

SUPPLEMENT I

JAGANNATH

The temple of Jagannath stands on an eminence near the sea at Puri, situated on the east-coast of India. For centuries Puri, Purushottama-Puri, or Sri Kshetra, as the place is variously known, has been an important centre of Hindu worship, famous alike for sanctity and historic associations. "Puri is the seat of Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe; the sanctity of the place exists from pre-historic period where traditions cannot reach"¹. The origin and the antiquity of Jagannath worship at Puri is still shrouded in mystery. According to tradition, Puri, which is also known as Niladri (the Blue Mountain), was once a richly wooded hill inhabited by the Savaras, a Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian tribe of the Austric linguistic family. The Savaras worshipped their tribal deity on the Blue Hill which was probably a tree, a log of wood, or some wooden image. The Savaras came to India after the Negretos, and brought with them the cult of totem worship which was probably the basis for their tree worship. How this primitive tribal deity came to be worshipped as Jagannath with a fully developed iconography will be related later.

The earliest mention of Jagannath or Daru worship at Purushottama on the eastern sea-shore is traced to Vedic sources. There is a couplet in Rigveda: Antiquity of Jagannath

"Ado yaddaru plavate sindhoh pare apurusam,
Tada rabhasva durhano tena gaccha parastaram"

(Rigveda, ×-155-3)

The Vaishnavite commentator Sayanacharya (1300—1380 A. D.) has interpreted these lines in the following manner. "There exists on sea-shore in a far off place the image of a deity of the name Purushottama which is made of wood, floating as it were, in the sea. O, ye, by worshipping that wood indestructible, attain the supreme place of the Vaisnavite"². This Rigvedic verse has been differently interpreted by other scholars; even Sayana himself has given an alternative interpretation to these lines.³ So, it is hazardous to infer any direct reference to the worship of Jagannath or Darubrahma at Puri from these cryptic Rigvedic lines.

1. Mano Mohan Ganguly, *Orissa and Her Remains*, p. 398.

2. Dr. Kanhu Charan Mishra, *The Cult of Jagannath*, p. 71.

3. Ibid.