Puri Jagannath Chetana Reflected Through Temples of Assam
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Abstract
The Jagannath Shree Kshetra of Puri has been occupying the psyche of the people of Assam as in other parts of India. Existence of many Jagannath temples in the same design and architecture of original temple of Puri in different parts of Assam proves that a rich tradition of Jagannath worship has been continuing in Assam for a long period of time. The belief in Assam goes as Sri Krishna himself is Jagannath, therefore a visit to the Jagannath temple at Puri is the utmost desire of every Assamese and one is considered to be very fortunate if he or she can visit this temple even for once in his or her lifetime.

There are many Jagannath temples in eastern, central and western parts of Assam. The ‘Daru Bigraha’ which is worshipped here is made in the copy of the original temple. All the rituals and festivals are observed here like Puri. Akshay Tritiya, Snanayatra, Jhulanyatra and Navakalevara are also celebrated here. It is notable that the main entrance of temple is also constructed facing the East similar to the original temple of Puri. There is no caste and religious bar in entering the temple and accepting Prasad. There is a Jagannath temple in Assam when the special involvement of the people from Karbi tribe of that locality is noteworthy and can be compared to the role of the “Sabaras” at Puri.

There is no idol worship in Vaishnav dharma of Assam. The ritual is only to keep Bhagavat or altars. But in many naamghars (public prayer house where only devotional songs are sung) the decorated pictures of Jagannath, Subhadra and Balobhadra are placed near the Bhagavat to which no one seems to object. In this way the temples of Assam reflect the Jagannath Chetana of Assamese minds. It is a good relationship between the two states which is a very positive effect. The universalism, humanitarian and the ideology of harmonious existence of different faiths spread by Jagannath Shree Kshetra has every ingredient to curb separatism, fundamentalism and other differences between people and can help to create a strong, united and a peaceful society.
Puri Jagannath Shree Kshetra is considered as the holiest place for the pilgrimage. It can be said that it is the ultimate goal for the Hindus. Jagannath Dharma is the gana dharma (mass religion) for the people of Orissa. Greatness and unique features of Jagannath always have an immense influence on the people of India.

Like the other states of India, Assam is also influenced by Lord Jagannath. The belief in Assam goes as Sree Krishna himself is Jagannath. The impact of Jagannath Sree Kshetra in Assam can be noticed since the visit of Sree Sree Sankaradeva, the founder of New Vaishnava religion during 15th century. It is said that Mahapurusha Sankaradeva received his divine illumination at Jagannath Shree Kshetra at Puri during the time of his first pilgrimage which continued for twelve years. The guru spent the major part of his sojourn at Puri Jagannath temple, which is considered to be the most holy centre for the people of the Vaishnava fraternity of Assam, even today. That is why we find many Jagannath temples in the same design and architecture of the famous shrine of Puri in different parts of Assam. It proves that a rich tradition of Jagannath worship has been continuing in Assam from a very long period.

Many myths are related with the establishment and construction of the above mentioned Jagannath Temples. These myths reflect the infinite respect and devotion of the Assamese people towards Lord Jagannath. Besides they also prove the cultural relation of Orissa and Assam.

For better and proper understanding of this, the temples are divided according to their existing places.

Western Assam
Central Assam
Eastern Assam

The Jagannath Temples of Western Assam
There is a Jagannath Temple at Kalita Para of Goalpara District in Assam. Made up of wood and tin this temple resembles the Namgharas of Assam. It also has similarities with the temple of Sri Sri Mayapur of Chaitanyaites. Statues of Jaya-Bijaya are at the gate of the temple. The idols of Jagannath, Balobhadra, Subhadra and Salegram are at the concrete simhasana inside the temple. There is a chariot at the front of the temple. The Rathayatra festival is celebrated here with joy and fervour. Forefather of Late Manikanta Medhi, resident of Kalitapara established this Mandir. (See: Foot Note- 1)

There is another Jagannath temple at Baguwan of Goalpara District. In conformity with the temple of Puri there is arrangement of Natghar, Bhog ghar, Bharal ghar and office. The Bigraha of Jagannath, Balobhadra and Subhadra are made of brass. These deities are placed above the wooden Simhasana.

Once in Baguwan area Kalajar spread as epidemic and the panic-stricken people started praying to Lord Jagannath fervently for the speedy recovery of the affected people and
also to prevent recurrence of this dreaded disease in future. They believed that worship of Lord Jagannath will keep them free from all evil. When they really got the desired result one Tangal Mara Nath, a saintly person brought a little amount of soil from the courtyard of the temple of Puri and made a small pillar with bamboo leaves and recognized it as a temple. Thus began the practice of regularly lighting the Lamp at the temple.

In the year 1905 Idols were installed at the temple and thus started the practice of conduct of rituals by the Purohit. Specially in Purnima of the month of Magha Puja, Kirtan, Ojalpali, Kushana yatra and Mela are organized here for three days. Many people come from far and wide to attend the festival for fulfillment of their desire and to make their lives worthwhile by visiting the temple.

Jagannath temple is situated in the Hulukanda hill of Goalpara. There is an idol of Jagannath between the idols of Narasimha and Venkat. There are wooden idols of Jagannath, Balobhadra and Subhadra and Bangshi Badan Krishna in the temple. Rathayatra festival is observed here with great spirit and enthusiasm.

At a distance of 9.5 Km. in the North West side of Dhupdhara town of South Goalpara, There is a statue of Jagannath along with Kartik, Dudh Konwar and Phul Konwar atop the Dudh Konwar hill.

Another Jagannath temple is situated in the west side of Lalmati village of Abhayapuri. Rathayatra Festival is observed here in a colourful manner.

A three hundred years old Jagannath temple is situated at Sarbhog in the district of Barpeta.

Another temple of Jagannathid situated at Sandheli village in the district of Nalbari and a belief goes that it was built about three hundred and fifty years ago and donation was offered by the Ahom King Swargadeo Shiva Singha. During the month Of Magha this temple is visited by innumerable devotees.

There are temples of Jagannath in two places of Guwahati, Kamrup district. One is near the Guwahati Shillong road at Ulubari named Jagannath Than, established by King Surachandra of Manipur. There is only a idol of Patit Pavan Jagannath made of neem wood. Navakalevara is observed here. There is a tradition of burning the old image on a pyre made of sandalwood after putting it on a raft made of Banana tree on the river Brahmaputra. Another is at Manipuri Basti, Tikendrajit Path, Ulubari. The image of Balobhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath made from Jackfruit tree are seen there. There is a legend that king Bhagyachandra of Manipur erected this temple after being ordered to do so by Mahaprabhu through a dream. Khejuri Bhog and Anna Bhog are offered here. All the festivals of the Lord are enthusiastically celebrated here like Puri.

One of the five supreme places of pilgrimage of Assam, The Hayagriva Madhava Mandir of Hajo, district Kamrup reveals the utmost respect of the people of Assam towards Lord Jagannath. In Yognini Tantra (See: Foot Note -2) a relation and fusion was tried to be
established between Hayagriva, Madhava and Jagannath. Accepting this view the people of Assam worship Hayagriva Madhava as the same form of Jagannath. The picture of Jagannath is well embossed inside. It has become a custom after offering Puja inside the temple to do pranam in the western direction where Puri is situated.

We find another Jagannath temple in Mitani village 7 to 8 km. north of Itila bil towards Tetelia gaon on National Highway 37 under Sonapur Mouza in the district of Kamrup. It is believed to have been built during the first part of the 13th century in the design and architecture of the original temple of Puri by King Arimatta of Dumaria. All the rituals and festivals are observed like Puri Akshay Tritiya, Snana yatra, Jhulan yatra, Janmastami, Daula yatra are also celebrated here. The people of the Karbi tribe of Dakhin Ram village take active part in Daula yatra festival. It may be compared to the role of Sabara tribe in the Rath yatra festival of Puri. There is no caste and religious bar in entering the temple and accepting Prasad.

There is an Akshay Bat at the Southern direction of the temple and the main entrance was also constructed facing the East like the original temple of Puri.

The glory of this is believed in this way-
Oresa nagare ji Purusottam Khetra
Mitani grameo sehi abikal matra
Jito jane mandirat pravesa karaya
Tahara manusya janma samphal haya
Dehe sakti pay rog byadhi nasa haya
Banchit jonar manobancha purna haya

In the area of Jayanagar and Panikhaiti at Guwahati two Jagannath temples are proposed to be constructed.

Central Assam
Besides the Jagannath Road of Nagaon district there is a beautiful Jagannath temple with the wooden idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Its glory is unmatching and infinite. A noted person of Nagaon Late Ghanashyam Bezbaruah established this temple in 1885 with an assistance of Bhimsen Mahapatra of Puri. Till then worshipping and offerings are made in the temple regularly. Balya Bhog is presented in every morning here. At the time of Pradakshina the dasawatar stotra is chanted.

In the month of Magha, Phaguna, Chaitra and Baisakha, Bhog is offered according to the local tradition. Khichiri Bhog is also offered here. Sweet potato and brinjals are mixed with the bhog following the custom of Puri.

Rathayatra is the main festival of this temple.

Women of this area sing songs relating to Jagannath, Balobhadra and Subhadra in the temple regularly.
Another temple situated at Talibar Sonari village of Dhing, Nagaon District. It was established on 1909. The local people always take part in all the festivals of this temple.

**Eastern Assam**

In the Hahchara village of Sivasagar district there is another Jagannath temple. Besides the Jackfruit wood made Jagannath idol, there are also the idols of Radha Krishna, Gopal Krishna, and Sri Chaitanya. Another Jagannath temple is situated at Simaluguri of same district.

There is another Jagannath temple in Lahowal area of Dibrugarh district. The temple is also open for all castes and creeds. The festival of Rathayatra, Jhulanayatra are also observed here. Balya Bhog and Khichiri Bhog are offered here as Prasad.

Thus Jagannath temples of Assam witness Jagannath consciousness in the minds of the people of Assam.

Namghara is the place of worship of Vaishnavism in Assam. There is no idol worship in the tradition of Assam’s Vaishnavism. But in many Sattras picture of Jagannath trinity are kept at the altar of the Namgharas. It is believed that the stone image of Mahaprabhu of Dakshinpat Sattra, Majuli (Jorhat) erected near Jagamohan was brought from Puri Jagannath (See: Foot Note -3). Similarly, Bangshi Gopal idol of Garamurh Sattra of Majuli was also brought from Puri. Picture of trinity is also seen near the altar of manikuta of this Sattra. The custom of offering bhog before the birgara in the manner of Shree Kshetra is found in Namgharas of Dakshinpat Sattra, Kuruabahi Sattra, Benganaati Sattra and Pukhuripar Sattra.

The study proves that the influence of Jagannath Kshetra of Puri in the religious faith of Assamese society is not only old but extremely deep. Very long ago the pandas from Puri used to visit Assam and a relationship was developed, they invited and escorted people from Assam to visit Puri. The convention of sending dry Prasad (offering) to Assam by the pandas of Puri still exists. The Assamese people consider it extremely fortunate if they can visit Jagannath Shree Kshetra at Puri once every year. Moreover, they visit Jagannath temples situated in Assam. The Dharma of Jagannath is the dharma of unity and fraternity. It reflects an India where there is unity in diversity. The tributaries of multifarious culture in India have joined in the unity of all Indian cultures and manifested here in Jagannath temples. Lord Jagannath stands as the single eternal symbol of that cultural assimilation (See: Foot Note -4).

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Foot Note:

Reference:
2. Dr. S. N. Goswami, Religious Traditions of Assam and Lord Jagannath (Research Paper) Published at Religious Tradition in Eastern and Lord Jagannath.
4. Data from Field Study.

(Note: In this paper I have tried to touch upon the Puri Jagannath Chetana lying among peoples’ mind in Assam. I will restrain from going to deep analysis of specific philosophy behind the faith. I have tried to give a brief idea of Jagannath Bhakti of Assamese people reflected through Jagannath temples and other temples of Assam and its contributions towards the cultural relation between Assam and Orissa.)

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