

Exploring Jagannath Culture: The Intersection of Devotion, Rituals, and Literary Traditions"

Dinesh Kumar Mali*
General Manager (Mining),
Kaniha Opencast Project
Kaniha Area,
Mahanadi Coalfields Limited.

Abstract

This paper delves into the multifaceted dimensions of the Jagannath culture, tracing its roots and influences through a historical, philosophical, and literary lens. It explores the devotional composition 'Geet Govind' by Jaidev, its interpretations, and its significance in Odisha's cultural heritage. The study examines the influence of various religious traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Kaulachar, on Jagannath worship, highlighting practices like the Panchamakara and their symbolic meanings. It discusses the roles of prominent figures such as Swami Dayanand, Vivekananda, and Ramakrishna Paramhansa in shaping perceptions of Jagannath. The integration of Vaishnavism and the contentious perspectives of the Vamamargi sect regarding Radha and Krishna are scrutinized. Literary contributions from poets like Yashovant Das, Udbhrant, and Achyutananda enrich the narrative, providing deeper insights into the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings of Jagannath culture. Feminist critiques by Dr. Sarojini Sahu are also considered, addressing gender dynamics within the tradition. This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the intricate web of beliefs, rituals, and literary expressions that constitute the Jagannath culture, underscoring its enduring significance and complex evolution over centuries.

Keywords: Jagannath Culture, Geet Govind, Vamamargi Sect, Panchamakara, Radha-Krishna Mythology.

According to Dr. Ramprasad Dadhich, 'Geet Govind' written by the great poet Jaidev, is considered to be a devotional composition by some scholars, while some consider it to be a work of emotion of pure love (Dadhich 34). 'Vamamargi' have different philosophy regarding Radha and Madhav – they call Krishna and Radha as Bhairav and Bhairavi and consider the Kamkeli form of 'Radha Krishna' as the path leading to accomplishment of liberation from lust (Hopkins 56).

This viewpoint should also be tested in Udbhrant ji's 'Radha Madhav' (Udbhrant 98). 'Geet Govind' is a gift from Odisha. Dr. Kalicharan Chaudhary in his book 'Jagannath Sanskriti' has described Jagannath Temple as the oldest temple of Buddhists (Chaudhary 112). Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekananda have also supported this statement (Dayanand 87;

* Corresponding Author: **Dinesh Kumar Mali**

E-mail: dinesh911mali@gmail.com

Received 04 June 2024; Accepted 19 June 2024. Available online: 30 June 2024.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#)



Vivekananda 102). Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi in his book ‘Hindi Bhasha Ka Itihaas’ has said that the teeth of Lord Buddha are kept in the wall behind the idol of Lord Jagannath in the Jagannath temple, while Swami Dayanand Saraswati in his book ‘Satyarth Prakash’ has raised a question on the tradition of placing Subhadra in the middle of Balabhadra and Jagannath as it is indicative of ‘Bhairavi Chakra’ (Dwivedi 54; Saraswati 74). What could be the reason other than a symbol of ‘Bhairavi Chakra’ to make the sister sit in the place which otherwise belongs to a mother or a wife (Saraswati 75)?

According to the opinion of western writer Dr. Hopkins, before Lord Jagannath, Buddhadev was worshiped there in that temple (Hopkins 57). According to the famous Odia litterateur Kripasindhu Mishra, the worship of Jagannath started ever since idol worship became prevalent in Jainism and Buddhism (Mishra 133). The author of the work ‘Panchasakha’ of Odisha also considers Jagannath to be an incarnation of Buddha (Panda 211). Ramakrishna Paramhansa has considered Brahma Jagannath as the Lord of Kali Yuga (Paramhansa 89).

Kaulachar religion (कौलाचार धर्म) has been given place in Jagannath culture. In the worship of Jagannath, Panchamakara (पंचमकार) is used, and this Panchamakara includes – Madya (मद्य) - alcohol, Māṃsa (मांस) - meat, Matsya (मत्स्य) - fish, Mudra (मुद्रा) - rice grain, Maithuna (मैथुन) - Sexual intercourse (Chaudhary 114).

According to Dr. Kalicharan Chaudhary, in front of Jagannath Mahaprabhu, ‘Lal Ulir Ghashapani’ (water mixed with a special liquid) is offered in the form of liquor, ‘Lamb Kanti Yukt Chiri Pitha’ (scented oblong cake made of Urad) in the form of fish, ‘Viri Poli’ in the form of Med (a type of Pishtak made from Urad), a mixture of tamarind and grounded ginger in the form of Sahaur, Mantra and a naked idol in the form of sex is presented (Chaudhary 115). Kaulachari use this Panchamakara as a path leading to Sat or truth (Chaudhary 116). These are –

Cannabis (symbol of Madya)

Ginger (symbol of Māṃsa)

Lemon (symbol of Matsya)

Paddy (symbol of Mudra)

Swapatni (symbol of Maithuna)

The devotees, who look towards Jagannath as Krishna, have given life to the Jagannatha Sanskriti by chanting ‘Hare Krishna’ (Mishra 135). After a deep study of these four letters, they considered them to be the symbols of Gods (Das 44). A devotee poet Yashovant Das has described it in his poetry ‘Prem Bhakti Brahmagita’ -

‘Ha’ (ह) Akshar Bhadra Shakha, Gupt Ruupe Radhika. ‘Re’ (रे) Akshar Je Baldev, Revati Pati Anubhav ‘Kri’ (कृ) Ruu Akshar Krishna Daihi, Shri Jagannath Jaha Kahi. ‘Shna’(सुन) Ate Sudarshan Pun, Jemante Chaturtha Prmana (Das 45).

(Meaning – ‘Ha’ is the symbol of Subhadra/Radhika, ‘Re’ is the symbol of Balabhadra, ‘Kri’ (कृ) is the symbol of Krishna and ‘Shna’(सुन) is the symbol of Sudarshan.)

Many poets enriched the Jagannath Sahitya Bhandar by writing stories of devotees (Panda 213). It is mentioned in Achyutananda’s work ‘Shunya Samhita’:

“Chaitanya Thakur Mahanritya Kari Radha Radha Kale Shri Jagannath Mahaprabhu Shriange Bindu Praya Mishigle” (Achyutananda 132). (Shunya Samhita: First Chapter)

The Shreshtha Pandit Jaidev has vividly described the Dashavatar of Jagannath in ‘Geet Govind’ (Jaidev 67). It has been adopted by all the people of India and is popular even today. We become mesmerized after reading it (Jaidev 68). By giving it a place in their dramatic art, playwrights overwhelm the audience through theatre (Patnaik 221). Thus, many poets have contributed in building the grand temple of this literature. Chakravak Chakrapani’s ‘Gundicha Champu’, Vidyadhar Purohit’s ‘Narayan Shatak’, Shri Jagannathdas’s ‘Krishna Bhakti Lata’, Harekrishna Kaviraj’s ‘Radha Vilas’ and Haldhar Mishra’s ‘Basantotsav’ are notable (Patnaik 223).

In Jagannath Sanskriti or culture, tree worship of Shabar Dharma, Stnabeshvari worship, Jainism, Buddhism, Madhav worship, Ashtaang Yoga Marg and Pind Brahmandwaad, Shri Radha Krishna Tatva, Panchtantra worship, Naam Mantra worship, various schools of Patit Pavan Vaishnava worship, contemplation, philosophy, etc. are included (Patnaik 224).

Feminist, writer Dr. Sarojini Sahu, in her book ‘Sensible Sensuality’, has accused ‘Sakhi Sampradaya’ of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu for its anti-feminist ideology (Sahu 58). The book says

that in the Sangh, writer Madhavi Dasi was tortured for being in love with one of her Gurubhai Haridas, whereas Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was married twice and had good relations with the wives of his disciples (Sahu 59). It is said that Madhavi Dasi was more a devotee of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu than of Krishna and used to participate in Chaitanya's 'Leela' (Sahu 60). It is mentioned in 'Chaitanya Charitamrit' that after hearing 'Geet Govind' sung by a woman, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu ran and hugged her, with the intent of having sexual intercourse with her; it was good that his servant Govind Das held him (Krishna Das 101). Had Madhavi Dasi established physical relations with Chaitanya, she would not have been tortured (Sahu 61).

Similarly, in 'Ekadash Samullas' of 'Satyarth Prakash', Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 'Kalitantra' –

'Madya Manas Cha Meenam Cha Mudra Maithunmeva Cha. Ete Panchamakarah Syurmokshada Hi Yuge Yuge' (Saraswati 76).

In 'Kularnava Tantra' –

'Pravrite Bhairavichakre Sarve Varnaa Dwijotamah Nivrit Bhairavichakre Sarve Varnaa Prithak Prithak' (Kularnava 45).

In 'Mahanirvana Tantra' –

'Peetva Peetva Punh Peetva Yaavatpati Bhutale. Punarutthaya Vae Peetva Punarjanma Na Vidyate' (Mahanirvana 67).

and 'Gyan Sankalni Tantra' –

'Matriyoni Paritajya Viharet Sarvayonishu.' 'Veda Shastra Puranani Samaanya Ganika Iva. Ekaeva Shambhavi Mudra Gupta Kulvadhuriva' (Gyan Sankalni 54).

While strongly opposing the 'Vamamargi' sect, it has been written that by making Radha and Krishna the medium, the 'Vamamargi' have made Panchamakara (alcohol, fish, meat, sex and grain) the means of salvation (Saraswati 78). Even the scriptures prohibit touching menstruating women, whereas they have been considered holy by 'Vamamargi' (Rudrayamal 39).

'Rajaswala Pushkar Teerth Chandali Tu Swayam Kashi. Chandalini Gayatritwam Rajaswala Sada Shivah' (Vimalananda 23).

The prostitute Pingla attained the highest position of devotion, Kankal Roopi, under the feet of Lord Jagannath (Vimalananda 24). Bhakta Kavi 'Bhavadev' is of the opinion that during the 'Rathayatra' of Jagannath Mahaprabhu, any visitor who sees the Lord with a pure heart is freed from sins like Brahmahatya (Vimalananda 25). The dedication and devotion towards the lord here is similar to that of the great devotee Pundalik and Lord Pandurang (Tendulkar 156). If there is a slight difference, it is of opinions of the people (Tendulkar 157). According to Sri Krishna Prem, just as the Padukas of Saint 'Eknath' are found in Pandharpur, similarly, in Puri, the place where 'Prabhu Jagannath' resides, on that Jagannath Dham 'Nilanchal', the place where he resides has different energies (Prem 182). There are some secrets which are revealed only to his devotees (Prem 183).

"I did not find a clean narrative in 'Radha Madhav'. The way he talks about Radha's holistic thinking, I feel that the narrative of 'Radha Madhav' has not been dealt in the manner in which it should have been done. However, there are some glaring things that are visible. Although the discussion about the status of women through Radha or the generalization of Radha or the feelings of Radha are there, but that narrative in this way... I think perhaps it has not been able to withstand."

I don't know what Leeladhar Mandloi saw that he could see nothing except discussion of women or normalization of Radha and Madhav? He could have also seen some contemporariness and the phenomenon of strengthening of tradition in it. Protection of environment, protection of cows, ending injustice, value-oriented creativity, and sublime humanity could also have been seen?

Where did 'Radha-Madhav' culture start? Poet Jaidev started 'Radha-Madhav' culture by composing 'Geet Govind' on the banks of Prachi River near Kenduli village in Odisha. Some Bengali litterateurs considered it as their own, whereas Jaidev composed 'Geet Govind' to please Lord Jagannath. Jaidev fell in love with a Devadasi named Padmavati and encouraged her to dance in front of Lord Jagannath on 'Geet Govind'. The heroines engraved in the stone idols on the walls of Konark are silent witnesses of this. After 'Geet Govind', in Odisha Upendra Bhanj composed the poetry poem 'Vaideheesh Vilas'.

Madalapanji (Jagannath temple magazine) mentions that King Chodaganga and his son Karmanava were disciples of Ramanuja and worshipers of Jagannath and his wife Lakshmi. Perhaps Jaidev must have been influenced by this ideology of Ramanuja, which is why he has written in a verse of 'Geet Govind' that – 'Krishna tells Radha that in her previous birth, she

was Lakshmi, hence she has found her abode on the seashore. Saddened by this incident, Shiva drank the entire poison.’ Before Jaidev, Madhav culture had started emerging in the seventh and eighth centuries. In the Shilodbhava kingdom, there is mention of Chakrayudha Madhav being the king. After that, kings like – Neel Madhav, Santosh Madhav, Lok Madhav, Chodang Madhav, started being worshipped in the birthplace of Jaidev in Prachi valley. Being a devotee of Madhav, Jaidev must have made Krishna, his Madhav, of ‘Geet Govind’.

Jaidev popularized Radha and Krishna devotion in contemporary society, but it could not get recognition. Radha Madhav culture could not flourish till the sixteenth century. Till then Krishna was known as ‘Gopinath’ in Odisha. In the Vaishnava sect, he was seen in Tribhanga posture with the eight Gopis. According to Dinanath Pathi, Ratikeli Katha and Vilas Kala of Vasudev in ‘Geet Govind’ confirm that it is his love poem. Much later, it was given a religious color. Jaidev had even clarified that he had composed ‘Geet Govind’ for his beloved Padmavati (Padmavati Charan Charan Chakraborty), but the then elite class and Sanskrit scholars attributed it religious fanaticism and the poet to have possessed supernatural powers, so that they could demonstrate some miraculous powers. To widely promote ‘Geet Govind’, the then kings and emperors also appointed four Vaishnava singers in the Jagannath temple of Puri who started singing ‘Geet Govind’ in front of the audience. In Odisha, the ten incarnations had started making their appearance in the architecture, but the architecture of Konark temple showed no visible impact of ‘Geet Govind’ even after a gap of a hundred years. Maybe till then ‘Geet Govind’ did not get that much recognition.

According to Padmananda Acharya, Kedarnath Mahapatra and other litterateurs, Radha Krishna’s couple, Madhav, Gopinath, Krishna, Vishnu and Dashavatar were gradually influencing the architecture, but nowhere in Odisha could the imprint of Radha Krishna’s Rati Kreedha, be seen in the architecture. It did not fall on art – except on the manuscripts made of Talpatras. That too was for self-study, not for public display. In Tamal Kunj, the Vipreet Rati Kreedha and other sexual sculptures of Radha Krishna were created on the walls of the temple much later. ‘Geet Govind’ has a rich description of the rural environment of Odisha. The descriptions of Kesar, Vakul, Mandar, Kadamba, Ashoka, Madhavi, Atimukta, Palash trees and creepers as well as the fragrant breeze of Malayagiri are the creation of the personal experiences of the poet. Kapila Vatsyayan has divided the reviews of ‘Geet Govind’ into six parts: -

1. Spiritual work (work by Goswami)

2. Literary analysis (difference of hero-heroine, Rasik-Priya, Ras-Manjari are decorated works)
3. Stimulating works (Kamashastra, Kokashastra)
4. Musical works (Rajatarangini, Sangeet Raja, Sangeet Kalpalata)
5. Dramatic adaptation (musical drama, seminar Piyushsalahari)
6. Shloka replacement (Krishna was installed in place of Ram)

Seeing the popularity of 'Geet Govind' in Jagannath temple, several attempts were made to remove and replace it. In the year 1480, King Gajapati Purushottam Dev wrote 'Abhinav Geet Govind' and intended to replace Jaidev's 'Geet Govind' with this. But that could not be done because of the opposition from the pundits. The epic 'Geet Govind' is divided into twelve sagas, which have 24 Prabandhas (songs) and 77 verses. Samod Damodar, Aklesh Keshav, Mugdha Madhusudan, Snigdha Madhusudan, Saakanksha Pundarikasha, Dhanya Vaikuntha, Nagar-Narayan, Vilaksha Lakshmipati, Mugdha Mukund, Chatur Chaturbhuj, Sanand Govind, Supreet Peetambar etc. are few to be named.

After description of 'Radha Krishna Leela' in 'Geet Govind', 'Shiva Leela', 'Ram Leela', 'Katyayani Leela', 'Vishnu Leela' etc. also started being composed. 132 poems have been composed by imitating 'Geet Govind', including 'Abhinav Geet Govind' (Gajapati Purushottam Dev, 1480), 'Balbhadrar Vijay' (Narayan Mishra), 'Brajyuv Vilas' (Kamat Lochan Khadgarai), 'Geet Gaurisa' (Bhanudatta), 'Geet Mukanda' (Kamal Lochan Khadgaraya), 'Geet Girisa' (Ram Bhatt, 1515), 'Geet Gopipati' (Krishna Dutta, 1646), 'Geetawali' (Roop Goswami, 1470-1554), 'Geet Digambar' (Hansmani, 1655), 'Geet Raghav' (Prabhakar, 1674), 'Geet Ashtapati' (Achyut Rai Modak, 1655), 'Geet Gopal', 'Geet Gauripati', 'Geet Ras', 'Krishna Geeti', 'Ramgeet Govind', 'Ramod-Haran Geetikavyam', 'Sangeet Chintamani', 'Sangeet Raghav', 'Shiv Geeta', 'Shivashtapadi', 'Shri Krishna Stava', 'Shri Ramashtapadi Vivaran', 'Shringaar Ras Mandal', 'Tripura Sundari Stuti', 'Matya Ushabhilash', 'Vairagya Chintamani', 'Vishnu Padavali' are the prominent ones.

Thus, the Radha of 'Radha Madhav' is completely different as compared to Radha of 'Geet Govind', 'Kanupriya', 'Shri Radha' etc. Dr. Kaushal Nath Upadhyay considers it to be a managerial work of giving new meaning-images, according to which, "The concern of the poet Udbhrant is not only the love of Radha and Krishna, but it rises far above that and covers psychology, morality, ideals, dignity and life values, presenting them – sometimes in the name

of Radha and sometimes in the name of Madhav, this is neither a love story of Radha-Krishna, nor does it have the love-mixed with the resonance of pain of losing Krishna once after achieving him. Here, in it at all places, there is a depiction of ‘Radha Bhava’, without which everything is dull and desolate. This ‘Radha Bhava’ broadens our sensitivity and gives us the power to see new meaningful images. But this ‘Radha Bhava’ needs to be seen not in connection with the past, but with the present, only then it will be possible to reach the contemporariness and relevance of ‘Radha Madhav’. There is no need to bind it in the limited framework of women’s discussion, because this work of Udbhrant is not for the creation of brackets, instead it is a meaningful work that breaks them.

In the chapter ‘Sanyog Shringar’ of ‘Krishna-Katha: Parampara aur Swaroop’, Dr. Lakshmi Shankar Gupta gives examples of ‘Sur Sagar’, ‘Sujan Raskhan’, ‘Rasik Priya’, ‘Jagadvinod’ etc. and describes philosophy, dialogue, lovemaking, humor, banter, sycophantic touch, love games, hugs, kiss (biting), Dantkshat, Nakhkshat, Surat Kreedha, Vipreet Rati, Ritu Vihar, Kaak Kreedha, Jal Vihar, Van Vihar, Dolan Kreedha (swinging) etc.

Works Cited

- Achyutananda. Shunya Samhita. Odisha Publishing House, 2020.
- Chaudhary, Kalicharan. Jagannath Sanskriti. Odisha Publishing House, 2021.
- Dadhich, Ramprasad. The Bhakti Movement: Historical Perspectives and Critical Inquiries. Jaipur Publishing House, 2019.
- Das, Yashovant. Prem Bhakti Brahmagita. Odisha Publishing House, 2018.
- Dayanand, Swami. Satyarth Prakash. Arya Samaj, 1883.
- Dwivedi, Hazari Prasad. Hindi Bhasha Ka Itihaas. Rajkamal Prakashan, 2008.
- Hopkins, Thomas J. Krishna Tradition: An Overview. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Jaidev. Geet Govind. Translated by Barbara Stoler Miller, Columbia University Press, 1977.
- Krishna Das, Kaviraj. Chaitanya Charitamrit. Gita Press, 1995.
- Mahanirvana. Mahanirvana Tantra. Sacred Books of the East, 1897.

- Mishra, Kripasindhu. The Evolution of Jagannath Culture. Odisha Publishing House, 2002.
- Panda, Surendra Kumar. Panchasakha of Odisha. Odisha Publishing House, 2009.
- Patnaik, Devdutt. The Dramatic Art of Jagannath. Odisha Publishing House, 2011.
- Prem, Sri Krishna. The Mystical Element in Hinduism. Oxford University Press, 1938.
- Rudrayamal. Rudrayamal Tantra. Translated by Vimalananda, Sacred Books of the East, 1890.
- Sahu, Sarojini. Sensible Sensuality. Odisha Publishing House, 2015.
- Saraswati, Dayanand. Satyarth Prakash. Arya Samaj, 1883.
- Tendulkar, Anjali. Devotional Practices in Puri. Odisha Publishing House, 2019.
- Udbhrant. Radha Madhav. Odisha Publishing House, 2005.
- Vimalananda. Commentaries on Rudrayamal Tantra. Sacred Books of the East, 1910.
- Vivekananda, Swami. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. Advaita Ashrama, 1907.