



## The Importance of Twenty Two Steps in Jagannath Temple

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Twenty two steps popularly known as 'Baaishe Pahaach' made of stone are existing inside the Jagannaath temple complex. Such steps are available at the Lion's gate or Singhadwara of the temple. A devotee after crossing Aruna Sthambha enters the temple through Singhadwara on the eastern side. A small enclosure named as Gumuta exists in between the main entrance gate and twenty two steps. Such steps are present from Meghanada wall i.e. outer parameter wall of the temple to inner wall. The other name of Jagannath temple is Neela Shaila i.e. Blue Hill. The sanctum sanctorum of the temple exists at the top of the hill. Hence one will have to climb the steps from the grand road to the peak of the hill i.e. abode of Lord Jagannath. The importance of twenty two steps can be analysed from religious and historical points of view.

Scholars of religion depicted twenty two steps as fourteen Bhubanas i.e. planets and eight

Brahamanda i.e. cluster of planets and universes. It is believed that Lord Jagannath is the epitome of Lord Bishnu. Hindu Religion believes in the existence of thirty three crores of Gods and Goddesses. Such Gods and Goddesses remain in different planets and universes. Whereas Lord

Bishnu stays at the top of the above spheres. Hence scholars opine that, after visiting all the planets and universes as twentytwo in number, a devotee attains the salvation or Moksha and becomes eligible to enter Baikuntha, the abode of Lakshmee Narayana.



Another school of thought believes in twenty two types of weaknesses in human character. After controlling and suppressing twenty two weaknesses, a person elevates himself to the status to be united with the God. Twenty two steps in Lord Jagannaath temple represent twenty two weaknesses of human character or human life. After crushing twenty two evils by feet a man empowers himself to visit Lord



Jagannath. Twenty two steps are existing in two phases. Twenty steps are available from Singhadwara to Kurmabedha where as remaining two steps are existing towards the northern side leading to Aananda Bazaar i.e place for sale and partaking of cooked food (Maha Prasad).

The size of twenty-two steps are not equal. Steps leading from Singhadwara to Kurmabedha are of forty ft. in length and five ft. to ten ft. in breadth. Steps were constructed by stone available in Odisha as popularly classified as Baulamala or Kunda. The height of each step is six inches to seven inches. Eighteenth step has longest width of fifteen ft.

Nineteenth and twentieth steps are semicircular in design whereas other steps are in rectangular shape.

On the southern side of third step, the temple of Kasi Biswanath is existing in a miniature form. Lord Siba was penalized by Lord Bishnu to have an un-important position in the Jagannath temple in Kaliyuga, as he did not share the leftover food of Lord Bishnu after being collected from monk Narada. The details of the popular story is related to Maha Prasad.

Twentytwo long steps available inside the Jagannaath temple are also the place to take rest by the devotees. People believe that to get rid of diseases of children, parents pray Lord Jagannaath for early cure and promise before Him to bring their children to twenty-two steps and roll them on such steps. Now even hundreds of children of different parts of the country are brought to

Jagannath temple by their parents for rolling on twentytwo steps as a sign of gratitude to Lord Jagannath after being saved from the evil effects of diseases.

The tenth step is considered as very important from religious point of view. In Hindu religion 'Shraddha' i.e. presentation of offerings to forefathers, is one of the most sacred rites. It is believed that on the day of death anniversary of father, the family members pay their gratification received from their parents and fore-fathers. Such annual rite can be organized in the residence of a person or in any temple. The organization of Shraddha in Jagannath temple is considered as the most important rite and it is believed that all the offerings in shape of food etc. dedicated to forefathers are received by them directly without any hindrance. Such religious rite is held on the tenth step by the priests of the temple. A specific place is available at a corner of tenth step to place offerings after the religious rite of Shraddha. It is also interesting to mention here that, Lord Jagannath also offers Shraddha in favour of King Indradyumna and queen Gundicha on twentytwo steps.

As per the followers of Lord Shiba popularly known as Saivites, Lord Biswanath Mahadeb is the presiding deity of twentytwo steps. As per them, Lord Biswanath Mahadeb controls and supervises the action of twenty two yoginees i.e. representatives of Goddess Maha Kalee. Yoginees, as literally known as she-monks and maneuvers different activities of the nature.



Such Yoginees are named a Teebra, Kumudbatee, Mandaa, Chandobatee, Dayatbatee, Ranjane, Ratikaa, Roudraa, Krodhaa, Badrikaa, Prasaarinee, Brati, Marjane, Kshati, Raktaa, Sandipane, Aajapaane, Madantee, Rohinee, Ramyaa, Ugra and Kshorinee. It is believed that above fourteen yoginees diminish the ego, evil nature and negative pride of devotees while proceeding towards sanctum sanctorum to make them eligible to appear before Lord Jagannath. In Shaivism, control on sensual activities and unconditional dedication to God are considered as primary phase of attaining the phase of Yogi or Yoginee.

A small temple of Shree Ram and Seeta also exists on the southern side of twenty two steps. Now the temple Police Station is also operating near nineteenth and twentieth steps. People of Odisha have an emotional attachment to twenty two steps as most religious and sacred in nature. Such steps remove all evils from human lives and paves the path of prospects of life in future. While climbing such steps most of the devotees touch their hands and heads on each of the steps. Twentytwo steps even described in Odia literature as the steps of un-matched virtues of the universe. Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Sudarshan are brought in procession as popularly known as Pahandi Bije on twenty two steps while leaving the grand temple and placed in chariots on grand road during car festival. The idols also return back to the grand temple during Niladri Bije on such

twenty two steps after nine days of journey to Gundicha temple.

While returning from Gundicha temple to grand temple, Goddess Lakshmi permits Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra to enter the temple and restricts Lord Jagannath. Goddess Lakshmi expresses Her anguish as Lord Jagannath being husband has forgotten to take His wife Goddess Lakshmi during the journey of Car Festival. Lord Jagannath presents Rasagola, a special sweet dish made of cheese to Goddess Lakshmi and requests her to excuse Him. Then Goddess Lakshmi permits Lord Jagannath to enter into the temple. The above episode with the dramatic conversation of two groups of priests representing Lord Jagannath and Goddess Lakshmi is held every year depicting the emotion of a wife towards action of the husband.

Taking the above episode into consideration, twentytwo steps of Jagannath temple are very famous from religious and emotional point of view embodied with the hearty attachment and respect of devotees to Lord Jagannath.

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