

SOME SACRED SITES OF PURI TOWN OF ODISHA IN EASTERN INDIA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT--The place of Puri town is famous for its historic antiquities and religious sanctuaries in Eastern India. This place is also well-known throughout the world for the notable temple of Lord Jagannatha. Though the temple of Lord Jagannatha is regarded as an important sacred shrine of Puri town, but some other minor sacred sites of this town also some times possess same religious sanctity like the shrine of Lord Jagannatha. As a sacred place, this ancient town has been maintaining its highest pitch of glory from time immemorial to till today. In Odisha, Goddess Vimala is popularly known as Pada-Pitheshvari of the Puri town. The spot of Ratnasimhasana of Lord Jagannatha has been considered by pilgrims as the holiest place of Puri town. It is called "Antarvedi", which is very rare sacred place in the world. The next important shrine in respect of sacredness at Puri town after the celebrated temple of Lord Jagannatha is the Gundicha temple or Gundicha Ghara. Another sacred site of Puri town is Koili Vaikuntha of the Jagannatha temple complex. So, from the cultural point of view, the Puri town is very interesting area for the study of scholars and historians. The aim of this paper is to study briefly the religious significance of some sacred sites of Puri town, which are closely attached with the rituals and festivals of Lord Jagannatha. Methodologically, both the primary and secondary sources have been used in this article to access the historical and religious significance of some sacred sites of Puri town of Odisha in Eastern India.

Keywords-- sacred, sites, Jagannatha, Ratnasimhasana, Gundicha, Puri town, Odisha, India

I. INTRODUCTION

Puri town is well known throughout the world for the celebrated temple of Lord Jagannatha, which stands on a prominent place near the sea shore (the Bay of Bengal). Puri, the famous seat of Lord Jagannatha, is situated (Latitude 19° 47' 55" North and Longitude 85° 49' 5" East) on the shore of the Bay of Bengal in the state of Odisha and also the head quarters of the district bearing the same name (Senapati & Kuanr, 1977, p.771). It is exactly located about 59 kms to the south-east of Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha. The Puri town is well-known for its historic antiquities and religious sanctuaries in India. After the construction of great temple of Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha) at this *kshetra*, the place became famous as the abode of Lord Purusottama or Purusottama *kshetra*. Puri town is not only famous as a holy place of India but its surrounding is also treated as grand and splendid in the whole of world. The *kshetra* of Jagannatha is a coordinating place where all the Hindu gods and goddesses are worshipped. The place of Puri town is mentioned in *Puranas* as *Nilahcala*, *Nilagiri* or *Niladri*, *Shankha kshetra*, *Dasavatara kshetra* and *Shrikshetra*. Besides these ancient names, other appellations of the *kshetra*, are

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Charitra, Bhaumakshetra, Dibya kshetra, Purusottamakshetra, Jagannatha kshetra, Jaggarnath-pooree, Purusottama-Puri and lastly Puri. The main Jagannatha temple is situated in the centre of the *kshetra* and around it are a number of streets (*sahis*). In fact, Puri town is considered by devotees and scholars as the most important religious centre of Eastern India. Puri town is well known throughout India as a centre of pilgrimage from the time of yore. The *kshetra* of Jagannatha can boast of its fame since hoary antiquity. For the millions of devotees, Lord Jagannatha is considered as a manifestation of the Supreme Being. In fact, Lord Jagannatha occupies a pivotal position in the religious history of Odisha in Eastern India.

The sanctity and historicity of the Puri town together with its ideal healthy environment have been a suitable resort through the ages for the travelers and pilgrims. Jagannatha *kshetra* gradually grew to be a place of religious tolerance accommodating different sects. On the basis of the cultural importance of the Puri town, M.M. Ganguly has considered Jagannatha *kshetra* as the most sacred place in India, even more sacred than Benaras (Ganguly, 1912, p.399). Puri town was also subsequently called as Jagannatha Dham, which became famous as one of the four religious domains of India. The sanctity of the *kshetra* of Jagannatha exists from the pre-historic period, where the tradition can not reach (Ganguly, 1912, p.398.) In the *Mahabharata Vanaparva*, there is a reference to the site of Purusottama *kshetra*, which has been mentioned as the place of *Yajna Vedi* and it is near the sea in Kalinga (*Mahabharata; Vanaparva*, Chapter-114, 1955, Vs. 22-24) . The *Vedi* mentioned in the *Mahabharata* is also identified with the place of *Ādapa Mandapa* i.e. the present Gundicha temple (*Ghara*) of the *ksetra*, as it then existed. A place of Puri town is nicknamed Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Krishna. In memory of His death scene, the old Presiding deities (*Chaturdha Murtis*) of Puri Shri Mandira are traditionally buried in the cremation ground i.e. Koili Vaikuntha of the Jagannatha temple complex. The site of Koili Vaikuntha is considered by millions of Hindus as one of the important sacred spots of the Puri town in Eastern India. A modest attempt has been made in this article to highlight the religious sanctity of some sacred sites of Puri town as far as practicable on the part of present scholar. Some sacred sites of Puri town are briefly discussed in the subject.

II. METHODOLOGY

Both the primary and secondary sources have been used in the writing of the present article. The primary data have been collected through Gazetteers, *Puranas*, Texts, unpublished thesis, the practical observation, public opinions, hearsay accounts and interview methods during the period of experimental field survey. The collected data with regard to the sanctity of sacred sites is based on practical observations and the earlier texts / sources. The secondary data relating to the present article are *Books, Magazines, Reviews, Journals, Periodicals, Proceedings, Manuscripts, Encyclopaedias, Antiquities, Records, Reports*, and published theses, which are available at the different educational institutions. These secondary data are the contribution of the former scholars, researchers, readers, historians and archaeologists. At first, the foot steps of these earlier research works have been followed in the present piece of work. The data collected from both the primary and secondary sources are critically analysed and applied in the writing of this article.

III. DISCUSSION AND RESULT ANALYSIS

3. Some Sacred Sites of Puri Town

The temple of Lord Jagannatha at Puri is not only the largest but also the tallest surviving Vaishnava temple at present. From the religious point of view, Lord Jagannatha of Puri is considered as the most important Vaishnava deity of India. The place of Lord Jagannatha of Puri is one of the important cultural centers of Odisha and it is also well known throughout India as a place of pilgrimage. Besides the temple of Lord Jagannatha, some other notable sacred sites of Puri town have also same religious sanctity, in some times, like shrine of Goddess Vimala, Ratnavedi (Ratnasimhasana), Mausima mandira, Gundicha ghara, Karushala in Koili-Baikuntha, etc. These sacred sites of Puri town are very important and also closely linked with various rituals and festivals of Lord Jagannatha of Puri Srimandira.

3.1. Site of Goddess Vimala

Goddess Vimala is one of the most important Shakta deities of Puri in Eastern India. Prior to the advent of Vaisnavism, the Puri town (*kshetra*) was a *Shaktapitha* and it can be substantiated both by the literary texts containing the list of *Shakta pithas* in Tantric texts and archaeological evidences. H.V. Stietencron has pointed out that goddess Vimala was the presiding deity and her original temple was situated on *Nilacala* (Stietencorn, 1978, pp.25-27). The temple/shrine of goddess Vimala is situated on the south west corner of the inner enclosure (Kurma Bedha) of the Jagannatha temple complex of Puri. It is located exactly to the west of the Rohinikunda near the Mukti Mandapa (Mishra, 1971, p.112). The temple of Vimala seems to be an old structure but not novelty is noticed in the architectural pattern. It is a temple usually resorted to by the Tantrikas who attach greater importance to it than the main temple of Lord Jagannatha (Ganguly, 1912, pp. 425-426). Goddess Vimala is popularly known as 'Pada-Pitheshvari' of the *kshetra* (Puri town). In this connection, T. E. Donaldson remarks that Goddess Vimala is considered as the patroness of the whole sacred area and is revered as Pitheshvari and Sriksheeta adhasvari (Donaldson, 2000, p.87). In the Puranic list of one hundred names of the mother Goddess, we also come across the expression 'Vimala Purusottama'. It means Goddess Vimala stays at the *kshetra* of Purusottama i.e. Puri town. In the *Sivacharita*, the *kshetra* of Purusottama is referred to as Nilacala and is the eighth pitha in the list of *Upapithas* and both Lord Jagannatha and Goddess Vimala are the presiding deities of that *kshetra* (Sircar, 1971, p.68). In this holy place Goddess Vimala is conceived as Bhairavi (the most powerful) and Jagannatha, the Lord of Universe, plays the role of Bhairava. (Devi, and Acharya, 2009, p.362, and see Nanda, & Nanda, 2004, p. 23). Hence, those devotees, who come to visit Lord Jagannatha, they also do visit goddess Vimala of the Jagannatha temple complex. So from the religious point of view, the shrine of Goddess Vimala occupies a unique place in the cultural history of Odisha.

Although the original temple of goddess Vimala has long been extinct, another temple dedicated to her was also erected within the Jagannatha temple complex at a later date. Most probably, the present temple of goddess Vimala was built during the Ganga period of Odishan history. The temple of Vimala belongs to the Kalinga Style of architecture. It consists of four structures such as *vimana*, *jagamohanaa*, *natamandapa* and *bhogamandapa*. The sanctum of the *vimana* preserves the image of goddess Vimala as the presiding deity of the temple. Devi Purana gives the iconographic features of goddess Vimala. The four armed image of goddess Vimala is in standing posture on a lotus pedestal. The image of goddess Vimala is carved in black-chlorite and it measures approximately five feet in height (Donaldson, 2000, pp.90-91). She displays *akshamala*, *kalapasa* (noose), an *amritakalasa* (*shudhakalasa*) and *varada mudra* in her four hands. She (Vimala) has the synthesis form of Mahakali, Maha-

Lakshmi and Mahasarashvati, which is described in Shri Candi.(Mishra, 2003, p.113.)She holds *kalapasa*, which is the *ayudha* (weapon) of Mahakali, *amritakalasa*, the *ayudha* of Maha-Lakshmi and *akshamala* (*ayudha* of Sarasvati) as a result of which ,she represents three *rahasyas* (qualities of devi). The goddess is installed on the *simhasana* of 2 feet high. Here devi is three-eyed, like Shiva and she wears a crown. Two nude and fierce looking female attendants are flanked on either side of the presiding deity (Mishra, *Edition*-1984, p.112).Characteristic features of the cult image of goddess Vimala of Puri are purely Shakta-Tantric. Both from the religious and artistic points of view, image of goddess Vimala of the site draws the attention of devotees, scholars as well as art historians.

3.2. Site of the Ratnasimhasana

The raised platform, on which the wooden images of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and the emblem of Sudarshana are installed in the *garbhagriha* of Lord Jagannatha temple of Puri, is called *Ratnasimhasana*. This raised platform of Lord Jagannatha is also known as *Ratnavedi* (Bramhachari,1962,p.8). The exact geographical location of the spot of *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple of Puri is at Latitude $19^{\circ} 18^{\text{m}} 17^{\text{s}}$ North and Longitude $85^{\circ} 51^{\text{m}} 39^{\text{s}}$ East (Senapati & Kuanr, eds., 1977, p.779).Besides the *Chaturdha murtis*, other images are also installed on the *Ratnasimhasana*. They are Madhava (a small image of Vishnu), Sridevi (a golden image of Lakshmi) and Bhudevi (a silver image of Sarasvati). The entire throne is adorned with seven deities including Jagannatha *Trinity*. Hence the spot of *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha is also called as *Saptavarna Pitha*.Most probably, the present *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple is the modified form of the earlier throne, which was built during the Ganga period of Orissa history. Due to inscriptions being incised on the bottom part of the *Ratnasimhasana*, it has more historical importance. From the Cultural point of view, the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple of Puri is considered by Hindu pilgrims as an important sacred place of Eastern India.

3.2.1. Features of the Ratnasimhasana

It is said that various precious stones and jewels might have buried inside the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha of Puri and this traditional belief can not be completely denied.The *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha is made of black chlorite like a blooming lotus. By observing the *Ratnavedi* of Lord Jagannatha, R.D.Banerjee had opined that “the bizarre arabesque of the decadent *Hoyasala type*, which appears in the temple of Hazara Ramasvami at Hampi or Vijayanagara is found on it (Banerjee, 1930, p.316). This type of design appears to Banerjee that a part, at any rate of this jewelled throne (*Ratnavedi*) consisted of a carved stone altar, which also was presented along with the metal portion to the Lord Jagannatha (Banerjee, 1930, p.316). I do not agree with the above view of Banerjee, because in my practical observation, I have thoroughly seen the front side of the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha is carved with scroll works, *jali* works, bordered line designs, small *tankus*, *kalasa* motifs, flower medallions, *simha vidalas*, male and female figures etc. Other three sides as well as the upper portion of the *simhasana* of Lord Jagannatha are devoid of decorative ornamentation. The designs carved in the *Ratnasimhasana* are certainly executed by the artists of *Kalinga School* under the patronage of native ruler and it is not the *Hayasala type*, which as said by Banerjee .Because this type of carvings really belongs to the *Kalingan School of art*. There is an inscription of king Virakishore Deva (1737-1793 AD) incised on the bottom part of the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha. In 1955 A.D. S.N.Rajguru & Padmashree Paramananda Acharaya had

noticed the inscription, which inscribed on the bottom part of the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple of Puri. The exact place of the inscriptions on the *simhasana* is completely covered with assorted colours, which had been given during the time of repair works in different periods. So the inscription of the *Ratnasimhasana* is not clearly visible at present. Near the inscription of *Ratnasimhasana* is carved with two figures; one is male figure adorned with royal dress and another figure (female) is standing behind the male figure. Back side heads of both the male and female figures are decorated with six-foil arch and *kalasa* motif flanked by inverted parrots at the apex. Most probably, the first male figure is the re-builder of the *simhasana* i.e. Raja Virakishore Deva and the second figure is his *Thakuramaa* (grand mother). The *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha measures approximately 16 feet in length 13 feet in width and 4 feet high respectively (Mitra, Vol. II, Reprint; 1984, pp. 210-211 and see Senapati & Kuanr, eds., 1977, p.784). This *simhasana* also contains three well polished separate rounded stones or *Chakas* for the installation of images of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra. In the *garbhagriha* of *Bada Deula* (*vimana*), there is a narrow gap of 3 feet left (between the western wall and *Ratnasimhasana*) for pilgrims to perform the circumambulatory prayer.

3.2.2. Religious Sanctity of *Ratnasimhasana*

The spot of *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha has been considering by pilgrims as the holiest place of Eastern India. On the basis of Sanskrit texts, the raised platform on which Lord Jagannatha is installed, that place is called “Antarvedi”, which is very rare sacred place in the world. So the *Ratnavedi* or *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple is revered by devotees as equal in sanctity to the image itself. The local tradition says that *Pancha devatas* are being worshipped on the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple of Puri. They are viz. Vishnu in the form of Jagannatha, Trilochana in the form of Balabhadra, Yogamaya in the form of Devi Subhadra, ‘Ganadevata’ in the form of Madhava and rising Sun in the form of Sudarsana Chakra respectively. The site of the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha of Puri is is universally accepted as the most sacred site of India through the ages.

3.2.3. Historical Importance of *Ratnasimhasana*

The earliest reference to the construction of the present great temple of Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha) is found mentioned in the *Dasagoba Copper Plate Inscription* of Rajraj-III issued in the *Saka* year 1120 i.e. corresponding to 1198 A.D. (*Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XXXI (31), 1956/57, pp.249-262). It makes us believe that *Gangesvara* i.e. king Chodaganga Deva initiated the construction work of the present great temple of Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha), which had been neglected by earlier rulers. Unfortunately, he could not complete the whole construction work of the present Jagannatha temple and some parts of the work of great temple were left incomplete before his death. So Chodaganga Deva would have never started the construction work of the *simhasana* of Lords in the *garbhagriha* of the great temple. The construction work of the new great temple was also carried on by his successors and lastly Anangabhima Deva finished it. B.K.Ghosh refers to that the artificers laboured fourteen years under the patronage of Ganga king and the great temple of Lord Jagannatha was finished in 1198 AD. (Ghosh, , 1848, p.10 And Hunter, 1872, pp, 101-102). The construction work of the incomplete portions of the great temple was completed by his orders under the supervision of Paramahansa Bajpayee, at the expense of rupees about thirty to forty lakhs (Stirling, 1980, p.236). *The Dasagoba copper plate inscription* distinctly

states that the temple was caused to be completed and not restored by Anangabhima Deva in the *Saka* year 1119 i.e. corresponding to 1197 A.D. (*Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XXXI (31), 1956/57, pp. 249-262 and see Rajguru, 1975, pp. 7-11). *Katakarakjavamsavali* also records that Anangabhima Deva constructed the incomplete portions of the new great temple of Lord Purusottama in *Sakavda* 1119 i.e. corresponding to 1197 A.D. (Tripathy and Kulke, 1987, p.20). It can be rightly said that King Anangabhima Deva-II (1190-1198 AD) had completed the construction work of the lofty temple during his short ruling time. The date 1197AD is the *terminus ante quem* for the completion of the whole work of the present great temple of Lord Jagannatha of Puri. According to the *Nagari Copper Plate Charter* dated *Saka* year 1152 i.e. corresponding to 1230 AD, after one hundred years of the initiation of the construction work of the present great temple, King Anangabhima Deva-III (1211 to 1238 AD) the Ganga ruler consecrated the great temple of Lord Purusottama at Puri (Rajguru, Vol. I, 1992, p.29.109.111). *Madalapanji* also records that Anangabhima Deva installed images of presiding deities on the *Ratnasimhasana* and offered 84 *Madha phuli bhoga* to Lords (Mohanty, 2001, p.22). So we can definitely say that king Anangabhima Deva-III had installed the *daru* images of Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha), Balabhadra, Subhadra and the emblem of Sudarsana on the *Ratnasimhasana* of the newly constructed great temple of Lord Purusottama. Before the consecration of the great temple, the construction work of the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lords was possibly completed by Anangabhima Deva II in 1197 A.D.

The *Ratnasimhasana*, which was initially built by king Anangabhima Deva-II, was damaged by Muslim invaders in later period. During the several attacks of Muslim invaders on the Jagannatha temple, the *Ratnasimhasana* had been one of the targets of invaders due to the deposit of jewels inside of it. The great onslaught was recorded during the reign of Bhanudeva III (1352-1378 AD), the Ganga king when ruled in Orissa. Then the Sultan Feroze Shah Tughluq of Delhi attacked the Jagannatha temple of Puri in 1360-61 A.D. (Ray, 1942, pp. 55-57 and see Panigrahi, 1985, pp. 176-177). Here Arjun Joshi has referred to that the *daru* images of Lords of Puri temple (*Srimandira*) were taken to some island in Chilka Lake before Sultan Feroze Shah Tughluq found to defile them (Joshi, 1984, pp. 148-149). At that time the Muslim invaders had displaced three sacred *Chakas* of Lords from the *simhasana*. The *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple might have broken by Sultan Feroze Shah Tughluq of Delhi for the collection of jewels. The damaged *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple of Puri was subsequently remodelled by King Virakishore Deva of Khurda. As per the inscription on the bottom part of *Ratnasimhasana*, it is clearly known that the present *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha had been completely remodelled by King Virakishore Deva (1737-1793AD) at the instance of his *Thakuramaa* (grandmother), the queen of Gopinatha Deva (Rajguru, 1988, pp. 7-8. And see Rajguru, 1996, pp. 105-106). King Virakishore Deva of Khurda had possibly rebuilt the present *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple in circa 1760 A.D.

The *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha temple was also modified by king Dibyasimha Deva-II (1793-1798 AD), the Bhoi dynasty ruler of Khurda. At the time of repairing, King Divyasimha Deva-II installed the stone wall of the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lords in the *garbhagriha*. According to *Madalapanji*, the stone wall of the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha was installed by Divyasimha Deva II, the Bhoi dynasty ruler of Khurda (Das, 1966, pp. 153-154). On the 9th July 1875 AD, three large blocks of stone from the lower ceiling (*garbhamuda*) had fallen on the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha. Hence, the Lords were brought from the *simhasana* and installed in the *anasara pindi* (Singh, 1964, p. 317). At that time, the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lords was repaired by king Divyasimha Deva-III (1858-1879 AD) of Khurda. After the independence of India, the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord

Jagannatha temple had also been modified through the Endowment Trust Board under the Government of Odisha. Thereafter, Archaeological Survey of India, Bhubaneswar Circle undertook the repairing work of the *Ratnasimhasana* as well as the temple of Lord Jagannatha.

3.3. Site of Goddess Mausima

The site of the Mausimatemple is one of the sacred sites of Puri town and it is situated almost on the midway of *Simhadvara* and Gundicha temple in the Grand road. Mausima temple is a small shrine dedicated to goddess Mausima or Ardhasani. The goddess Ardhasani is popularly known as Mausima (the mother's sister) of Lord Jagannatha (Kar, 1992, p.41). Legend says that when the sea overflows during the deluge, this goddess sucks half of water and hence she became famous as Ardhasosani or Ardhasani i.e. the goddess who drinks a half (Padhi,2000, p.197.and see Tripathy, 1996, p.180). Skanda Purana says goddess Ardhasosani or Ardhasani allows the pralaya vari (water) in the beginning of creation. Goddess Ardhasani or Mausima is also one of the Asta-shakti engaged in the protection of Shrikshetra.³⁰During the Car festival, Jagannatha's chariot stop in the Mausima temple to take special pancakes (*podapitha bhoga*) from His auntie. (Devi, and Acharya, 2009, p. 362.)

3.4. Site of Gundicha Ghara/Temple

The place of Gundicha ghar is one of the important ancient sacred sites of Puri town in Odisha. It is situated at the other end of the great highway (*Badadanda*) of Puri. The distance between the *Simhadvara* of Lord Jagannatha temple and the Gundicha temple (*Ghara*) is exactly 2,688.0696 metres i.e. 8327 feet (Senapati & Kuanr, 1977, p.788).The next important shrine in respect of holiness and sacredness at Puri after the celebrated temple of Lord Jagannatha is the Gundicha temple or *Gundicha Ghara*, the abode to which Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana are driven each on his or her wooden chariot once in a year, during the Car festival(Mohapatra, Vol.I, 1986, p. 174). In the Gundicha temple, the deities stay till the *Vahudayatra* or return journey to *Srimandira*. Except for these days the temple is unoccupied, but there is a small establishment of *sevakas* by whom it is regularly maintained. The Gundicha temple is often called as the Garden house of Lord Jagannatha. It is also said that Gundicha temple is the place of *Janakapura* i.e. the birth place of Lord Jagannatha, where Jagannatha had His first manifestation in the present form(Padhi, 1964, p.189. Also see Tripathy, , 1989, pp. 28-29). On that ground, initially the three or four wooden images were carved in this place and in a later date these images carried to the main temple of Lord Jagannatha. The place of the Gundicha ghara was also called 'Adapa Mandapa' suggesting that it was a pillared hall. It was an open hall in the beginning, but later it was built in sand stones in the form of temple (Das, Third Edition:2002, p. 143). The place of Gundicha temple of Puri is also said by devotees in various names. They are such as *Mahavedi*, *Yajnavedi*, *Yajna Mandapa*, *Janakapuri*, *Gundicha Mandapa*, *Gundicha Ghara* and *Gundicha Badi*. The present temple of Gundicha belongs to the Ganga period and it is an important shrine of Hindus in Eastern India. From the religious point of view, it is a famous sacredshrine of Puri. So those devotees who come to visit Lord Jagannatha, they also do visit *Devi* Gundicha as well as the vacant throne of the Jagannatha 'Trinity' in the temple of Gundicha.

3.4.1.References to the Shrine of Gundicha

The sanctity of the place of Gundicha temple of Puri goes to remote past. To know about the sacredness of the shrine of Gundicha in the past, we have to depend upon the records of earlier works (texts). Some of the earlier works relating to the fact are being discussed here. There is a reference to the site of *Vedi* found mentioned in the *Mahabharata Vanaparva*. This epic records that the place of *Vedi* (*Yajnavedi*) located near the sea in Kalinga (*Mahabharata Vanaparva*, Chapter-114, *Slokas*-22-24, 1955). It also elaborately mentions that *Pancha Pandava* (Yudhistira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva) at the time of disguise for one year visited “Yajnavedi” on their way to *Tirtha yatra*. They reached at the *kshetra* of Purusottama in the evening, stayed one night here and worshipped Lord Vishnu for their favourable journey (*Mahabharata Vanaparva*, Chapter-114, *Slokas*-25-30, 1955). Some earlier scholars like M.M.Ganguly and Sadashiva Ratha Sharma have referred to that the word ‘Vedi’ mentioned in the *Mahabharata Vanaparva* can be identified with the *Ratnavedi* of the main temple upon which the image of Lord Jagannatha is enshrined (Ganguly, 1912, p.399. Also see Rathasharma, 1986, p.469). Here I am not agreed with the view of above scholars regarding the word *Vedi* is the exact place of the present *Ratnasimhasana* (*Ratnavedi*) of Lord Jagannatha. Some scholars opine that the *Pancha Pandava* visited *Mahavedi* not ‘Ratnavedi’ of Lord Jagannatha (Das, 2002, pp.15-16. Also see Das, C.C. 1982, Vol.3, Chapter-29, Verse-34). In this connection Bichitrananda Mohanty has pointed out that the seat or throne, which installed in the *garbhagriha* of the Gundicha temple, is called *Mahavedi* (Mohanty, B.N., 1987, p.459). It is also known from the *Puranic* evidences that the *Mahavedi* and *Ratnavedi* are not the same. That is why; we can not completely accept the word *Vedi*, which is identified by Ganguly and Pandit Rathasharma with the present *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha. My point of view, the word *Vedi* or *Yajnavedi* mentioned in the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahabharata* can be identified with the *Mahavedi* i.e. *AdapaMandapa* where thousands of horse sacrifices (*asvamedha yajnas*) were performed by *Maharaja* Indradyumna. This *Mahavedi* is possibly the site of Gundicha temple of Puri (Mohapatra, R. 2006, p. 65).

The legend narrates that in the neighbourhood of this place (*Gundicha Ghara*) the sacred log came floating from the *Swetadvipa* stranded on the sandy shore; here the divine carver produced the four images. Here king Indradyumna first pitched his tents when he came in search of the blue god i.e. Nilamadhava, here he performed thousands of horse sacrifices (*asvamedha yajnas*) and installed an image of Narasimha when he failed to locate Nila-Madhava and from this place the four images when carved were placed in cars and ceremonially taken to the Jagannatha temple (Das, R.K., 1978, pp.56-57). Further king Indradyumna’s principal queen’s name was Gundicha and she played the role of foster mother to Sri Krishna’s mother’s (Devaki) sister. Indradyumna had made an arrangement for making of *daru* images of Jagannatha ‘Trinity’. Figuratively saying it means that Indradyumna was the father and Gundicha the mother of the images (Das, R.K., 1978, p.57). On the basis of legend and tradition, it can be said that the temple is possibly named by the name of queen Gundicha. Hence the shrine is called Gundicha temple or *Gundicha Ghara*. *Ghara* is an Odia word, which means the house. *Gundicha Ghara* thus means the house of Gundicha, the queen of Indradyumna of Malava. The legend has it that the *Gundicha yatra* was initiated during the reign of King Indradyumna. The *Ratha yatra* of Lord Jagannatha of Puri is the most important festival of Odisha. The annual sojourn of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana to their foster mother’s house is the most natural as is done in our society. So the images of Jagannatha Trinity or *Chaturdha Murtis* are dragged in a grand procession on three separate chariots along the *Badadanda* from the

Srimandira to the Gundicha temple. For its profound religious fervour, magnificence and display of colour, the Car festival of Lord Jagannatha is the most spectacular religious ceremony in the world (Behera, "July;1997, p.11).

Utkala Khanda of the *Skanda Purana* records that King Indradyumna had initially installed Lord Narasimha here and in later performed *yajnas* (sacrifices), for which reason, the place of Gundicha temple and its nearby Narasimha temple is said as *Nrusimha Kshetra* (*Skanda Purana; Utkala khanda, Chapter-29, Sloka-34*. Also see Das, S.N. 2002, pp.243-244). This *Purana* also says that the *Mahavedi* of this *Kshetra* is the holiest place where one thousand horse sacrifices were performed. The place of *Gundicha Mandapa* is the birth place of Lord Jagannatha. Such type of holy place is nowhere found existed in the world. There is another reference found mentioned in the *Skandapurana* regarding the sanctity of the *Gundicha Mandapa*. It records that during the stay of Jagannatha trinity on the *simhasana* of Gundicha temple at the time of Car festival, those devotees, who bathing in the Indradyumna tank, visit the Lords (Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra) on the Gundicha temple, they achieve great virtue (Chaitanya Charana Das (ed.), *Skanda Purana; Purusottama Mahatmyam*, Chapter-III, Sloka-6, p. 141. Also see Das, S.N. , 2002, p. 247). So the shrine of Gundicha is considered by devotees as the next to the *Bada Deula* in point of sanctity. The *Niladri Mahodaya* text refers to the sanctity of the *Gundicha Ghara* and its *Mahavedi* ("Niladri Mahodaya", Chapter-3, Also see Mohapatra, S., ed., 1984. *Niladri Mahodaya*, Chapter-3). It also says on *asvamedha yajnas*, which were performed by *Maharaja* Indradyumna in this (sacred) place. The *Niladri Mahotsava* text also contains a few references to the shrine of Gundicha, *Gundicha yatra* and *Gundicha Mandapa*. It records the *Gundicha Mandapa* as 'Adapa Mandapa' of the *Kshetra* (Mishra, R.C. 2002, pp. 37-41). Those pilgrims who come to Purifrom outside Odisha, they consider the *Gundicha Mandapa* or *Yajna Mandapa* as the holiest place of India.

The annual sojourn of Lord Jagannatha in the Gundicha temple for nine days is an important part of the cycle of the Car-festival. In this regard *Chaitanya Charitamrita* text records on Chaitanya's *Gundicha marjana* or cleaning the Gundicha temple for Lord Jagannatha's annual sojourn (Kaviraja, Krishna Das, 1909, pp. 407-411). In the Bengali scriptures on *Chitanya*, the *Gundicha Ghara* or *Gundicha Badi* is more celebrated than the temple itself, due to Chaitanya's intimate association with it. Chaitanya with his *Gaudiya* or Bengali disciples used to clean the Gundicha temple with hundreds of pots of water, with broom sticks, till the last tiny speck of dust was removed and held *sankirtana* in the *Gundicha Ghara* (Mohanty, S. 1982, p.60. See Mishra, B., 2003, pp. 20-22). The rituals on Chaitanya's *Gundicha marjana* or cleaning the *Gundicha Ghara* are rightly performed on the 7th, 8th and 9th days of the Lord's Sojourn. Besides these, some references with regard to the sanctity of the shrine of Gundicha are also found mentioned in *Brahma Purana*, *Padma Purana*, *Bamadeva Samhita* and *Madalapanji*.

3.4.2. Temple of Gundicha

The temple of Gundicha consists of four structures such as *vimana*, *jagamohana*, *natamandapa* and *bhogamandapa*. The sanctum of the temple preserves a raised platform (*simhasana*) on which the images of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra are placed at the time of *RathaYatra* (Car-Festival) when they are driven in their cars from the main temple. This raised platform is often called as *Mahavedi* (Ganguly, 1912, p.432). It is made of chlorite and measures approximately 19 feet in length and 4 feet in height (Senapati & Kuanr, ds.), 1977, p.788). It contains three well-polished circular stone pedestals for the installation of images of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra during their stay. So the sanctum of the main shrine preserves only the vacant *simhasana*

of Jagannatha 'Trinity.' Because the throne remains empty throughout a year except in the Car festival time. Images of the Jagannatha 'Trinity' are installed on the throne at the time of Car festival for a period of seven days only. Here all the rituals are rightly performed by *Sevakas* at the time of stay period of Lords. On the basis of *Puranas* and *Sanskrit* texts, some of the devotees as well as pilgrims say that the spot of *Mahavedi* is the holiest place of *Srikshetra* (Puri). The present *simhasana* of the Gundicha temple was renovated by Shyamananda Deo, the king of Balasore(Mishra, B.,2003, pp.29-30). According to tradition, hearsay accounts and the opinions of priests, the present temple of Gundicha was constructed by the Ganga ruler of Odisha. *Madalapanji* records that the Gundicha temple was a wooden *Mandapa* in the 12th century AD. (Mohanty ,ed., , 2001, p. 24. See Mishra, 2003, p.27).That wooden *Mandapa* was possibly broken in later period. Here Pandit Surya Narayana Das says that the Ganga ruler Narasimha Deva II(1278-1306 A.D.) constructed the present Gundicha temple in sand stones(Dash, 2002, p.143). Considering the architectural pattern, the construction period of the Gundicha temple can be tentatively assigned to the first quarter of the 14th century A.D. Most probably the Ganga ruler of Odisha built this temple.

3.5. *Karushala and Koili Vaikuntha*

Another notable site of Puri town is the Koili Vaikuntha located inside the Jagannatha temple complex. In this site several huts (halls) are made for the *pratistha*, which consists of sacrifice performed by the Vedic Brahmanas and for the carving of the new wooden images (Padhi, 2000, p. 167). The important *Shalas* (*Yajna* halls) in *Shri mandira* are the *Karushala*, *Ankura Ropana Shala*, *Nyasa Shala*, *Snana Mandapa* and *Yajna Mandapa*. Among these, the *Karushala* (the place where the wooden images of Deities are carved) is the most important(Ratha Sharma,1996, p. 43). On the day of *Snana Purnima*, when the old worshipped deities are bathed, simultaneously *Abhiseka* is done to the *Mahadarus* with *Mahajyestha mantra* in the Koili Vaikuntha (Ratha Sharma, 1996, p.43).Thereafter, the *Visvakarmas* (carpenters) will start the carving of the new wooden images inside the *Karushala*, amidst the sounds of various musical instruments, so that nobody can hear the sounds of the carving (Devi & Acharya, 2009, p.322). The public is not allowed to enter inside the *Karushala* but only the selected *Acharyas*, Homa Brahmanas, *Daitas* and Pati-Mohapatras can enter into the *Karushala* as per the strict rule of Navakalevara ritual. The *Yajna* is performed there for a period of thirteen days with the verses invoking Lord Narasimha. In this period, the carpenters carve the new wooden images of Lords under the strict supervision of the *Daitas*. The images of Lords are made each of one solid block, the hands being formed of separate pieces (R.L.Mitra, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.204.).The images of Jagannatha , Balabhadra and Subhadra are crudely carved in Neem wood without feet with incomplete hands and circular eyes for Lord Jagannatha and the deities wearing no ornaments (Mohapatra, G., 1978, pp.153-154). Jagannatha and Balabhadra have arms projected horizontally forward but the sister Subhadra has no arms. These wooden images resemble to human heads resting on a pedestal (Patnaik, H.S., 1992, p.71). According to *Niladri Mahodaya*, the heights of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra are 84 *yavas*, 85 *yavas* and 52 *yavas* respectively(Mitra, Vol.II, pp.204-205).The 'Sudarshana Cakra' is a mere stump, 84 *yavas* in long and 21 *yavas* in thickness (Mitra, Vol.II, p. 205).These *Chaturdha murtis* are rightly carved by the carpenters following the description given in the *Purusottama Mahatmyam*. The making of new images is completed before the day of *Netrotsava*. The *puṇahuti* is performed on the day of *Sankranti*, which also falls on the *Amabasya*. Thus, the carvings of the new wooden images of deities such as Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana are duly executed by the carpenters in this *Karushala / Daru gruha*.

Koili Vaikuntha is one of the important sacred sites of Puri in Eastern India. After the 'Brahma' is transferred to the new images of presiding deities of Srimandira, the Pati-Mohapatra comes out of *Anavasara Pindi*. Then the *Daitapatis* carry the old deities to the Koili Vaikuntha, where the four burial pits have already been dug under the Salmali tree / creeper (*Siali lata*). Here, the old deities (*Chaturdha murtis*) are completely buried and this funeral rite is performed in the dead night of the *Amabasya Sankranti* day under the direction of Mother Goddess Sitala Devi. This night is considered by devotees as a very regrettable day and it is also a sorrowful night for Lord Purusottama i.e. Jagannatha. In public opinion, it is the *Golaka vishrama* of old deities of *Shri mandira*. This *Golaka vishrama* scene of *Daru Brahma* Jagannatha can be compared with the last moment / life of Lord Krishna while He was resting under the *Siali lata*, then He was killed by hunter Savara on his toe through his bow in which he mistook for the tender ear of a deer for which Lord Krishna had breathed his last in 'Dvapara Yuga' (Ratha Sharma, 1996, p.33. and see Padhi, 2000, pp.150-151). Really. It was predetermined by the divinity. Shorn of details, the lifeless body of Lord Krishna was consigned to flames Jara by both Arjuna and Jara Savara with the help of the same Aguru tree, where the Lord in the first place was worshipped as a Blue stone (Das, Durga Madhava, July-2002, p.37). In this connection, R.K.Das remarks that at the end of *Dvapara Yuga* when Shri Krishna renounced his mortal soul, Arjuna, the third of the *Pandavas*, brought the body traversing the *Dakshinapatha* to this place and consigned it to here (Das, 1978, p. 48). Therefore, this place of Puri is nicknamed Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Krishna. In memory of His death scene, the old Presiding deities (*Chaturdha Murtis*) of Puri Shri Mandira are traditionally buried in the cremation ground i.e. Koili Vaikuntha of the Jagannatha temple complex. In 'Kaliyuga', Lord Krishna appeared as 'Darubrahma Jagannatha' to save the mankind and to establish "Truth Dharma" in the country (Das, 1978, p. 48). Shri Jagannatha being Shri Krishna himself is God absolute nothing less or more and He is considered as a manifestation of the Supreme Being.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, we come to know that the above sacred sites are closely connected with the rituals and festivals of Lord Jagannatha of Puri. Really, Puri town is famous in the world for its remarkable temple of Lord Jagannatha. For the millions of devotees, Lord Jagannatha is considered as a manifestation of the Supreme Being. In fact, Lord Jagannatha occupies a pivotal position in the religious history of Eastern India. However, some other sacred sites discussed in the fact also possess equal religious sanctity like the shrine of Lord Jagannatha. As a holy place, this ancient town has been upholding its sacredness from very remote past as evidenced by the existence of some sacred sites. Goddess Vimala is considered as the patroness of the whole sacred area and She is revered as Pada-Pitheshvari and 'Srikshetra adhasvari'. In this holy place, Goddess Vimala is also regarded as Bhairavi and Jagannatha as Bhairava. Hence, those devotees, who come to visit Lord Jagannatha, they also do visit goddess Vimala of the Jagannatha temple complex. So from the religious point of view, the shrine of Goddess Vimala occupies a unique place in the cultural history of Odisha. The spot of *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha has been considered by pilgrims as the holiest place of Eastern India. On the basis of Sanskrit texts, the raised platform on which Lord Jagannatha is installed, that place is called "Antarvedi", which is very rare sacred place in the world. The site of the *Ratnasimhasana* of Lord Jagannatha of Puri is universally accepted as the most sacred site of India through the ages. The site of the Mausima temple is one of the sacred sites of Puri in Odisha. Goddess Ardhasani is popularly

known as Mausima (the mother's sister) of Lord Jagannatha. The next significant shrine in respect of sacredness at Puri town after the notable temple of Lord Jagannatha is the Gundicha temple or Gundicha Ghara, the birth place of Lord Jagannatha. Such type of holy place is nowhere found existing in the world. From the religious point of view, the Gundicha ghara is considered by Hindus (pilgrims) as the sacred shrine of Odisha. Due to close connection with the rituals and festivals of Lord Jagannatha, the shrine of Gundicha occupies a unique place in the history of Jagannatha cult. In the site of Koili Vaikuntha, *Karushala* the place where the wooden images of 'Chaturdha Murties' are carved, so it is an important sacred spot of Puri town. The most sacred site of Puri town is 'Koili Vaikuntha', the abode of Lord Krishna. In memory of His death scene, the old Presiding deities (*Chaturdha Murtis*) of Puri Shri Mandira are traditionally buried in the cremation ground i.e. Koili Vaikuntha of the Jagannatha temple complex. The site of Koili Vaikuntha is considered by millions of Hindus as one of the major holy spots of the Puri town. On the whole, from the religious point of view, the above discussed spots of Puri town can be rightly considered by scholars, devotees and pilgrims as important sacred sites of Eastern India.

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