CHAPTER - III

CULT OF WOODEN POSTS

In the process of evolution of cults in Hinduism, many cults can be regarded to have sprung from the 'Tree Cult'. The worship of the wooden posts and its subsequent phases of worship of posts in temples and the worship of wooden images of Brahmanical gods are derived from the worship of trees. A tree, throughout its life acts as a benefactor of mankind, so it is sacred. But its sanctity does not end with its life, rather, it persists even after its decay. A huge tree seldom gets uprooted at a time. The decaying process takes away the upper portion of a tree, leaving behind the trunk, which remains intact for a considerable period and gets ultimately decayed in course of time. In ancient times, the trunk or even the stump of a sacred tree, must have stricken the same sense of awe and respect as did the tree, so that the worship of the tree became substituted by the worship of the stump. In course of the worship of the stumps of the sacred trees, a new trend must have started, when wooden posts came to be regarded as sacred objects. This must have given rise to the cult of the worship of wooden posts and subsequently of stone pillars. In course of time, it became severed of the mother cult (i.e. the tree cult) and treaded on its own course of development. It can be regarded as a major development in this regard, when wooden posts were obtained, not from the stumps of the decayed trees but from the logs of the living ones. Subsequently, such posts became installed in shrines and as such enjoyed the status of an image, representing gods as well as spirits. Even, they became anthropomorphised with the addition of face and hands and thereby added a new feature in the iconography of Hindu deities. "In many parts of the world poles and posts have had a religious or magic significance. There is reason to believe that in many countries, the post or pole has gained its significance as the representative of a once sacred tree, the spirit of the tree being supposed to have passed into it" (Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics - X : 91).

In this context Pillai (1948, P-85) mentions that "when a tree which was held sacred and worshipped, but gradually faded, withered and perished, it did not cease to be sacred and so the worship was carried on. The devotees of the tree seemed to have taken
particular care in preserving this last vestige of the tree spirit by constructing a platform around it and covering it with a roof to protect it from wind and rain. This remnant of the once flourishing tree was likened to the post to which an elephant was ordinarily tied and was called "Kanthu" or pillar. Thus shrines for Kanthus cropped up throughout out the country in course of time. The ancients also believed that to keep a spirit dwelling in a stump of a decayed tree, the usual offerings and worship should be carried on regularly and their cessation would make the spirit desert its original abode........... As this wooden remnant was also subject to decay and so threatened to disappear ultimately, stone pillars were employed in their stead and the worship was carried on, because, the devotees thought that some object was necessary for the deity to pervade and persist to live at the spot and confer benedictions on its worshippers. The people found in the stone pillars an imperishable residence for the tree spirit. Thus, gradually, the worship of stone pillars became a common feature in the country. These stone posts that replaced the vanishing wooden posts were worshipped and in many cases their original trees might have been forgotten. (Pillai, 1948, P.85).

In previous chapters, it has been discussed that, worship of tree is a consistent feature of Hinduism, both in its Great and Little Traditions (including folk traditions). It thrives simultaneously in the classical, popular and folk levels. As it is a common cult, probably none has borrowed it from the other. But the worship of wooden posts flourishes more as a cult of the tribals than that of the other two groups. In its aryanised form, only, it has entered into the arena of the popular and classical groups and has given rise to significant features in their iconography. Of course, Vedas, the most ancient Hindu scriptures, are not completely devoid of the mention of posts. Rig Veda (3.8) deifies the sacrificial post, which is evident from the following hymn.

"1. God-serving men, O sovereign of the forest
With heavenly mead at sacrifice anoint thee,
Grant wealth to us when thou art standing upright.
And when reposing on this Mother's bosom."

etc. (Bloomfield - 1972, p.67).
Here, the tree from which the sacrificial post is made, is described as sovereign of the forest, which implies a note of veneration for the tree.

More over, Atharva Veda (10.7) describes the Supreme Being as *Stambha* or pillar on which everything hangs and rests. But such references do not seem to indicate any tradition of worship of post, in the way it has been dealt with here, as the cult of wooden posts.

It will be convenient to start the discussion from the tribal level, as the cult of wooden posts is basically a tribal cult. The tribal life is unusually associated with trees. So the wooden posts bear a remarkable degree of sanctity for them. The tribal shrines do not contain any anthropomorphic image. They may be empty or they may contain some uniconical symbol. Wooden post is one such uniconical symbol. It may represent a spirit or a god.

The Kandha, Saora and Gadaba (tribes of Orissa) shrines are remarkable places of the tribal worship of wooden posts. These are open mud houses with thatched roof, with enclosures fenced by posts of Sal (shorea robusta) wood. Inside, there is one stout post of "Rohini" wood and another post of "Mahula" (madhuka latifolia) wood. Occasionally, the priest worships the post by offering water, milk, flowers, Punji (heaps of rice) etc. and also sacrifices buffalo. The Dumas are another tribe, whose worship of the posts is known as Badi Puja (Worship of sticks). Their sacred compound consists of respectable brick house with beautifully covered doors, facing east and an open enclosure with one post. The bidis (sticks) in the shrine consist of long, slim, highly polished sticks of red Mahula wood which represent goddess Paramaheswari. In most of the shrines there are two sticks of almost human height and in between them stands a shorter one, which is the handle of a sword, used for sacrifice. The sticks are supported by a structure of Sal (shorea robusta) wood. They stand within an earthen pot, where, ankle rings, meant for the goddess, are also placed. A silver 'girdle' is sometimes put round the waist of the sticks. The post, standing in the outer enclosure, represents Maheswari - Khambeswari. It is of Rohini wood and always rectangular in shape. The post is of considerable height, there is a rectangular hole at the middle of the post, referred to as its naval. The worship and sacrifices are performed several times a year. In some temples, the bidis and the outer khamba are worshipped daily by the dehuri (the priest who is always a Duma), with the performance of Pancha upchara or five services. (Eschmann, 1978).
The prominent goddess of wooden posts, worshipped by the tribes and several people of Ganjam in Orissa is goddess "Khambeswari". This goddess seems to have played a conspicuous role in the aryanisation of the cult of wooden posts. The following facts can justify this assumption.

1. The gradual change in her name from 'Khambeswari' to 'Stambheswari'. Stambha is the Sanskrit word for Khamba, which must have been attributed to the goddess only after her aryanisation.

2. The prominent place, assumed by the goddess in the folk and regional cults of Orissa, and the attempts made by historians to fix her up in the reigns of great ruling dynasties of Orissa.

The reason for the aryanisation of the cult of 'Khambeswari' is latent in the cult itself. For example, in her ritual of worship, she is not always treated as a symbol. There are occasions, when she is treated as an image. For example, when a Kandha priest invokes the goddess by offering vermilion etc., it gives the impression of an anthropomorphic image. Moreover, at the time of renewal of the post, it is treated as an image and a Brahmin priest imparts "Pranapratistha mantra" (Incantation for instilling life into the image of Vanadurga. (Eschmann, 1978).

It has been an historically established fact that the religion of the people is always regulated by the religion of their rulers. So, patronisation by kings was, perhaps, mainly responsible for the conversion of the goddess from 'Khambeswari' to 'Stambheswari'. Many kings are known to have regarded this deity as their tutelary goddess, as a result of which she became widely worshipped by the people of the time.

Raiguru (1992) mentions that, before 4th Cent. A.D., in the dense forest of Kalahandi, there was a kingdom called "Prastara Dwaraka", where the ruling house worshipped 'Stambheswari' as the tutelary goddess. The prevailing peace and prosperity in the kingdom and the cordial relation between the ruler and the ruled was regarded as the blessings
of the goddess. A copper plate of Maharaja Tustikara, discovered from Terasinga in Kalahandi, bears evidence to the fact that, he was a devotee of goddess 'Stambheswari'. In the subsequent periods, the Bhanjas and Somavamsi kings also worshipped 'Stambheswari' as their tutelary goddess. "Stambheswari Labdha Baraprasada" (obtained under the blessing of Stambheswari) is written on the copper plates issued by the Bhanja kings. It was under the blessing of this goddess that the Bhanjas ruled quite peacefully.

Eschman (1978) mentions that goddess "Khambeswar" is known in Orissa since about 500 A.D. She was the tutelary deity of the Sulki and Bhanja dynasties and she is widely worshipped in Western Orissa.

Prominent shrines of Khambeswari in Orissa are mostly in western & southern parts. The rituals, performed in the shrines of these regions witness an assimilation of Aryan and non-aryan elements. Moreover, the devotees who worship these shrines are a mixed tribal and non-tribal population. The Aska shrine of "Khambeswari" (Eschmann, 1978) is an example of such shrine, where the goddess is represented by a stone pole, but due to the addition of a dish on the head, it gives the impression of an anthropomorphic image. The dish contains nose, mouth, three eyes and a protruding tongue. Gold ornaments decorate the nose. The image confers the impression of a real Hindu image as well as of a Pole Eschmann (1978), further, compares the image of Subhadra in the Jagannath temple, Puri with the image of Khambeswari of Aska. She points out only marginal differences that, the shape of Subhadra's head is more oval and there is a waist line in the figure but the body of "Khambeswari" in Aska is a straight pole. She also mentions that Subhadra and Khambeswari are not only similar in their iconography, but also to a certain extent is their iconology, i.e. Subhadra is worshipped with "Bhubaneswari Mantra (invocation)".

In the eastern part of Orissa, there are prevalent, to-day, some instances of the worship of wooden posts in an aryanised form. Some of them are goddess Manika Bhuyan of village Manika Goda in Khurda district, goddess Bhagabati of Banapur of Khurda district and goddess Bhuasuni of Samantarapur, in Bhubaneswar.
The village of Mankiagoda is situated at a distance of about 50 Kms. from the district headquarters of Khurda. There is a shrine in this village, where a wooden post is worshipped in the name of goddess Manika Bhuyan. This shrine is located towards the end of the village. It consists of an earthen platform inside which there is a room made of stones and having an asbestos roof. Inside the room, four pieces of stones covered by earth are placed. Outside the room, almost at a corner of the platform, there is a thick wooden post of about six feet high. So far as the memory of the villagers goes, the post is not renewed, as there is no sign of decay, so far. However, the villagers feel that the thickness of the post has been reduced in course of time. Previously, the post was protected by thatched roof, which is now destroyed. So, in order to preserve it, a polythene paper is wrapped around it, leaving about one feet of the post from below, uncovered, so as to enable the performances of 'services' at the time of worship. There is a proposal to construct a roof in near future.

At present, in the village population, the tribals constitute the minority. In fact, the family of the "Jani" (priest of the village) belongs to a tribal community living there. So the Hindu castes are the main devotees, who visit the temple. Still, certain factors tempt to presume tribal origin of the goddess. These are, the name of the deity and Her worship by a tribal priest (Jani). Of course, "Manika Bhuyan" was not the original name of the goddess. It is difficult to ascertain her original name. The villagers mention an incident which is related to the assumption of the name "Manika Bhuyan". At a time (the exact time is not known) attempt was made to enclose the shrine by constructing a wall. But one side of the wall repeatedly broke down even if it was promptly repaired. Thereafter, Manika Bhuyan the daughter of the 'Jani' sacrificed her life by burning herself alive, so as to remove the impediment, which was disturbing the construction of the wall. True to her presumption, the wall could be constructed after the death of Manika. So, in her memory, the goddess came to be named as "Manika Bhuyan". Another room was also built up, where the stones are placed for worship.

In so far as, the deity is the goddess of all the people of the village including Hindu, tribes and Muslims, and she is the main deity of the village, she may be regarded as the "Grama Devati" or "Village Deity". But it may restrict her status. Because, people of nearby area, also offer their worship and as such she enjoys more than local importance. In her rituals also she differs from a village deity. Unlike a village deity, she is worshipped daily. The
offerings made to her include both dry and dressed food. The dressed food is mainly vegetarian. Only during "Dasahara" (the worship of goddess Durga performed in October) non-vegetarian offerings are made. On every Sankaranti (first day of the solar month) and amavasya (new moon day) thousand of people from near by areas offer their prayers in the shrine. People, even from outside the village, keep vows at the deity and after fulfillment of their vows, offer worship. There is a movable post or Danda to represent the deity during Dasahara, celebrated in the month of Asvina (October). The Kalesi (the Jani or the priest himself) carries the danda and goes around the village. Then he goes to the pandal near the seat of goddess Bhagabati (another goddess of the village) and places the danda. Goddess Kanakadurga of Divyasinghpur and goddess Mahishamardini of village Manikapatana are also brought to the same pandal. The Dalabehera, who presides over the worship of the deities, which is performed together, is a Muslim. He carries his sword known as (Pata Khanda).

The villagers do not seem to know anything about the origin and time of this goddess. But they believe that, the goddess was being worshipped and had already assumed the present title, by the time of Gajapati king Dibyasingha deba (1688-1716). They believe that Dibyasinghadeba, left Puri on account of his conflict with king Mukundadeva and set up his fort in this village. As he became a devotee of this deity, he named the fort after the name of the deity as Manikagada. Perhaps the name of the village, i.e. Manikagoda, has been derived from the name of the fort. The king had granted some land to the Jani or priest. So a question is likely to arise as to why the king did not construct a temple for the goddess. It may be that, the people of that time liked the goddess to continue in her status of a tribal deity. But, in course of time, when the popularity of the deity widened, the Aryan elements like daily worship, with the performances of Upacharas or services, offering of vegetarian dressed food, performance of special worship on days which are holy in the Aryan calendar, etc. crepted into it. To-day, the devotees do not care to go through the history or origin of the deity. They look upon her as their divine protector, who showers her blessing on them one and all.

Wooden posts are also worshipped in the Bhagabati temple of Banapur village in Khurda district. It is believed by the people of the place that, earlier the deity was worshipped under a Khirakoli (a kind of wild berry) tree and goats, buffaloes, even human beings were sacrificed there. It was in subsequent periods that the temple was constructed. The deity is represented by an image, but she is related to two posts. As regards the construction of the temple, the version which prevails there, is that it was constructed by the
Rathor King Sri Jagannatha Harichandana, who was a contemporary of Gajapati King Divya Singhadeva, who was a devotee of goddess Manika Bhuyan. There was cordial relation between the two kings. So it may be that under the influence of the Gajapati King, the Rathor king placed the post in the temple of Bhagabati, constructed in his time. In the present temple of Bhagabati there is a wooden post in the Nata Mandira (Dancing Hall). This post is the proxy of goddess Mala Birajai whose image is placed and worshipped in a separate temple at Bankudagada, about 3/4 Kms. from Banapur. This post is very big in size and stretches from the floor to the roof of the temple. It is thickened by the wrappings of thread and clothes. Perhaps, in this way, the post is preserved from decay. A black coloured Sari is tied around the post, as a pleated Sari, leaving about six feet from below. This post is daily worshipped by the same Brahmin priest, who worships goddess Bhagabati and the food offered to them daily is also the same. In the daily offerings, dressed non-vegetarian food is included. Fish is the main non-vegetarian item, offered daily.

There is another post, regarded as the proxy of goddess Bhagabati, which is placed in another temple, known as the temple "Dakhyaprajapati" or "Dakhineswara" or "Dakhyeswara". It is a very old temple, built much earlier than the temple of Bhagabati. It is mentioned on the plate on the temple gate, that it was built in the 13th century A.D. It is preserved as a national Monument. The people believe that, this temple originally did not contain the post. The post was placed, later, by king Jagannatha Harichandan, during whose time the Bhagabati temple was constructed. This king had also placed the two temples of Bhagabati and Dakhineswara under same managing body.

This post, i.e. the proxy of goddess Bhagabati is a very big post, whose length stretches from the floor to the roof of the temple. It is believed to have been made up of Astadhatu (alloy of eight metals). To-day, the actual body of the post is not visible, as it is covered by many wrappings of thread and clothes. Devotees offer clothes to the goddess, on the fulfillment of their vows. Very costly and beautiful Saris are thus presented by the devotees, which are pleated and hung around the post. This post is daily worshipped by the same Brahmin priest, who worships Lord Dakhineswara, the main god of the temple. So the rituals of worship are based on purely Aryan features. Inside the campus, she is offered only vegetarian dressed food, and thereby, is treated in all respects, as an Aryan deity. But she is
not free from her non-aryan elements. On every Tuesday, this post is carried, dancing all through to the Bhagabati temple, and is placed near the main deity. Here, non-vegetarian dressed food is offered to the post, along with the deity. Every year, on the occasion of "Bheta amavasya" (Mahalaya, which falls on the new moon day of the month of Asvina or October), this post is taken to the market place, where the other post, which is the proxy of goddess Mala Birajai is taken. In the market place, the Bheta or the meeting of the two goddesses of post is observed. Thereafter, the post which is the proxy of goddess Bhagabati, is taken to the temple of goddess Bhagabati and is placed there, in a room reserved for the purpose. There, it is kept for eight days, i.e. from the first day to the eighth day of the bright half of the month of Asvina (October), i.e. the period of Dasahara. During this period, this post is worshipped by a Brahman priest. Once a year, animal sacrifice (mainly goat) is made at the sacrificial post, placed in front of the Jagamohana (Dancing Hall) of the temple. The sacrificial post is a concrete post and it is placed, directly facing the image of goddess Bhagabati.

The post, which proxies goddess Bhagabati and is placed in the Dakhineswara temple, moves out of the campus in a number of fares and festivals. On Dola Purnima i.e. the full moon day of the month of Phalguna (February - March), this post, along with other gods of the nearby villages, moves from house to house to accept a special type of offering, known as Chacheri Bhoga. During Chandana Yatra (a festival celebrated during summer, when sandal paste is applied on the deities to lessen the heat), the post is taken to Gopalapur. On the occasion of Panasankranti (in the month of April), the post is taken to 'Bhatapada'. On the occasion of Ashokastami (in the month of March), it is taken to 'Gobindapur'. On Bhadraba Saptami (the seventh day in the bright half of the Hindu month of Bhadra (August -September), it is taken to 'Kalijai' in Chilika. Again, on 'Sripanchami', the occasion of the worship of goddess Saraswati (presiding deity of learning) in the Hindu month of Magha (February-March), this post is carried to 'Kalijai', where exchange of ajnamala (a kind of wreath) takes place. Thus, this post is worshipped in almost all the fares and festivals, celebrated in the regional level.

Another post worshipped in the 'Bhuashuni' temple, situated at a distance of about five kms. from the Lingaraj temple, Bhubaneswar, and in the Mouza (village) of Samantarapur is worth mentioning. The post gives such a lively impression of an anthropomorphic image that, mostly people do not know its original structure. The priest and
the people living near by are not able to tell about its time, but as regards its origin, they say that, the goddess was first worshipped in a Kochila \( (strychnos nux-vomica) \) tree, which was there at the same place, where the post stands now. Even after the tree decayed, the villagers continued their worship at the same place. So the goddess became pleased and emerged out of earth in the form of a stone post. As it has come out of earth, so it is named as \textit{Bhubasini} or dweller of the earth. The present temple is believed to have been constructed by King Sisupalagada, who happened to be a devotee of the goddess.

The post is very strong like a stone, but actually it is not possible for a stone post of about 6' high to emerge out of earth. Its outer surface is not smooth like a post of stone, it is tilted towards right and at the upper part the thickness is narrowed, which is at present used as the face of the deity. Towards the upper part of the post, there is a big hole just like a hollow in a tree. All these factors, make one presume that it must be the wooden stump of the Kochila tree which was worshipped there, and which became in course of time fossilised. In the present temple, a platform is there around the post and the image of a lion is placed at the foot, which is regarded as the Vahana or vehicle of the deity. A wooden frame is fixed up just in front of the post, which enables the priest to tie Saris on the deity. One can have the actual view of the deity, when Marjana or the bathing ceremony is performed. The Brahman priest, anoints oil on the post and pours water on it. Then he applies vermilion at the top, on which he fixes up a silver face having prominent eyes, nose and mouth. The priest ties up saris in the wooden frame in such a way that it appears as if the deity is clad in a beautiful sari. Then ornaments like necklace, nose ring, ear ring etc. are fixed up.

The non-Sanskritic elements, found in the rituals of the deity seem to have been overshadowed by Sanskritic elements. This deity is worshipped by Vanadurga mantra, i.e. the invocation with which a sylvan deity is worshipped. It may be mentioned here that, a purely Sanskritic goddess is worshipped by the hymn known as Bhubaneswari mantra. Daily it is offered non-vegetarian dressed food, which includes fish curry. At times, people, on fulfilment of their vows, sacrifice goat in favour of Her. The Sanskritic elements are there, like the worship by a Brahmin priest. The priest is also connected with the services of Lord Lingaraja. For fifteen days in a month, he goes to the Lingaraj temple to perform certain services there. During his absence, his son worships the goddess Bhuashuni or Bhubasini. This has been going on for many generations, which is beyond the memory of the present priest. Another
Sanskritic feature is that during certain months like *Magha* (January-February), *Vaisakha* (April-May) and *Kartika* (October-November), which are pious in the Sanskrit calendar, animals are not sacrificed in the shrine and the deity is not offered non-vegetarian food. Moreover, the deity is very fond of offerings like betel nuts and coconuts. So devotees, very often, offer Her these two nuts on fulfilment of their vows.

The worship of wooden posts, involving purely tribal rituals are very common in the tribal shrines like the shrines of Dumas, Kondha, found in the tribal belts of Orissa. So the cult can be regarded as tribal in origin. But its prevalence in the non-tribal regions of coastal Orissa like Bhubaneswar, Banapur, Manikagoda and the assimilation of Hindu and tribal elements in their ritual tempts to presume that the posts worshipped here are aryamised forms of the original tribal cult. The worship of the posts in these coastal areas has so deeply enrooted in the folk culture of Orissa that these centres draw, daily, innumerable non-tribal devotees, as do the purely Hindu temples of the region.

In the folk tradition of Orissa, wooden post is deified on certain other occasions. In the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) in the villages of coastal Orissa, a group of men (usually consisting of three) move from house to house, carrying a small wooden post in their hand, which represents mother goddess. Usually, such parties belong to three Sakta centres of Orissa, i.e. Mangala temple at Kakatpur, Sarala temple at Jhankada and Charchika temple at Banki. The parties start their activity on *Mina Sankranti* (first day of the month of *Chaitra*) in March-April and conclude on *Panasankranti* (first day of the month of *Baisakh*) in April-May. Their purpose is to enable the people to get the blessings of the goddess, which they need to protect themselves from the epidemics, likely to spread in April and May. In spite of the development in medical science and the invention in medicines, people, both in rural and urban areas seek the blessings of the goddess as a prevention as well as cure for the epidemics.

From the Mangala temple of Kakatpur, seven parties start for the purpose, each containing three men, one being the Ghanta patua and two others are the Patuas. The Ghantapatua dresses up in a typical faminine way, i.e. he wears a long colourful skirt, a long blouse and ties a cloth around his head. One of them carries a wooden post, which represents goddess Mangala. It is a post of Sishu or Rose wood, fixed on a wooden platform. It is built
by the carpenter in the prescribed size and shape. At the top, five Kalasas or earthen pots are fixed on the post. These are known as Panchamukhi Kalasa as it has five openings. One big Kalasa (earthen pot) is placed on the top most part and four others are placed, facing four sides. Pieces of red cloth are clad around the post and it is decorated with flowers, bangles, vermilion etc. The actual body of the post is not visible and it gives the impression of an anthropomorphic image. On the day of Mina Sankranti (first day of the month of Chaitra) March-April, they start their activity. Very early in the morning, the Ghantapatua, the chief of the party takes a dip in the Prachi river (flowing by the side of Mangala temple), fills an earthen pot with water and brings to the temple of Mangala, where the inaugural ceremony is performed, known as the Sankalpa. Thereafter, the parties decorate the posts and start their procession which continues for one month. Every morning, before starting from the temple, they worship the post. The whole day, they move from house to house and return back to the temple, in the evening, where the post is worshipped and is put to rest. Each party is assigned to move through a particular area. During the procession, the party keeps on beating the Ghanta (Gong, bell-metal plate with turned rim which resounds as bell when struck with soft mallet) to indicate the arrival of the goddess. People clean the courtyard of their house and invite the party, where, in the presence of the people of the nearby houses the chief of the party who belongs to lower caste (ex-untouchable), worships the post, places it on his head and dances in trance. After sometime, he stops the dance, then distributes flowers, vermilion of the goddess to the people and receives from them rice, vegetables etc., as offerings to the deity. He prays for the safety of the area from the onslaught of the epidemic. On completion of one month, on the day of Panasankranti in the first day of Hindu month of Baisakha (April-May), the ceremony ends and the post is immersed in the Prachi river. Similar rituals with slight variations are said to be in vogue in Banki and Jhankada in Cuttack district (a neighbouring district) of Orissa.

Another occasion on which wooden post is deified is the performance of a type of dance known as Dandanata. This dance is performed to worship Lord Siva, in which a wooden pole represents the Lord. Here it can be mentioned that Shiva has no image, but a stone phallus represents the deity in several shrines and temples devoted to the Lord. In this type of dance, song and physical feats are performed to please this Lord, represented by a pole. Anybody, who desires, irrespective of caste, can join the party to dance. The performers
of the dance and the physical feats are known as the Bhoktas (vow keepers). There are thirteen Bhoktas in such a party, known as the Danda party. The Bhoktas move from village to village, in the month of the Hindu month of Chaitra (March-April). People who keep their vow at Lord Siva, invite the Danda party, by cleaning their courtyard with cowdung emulsion. The Danda party performs a lot of physical feats to draw the kind attention of Lord Siva towards the devotee. The dance is performed during day time only. In the month of Chaitra (March-April), the heat of the sun becomes unbearable. Still the performers roll on hot sand, they dance and sing without showing any kind of suffering or exhaustion, because, thereby they try to please the Lord. After thus performing the dance, they take their bath and pray to God, on behalf of the devotee, to fulfill his vow. The Dandamata is performed at many religious centres of Orissa. "The Dandamata" is performed in the premises of Gods and Goddesses like the Bhattarika of Baramba in Cuttack district, the Chandrasekhara of Dhenkanal, the Hingula of Talcher, the Katapat of Angul, the Samalai of Sambalpur, the Rankei-Sukia Bauti of Hindol, the Gouri of Nayagarh, the Gopinath of Narsinhgpur, the Ramchandi of Konark, and the Danda Debi of Keonjhar". (Das, 1953 page-66).

If the worship of wooden posts in certain temples of coastal areas, as mentioned above, represents the popular aspect of the cult of wooden posts, its classical aspect can be sought in the worship of wooden images of Brahmanical gods. Usually, Brahmanical gods are not represented by wooden images. On the other hand, wood is so sacred in the tribal theology that, if there are any images in tribal shrines, they are of wood, mainly. Mostly, the tribal shrines do not contain any image. But wherever, there are images in their shrines, may be under the influence of the Hindu castes living in proximity, these are made of wood. The images in the shrines of the Saoras can be cited as an example. In Orissa, the Saoras are such a tribe who have mostly assimilated themselves to the local and nearby Hindu population, adopting its language, its manners, its dress and its goals. (Elwin, 1955).

Before discussing the instances of wooden images of Brahmanical gods, a reference is made to the sanctity attached to the wooden objects in Saora shrines and the principles which regulate the worship of such shrines. Because, here, the object is to trace out a presumption that wooden images of Brahmanical gods are an outcome of Hinduization of tribal cult.
In the Shadru shrine of the Saoras, wooden objects like guns, swords, knives, spoons and birds are common. At places, there are wooden altars on which offerings are made. In some shrines, a small block of wood, pierced with little holes, representing a piece of honey-comb is found. In some villages, the shrines contain small wooden images of gods. The most common images are those of Sahibosum and his consort. These images are worshipped regularly. It may be mentioned here that, regular worship is an unusual feature in a tribal shrine. Once, the cult of a god is started, it has to be maintained against all odds, because, it is dangerous to drop a god. In some places, new images are made every year, but in some others, new images are made only after the decay of the old ones. The decayed images are rejected and thrown to rot on the ground. There is nothing sacred or dangerous about the rejected images. The images are roughly carved in wood. There is no special class of dedicated craftsmen. But some rituals are performed to obtain the wood. For this purpose, the carpenter observes fast and goes to the forest in search of a suitable Sal (shorea robusta) tree. He carries the wood to one of the shrines, where the Shaman (chief priest of the village) offers it rice and liquor. Then, still fasting, the carpenter fashions the figures with axe and knife. When the image is thus made, the Shaman again offers rice and liquor to them, and people carry them down the path out of the village, escorted by drums and a great company of children. At the selected place, the Shaman digs the ground and erects the images. Once the images are thus placed, the beating of the drum ceases. Then, the Shaman offers a pig and goat to please the spirit in the wood and prays it to depart and trouble them no more. The images of Sahibosum range in size from three to seven feet. (Elwin, 1955).

If it can thus be presumed that the concept of images was borrowed by the tribals from the Hindus and the Saora worship of wooden images and the development of rituals, associated with it, is an instance of it, the idea of wood as a material for image can be regarded to have been borrowed by the Hindus from the tribals. Of course, the mention of wooden images is not totally alien to the Hindu scriptures. Taking reference from Bhabishya Purana, Mishra (1971) mentions that wood of different trees are used in making images by different castes, i.e. Suradaru, Sami, Madhuka, Chandana etc. are auspicious for the Brahmins. Arista, Khadira, Asvattha etc. are auspicious for the Kshatriyas. Chandana and Khadira are auspicious for the Vaisyas. Kesara, Amra, Sala are auspicious for the Sudras. But Nimba, Sriparna, Panasa, Arjuna are auspicious for all castes. Moreover, this Purana regards Nimba
Mishra (1971) assigns importance to the worship of images made of *Daru* (wood) because, through it, the devotees acquire longevity, wealth, health and victory. Inspite of the Puranic (mythological) sanction wooden images are very rarely installed in the Hindu temples of Brahmanical Gods. In Orissa, the wooden images of the main deities of the Jagannath temple, Puri, provide a rare instance of worship of wooden images in a highly Sanskritized temple of all India importance. Throughout India, in Vishnu temples, the images, installed for the Lord are mostly metal or stone. So the wooden structure of the Jagannatha images and their peculiar form have provided ample scope to scholars to explore the philosophy behind it. Out of the many explanations provided so far to justify the iconography of the Jagannatha images of Puri, the one tracing out its tribal connections seems to be quite acceptable. There are many tribal elements in the cult of Jagannath which can support this explanation. On the basis of such elements, an attempt has been made to here, to presume that the wooden images of the Jagannath temple, are the aryansed form of the Saora images.

It is a popular belief in Orissa that, Jagannath, before being installed in the present temple at Puri, was worshipped by a Sabara (Saora) called Visvavasu. This belief is supported by literary sources also. It is believed that king Indradyumna of Malwa sent Vidyapati to trace the image of Nilamadhava which was worshipped by Visvavasu. Vidyapati took the help of Lalita, the daughter of Visvavasu and traced the deity. After obtaining this information from Vidyapati, Indradyumna started a military expedition to Orissa and met Visvavasu at Banki, in the district of Cuttack. Nilamadhaba disappeared, but was pleased to appear in a dream to Indradyumna, who was, then observing fast for twentyone days with a view to know the whereabouts of the Lord. In the dream king Indradyumna was ordered to collect the Daru (wooden log) of Nilamadhava, floating on the sea and to install the images, as they would be constructed by Viswakarma. He commanded the king to open the door only after the completion of the work. But Gundicha, the queen of king Indradyumna became impatient and opened the door before the work was finished. So the images were left half constructed. The same story has been written by other writers of Oriya literature, with slight variations. The Saoras also believe in a similar story. Elwin (1955) mentions the Saora version of the story in the following manner. Formerly *Kittung* (a god of Saoras) shrines were always in the thick forests and were built up large and noble, like the Hindu temples. There
was an old Shaman (priest of Kittung) living with his wife and daughter. Once, a Brahmin youth came to his house and wanted to marry his daughter. After marriage, he won the confidence of his father-in-law. As a result, one day, the later took him with his eyes blindfolded, to the shrine and showed the image of Kittung and his wife. The Brahman had dropped cotton seeds on the path, which helped him to trace out the shrine on some otherday. He reached the shrine and promised Kittung to give Him cooked food with ghee, milk and sugar, but not the raw food which was offered to Him by the Shaman. There upon, Kittung agreed and the Brahman took the images to Puri. When the Shaman came to the shrine, the images were gone. From that day, the Saoras decided to construct Kittung's shrine inside their villages. But the shrines are empty, because they believe that their gods are stolen by the Hindus. Different versions of this story are believed in all over the Saora community. Thus, both the popular and folk stories, mentioned above, believe that Jagannath was, first worshipped by the Saoras in the forest.

Iconographically, the images of Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana, in the Jagannath temple of Puri, seem to have developed from tribal origin. These images do not possess complete human form, even though in the upcharas (services) performed daily at the time of their worship, they are treated as human beings. Of course there are mythological and scholastic explanations which try to justify the incomplete figures. The myth of opening of the door by queen Gundicha prior to the completion of the making of the images, is popularly believed as a cause of incompletion of figures. Scholars who describe Jagannath as Purushottama, putforth their views accordingly to justify the figures. Mishra (1971) refers the "Svetasvetara Upanishad" and the "Kaivalya Upanishad" to mention Purusha as one who possesses neither hands nor legs, who has no eyes but sees everything, no ears, but hears all, who though unknowable, knows everything. Even if, we justify the figures of the deities on the basis of this description of Purushottama, we can not deny the tribal elements involved in their construction. Scholars like Eschmann (1978) have tried to ascertain similarity in the figures of 'Stambheswari' and "Subhadra". The tribals obtain their wooden posts from the trunks of trees. This principle seems to have been honoured in the Puri temple. Because the images of the deities in this temple are obtained from trunk of a tree but not from any other part of it. Moreover, the images are carved from a single piece of log. In other words a single piece of log, or daru or stambha is shaped to make the image of each deity.
Different pieces are not connected to make the images. So each image, in its crude form, is but a wooden post. Sudarsana is represented in the temple as a stambha or pillar. But the images of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra are shaped and decorated to emerge into the most beautiful images ever installed in the world. The wooden structure of the images are covered by seven layers of coverings and then, these are coloured in accordance with the principles of Silpasasstras Agamas (scripts dealing with temple sculpture and architecture). These images differ from the crude images of tribals in another sense that in their making, continuity of tradition is maintained. Every subsequent designing of the images follow exactly the previous pattern in all particulars and details.

The name of the Lord i.e. Jagannatha, is another factor which can point to the tribal link. The word jagannatha does not seem to have been derived from either Pali or Sanskrit literature. It can be regarded as the sanskritization of the tribal word 'Jaganta' which stands for their deity. 'Kittung' is the god of the Saoras. The Saoras believe that Kittung has ten forms - (1) Jaganta, (2) Tota, (3) Tumana, (4) Bhima, (5) Rang Rang, (6) Garsid, (7) Raman, (8) Jojepal, (9) Matta, (10) Titi. These ten form are in tune with the classical conception of ten incarnations of Vishnu. (Padhy, 1964).

The Jagannatha temple at Puri is a Brahmanical temple of all India importance. But in the rituals of the temple, there is an assimilation of Brahmanical and tribal elements. Specific periods are fixed in a year during which these rituals can be performed. During the period, starting from Anavasara (from the first day of the dark half of Asadha (June-July) to the end of the car festival) (i.e. upto the return of the deities to the temple), the deaitas (the descendants of Visvavasu) worship the deities as per tribal rituals. But, during the rest of the year, the deities are worshipped as per vedic rites. In the performance of Snanayatra (which is performed on the full moon day of the Hindu month Jyestha (May-June)), tribal elements can be traced. On this day, the deities are bathed with water which is brought from a well known as Sunakua. It is a closed and confined well. This system goes against Vedas, which sanction for running water of the rivers or water of open well, for bathing of deities. Mishra (1971) mentions that the system of using the water of a confined well goes in tune with the Sabara tradition, which attaches, sanctity to the Anadbah (confined) water, which is stored inside thick forest unpenetrated by sunlight, for holy bath.

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As regards the priests of the temple, there are three categories, i.e. the Brahmins, the Savaras and the half Savaras. The Savaras are the descendants of Visvavasu and the half Savaras are the descendants of Vidyapati. During the period of the performance of Vedic rites, the services of the Brahman priests are prescribed, but during the period of the performance of tribal rites the services of Savara and half-savara are prescribed. During the period of anavasara (mentioned earlier), the deities are kept at a separate place (inside the Jagamohana), the doors of which are closed for the visitors. As the deities are supposed to take rest, the usual course of worship by the Brahman priests is stopped and the Savaras, known as the Daitas take care of the deities. Some of the layers of wrapping on the wooden structure of the deities is taken out and is substituted by new ones. This service known as the "Srianga Phita" is performed by the Daitas. The Daitas also apply new paints on the deities. They offer fruits to the deities, and then they themselves take it there as Prasada (offering). As the Savaras regard the deities as their family members, they take 'gyantisara' dishes (dishes taken by the members of the same lineage) along with the deities. When the deities are taken to the cars, on the occasion of Car Festival, they are dressed up in Savara fashion. The daitas tie charms and talisman made up of roots and leaves, in the arms of the deities.

The tribal elements, latent in the rituals of the Jagannatha temple, can be best ascertained through an account of the performance of the ceremony of Navakalevara; a ceremony performed to substitute the old images by new ones. A reference has been made here, to two aspects of the ceremony, i.e. (i) the similarities, that it bears with the tribal ritual of renewal of wooden posts and (ii) the predominant role played by the daitas in this ceremony. At Puri, it is a custom to renew the wooden images of the main deities, i.e. Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana at regular intervals i.e. once in 12 to 20 years, when two months of Ashadha (June-July) occur in a Hindu Calendar year. But among the tribals, it is a tradition to renew the wooden post or wooden structure, whenever necessity arises. A good deal of similarity exists between the ceremony performed at Puri and that performed in a Khond shrine, having wooden posts. To begin with, the search party of the Tribals search for the appropriate tree, from which the log is to be obtained, under the orders of the goddess of the post expressed to the Chief Priest in a dream. Similarly, the search party of Puri also obtains the order in a dream. But the order is not imparted by the deities of Puri,
but by goddess Mangala of Kakatpur in Puri District. In both the cases, the trees are required to satisfy, certain prescribed conditions. For the Khonds, the tree must have to be straight, strong, round and must not have been struck by lightning or by axe and must not bear any bird's nest. For the Navakalevara at Puri, the tree must bear four sacred symbols of *Sankha* (conch), *Chakra* (celestial wheel), *Gada* (mace), and *Padma* (lotus). There must have to be a river, a hermitage or a grave yard nearby. There must be an anthill at the foot of the tree. There has to be a cobra at the foot of the tree etc. The trees are worshipped in the same manner as the concerned deities are worshipped in their shrines. The trees are cut with equal care by both the parties, and are moved very cautiously, obeying certain prescribed rules. In both the cases, the logs are kept in a separate place, built for the purpose, near the shrine, and while making the wooden structure, the carpenters observe same type of purity. In both the cases, the images are consecrated by Brahman priests. At Puri, the images are installed by the Daitas and in the Khond shrine, the wooden post is installed by the tribal priest of the shrine.

The above mentioned phases of the ceremony are performed in an elaborate and complicated manner at Puri. The ritual of renewal as such, is a very complicated and expensive affair. So, in tribal shrines of remote villages, it is performed only when it is backed by the entire community. But whenever, the shrines having wooden posts were patronised by kings, the ceremony became elaborate and expensive. Eschmann (1978) mentions the ceremony performed at Gopalaprasad, Talcher on the occasion of the first *Hingula Yatra* which occurs after the accession of a new king. The ritual of renewal at Gopalaprasad, in the shrine of goddess Hingula, is most systematic and elaborate, than that in a purely Khond shrine. In the Jagannath temple, Puri, by virtue of the patronisation, it received from the richest and mightiest kings of Orissa, the ceremony of Navakalevara naturally developed into a very expensive and aristocratic affair. Through out the entire course of the ceremony, starting from the receiving of the "ajnamala" (wreath of order) from the deities on the tenth day of the bright half of the Hindu month of *Chaitra* (March-April), upto the final conservation and installation of the images, every day is full of activity. The services of the *Rajguru* (royal tutor) and the Brahman priests are indispensable without which rituals like fire sacrifice at the foot of the tree, consecration of the images cannot be performed. A number of Brahman priests are engaged in these services. Eschmann (1978) mentions about the engagement of seventy priests for thirteen days to perform the 'pranapratistha' (consecration)
of the deities. Still, this ceremony attaches so much of importance to the services of the Sabaras and half-sabaras that it appears as if the deities originally belong to the Sabaras and the Brahmans are there only to instill some Aryan elements into the ceremony. At the beginning of the ceremony, the Daitas only carry the 'agnamala' (garland as the symbol of authority). Pati Mahapatra (the supposed descendant of Lalita and Vidyapati) strikes the first stroke at the tree with the golden axe, the daitas strike the second stroke with silver axe, then only the tree is cut. After being cut, the logs are brought to temple and are kept in a separate shed known as Nirmana mandapa (Pandal for construction). Only the Daitas and the Pati Mahapatra can enter into this pandal. The carpenters who carve the images are also Daitas. Theoretically, the Brahman priests consecrate the images, but actually, what they consecrate is a piece of Daru (log) for each deity, which is known as 'Nyasa Daru' (log for image). The "Brahma Padartha" (sacred object), without which the wooden structures cannot be converted to worshippable images, is worshipped by the Pati Mahapatra. It is again the Daitas who fix the Nyasa Daru on the images, after the Brahma Padarthas are being inserted. (It is transferred from the abdomen of old images to the new ones). The old images are taken to the Koili Baikuntha (celestial graveyard) which is inside the campus of the temple and are buried by the Daitas only in previously dug pits. Thereafter, the Daitas mourn and observe purificatory rites for eleven days as per the prevailing Hindu custom, as if their own family members have passed away. The belongings of the old deities are handed over to the Daitas as a matter of inheritance. They are also paid compensation in terms of cash.

Thus, in view of the prevalence of tribal elements in the regular rites, performed in the temple of Lord Jagannatha and also the pre-dominant position assigned to the Daitas on certain occasions, it can be presumed that Lord Jagannatha represents Sanskritization of the tribal cult of worship of wooden images and wooden objects. Last but not the least, another point can be mentioned to support this view. Earlier, mention has been made of the Saora shrines, where wooden objects are deified. Similarly, in the Jagannatha temple, extraordinary sanctity has been attributed to 'wood'. Besides the fact that the images are wooden the Garuda Stambha (the pillar bearing the emblem of Lord Vishnu) is a wooden post. In other Vishnu temples of India, such post is made up of stone. Moreover, wood is the chief object used in the construction of cars on the occasion of Car Festival.
Wooden images of the type of Lord Jagannatha of Puri, are worshipped at many other parts of Orissa. Steitencron (1978) mentions the number of such temples as 931. The number must have certainly increased in the meantime. But all these temples are not dedicated to the four images of Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana. There are certain temples, where a single wooden image is installed, known either as Dadhivamana or "Patitapabana" or "Trutiyadeba". Such images are mostly identical with the Jagannatha image of Puri. Steitencron (1978) mentions that 'Dadhivamana' possibly represents the Sanskritized form of the original tribal name of the wooden god, who at a later stage of his development was identified with Vishnu-Purushottama and who finally adopted the title "Jagannatha". The images of Patitapabana can be regarded as a later development. Because 'Patitapabana' is believed to be a creation of the time of king Ramachandradeva-II of Khurda. It is believed that when Ramachandradeva-II was imprisoned at Cuttack, he fell in love with the Nawab's daughter. So the priests of Puri declared him to be an outcaste and didn't allow him to enter into the Puri temple. So, the image of the Lord was installed at the right hand side of the main gate of the temple of Puri, under the name 'Patitapabana' i.e. the god of the Patita or low castes, who could view the god from outside the temple. Thereafter, temples were erected in the villages of Orissa for Patitapabana. The images of 'Trutiya Deba' are also worshipped in certain villages of Orissa. Such images resemble the image of Lord Jagannatha. Thus Lord Jagannatha is the supreme Lord of all the people of Orissa. He is 'Kittung' of the Savaras, 'Dadhivamana' or 'Patitapabana' or 'Trutiyadeva' of the folk and the Purushottama of the Hindu religious group of Orissa.

The temple of 'Raghunatha' at Odagaon in the Nayagarh district, provides another instance of the worship of Brahmanical gods in wooden images. In different parts of Orissa, Lord Rama is being worshipped as Lord Raghunatha. Out of them, the two important shrines are at Telengabazar in Cuttack and at Odagaon in Nayagarh. The images in the temple at Telengabazar are not made of wood, but the images in the temple of Odagaon are made of wood.

Lord Rama, who is regarded in Hindu mythology, as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is usually worshipped in stone or metal images. So, like the wooden images of Jagannatha (temple) at Puri, the images of Rama, Laxmana and Sita at Odagaon seen to tread
out of the track and thereby tempt scholars to attribute some reason for it. For this purpose, we should take into account, the time and the founder of the temple. From the copper plates preserved in the temple, it can be inferred that the present temple was built in 1905 and in the same year, the wooden images of Rama, Laxmana and Sita were installed in it. In the subsequent years further development was made in the temple. Because, it is mentioned on the doors of the south gate that it was made in 1906-07. On the walls of the northern side of the 'Tripura Mohana Mandapa', the year of the marble flooring is mentioned as 1908. But the present temple is not the original shrine of Raghunatha. Elderly members of the village say that prior to the construction of the present temple, the deities were worshipped in a cottage, but the cottage was not the original shrine. The exact time of the deities has been traced out by Das (1967) on the basis of his interpretation of the following copper plate.

"Sakabde Saramangalye
rutuscha uddanayahkah
Ramam Laxmanam Sansthapye
Bairagi Pattanayaka"

He interprets the first line, i.e. "Sakabde Saramangalye rutuscha uddanayahkah", that the year of installation was 1703. The second line, i.e. "Ramam Laxamanam Samsthapya Bairagi Pattanayaka", is interpreted that Bairagi Pattanayaka had installed Rama, Laxmana. Das (1967) also mentions that "Sadhu Bairagi Pattanayaka" was helped in this regard by the famous oriya poet Upendra Bhanja, whose father Nilakantha Bhanja was the king of Gumusur from 1701 to 1703 A.D. According to Pattanayak (1973) the Bhanja Kings of Gumusur royal house were devotees of Lord Rama and Upendra Bhanja, who helped Bairagi Pattanayaka in the installation of the images had attained his "Siddhi" (supreme knowledge) under the blessings of Raghunatha.

In so far as the Bhanjas were associated with the installation of the deities of Rama, Laxmana, Sita at Odagaon, we can justify the wooden structure of the deities on the presumption that, the Bhanjas, who worshipped Stambheswari as their tutelary goddess (Rajguru, 1992 & Eschman, 1978), were so much accustomed to the worship of the wooden post goddess that they preferred wooden images for the deities in the Raghunatha temple of Odagaon.
Another reason can also be attributed to the wooden structure of these images. It is believed by the people of Odagaon that Rama is worshipped there as a Banabasi (dweller of the forest), as in course of his "Banabasa of fourteen years" (stay in the forest for fourteen years), he had passed some time in the nearby forest. This must have led to the idea of the construction of wooden images. Here, the images of Rama, Laxmana bear moustaches which is a rare feature for a Brahmanical image. So, we can presume that Lords Rama, Laxmana and Sita are installed at Odagaon as forest deities, but not as Brahmanical gods.

It can also be presumed that the wooden structure of these images is due to the impact of the religion of the tribals of Gumsur and the neighbouring Khimidi who are described by scholars as staunch devotees of goddess Khambeswari. So, this can be regarded as another factor to ascertain the point that wooden images of Brahmanical gods represent the aryisation of tribal tradition of worship of wooden posts and wooden images.

In the Jagannatha temple, Puri, the rituals performed, (as mentioned already) represent an assimilation of tribal and Brahanical elements. But the rituals, performed in the Raghunath temple, Odogaon, do not bear any trace of tribal element. But for the peculiarity in the images, the Raghunath temple is purely a Brahanical temple.