

## Religion of Humanity: A Study on the Jagannath Cult

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Syncretism is an essential feature of the Jagannath cult which synchronizes with humanistic approach spreading the message of love, peace and mutual harmony. Till now, it is difficult to ascertain the exact date of the origin of the cult, but the empirical evidences corroborate to the fact that the cult has been growing since time immemorial, assimilating and incorporating the theological and philosophical concepts of tribal, Aryans, Dravidians, brahmana, Jaina, Buddhist, Śaivites, Śāktas, Vaishnavas, Sauras, Gāṇapatyas, Sikh, Islam and Christianity. The principal object of the present paper is to analyze 'how the cult exhibits humanitarian approach promoting socialism in the one hand and fostering love, peace, compassion, fraternity, equality, amicability and religious harmony among the masses on the other'; to establish the fact that the cult is syncretic one in which the essence of other religions are infused. Jagannath cult promotes Odia nationalism. It is seen that one of the rulers of the Bhoi dynasty, called Rama Chandra DevaII, who embraced Islam attached importance for safeguarding the security of the temple of Puri and the Dieties than to his self security. Even if Utkala Gaurav Madhusudan Das, a Christian, restored the right over the temple of Sri Jagannath to the king of Puri pleading against the British. The word Jagannath is believed to be derived from the tribal god 'Jaganta', one of the ten forms of the god 'Kitunga' who usually resides in a tree of a forest situated in the nearby village. Timber-wood worship was widely prevalent among the tribes of Odisha which is also continuing now-a-days. The Jainas also claims that the name of Jagnnath is derived from the word Jinanath arguing Jagannath is the manifestation of Rishabha Nath because Rishabha means 'Jagat'. Similarly some distinguished scholars claim the evolution of the Jagannath Triad occurred from the 'Triratna' theory of the Buddhist philosophy; the *Budhha*, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha* signify to *Purusha*, *Prakrit* and the union of the two respectively. Sri Jagannath is the manifestation of Lord Buddha is also accepted by a number of Odia laureates. Both the Jainas and the Buddhist claim the car festival of Sri Jagannath symbolizes a strict adherence to their cults. The brahmanic scholars vehemently denounces the theory of the Buddhist origin of Sri Jagannath. In their opinion, the Buddhist Triratna hailed from the word Om(a,u and m). Therefore, the Jagannath is a brahmnlic god whose face is the symbol of *Om*. The prominent black spot inside the round eyes of Sri Jagannath symbolises the '*Chakrakalā*' of the Muslim faith and from his backside is found the 'Cross' sign of the Christians. The cult teaches universality not sectarianism. There is no place for gender-bias, caste distinction, communal conflicts and inequality in the cult. The dietary offerings called '*mahāprasād*' is eaten together without any caste distinction. The unbroken cultural tradition of the Jagannath Cult and curious synthesis of various religious beliefs in the cult have strongly influenced not only the devotees but also the followers of other sects. Each devotee could seek an explanation of the Trinity according to his spiritual enlightenment and vision. As if Jagannath always spoke to the devotee according to that person's religious affiliation and attitude. Thus, the Jagnnath cult is so broad in its scope, that all can be satisfied.

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