



Sri Krishna and Lord Jagannath

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Before dealing with the Puja system of the great Jagannath Temple of Puri, we must look into the real definition of the terms Vaishnava and Vaishnavism. According to Indian epics, there are three deities, known as Trishakti, Trideva or Trio. They are Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the maintainer and Shiva the destroyer. These three attributes are indispensable in all matters; even now in science and in the simple construction of a building. Everything we think, feel, and hear is subject to these three influences, as told by the ancient Rishies in the days of yore.

It is most interesting to note, however, that Avatars, or Divine Beings who incarnate on earth as man from time to time to uplift humanity, are never born. They come to earth in a divine way, from Vishnu, the Maintainer Himself. There are no Avatars of Brahma or Shiva. According to Ishabasya Upanishad, all creation is filled with Divinity.

*"Ishabasyamidam sarbam jat kichnitya
dagatya jagat."*

That which is created is easy to destroy, but difficult to maintain and protect. For this reason, Lord Vishnu Himself comes in the form



of a divine man, or Avatar, as a father would come to protect his children.

*'Jada jada hi dharmasya
Glanirbhabati Bharat
Abhyuthanamdharmasya
Tadatmanam Srujamyaham
Paritranaya Sadhunam
Binasaya cha Duskrutam.'*

"Whenever problems overwhelm the world,
To uphold Dharma, or Righteousness,
I incarnate from age to age."

From the word Vishnu, "Vaishnava" is derived, that is, one who worships Vishnu, the maintainer and protector. This worship or spiritual practice is known as "Vaishnavism".



In Vaishnavism, we do not give so much emphasis to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, such as:

1. Yama- Non-violence, having truth, compassion, forgiveness, purity
2. Niyama- Spiritual practice, puja, worship, japa or telling holy names, giving alms
3. Asana-such as Hatha Yoga
4. Pranayama-breathing exercises
5. Pratyahara-worship through forms, known as Sakara, formless worship, known as Nirakara, and seeing God in all, known as Atmabhava.
6. Dharana- one- pointedness, or forbearance
7. Dhyana- meditation
8. Samadhi-God realization

Here what alone is essential is Bishwasa, or Faith, and Anuraga, or Loyalty and Affection, and most importantly, Abhimana or Unconditional Love.

"Bishwasa" means having complete faith, with no doubt, blind faith even. With such faith in her Lord Krishna, while uttering His name, the poet-saint Mirabai drank poison. The poison turned to nectar. "Anuraga" is the feeling of loyalty, even if it is only one-sided. The child Dhruva meditated in the forest, not to get anything. But when he had a vision of Lord Vishnu, he was given a place in the sky, known as Dhruva Star. When one gives flowers to God, decorates God, brings food to God, and meditates on Him out of such deep affection, with no thought of results, but simply as an offering, this is Anuraga.

"Abhimana" is the highest feeling for a Vaishnavite. It is that found only between a husband and wife, or a devotee and God. It is love of the deepest kind, as in the union of the sun and its ray, a flower and its scent; or sugar

and its sweetness. So mixed with good feelings is it that even anger is not anger, and sadness is not sorrow. The main Gopi of Krishna's childhood days, Radha, was the foremost example of this love. When Krishna left Brindaban for Dwaraka, He did not return. Four days became four years and more, although He had promised to return. Radha one day tells her friends like this.

"Krishna is now busy in Dwaraka. He is not coming. I will die one day. Please, my dear sisters, you can do this one thing for me. At that time, carry my dead body on the path where He once walked. Over it you throw a cloth on which is written only Krishna, Krishna, and Krishna. Write His name on my breasts. If by chance the sound of a sweet flute is heard, turn my head so that its sweet music will enter my ear. This is my last prayer to you, my dear sisters. Let my dead body also be content that I have been with Him, and let all remember that here is a lady who liked Him so much."

In Vaishnavism complex rituals are not at all necessary. The essential thing is only this Radha-Bhava, the Love of Radha for Sri Krishna, and Anurakti, the feeling that Radha had of being inseparable from God. This Anurakti is the feeling of treating God as a man; no third party is required. There is just the devotee and God, not a God made of wood or brass, but alive and one, we can talk to in a human way. What is true to us is true to Him also. A true Vaikuntha or Heaven is not far away, but right here in the midst of the home. God is with us like a member of the family. Krishna Himself said in Bhagavat Geeta.

*"Mada Bhaktra Jatra Gayanti
Tatra Tisthami Narada"*

"I do not live in Vaikuntha or Dwaraka, but where My devotees sing and remember Me, I am there."



A true Vaishnavite is a selfless servant and surrenders to this almighty, before acting. He does not believe in his own strength or worldly power or wealth. To him, his body and the whole world consist of only two things. Chetana and Achetana." Achetana" means non-awareness and refers to the physical transient blood and bones that make up the body. "Chetana" means awareness and refers to the invisible and Supreme Purusha, or Divine Being residing within this pure shell. When a Vaishnavite surrenders, he forgets the misery of "Achetana" and communicates directly with the invisible God dwelling inside himself.

Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Adishankar, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, they all had glimpses of Godhood. Their ways and means were different, but their goal was the same. But Sri Krishna came to be the symbol for Vaishnavism.

If a devotee thinks of God to be his inner master, closer than the eyelid to the eye, Krishna comes as Krishna Chandra; as friend, Golakchandra; as divine child, Balkrishna; as lover, Gopikrishna; as cowherd boy, Gopal Krishna, as the one who steals all hearts, Chitta Chora; as the most attractive in the world, as Krishna Himself. The word "Krishna" means to attract, and from the derivative word of Krishna, "Karsayati iti Krishna." His name also means the excuser of all mistakes. Taking anyone name and its substance, a devotee can reach Krishna. In such a way was He a peculiar and unique Avatar to the world.

Many divine souls and Avatars have come to the world, but only Sri Krishna was called the "Poorna Avatar", the full Avatar having all 16 *kalas*, or divine arts or attributes within Him. They are as follows:

1. Daya - Compassion

2. Dharjya - Patience
3. Kshyama - Forgiveness
4. Nyaya - Justice
5. Nirapeksha - Impartiality
6. Nirasakta - Detachment
7. Tapasya - Meditation and spiritual powers
8. Aparchitta - Invincibility
9. Danasheel - Beneficence, Bestower of all wealth in the world and nature.
10. Saundaryamaya - Beauty Incarnate
11. Nrityajna - Best of dancers
12. Sangitajna - Best of singers
13. Neetibadi - Embodiment of Honesty
14. Satyabadi - Truth itself
15. Sarvagnata - Perfect master of all arts, such as poetry, drama, painting, etc.
16. Sarvaniyanta - Controller of All

So eventhough many sages and seers have come, having divine attributes, such as Compassion, Dharna, Sacrifice, which have helped the world, none was having the spiritual power of Sri Krishna.

Krishna is Brahmanda Pati, "Lord of all the universes, of which this world is only a small part. There are numerous universes not even seen or knowable. Narada tells that for this reason alone all should take shelter in him".

In the Oriya version of Bhagavata, it is told,

*"Brahmanda mala mala hoi /
To lomakupe jhuluthai //"*

"Whole universes are revolving around me, I am here to care for all."

In the last part of Mahabharat, a mysterious connection is made. Sri Krishna told Arjuna,



"Now that the war is over, hear what I want; I wish to take rest in Seealee Lata, a distant forest of creepers. I know all. There while I sleep, I will be killed by site of Jagannath Puri, as stated in Rig Veda,

*"Ato Jutta daru Plabate
Sindhupara aparusiya".*

"Ato" means here, "Jutta" means that, "Daru means wood, Plabate" means floating, "sindhupare" means that side of the ocean, "apuruseya" means not manmade.

"Something will be carved from a log of wood floating on the ocean here (describing the origin of the Murti of Lord Jagannath along the beach of Puri) that cannot be manmade".

About that dense forest more details are given in the ancient Sanskrit text of Jagannath Temple, called Niladri Mahoday, in which the origin of the temple and the basic outline of the Puja systems are described. It is stated that the great Niladri Temple of Lord Jagannath was once on a huge blue hill surrounded by a dense forest. The inhabitants worshipping Lord Jagannath here were tribal people called Dayitapatis. Even today a street of the temple community bears their name, Dayitapati Sahi.

Lord Krishna came here and while resting under a tree, the hunter Jara Sabara appeared he thought the two feet of Sri Krishna to be the ears of a deer, so soft red in color they were. When he realized he killed this Krishna with his bow and arrow, he tried to burn the body. But it was the body of Deva Purusha Himself; it could never be burnt. So he left it at a place by the sea in Puri called Banki Muhana. It becomes a fossil of wood. This marked the beginning of Kali Yuga. After some thousand years passed, King Indradyumna of Nepal had a dream and in the dream, he was told to find the log of wood there in Banki Muhan,

carve an image from it as he saw in this dream, and install it in the great Jagannath Temple of Puri. Thus Sri Krishna became Lord Jagannath for the modern age, and all of His Leelas and past times continue today in the Sri Kshetra of Puri, as they once did in Brindavan.

According to the epic Indra Neelamani and Niladri Mahodaya, it was this same image of Sri Krishna that was being worshipped by Bishwbasu, the tribesman who met King Indradyumna's minister, who had been sent to find the divine Murti.

The image was called Neela Madhava or Nilakanta Bigraha. 'Neela' means the colour of the sky and Kanta' means beautiful. This 'Bigraha' or deity was none other than Ghanashyam, or Sri Krishna Himself. On reaching the tribal man' hut, the minister was fed a sumptuous meal, which he called 'Mahaprasad', or the food of the gods. Wonderful rice preparations and exotic fruits were offered to him. The minister wondered how such a poor man, who himself ate not a grain of rice, could offer or find such food ! The tribal man said it was the Prasad, or blessing of his beloved Lord. All the gods and goddesses of the world bring with them the best foods to offer at the feet of the Murti. The minister begged Bishwvasu to take him to this strange god. But after the minister saw the deity, it vanished. He could only give a description of it to the King.

Thus the birth of Lord Krishna is observed every year in Jagannath Temple, alongwith many holy days connected with His life. Chandan Yatra in the spring is a festival in which the images of Jagannath as Gopi Krishna with Radha, and Madan Mohan, two dancing Krishnas, are taken in procession in Vimanas or Palanquins, to a reservoir and floated on boats for 21 days. This celebration is said to be in remembrance of the loving boat journey of Radha and Krishna on the



river Yamuna. One of these dancing Krishnas is worshipped every day inside the main temple beside Lord Jagannath Himself. Only for Rath Yatra, the great Car Festival of Puri, does the deity of Lord Jagannath emerge from the temple. For all other holy days, it is in His image of Sri Krishna that He comes out.

During Jhulana Yatra, the Festival of swings during the rainy season, the images of Radha and Krishna are set on a flower decorated swing in front of Lord Jagannath. The love songs of Jayadeva's immortal poem, The Geeta Gobinda, are sung before Them for seven days. On smaller Jhulanas the same is done in many monasteries and Ashrams of Puri during this period. An inscription on the great temple reads that only the songs of Krishna as written in Geeta Gobinda must by tradition be sung nightly in the temple. They were sung by Kokila, the last living Devadasi, or temple dancer, before Lord Jagannath while the deity was being dressed for bed. Earlier in the evening, the Bhagabata, recording the childhood pastimes of Sri Krishna and the Gopies, is sung inside the main temple and every tiny street temple of Puri as well.

The name of Sri Krishna is not directly associated with Jagannath, but Subhadra is the same sister Subhadra of Dwapara Yuga, and Balabhadra is called Balaram also, the name of Krishna's elder brother. No epics depict such a Trinity; their names associated only with the glorious life of Sri Krishna. However, in describing Lord Krishna, Narada gave Him the epithet of "Jagannath". "Jagat" means universe and 'Natha' means Lord. Narada says He is the Lord, the directing force behind the Universe. The entire universe proceeds from Him and rests in Him. In Vaishnavism, too the supreme Lord has been described as having two shapes, one with form and the other formless. He is "Akshaya" imperishable, beyond birth and death and

"Akshaya", the universe itself having 100,000 forms. The universe is His dress, His Vishwarupa. He is the uppermost and the nearest. The entire universe is pervaded by Him, as it proceeds again into Him. As is said in Brahma Sanhita,

"Eksada bipra Bahudha Bhabanti"

"From one, I have become many".

Mind, which ever flows like a river and whose speed exceeds even that of wind, is ever drawn to Him, held to me, the one who attracts all, like an iron is drawn to a pure magnet. His five-coloured garland, known as Baijayanti Mala, is the garland of the senses. All the senses, or Indriyas, the five outer ones meant for service to man and the five inner ones for god realization, are held by Him as arrows. The Lord who has no shape assumes shape, out of his great love, His prema, for the good of created beings.

He is Prema Swarupa, the essence of all Vedas. He is fully self-contained and free from destruction of any kind. He knows no birth, no motive, no cause or effect. He is ever mysterious and about whom the only thing that can be said is that He exists always. He is called Basudeva, as is stated by the ancients in the Puranas. "Basu" is derived from the root "Bas" which means to exist. "Deba" is derived from the root "Dib", to glow. Thus "Basudeva, as" means the lustre that exists. His lustre is everywhere and in everything. Everything rests in Him and proceeds from Him. This is how Basudeva, as is described by those who knew.

Basudeva, also means Lord Krishna, the illustrious son of Basudeva, or Basudeva Nandana, in the "Krishna Avatara", as the mysterious bond between the form and formless is ever present 'He alone', Narada says. It is to be known, Surya Sanhita states that those who were Tapi, sages or seers in Satya Yuga, become



Kapi, monkeys with Rama in Tretaya Yuga, and Gopi, cowherd companions of Sri Krishna in Dwapara Yuga, and now Sevakas, or worshippers of Lord Jagannath in Kali Yuga. At least that is the feeling of persons born into families of worshippers in Jagannath Temple, how blessed they are to again be connected with and serve Sri Krishna. Not only do they feel themselves to be gopies, but the three main worshippers of the three deities are bound by tradition to wear their hair long. They do Puja as a lady before the Supreme Purusha. Not even a day went by that the Gopies were without Krishna, so for the Sevakas not even a single day can go by without going to Lord Jagannath in the temple. They think of Lord Jagannath for everything, from birth and naming ceremonies, to marriage and death. "He is life and death to us, without him what are we to do". Such was the feeling of the gopies. All worshippers in Jagannath Temple may not be true seekers, but the feeling is universal among them that "Lord Jagannath gives us everything".

There are four types of devotion. First, a devotee remember God in times of troubles. This is Artee, or danger. When he faces a tiger, he is a devotee and calls on God. But when the tiger is gone, he forgets, Droupadi called on Krishna when she was in distress in the Kaurava's Court. Krishna heard and gave her a Sari of such length, no one could disrobe her.

The second type of devotion is Artharthi, or worldly desires like to be a loan officer in a bank, one submits an application before God and prays for this or that to be given, be it wealth, health, fame, or a good marriage. Arjuna sought Krishna's help to win the war and regain the lost Kingdom.

The third type of devotion is a Jignasu, a true seeker, one eager to know of Jagannath, what is divinity, this world, what is the meaning of life.

Krishna's companion in Dwaraka, Udhava, was a true seeker and Krishna sent him to Brindavan to learn realization from Gopies.

The forth and final type of devotee is a Jnani, one who knows God, who has some direct experience of him. Sankaracharya was such a one, but so were Radha, and Yashoda, Krishna's foster mother, and all the Gopies. When Udhava asked them about Krishna, Yashoda simply cried and the other Gopies were silent and could not utter a word finally Radha said.

"He has not gone from us. He is Kalia Kamala, The black lotus; He is the dark rain cloud. How can He leave us? He is the very Life Force in us; He is never apart from us".

Just as Sri Krishna was to the Gopies in Dwapara Yuga, Lord Jagannath is now to Sevakas and devotees alike in Jagannath Puri. On first meeting, or sight, He is Abyakta, unknown. Seeing his strange form and manner, one may not like it and may be full of doubts. But after some time, Jagannath becomes Byakta, known. The devotee or Sevaka has felt something, some divine touch, and divine intervention. He thinks as if he knows Jagannath. He feels Him, he slaps his own cheeks in front of Jagannath for all his stupid mistakes. He closes his own ears, to block out other's doubts. However, again after sometime, it becomes the daily habit to go for Darshan of Jagannath in the temple and Lord Jagannath becomes again Abyakta, unknowable. He is again full of mystery, but now there is no doubt, only inexpressible joy in beholding Him.

These feelings of Byakta and Abyakta are the day to day experiences of a devotee with God, just like the ever changing movements of the ocean and its waves, or the play of light and darkness, or the indescribable beauty of clouds passing across the sky. Worshippers in the temple take Jagannath to be their Lord and Master, as an



woman takes her husband. They sing lines from Adishanker's poem "Kadachit Kalandi Tata Bipina", as the cars move down the Grand Road on Rath Yatra days.

*"Jagannath Swami Nayana Pathagami
Bhavatu Me"*

"Oh Lord Jagannath May our eyes ever follow in your footsteps",

This sort of Gopi-Bhav develops from childhood as the father teaches his son how to do his hereditary Seva in the temple. It is strange how in the modern world Sevakas maintain their families. Some have outside careers, but for their temple service they receive no salary. They rely solely on Jagannath Himself to maintain them. If food offered to Jagannath, called Mahaprasad from its earliest origins, is not arranged, no marriage ceremony in the temple community can be performed. This holy food of Lord Jagannath must be distributed, or no rites are sanctified.

This is the attachment of Radha with Sri Krishna. As Radha had only Krishna to see, touch, and to daily, so the worshippers of the temple have only Jagannath in their lives. In previous generations fathers knew only two places, the home and the temple. So during Car festival days, when Jagannath left the main temple for nine days, the worshippers also left their houses for the same period and slept on the road beside the huge cars and ate only Prasad of fruits thrown to Jagannath. This is again the feeling of Radha, as She, her house, her husband, everything, when she heard the call of Krishna's flute. If there are sorrows and difficulties, it is his wish. If it is His wish, we will also be saved.

The word Radha, or Radhika, is composed of "Radhika" "Ra" means beauty, strength, deep meditation, and devotion. "A-dhika" means more. So "Radha" means the most beauty, the most

spiritual power, the most communions with God, as well as deep devotion. The Gopies and Radha Herself had been great sages in the past, who desired to get Krishna as God. The worshippers of Jagannath Temple think themselves to be Radha. For them, "not this, not this" or "nasti" which is the attitude of Netibada or nihilism is not present. Such persons tell that God is not small, not great, not tall, not white, or black, not having any shape at all or any symbol. All this felt to be not true. Rather Lord Jagannath is felt to be all this. In the half-formed black Murti of Jagannath, God is felt to be very much alive and aware. With His huge round eyes, called Chakadola, He sees everything, with His handless arms, He embraces all and does all. This same God, this same Jagannath is also ever present in every house of Puri. If a worshipper or devotee of His had hundred percent faiths, He will even manifest Himself in ordinary piece of stone, where no Puja has ever been done. His presence is felt to be all-pervading, in everything, and so all is to be worshipped as His form.

When a worshipper of Jagannath Temple is about to die, he has two last wishes, one is to taste Mahaprasad the holy food offered to Lord Jagannath, in his last hour. The second is to hear at that same time Bhagavata, where Radha's love for Krishna is described. Thus in his last moments, the form and the formless merge into one. Banamali, a famous Vaishnavite poet of Odisha, expresses it in this way.

*"Jagannath Yasoda nandana
Shreemati Chitta Chatak nutan Jaladhar
Laban Jaladhitata Niladree nama Prakat".*

Oh Jagannath,
Mother Yashoda's dear foster son,
Your Radha is like the Chataka bird,
Drinking only the pure rain drops
You shower as Your grace".



As stated at the beginning of this chapter, rituals are not at all necessary for a Vaishnavite. If the heart and mind are pure and one-pointed towards God, spontaneous devotion will flow. However, to help arouse such sublime feelings, rituals are performed. To purify the mind, the body, and the place, rituals are done daily in all temples and churches. In giving a garland to God, the heart becomes filled with joy and the disturbed mind becomes redirected.

The rituals of the great Jagannath Temple of Puri may appear complex and obscure at first glance, as in comparison with even those of the Catholic Church. Because of the long history associated with temple, tinges of Tantric Mother worship of Buddhism and Saivism can be found, in addition to pure Vaishnavism. It is said in Manu Sanhita,

"Jatha dehi, Tatha debe".

"What is true to man ?
Is true to God also".

Unlike the temples devoted to the Mother, where there is blood and animal sacrifice, and complicated Yantras to be followed exactly, or Shiva temples, which are dark places of austere meditation, Vishnu temples, such as the great Jagannath Temple of Puri, are felt to be the Lord's own earthly home. The powerful hand gestures performed during Puja and the Sanskrit Slokas recited must be memorized and understood, but their meaning is simple. They simply invite the Lord to come, to sit close, and take the food offered, and then to bless all present. They act as a powerful medium to draw God to us, to humanize Him, so we can feel him, feel His divine energy, talk with Him, and serve Him. Our minds, like the raw iron drawn to the pure magnet, are transformed by this association with him.

Secondly, even in daily life we have our little personal rituals to perform for ourselves, such

as washing, dressing, and putting scent and make up. But we never think of these as rituals. So too worshippers in Jagannath Temple give the deities daily bath, change their cloth, brush their teeth, feed them, and put them to bed at night. They never think these to be imposed rites, but the natural things to do for a loved one.

However, discipline in the Puja must be strictly followed. Each family of worshippers has the right to serve, but only to do the one duty given to him by hereditary tradition. The man who carries flowers to Jagannath offered by devotees cannot decorate him with them. This is the sole Seva of another family of worshippers. Why is this discipline imposed ? Perhaps the words of the great Vaishnavite saint Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu best express it,

"Only when man feels himself to be
Lower than a blade of grass
can then see the glory of God".

On Rath Yatra day, thousands of Sevakas must help to bring the deity of Lord Jagannath out of the temple to the awaiting cars, each one doing his allotted Seva only. One has the vision of a great black elephant being moved by thousands of tiny ants. By discipline and rituals, Ahamkara, the feeling of ego, is slowly eliminated. No one alone can carry Lord Jagannath, but only by all working together. The way of life in the temple must be like that of a very large family. Then it becomes a power-house of love and peace, and it blesses the whole world. Such is the grace of Lord Jagannath for the entire modern world whether one lives in Jagannath Puri itself, or in some far off region of the globe, if one lives under His influence, there is peace in one's home.

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