



## The Distinct Speciality of Lord Jagannath

*Dr. Harihar Kanungo*

During the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, the Bhagabat religion in India was wrongly acclaimed as Vaishnavism under the patronage of the then rulers. Subsequently its impact was also felt in Orissa. Rationally speaking, Bhagabat religion is markedly different from Vaishnavism. The latter is associated with the worship of different contexts in Indian literature, history and religion. The word Vaishnav is derived from the word Vishnu. The word like Vishnu or Vaishnav is illogically and deliberately associated with Lord Vasudev Shrikrishna. When Brahminism revived under the patronage of the Gupta dynasty during 3rd or 4th century, this deliberate mischief found place in religion, literature and history. The reason can be found in the fact that, prior to Mahabharata war, Brahminism was associated with Sun-worship. The alien Aryans who invaded India were accustomed to worshipping the elements of nature as gods; hence Sun-worship.

Sun-worship was mainly confined to Yagna (holy offerings to the fire-god). Sacrifice of animals and drinking of Soma-Rasa. Under the influence of Lord Srikrishna's diplomacy during the Mahabharata war, people shifted their attention from yagna and worship of elements and turned them in to introspective spiritualism. In keeping with that basic change, the post-Mahabharata era witnessed the advent of introspective religions like Jainism and Buddhism. These religions had such

a profound impact on the contemporary society that the practice of Sun-worship and worship of the elements of nature characterizing Brahminism was totally discontinued. In fact, right after the end of the Mahabharata war, the Bhagabat dharma, introduced by Vasudeva Srikrishna along with Jainism and Buddhism had greatly influenced the people and put an end to Brahminism. It could not revive even by 3rd or 4th century.

Protagonists of Brahminism cleverly conspired, by means of surrogate language and jargon to identify Saivism and Vasudev Srikrishna with the Sun-God or Lord Vishnu and nearly succeeded in getting public support for their endeavour. The derivation of the word Vishnu can be found in 1, 85, 7:6, 48,14 Mandalas, Sukta and mantra in the Rig Veda.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in the Rig veda, the Sun-god or Lord Vishnu has been portrayed as a God of sacrifice. Can there be any justification for identifying such a god of external and inanimate nature with Vasudev Sri Krishna? The latter is the presiding deity of an introspective religion and hence the efforts of the torch bearers of Brahminism to treat Vasudev Srikrishna on par with the Sun-god or Vishnu, god of outward and inanimate nature is highly unrealistic. The reason is that when the supporters of Brahminism discovered that the worship of Vishnu or the Sun-god can not stand the powerful influence of Saivism, the Bhagabat religion,



Jainism or Buddhism, they propagated rather fraudulently about Shiva, Buddha etc. being the incarnations of Vishnu or the Sun-god. By massive false propaganda, they have managed to ensure the perpetuation of Sun-worship which prevails even today. Such endeavours led to revival of Brahminism during the rule of the Gupta dynasty. This conspiracy no doubt eluded the people. But, still, they have never accepted Vishnu as Sun-god at any time. The patrons of Brahminism derive a great mental satisfaction by keeping the Sun-god in the guise of Lord Vishnu.

The Protagonists of Yagyajna (Sacrificial offerings to the fire-god) and Sun-worship, under the encouraging patronage of state-power penned several Puranic literature where they invariably propagated that all the deities and religious beliefs worshipped and sustained by the people irrespective of caste or creed were mere parts of incarnations of Lord Vishnu or Sun-god. Therefore we find in the Puranas that Lord Rama, the Son of Kaushalya, Vasudev Srikrishna, Gautam Buddha and Nrusingha have been portrayed and propagated as parts of the so-called Lord Vishnu or Sun-god. Lord Sriram, Lord Srikrishna, the son of Devaki, Lord Nrusingha who emerged out of a shattered pillar greatly influenced and inspired the contemporary society as symbols of inward consciousness. Unfortunately, the protagonists of Brahminism, in the Puranic literature purposefully created by them, identified these gods with the worship of the inanimate Sun-god or Vishnu. The state power no doubt encouraged and patronized such propagandas. The people, though confused, rejected such notions outright. Along with the mythological characters like ShriRam, Srikrishna and Nursingha, the historical religious leaders of Buddhism and Jainism like Gautam Buddha or Mahavir Jain were falsely propagated as the incarnations of the Sun-god or Vishnu. The

confusion these propagandas created can be traced to Lord Jagannath of Puri.

Historically and ethically speaking, Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of the land of Odra was worshipped by the Buddhists during the 7th and 8th centuries as the overall manifestation of the spiritual consciousness of different tribal groups like the Odras and the Nagas. The Buddhists accomplished unanimity in the diverse religious beliefs of these different tribal races like Nagas and Odras and this gave rise to the practice of worshipping Lord Jagannath. That is why we find the influence of Buddhism in the cult of Lord Jagannath even today. Such synchronized religious feeling and reasoning reflect an introspective consciousness having its own speciality and distinction profoundly affecting the minds of all Indians. That is why during the 7th and 8th centuries; Lord Jagannath was acclaimed as the presiding deity of the entire Odra region. We find in Madalapanji that with the rise of Keshari dynasty, Jajati became the monarch. He searched for this state deity of Orissa and installed Him in Puri. By the time of the Lord's installation, the popular gods like Lord Shriram and Vasudev Shrikrishna were given the title of Purushottam (The perfect man and the propaganda of their being parts or incarnations of Lord Vishnu or Surya (The Sun God) went on unabated. These propagandas originated from the Puranic literature since the 3rd and 4th centuries and are still in vogue.

After Lord Jagannath's installation in Puri by royal effort, he too has been fraudulently termed as a part or incarnation of Lord Vishnu or the Sun God. His name, therefore has acquired the prefix of Purushottam or the perfect man. Initially, Lord Jagannath was described as a miraculous derivation of Nrusingha and subsequently, he is identified with Vasudev



Srikrishna. But from the historical and logical view point, even by his acquiring this prefix of Purushottam, he can neither be identified with Nrusingha nor with Shri Krishna, the Purushottam. The word Purushottam or the perfect man, fails to convey the full significance of the omnipresent Lord Jagannath, from the ethical point of view. Possibly, this is the view expressed by Dibakar Das, a 17th century poet in his book of verse 'Jagannath Charitamrita' - "Lord Jagannath is cent percent complete with Divine Qualities, a part of which went to Srikrishna the son of Nanda. But he turned this part into one hundred percent and moved around in the land of Gopa."<sup>2</sup>

From this, we find that 'Purushottam' or the Perfect man is qualitative concept. But a deliberate attempt has been made to attach this term to Lord Jagannath who defies any qualitative description (Gunatita). He is far beyond logical reasoning and some one very special. So from this view point, Lord Shri Ram has been called 'Maryada Purushottam' (the Perfect Man of Glory), Srikrishna or Nrusingha also carry this prefix as all of them have been propagated as belonging to the category of Lord Vishnu. Lord Jagannath is altogether a different phenomenon and beyond qualitative description. Unfortunately 'Purushottam' is prefixed to this name so that He can be easily called an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

The ancestors of the Monarchs belonging to the Soma or Keshari dynasty made Sripur of Madhya Pradesh their capital and ruled in that state. Nrusingha, the Purushottam, was their house-hold deity. From an inscription preserved in the Museum of Raipur, it is learnt that, in the 8th century, Basatta Devi, a queen of the Soma dynasty, has built a temple in Sripur and installed her house hold deity, Nrusingha, the Perfect Man, there. In the years that followed, descendants of

Soma dynasty who ruled Sonepur in Orissa also built a temple in the mountain region of Gandhamardan, installed Nrusingha, the Perfect Man in that temple and worshipped Him. That is the famous Nrusinghanath temple of Bolangir. We learn from history that, years after, the descendants of Soma dynasty also built a temple at Puri, for the worship of their household deity, Lord Nrusingha, the Purushottam. Having conquered different regions in Orissa, the Somavanshi kings installed the statues of Purushottam Nrusingha in those places and encouraged His worship. They also patronized many books of verses eulogizing the deity, Purushottam Nrusingha. "Anargha Raghav", a drama by Murari Mishra, "Prabodha Chandrodaya," another drama by Krishna Mishra, "Vaswati" by Satananda, 'Krutya Kalpataru' and 'Brahma Yamalatantra' are some of these books lauding the Lord Nrusingha the household deity of the Somavanshi rulers, brought from Sripur of Madhya Pradesh. Many historians, litterateurs and research scholars have deliberately attempted to identify this Purushottam Nrusingha with Lord Jagannath. Such attempts were wrong and miss leading. Puri was widely propagated as Purushottam Kshetra (or the land of the Perfect Man) only because the Soma Vanshi kings installed the deity Nrusingha (brought from Sripur in Madhya Pradesh) in Puri. These kings tried to popularise Nrusingha-worship throughout Orissa. Hence Puri earned the epithet Purushottam Kshetra. But in later period, Lord Jagannath earned the status and recognition of being the presiding deity of the Odra land and was installed in Puri and in due course of time replaced Nrusingha who had earned the same status before. So Puri, previously called Purushottam kshetra (or the land of the Perfect man) came to be known in due course of event as the land of Lord



Jagannath who was installed there as the presiding deity and was worshipped.

So "Purushottam Kshetra"(the land of the Perfect Man and Jagannath Dham)the land of Lord Jagannath are not at all synonymous. "Purushottam" and "Jagannath" are different terms, the former referring to "Purushottam Nrusingha" and not to Lord Jagannath. However, the unjustified effort is on to identify Jagannath with Purushottam as well as to equate Lord Jagannath with Lord Vishnu. From time to time, this effort has obtained royal patronage which encouraged the writing of such fictitious and propagandist puranas like Skanda Purana.<sup>3</sup>

We can also mention the age-old attempts to equate Lord Jagannath with Purushottam Nrusingha. And at a later stage, the Vaishnavites adopted a different strategy to identify Lord Jagannath with Vasudeva Srikrishna, the Presiding deity of Bhagabat religion. Of course, taking a closer look, we can not find any marked difference between the religious aspects of Vasudeva Srikrishna and Lord Jagannath. But still, both are certainly not identical. Just as Vasudeva Srikrishna of Bhagabat religion is distinctly different from Vishnu or Surya worshipped by the Vaishnavities, similarly, the cult of Lord Jagannath, enunciated by the Buddhists, is different from that of Vasudeva Shri Krishna. But as a result of conspiracy laid out by the Vaishnavities, many propagandist Puranic works proclaiming Vasudeva Shri Krishna as the incarnation or part of Lord Vishnu came into being. In a similar manner, malafide efforts to identify Lord Jagannath with Vasudeva Shri Krishna with the help of Propagandist Puranas have never stopped.

Possibly noting this, Jayadev, a 12th century poet wrote in his Dasavatara Stotram -

"Thou, O Keshava ! Who discredited the rituals of yajna and the Vedas, thou whose soul wept

witnessing the religious sacrifice of animals, incarnated thyself as Lord Buddha. Glory to thee, O Jagadish (Lord of universe) Hari."

It is obvious that Jayadeva was referring to Lord Keshava or Srikrishna reincarnating Himself as Lord Buddha or Lord Jagannath. But despite all the apparent similarities research scholars have proved that they are not inseparable. As has been said earlier, under pressure of circumstance the patrons of Vaishnavism or Brahminism had drawn Vasudeva Srikrishna into their religious fold. However, the cult of Lord Jagannath is very special and distinct. Conforming this distinctive aspect of Lord Jagannath, Dr. Harekrishna Mahatab has aptly observed in his "History of Orissa":-

"Three factors prevent us from accepting Jagannath as the Lord of Brahminism, they are, (i) the name, "Jagannath " (The Lord of Universe), (ii) The very statue of Jagannath, (iii) The presence of Suvadra with Him.

So how did the name "Krishna Vasudeva" "Vanish and was replaced by Jagannath?" Along with their effort to proclaim, Lord SriRam, Lord Srikrishna and Lord Nrusingha Vishnu or Surya incarnate, the patrons of Brahminism spared no pain in encouraging the special worship of Surya or Vishnu in Orissa. This effort was very expensive. The Sun-Temple at Konark (Arka kshetra or the Land of Sun) testifies to this. All the revenue Orissa earned in twelve years was spent for the construction of this temple. The Sun-Temple, no doubt, is a marvellous object of art. But the basic purpose (Sun-worship) for which it was built went flak with the people of Orissa. Although they are proud of this beautiful artistic work, they have never taken to worshipping Vishnu or Surya. That is why the Sun Pillar (Arun Stambha) of the Konark Temple was shifted to Puri and was placed in front of the Lion's gate of



Jagannath Temple facing the Grand Road. On the other hand the Konark Temple has become a ruined mess. Is it not proof enough that people of Orissa never accepted the practice of worshipping Vishnu ? Many people attribute the dilapidated state of Konark temple to natural and geographical factors. But this is not true. Both the Jagannath temple of Puri and the Sun-temple at Konark are situated near the sea-shore. But the latter is of a more 'recent' build. One hundred years after the Puri temple was built (1115-1147AD) by Chodaganga of Ganga dynasty (1078-1147AD), King Narasingha Deva or Langula Narasingha Deva (1238-1264AD) built the Sun-temple at Konark with much gusto; the place was named Arka-kshertra (the land of Sun-God) and found a glorious mention in fictitious Puranas like the Samba Purana. Despite these much hyped propagandas, the temple remained unused and closed to public view round the year. Only on the day of Magha Saptami, devotees gather here to take a holy dip in the near by Chandrabhaga. This rite has nothing to do with the Konark temple. Of course, the devotees are certainly enchanted by the artistic excellence of the temple, but it does not raise any religious feelings in their hearts. The temple does not have any priests or servitors. Thus for the want of use and sheer disinterest of the public, the temple collapsed and remains ruined and abandoned. This rather than natural factors is a greater cause for its devastation. Due to lack of religious attachment to the temple, no effort has been made for its up keep and repair. In contrast to this, the temple of Lord Jagannath is a crowd - puller and primarily in public interest timely repairs and preservation of this sacred monument have been done.

Temples have cropped up time and again with much pomp and ceremony in different parts of India. The state- power has encouraged their construction and has tried forcibly to impose them on the people. But since they have failed to touch their hearts, people have outright rejected them. As a result, many of the temples are in shambles. As a matter of fact, nowhere in India, people have accepted the practice of worshipping Vishnu or Surya : hence the wretched condition of their temples. So the patrons of such worship have made a feeble attempt to sustain it by propagating an imaginary religion called Vaishnavism and giving a Vaishnavic religion. On the other hand, Lord Jagannath draws millions of people from every part of the world to Puri. This proves that the cult of Lord Jagannath is superior to Vaisnavism and it is a humanitarian religion. So it is clear from the above discussion that Jagannath is different from Purushottam Nrusingha or Vasudeva Shrikrishna.

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Harihar Kanungo is a Sr. Reader in Oriya, BJB (Autonomous) College, Bhubaneswar- 751014.

