura during the Sunga period (2nd Century B.C). The deity holds club (*Musala*) in his right hand and plough in the left.

Balabhadra is known as elder brother of Vasudeva. Rebati Raman, Talanka, Musali, Hali, Kamapal, Kalandi Vedan, Pralaghna, Achutagranja, Bala, Rohineya, Nilambara, Sirapani , Halayudha, Baladeva, Balarama and Sankarsana are the sixteen other names of



Balabhadra.⁵ He is the God of Destruction for which strength (*Bala*) is necessary. So his name is Sankarsana, Balaram, Balabhadra and Baladeva for his vigour.

Not for the strength of destroyer but for his wisdom, Balabhadra is the 'Siva' of the Universe. In the *Agama (Tantra) sastra*, Siva is the *Paramaguru*. When Siva describes the essence of *Tantras*, He is knowledge, called '*Dakshina Murty*'. Balabhadra is white, as if He is powdered by *Bhasma*. So he is the incarnation of Siva.⁶ In the 12th century A.D. Kavi Jayadeva of Orissa also described in Gitagovinda as ;

*"Bahasi Bapusi Bishade Basanga Jaladavang
Hala hati viti milita Jamunavang
Keshaba dhruta ! Haladhara rupa
Jaya Jagadisha Hare."*

Lord Balabhadra was worshipped during 4th-5th century A.D. in Uttar Tosali. The entire ancient Uttar (northern) Tosali is named as Tulasi Kshetra, but the present Tulasi-kshetra is the modern Kendrapara.⁷ The area extending from the Bay of Bengal in the east, the high hill of Lalitagiri as well as the Assia mountain range in the north-west, river Baitarani in the north and river Mahanadi in the south, is the part of north Tosali or UCHA (UDRA) of Hiuen-Tsang. The present Kendrapara district is surrounded by three major rivers of Orissa forming a deltaic region. The low delta region is submerged by sea water and river water during extreme rainy season leaving high silt.

This deltaic region is very fertile for the production of agricultural goods. People here worship the God of Agriculture and oxen/bull. The Lord Balabhadra of Kendrapara was first enshrined by Gopal Siddha Das, a cow-herd boy of that area. It is very interesting to note that Siva is represented as a cultivator who ploughs his fields, sows seeds, takes out weeds, cut grass

and carries it home on his head as appears in the medieval Bengali literature.⁸ Regarding the festival it is stated that "In the half-Buddhistic and half-Saivite '*Gambhira* and '*Gajan* festivals, which appear to have originated at an early date and must have preceded Ramai Pandit's work, there are references to the agricultural role of Siva, on the *Ahara puja*, a feature common to both *Gambhira* and *Gajana* festivals. Cultivation by Siva is represented by bhakatas or devotees before the spectators."⁹ We know that the wisdom of Balabhadra is the Siva of the Universe. Hence Siva-Balabhadra is the God of Agriculture from the ancient times.

Iconographic representation showing the relation between Vaisnavism and Saktism is not uncommon in India as well as in Orissa. The earliest representation so far available of the holy triad of Krishna - Vasudeva - Subhadra (Ekanamsa) and Sankarsana-Balaram is preserved in Karachi Museum, Pakistan (2nd century A.D.).¹⁰ Here two armed Balarama is in standing pose and holding a colossal plough (*hala*) in his right hand. The utter absence of snakehoods above his head is to be noted with great interest. The association of Krsna-Balarama in a few Jaina relief from Mathura Museum and datable to the Kusan period is also worth taking note of.¹¹

It is said that after the death of Baladeva, his dead body was transformed into a stone image which was worshipped by *Devatas* at the door of *Patalapuri* which is identified with Lalitagiri in *Dwapar Yuga*. The area extending from the Bay of Bengal in the east, the Lalitagiri and Assia mountain range in the north-west, river Baitarani in the north and river Mahanadi in the south is called the part of *Patalapuri* (nether world) in the Puranic literature.¹² When *Kali Yuga* appeared and *Buddha Dharma* (Buddhism) spread over



the area, the *Devatas* kept the image of Balabhadra in disguise underwater of the river Madhusagar which is now called the river Gobari. After Gopal Siddha Das discovered the image of Balabhadra near Siddha Sarovar, he worshipped him at Kendrapara. There are some examples which state that Balarama worship was prevalent in other parts of India and even in the heart of Buddhist site like an ancient site of Nalanda. An inscription of king Devapal is engraved on the pedestal of a bronze image of Baladeva discovered from here. So it appears that this Brahmanical deity was worshipped at Nalanda during Devapal's reign.¹³ An interesting carving of Balarama belonging to the 2nd or 3rd century A.D. had been discovered from the Gwalior area at Tumain (ancient Tumbavana). Thus the locality of Gwalior state came under the influence of Vaisnavism in the Saka-Kusan period or the early centuries of the Christian era (i.e. 3rd century A.D).¹⁴

In the 5th-6th century A.D., *Pancharatra* System of the Bhagabata Cult which accept Sankarsana-Baladeva and Krsna - Vasudeva as the supreme deity was followed by the Sarabhapuriya kings of western Orissa.¹⁵ It is a very interesting fact that one inscription on the wall of the Nrusingha temple in the campus of Sri-Jagannatha temple Puri was discovered by late S.N. Rajguru. The said inscription is fixed in the southern wall at a floral-base under the Varaha shrine. It records that in the 37th Srahi of Anangabhima-III (i.e. A.D. 1241), a *Mahamandalika* had donated lands for *Amrta Manohi (Bhoga)* of two Gods, namely Balabhadradeva and Kamalakshadeva (Sri-Krsna). Hence it is to note that Balabhadra *upasana* is given prior importance even in Sri-Mandir, Puri.¹⁶

According to a legend, Kandarasura, a demon king, a destroyer of *yajnas*, was ruling

over the area surrounding Lalitagiri and Assian mountain ranges. *Tulasi Kshetra Mahatmya*¹⁷ reveals that he lived near Lalitagiri -Alatigiri, and was terrifying the local people. Lord Balarama defeated him in a fight as a result of which he left the place went to Kapilash mountain near Dhenkanal and lived in disguise in the nearby mountain ranges as he was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. Lord Baladeva thoroughly searched every nook and corners of the hill and lastly ploughed the hill with his plough (*hala*) as a result of which one perennial spring emerged from the hill, which is now called '*Langal Siar Jharana*' (spring of the plough). After persuading him from Kapilash, Lord Baladeva killed the wicked demon Kandarasura in a fight and threw his scattered body all over the nearby places.

It is every interesting to note that the present place names centering to Kendrapara are known according to the names of the fallen body parts of the demon king. Such as Asureswar is derived from the fallen cut head (*Asura Sira*) of the demon, Balagandi is derived from the fallen *gandi* (trunk) of the demon (i.e. *Kandara padi*), Kamar Khandi is derived from his fallen *Kamar* (waist). *Navi Khanda Lahakhanda* is derived from his fallen *Navi* (Naval) of the demon. Besides these places, Lord Baladeva founded some 'Siva' temples over the other fallen parts of the demon like Swapneswar Siva temple at Kantia, Lankeswar Siva temple at Gualisingh and Biuleswar Siva temple at Kajala where demon's body parts like feet, neck and waist (part) respectively were fallen. Demon's body (*gandi*) is buried at Balagandi which is proper Kendrapara.¹⁸

Some research scholars have the opinion that Kandarasura who lived near Chandikhol was not a demon but an ardent Buddha *arhat* (follower of Buddhism) and a tantric. He was a leader of a aboriginal race like *Kondha (Kondharasura)*.



According to his name, the place name 'Kandharapara' or 'Kendraparah' has been derived. But other scholars think differently that the name 'Kendraparah' is derived from the word 'Kendra' (one kind of musical instrument made of from the gourd) and 'para' means pada or hamlet of a village.¹⁹ This instrument is played by some sects of people called *Natha Jogi* (Yogi), who lives his livelihood by playing *Kendara* and by moving from door to door for alms.

After the advent of the new Nathism, some sects of people adopted Nathism and called themselves *Natha* or *Natha yogi*. It is worth mentioning here that one ancient stone image of Machhendranatha, one of the chief preacher of Natha cult is worshipped at Rajanagar (Pattamundai). It is understood from an inscription on the body of this image that Natha-cult was prevalent in Kendrapara area during 9th century A.D.²⁰ Descendants of Natha family are now living area of surrounding in Kendraparah at Ichhapur (Kendrapara), Choudakulat, Taradipal (Pattamundai) Chandiapalli (Aul), Nikirai, Kashati, Chandol, Rajanagar, Derabisi etc. and Kendraparah being its *Kendra* (centre) the name derived Kendra-Pada or Kendraparah.

Kandharasura, the destroyer of *Yajnas* was finally killed by Lord Balabhadra. His head was cut for five times but they again appeared which indicates the *Pancha-skandha* of Buddhism i.e. *Rupa, Bedana, Sangya, Sanskar* and *Bijyan*. This legend describes the culture of Buddhism. It is a conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism. At least the Brahmanism (*Tulasi*) won the battle. Lord Baladeva married Tulasi, the daughter of Kandarasura on the 12th day of the bright-fortnight of the month of *Magha*. This *Magha Sukla Dwadasi* day is observed as '*Tulasi Bihaba*' day (marriage day of Tulasi) with great pomp and ceremony every year.

War of Lord Baladeva with Kandharasura indicates the war of religious understanding. From the early times, worship of Nagas (Snake) was prevalent in Orissa. *Naga Puja* is mingled with Brahmanism. During archaeological excavations at Paharpur in Rajshahi districts of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) shows that one gray sandstone sculpture of Balaram, one of the ten incarnations of Visnu depicted with plough (hala) and under snake-hood.²¹ As this image is dated to the 9th century A.D. It is proved that the Balabhadra Upasana was fully developed from 9th century A.D. in the neighbouring province of Orissa.

In the 13th century A.D., king Anangabhimadeva-III of Ganga dynasty constructed one temple for the worship of Lord Baladeva near the present Kacheri of old Kendrapara town, which is about 60 hands (28 metre) high for the worship of Lord Baladeva Jew in the heart of Tulasi Kshetra.

The original temple was demolished by Khan-i-Dwina (1660-1667 A.D.), the then Subedar of Orissa during the time of Moghal Emperor Aurangzeb.²² He constructed one Masjid on the foundation of the dismantled temple in the year 1663 A.D.

Devotees took the deity in disguise in a boat through the river Govari by boat and kept the deity secretly near Baranga (Chhedara) Jungle. Afterwards it was shifted to Balarampur village near Luna river at Samkhi Bata. So this place is also sacred for Hindus.

The original stone image (*Manibigraha*) of Lord Balabhadra was found from the Tulasi forest by a cow-herd boy named Gopal Siddha Das. According to his name, the name of the presiding deity Lord Baladeva is Siddha Baladeva Jew.

In 1761 the present Baladeva Jew temple was constructed at Ichhapur (Kendrapara) during



the Maratha rule in Orissa. It is constructed by the king of Kujanga, Raja Gopali Sandha and Zamindar (Land lord) of Chhedara *kill*, Sri Srinivas Narendra Mahapatra. One saint *Santha Gopi Das* and *Sairatak Giri* convinced the then Maratha king of *Janoji* and constructed the *Jagamohan*, *Bhoga Mandap* etc. of the main temple, temple of *Gundicha* and compound wall. The *viman* and *Jagamohan* are built in *pidha* style of temple architecture. Afterwards *Mukti Mandap*, *Ananda Bazar*, *Bhandarghara* (store), *Gouranga temple*, *Basudeva temple* and *Garuda pillar* were constructed inside the compound wall. Painting of some Hindu iconography was done on the roof ceiling and inner wall of *Jagamohana*. The entire area surrounding the *Baladeva Jew temple* is traditionally known as '*Tulasi Kshetra*'.

The image of *Tulasi Devi* was worshipped in a temple near village *Gochha* on the northern side of the road from *Kendrapara* to *Ichhapur*.

The stone image of *Lord Balabhadra* and wooden idols of *Jagannatha*, *Subhadra* and *Sudarsana* are worshipped according to the rituals of the temple of *Lord Jagannath* at *Puri*.

Tulasi Kshetra (*Kendrapara*) is very near to *Lalitagiri*, *Udayagiri* and *Ratnagiri* where famous *University of Puspagiri* and *Buddha Vihar* *Buddhist* flourished since 3rd - 2nd century B.C. So entire deltaic area from *Lalitagiri* to the river *Mahanadi* and sea is full of scattered *Buddhist* antiquity. Important places are *Pancha Varahi* (*Satavaya*), *Laxmi-varaha* (*Aul*), *Chandra Mayuli* (*Chandan nagar*), *Rama Chandi* (*Ramanagar*), *Patharakani* (*Barua*), *Satavauri* (*Panturi*) *Maa Kalinaguni* (*Gangapara-Sanamantia*) and *Gramadevities*.

Zamindar of *Chhedara* was worshipping one *Buddha* image in a temple facing north²³ in the deep forest of *Baranga* (*Kendrapada*) where the present shrine of *Lord Balabhadra* and other

deities were worshipped. The same *Buddha* image is now worshipped inside the compound of *Valadeva Jew* premises as *Basudeva* (father of *Balarama*). The present *Tulasi Kshetra* and its adjoining areas were once upon a time great centre of *Buddhist* and *Saivite* cultures. Some of the *Buddhistic* and *Brahmanical* images recovered from here, have been preserved in the *Indian Museum* at *Kolkata*.²⁴

Besides *Viraja Kshetra* and *Assia* mountain ranges, the upper *Baitarani* river valley was also influenced by *Buddhistic* and *Saivite* cultures. One *Siva-Nataraj* image was found from *Asanapat* (*Keonjhar*) and kept in the *State Museum*, *Bhubaneswar* which belong to the 4th century A.D. An inscription is inscribed in the lower portion of the image which describes the devotion of *Maharaja Satru Bhanja* towards '*Siva*'.²⁵ A single copper plate grant was discovered from *Deogaon* (near *Anandapur*) *Kosaleswar Siva temple*. The donor is *Sri Ranabhanja Deva* of *Bhanja* king of *Khijjinga kotta*, who is described as *Parameswara* which denotes that, he was a devout of *Siva*.²⁶

There is an ancient well in the campus of *Kosaleswar Siva temple* at *Deogaon* which is identical to a well found at the *Buddhist* site of *Udayagiri*. An *Abalokiteswar* (*Padmapani*) image was also found from here which is of *Bhaumakar* dynasty period. The *Kosaleswar Siva* of *Debagram* (*Deogaon*) was established by *Jajatikeshari* during 10th century A.D.²⁷ Hence the area between river *Baitarani* and *Mahanadi* were influenced by *Buddhism*, *Saktism*, *Tantric Buddhism* and *Saivism* side by side in the past.

During the 16th century *Sri Chaitanya* visited the old temple of *Baladeva Jew* and remained there for five days. He took new rice (*Nabarna*) at *Chhedra*.²⁸ As regards the spread of *Vaisnavism* in that period, we know that the



religious movement was divided into two sects : *Baikhanasa* and *Pancharatra*. The sect of *Baikhanasa* depends on *Vedas*, whereas the other sect *Pancharatra* depends on *Agama* (*Tantra*). According to *Pancharatra* tradition, Lord Visnu has four *Swarupas*. 1. *Para*, 2. *Vyuha*, 3. *Bibhaba* and 4. *Antaryami*.²⁹

1. **Para Swarupa** - Lord Visnu is known as Parambrahma, Parameswar, having six virtues : *Gyana Bala*, *Aiswariya*, *Virya*, *Sakti* and *Teja*. But in some other text it is :³⁰ *Gyana* (Knowledge), *Virya* (heroism) *Aiswariya* (divinity), *Yasas* (fame), *Sri* (Prosperity) and *Vairagya* (renunciation).

2. **Vyuha Swarupa** - Here Lord Visnu has four *Swarupas* like : Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha. Here Vasudeva is believed to have possessed these six attributes as above. So he is regarded as God Himself. Sankarsan has *Gyana* (knowledge) and *Bala* (power) Pradyumna has *Aiswariya* (divinity) and *Virya* (heroism) Aniruddha has *Sakti* and *Teja*.

Here according to *Vyuha Swarupa* - Jagannatha is Vasudeva and Balaram is Sankarasana. New movement of Vaisnavism shows a full development in *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva in the 12th century A.D. in the soils of Orissa.

So in a very extensive area of the State of Orissa as well as India and abroad, the Lord Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannatha were worshipped in the temple called Baladeva Jew temple. These are some other Baladeva Jew temples in Orissa like Siddha Baladeva Jew of Kendrapara, Sri Baladeva Jew of Jignipur near Salepur, Sri Sri Baladeva Jew of Patapur under Dharmasala (Jajapur), Sri Baladeva Jew of Garadapur (Patakura), Sri Baladeva Jew of Indupur and Kanikagarh (Kendrapara dist.) Sri

Baladeva Jew of Agarpada, Baladeva of Gud village, Sri Sri Baladeva Jew of Manjuri (Ranajit village) in Bhadrak district, Baladeva of Kupari hill (Balasore), Baladeva Jew of Keonjhar, Siddha Balaram of Dhenkanal, Baladeva of Dasapallah (Nayagarh), Sri Balaram of Tumantara (Balipatana) it testifies to the prevalence of extensive Baladeva worship in the deltaic region and its suburb areas of Orissa.

Car Festival of Lord Balabhadra in the Tulasi Kshetra is celebrated on the 2nd day of bright fortnight in the month of *Asadha* just like the festival of Puri. He moves in a magnificent chariot called '*Taladwaja*'. His chariot is 39 feet (12 mts.) in height and 24 feet (7.5 mts.) in diameter having 14 wheels. Two black and two white horses are fitted in front of the chariot. Zamindar of Chhedaragarh was performing all royal duties of Puja like Chherrah Pamhara etc. but now it is performed by the successors of Zamindar late Radheshyam Narendra of Kendrapara. *Bhoga* like "*Rasabali*" is famous in Baladeva Jew temple. Besides this, the festival of *Makar Sankranti*, *Mahabishuva Sankranti* (*Pana Sankranti*), *Chandan Jatra* and *Snana Purnima*, *Shravan Purnima* (*Baladeva Janma*) and *Maghasukla Dwadasi* (Tulasi Bibaha) are some of the main festivals observed in the Baladeva Jew temple at Kendrapara with devotion to Lord Baladeva :

"Barsanam Bharata Shresthah

Desanam Utkal Tatha,

Utkale Shrestha Tirthani

Krushnak Parvati Harah.

Yatrayam Halayudha Gachheta

Tulasi Kshetre Tisthatah,

Utkale Pancha Khetrancha

Badanti Muni Punga Bah."

(*Brahma Tantra*)



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