

DARU BRAHMA AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPIRITUAL COMMON-ISM

G. C. NAYAK

Indian culture seems to have reached its culmination in Jagannātha culture, and Jagannātha consciousness is the foundation of this Jagannātha cult. But what is this Jagannātha consciousness? This consciousness is the greatest contribution of Indian culture to the world at large and it won't be an exaggeration to state that this is the noblest manifestation of human culture. This consciousness is so all-pervading that it has the capacity to provide nourishment and happiness to all levels of human existence — rich or poor, king or beggar, wise or foolish, learned or ignorant, sinner or virtuous, female or male, well-bred or ill-bred, foreigner or a country man. Exactly for this reason Upendrabhanja, the great Oriya poet, in describing Sriksetra, the place of Lord Jagannātha, has justifiably obliterated the distinction between the sinner and the sacred under the banner of Lord Jagannātha.¹

In Jagannātha consciousness there is no sin, no evil, nor is there any abasement on account of the same; there is simply an unparalleled pervasiveness here in which human soul gets supreme satisfaction and finds salvation here and now. Not only that. The wise find a personified and a successful manifestation of the Vedantic ultimate 'Brahman' in Jagannātha. In his eyes Jagannātha is that ultimate reality about which the Upanisads, the pinnacle of all *śrutis*, tirelessly sing.² Jagannātha, it may be said, is devoid of sense organs and yet there are apparently all perceptual qualities in Him.³ 'He hears and yet has no ears', 'he walks and has no legs'⁴ or in the words of Goswamiji, 'He walks without legs, hears without ears',⁵ as it were.

But is it not a fact that Jagannātha is endowed with very big eyes, those famous round eyes enticing the devotees throughout the ages? How can He in that case be said to be devoid of sense organs? But are they the eyes of Jagannātha? Are we sure that we are not imposing our own thoughts on a

nebulous figure ? And this nebulous form itself has provided men throughout the ages with a fertile ground for all sorts of fanciful speculation of which human mind is capable. Jagannātha's significance seems to lie in the fact that it is a successful attempt in the form of an image to express the Reality of the Upanisads which is both *nirguṇa* and *sagūṇa* and in whom the salvation of mankind rests. Jagannātha of course may have nothing to do with the Vedas and Upanisads ; even Sāyaṇācārya's explicit reference to Purusottama in his commentary on Ṛgveda,⁶ (10.155.3) does not conclusively prove that Jagannātha was Vedic God, and Sri Caitanya's reference to him as one who is sung by the Upanisads may well be set aside as simply the admiration of a devotee proving nothing whatsoever. It may be the fact that the aboriginal who at first constructed this image and worshipped it was not aware of any such significance. As Plamenatz, Professor of Social and Political theory of Oxford, has aptly pointed out in another context, "In primitive societies, men can perhaps do without a systematic philosophy just as they can do without a dogmatic religion. In the eyes of a sophisticated student of a primitive society, the customs and beliefs belonging to it may form a coherent whole ; he may see how they fit together to make it the peaceful and contented society which it is. But in the eyes of the primitive man, they are not a coherent but a familiar whole ; he does not see how they fit together".⁷ A mere historical survey therefore cannot be adequate in this context and here I am not concerned with any such historical or genetic enquiry. The more important question for me is, what is there in Jagannātha which satisfies the demands of millions of souls ? What is it that makes Jagannātha a source of inspiration throughout the ages ? Until and unless we unravel this mystery and pinpoint it our mind cannot be set at rest only with bare historical information, in any case not with wild historical speculations about a hoary past. We must see that we are not carried away by our imaginative faculties, and stick to the facts as closely as possible. When we come to pinpoint that significance of this cult which has sustained it throughout the ages as a source of inspiration, it seems to lie in the fact that Jagannātha is a unique expression of the Vedantic Reality which is formless having form as it were. To say that the form of Jagannātha is abnormal is to miss a very significant point that it has proved its capacity to express the formless in a way which is unique in the history of mankind. It is no wonder that Jagannātha being the expression of such a Reality has proved himself capable of fulfilling the aspirations of varieties of races and cults throughout the ages. And this also explains how diverse, antagonistic, and mutually contradictory theories are built and flourishing side by side in connection with the same Deity Jagannātha culture has no antagonism towards and is not opposed to any religion,

caste or creed just as the Vedāntic culture of India based on the conception of Brahman as both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* is naturally disposed towards contending speculative metaphysical systems and religious dogmas.

Jagannātha is thus the symbolic representation, so to say, of the mystical and paradoxical philosophy of the Upanisads.⁸ It is significant that the mysterious entity which is supposed to be hidden inside the image and transferred at the time of Navakalevara from the old to the new image is called *Brahma* and Jagannatha is well-known as *Dāru Brahma*. And yet this is not all that is there to it. There is here a curious mixture, a strange amalgamation of the sacred and the profane, the unfamiliar and the familiar, the philosophical and the secular, and this also partly explains the mysterious attraction this culture has for the massmind, the laity. Look at the profuse pourings of abusive words on Jagannātha by His devotees. The devotee gets a supreme satisfaction and ultimate peace in sometimes addressing him as Kālasarpa (the great serpent in the form of time) and at others scolding him as follows: "O black faced Jagā, why have you made me so wretched?" The pomp and grandeur of Jagannatha are beyond comparison when the Lord of the three worlds ascends the car. He is an aristocrat *par excellence*, the king of kings, and yet the same Lord cannot escape the red eyes of his wife like ordinary people. Being angry, Mahalakshmi, the queen of the great ruler of the three worlds, herself breaks a part of his car. She bolts the main entrance of the great temple from inside and in order to pacify the anger of the beloved wife the Lord has to approach and request in all sorts of flattering terms. Moreover, Jagannatha has to undergo physical suffering like ordinary human beings. At the time of 'Anavasara' he takes rest and lives on prescribed diet. The most astonishing fact is that the Lord also needs reincarnation. The embodied gives up the old body and accepts a new one as one throws away the torn cloth and takes a new one. Jagannātha is also not free from transmigration as depicted above in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It is for this that in spite of being the ultimate Brahman Jagannatha is as if one from amongst us — very near and dear one — the most intimate of all. He is beyond our reach and yet very near to us — '*dūrastham cāntikecata*'.

None, may he be a Dāsiābāuri the poorest of the poor, a Balarām Das the infatuated, or a Sālabega the muslim, has been left out from this Jagannatha consciousness. Where is the place for these differences in this consciousness? And it may be taken for granted that where there is Jagannātha consciousness there no differences of caste, creed and colour can exist. We witness the highest manifestation of humanism in this consciousness when we find that the Lord of the discredited, downtrodden, fallen and proletariat descend from his throne to bear the burden of quenching the thirst and hunger of Jajpurifriend who spent the

whole night in hunger near the drain flowing from his kitchen. This is how the story runs, the anecdote is built up throughout the ages, and what are these but the manifestation of a unique consciousness, the Jagannāth consciousness ?

“Natvāham kāmāye rājyam na svargam nāpunarbhavam
Kāmāye dukhataptānām prāṇināmārti nāsanam”

(I do not aspire for the happiness of kingdom or heaven or salvation. I only pine for the cessation of suffering of all the suffering creatures.)

‘Dhika se samsara pravalara yahin savu kathare suyoga, durvalara yahin lalaṭa lekhana nirave lanccana bhoga.’⁹ (Fie on this world where the strong alone gets all the chances, all the opportunities and the weak has no other alternative but to bear his misfortunes in silence.) There is no doubt that this saying of Rādhānātha reflects the true state of affair as it obtains in this world of the mighty and the strong. Jagannātha culture however presents what may be regarded as a sort of spiritual common-ism before the entire human race where the weakest individual of the society may be able to enjoy an equal right to exist. Spiritualism is usually connected with something sacred, something holy, something uncommon. But here is a form of spiritualism which is of the common and for the common. As is well known, the lowliest of the low even is not deprived of the *Mahāprasāda*. Being enveloped and swayed away by this Jagannātha consciousness Goddess Mahālakṣmī does not mind the insults and humiliations, she had to suffer at the hands of the ignorant on account of the fact that she had come down to the cottage of the untouchable Caṇḍāla lady. And at last this unique ideology of spiritual common-ism has been successful in finding its footing even in the heart of its great antagonist, Balarāma. Casting away the false sense of prestige and aristocracy, Lord Balarāma has understood the significance of Jagannātha consciousness and has identified himself with its ideology of spiritual commonism. “Muhin Caṇḍāluṇi yeve ṭekidevi anna, bhojana kariva teve kālīyaganjana”¹⁰ (Only when I, who has been accused as a Caṇḍāla lady, would cook and hand over the food to you then only you will have your meals, O Lord), this was the declaration of the Jagannātha consciousness-intoxicated Lakṣmī and at last the victory was on the side of Jagannātha consciousness and of the common-istic ideal. Being unable to stand the burning hunger the Lords of the three worlds are forced to take the food cooked and served by Mahālakṣmī, then assuming the role of a downcast woman. The false senses of vanity, prestige and aristocracy are shattered to pieces.

“Suna he mānuṣ bhāi, savāra upare mānuṣ satya” (Listen, O man, there is none greater than man, man is the highest truth), the idea contained in these words flowing from the lips of the poet has found its culmination in Jagannātha

religion, culture and consciousness. The differences and conflicts between man and man are antagonistic to human existence and that is why they do not picture at all in Jagannātha culture. The Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest might be correct according to the laws of nature but the motto for Jagannātha culture is, to put it in the words of Anukul Chandra, in another context, "Make the unfit fit and then alone shall we all survive".¹¹ This is the unerring message of the Jagannātha cult to the so-called reputed, qualified, powerful, rich, wise and prestigious aristocrats of the society. It is to be kept in mind that a culture which neglects the unfit, a religion that hates the sinner, a consciousness that keeps one man away from another is far away from the main stream of Jagannātha culture, religion or consciousness.

The prince of Ayodhyā runs to be the guest in the cottage of a Śavara woman to eat her tested fruit, the Lord of Dwārakā snatches away the fried rice from the Brahmin Dāmodara—the poorest of the poor—and relishes it much more than the palatable dishes cooked by Mahālakṣmī herself, who again showers her love on a down cast woman being pleased by her purity. And the Lord to whom all kinds of worship are offered on the great throne hankers for a cocuanut only of an ordinary, *Dāsiābāuri*. It is because He is actually the Lord of the lowliest, the downtrodden in the garb of the king of kings. 'Ordinary'? Who is actually 'ordinary'? and why at all is he ordinary? Is it only because he is untouchable, some one very insignificant amid the countless millions? May be that he is ordinary in our level of thought, but where is the difference between ordinary and extraordinary in Jagannātha consciousness? The extraordinary is so only because of the ordinary, otherwise where lies its extraordinariness? And what is that extraordinariness? This, what I would say a form of spiritual common-ism, is what constitutes one of the most pervasive feature of the Indian culture in general and the Jagannātha consciousness in particular. It is to be borne in mind that future of human race depends on the propagation of this commonistic philosophy throughout the world and it is the responsibility of each one of us, whether individual or institution, who is an ardent lover of Jagannātha culture.

But it is to be remembered that a thousand words of appreciation that comes out of a mere emotional upsurge cannot fulfil this huge responsibility. Rather it runs counter to Jagannātha consciousness to merely go on talking boastfully about its greatness, as by this it only becomes possible on our part to satisfy our ego in establishing ourselves as the representatives of a great culture. Jagannātha consciousness points to a lifestream where there is no scope for the distinctive feature of even the smallest, the poorest and the most ordinary being lost sight of Jagannātha culture will continue to remain as mere talk so long as this extra-

ordinariness has not been manifested in the daily life of the laity and as long as it has not become a part and parcel of our social milieu to give the legitimate recognition to the 'uncommon' in the 'common'. The highest manifestation of the Indian culture is still miles away from the Indian life and human consciousness. Its manifestation is waiting for the dedication and sacrifice of these individual and organisations who have pinned down their deepest faith in this culture and consciousness.

Be it an individual or a nation, one can hardly do without a practical philosophy to steer his course and guide his conduct. Even if this practical philosophy may not be rooted in mysticism or spiritualism or any such 'ism' of metaphysics in future, it is very important to have and perpetuate the right type of ideology at the right time. Jagannath culture is rooted in commonistic philosophy which seems to be the ideology capturing the imagination of the world today and it is also very likely to hold sway over the world to come. Hence Jagannath consciousness will continue to be adored and cherished in our hearts so long as this commonistic thought holds sway over us. Spiritual mysticism may not have a significant place in the conceptual framework of pragmatic commercialism which seems to be the moving force of the contemporary world. But it also is an undeniable fact that commonistic thought is the thought of to-day and it is very likely to influence the future course of events of the world. So long as a practical form of commonism, making common place, the secularisation so to say, of the so called sacred, spiritual or the pure is going to attract and guide the man of today and tomorrow, we can rest assured that the message of Jagannatha culture or Jagannatha consciousness will never be dead to us.

References :

1. *Rasikahārāvālī* Chhanda 3. 2. *Jagannāthāṣṭaka* by Ācārya Śankara (according to others, written by Sri Caitanya.) 3. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 3. 12. 4. *Śvetāśvatara* 3,19. 5. *Srī Rāma Carita Mānasa* Vālakāṇḍa. 6. "Ado yaddaru plavate sindhoh para apurusam tadarabhasva duhrano tena gatota parastaram". 7. *John Plamenatz*, "The use of Political Theory", Anthony Quinton(ed.) *Political Philosophy* (Oxford,1967). 8. See my paper 'Jagannatha and the philosophy of the Upanisads' in *Bharati*, July,72 published by Utkal University. 9. See *Parvati* by Radhanatha. 10. *Lakshmi-purāṇa*, 11. Ray Hauserman *Ocean in a Tea Cup*,p,229.

Professor of Philosophy,
Utkal University,
Bhubaneswar (India)