

Jagannatha Dhama of India: A Study on History and Culture

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Abstract: Jagannath Dhama popularly known as Puri, is famous for its historic antiquities and religious sanctuaries in India. It is considered by millions of Hindus as one of the four Dhamas of India. This place is also well-known throughout the world for the celebrated temple of Lord Jagannatha. In fact, Jagannath Dhamahad also been maintaining itself as a stronghold place of Hinduism in India before the establishment of the Muslim rule in northern India. A good number of temples and mathas of medieval and modern periods are found to be established in the different parts of the Puri town. As a sacred place, this Dhama has been maintaining its highest pitch of glory from time immemorial to till today. So, from the cultural point of view, it is very interesting study for scholars of history. The aim of this paper is to study the history and culture of the Jagannatha Dhama of India in detail. Methodologically, both the primary and secondary sources have been used here to access the historical and cultural importance of Jagannatha Dhama of Odisha in Eastern India.

Keywords: Jagannatha, Dhama, religion, culture, Puri, Odisha, India.

Abbreviations: JASB: Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, OHRJ: Orissa Historical Research Journal

1. INTRODUCTION

Puri, the famous seat of Lord Jagannatha, is not only famous as the holy place of India but its surrounding is also treated as grand and splendid in the whole of world. The place of Puri is popularly known as Jagannatha Dhama, which became one of the four religious domains of India. It is situated on Latitude $19^{\circ} 47^{\text{m}} 55^{\text{s}}$ North and Longitude $85^{\circ} 49^{\text{m}} 5^{\text{s}}$ East) in the state of Odisha.¹JagannathaDhama is exactly located about 59 kms. to the south-east of Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha. The Jagannatha Dhama is famous for its historic remains and religious sanctuaries in India. It is also well-known throughout the world for the celebrated temple of Lord Jagannatha, which stands on a prominent place near the sea-shore. This seaside *tirtha* by the wave lashed shore of the Bay of Bengal is an important sacred places of India. Odisha is like a lotus in the lake of *Bharatavarsha* and the site of Jagannatha temple is the heart of the flower.²Besides the Jagannatha temple, there are also a number of temples and *mathas* (monasteries) noticed in the different parts of the Puri town. The place of Jagannatha Dhamais one of the important cultural centers of Odisha and it is also well known throughout India as a place of pilgrimage from the time of Yore.³Dhamais called the sacred abode of Lord Vishnu or one of his *avatars*. The PuriDhama boasts of a continuous history from the third century BC to the present day and its unique monument like that of Jagannatha is famous in the world. Millions of pilgrims and tourists from all over India and abroad come to visit this holy place.⁴This article attempts to focus on history and culture of Jagannatha Dhama of India.

2. METHODOLOGY

Both the primary and secondary source materials have been used in the writing of this article. The primary data have been collected through the practical observation, public opinions, hearsay accounts and interview methods during the period of experimental field survey. Photographs have also been taken from the most of the temples of the *kshetra* except those in the premises of Lord Jagannatha temple. The collected data with regard to the dates of temples are based on practical observations and the hearsay accounts through respondents. The data relating to the present work are *Books, Magazines, Reviews, Journals, Periodicals, Texts, Proceedings, Manuscripts, Encyclopaedias,*

Antiquities, Records, Reports, and unpublished theses, which are available at the different educational institutions. The primary sources are mainly the archaeological sources, literary sources (*Puranas, Texts*), *Gazetteers*, on the spot study, public opinions, hearsay accounts of respondents, practical observations etc.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Historicity of Jagannatha Dhama

In the past the place of present Jagannatha temple was said as PurusottamaKshetra (Puri). In fact, the Jagannatha Dhama is a coordinating place where all the Hindu gods and goddesses are worshipped. The main Jagannatha temple is situated in the centre of the *kshetra* and around it are a number of streets (*sahis*). The place of Puri town is covered by the traditional seven *sahis*, which are mostly inhabited by the priests and other *sevakas* of Lord Jagannatha temple. It may be the nucleus and as L.S.S.O' Malley has aptly referred that it has spread out somewhat in the shape of fan.⁵ The traditional *sahis* of the *kshetra* are Harachandisahi on the west, Bali sahi on the south, Dolamandapasahi and Mochisahi on the east, Markandesvarasahi and Cudangasahi on the north and so on .

The earlier name of Jagannatha Dhama was *Nilachala* (Blue-Hill), on which the present Jagannatha temple stands. ⁶The name *Nilachala* however, is not now in common use. It is one of the fascinating aspects of the cultural history of Odisha that religion became the part of Odishan kingship. The early development of this relationship can be traced back to the Somavamsi period. It is said that in order to strengthen and legitimize their rule in the Puri region, which was then known as Purusottamakshetra, the rulers have utilized the religious faith of the people upon Lord Purusottama. The word 'Purusottama' is the name of the divinity, the noblest male deity of this *kshetra*. After the construction of great temple of Lord Purusottama at this *kshetra*, the place became famous as the abode of Lord Purusottama or Purusottamakshetra. In the *Nagari Copper plate charter* of Anangabhima Deva-III dated *Saka* year 1152 i.e. corresponding to 1230 A.D., the place is recorded as Purusottamakshetra.⁷

During the reign of Anangabhima Deva III (1211 to 1238 A.D.), the presiding deity Purusottama was called as Jagannatha, the Lord of the world. The *Kurmesvara temple inscription* (dated 1230 A.D.) is the first record (so far known to us) to refer Jagannatha as the presiding deity of the *kshetra*.⁸ This inscription also clearly refers to SriJagannatha as the real king of Ganga kingdom and Anangabhima Deva-III as the *Rout* or deputy of Lord Jagannatha. The name was changed from Purusottama to Jagannatha to suit the different sections of religious beliefs such as Buddhists, Jainas, Shaivas, Vaisnavas and Shaktas. At that time, Muslim powers of the frontiers of Ganga kingdom were powerful and called the Ganga kingdom as the *kshetra* of Jagannatha. After the complete occupation of Odisha by British in 1803 A.D., the British officials recorded it (*kshetra*) as the city of Jugarnath. Initially, the *kshetra* was also recorded as Purusottama by them but in later period they recorded it in various names such as *Jekarnat, Juggernaut, Juggarnath-poore* etc.

Sir Thomas Roe, who visited India during the reign of emperor Jahangir (1603 A.D. - 1627 A.D.), has described to the place as the chief city called 'Jekarnat'. Similarly an English visitor William Bruston, who came here (Puri) in 1633 A.D., has called it 'the great city of Juggarnat'. William Hamilton in his 'Description of Hindostan' written in 1820 A.D. mentions the city as *Juggarnath, Juggannath-poore* and *Poore*. While Andrew Stirling has referred to it both as *Jugarnath-Poore* and simply *Poore*.⁹ L.S.S.O' Malley writes 'Evidently, therefore, the later name commended itself to popular taste as a handy abbreviation and displaced the older and more correct name Jagannatha, the Lord of the world, whose temple has made the town famous throughout India.¹⁰ The present name of this *kshetra* (Puri), which seems to have been derived from the British recorded word i.e. *Jugarnath-poore*. So this place is popularly known as Jagannatha-Puri in the whole of India.

3.2. Sanctity Of Jagannatha Dhama

The sanctity of the place of Purusottama (Jagannatha) exists from the prehistoric period, where the tradition cannot reach.¹¹ In the *Mahabharata, Vanaparva*, there is a reference to the site of Purusottamakshetra, which has been mentioned as the place of *Yajurvedi* which is near the sea in Kalinga.¹² Jagannatha is found mentioned in the chapter entitled 'UttaraKhanda' of the epic *Ramayana*, where Lord Rama asks Vibhisana to worship Jagannatha, who is the family deity of the Ikshyavaku dynasty.¹³ The glory and sanctity of Lord Purusottama and its *kshetra* also find mention in many works.

From the very beginning, this holy place has been dominating by the different religious sects, such as Buddhists, Shaivas, Shaktas, Vaishnavas, etc. According to Robert Dunbar, Puri (Purusottamakshetra) is the Mecca of the righteous Hindus, one of the original strongholds of Buddhism and the home of Juggarnath, the 'Lord of the world'.¹⁴ Due to the cultural importance, this site attracts to the orientologists, scholars, archaeologists and antiquarians. It is an interesting place, which few cities can boast.

It was generally believed that the temple of Purusottama (Jagannatha) was built over a Buddhist Stupa. Puri seems to have been an intermediate place of pilgrimage, where the pilgrims from Ceylon used to stay here for going to Bihar, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.¹⁵ William Hunter says that 'Juggarnath, the presiding deity of the kshetra, represents with unmistakable clearness that coalition of Brahmana and Buddhist doctrines, which forms the basis of Vishnu Worship'.¹⁶

The prior to the advent of Vaishnavism, however, the place of Puri was a *ShaktaPitha* as substantiated both by literary records as lists of ShaktaPithas in Tantric Texts and by archaeological evidences. H.V.Stietencron has pointed out that Vimala as the presiding deity and her temple was situated on Nilacala.¹⁷ Both Jagannatha and Goddess Vimala are the presiding deities of that kshetra.¹⁸

In respect to archaeological evidence, some of the most important Shakta images in this kshetra are the SaptaMatrikas, presently preserved in a modern shrine on the edge of the Markandesvara tank, assignable to the late 10th century AD. The Shakta environment of Jagannatha Dhama is also apparent in the belief that the Jagannatha temple is protected by *astashaktis* namely, SarvaMangala, Ardhasini, DakshiniKalika, BattaMangala, Vimala, AlamChandi, Marchika and Harachandi.¹⁹ Other minor Shakta shrines of the Dhama are Lakshmi, Syamakali, Indrani, Rama Chandi, Bhubanesvari, Durga, etc.

The popularity of the Puri increased after the construction of a grand temple of Purusottama (Jagannatha) by Chodaganga Deva, the founder of the Ganga dynasty of Orissa.²⁰ The Copper plate charters of his successors record that the construction work of the present temple for the God Purusottama was initiated by Gangesvara i.e. Chodaganga Deva (1077 AD to 1147 AD). The earliest reference to the construction of the present great temple of Purusottama is found in the Dasagoba charter of Rajaraj-III dated 1198 AD.²¹ The construction work of the present great temple Lord Jagannatha was carried on by his successors and lastly it was finished in the last decade of 12th century by Anangabhima Deva II. After one hundred years of the initiation of the construction work of the present great temple, Anangabhima Deva-III, the Ganga ruler consecrated the great temple of Sri Purusottam at Puri.²² The temple of Lord Jagannath is the best example of *Kalinga style* of architecture of Odisha in Eastern India. The style of Jagannath temple follows the *Nagara style* of temple architecture of north India but with some beautiful variation. The heart of Puri town is the great Jagannatha temple, which stands at one end of the *BadaDanda* or the Grand Road. In the sanctum (*garbhagriha*), Jagannath is the presiding deity. At Puri, Jagannatha, who is an aspect of Vishnu, the Lord of world, is worshipped as Lord Krishna, the eighth *avatara* of Vishnu.²³ In Odisha, Sri Jagannatha temple of Puri is popularly known as *Srimandira*.

Navakalevara is the most important ceremony of Lord Jagannatha of Puri in Eastern India. The word 'Navakalevara', which literally means 'New Body' is made out of a newly cut Neem tree. The newly made wooden images of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sudarsana of the Jagannatha temple are traditionally celebrated by *Daitas* Navakalevara. Particularly, the *suddhasavaras* (*Daitas*) are permitted to perform some rituals in the Jagannatha temple mainly at the time of Navakalevara festival. The Navakalevara ceremony of Puri Jagannatha temple is the prominent ritual, which is not found prevailed in any other Vishnu temples of India. Sri Jagannatha temple of Puri is popularly known as *Srimandira*. The *Chaturdhamurtis* on the 'Ratnasimhasana' of *Srimandira* i.e. Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana are prepared out of Neem wood, which is the best wood available for making divine images.²⁴ As per the *Silpasastras*, the wooden images of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana are required to be renewed from time to time. The Navakalevara ceremony is the periodical renewal of the *DaruDevatas* of the 'ChaturdhaMurtis' of Puri Srimandira. On the basis of tradition, the Navakalevara (New Body) ceremony is observed like the life of human being's event of "death and re-birth" of Lord Jagannatha. Generally, the Navakalevara ceremony of Lord Jagannatha of Puri is observed in every 12 to 19 years accordingly the astrological calculation. Looking at their rough hewn style, scholars feel that originally the icons were tribal deities that were absorbed into the Hindu pantheon and the main icon was

transformed into an *avatar* of Vishnu.²⁵ The myth of Lord Jagannatha indicates the tribal origin. Navakalevara ceremony of Lord Jagannatha of Puri is the symbolic of the traditional Vedic worship mixed with tribal worship of India.

The ceremonies of Lord Jagannatha temple have fascinated visitors for centuries. The famous *RathaYatra* of Lord Jagannath is observed in the month of *Ashadha* in June/July, just as the first monsoon rains begin to fall over the land. Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra ride in chariots (*rathas*) with brightly coloured canopies, majestically moving down the road to the sound of conches, bells, drums, and chanting of *mantras*.²⁶ Large numbers of pilgrims arrive and this huge crowded chaotic festival has justified the word 'Juggernaut'. At the time of *RathaYatra*, non-Hindus can see the images of Jagannath Trinity. Jagannath's chariot is named *Nandighosh*, which is canopied by the wheel of the *Sudarsana Chakra*. Balabhadra's chariot is said *Taladhvaja*. Devi Subhadra travels in the 12 wheeled *Padmadhvaja (Devadalana) ratha* with a red and black canopy. The duration of the *RathaYatra* festival is for 10 days starting from the 2nd to the 10th day of the *shuklapaksha*, the bright fortnight of *Ashadha*, in June/ July.

Puri town is studded with minor places of architectural or antiquarian importance. The main attention has been so exclusively immersed by Jagannatha temple that little has been done for any other sacred spots. There are, however, a great number of insignificant small temples, which enjoy the reputation of considerable sanctity. Among these the most noted are the eight Shaiva shrines. They are viz. Markandesvara, Yamesvara, Nilakanthesvara, Belesvara, Kapalamocana, Vilvesara, Isanesvara and Patalesvara.²⁷ W.W. Hunter records the existence of temples dedicated to the worship of Siva and his female energy in their sixteen different manifestations in the kshetra of Purusottama. The male *Sambhus* are represented by the images of Markendesvara, Kapalamochana, Lokanatha, Yamesvara, Nilakanthesvara, Trilochana, Bhutesvara and Patalesvara; the female chandis have the names of Mangala, Vimala, SarvaMangala, Kali, Dhatri, Kamakshya, Ardhaasti and Bhavani.²⁸ The place of Puri is one of the greatest centres of Vaishnava worship. Though the kshetra primarily associated with Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha), it contains a number of temples sacred to the worship of all other Principal deities in the Hindu religion.²⁹ The minor Vaishnava shrines of the kshetra are viz. Narasimha, Nilamadhava, Narayana, Sakhi-Gopinatha, Yajna-Narayana, Gopinath, BenuMadhava, etc. Other miscellaneous temples, which are dedicated to different sects such as Gundicha, SuryaNarayana, Siddha Mahavira, DariaMahavira, Ganesha, etc. The pious Hindus also do visit the above sacred shrines of the Dhama of Lord Jagannatha.

A larger numbers of *mathas* or religious monasteries belonging to the different sects are also established at the place of Jagannatha Dhama. According to *Madalapanji*, the palm leaf chronicle of the temple of Lord Jagannatha, the *mathas* were originally founded with the purpose of imparting education to disciples and give shelter to pilgrims, feeding travellers, ascetics and Beggars.³⁰ The main purpose of the establishment of *mathas* is to impart religious instructions to the disciples and generally of encouraging a religious life.³¹ But the *mathas* of Puri were originated and developed as inseparable institutions, traditionally associated with the worship of Purusottama or Jagannatha. It is said that in the 8th century AD, Sankaracharya established the first *mathas* at Puri.

According to tradition, Sankaracharya (788-820 AD) in course of his spiritual conquest of the whole of India, stayed at this kshetra (Puri), which was well-known by that time as a chief centre of religion and culture. He founded one of his four *pithas* called Govardhanapitha here, which has remained in existence till today.³² This pitha is now called as Govardhanamatha of Puri.

Being attracted by this far-famed place, Ramanuja Acharya also came to this kshetra during the reign of Chodaganga Dava. He was also interested to establish a pitha at Purusottamakshetra like the great Sankaracharya. The visit of Ramanuja to Puri is also indirectly proved by the existence of two *mathas* there, one namely Ramanujamatha, which is said to have been founded by himself and the other being Emaramatha, which is attributed to Govinda, the favourite disciple of Ramanuja.

Nimbark, another great Vaishnava preacher of South, who lived a few years after Ramanuja is said to have visited to this kshetra to establish a seat on his religious faith here. Out of the five important *mathas* of Puri, one is RadhaVallabha for the sect of Nimbarka. Jayadeva, the famous poet, who was a follower of Nimbarka wrote his famous *Gita-Govinda* with staying at this *matha*.

Madhava Acharya or Tirtha, the latest of the four famous Vaishnava preachers of South India is also said to have visited Puri during reign of Narasimha Deva I (1238-1264 AD), the Eastern Ganga king

of Orissa. Sri Ramananda also visited Puri in the 14th century AD. He established a training centre at Puri to train young people in order to protect the temple of Jagannatha from Muslim attack. During the reign of King Prataparudra Deva, Sri Chaitanya from Bengal came to Jagannatha-Puri. He stayed in this *kshetra* for a period of 24 years out of which he traveled for only 6 years to Mathura and Vrindavana respectively. He was staying at KasiMisralaya, which is called as Radhakantamatha at present. Nanak, the Guru of Sikh religion also visited to Puri and established Baulimatha and Mangumatha here. Tulasi Das, the great saint of north India also came to Puri.

Other *mathas* like Sri Ramadasamatha, Uttaraparsvamatha, Siddhesvaramatha, Odiamatha, Siddhavakulamatha, Rmjimatha, etc. are noticed in the Puritown. After the establishment of *mathas* in this place, a large number of devotees and travelers from all over India as well as abroad came to visit Puri as a sacred place of Hinduism in eastern part of India.

3.3. Cultural significance of Jagannatha Dhama

A group of tribals are found to be resided at the place of Puri town and they are associated with various festivals and ceremonies of Lord Jagannatha.³³ The Brahmins hold on the daily rituals but Shabars involve in many of the rituals and festivals. They search for the neem trees for carving and painting the new images and playing a major role during the Car festival.³⁴ This Shabar servants of Lord Jagannatha are called *Daitas*. The *kshetra* of Jagannatha is commonly inhabited by priests as well as other *sevakas* of Lord Jagannatha. Probably people of all castes reside in the different parts of the *kshetra*. According to tradition, people of the Kalingan society have been worshipping three gods viz the home deity, the village deity and the mass deity.³⁵ The Mother goddess of home who protects the family. She stays in a secret place of the residence. On each and every auspicious occasion she is to be worshipped first. Another deity is the village deity who is worshipped by the entire villagers. This deity generally resides in the boarder of the village. Besides these two types of deities another deity named mass deity i.e. 'Rastra Devata' or *Loka Devata* was being worshipped with deep reverence as the god of state. He was worshipped by the entire population of the state irrespective of caste, creed and colour. He is above all deities and also worshipped in the concept of a human being. That is why; He is a Greatman or Purusottama (Jagannatha). This *Devata* required a large number of *sevakas* known as *Niyogas* (*sevakas*). According to *Madalapanji*, the temple chronicle of Lord Jagannatha written in Odia language, king Anangabhima Deva III of the Ganga dynasty had established 36 *Niyogas* known as *Chhatisa Niyoga*.³⁶ The term *Chhatisa-Niyoga* refers to thirty-six categories of servants (*sevakas*) employed in the service of Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha). Infact, at present Lord Jagannatha is being worshipped by the thirty-six categories of people (*Chhatisa Niyogas*) as it is assumed that there were 36 categories of people present in *Srikshetra* and its vicinity. People of the Puritown were divided into thirty-six categories as per their occupations. The names of all categories are mentioned below.

They are such as *Rajguru* (Brahmin), *Purohita* (temple priest), *Mahajana*, *Khuntia* (who watches the deities), *Mekap* (in charge of store), *Padhiari* (in charge of guarding the temple), *Daita* (in charge of *Anabasara* and *Navakalevara*), *Paika* (soldier), *Sunari* (goldsmith), *Kacara* (bangler), *Gudia* (sweet man), *Teli* (oil man), *chitrakara* (painter), *Bauri*, *Bhandari* (barber), *Gauda* (milk man), *Mali* (florist), *Liari*, *Pandari*, *Kumbhara* (soil pot maker), *Paöara* (maker of Silk cloth), *Keuöa* (fisherman), *Kansari* (brazier), *Roul*, *Dhoba* (washer man), *Badhei* (carpenter), *Halua* (cultivator), *Sahukar* (shop keeper), *Matia* (labour), *Hadua* (salesman), *Gola* (preserver), *Bindhani* (blacksmith), *Khandayata* (soldier), *Nayak* (astrologer), *Bhoi* (lower caste) and *Dora*.

In the past, Devadasi system / tradition was prevalent in the Jagannatha temple of Puri. The *Devadasis* are treated as the existing wives of Lord Jagannatha. The social status of *Devadasis* is very high for the performance of their traditional divine dance and music before Lord Jagannatha. The system of *devadasi* dance has a spiritual origin. When the system thus established became a custom, the descendants of the original damsel continued it and were known as Devadasis, the maid servants or female attendance of Lord Jagannatha.³⁷ The dance of *devadasis* (dancing girls) is a unique cultural tradition of Lord Jagannatha temple of Puri.

The traditional paintings of Jagannatha Dhama indicate the amalgamation of three cultural traits such as Shavara, Dravidian and Aryan culture and all these three traits have contributed immensely to our cultural heritage.³⁸ The temple of Lord Jagannatha is lavishly depicted with the traditional paintings of Odisha. The walls and ceilings of the *jagamohana* as well as the *natamandapa* of the

Jagannath temple are elegantly depicted with paintings of various gods and goddesses. In these paintings, the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu are depicted. They are such as Matsya (fish), Kachhapa (tortoise), Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Balarama Buddha and Kalki. A few *Krishna lila* scenes are also depicted in the *jagamohana* ceiling of the temple. A few modern paintings depict the mythological scenes, which are also found in the *natamandapa*. There are numerous paintings, however, including the Kanchi-Kaveri expeditions of king Purusottama Deva depicting the interview between the milk-woman (Manikagauduni) and cavalries on horseback (Jagannatha and Balabhadra). The relief is elegantly depicted with traditional *PattaStyle* paintings of Odisha. The local painters are engaged on hereditary basis and are known as “Sevakas” of SriJagannatha.

People of the *Jagannatha Dhamanot* only worship the Lord Jagannatha but they also worship all types of Hindu gods and goddesses. Hence a large number of temples are erected in the different parts of the *kshetra* dedicated to those divinities. All the extant temples of Jagannatha Dhama exhibit the *Kalinga style* temple architecture of the state of Odisha.

In the post Gupta period, Shaivism became the strongest Hindu sectarian religion in Odisha as well as in the *kshetra* of Lord Purusottama. It was the dominant religion in central Odisha from the 6th century A.D. onwards and reached the peak of its glory during the Somavamsi period in the 10th and 11th century A.D. During this period, most of the ancient Shaiva temples of the *kshetra* were constructed by the Somavamsi rulers of Odisha. Saktism was closely related to Shaivism, although its traces may reach back to an even more distant past. The female deities were worshipped by the lower strata of society. The *Shaktas* gained their greatest influence and were most generously supported by the rulers of Odisha extending during the period from the 8th to the 16th century A.D. Vaishnavism entered into the *Srikshetra* region as a predominant religious faith later than that of *Shaktacult* and it over shrouded all the Brahminical sects. The Ganga kings fully turned towards Vaishnavism in the early part of the 12th century A.D. and it remained as the religion of the majority of people of Odisha. Vaishnavism advanced towards Odisha from the South and the West. Scholars mostly contend that the Odishan Vaishnavism is an offshoot of Buddhist philosophical doctrines and religious practices characterized by Tantric form of worship.³⁹ Like Shaiva, Shakta and Vaisnava deities, other deities are also being worshipped in the *kshetra*. They are Ganesa, Surya, Hanumana etc. The inhabitants of the *kshetra* (Puri) were the worshippers of *Panca Devatas* namely Siva, Visnu, Durga, Surya and Ganesa who were enshrined in different parts of the *kshetra*. Hence, the entire *kshetra* became full of temples of various sects of Hinduism. The cult of Jagannatha assimilated the essence of all the sects and evolved as a major religion of India.

Puri Dhama boasts a continuous history from the third century B.C. to the present day and its unique monument like that of Jagannatha, which is famous in the world. So millions of pilgrims and tourists from all over India and abroad come to this holy *Dhama* and the flow is the greatest during the Car-festival of Lord Jagannatha celebrated in the month of June-July of every year. Puri has been considered as an important place of Hindu worship of the country. The sanctity and historicity of the Jagannatha Dhama together with its ideal healthy environment have been a suitable resort through the ages for the travelers and pilgrims alike. The history of religion of the Jagannatha Dhama is of special interest, as at one time or another it has been the home of widely different cults as Animism, Vedic Brahminism, Buddhism, Jainism and Puranic Brahminism, including Shaivism, Sun worship and Vaishnavism.⁴⁰ Jagannath Dhamagradually grew to be a place of religious tolerance accommodating different sects such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Besides these, some other sacred spots of the Jagannatha Dhama are viz Svargadvara or the gateway to heaven, Sveta Ganga, Indradyumna tank, Narendra tank and *Chakra tirtha*. The pious Hindus also visit the above sacred places of the Jagannatha Dhama.

Puri is also well-known as Jagannatha Dhama, which became famous as one of the four religious domains of India. Its fame afterwards out stepped the boundary of India. This *Dhamahad* also been maintaining itself as a stronghold place of Hinduism in India before the establishment of the Muslim rule in northern India.⁴¹ E. Hein considers that Purusottamakshetra, the abode (site) of Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha) at the coast of Bay of Bengal in Odisha as one of the most prominent centers of Hindu pilgrimage.⁴² From the cultural point of view, India is divided into four religious centers, which were recognized as four religious domains (*dhamas*) situated in the four directions of India. Those are called Badrinatha Dhama, Ramesvaranatha Dhama, Dvarikanatha Dhama and

Jagannatha Dhama existed in the north, south, western and eastern sides of India respectively. Traditions describe that Badrinatha Dhama was originated in *Satyayuga* where Lord Jagannatha was in meditation, Ramesvaranatha in *Tretaya* where Lord Jatannatha took his full bath, Dvarika in *Dvapara* where Lord Jagannatha was in deep sleep and Puri Dhama in *Kali-yuga* where Lord Jagannatha is taking various kinds of delicious and sacred food (*Mahaprasada*). Therefore, Badrinatha is regarded as the place of meditation, Ramesvara as the place of bathing, Dvarika the place of sleeping and Jagannatha Dhama the place of eating of Lord Jagannatha respectively. The sight *Ananda Bazar* of Lord Jagannatha temple complex is conceived and created as a mass hotel-largest in the world.

4. CONCLUSION

We come to know from the above discussion that the religious sanctity of Jagannatha Dhama surprises from the remote past. Various earlier works and extant monuments of the Puri town prove its cultural identity. In fact, Puri town had been sustaining as a stronghold place of Hinduism in India earlier the founding of the Muslim rule in northern India. During the reign of Anangabhima Deva-III (1212 AD to 1238 AD), the place of Puri town was called as Jagannatha Dhama of Eastern India. This name was also continued during the period of Muslim rule in India. At that time it was also called as Jagannatha Dhama or Jagannathakshetra of India. After the occupation of Odisha by British in 1803 AD, Puri town was recorded as Jagannathapooree. The present name of Puri seems to have been derived from the British recorded word i.e. *Jugarnath-poore*. So this place is now popularly known as Jagannatha-Puri (Jagannatha Dhama) in the whole of India. The Jagannatha Dhama of Odisha can not be accepted by scholars as a Buddhist site as evidences are not available regarding the fact. The prior to the advent of Vaishnavism, the place of Jagannatha Dhama was a Shaktapitha as evidenced both by the literary and archaeological sources. In fact, the cultural importance of the Jagannatha Dhama was increased after the establishment of temples and *mathas* of the different sects. Though the place of Puri town was chiefly associated with Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha), it holds a number of temples sacred to the worship of all other major deities of the Hindu religion. The extant insignificant small temples of the Dhama enjoy the reputation of considerable sanctity. Most of the ancient Shaiva temples of the Puri mentioned in the fact were constructed by the Somavamsi rulers of Odisha. Besides the Lord Jagannatha temple, some minor Vaishnavite shrines like Narasimha, Nilamadhava, Narayana, Sakhi-Gopinatha, Yajna-Narayana, Gopinath, Benu Madhava, etc. are found noticed in the Puri town. Other miscellaneous temples dedicated to different sects such as Gundica, Surya Narayana, Siddha Mahavira, Daria Mahavira, Ganesha, etc. are also found to be erected in the Dhama of Jagannatha. The Navakalevar ceremony of Jagannatha temple reveals the real devotion, sincerity and perseverance of the *Daitas*, Daitapatis, priests, and devotees to Lord Jagannatha. This ceremony is considered as the symbolic confluence of the Tribal-brahminical rites. It is not only a unique ceremony of Odisha but also of the whole of India. The famous *Ratha Yatra* of Lord Jagannatha is observed in the month of Ashadha in June/July. Large numbers of pilgrims from India and abroad come this Dhama and this massive crowded chaotic festival has identified the word 'Jagannatha' or Lord of world. So, being an important historical site, the Jagannatha Dhama draws the attention of historians, archaeologists, scholars and pilgrims of entire globe. Really, the historical and cultural prominence of the Jagannatha Dhama in the ancient period is enigmatic, but from the early medieval period this place boasts a continuous history as evidenced from the available monuments, which are conspicuously discernible. The Jagannatha Dhama is considered as the most sacred place than the other holy places of India. On the whole, from the cultural point of view, the place of Jagannatha Dhama of Odisha can be rightly considered by scholars as one of the prominent religious domains of India.

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