

# Cultural Tradition of Lord Jagannath Readings from Literary Sources: A symbol of National Integration

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As Literature is regarded as the mirror of society, literary sources contain a wealth of information for reconstructing a nation's history. Numerous works of literature speaks of Orissa's glory in various ways and at various times. Thus, ancient literature provides a wealth of information about Orissa a state, where the culture exhibits a unique experiment in religion. Orissa is better known as the Land of Lord Jagannath and He, the Lord of Universe, is Omnipresent. His Divine Grace has been bestowed upon all His Devotees and Disciples across the World over. The culture of Orissa means the culture of Lord Jagannath, and the culture of Jagannath means the synthesis of varied religions prevalent in Odisha.

*"Cultural Tradition and Lord Jagannath in Odisha: Readings from Literary Sources"*, is a work that analysed Jagannath Culture and Tradition and how it is related, reflected and connected with Odia Literature. In this work it is shown that, how Odishan history, tradition, legends, nature of the Indian link have been used and constructed in defining Jagannath Consciousness in various forms. It also established a Casual Connection between Culture and Traditional Lord Jagannath and Odia Literature in this work. The work is departs from most of others importantly in the study of Odishi's and religio-cultural perspective which have already been dealt with at great length in some earlier works. One more important feature of this work is the study of Jagannath culture in the light of Odias interrelation hitherto neglected by other scholars.

The Religious History in India, at least in respect of the deities is characterized by complexities. But here that complexities is normalize and popularize among common people. The entire activities of the people of Odisha - social, cultural and religious, are Jagannath Purusottam oriented in the time sense of term. So, a

reader can find immense pleasure, by reading such types of works.

Jagannath is intrinsically associated with the Odia's life, a central figure in its Art, Culture, Society, Sculpture, Legends and Literature etc. Centuries ago He is the Lord of this land and the symbol of the Odia's identity. Even in abroad Odisha is known of Lord Jagannath. A normal Odia starts his life and days using His name on religion, thought and belief and he also becomes the last companion in the journey in life to the other world finding the expression of Almighty Jagannath. The Lord is an integral part of Odia life in each and every activity deeply associated with the ups and downs, victory-defeat, laughter-joys, and fortune-misfortune, Happiness - grief, natural calamities & disaster of the Odia as a member of the family, a brother of the family and a best friend at the time of need. No other nation has so closeness with its mass deity as Jagannath has and we find a king like Anangabhim Dev declared legally that the state is not his own but his state deity's and he is only a servitor or Routa. So this is the powerful influence of Jagannath.

The impact of Lord Jagannath in the life of the Odias is so prominent that we see life of an Odia baby begins by partaking his Mahaprasad & the Odia man's life ends with taking his Nirmalya so it is proudly said that the Odishan art, culture, and above all everything centres around Him. From folklore to epics in Odia all are full in His praise.

The life style of the Odias are related with festivals, proverbs, rituals, prayers, and worships and it seems that when there is no rain he calls the Lord: when there is illness in the family, he or she prays the Lord, when an Odia is going to marry; his first invitation card is sent to Lord Jagannath. Here, the Lord has stood not only to protect His fellow beings but also to guide them to lead a perfect and balanced life. Without Him

one cannot think of Odisha and people of Odia. It is obviously that in the public life, public domain, customs, traditions, festivals, praise and prayer everywhere His omnipresent is felt. Whether the literature is written or non-written, scholar's or folk but His thought blended expression in literature of the land. Naturally it comes to the mind of Late Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab that our identity as an Odia without Shree Jagannath is not only non-existent but also unthinkable.

As a rich and varied cultural tradition of Odisha or Utkal, Lord Jagannath is surrounded from birth to death of an Odia find the involvement of the lord in their life. Social, cultural and religious life of Odia people are in a true sense connected like a magnet with Lord Jagannath Mahaprabhu so it is uncommon that the cultural life of Odisha is greatly influenced by Lord Jagannath or Purusottam. The lord has been cited to in several puranas such as the Padma, Skanda, Brahma, Vishnu, Harivamsha, and also in Niladri-Mahodaya. Even in the Ramayana it is advised to worship Mahaprabhu Jagannath who is the home deity of Ikhyaku Vamsha the lineage of Dasharatha.

Dance and music especially exotic classical dance form is an inseparable part evolved from the cult of the 'Devadasis' or female temple dancers is a rich culture of the state. After all 'Rathyatra' of Lord Jagannath becomes an absolute synonym to Orissan culture. Odisha speaks eloquently of a living past continuing present and prospective future. Flowing through the arteries of Odisha the temple-culture condenses the quintessence of India. It may be the sacred environs of Puri Shree Jagannath temple, the eroticism of Konark Sun temple, the wondrous caves of Udayagiri Lalitgiri or Khandagiri, the mystical monasteries of Buddhism, the paintings of folklore or the handloom weaver's magic etc etc.

Starting from Lord Jagannath himself was a tribal deity, adorned by the Sabar people, a symbol of Narayan. This has been accepted our proud heritage that the beginning of the cultural history of Shrikshetra is found in the fusion of Hindu and Tribal Cultures. So ultimately it is found that there is a fusion of Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism, Jainism and up to an extent Buddhism in the culture of Jagannath and in the Hindu religion as a whole and this cultural tradition so much reverently held together in Shrikshetra.

The Lord has been referred to in several Puranas like the Padma Puranas, Skanda Puranas, Brahma Puranas,

Vishnu Puranas, Harivamsa Puranas and Niladri Mahodaya. Religious reformers and preachers like Sankara, Ramanuja, Vallabhacharya and Sri Chaitanya have paid their tributes to Lord Jagannath. His greatness has also been sung by non-hindus like Salabega and Haridas. The glory of the Lord was also sung by Swami Tulasi Das and Guru Nanak.

So, *the Lord, Koti Utkalara Moudamani, Bada Thakura Sri Sri Jagannath Mahaprabhu* is rightly said as a "*Symbol of National Integration*".

Orissa was inhabited by the aboriginal tribes and had a civilization and culture which was quite distinct from that of the Vedic Aryans. After the Aryans migrated to Orissa a combination of the Vedic religion and culture, the Upanisadic philosophy and Smarta rituals began to spread in this land the state of Orissa.

Historically the cult and culture of Jagannatha found its origin in the primitive system of worship of the non-Aryan tribals. The Aryans must worship Jagannatha in Vedic rites and rituals connected them with all religious practices. The Mouryan emperor Asoka, who conquered Kalinga in the third century B.C after a dreadful Kalinga War abandoned violence, embraced Buddhism and left no stone unturned to propagate it. But no doubt Buddhism and Jainism must have penetrated in to the innermost apartments of the shrine of Jagannatha. Hence the cult of Jagannatha as we call it now (by way of translating the words Jagannatha Dharma) has to be understood, interpreted and appreciated with all its social, cultural, religious and spiritual implications.

Be it noted that while the images of the Hindu deities are made of stone or metal, the image of the Supreme Being Purusottam Jagannath is made of wood. Since the original name of the Savara deity was Nilamadhava, the name of his new place came to be known as Nilachala. It is said that wooden idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan represent the primitive art of the savaras. Jagannath, the God of the Savaras was so deep rooted in the Oriya mind that Sarala Das described Jagannath as "Savari Narayana" in his Mahabharata written in 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Jainas believed in idol worship accordingly. It is also said that Tri-Ratna of Jainism namely Right Faith, Right knowledge and Right Action are symbolically represented in the trinity Idol of Sri Jagannath, Badathakura Balabhadra and Maa Subhadra.

According to some scholars, the images of Jagannath, Subhadra and Balabhadra symbolized the Buddhist

Faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Some historians said that forest-dwellers of Odisha like the Savaras adopted Buddhism in Asoka's time and when idol worship became common among the Buddhists, the savara came to regard the image of Jagannath as the image of Buddha. In course of time the Hindus also regarded Buddha as an incarnation or Avatar of Vishnu and identified Buddha as Jagannath, The Supreme Being in this Age of Kali (Kaliyuga).

In order to justify the presence of Balabhadra and Subhadra with Jagannath it was said that Jagannath is Vasudev-Sri Krishna, and therefore Krishna's brother Balarama and, sister Subhadra have been given place with Jagannath and Sudarshan with Krishna's 'Sudarshan Chakra'.

At a time when Jagannath gained immense popularity all important religious cults and creeds known to the people of India in those days were assimilated into the texture of Jagannathism. Such a board-based system of religious life is not to be found anywhere in the world. Consequently, the cult of Jagannath came to be regarded as the religion of masses 'Gana Dharma' means Jagannath cult is a unique cult. Indian culture has reached its culmination in the unique culture of Lord Jagannath. It is more than a cult – an all-embracing synthesis of cults. It has combined diverse faiths, cultures, creeds and ideologies.

Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Orissa, is the Lord of the Universe. The family God of most households in Orissa, who not only holds a unique place in the history of the land, but in the lives and customs of its people. He is also known as Jagabandhu. He is the friend, philosopher, guide and the anchor of the purest thoughts of the people of the entire Universe. He is the Great Initial. He is Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Ganesh, Kali, Bhairab, Buddha, Jin and what not. He is the supreme creative artist who has created Himself and is also the source of all art. As 'Sakti', He is the source of all creative energy.

The gap between men and Divine has been bridged in Jagannath culture because Jagannath is a highly humanised Deity. Like a person performed his/her daily routine Mahaprabhu brushes his teeth, takes bath, changes his cloth, wears out robes and gold ornaments, studded with diamond, sapphires to suit festive. The significance of the Jagannath Culture lies in the fact that it has absorbed all religions and all religious believes within itself. Within its all-embracing fold, one finds the essence of the

evolution of Indian religions and cult. The unique feature of Hinduism from ancient Times was the freedom of every individual to think of God in his own way. Every group, community or caste was also given freedom to develop own religious tradition. There was neither rigidity nor intolerance- the Hindu way of life. In this atmosphere of perfect freedom and liberalism developed in India numerous religious customs and systems, mode of worship and prayer, higher human ideal and blind superstitions as well in this over all background the culture of Jagannath developed itself in all varieties of believes within itself. Diversity in unity and unity in diversity is prime character of Jagannath culture. The Supreme Being is one and the only the Lord Jagannath is the Lord of the- Universe. In supreme of outward differences and human existence, Jagannath is the One and only God for all. Though in shape of wooden idols, Jagannath is that Absolute Being who is beyond description, beyond form, and beyond comprehension. He Is the Saviour of all, irrespective of caste, colour or freedom of man. The Supreme Lord Jagannath is represent in Vedic Brahmin, Jainism, Buddhism, Puranic Hinduism, Saivism, Saktism, Taoism and Vaishnavism in various Phases of time.

The Universality of Jagannath has also carried its Western thinkers of the present day. In the Cult of Jagannath they find the highest spiritual ideals and the deepest feelings of demotion mixed with outward ceremonies to satisfy the common mind. The Cult of Jagannath is thus a gift of Odisha humanity to satisfy its desire for spiritual peace, social harmony and universal divinity.

The rituals practices of Lord Jagannath help to identify Him with Oriyas. For example, the food and the dress used for the deities typify that of Orissa and by way of such typification, a sense of belonging to the same religious world is induced. The deities are offered only locally-produced vegetables and even potato and tomatoes, being foreign in origin, are excluded. Obviously the fifty-six varieties of Bhogas or dishes are usually offered to the deities are typical of the Oriya preparation of rice, curry, and cake and sweet. Very interestingly, the most typical of the Oriya dishes, *Pakhala* or watered rice highly appreciates and rediscovers on the poem of Chintamani Mohanty (1867-1943 AD) '*Pakhala*' as the most valuable possession of Oriyas is offered to the deities three times a day is even an eating tradition of Oriyas. His

poem “*Pakhala*” celebrates it as the nectar and as the unifier of the Oriya jati from the Ganga to the Godavari.

Jagannath culture does not admit any distinction in between the caste and communities aims at liberating poor and down-trodden. 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. Culture of Lord Jagannath has effected unity in diversity by faith, and integrated human society with the help of human value. Darshan and Mahaprasad sevas are the twin desires of each believer of Lord Jagannath. People usually wait for some time to partake Mahaprasad preferably in Anand Bazar. 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.

Every Odia has an inner desire to have a glimpse of Sri Jagannath on the chariot & to attend his famous Rathayatra. In the scriptures it is said that “*Rathe to Bamanam drusthtwa punarjanma na bidyate*” means one who sees Jagannath riding on chariot has no rebirth or he gets salvation. Again it is believed that without his Dori or desire one cannot have a darshan of the Rathayatra or the Patitapabana (Redeemer of sins) even if one has all means to go to Puri. Only those people can attend his Rathayatra are graced by his mercy. The Odia by having a darshan of the Lord on the Snavedi and his Snavajatra and in Rath become stunned. He loses his power to think any other of his / her personal matter and completely sink in joy and emotion.

So far as spiritual concept is concerned, the people of Orissa are tolerant to different opinion and accept each and every spiritual master with positive mind keeping that Lord Jagannath as supreme head. 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 be he Sankaracharya, Madhabacharya, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, but all have accepted Lord Jagannath as their supreme Lord and have gleefully accepted the concept essence of Lord Jagannath.

The character of Odia culture is generosity, endurance and coordination. 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. The Jagannath Temple at Puri in Orissa has been a center of religious, spiritual and artistic pursuit through ages. Lord Jagannath is more than a religious deity for the people of Orissa; He is the fountainhead of their cultural, intellectual and emotional sustenance.