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## Jagannath Consciousness: An Emerging Global Spiritual Quest

### Dealing with *Basudhaiva Kutumbakam*

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#### **Abstract:**

Every state of India has its singular flavour. Odisha, an eastern Indian state, is widely acknowledged as the land of Lord Jagannath due to the illustrious existence of Lord Jagannath in the monumental temple at Puri, on the east coast of the Bay of Bengal. Innumerable scriptures including the virtuous Vedic literature have acclaimed magnanimous holiness of this pious pilgrimage as well as the colossal glory of Lord Jagannath. His profound reverence is not only presidential but also pontifical. This paper is a reappraisal of the culture, tradition and consciousness associated with Lord Jagannath. It deals with Jagannath Consciousness which may be considered as an emerging global spiritual quest dealing with *Basudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Since time immemorial, different intuitions and intellections have interlaced rigmaroles around the origin and evolution of Jagannath Cult to enhance His overwhelming reverence and to strengthen His stupendous cultural cosmopolitanism. As a result, the Lord has been esteemed as synthesis of various spiritual creeds and excellent assimilation of divergent humanitarian aspirations. He has been admired not merely as a mythical idol but a benevolent reality of contemporaneity and futurity.

**Keywords:** Jagannath Consciousness, *Basudhaiva Kutumbakam*, salvation, Vaishnavism, Jagannath Cult.

#### **Introduction:**

Precisely we do not know, since when, inquisitive intellectuals have been wrestling over the enigmatic historicity of Jagannath consciousness and its prodigious impact upon sociocultural concepts in the global village. It is noteworthy to mention here that King Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva (1077-1150 A.D.) of the Ganga dynasty built a majestically grand temple on the Bay of Bengal at Puri for Lord Jagannath. It is also accepted that King Chodaganga Deva patronized Vaishnavism under the spiritual

inspiration of the renowned Vaishnavite Saint Ramanuja (1017-1137 A.D.). According to an eminent critic S.N. Rajguru, later in 1230 A.D., the Ganga king Anangavim Deva III not only dedicated his empire to Lord Jagannath but also declared the Divinity of Puri as the sole deity of Odisha. Hence Lord Jagannath became the source of spiritualism, artistic exploration and cultural exultation. Number of legends, uncountable literary creations and significant scholastic reviews in the form of well-worded compositions have been published to establish the mysterious magnanimity of Lord Jagannath (meaning the Master of the Universe). The Grand Temple at Puri has gained excellence by possessing Lord Jagannath and His associates. Moreover, the holy abode of Lord Jagannath has been one of the important pilgrimages in India. Millions of devotees, travellers, pilgrims flock to this venerable city to witness the ever continuing traditional practices and to participate in ever enchanting celebrations.

### **Puri: The Holy Abode of Lord Jagannath**

Situated on the east coast of India, Puri enjoys its glory as one of the foremost religious sanctuaries. It is one of the distinguished salvation centers of the Hindu belief and has been a destination of spiritual leaders through centuries. Savants and seers like Adi Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Sri Chaitanya, Guru Nanak, Kabir and many more have visited it. Some have established their respective monasteries to add grandeur to the mosaic of its vibrant culture. The religious sanctity, enigmatic antiquity, sea-scape beauty, moderate environment and cultic atmosphere of Puri have been the factors to attract the visitors from different parts of the country and abroad. For these aspects, Puri has been elevated magnanimously than any other religious centers in India.

There are four major religious centers (*dhamas*) established by Adi Sankaracharya at four cardinal points of the Indian subcontinent, around which the Brahmanical religion and practices flourish. They are Puri in the east, Rameswar in the south, Dwaraka in the west and Badrinath in the north of India. "Of these, while Badrinath and Dwarkanath are centers of Vaishnavism and Rameswaram is the centre of Saivism, Puri fosters the confluence of all sects in and through Purusottama Jagannath, even though many regard Him as the embodiment of Vaishnavism"(Patnaik 1). It is believed that Lord Vishnu takes His holy bath at Rameswaram, meditates at Badrinath, takes food at Puri and retires at Dwaraka. Although all these four *dhamas* are mystically noble in effect to the foreigners and the intellectuals in general, the unanimous reverence of the Hindu community for sacred pilgrimage is concentrated at Puri, dedicated to Lord Jagannath.

### **The Grand Temple of Lord Jagannath**

Just as Puri is extolled by the name *Sri Kshetra* (the land of divine prosperity), so also the temple of Lord Jagannath is acknowledged as *Sri Mandir* (the temple of divine prosperity). There is an established mythological belief in connection with the pioneer of Jagannath cult. It is considered that the king of Malwa named Indradyumna has built this grand Temple and installed the deities on the *Ratna Singhasana* (Jewel Pedestal).

Here we find a queer amalgamation of conceivable beliefs and spiritual pursuance.

During the pre-Vedic period, as the scriptures like *Niladrimahoday*, *Brahma Puran*, *Skandha Puran* and *Indranilamani Puran* vouchsafe, the Lord was worshipped as Neelamadhab by a tribal chieftain of *Sabar* (aboriginal tribe) clan, named Viswvasu. Primarily, the iconography of Neelamadhab was an idol carved out of blue emerald. "Viswvasu used to worship his God in a wooded recess in the forest which stretched behind the present temple in the western direction"(Mishra 7). The so-called secret recess is acknowledged as *Nilakandara* (Blue Cave) of *Nilagiri* (Blue Mountain). It is remarkable that *Nilagiri*, *Niladri*, *Nilasaila*, *Nilachala* - literally, the Blue Mountain - are the synonyms of Puri of the present time. Although we do not find any mountain in this region, "this is a sacred place with which a sacred mountain is associated as a symbol of the *nabhi*, the naval, of the universe"(Silva 27).

The spiritual quest of Indradyumna - king of Malwa, and his intervention brought a dramatic change in the proceedings. Being aspirant enough to have the glimpse of Neelamadhab, King Indradyumna sent Vidyapati to trace out the whereabouts of the Lord. Vidyapati also succeeded in his attempt. He walked across a long distance through dense forest to reach the *Nilagiri* and fortunately became the guest of Viswvasu. While residing as the guest of Viswvasu in his domain, Vidyapati developed marital attachment with Lalita, daughter of Viswvasu and won the favour of the chieftain. Subsequently, Vidyapati accompanied Viswvasu and discovered the Lord. After the great discovery of the Lord, Vidyapati left for Malwa secretly and informed King Indradyumna everything regarding the existence of Neelamadhab. It is also said that when king Indradyumna reached *Nilagiri* with his ministers, followers and soldiers to pay reverence to Neelamadhab, the Lord had vanished. The grief-stricken king accepted the advice of Narada - the divine saint and performed a grand fire sacrifice.

The fire sacrifice was conducted beside the Narasingha Temple in *Sri Kshetra*. In the mean time Lord Vishnu instructed the king in dream to collect the necessitated holy log for the idol from the sea. On the next day while the king was about to collect the holy log having four branches, there was an instruction also from the blue sky to construct the image in a closed pedestal beside the fire sacrifice pavilion. The voice from the blue also guided that the God in the camouflage of an aged fellow would arrive to construct the images. The king then performed everything in accordance to the airy instruction. All the ritualistic activities were done under the guidance of sage Narada. In the due time an old carpenter reached the king and made the four divine images in fifteen days. After the consecration of the divinities, the king also built the Grand Temple in Puri for the worship of the Lords. In this way, all the legends concerning the cult of Lord Jagannath credit Indradyumna as the founder of Jagannath Cult. The legendary king Indradyumna is said to be responsible for the introduction of rituals, festivals as well as the corroboration of aboriginal and Brahmanical tradition in the Temple too.

According to some historians like S.N. Rajguru, Harekrushna Mahatab, K.C. Mishra, Kulke, King Jajati Kesari (1025-1040 A.D.) of Somavansi dynasty at first established a

small temple at Puri and installed *Purusottama* in it. The present temple is the monumental creation of king Chodaganga Deva. This is the highest among existing temples in Odisha. It measures 214 ft. 8 inches from the ground level. "It is a mature *kalingan* style, consisting of four structures called (i) the *vimana* (sanctum-sanctorum), (ii) the *Jagamohana* or *Mukhasala* (the Porch), (iii) the *Nata Mandira* (the dancing hall), (iv) the *Bhoga Mandap* (the hall of offering), built in a row in one axile alignment facing east" (Patnaik, S.K. 119). The main temple (*Vimana*) carries a curious mixture of the North Indian together with the South Indian style of temple architecture. The base of the temple which is square in shape shows South Indian pattern. The circular part toward the top is of North Indian temple pattern.

Lord Jagannath is established with His siblings on the pious sanctum (*ratna singhasana*) in the main temple. In front of the deities the Lord's charioteer Garuda squats from a wooden pillar facing toward the Lord. The main temple has two compound walls - the outer wall is called *Meghanada Pacheri* (665 ft x 640ft) and the inner wall is named as *Kurma Bedha* (420ft x 315ft). Moreover, both the outer and inner enclosures have four gates. The entrance of the outer enclosure in the east is known as *Singhadwar* (the Lion Gate), for the presence of lions on both the sides. Similarly the southern, western and northern sides of the outer enclosure are named as *Aswadwar* (the horse gate), *Byaghradwar* (the tiger gate), *Hastidwar* (the elephant gate) respectively with the structure of respective animals. The total campus area of the temple measures 10 acres.

The temple is surrounded by a number of small temples meant for Demi Gods and Goddesses. According to some critics the cult of Lord Jagannath is the synthesis of five significant cults of Hinduism namely *Saiva* (worship of Lord Siva), *Sakta* (worship of Sakti), *Vaishnava* (worship of Vishnu), *Ganapatya* (worship of Ganesh) and *Soura* (worship of Sun). Hence deities of different cults are installed in the temple surrounding. Among the adjoining temples, the temple of Goddess Bimala in the south and the temple of Goddess Mahalaxmi in the north are important. When one wants to visit Lord Jagannath, he has to cross twenty two steps made in the courtyard of the temple close to the Lion Gate. After paying his reverence to the Demi Gods around the main temple, he will have to mount the seven steps in the north side of the *Jagamohana*. The devotee would have to pay his obeisance to the Lord standing behind the Garuda pillar. Especially in the morning, there is the provision of *sahana mela* (meaning general appearance) during which all are allowed to go near the Lord to have holy glimpse (*darsan*). Although the temple inholding the Lord seems fascinating, it has certain symbolic value. The temple symbolizes human body inholding God in the form of soul. The Skanda Upanishad advocates in the shadow of mysticism, '*deho debalayah proktah*' - the human body is a replica of temple. "The body-temple is also called *Sri Mandira*. Lord Jagannath is enthroned in the body-temple. The body is beautiful due to the presence of Lord Jagannath" (Prajnanananda 28). One has to realize the existence of God through *sadhana* (yogic meditation).

### **Deities on the Jewel Pedestal**

The *Ratna Singhasana* (Jewelled Pedestal) in the sanctum sanctorum of the main  
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temple is occupied by the seven deities - Lord Balabhadra, Lord Jagannath, Lord Sudarsana, Goddess Subhadra, Bhudevi, Sridevi and Madhava. Collectively these seven deities are revered as *Saptavarana Murti* (unit of seven idols). All of them are made of wood except Bhudevi and Sridevi who are metallic icons with usual Goddess form. The other deities are unique in forms. Jagannath and Balabhadra have two hands without palms or fingers. Subhadra has no hands at all. The unit of these three idols form the Triad. None of them has legs. The holy Triad with Sudarsana who is only a long bar, is called *Chaturdha Murti* (unit of four idols).

Critics and spiritual thinkers like J. N. Banarji, H. Kulke and Prajnanananda have evaluated *Chaturdha Murti* in their prospective ways. According to the great odia saint-poet Balaram Das, Lord Balabhadra represents Sam Veda, Devi Subhadra stands for Rig Veda, Lord Jagannath symbolizes Yajur Veda while Sudarsana is for Atharva Veda. Alexander Cunningham in his books like *The Stupa of Bharhut* and *The Bhilsa Topes*, advocates that the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra in the Grand Temple are the Buddhist Triple-Gems representing *Buddha, Dharma* and *Sangha*. The Indian scholars like N.N. Bose, R.L. Mitra and H.K. Mahatab have also supported the Buddhist point of views of Lord Jagannath. Nilakantha Das (one of the great nationalist historians) has a different opinion. He believes that under the influence of the *Sunya* or nihilistic theory which developed out of the *Mahayanic* system of Buddhism, the Jaina symbol came out in the name of 'Neelamadhava'. He explains that the term '*Neelamadhava*' is the combination of three words - *Neela, Ma* and *Dhava*. '*Neela*' stands for black or nothingness, '*Ma*' represents mother or creative energy, and '*Dhava*' signifies white which is the phenomenal universe. Thus icons of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra stand for *Sunya*, Energy and Universe respectively. In addition Lord Sudarsana might be taken as the symbol of Jaina *Dharma chakra* (wheel of religion).

Some scholars attribute that Lord Jagannath was initially worshipped by tribal people as Neelamadhava. "He was originally in the form of a *Sila* (stone) *Brahma* and afterwards became a *Daru* (wood) *Brahma*. In the course of development, Neelamadhava became Jagannath and worshiped alone. Subsequently Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana are incorporated consequent upon the resurgence of Saivism and Saktism"(Pasayat 35). Through the process of cultural evolution Lord Jagannath accepted reverences of different sects of Hinduism. In the contemporary concept Lord Jagannath is Vishnu, the Principal deity for the Vaishnavites. Lord Balabhadra is Shiva, the chief deity of the Shaivites and Goddess Subhadra is *Sakti*, presiding deity of the *Saktas*. Lord Sudarsan is Sun, the chief deity of *sauras* (devotees of the Sun). Most importantly the idols in the Grand Temple are revered as brother and sister to symbolize religious integrity in the world. Such combination and integration of sects is a unique system which has attracted millions of devotees having different religious beliefs and faiths to the folds of Jagannath culture. Moreover, the colour of Lord Jagannath is black, Balabhadra white, Subhadra yellow and Sudarsana red. "Black Jagannath is the representative of the Indians, while Balabhadra, the Europeans, turmeric colour Subhadra the Chinese and pink colour Sudarsana the Red Indians"(Mishra, R. 39). United they represent the colours of the people in the world. This colour combination is also unique in the whole pantheon of gods and goddesses being worshipped in the

world .

In various temples of the world Gods and Goddesses are worshipped either alone or with their spouses. Lord Jagannath (unlike other temples) is worshipped with His brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra gives a message that we should live happily with our brothers and sisters in the world. Hence, Jagannath culture announces as well as aspires universal brotherhood beyond dogmatic religious concepts and sectarian traditions. Lord Jagannath presents Himself as an inspiring Divine force to materialize the principle of 'unity in diversity'. His daily rituals and festivals too highlight the essence of integrated spiritualism.

### **The Daily Rituals in the Grand Temple**

We know that tradition is a set of ritualistic practice which has root in the past, continuum in the present. Although Lord Jagannath is regarded as the God of the masses, in His tradition all categories of people beginning from the king to the commoners are engaged to perform different rituals as sober servitors. In the great car festival the king of Puri sweeps the cars which proves the equality of the servitors before the Lord.

Lord Jagannath wakes up in the early morning with chants and music. He changes His dress, brushes His teeth and takes bath. Before taking breakfast He behaves like a living God as well as the Lord of the Universe. He knows that hundreds of devotees are waiting in the temple premises without taking their breakfast to see Him and offer their prayers near His jewelled throne (*Ratna singhasana* ).So all the devotees are allowed to enter into the main temple to have a soulful sight of the Lord like near and dear ones, offer their prayers and express their tales of sorrows. Like a great master of the Universe He allows the worship of His gate keepers - 'Jaya' and 'Vijaya' before He takes breakfast. Like a human being He takes launch and dinner too. During the course of a day and night He adorns Himself in colourful dresses, scented flowers, sandalwood paste, camphor and holy-basil to remain fresh and fine. The most adorable fact is that some of His usual activities are celebrated as festivities.

### **Festivals Celebrated in the Cult of Lord Jagannath**

The rites and rituals of Lord Jagannath are performed projecting Him to be a human god. Some of His occasional rituals are acknowledged as festivals. In the Grand Temple a series of festivals and celebrations are performed throughout the year. The significant factor is that all the activities of the Lord is celebrated in festive flavour. During summer He enjoys sailing boats in the *Narendra* tank and remain in sandal mixed water for some time to beat the heat of summer. It is His *Chandan Yatra* (sandal festival). During winter He is dressed in winter garments. It is observed in the name of *Prabarana Yatra* (festival of wearing warm clothes). When the Lord plans for a periodic sleep for four months from the eleventh day of bright fortnight in the month of *Asadha* (June-July), people celebrate it as *Harisayan* (the ceremony of sleep). Even His



'turning the side' and 'rising from sleep' are celebrated as *Parswa Paribartana* (August-September) and *Utthana* (October-November) ceremony respectively. In the name of *Ratha Yatra* (car festival) He visits His aunt and His birth place - the *Gundicha* temple. He has His pains too. Like a common human being, He also suffers from fever after the grand Bathing Ceremony (*Snanayatra*). He suffers for long fifteen days, accepts traditional herbal treatment and gets cure. The most significant aspect of Jagannath tradition is that the Lord prepares Himself for inseparable death and accepts reincarnation in the name of *Navakalevara*.

## Conclusion

Evaluating the culture and tradition of Lord Jagannath we find it a unique one. If all the human beings living in the world are treated as the members of a family then Lord Jagannath, The Lord of the Universe, is the head of it. The affectionate accumulation of many a spiritual concepts and practices have moulded its essence. In the context of contemporary global scenario, when the materialistic outlook and incessant religious conflicts have infested the way of life, the tradition and culture of Lord Jagannath become beckoners to establish mutuality propagating a spiritual vision with a unique emphasis on the principle of 'Unity in Diversity' together with *Basudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the entire human race is a family). In reality, His image, rites, rituals, fairs and festivals are uniquely unique. In fine, Jagannath consciousness might be estimated as an emerging global spiritual quest which believes in universal brotherhood, love, tolerance, equality and fraternity.

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