

## Jagannath Cult as The Odia Ways of Life: A Critical Study

Khiraabdi Choudhury

HOD, The Department of History,  
Mahanga Puspagiri College, Erakana, Cuttack.

**Abstract:** The people of Odisha and Bengal believe Lord Jagannath in the famous religious place Puri which is one of the four pious places of India. Actually the Jagannath culture was developed as cult in the eleventh century after receiving the royal patronage. It is one of the cults of the Hinduism and as the ways of life of the Odias.

**Keywords:** Jagannath Cult, Odia Ways of Life, Ways of Life, Odia

Jagannath cult has its special impact on the socio-religious life of Odias which is more scientific and secular in spirit than that of mere religious fundamentalism that is the uniqueness of this cult. The very substance and significance of the cult is that it believes and preaches for universal brotherhood, love, non-violence, religious tolerance and family intimacy. Both sociologists & historians who peruse their research on religion wonder finding this cult as the basic theme or synopsis of all the religions of the world. Jagannath cult is not a part of Hindu religion rather it is a way of life of the all Jagannath loving Odias, who are taught peace, prosperity, brotherhood, and religious tolerance, equality between men & women and anti-untouchability. *Anandabazar* is a place which prohibits untouchability. It is a place where a Brahmin can share his dish with a *Sudra*. That is the significance of religion. Another important socio-cultural aspect of Jagannath cult is that, the three deities Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra & Devi Subhadra come out side leaving their *Ratna Singhasana* to meet their devotees on occasion of Ratha yatra.

Everyday devotees go to the temple of Lord Jagannath, so to keep good relationship and to respect their devotees' Lord Jagannath come out of the temple to meet cores of his devotees. It is a wonderful union between the *bhaktas* & *bhagaban* in *Badadanda*. Such wonderful union between *bhakta* & *bhagban* in one face is not found in other religion. Jagannatha says, 'I control the fate chariot of all the people every days in a year & he allows his devotees to drag his own chariot of his brothers & sisters for one day that is on the occasion of *rathayatra*. It is the Jagannath cult where the *bhakta* & *bhagaban* interact with each other.

Jagannath cult is people friendly. It keep on some people engaging themselves throughout the year by observing festivals in each months, so that the mind & heart of the devotees could not be polluted, as a result they would enjoy a heavenly bliss on the earth. Out of the all functions, the most

important function of lord Jagannath is *Nabakalevara*. The word *Nabakalevara* means the change of maunden body of the three deities and getting their brahams transferred to the new bodies. It indicates that no one is Immortal in the earth if he may be god or human being. In the interval of every 19<sup>th</sup> years, *nabakalevara* falls during the religious occasion, the soul or brahmas of three deities are planted in the new erected deities. The significance of this ceremony is that lord Jagannath & his family members are like the other human beings who are their devotees.

Records show (*madalapanjee*) that nabakalevara has been celebrated since 1775, but the research scholar Bishnu Sharma says, it is even much before that. He cites some proofs that Nabakalevara was taking place even during the time of Prataprudradeva. Again there are ample evidences that Nabakalevara took place during the visit of Srichaitanya to puri in 1510. He came to Puri with rasagolla & gave them to Gajapati Prataparudradeva. Prataparudradeva was extremely glade eating rasagolla. He requested the chief priest to make it a *bhoga*, for lord Jagannath & his brothers and sisters. It is said that a group of senior priests rejected the request of king to make rasagollas entry to the temple for the king; they accepted rasagolla to make as a Prasad in the temple of goddess Lakshmi. As rasagolla was not an indigenous item its entry was restricted to the temple premises. In the same way potatoes, tomatoes, pumpkins, rose, jasmine are strictly prohibited to the temple premises. In this way Jagannath cult preserves the ancient culture of Odias & Odisha. One can distinguish easily became the indigenous food and the imported food simple by going through the *mahaprasad* or *abhada*.

*Abhada* is treated as Mahaprasad. Everybody is crazy for *abhada*, which is as ambrosia on the earth. A man thinks himself to be fortunate going through *abhada*. A morsel of *abhada* can purify a thought of an idea to the

highest level, so that he could immediately experience spiritual vibration inside him. In this way Jagannath cult has been inserted in the everyday activity of the Odia which is a religious constitution for each and everyone who are abiding it spontaneously and spiritually.

The Jagannath cult controls the socio-culture life of people entirely. When a baby is born, its birth card or *jataka* is framed in the name of lord Jagannath & the parents get the child surrendered to Him. They pray to the Gods to bless the child to serve Him throughout his life & at last breathe his last in *badadanda*. Every Odia wants to die in *badadanda* because it is the doorstep to heaven. People believe that who die near the temple premises they get *mokhya* or salvation. Their soul gets peace and it does not come to another body. Still now the rich and affordable people prefer to cremate the dead body of their nearest and dearest in the *Swargadwara* because the dead body soul could directly go to heaven. In Hindu religion there is a theory of *papa* & *punya*. Throughout the life man commits mistakes & sins in this way he earns insurmountable sins. Simply getting a single glance of lord Jagannath's face, treading the dust of *badadanda* & smearing it (dust) on forehead or once repeating the name of Jagannath at the time of death, a man gets rid of all his *papas* throughout his life. That is why the people are devoted to lord Jagannath, who renders *nirbanas* to his devotees in a simplest way. Most of the parents name their sons, grandsons, daughters and granddaughters after

Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Every Odia family has got such name, in a profit to get *nirabana* in case of calling their sons and daughters, whiling dying. If they call their son as Jaga or Balia, while suffering in the death bed, indirectly they repeated the name of Lord Jagannath. So in this way they can get rid of their entire *papas*. The parents call their sons and daughters Jaga, Balia & Subhadra every day in this way repeating the name in several times in a day, they earn *punyas*. It is the believes of the Jagannath cult. Consciously, subconsciously and unconsciously Odias are tied with Jagannath cult and the entire social system is based on it. Everyday's activity begins chanting the name of

Jagannath and ends in the same process. When a man goes outside of his home, he generally solutes Lord Jagannath to make his work successful. When he returns, he salutes dedicates his failure and success to him. For an Odia success and failure are the two fruits of work or *karma*. neither rolls on the ground for the failure what he gets either failure or success is everything for his blessing the devotees does not bother for any kind of accidents. He thinks that is done to him by the direction of lord Jagannath for his betterment. In this way he gets mental peace, even facing or great failure. If somebody dies premature people think, he is loved by the lord Jagannath, so he takes him to heaven. In this way Jagannath cult becomes a panacea to relieve people at the time of death of their nearer and dearer.

Jagannath cult is not a religion. In true sense of term it is the ways of life based on scientific reasons. The people who are true devotees of lord Jagannath, they are real rich. They are rich in peace, happiness & enjoying life, getting them absolutely free from tension. Odia life is deeply influenced by Jagannath cult, which is major part of life next to family.

Jagannath is very thing to the Odias so the cult is the ways of life here. The people are very much sensitive to the cult as the entire year is guided by the astrologer of Gajapati and the royal astrologer arranges the thirteen religious functions in the twelve months within a year. *The Orissa History* written by Professor H. Panda sheds a flood of light about the socio-cultural history of Lord Jagannath which constitutes the social and religious structures of Odias. The over religious sentimentality is the only reason which makes Odia as a race of peace loving. Always the Odias dedicate everything to Lord Jagannath who is in true sense of term as their protector that they believe. Such belief is strengthened by the Bhagabata, the legend of the origin of Lord Jagannath.

Jagannath cult and Odia are very much complementary and supplementary to each other. One cannot exist without others because this cult is already in the bold and cells of the Odias.

### Works Cited

- Panda, H. *The Orissa History*. Cuttack: Kitab Mahal,2002  
Das, Mannmath Nath. *Orissa History and Culture*. Ctuuack: Kitab Mahal,1090.