

VISION OF ORISSA: A SYNTHESIS OF DIVERSE CULTURERS

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Exotic Orissa on the coast along the Bay of Bengal with its green valleys, blue hills, lush green forests and golden beach have a magical impact. Otherwise known as 'Kalinga', 'Koshala' and 'Orda', 'Udra' or 'Utkala' in ancient times mentioned in Ramayana, Mahabharata, the Vedic and early Brahminical works and Pali literatures was never geographically isolated nor unexplored in the past. At different stages of history, it is found that thirty-two powerful Kshatriya Kings, who either made it the part of a big empire or made it an independent empire playing a role affecting India as a whole, ruled Orissa.

In the period of Mahameghavahana Kharavela, the Kalinga Empire had spread from Kerala to Mathura and from the south of Vindhya to the Kalinga Sea or modern Bay of Bengal. Later it was extended from the river Ganges to the river Godavari under many political powers from time such as the Maurya, Chedi, Gupta, Bhaumakara, Ganga, Suryavansi, Pathan, Mughal, Maratha and the British.

Kapilendra Deva (AD 1435 – 1467) of the Suryavanshis has been described as the founder of Orissan Empire as he conquered some portions of South-West Bengal, subjected Rajahmundry, Kondavidu, and Telengana and captured some parts of Vijayanagar Empire. At the time of British rule, it had been fragmented and included in the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

On 1 April 1936, the Oriya speaking areas were integrated to form a separate Orissa province, which was done only geographically and politically. Orissa consisting of Oriyas possesses a cosmopolitan culture, an intermixture of Austric, Dravidian, and Aryan elements as revealed in their languages, scripts, literatures, culture, religious traditions, art and architecture. For example, the national God of Orissa, Lord Jagannath is stated to have been the deity of Savaras, the Austrics. History also tells how at different times Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam held sway over this land.

The cosmopolitanism of Orissa is best revealed in the Jagannath cult, which determines Oriya's perception of life. It represents a cosmopolitan faith, as diverse streams of Hinduism such as Vaishnava, Saiva, Saura, Ganapatya and Sakta with Savara – Austric traditions, Jainism and Buddhist traditions were welded together into it. The founders and preachers of different religions such as Shankaracharya, Ramananda, Ramanuja, Madhava Tirtha, Narahari Tirtha, Kabira, Nanak, Sri Chaitanya and Muslim saint Salabega had also accepted Purushottam, (the land and its' lord Jagannath), the greatest, most beloved, most respected of the gods of all lands and regions as the cherished and adored. All of them contributed to the growth of catholicity of Jagannath cult, which has become a symbol of equality, fraternity and harmony. Lord Jagannath has been worshipped as the symbol of One in Many and Many in One.

The people of Orissa due to the ancient traditions and glorious heritage possess a unique culture, which is considered as the confluence of the north, the south and the South East Asia. As the Kalinga colonists had trade links not only with Ceylon (Sri Lanka) but also as far as Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Bali during early 5th and 4th century B.C, they carried Indian civilization with them to those far off places.

Therefore, before the Christian era, there was maritime relationship between Orissa and South-East Asia.

Oriya literature has a rich tradition with compositions in Sanskrit and Oriya languages. For example, the world famous Vishnu Sharma's Pancha Tantra, Sarala Das, Pancha Sakhas (Jagannath Dasa, Balarama Dasa, Yasovanta Dasa, Ananta Dasa, Achyutananda Dasa), Adi Bhoi poet Bhima Bhoi, Jayadeva, the prince among poets of Orissa, whose Geeta Govindam achieved world fame, Biswanath Kaviraja's Sahitya Darpana (The mirror of literature) which had uniqueness with a presentation of glorious traditions of Orissa. The literary personalities of Orissa had composed their works for the benefits of the 'entire world', 'all people', 'all creatures'. The themes of their works were a revolution against the prevailing social disparities and untouchability. 'Fellow feelings', 'world view' and an intense desire for establishing man-to-man relationship was vividly reflected in the Kavyas, Stuties and Jananas of early Oriya poets.

In arts and sculptures, Orissa enjoys a distinct place in India. There is rock cut caves for Jain monks in the hills of Udayagiri and Khandagiri. 'Viswa Shanti Stupa', a Buddhist temple built by Indo-Japanese collaboration on the top of Dhauligiri beside the river Daya where the great Kalinga war was fought, immortalizes the historical event of Ashok's conventions after his Kalinga war with the famous declaration 'all men are my children'. The land of Orissa contains superb temples in Kalinga style, which was included in Nagara and Dravida prevalent in India. The Kalinga style is best represented in Lingaraja temple of Bhubaneswar, Jagannath temple of Puri and Sun temple of Konark.

In sculpture, also Orissa possesses non-iconic sculpture such as decorative female figures, animal figures and in cult, images of different religion and sect.

Orissa's musical art is well established and accepted by the whole world. Fine example is classical Odissi dance which has its own distinctive style and different from other classical dances of India. The dance was developed from the Mahari tradition (Female temple dancers) and Gotipua system (young boys dressed as females), which were ritualistic dances in honour of the Lord. The dance is rich with poses, both ornamental and suggestive, with its specialty as the consummate art which has exploited the 'three – band' configuration of Hindu iconography.

Orissa though had its own line of development in all fields from religion to art in ancient times does not separate itself from India. Rather, it acts as an essential contributory to composite Indian culture. Here there are fine examples of unity in diversity visibly marked in its' religious traditions, architecture, literature wherein the part completes the whole but the part does not remain a part once taken out of the whole; it becomes a complete entity in itself, which is the essence of Orissa and Oriyas.

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