



The Role of Mathas at Puri in the Culture of Lord Jagannath

Bhagaban Mahapatra

Among the four religious centers of Hindus, namely Badrinath, Ramnath, Dwarikanath, Sri Jagannath Dham, Puri is regarded as the most important Pitha as Lord Himself has taken his abode at Srikhtra, Puri in this Kali Yuga. He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He is the only religion. All sects, all beliefs and all religions have mingled in His eternal oblivion. He is Lord Jagannath.

Puri is famous to such an extent that it is regarded as heaven. It is universally believed that the Jagannath Dham is the confluence of all religious faiths. The precepts of different sects have paid their visits to the holy land of Puri and preached their philosophy and got them involved in the rituals and services of Jagannath temple, and in course of time established their Mathas (monasteries).

The establishment of Mathas at Puri dates back to the 9th century. The great Sankaracharya,

who in course of his spiritual conquest of whole India visited Puri (820 AD) and brought many reforms in the Jagannath temple. He also established a Matha at Puri which is known as Govardhan Matha. The Bhoga Mandap, where large quantity of Bhoga are generally offered to Lord to cater the need of devotees was

introduced by him in the temple.

After Sankar, the great Vaisnav saint from South India Acharya Ramanuja came to Puri during the reign of Chodaganga Deva. He established a Matha which is



known as Emar Matha in front of the Lion's Gate, Puri.

It is also said that Visnuswami established Jagannath Ballav Matha at Puri which is known as playing garden of Lord Jagannath. Many rituals of the temple are performed in this Matha throughout the year.



Sri Ramananda, another saint also visited Puri in the 14th century. He also established some training centers known as Akhadas, the main purpose of which was to protect the temple from the attack of Muslims. These Akhadas are known as Bagha Akhada, Khaki Akhada, Nirmohi Akhada and Bada Akhada. Lord Mahavira Hanuman is the symbol of hero worship (god) of these Akhadas.

Ballavacharya who belonged to Vishnuswami sect, also established a Prabhuji Baithak at Puri to preach the glory of Sri Gopal Krishna.

During the reign of King Prataparudra Deva, Sri Chaitanya from Bengal came to Puri to see the Lord. He stayed at Puri for a period of 24 years. His place of stay is presently known as Radhakanta Matha. During his period the Vaisnavism reached the climax point in the religious life of people.

Kabir Das, a great saint came to Puri and could witness Allah in Jagannath. According to him there is no difference between Allah and Jagannath. He stayed at a place near the sea shore which is commonly known as Kabir Ghat.

Nanak, the Guru of Sikh religion also visited Puri. The Matha established by him is known as Mangu Matha.

Tulsi Dasa, a great saint of north India, who composed the famous Ramacharita Manas came to Puri and realized that he could not see his devoted Lord Ram in Jagannath. He returned back to a place near Puri and sat in meditation. In the night he could see Lord Jagannath in a dream, who directed him to see the Lord in the temple. Tulsi Das came back to the temple and could see Lord Ram in Jagannath. He became overwhelmed with joy. This place where saint meditated is known as Tulasi Chaura (about 8 km away from the temple).

Ganapati Bhatta a great devotee of lord Ganesh could see Ganapati in Jagannath on the day of Snana Purnima on Snana Mandap. He established a Matha which is known as Raghab Das Matha.

The saints and seers of different sects of Hinduism had come to Puri being attracted by Lord Jagannath and accepted Jagannath as their Lord of Worship. They felt the assimilation of their religious faith in the Jagannath culture. Accordingly large number of monasteries of different sects of Hinduism have developed at Puri by their religious leaders. Generally Mathas are divided in two kinds. Those Mathas administered by Sanyasis are known as Nihangi Matha and those administered by Gruhi are known Gruhi Matha. In Puri, Mathas are developed with the following main objectives:

- (a) To preach and spread the Jagannath culture and the essence of Hinduism.
- (b) To give shelter to the pilgrims of different sects and saints,
- (c) To donate food to the distresse, beggars, poor people and to help poor students in their studies in different schools and colleges,
- (d) To involve and support in different rituals and Nitis of the temple.

Presently about thirty Mathas are closely involved in different rituals and Nitis of Lord Jagannath. The functions of Mathas in the temple are detailed below:

Matha Services:

1. *Emar Matha*: Provides Chamara and Canopy Seva. Chandrika made of flower are supplied daily.
2. *Uttar Parswa Matha* : Offers daily Mohan Bhoga (made of coarse flour and sugar) to distribute among the devotees.



3. *Trimali Matha* : Offers Bhoga during Chandan Yatra.
4. *Raghabadas Matha* : Offers Bhoga at the time of Ballav (Morning Tiffin), Chamar and Alata seva. Hativesa on the day of Snana Purnima.
5. *Jaganath Ballav Matha* : Associates with many rituals of Lord, such as Ramanabami, Dola Yatra, Dayanachori, Lakha Vindha, Dussahara. Provides lotus flower for decoration of Lord and ornaments made of flower.
6. *Govardhan Matha* : Chief of Muktimandap Pandit Sabha and gives final opinion on Niti and rituals of Sri Jagannath temple.
7. *Badachhata Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva, Kirtan at the time of daily Puja, and Chandan Yatra, to recite some traditional songs at the time of Mangal arati and Bada singhar.
8. *Radhakanta Matha* : Cleaning of Gundicha temple before Car Festival.
9. *Jhanjapita Matha* : Offers seva and puja at the lotus feet of Lord inside the compound wall of the temple.
10. *Bada Odia Matha* : Provides Ballav Bhoga (Morning Tiffin) of Lord. Alata and Chamar Seva.
11. *Dakhinaparswa Matha* : Canopy Seva and Chamar Seva.
12. *Revasa Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
13. *Gangamata Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
14. *Radhavallav Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
15. *Ramji Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
16. *Sana Chhata Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
17. *Goswami Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
18. *Venkatachari Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
19. *Nua Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
20. *Mangu Matha* : Alata and Chamar Seva.
21. *Labanikhia Matha* : Sports of Lord during Krishna Janma.
22. *Kapadia Matha* : Provides dress materials.
23. *Dasavatar Matha* : Cultural function
24. *Sunagoswami Matha* : Flower garlands for decoration.
25. *Sivatirtha Matha* : Provides tooth brush for Lord.
26. *Mahiprakash Matha* : Provides tooth brush.
27. *Darpanarayan Matha* : Offers flower garlands.
28. *Gopaltirtha Matha* : Hati Vesha for Lord Balabhadra.
29. *Rani Matha* : Provides decorated Tahia
30. *Nandimata Matha* : To stick jari in *patta*

At present some Mathas are not performing their duties with the pretext of paucity of funds. Although Mathas are in possession of huge landed property in papers, but actually they do not get any income from these properties. This has been due to the implementation of land reform act. To revive the glory of the past, all efforts should be made at all levels so that all Mathas can perform their Sevas for Lord properly.

Bhagaban Mahapatra lives at Sri Gundicha Vihar, Sarboday Nagar, Puri-752002.