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Not to assert but to absorb seems to have been the dharma of Kalinga

A people led by their Lord

ONE HUNDRED and fifty thousand persons were carried away captive; one hundred thousand were slain and many times that number died," says the 3rd century BC edict of Emperor Ashoka, engraved on a hillock at the site of the great Kalinga War, on the outskirts of the city of Bhubaneswar.

If Ashoka's illustrious

By Manoj Das

grandfather Chandragupta, founder of the Maurya empire, had refrained from any attempt to annex Kalinga in the immediate neighbourhood of his native Magadha and Ashoka's father, Vindusar Amitraghat had been equally prudent in this regard, it was probably because an expedition against Kalinga was likely to prove a high risk adventure.

But that could have been the very reason to provoke the young and ambitious Ashoka to strike against the supposedly invincible kingdom.

Did he conquer it? His own admission implies that he could not, despite causing

death and destruction unprecedented in their magnitudes, for the remorseful invader had no hesitation in declaring that the sword could never be the conqueror; true conquest could be possible only through love and non-violence.

The intriguing question, however, is, who led the formidable resistance offered to the colossal Magadhan army by the people of Kalinga? Who was the king under whose command they faced the enemy like a human wall and fell?

History is silent on the question.

Indeed, silence covers centuries and aeons in the history of Orissa that was Kalinga and Utkal. Against the name of one Chodagangadeva who began building the great temple of Sri Jagannath at Puri or one Narasimhadeva who transformed his dream of the mighty Sun'god driving his powerful chariot into the marvel in stone that is Konarak, there are hundreds of shrines and monuments, caves, stupas and Viharas strewn over the land the makers of which have silently disappeared into

oblivion.

Sometimes even a city or a mini-civilisation seems to

Buddhist settlement and monuments emerging through a slow process of ex-

Not to assert but to absorb seems to have been the dharma of Kalinga. Buddhism, no doubt, once flour-

cause of attack from his enemies, the then custodian of the Relic, King Grihasiva, entrusted it to his daughter Hemamala, who carried it to Ceylon with the help of her husband, Dantakumar, and ceremoniously handed it over to King Meghavarma of the island. That was in the AD 4th century.

But where was Dantapura? While many historians trace it to a couple of twons outside the present State of Orissa, some believe that Dantapura was none other than Puri, the seat of Lord Jagannath. In fact, they believe that the image of the deity contains some Relics of the Buddha even though the holy tooth was despatched to Ceylon. When the old wooden image is changed for a new one these Relics are transferred into the latter under rituals carried in strict secrecy.

But the devotees of Sri Jagannath as well as several mystics have a different theory. For them the deity is a form of Vishnu. What it contains are the Relics of Krishna. How did that come about? It is explained by a legend of hoary antiquity - sweet and signifi-

cant.

King Indradyumna intuitively knew that somewhere not far from Puri lay hidden the Presence of Vishnu - and it was time for it to be revealed to all. He asked a young mystic, Vidyapati, to try discover it. Vidyapati wandered on till he met Vishvasu, a Sabara chieftain, in a forest. He remained as the chieftain's guest and fell in love with his daughter, Lalita, and married her.

As days passed, he observed that at daybreak Visvvasu went out with flowers to some secret destination, without fail. On his insistent query Lalita had to confide to him that inside a cave remained their ancestral object of worship which her father visited.

Vidyapati was curious. At his ardent request one day Visvvasu led him there, but blindfolded. Once inside the cave, the mystic in Vidyapati knew that this was what he was looking for, worshipped by Visvvasu as Nilamadhav.

The clever young man had carried a handful of mustard seeds which he had strewn along the way. They sprouted after a shower. Vidyapati found his way to the cave and,

lifting the sacred stuff, headed for Puri.

King Indradyumna knew that he had got what he sought. He was directed in his dream to bring ashore a log that was floating on the sea out of which was to be carved the new image of the Lord and that was to contain the object Vidyapati had brought.

But the log could not be drawn ashore, however the king's men tried, until, at the king's request, Visvvasu himself came forward to lend his hands to it. (The descendants of Lalita and Vidyapati are among the priests of the Lord to this day.)

Now, the question before the king was, what form to give to the deity? He received no indication about it either in his dream or in his vision, but when a haggard-looking stranger stooping with age, but not without mystery in his eyes, arrived from nowhere and offered to undertake the task, the king knew that the destined carpenter had come.

The stranger would work only under the condition that none should disturb him until he had done with his job. The

Contd. (On Page 4)



have been buried under thick crusts of time. Any one who visits the Ratnagiri complex of

cavation, can only stare with disbelief. Could such large areas studded with a variety of astounding sculptures and stupas (Relics believed to be of the Buddha have been found from one of them) have lain forgotten for centuries?

ished on its soil prominently. Why otherwise should the celebrated Bhikshu Kshemather, soon after the Buddha's passing away, bring the Master's tooth to King Brahmadutta of Kalinga? And why should the king alter the very name of his capital to Dantapur - Abode of the Holy Tooth? Only after eight centuries, when his reign and life were coming to an end be-

A people led by. . . (From Page 1)

king agreed; the inspired craftsman enclosed himself in a makeshift workshop in the palace.

The curious consort of Indradyumna, Queen Gundicha, would press her ear on the doors and listen to the sound of the carpenter's hammer and chisel, day after day. But one morning all was quiet. As the silence continued till the next day, the queen thought it rather ominous and wondered if the old man had kicked the bucket! She pushed open the doors. The stranger looked askance and lo, clean disappeared, leaving his work incomplete. It was not difficult to understand that he was none other than Viswakarma, the architect - sculptor of the gods.

The king decided to install the image as it was. The Relics Vidyapati had brought were lodged in the *Navipadma*, the navel of the image. Nilamadhava came to be known as Purushottama and later as Sri Jagannath.

Some people believe that Visvavasu was a descendant of Jara Savara who had unwittingly become the cause of Krishna's passing away at Prabhas. After the cremation of Krishna's body, he had collected some remains of it and had walked along the coast and had settled down at a new place. Nilamadhav means Krishna of the bluish colour - by no means the name of any traditional tribal deity. And Visvavasu was a Savara.

Strange was the boon King Indradyumna sought of the deity. "Grant that I should leave no heir to be proud of my achievement, for it will be difficult for them to remember that I have worked only as your humble servant! And let me also pass into oblivion."

Indradyumna's humility was symbolised in the kings of Kalinga sweeping the chariot of Jagannath.

His spirit of self-effacement was to be once again witnessed in Dharmapada, the teenage genius of the 13th century. Commissioned by the king, his father, Vishu Maharana, led a team of twelve hundred architects,

sculptors and masons in constructing the Konarak on the sea. Dharmapada was born a month after his father's departure from their home and twelve years had passed. He proceeded to the site to meet his father and saw that the leading builders were beset with a certain problem in fixing the crown of the temple. The boy solved the problem. But then he disappeared. Legend says that he had been last seen atop the temple completed under his direction. It was a fullmoon night and the high-tides had engulfed the monument, as it had been designed to be so.

Had he suddenly come under the spell of an uncontrollable ecstasy and a desire to be lost in the infinite after having fulfilled his life's mission? The popular legend says that he shirked the possibility of posterity crediting him for an achievement which was truly due to his father and his kinsmen.

Every spiritual, religious, occult and mystic wave had swept over Orissa in its full swing. One of the Tirthankaras, Kalinga Jina, was born in Orissa and the last of them, Mahavira, travelled across the land. Buddhism was popular even before Ashoka took up its cause. Saivism and the Sakti cult and Tantra in all their complex manifestations had their heyday at different periods. (Successful efforts at a synthesis between Saivism and Vaishnavism are to be witnessed at the greatest Saiva institution in Orissa, the Linjaraj temple at Bhubaneswar and at several other temples like that of Harishankar.) Sri Chaitanya's Bhakti movement found its fruition here. What is remarkable, the greatest single institution of Orissa, the shrine of Sri Jagannath and the tradition built by it, has absorbed all these waves. No wonder that the illustrious patriot - poet, Gopabandhu Das, should sing that the leader of Utkal is Jagannath.

This piece is written on the occasion of National Convention on Oriya literature and culture being held in New Delhi.