



Antiquity of Puri City

Dr. Bhaskar Mishra

Puri, the seat of Lord Shri Jagannatha, otherwise known as the Purusottam Kshetra or Shriksheeta is an important centre of Hindu pilgrimage in India. Like Badrinath, Kedarnath, Amarnath, Rameswaram and Tirupati, it is a large sanctuary which is the main centre for pilgrimage in the sub-continent and it has been accepted as an all south Asian shrine by James J. Preston. From the early period (at least from the Gupta Age) till the present time, Jagannatha Puri became a full grown *kshetra* for the Hindus with considerable political and social support.

The sacred city of Puri, in the Indian province of Odisha, is best known throughout the world for its great temple of Lord Shri Jagannatha. The extraordinary sanctity of this *Kshetra* is reflected in the Puranas and other religious texts in India. The Vishnu Purana mentions Purusottama as the abode of Vishnu, while the Vamana Purana refers to the Supreme Purusottam in connection with Tirtha Yatra of Prahallad. It is also known as *Sankha Kshetra* described in Utkal Khanda of Skanda Purana. This sacred tract is said to resemble in shape a conch-shell, Sankha, which is one of the four *ayudhas* of Vishnu, others being *chakra* (discus), *gada* (mace) and *Padma* (lotus). Puri is known as Sankhakshetra and Bhubaneswar, Jajpur and Konark are respectively

called Chakrakshetra, Gadakshetra and Padmakshetra.

Puri is the modern name of this Puranic holy city. Puranas and other old Sanskrit texts refer to it by various names viz., Nilachal, Nilagiri, Niladri, Purusottama, Purusottam Kshetra, Srikshetra, Purusottam Puri, Jagannatha Kshetra etc. Of these names Purusottama and Srikshetra were most popular. In the Odia inscriptions of the 15th Century A.D., it is called Purusottama Kataka. The Ain-i-Akbari describes it as the city of Purusottama. To the pilgrims of other parts of India it is generally known as the Jagannatha Dham. The earliest English visitor, William Bruton, who came here in 1633, called it 'the great city of Jaggarnat' being called after their great Jaggarnat'. In the early years of the British rule, in the Government records, Puri has been described as the city of Jagannatha and the district was also given the same name. Andrew Stirling in his 'Account of Orissa' published in 1824, uses both Jagannatha-Poree and simply Pooree. Few places in India can vie with Puri in religious sanctity, cultural greatness and continuity. The antiquity of this holy city goes to remote past. According to Cunningham the ancient name of the town was Charitra. In the drama of *anargharaghava*, we find the word Purusottam used for this place. In the Nagari plate of Anangabhimha III of 1229-30



A.D., the town is referred as Purusottam Kshetra. This name has been used by Muslims and Marhattas as Purusottam Chhatar or simply as 'Chhatar' in their official records. According to the Sanskrit Scriptures, the Kshetra extends from the temple of Loknath on the west to Vilveswar on the east and from the sea to the Mitiani, the small rivulet.

Puri is situated (lat. 19° 47' 55" N. long 85° 49' 5" E.) on the shores of the Bay of Bengal known as 'Mahodadhi'. The blue sea gives the town a picturesque appearance. The town is bounded on the south by the sea; on the west by Mauza Sipasarubali (No.1); on the north by Gopinathpur and on the east by Mauza Balukhand. The area represented by the sandy shore on which stand most of the Government buildings is known in official records under the name Khasmahal Balukhand and is popularly known as Balukhand, (the sandy portion). Puri is connected both by roads and railway prior to the British conquest in 1803 A.D. There was no road in the real sense of the term, besides a few fair-weather cart-tracts without bridges and without proper ferry arrangements for crossing the river. The traffic from the south to Cuttack passed along the eastern shore of the Chilika Lake between it and the Sea; to Puri and hence followed exactly the line of the present Jagannath Road. It passed through Khurda along the Ganjam road, the old route being abandoned to Nulias and antelopes. Another road from Puri passed through Khurda and the Barmul pass in to the Central provinces via Sambalpur until 1804-1805 that this line was adopted. The former route was through the States of Nilagiri and Mayurbhanj. It passed in many places through dense forests full of wild animals and dacoits.

The construction of Jagannath road was taken up in 1811, but it was not completed until

1826 A.D. The greater part of the earth work between Cuttack and Puri was completed in 1813, but it did not become negotiable until 1817. Late Maharaja Sukhmoy Ray of Calcutta contributed a sum of one lakh and half for the benefit of the Bengali pilgrims visiting the temple of Jagannatha. Sarais, shelter houses were built at Bhadrak, Akhuapada, Balasore, Basta and Rajghat to accommodate pilgrims.

By railway and road, it is 63 km and 60km respectively from Bhubaneswar, the Capital city of Odisha. The city was administratively recognised since 1828.

The population of Puri in 1901 was 19,334. According to the census of 1971, the population of the town was 72,674 with 14,519 number of households and stands in 2008 it about 2 lakhs. In 1881 the Puri Municipality was formed with the streets as Harachandi Sahi, Bali Sahi, Kalikadevi Sahi, Dolamandap Sahi, Kundheibenta Sahi Markandeswar Sahi, Baseli Sahi, Gourbada Sahi, Chudanga Sahi, Dandimala Sahi, Matimandap Sahi, Daitapada Sahi and Kumbharapada Sahi. The area of the Municipality is 16.84 sq km.

Puri gradually gained the reputation of a health resort because of its fresh sea breeze and cooling temperature. Many residential buildings of well-to-do people, Guest Houses, Lodging Houses, hotels and restaurants have been constructed along the Sea-shore. Prominent in the centre of Balukhand and close to the sea stands the Raj Bhavan, built in 1913 for the summer residence of the Governors.

More than four hundred of hotels, lodges, Dharmasalas and Holiday Homes are available for the accommodation of the pilgrims / tourists. Puri, today, presents a multi faceted profile, the



old city teeming with market places and fine old Temples which still bear the historic imprint of its finely woven culture. Equally impressive is the sea-shore at least 7 km long with its verdant, exquisitely laid marine drive and streamlined modern beach resorts.

General Information about Puri :

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| Area | - 16 sq. km (city) |
| Altitude | - sea level |
| Population | - 1,60,000 (2001) |
| Temperature | - Summer Max-39.90 C |
| Min | - 20.0 C |
| Winter Max/Min | - 17.10 C |
| Rainfall | - 135.23cm |

Language Spoken - Odia, Hindi, Bengali and English.

Clothing - Light cotton in Summer and light woollen in winter.

Peak Season - During Rath Yatra (June –July) Shrikshetra or Puri boasts as a famous place of pilgrimage since hoary antiquity. The sea known as ‘Mahodadhi’ is one of its five main Tirthas. The sanctity and historicity of the place together with its ideal healthy environment have been a suitable resort through ages for the pilgrims and tourists alike.

Dr. Bhaskar Mishra, O.S.D (JTA), Law Department,
Stationed at Puri, E-mail : drbhaskarmishra@gmail.com

