



The Vaishnav centres in Medieval Odisha in historic perspective: A study

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ABSTRACT

Modern Odisha, known from the very ancient times in the nomenclatures of Kalinga, Odra, Toshali and Utkal, because of her physiographical identity, has evolved a distinct and systematic pattern of religious life, art, language, literature and painting of its own over the time. The civilisational trends gave her inhabitants individuality and a unique identity out of which grew up a culture representing a strange mixture of the Aryans and the Dravidians. All along Odisha had maintained her overseas trade and commercial relations with the South and South East Asian countries due solely to her great Sadhavas of the past. She was able to maintain her political identity despite the invasions and inroads made by many alien aggressors. Considered as a repository of religious specimens, Odisha developed hundreds of religious centres to her great credit in the hands of ruling dynasties who played a very conspicuous role in developing the centres for *Jainism*, *Buddhism*, *Saivism*, *Saktism*, *Vaishnavism*. They stand today as a symbol of the socio-cultural and economic progress and prosperity of the land of Odisha. Vaishnavism and vaishnav centres in Odisha play an important role in the canvas of tourism as economic booster as well as the socio-economic management of the people. This research article has been developed keeping in view of some primary objectives. The foremost objective is to explore an unexplored vaishnava centres in the land of Odisha. Secondly to discuss the socio-religious mind set of the people pertaining the vaishnav gospels. Third one deal with the role of vaishnava centres in the tourism map of Odisha in particular and India in general. Besides how the vaishnava centres caters the tourists of national, international, regional, intraregional, where employment generation is the thrust area of discussion.

Key words: gospel, invasion, aggressors, Aryan, Dravidian, inroads, Sadhavas

The evolution and rise of *Vaishnavism* associated with the tradition of Sree Jagannatha at Puri is the thrust area as far as the most famous vaishnava centres concerned. To accelerate the process of development of tourism in Odisha, the important Vaishnava centres have played a very pivotal role. These centres are developed with its manifold significance, such as historical development, art and architecture, and its attractions of religious testimonies. Sree Kshetra, known as Kambu Kshetra, the seat of Sree Jagannatha, delights unique destination of being both highest centre of pilgrimage (*Tirtha.Raj*) and holiest place *Kshetra-Raja*¹ since a hoary past under the royal patronage. It has commanded the

national reverence of the Hindus and is among the Indian places of pilgrimage certainly the best known in the world². Here is a brief description about the important vaishnava centres in medieval period. As the nerve centre of vaishnavism Sree Mandira is directly associated with the miracle personality and the profounder of *Vaishnavism*, Sri Chaitanya. At present Sri Mandira stands for its artistic heritage of a bygone age. Today it invites countless religious tourists and art lovers from many quarters of the world without any distinctions. In the fitness of things the historical monuments need not merely to preserve the physical side, but also an appreciation of the core values of mankind which is presented³. The treatment that has been meted out to the subject in the foregoing pages make the need for further study in the faces of inter-disciplinary approach. In a wider perspective of history, culture and religion, Sri Jagannath temple stands as witness to the socio-cultural developments going on in the society. Thus, a study of Sri Jagannath temple at Puri becomes an imperative need here. It is an irony of history the great architect who built a monument like Sri Jagannath temple did not think it necessary to leave accounts of his life or time for prosperity. Whatever the sources available are inadequate to give a proper platform for the historical construction of the temple, origin and its association with *Vaishnavism*. It is the high time to discuss on the main deities of *Sri Jagannath Trinity*. The concept is very challenging one as it requires a thorough analysis of literary records, legends, folklores, ritual practices followed folk art, aesthetic representation in colour designs etc. Enough chaos and confusion now prevails among the scholars, historians, indologists, archaeologists and anthropologists regarding the origin and nature of the cities as well the construction of the temple. A few scholars of orientalist like Stevenson, J. Fergusson, Wilson and W.W. Hunter, J. Beams, A. Stirling, R. Kenedy and nationalists Historians like N. Dash, H.K. Mahatab, B.M. Padhi, have claimed that Sri Jagannath belongs to different faiths, beliefs, rituals and practices of *Buddhism*, *Jainism* and *Vaishnavism*. On the basis of puranic sources and mythology, the scholars, like B.M. Padhi, S.N. Dash, J. Padhi, N. Mohanty, S.K. Maqbul Islam, A.O. Khan and many more have traced its origin from the tribes or aboriginals. Besides, the historians of the recent trends like R. L. Mitra, B. K. Ratha, B. B. Mishra, P. Mukherjees, N. N. Bose, have expounded the concept regarding its origin and development of Sri Jagannath Trinity is not only pre-vedic but also pre-historic⁴. As a scholar of history the author has tried to confine his knowledge in supporting to the views of nationalist historians of the tribal origin. This concept of origin is supported by the vedic sources *Bhagabata Geeta*, *Skandapurana* and *Kapila Samhita*. So Sri Jagannath is regarded as *Daru Brahma*, *Parambrahma*, *Purana Brahma*, *Sabdabrahma*, *Namabrahma*, *Drabyabrahma* the void and *Pranava*⁵. i.e, godhead manifested in a wooden image. Sri Jagannath has also been identified with the mystic *bijamantra* 'OM'. supported by Paterson. He traces the origin of Sri Jagannath to the adoration of the mystic syllable 'a.u.m' collecting into 'OMM'⁹⁵. The Oriya texts like *Daru Devata* of B.M.Padhi, *Darubrahma Geeta* of J. Dash, *Deulatola* of Nilambar Das find mention regarding the origin, worship of Sri Jagannath with the tribal sect called *Jitung* as *Ujang Mung Fu*⁶, (*Daru Devata*), as *Jaganta*, which the vedic tradition denotes as Purusottam accepting the theory of omnipresent. Within a passage of time the historicity of Sri Jagannath temple has become personified with Vishnu, cult hero of *Vaishnavism*. Purusottam (Sri Jagannath) first gained prominence in India due to the establishment of Gobardhan Matha by Adi Sankaracharya in 8th century A.D.⁷ Further it enhances the importance with the establishment of the *Mathas* by the great four vaishnavs. Acharya as of the south such as Sri Ramanujacharya, Sri Vishnuswami, Sri Nibarkacharya and Sri Madhabacharya for the propagation of their respective faiths and doctrines.⁸ We find that after Sankaracharya almost all the acharyas of different Hindu sects, from Ramanuja to Nanaka, Kavira, have established their monasteries at Puri. The outline aspect of this study of this chapter is when the whole

India was under the Muslim rule; Odisha remained a Hindu kingdom till as late as of the 16th century A.D. Even under the Muslim supremacy the life of the Oriyas center round Sri Jagannath and fought ceaselessly to hold its sacred land. There was a long cherisable religious conflict with the Muslim rule led to the erection of the masjids at temple sites.

The importance of Sree Jagannath, Sree Mandira, *Mahodadhi*, and *Rohini Kunda* have become more famous sites in Eastern India due to Sri Chaitanya's long association with them where he lived with hundreds of disciples for the last eighteen years of his life. Another predominant factor which contributes to the popularity of Sree Jagannatha throughout India, particularly in northern India is the unbroken tradition of daily worship in the shrine of Sree Jagannatha.

The disciples of Sri Chaitanya generally believe that he was a combination of Radha and Lord Krishna and they visualize Sri Jagannath in him. As an ardent follower and worshipper of Sri Jagannath he used to associate himself in *Darshan* right from *Mangala Alati*, *Abakash*, *Sakala Dhupa*, *Madhyam Dhupa*, *Sandhya Dhupa* upto the *Bada Singhara Vesha* in late night with the chanting of *Nama Samkirthan*⁹, Besides his association with *Chandan Yatra*, clearing Gundicha mandira, *car festival*, *Sri Krishna Janmastami*, *Dasahara Pushyaviseka*, *Magha Saptami*, *Nrushingh Janma*, *Vamana Janma*, *Sunia*, and *Dola Yatra* etc. the mathas like Radhakanta Matha, Jagannatha Vallabha Matha, Kothabhoga Matha, Siddha Bakula Matha, *Chataka Parvata*, *Tota Gopinatha* and association with religious philosophers like the Panchasakhas¹⁰. Contemporary literatures have described the pious relationship that the five chief Vaishnavas of the then Orissa were associated with Sri Chaitanya. Jagannatha Dasa and Sri Chaitanya both used to discuss inside the temple premises regarding different chapters and aspects of *Srimad Bhagabata*. Another Vaishnava shrine is located at Odagaon in the district of Nayagarh at a distance of 135 kilometres from the modern capital city, Bhubaneswar. This is the first attempt by any scholars or social scientists to bring this religious centre to the lime light with support of historical interpretation and a field study made by the scholar. The derivation of Orissa might have been abstracted from the term Odagaon. The village Odagaon is located between the border of ancient Gajam and Orissa (Cuttack, Puri, Balasore). The early history and cultural heritage of Odagaon is very interesting and significant from the socio-religious point of view. Though there are no much literary sources to construct the history of Odagaon still it depends on folk culture and local tradition. Since time immemorial it was associated with Rishi Atri, who constructed this *Ashrama*, in the *Virat Chalan* forest. Even today its scenic beauty attracts large number of religious tourists from the nook and corner of Orissa in particular and India is general. It is an accepted fact that in the ancient world the sages, hermits and rishis have generally meditated to achieve knowledge and *Divyajanna*, in the forest area, which provides a hospitable atmosphere. Rishi Atri was living with *Sati Anushaya* in a hut. After taking a long period of meditation, he pleased Brahma and received *Amlan* clothes. This clothes, was given by Anusaya to *Sati Sita* when she was maintained the life of penance and austerities with *Prabhu Rama* and *Anuja Laxman*. To see this religious sanctity of the said place, the king of Nayagarh constructed the present temple. There is a very controversial argument regarding the installation of the deities and the building activities of the temple. Some extent British ruler L.E.B. Cobden Ramsay has developed an opinion that the present temple at Odagaon has been constructed in the year 1903, with deep sense of co-operation of the common masses. The temple is 60' feet in height the *Kalasa* of the temple is made up of gold coating. The Raja of Nayagarh Binayak Singh Mandhata has installed the wooden deities of Rama, Laxman and Sita on the

pedestal. For the authenticity of the above mentioned information there has been written of two lines on the lotus pedestal of *prabhu* Raghunatha as follows

Sakabda sora mangalya rutusya Odanayak

*Rama Laxman Sanstapya Bairagya Patanayak.*¹¹

To support this notion the deities Rama, Laxman and Sita were installed in the temple in the *Saka* year *Sarada* (Five), *Mangala* (Eight), *Ruta* (Six) *Odanayak* (One) or 1685 as per Bairagi Pattanaik who was *Beberta* or revenue officer of Mandhata, the ruler Nayagarah State.¹²

The importance of the temple lies in the fact that there was a keen competition between the followers of Rama and Krishna during that time in Ganjam as elsewhere. Gradually, there has been developed a concept of Rama worship in Ghumsar and Chikit areas in Ganjam district and Nayagarh undivided Puri district while the centre of Krishna consciousness developed in Athagarh, Paralakhemundi, Badkhimundi in Ganjam district. The process of evolution was reflected not only in literature of the age but also in temple building activities and monasteries for development of their respective religious faiths and beliefs. In medieval period the concept of Rama worship became predominate after the rise of Kabisamrat Upendra Bhanja at Malisahi in the district of Nayagarh. Achieving the blessings of *Prabhu* Ramchandra, the master piece in the medieval literary work the *Vaidehisha Vilash*, an unparalleled *Ramkabya* was written about 1715 A.D. The emergence of Upendra Bhanja and his text *Vaidehisha Vilash* bears the religious testimonies of *Vaishnavism* in medieval Orissa. We found some medieval literatures also influenced by the tenets of Vaishnava philosophy. The importance of this temple reaches immensely to the pinnacle of glory the fact is that no earlier Raghunatha temple has come to light.¹³ As far as art and architecture and sculpture of the temple is concerned, it is an imitation of Orissan temple building activities consisting of *Vimana*, *Jagamohan*, *Bhog Mandap* and *Nata Mandap* like Sri Jagannath temple at Puri, the Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar. The second characteristic feature of this temple is the representation of the scene of *Ramayana* in the sculptures at different places of the temple premises. The scene of Shiva, Subalaya Giri, also appears where Rama, Laxmana and Sita represented in conversion regarding the ethical values of *Ramayana*. The *Tapobana* is beautified with the depiction of the *Ashramas* of the Rishis like Valmiki, Viswamitra, Vasista, Agasti, Pulastya, Jamini and Atri.¹⁴ This is a brief description about an interesting medieval Vaishnava centre in Orissa which bears the philosophy of *Ramayana* and the multifarious activities of *Prabhu* Ramachandra with the ethical code of the purification of human body, mind and soul. The temple of Raghunath is situated at Dhenkuna in Nayagarh district located at a distance of 120 kilometers from the modern capital city, Bhubaneswar. The destination is well communicated by all weather roads. As far as history is concerned, primarily in the ancient times it was a *Matha* of Ramanujacharya sect. Ramanuja influences on the subsequent Vaishnavite culture of Orissa is of considerably importance¹⁵. Sri Jagannath hence, was exclusively identified with Vishnu and his ten incarnations enjoyed increase honour and pious. The following table provides a glimpse on different vaishnava centres in Odisha , its attraction and the approximate distance from the capital city Bhubaneswar.

Table No. 1

Vaishnava Centres in Odisha

Sl. No.	Name of the Destination	District	Attraction of the said Destination	Approx. Distance From Bbsr
1.	Choursahi	Cuttack	Laxmi and Narayan richly ornamented seated on double lotus pedestal	48
2.	Thakurpatna	Cuttack	Laxmi Narayan Image	42
3.	Kudapatana	Cuttack	Rama image measuring 2" in hight	44
4.	Radhakanta Matha	Cuttack	Krishna image measuring 4" in hight	39
5.	Kurangsasan	Puri	Krishna Jagannath Image	46
6.	Pratap Nagar	Puri	Krishna Jagannath Image	43
7.	Barahpur	Puri	Krishna Jagannath Image	36
8.	Antarvedi Math	Cuttack	Krishna Jagannath Image	45
9.	Pandav Kunda	Puri	Krishna Jagannath Image	50
10.	Nirarana	Puri	Krishna Jagannath Image	48
11.	Manikarnina Matha	Puri	Krishna Jagannath Image	45
12.	Kenduli	Khurdha	Dasabatar image	30
13.	Jagannath Temple	Puri	Sri Chaitanya image	65
14.	Swargadwar	Puri	Dancing posture of Sri Chaitanya	68
15.	Kantilo	Nayagarh	Nilamadhav Temple	65
16.	Odagaon	Nayagarh	Raghunatha Temple	95
17.	Niali	Cuttack	Chaitanya Matha	48
18.	Choudwar	Cuttack	Chaitanya image	43
19.	Bhimakunda	Dhenkanal	Chaitanya image	67
20.	Saranga	Dhenkanal	Chaitanya image	68
21.	Remuna	Baleswar	Khirachora Gopinath Temple	245
22.	Sakhigopal	Puri	Sakhigopal Temple	47
23.	Alarnatha	Puri	Alarnatha Temple	85
24.	Baud	Baud	Chaitanya Math	345
25.	Nrusinghanath	Bolangiri	Chaitanya and his Consort	340

26.	Padagarah	Koraput	Vaishnava Centres	470
27.	Mukhalingam	Orissa Andhra Border	Chaitanya image	500
28.	Khiching	Mayurbhanj	Vaishnava desciples in a dancing posture	340
29.	Harisankar	Bolangir	Harisankar Temple	340
30.	Lingaraj Temple	Khurdha	Image of Jagannath	7
31.	Bhattarika	Cuttack	Chaitanya image	90
32.	Ranpur	Nayagarh	Sri Jagannath Temple	78
33.	Ranapur	Nayagarh	Harihareswar Temple	80
34.	Bandhahuda	Cuttack	Gopinath Temple	123
35.	Daspalla	Nayagarh	Gopinath Temple	140
36.	Daspalla	Nayagarh	Radha Madhav Temple	143
37.	Daspalla	Nayagarh	Radhakanta Temple Temple of Sri	145
38.	Radhakanta Temple	Nayagarh	Chaitanya Das	145
39.	Daspalla	Nayagarh	Braja Bihari Temple	150
40.	Daspalla	Nayagarh	Govindajew Temple	150
41.	Village Kantilo	Nayagarh	Raghunath Temple	70
42.	Khandapada	Nayagarh	Sri Jagannath temple	95
43.	Narasinghpur	Cuttack	Sri Gopinatha Temple	120
44.	Odagaon	Nayagarh	Radhakrushna Matha	135
45.	Sri Jagannatha vallav Matha	Puri	Image of Srikrishna chaitanya Rairamanda	65
46.	Mali Sahi	Nayagarh	Raghunath Temple Radhamohan	92
47.	Nayagarh Town	Nayagarh	Mandira	90
48.	Nayagarh Town	Nayagarh	Radhanatha Mandir	90
49.	Nayagarh Town	Nayagarh	Gopinatha Temple	90
50.	Nayagarh Town	Nayagarh	Raghunath Temple	90
51.	Gopalpur	Nayagarh	Sri Jagannath Temple	85
52.	Gopalpur	Nayagarh	Raghunath Temple	85

53.	Nayagarh Town	Nayagarh	Raghunath Debartas house Rama Mandir	90
54.	Nayagarh Town	Nayagarh	Sri Jagannath Temple	90
55.	Sankhatras	Cuttack	Sri Chaitanya Matha	40
56.	Kanapur	Cuttack	Gopinath Mandir	100
57.	Kendrapara Town	Kendrapara	Baladevjew Temple	120
58.	Jajpur Town	Jajpur	Sri Chaitanya Temple	89
59.	Bhubaneswar	Khurdha	Iskon Temple	00
60.	Malatira	Bhadrak	Gopinatha Image	195
61.	Puri Town	Puri	Sri Gouranga Matha	65
62.	Gopinathpur	Jajpur	Gopinath Image	105
63.	Balianta	Khurdha	Shrine of Gopinath Image	30
64.	Hirapur	Khurdha	Shrine of Gopinath	46
65.	Sarakana	Puri	Shrine of Gopinath	48
66.	Sri Gouranga Ashram	Khurdha	Nrusingh Temple	00
67.	Nrusinghnath	Cuttack	Nrusinghnath Temple	115
68.	Kurar	Nayagarh	Sri Chaitanya Matha	97
69.	Paralakhemundi	Gajapati	Bada Radhakanta Matha	240
70.	Paralakhemundi	Gajapati	Sana Radhakanta Matha	240
71.	Kurar	Nayagarh	Radha Mohan Matha	98
72.	Kurar	Nayagarh	Raghunath Temple	98

Source: Field Study made by the Scholar.

All the vaishnava centres in Odisha play an important role to cater the tourists from far and wide. Due to the tourist influx the vaishnava centres facilitate the best opportunity for employment generation in one hand. The other one is to enhance the foreign exchange in terms of economic development of the state in general and the condition of the people in particular. In 21st century a new concept that has been emerged progress through partnership is the motto of the vaishnava centres. It not only provides the platform for the economic stabilization of the state but also propel the socio-cultural understanding as well as transmigration of cultural bounties. From the architectural point of view all the vaishnava centres are well designed which includes the mathas, the temples, and the ashrams. Therefore the vaishnava centres in the medieval Odisha have been considered as the matrix socio, cultural, and religious pursuits as well as the determined force in the life of the Odias as well as the global people.

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