LORD JAGANNATH,
HIS TEMPLE HIS KSHETRA IN THE ANNALS OF HISTORY

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Abstract

Lord Jagannath is both visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, comprehensible and incomprehensible. It is just an impossible task to restrict Lord Jagannath within historical datas, events and historicity. The treatises like etc have vivid references of Lord Purusottam Jagannath. The Inscriptions like Nagpur Inscription of 1104 AD etc tell about Lord Purusottam Jagannath. Interestingly, not only Indian Scholars but also many foreigners have thrown glimpses on Purusottam Jagannath in varied ways. The present paper throws a light on it and gives a brief introduction of all of the above.

Lord Jagannath is a mystery and enigma in Himself. He is the super synthesis of all forms of religious movements, worships and faiths. He is both visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, comprehensible and incomprehensible. It is just an impossible task to restrict Lord Jagannath within historical datas, events and historicity. Lord Jagannath in different shapes and names is continued to be worshipped in Purusottam Kshetra or Puri from time immemorial. From Viswavasu's Neela Madhaba to Matharas's Narayana, from Sailodabhada's Madhaba to Soma's Purusottam and Ganga's Jagannath, His divinity attracts people from different sects. Faith of different sects & groups like Tribals, Jains, Buddhists, Saibas, Saktas, Ganapatyas, Tantras inhale the essence of their respective sects in Jagannath consciousness. That is why probabley, Lord Jagannath is being still worshipped here whereas His contemporary deities, Gods either forgotten or attract the tourists in the Museums.

Jagannath makes His first appearance in history, according to Hunter, in 318 AD when the priests fled with the images to escape the wrath of Yavan Raktabahu and his followers. We can have direct and indirect evidences of worship of Purusottam Jagannath in Rigvedic literature, Ramayan, Mahabharat, various Puranas and Samhitas. If Sayanacharya's interpretation of "Ado-Yaddaru-Plavate" is to be accepted then there is reference of Daru Brahma Purusottam in the Vedas. The Kapila Samhita, Matsya Purana, Brahma Purana, Skanda Purana, Padma Purana, Narada Purana, Garuda Purana, Agnee Purana, Bamana Purana, Vishnu Purana, Maha Purusa Vidya, Kapila Purana, Kalika Purana, Neeladri Mahodaya, Bamdev Samhita, Sunya Samhita, Annakar Samhita, Amar Kumar Samhita, Sabda Brahma Samhita etc have vivid references of Lord Purusottam Jagannath. The Brahaspatya Sutram compiled in c.6/7 Cent AD speaks of Purusottam Kshetra and mention its distance from Dwaraka 700 Yojanas. Murari Mishra's "Anargharaghava Natakam" of C. 9th cent. AD refers to God Purusottam being worshipped on the sea shore. In Indrabhuti's "Jnana Sidhi" of 8th cent AD we can find mention of Jagannath. Krushna Mishra's "Prabodha Chandrodaya Natakam" of 1050/1078 AD refers to Devayatan of Lord Purusottam. The reference of Jagannath in Purusottamdev's "Trikonda Kosa", a Tantra Text of 10th Cent. AD propagates

Jagannath as Hari. In the Sarada Devi temple inscription at Maihar in Satna, MP of 10th Cent AD mentions Purusottama in Odra. As per the description, it is learnt that one Brahmin Youth namely Damodar on a pilgrimage to Purusottam Kshetra drowned in the Sea while taking bath. Similarly in the Govindpur, Gaya inscription of C. 9/10 cent AD mention of a God known as Lord of the Universe & visit of a person called Manoratha to Purusottam Kshetra located on the noisy sea shore. The Kapilasa inscription of Narasingha I (1246-53 AD) mentions God Purusottam as "Chaturdasabhuvanadhipati" or the Lord of the 14 worlds. In Paramara king Laxman Sena's Nagpur inscription of 1104 AD, there is a mention of Purusottam Kshetra located on the sea shore of Eastern India.

The Pujaripalli ins. of 11th Cent AD describes Purusottam Kshetra as one of the holy places. The Boramdeo temple inscription of 1088 AD, Gobindpur ins. of 1120 AD, Siripur queen Basuta's stone inscription throw light on Lord Purusottam and his Kshetra. Ganga ruler Bhanudeva II (1306-1328 AD) mention the name of Jagannath for the first time in his inscription. Many inscriptions inside different parts of the Jagannath temple premises throw ample light on Lord Jagannath and gift of land, lamp etc. Mainly the 61 inscriptions on the Narasingha Temple inside the main temple premises, out of which 30 inscriptions were deciphered by Dr.S.N. Rajguru and published in "Inscriptions of the temples of Puri and origin of Sri Purusottam Jagannath" in two volumes, one inscription of Anangbhimadeva of 1234 AD in the western side near Benu Gopal idol, seven inscriptions of Anangbhimadeva and other on the walls of Pataleswar temple, 12 ins. of Kapilendra, Purusottam, Prataprudra and other on the wall of Jayavijaya Dwara(Gate) and inscriptions engraved on the Neela Chakra, Bhogamandap South gate, sacred Sanctum inscription, and Markandeswar temple inscription etc. render historical evidences to corroborate the literary sources.

A sculptural piece of Konark of the 13th Cent AD, now preserved in National Museum, Delhi shows its builder king Langula Narasingha I, offering worship to Shivalinga, Purusottam Jagannath and Durga. In the Kailan copper plate of Samatata Chief Sridharaa Rata of the 7th Cent AD described that Purusottam as the creator, sustainer and destroyed of the world. Satanananda's Ratnamalaya of 11th Cent. AD & Laxmidhar Bhatt's "Kriya Kalpa Taru's Tirtha Kanda, a work 9th Cent AD testifies the popularity and fame of Purusottam Kshetra in Northern India. Hema Chandra's work of C.10/11 cent AD namely "Abhidhana Chintamani" describes Vishnu was famous as Jagannath in Gujurat by that time. In many Tantra Shastras like Rudra Jamala of Abhinaba Gupta (10th AD), Brahma Jamala, Tantra Jamala (10th AD), Vishal Dev Raso (12 AD), Pritivi Raj Raso of Chand Bardai of 12th Cent AD we find mention of Purusottam Jagannath.

Apart from this, many copper plates from 8th Century AD refers to individuals bearing the name Purusottam, which also substantiates the wide fame and popularity of Purusottam Jagannath. Ananga Bhima Dev III's Nagari Copper plate, Narasingha II's three Kendupatana copper plates and one Allarpur copper plate, Narasingha–IV's two Puri Copper plates, Kalindi grant of Chalukya King Raja Raj Deba, Kesaba Sen's Adipur copper plate,

Biswarupa Sen's Madanpada Copper plate, the Dasagoba copper plate of Raja Raj Deba III (1198-1211) and the sculptural ruins of Telia Garhi temple near Dhanamandal Rly. Station in Cuttack of 13th Cent AD are important evidences which attribute to the importance of Lord Jagannath and his worship. The Madala Panji, the palm leaf chronicles of the Puri temple speaks of a Jagannath temple built by Yayati Kesari, prior to the construction of the present temple. Krusna Misra's Probodha Chandrodaya Natakam of 11th Cent AD mention about the existence of a Jagannath Temple before the present temple built by Ananta Vermn Chodagangadeva. Similarly, the Nagari plates of Anangabhimadeva III, the Kendupatana copper plates of Narasingha Dev II and Puri copper plates of Narasingha Dev IV, the Dasagoba copper plate of Raj Raj Deba III envisage about the construction of a new temple by a Ganga ruler in place of an old temple. The above historical evidences testify that before the construction of the present temple, there was one old temple situated near the sea shore built by the king Yayati Keshari. If the version of the temple palm leaf chronicle is to be accepted then Somavamsi King Yayati built a temple for Lord Purusottam Jagannath after recovering the divine images cremated in the Gopali Village in Sonepur and brought Daitas from Biribandha and Patis from Ratanpur, perform Nabakalebara after being influenced by Adi Sankara. It proves that, the worship of Purusottam Jagannath was prevalent & very ancient prior to Yayati and visit of Adi Shankar.

Interestingly, not only Indian Scholars but also many foreigners have thrown glimpses on Purusottam Jagannath in varied ways. Notable scholars from the west were Friar Odoric, Nicolo Conti, Sir Thomas Roe, W.Bruton, Vernier, Capt. Hamilton, Major W. Thorn, Robert Southey, Strevens, Wilson, James Fergusson, Gen. Alexander Tomas Bowrey, Cunningham, Carl Marx, John Beames, A.Eshmann, H.Kulke, H.V.Stieterncron, Hunter. Andrew sterling etc. Jagannath Triad's popularity, divinity and fame not only attracted the western scholars, but Muslim writers were also not remain untouched. The famous were Mahmud bin Amir wali of Balkh of Afganisthan who visited India in 1624-31 left an account titled "Bah-rul-Asrar". In his work, balkhi gave a vivid description of Sri Jagannath temple and the Car Festival. The earliest descriptive account on Lord Jagannath is found in Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi written by an anonymous writer supposed to be a contemporary of Firuz Tughlog. Another contemporary account given by Aynue Mulk Mahru. Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi bu Shans-i-Siraj Afif, Shitab Khan's Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, Amin Ahmed Razi's Haft – Iqlim or Seven climates, Abul Fazal's Ain-i-Akbari, Ghulam Husain Salim's Riyaz-us-Salatin. Munshi Salim Ullah's work translated into English under the title "A Narrative of Govt. of Bengal by East India Company.These are few literacy, Archeological works by scholars, travelers on Lord Jagannath and his history, testifies the uniqueness of Sri Jagannath consciousness which upholds, non violence and Universal brotherhood. Sri Jagannath Culture is a very ancient, rich and living culture.

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