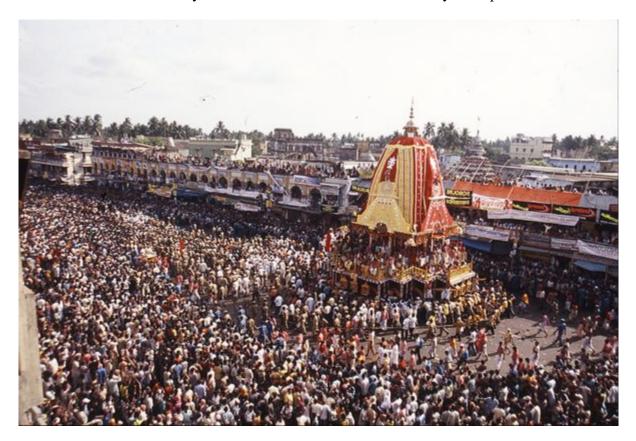**Ausschnitt aus Brill Online: Artikel „Odisha"**

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Religious Politics in Medieval Odisha: The Cult of *Jagannātha*

Inclusion – as a viable alternative to opposition – has been a technique to avoid religious conflict throughout the religious history of Odisha. The most striking result of this technique is the famous cult of *Jagannātha* (von Stietencron, 1977). This is a 12th-century successful attempt to control the basic rivalry among the Śaiva, Śakta, and Vaiṣṇava communities of Odisha by juxtaposing the gods of all three of them on a common ritual platform and claiming a brother- sister relationship among them. Śiva, whose color is white, is considered identical with Balabhadra or Balarāma, the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa, whose color is also white and who takes the first place in the *Jagannātha* triad, followed by his considerably smaller sister Subhadrā in yellowish colors. Next to her, as tall as his brother but black in color, is Kṛṣṇa. The three images have only stumps for arms. They are wooden blocks, given only minimal indication of human form. Yet their prominent painted eyes that directly confront the visitor leave no doubt that the deity takes note of the devotees and is ready to respond to their needs.

This triad testifies to the Vaiṣṇava character of the deity of Puri. But since Balarāma evokes also Śaiva associations, and Subhadrā stands for the Great Goddess, the triad does indeed represent the three major religious strands of medieval Hinduism. At the same time, the roughly hewn form of the three wooden figures evokes the characteristic form of deities prevalent in tribal Odisha. Evidently, such an unusually rough shape of well-known Hindu deities functions as a deliberate attempt also to integrate tribal religion into the cult of *Jagannātha* – an aspect that is reflected further by the inclusion of descendants of a tribal

priest in the *Jagannātha* priesthood. Consequently – and unique among the major temples of pan-Indian fame – priests of tribal origin are joined with Brahmans in the performance of ritual of the Puri temple (see Dash, 1978). The worship of the god follows an elaborate ritual scheme that is based on the temple's huge economic resources (Tripathi, 2004; Rösel, 1980).

The worship of Lord *Jagannātha*, the "Lord of the World," was a privilege of the kings of Odisha. The rulers of feudal states had to be content with installing only one deity out of the *Jagannātha* triad in their temples, usually either Kṛṣṇa or Balarāma, since a goddess protecting their territory already had her place of worship in the feudal state. In most cases, it was Kṛṣṇa in his wooden shape that was selected for worship by the feudatory chiefs. This single god is often called Dadhibāmana, a reference to the child Kṛṣṇa as a butter thief. He can also be called Patitapābana: "(The Lord) Who Purifies the Fallen Ones." As such, he was also placed in a niche outside the gate of the *Jagannātha* Temple to be seen and worshiped by those who were too impure to be allowed into the temple. This was the case even with the king of Puri when he had been a prisoner of the Muslim governor in Cuttack. There he fell in love with the governor's daughter – an affair that the Puri Brahmans were not prepared to tolerate. The king's exclusion from the temple did not, of course, last forever. A purifying ritual was performed. There is always a way out of an untenable situation.

The process of religious integration of Śiva, Devī, and Viṣṇu into a common temple and onto the same altar was rendered even more revolutionary by the choice of material: instead of the smooth bluish-black *muguni* stone that had hitherto been used for images of gods, the three deities in the *Jagannātha* Temple are made of wood. This fact links them to a tradition of the Ādivāsi (i.e. tribal) population of Odisha. The tribal religious practice included the erection of wooden poles to mark the places where communication with gods or ancestors could be successfully achieved. Long wooden poles were – and still are – used to represent various tribal deities from different villages when at festival time they come to meet on a common festival ground.

The three wooden images of Lord *Jagannātha* are but roughly shaped. Their form is abstract: with huge head and prominent (painted) eyes, they have only stumps for arms, no hands. Together, as a triad, the three major deities of Odisha have thus been given a tribal aspect while at the same time retaining their individual Śaiva, Śakta, and Vaiṣṇava connotation under an overall Vaiṣṇava vision of the lord of the world (von Stietencron, 1978). The crude shape of the *Jagannātha* figures receives its final form by the addition of many layers of cloth soaked in chalk and refined with raisin and sandalwood. The last cover consists of several layers of paint. The god's resulting characteristic appearance, though, is not resistant to water. The yearly bath festival (*snānayātrā*), during which 108 pots of water are poured over the deity, has a destructive effect on the images, damaging their appearance to a considerable degree. The god is consequently declared to have fallen sick with fever for a couple of days. This is the *anavasara* period (period during which the deities are not available for public view), during which the *daita*s (priests regarded as descendants of the original tribal worshippers of *Jagannātha*) are kept busy "healing" the three images of the lord. The outer shape of the images is renewed and freshly painted, so that the gods reappear in the freshness of youth. The final touch is again the opening of the eyes, which is done with fresh paint. Only from that moment onwards are the deities again able to act. It is the renewal of their big, round eyes with their black pupils that restores the possibility of *darśana*, or visual communication with their devotees.

Thus restored and newly dressed, the three deities each mount a separate wooden chariot (*ratha*) with many wheels. Each of them resembles a temple, its shape formed with bamboo

and cloth. These movable temples are pulled by hundreds of devotees along the main road in Puri to the Guṇḍīca Temple. Thousands of people accompany this procession of the gods. At its beginning, the Gajapati king of Puri has two duties to fulfill. Before they start the procession, he symbolically sweeps the upper front portion of Lord Jagannātha's chariot with a golden broom. He also gives the sign to start the procession by touching with his forehead the rear of the chariot of Balabhadra who, as the elder brother, has the privilege of leading the procession. At their destination, the Guṇḍīca Temple, the deities remain for seven days and can be worshipped by the devotees. After their return to the main temple, they are again decorated with costly ornaments and a crown, with hands and feet also being added on this occasion.

Since the *Jagannātha* images are made of wood instead of stone, they are subject to decay and require periodical replacement. This is the case after an interval of 12 to 19 years, when the coordination of the solar and lunar year requires the insertion of an intercalary, leap month. In the month of *āṣāḍha* (Jun–Jul), an "extra *āṣāḍha*" is added after the first fortnight. This provides for enough time to make a "new body" (*navakalevara*) of the lord (Tripathi, 1978; Hardenberg, 1999). All the three images of the lord plus his disc weapon Sudarśana need to be replaced. For this purpose, adequate *nīm* trees (neem; bot. Azadirachta indica) have to be found that show the typical signs of Viṣṇu: the disc and the conch, a separate one for each image. The trees must be devoid of any defect, and the search party goes all the way to Kakatpur (approx. 80 km farther east as the crow flies, but reachable only after a major detour) to request the goddess Maṅgalā to reveal in a dream the right direction for a successful search.

When the trees have been found, the spirits living in them are invoked and requested to leave the trees before these are cut and transported back to Puri. There the four new images of Balabhadra, *Jagannātha*, Subhadrā, and Sudarśana are roughly carved during the intercalary month, Sudarśana being represented by a wooden pole with a *cakra* (discus) on top. When the crude wooden shape of the new bodies is ready, the *brahmapadārtha*, the soul substance of the deities, is transferred from a cavern in the old images to a similar one in the new ones. Thereafter, the process of shaping the new images by layers of cloth and raisin is completed, and the bodies are freshly painted. The final touch consists in painting the eyes, which makes the image accessible to worship. With the consecration of the images, the gods are in command of their new bodies and ready to confront thousands of devotees again. The old images receive a burial in the northern section of the *Jagannātha* Temple compound. During these renewal rituals, the *daita* priests and Patimahāpatra, as descendants and half-descendants of the former Śabara (tribal) worshipper Viśvāvasu, play a prominent role, along with the *rājguru*, the chief Brahman priest.

The *Jagannātha* Temple maintains an India-wide network organized by the *paṇḍā*s or pilgrim guides, who receive and guide pilgrims from all parts of India and look after their lodgings and food in Puri itself. These *paṇḍā*s, in many cases, keep records of the families of their clients over generations. Such records are valuable historical documents and provide insights into the pan-Indian fame and attraction of *Jagannātha*, as well as of pilgrimage routes and the changes brought about by political conditions and new forms of traffic.

In historical perspective, *Jagannātha* is the final result of a royal attempt to place the country under the protection of the three major deities of Odisha and to end communal rivalries among the Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇava communities of their realm. This policy proved to be successful. In spite of major difficulties in times of Muslim aggression, when the triad of

Jagannātha had to be rescued several times from capture and destruction, not only has the cult survived but the god came to be seen as a national symbol of Odisha (Kulke, 1975).

The deities Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Devī have, of course, temples in almost every village in Odisha. They all have their own cult and ritual tradition. They were peaceful rivals, each having a separate temple, a separate theology, and different myths. Sometimes, but by no means always, they were worshipped by a different set of devotees. The forms of their images were subject to changing taste and skills, and devotees could use the rich treasure of Hindu myths to depict these gods in calm hieratic pose or in action. In the case of Śiva, this applies only to representations of the god on the outer temple walls. In the shrine room, Śiva is always worshiped in the shape of a *liṅga* (emblem of Śiva) that rises from a female womb (*yoni*). Images of Viṣṇu usually show the god with four arms, standing in a hieratic posture, wearing a crown, and holding discus (*cakra*), conch (*śaṅkha*), mace (*gadā*), and lotus (*padma*) in his hands. But images showing him seated, with his consort Lakṣmī (the goddess of wealth and luck) sitting on his lap are also frequent and are known as Puruṣottama, the highest being. These are masterpieces of traditional Hindu sculpture and are all the more remarkable for the subsequent sudden shift away from classical Hindu art and iconography to represent Viṣṇu or rather Kṛṣṇa in the crude form of a wooden log with painted eyes.

Developments in the sculptural presentation of Śiva, by contrast, do not take place in the sanctum of the temple where the *liṅga* offers only restricted scope for innovation. They occur on the body of the temple with the dancing Śiva often in a dominant position above the main entrance to the sanctum. Ekapādabhairava, a one-footed form of Śiva representing the sacrificial fire with its capacity to link heaven and earth, becomes an important addition to the Śaiva religious imagery, and representations of Śaiva ascetics on the temple walls show members of the Pāśupata sect and its deified spiritual founder Lakulīśa, who is considered an incarnation of Śiva.

Bhakti and Caitanya

In early 16th-century Odisha, the town of Puri and soon the entire coastal belt of Odisha witnessed a new religious development. Coming from Nabadwip (Navadvipa) in southern Bengal, Caitanya (1486–1533) and his followers brought an ecstatic and highly emotional form of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa devotion (*bhakti*) to the streets and the shore of Puri. Singing and rapt in ecstatic dance, they would move in groups on the main road and in front of the temple of *Jagannātha* or collapse in a swoon on the road. These *bhakta*s considered themselves to be in the role of Kṛṣṇa's beloved Rādhā, and in their intense love of the lord, they hoped to reach him in his paradise Goloka.

The Caitanya movement was one of several forms of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* that had its roots in the teachings of the philosopher Madhva (1238–1317) and swept across central and northern India during this period. It was the idyllic Vrindavan on the northern bank of the Yamunā River where Kṛṣṇa had spent his childhood and youth that inspired the religious imagination and the theology that arose from it. Rūpa Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī, and Sanātana Gosvāmī provided this influential ecstatic movement with its theology as embedded in important new Vaiṣṇava scriptures. Temples, monasteries, festivals, and rituals of the Caitanya tradition dedicated to the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa have been a persistent feature of the cultural and religious landscape of Odisha up to the present day. In this religious movement, a whole spectrum of new and ecstatic religious expression became popular. It includes religious performances such as communal singing, reciting poems, and singing praise songs (*kīrtan*), as well as a rich body of Sanskrit and Oriya devotional literature (Malinar, 2004). The followers

of this movement were – and still are – dedicated to a consciously religious life or have become monks in a monastic institution (*maṭha*). *Bhakti*, devotion, plays the central role in their life and thus constitutes one of the most important dimensions of Vaiṣṇava religion in Odisha. The result is a form of religious awareness that looks back at quite a long history of dissemination and theological elaboration. The *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (see *purāṇa*s) are amongst the most popular religious texts in Odisha, especially the Oriya version of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. This text was composed by *Jagannātha* Dāsa in the 16th century and is regularly recited during festivals. Another highly influential text that explores the loveplay between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* (late 12th cent.), the author of which is claimed to have lived in Orissa. This poem sets the paradigm for emulating the aesthetics and the sentiments of love within the framework of religious practices.

The emphasis on devotional sentiments and the new theological concepts regarding the transformative power of *bhakti* were essential for the religious communities following the saint and teacher Caitanya. Caitanya himself was very much engaged in theological writing, but rather focused on propagating the recitation of the name of god (*kīrtana*, singing or *japa*, more or less silent mumuring) as the only way to salvation in the present age of decline, the *kaliyuga* (see cosmic cycles). This is also emphasized in the only text ascribed to him, a devotional poem comprising eight stanzas, the *Śikṣāṣṭaka*. Caitanya and his ecstatic followers seem to have also impressed King Pratāparudra Deva (1497–1540). Some of the oldest temples and monasteries of Caitanya's followers, such as the Rādhākānta Maṭha, were established under his reign and probably with his support. The rise of the Caitanya movement coincides with the political decline of Odisha during the reign of Pratāparudra Deva. He was defeated by the king of Vijayanagara, and shortly afterwards, in 1568, the *Jagannātha* Temple was plundered by the Afghan general Kalapahar. Odisha came under the control of the sultan of Bengal. The Caitanya movement as well as other forms of emotional and highly aesthetic Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worship were quite successful, especially in coastal Odisha and in some districts such as Mayurbanj, Ganjam, and Balasore. This can be seen in the dissemination of temples and monasteries in these areas that testify to a history of patronage and support (Malinar, 2007). The surge of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* after Caitanya also helped to popularize the identification of *Jagannātha* with Kṛṣṇa, which had already been claimed in the Vaiṣṇava tradition of Pāñcarātra and the writings of the philosopher-theologian Rāmānuja (12th cent.).

Following Caitanya, another group of poet-saints that became important for *bhakti* traditions in Odisha, are the *pañcasakha*s, the "five companions", who were regarded as being Caitanya's contemporaries and companions from Odisha. Therefore, they are sometimes addressed as the "Oriya Vaiṣṇavas" (Mukherjee, 1940). The group comprises the following *bhakti* teachers, each following his own perspective and theological positions:

1. Balarāma Dāsa (born at the end of the 15th cent.) is the author of the Oriya version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and several theological poems (*gītā*s) in which he stresses the importance of worshipping *Jagannātha*;
2. *Jagannātha* Dāsa (early 16th cent.) was born in a village near Puri and became renowned for his Oriya adaptation of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. His followers constitute the Atibāḍi lineage of the Caitanya tradition and are in charge of some of the oldest monasteries (*maṭha*s) in Puri;
3. Acyutānanda Dāsa was born at the beginning of the 16th century in a village near Cuttack and is venerated by a community of followers who run several monastic institutions and annually gather for a major festival at his *samādhi* (burial place). He is the author of an Oriya *Harivaṃśa* and of several theological-philosophical treatises, of which the *Śūnyasaṃhitā* is the most popular. He teaches a unique combination of *bhakti* concepts and Buddhist ideas, like the "emptiness" of the highest being. Most influential also in contemporary Odisha is a

text corpus of "prophesies" (*mālikā*) that are consulted in different life situations;
4. Yaśovanta Dāsa (16th cent.) has become famous as the author of the *Premagītā*, an adaptation of the *Bhagavadgītā* with strong emphasis on *yoga*; and
5. Anantdās (16th cent.) is part of the group as the author of several *yoga* treatises, but has not become the center of a religious tradition.

Important and influential in the next centuries, the *bhakti* ideas spread also into the tribal communities of Odisha and in the mid-19th century resulted in the emergence of a new religious community, the Mahima Dharma and of Bhima Bhoi as one its most important teachers. Bhima Bhoi (1847–1895) was born into a poor family of the Khond, a tribal community. He became the disciple of Mahima Swami, a religious leader and founder of Mahima Dharma, a religious community stressing the practices of *bhakti* towards a highest being that transcends all qualifications. In this way, Mahima Dharma and the poems of Bhima Bhoi are connected especially to the teachings of Acyutanandadāsa. A strong emphasis is placed on following certain ethical norms such as honesty, modesty, vegetarianism, and the rejection of alcohol. Bhima Bhoi's perspective and his social work were also influenced by the Odisha famine in 1866, which is also a topic in his religious poetry. He is regarded as a saint, not only amongst the tribal communities, but also all over Odisha, and his followers have established different branches and monastic institutions (Eschmann, 1978).

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