The greatest mystery that has baffled scholars through centuries is Lord Shri Jagannath, His temple, His ritual system and the persons associated with the rituals. Religions like Jainism, Budhism, Tantrism, Saivaism etc claim Shri Jagannath as representative of their own religion but paradoxically He has transcended all religious doctrine.

It is known from different spiritual scriptures like Skanda Puran, Niladri Mahodaya, Bamdev Samhita and other historical references regarding the origin of the sevaks. Madala Panji, the chronicle of Temple describes the origin of the ritual functionaries popularly known as sevaks/sevayats during 7th or 8th century. The magnitude of rituals and people associated with it have flourished thereafter.

THE RITUAL SYSTEM

Every Hindu temple has a ritual system prescribed according to scriptures. Jagannath temple is a peculiar Hindu shrine where Vaishnavite, Shivaite and Shakti elements have been embodies in a ritual system.

Daily Rituals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME OF THE DAY</th>
<th>NAME OF THE RITUAL</th>
<th>BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WORK PERFORMED</th>
<th>CATEGORIES OF SERVITORS (SEVAYATAS) INVOLVED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05 AM - 06 AM</td>
<td>Dwara Phita and Mangal Arati (Opening of the Temple door and auspicious waving of lamp)</td>
<td>The doors of the sanctum sanctorum are to be opened by 5.00AM as stated in the Record of Rights of the temple. The subsequent ritual after opening of the temple door is auspicious waving of the lamps (Mangal Aarati)</td>
<td>Bhitarachha Mohapatra, Pratihari, Muduli, Akhand Mekap and Palia Mekap for opening of the door. Bhitarachha Mohapatra along with 2 other Pushpalak servitors perform the auspicious waving of the lamps.</td>
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<td>06.00 – 06.15 AM</td>
<td>Mailam (Removal of dress &amp; flowers etc)</td>
<td>The Deities change their clothes followed by removal of flowers and tulsi (a holy basil plant) leaves worn on previous night. A new set of clothes are worn by the Deities.</td>
<td>Pushpalak (3persons), Khuntia, Changada Mekap and Dhoba (Washerman)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>06.15 - 06.45 AM</td>
<td>Abakash This time is for purificatory rites of the Deities such as brushing of teeth and taking bath. Servitors performing the Abakash are Puspalak, Suarabadu, Panipat, Mukhapakhal, Pratiharidhiary, Amla Ghatuary, Bhandar Mekap, Mahabhoi, Khuri Nayak and Darpania.</td>
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<tr>
<td>06.45-07.00 AM</td>
<td>Mailam(Change of Dress) The Deities change their dress and wear another set. 5 type of servitors are required to change the dress of the Deities and also light the lamp which keeps burning till the mid night pahada. The servitors involved are Puspalak, Changada Mekap, Akhanda Mekp Suara Badu and Dhoba.</td>
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<tr>
<td>07.00-08.00 AM</td>
<td>Sahan Mela (General Darshan) Darshan for all devotees near the Ratna Bedi is carried out to satisfy the general public. As per Record of Rights 7 types of servitors are required to remain present during the Sahan Mela. They are Puspalak, Khuntia Mekap, Tadu Karan, Gochhikar, Pratihar and Suara Badu.</td>
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<tr>
<td>08.00-08.30 AM</td>
<td>Vesha Ullagi (Change of Dress) Here the Deities are dressed up again. The same categories of servitors are required to be present. Besha Ullagi and Rosa Homa are observed almost at the same time.</td>
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<td>08.30-09.00 AM</td>
<td>Rosha Homa, Sun Worship and Dwarapal Puja Fire sacrifice is done in the sacred kitchen of the Deities before cooking of the food. The yantra of Sun God near Mukit Mandap and the image of Divine Gate Keeper (Dwarapala) at the Jay Vijay gate is performed. Rosha Homa is performed by Puja Panda Sevak, Dhopakhalia and Mekap whereas Sun Worship and Divine Gatekeeper worship is performed by Puja Panda.</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.00 AM</td>
<td>Ballav Gopal Dhupa (Morning Breakfast) The breakfast food offered to the Deities consists of sweet popcorn(Khai), Ladoos, coconut, sweets, chipped coconut, ripe banana and curd. 3 Puja Panda Sevakas along with 7 types of Sevaks are required to offer the food to the Deities. The sevaks are Sudu Suar, Ballav Jogania, Saura Badu, Patri Badu, Gara Badu.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00 AM</td>
<td>Sakala Dhupa (Morning Meal) This is called the Raja Bhog or Koth Bhog which consists of rice, kanika, khichudi, dal, vegetables curries, cakes like pitha puli, hansakeli and jhili, ada pachedi (ginger tonic) etc. The servitors engaged in this important ritual are Pujapanda, Suarabadu, Paniapata, Pradhani, Pratihari, Palia-Mahasuara, Pantibadu, Garabadu, Rosha Paika, Palia-Patri, Changada-Mekap, Muduli, Chandan Ghatuary, Palia-Mekap, Palia Khuntia, Hadap Nayak, Bidia Jogania, Sudu Suar, Gochhikar, Dakhinghar Pratihari, Ghatua, Vaijayanti, Dhukudidwar Pratihari etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00 AM</td>
<td>Mailam and Bhog Mandap Puja After offering of food the Deities change their Clothes and then Puja starts for the huge quantity of food such as rice, dal, curries, leafy vegetable and cakes of different type. This food is generally prepared for general public. The servitors who participate in this rituals are Puja Panda, Mahasuar, Suar, Changada Mekap, Palia Mekap, Palia Puspalak, Bhog Mandap Pratihari, Suarabadu, Khuntia Pratihari etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30-01.00 PM</td>
<td>Mid-day Meal (Dwiprahara Dhupa) This Prasad is offered near Ratna Bedi (Sanctum Sanctorum) in the same manner of Morning Puja. The same number of servitors are required like the Morning Puja.</td>
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02.00 – 02.30 PM  Evening Lamp Offering

Normally there is provision of afternoon nap between 1.00 to 1.30 PM. If the rituals of Afternoon Puja and Prasad get delayed then the evening Aarati is performed after the Afternoon Puja. Taluchha Mohapatra and Puspalak Sevak remains present during evening lamp offering.

07.00-08.00 PM (Evening Meal)  Sandhya Dhupa

The system is same as Morning and Afternoon Dhupa but the Prasad items are less in variety and number. Mostly watered rice and cakes like amalu, puli and sakara etc. After the Puja the lamp offering is also made.

08.00-08.30 PM  Mailam and Chandanlaagi

The Deities change their clothes and anointed with sandal paste mixed with camphor, keshar and kasturi. This is basically done by Puspalak sevaks who are assisted by Suarabadu, Ghatuary, Muduli, Palia Mekap, Palia-Padhiary, Garabadu, Hadap Naik, and Palia Khuntia.

11.00PM  Badasinghar Besha

After Chandanlagi, the Deities are dressed up again for Badasinghar Besha by wearing silken robes and decorated with flowers, flower garland and floral headgear.

11.15-11.45 PM (Night Puja)  Khata Seja Laagi and Pahada (Rest for the day)

Bedsteads are arranged for the Deities. A metallic conjoined idol of Lord Vishnu and Goddess Laxmi are placed near the idol of Lord Jagannath. Green coconut, betel and camphor are offered.

11.45 PM-12.00 Midnight  Clousure of Temple Gate

Locking and sealing of the temple doors. Talichha Mohapatra puts the seal of the Temple after it is closed.

PERIODIC RITUALS

In addition to this there are periodical rituals. Each Thursday Lord Jagannath and Goddess Laxmi meet in the afternoon to discuss about home affairs and the affairs of the world.

The birth day celebration of the three deities are observed and on each Ekadashi. Evening lamps are taken to the top of the temple and circumnutated around Neela Chakra.

On each Amabasya day (last day of the dark fortnight) Lord Jagannath goes to the sea shore to perform a special ritual as Mahodadhi arati as the sacred sea is His father-in-law. This ritual is performed by Sabat Nijoga a particular class of servitors earmarked for the purpose.

Likewise there is Banaka Laagi where paintings of the deities are performed and Benta or hunting ritual once in a year signifying the royal status of the Lord. In addition to this according to the constellation of stars specific rituals are performed for the birthday celebration of the following deities.

Lord Balabhadra - Shravana Makara
Sri Jagannatha - Rohini Brusha
Goddess Subhadra - Jyestha Bichha
The birthday celebration of Sri Ram, Sri Krishna and Nrusingha are also observed as per the rites.

**Festival Rituals**

There are around 65 rituals performed in a year out of which 12 are famous festivals as specified in the Niladri Mahodya like Chandan Yatra, Devasnana Purnima (when the Deities take celestial bath), Car Festival, Sayan Ekadashi, Dola Utsav, Dakshinayana Yatra, Uttarayana, Damanak Yatra, Parswa Paribartan, Hari Utthapan Ekadasi, Pravarana Sasthi and Pusyabhiseka where the role of extra servitors are needed.

**Special Festivals**

On special occasions like Navakalebar which is a very complex and arduous process, the role of the ritual functionaries becomes more pronounced. Navakalebara or embodiment ceremony falls normally once in 19 years which lasts for almost two months and draws lakhs of crowd from the world.

**TYPE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Consequent upon the enactment of Shree Jagannath Temple Act 1952, a Record of Right containing the detail rituals of Shri Jagannath and Sevakas along with their divine duties in day to day responsibilities and duties pertaining to different festive occasions have been brought out. As per the Record of Rights 119 types of sevaks have been enlisted as below.

**Maharaja of Puri (King of Puri)**

**Gajapati**: He is the first and foremost Sevaka. He performs important role during Chandan Yatra, Snana Yatra, Dola Yatra and Car Festival. He has also major role during Navakalebara which normally comes once in 19 years. He is the permanent Chairman of the Temple Managing Committee. Apart from the King there are 119 categories of servitors who have been alphabetically listed below:

1) Akhanda Mekap - Lighting and arrangement of the perpetual lamps.
2) Alati Balita Sevaka - Wicks supply
3) Amalutoli and Purakharada - Preparation of food called Amalu and preparation of Pura.
4) Amunia Chhatars - Leading the food offerings procession with erected umbrella
5) Anasara Sudha Suara and Sudha suara - Supply of soft drinks to the deities during Anasara days, supply of Khali and Osua and cleaning of the place for offering of Puja.
6) Asthana Pratihari - Water sprinkling for Bahara Deula, Prasad distribution of food shares among the Sevaks after the Bhog. Has major role on Jhulan, Janmastami, Radhastami and Kartik Purnima etc.
7) Baanua - Supplies firework when required
8) Badapanda - Supervision of the Puja Panda Sevakas
9) Badasuara-Thali Tuna and Amalu Suara - Cake and sweet preparation
10) Badhei - Carpenter
11) Bahardeuli Jogania - Supply of food material to the kitchen of goddess Laxmi.
12) Bahar Deuli Suara - Cake preparation in the kitchen of Goddess Laxmi.
13) Baithi Karana - Accounts maintenance regarding income from flag and gift offering on the Simhasana.

14) Ballav Jogania- Supply sweets to the Sevaks from the store for ballav Puja

15) Bania - Prepares and repairs ornaments

16) Baijayanti- Musical instrument playing

17) Bentabindha Paika Ritual of arrow shooting in accordance with mythology

18) Bhandara Mekapa - Remains in charge of Ratna Bhandara containing jewellary required for daily use of the deities. 

19) Bhitarachha Mohapatra - Main Sevaka, associated with the ritual of door opening of the temple in the morning and lamp offering called Mangal Arati

20) Bhitarachha Mohapatra - Main Sevaka, associated with the ritual of door opening of the temple in the morning and lamp offering called Mangal Arati

21) Bhitara Gaani - Ritual service of singing devotional songs at the time of Pahada

22) Bhandara Mekapa - Remains in charge of Ratna Bhandara containing jewellary required for daily use of the deities.

23) Binakara - Harp plying

24) Biribuha - Transporting black gram etc from the store for grinding and to the kitchen for preparing cakes

25) Birimunda Samartha - Black gram and Rice grinding

26) Chaka Apasara- Takes charge of Chaka apasara (pillow) from Darji Sevaka

27) Chakradhara - Responsibility of showing lighted candle in the procession and grinding rice for cakes

28) Changada Mekapa - Cloth arrangement of the deities

29) Chap Dalei - Boat rowing

30) Chapa Behera - Boat playing during Chandan Yatra and Kaliyadalana

31) Charcha Karana- Inspection of the services of Sevaksas

32) Chaulabachha Karana- Service of refining and grinding rice and Mung

33) Chhamu Dihudi Candle lighting

34) Chhatisha Nijoga Naika Patajoshi - Management and Supervision of daily rituals, temple and food offerings. He heads and controls the Chhatisha Nijoga.

35) Chhatra Nijoga - Service of holding umbrella and other articles during regular ritual activities

36) Chittrakar - Painting of the temple walls

37) Chunara Garuda Sevak (Mahadwipa and Dhwajabandha) Ritual services related to God Garuda, hoisting the flag and lighting the lamp atop the temple and undertake masonry works with lime mortar.

38) Daita - They do specific ritual services during Car festival, Navakalebara, Anasara, Rahurekhalagi and Chitalagi

39) Darji - Stitches clothes, Chakaapasara etc

40) Darpania - Vessel washing, mirror placing and purnakumbha setting

41) Datta Mohapatra- Face colouring of the deities Srimukha Singar)

42) Daudibola - Rope making and supply the same for drawing water from Bimala’s well

43) Dayanamali - Flower and Tulasi leaves supply and garland making

44) Dayanpatri - Ritual service related to Dayanachori festival
45) Deula Karana- Inspection of the regular ritual services of Sevakas, keeps accounts of the Bhandar, Changada Ghara and distribution of Parbani Kheli etc.

46) Deula Purohita - To sanctify services and to preside over special ritual functions according to Smarta Dharma scriptures. Performs Ratha Anukula and Ratha Pratistha (Car festival rituals)

47) Garabadu- Supply and storage of water during performance of rituals

48) Ghanta Seva - Gong Beating

49) Ghatuari -Occasional gong beating

50) Ghatuari Amla-Camphor and sandal paste supply

51) Gita Govinda - Devotional songs recitation from Gita Govinda

52) Gochhikar- Control and regulation of pilgrims entry. They belong to Pratihari class who watch Jay Vijaya Dwark.

53) Hadapa Naika - Betel supply

54) Handi Jogania Tolabati -Supply of earthen pots

55) Jagia Mahasuara -Inspection of consecrated food preparation

56) Jyotisha (Khurinayaka)- Astrological calculations and forecasting

57) Kahalia - Plays on bije kahali

58) Kalabethia - Who drags the Chariots

59) Karatia - Sawers

60) Khataseja Mekap - Bed arrangement of the deities

61) Khatuli Sevaka- Puts Khatuli (small wooden cot) for Abakash Puja

62) Khuntia -To supply flower garlands and Tulasi leaves to the Pasupalak

63) Kotha Karana – They usually report any deviation of services for the supreme lord Jagannath. They accompanied the God during Chandan Yatra festival with sword and knife as a protective force.

64) Kotha Suansia - Supervise and undertake arrangement for the visiting deities on festive occasions.

65) Kothabhoga Jogania - Food ingredients and fuel supply to the kitchen from the temple store

66) Kothabhogapania - Supply of water to Suaras and Mahasuaras from the kitchen well

67) Kumbhar Bishoi - Supply of earthen vessels for preparation of consecrated food

68) Lenka -To call the Sevakas for kitchen work

69) Lugadhua and Panikunda Sevak - Water supply to the Lugadhua Sevak and washing the clothes of the deities

70) Madeli - Madal (Musical instrument) playing

71) Mahabhoi- Milk and milk product supply

72) Mahajan - They serve all the representative deities of the Dakhinighar and offer ‘ballav bhog’ there. Carry the representative deities (Bije Pratimas) for specific rituals.

73) Mahasuara - Supervises preparation of food in the kitchen. Himself cooks Hariballav tata pitha. Takes the first Pankichheka

74) Malachua Seba- garland making
75) Mandani - Canpoy fixing on festive occasions over the platform on which deities are installed.

76) Mapasaita Karana or Mahaprasad Seva - Supervision of food distribution among the Sevakas.

77) Matha and Byaktigata Seva- Services of certain monasteries and ritual service based on individual capacity (whisk service)

78) Mudra - Sandal paste supply for the anointment of the deities

79) Mudrahasta or Mudiratha - Ritual services of King in his absence

80) Muduli - Store keeper of various articles such as cups, plates, whisk and camphor

81) Mukhapakhala - Supply of tooth sticks and tongue cleaners and flowers in the morning

82) Mulla Suansia - Supply of wooden materials on certain festive occasions

83) Nikapa and gandhan Nikapa- Grinding Spices

84) Ojha Maharana - Blacksmith

85) Paika - With their team head Dalei and Dalbeheras stay in the temple throughout the day and night.

86) Palia Mekapa - Flower decoration of deities and inspection of door at the time of opening in the temple and other specific duties.

87) Pani Apata - Utensil cleaning and water supply from Bimala’s well

88) Panikipata - Previously doing fish cutting during Dussehra and was cutting vegetables in the kitchen. Now it is discontinued.

89) Pantibadu and Ghia Pasara - Consecrated food related services carrying Chhekas

90) Parabjata Jogania- To provide food material supplied from the store to the Mahasuara on festive occasions.

91) Parichha or Rajguru - They were associated with temple administration by getting associated with King of Puri.

92) Pasupalaka(Puspalakas)- Adornment, flower decoration and dressing of deities and Puja at the time of ‘Abakash’.

93) Patara Bishoi- Preparation of silk ropes

94) Patarabandha-Leaves supply for packing

95) Pati Mohapatra- Works with Daitas but as a Bramhana has other functions.

96) Patri Badu- Ritual ingredients supply

97) Pradhani - Call the Panda Sevaks, distributes Khei of Muktimandap

98) Prasad Badu, Badu Mohapatra- Responsibility of supplying Tata (container) with offered food to the deities from the temple to the palace.

99) Pratihari - Guarding the deities and looking for the status of the pilgrims, watching the movement of the pilgrims.

100) Puja Panda- Worship of main-deities of the temple

101) Purana Panda- Purana recitation during food offering

102) Ratha Bhoi - Works for the construction of chariots, sheds and canopies

103) Ratha Dakua - Singing songs in the Chariots during Car Festival
104) Rosa Dhopakhalia, Angarua and Gobarpania Dhopakhalia - Kitchen and over cleaning.

105) Rosa Paika - Intimation to the Sebakas regarding the affairs of the kitchen

106) Rupakar - Drawing and painting of the walls of the temple and make Bije Pratimas, Sarathi etc attached to the chariots.

107) Sabata Nijoga - Service to pilgrims with regards to Hindu rites such as Sankalpa, Sraddha and Dana in Panchatirtha and at Swargadwar on new moon days.

108) Samprada Nijoga - Dance at the time of Patuara and function at the time of Krishna Janma

109) Sankhua - Playing Conch shell

110) Suara Nijoga Nayaka - Manages all the affairs of Suaras and the kitchen

111) Suarabadu - Who washes the floor of the inner sanctuary several times. Arranging the food after offerings are made.

112) Sunagoswami - Draws water from sunakua (well) on Snana Purnima

113) Tadau Karana - Record keeping, maintenance of almanac, supervision of daily services round the day of the temple festivals.

114) Talichha Mohapatra - He seals the doors at night after ‘pahada’, controls and checks the purity of the kitchen.

115) Tamara Bishoi - Works as copper smith during car festival

116) Tatua - Transportation of foods Tat from the temple to the palace

117) Tolabadu - Transportation cooked food from the kitchen to the temple

118) Vaidya - Herbal medicine supply to the deities at the time of their illness during Anasara (after Snana Purnima and before Car Festival)

One Seva which was not recorded in the Record of Rights was revived in the year 1988 by the Temple administration i.e. Beherakaran Seva (Ratha, 2010).

The following 14 Sevas (ritual services) are not being performed now a days.

Panikikata, Daudibandha, Binakar, Gitagovind, Bhitargayani, Madeli, Patarabindha, Sankhua, Kalabethia, Kumbharibiso, Malachula, Banua, Mapasaitakaran, Charchakaran,

The main reasons for discontinuation of the Seva as informed by the temple authorities are as follows :-

a) This Seva is hereditary in nature. In the initial days of Seva, the Sevayat family who did not have any son to carry out the tradition stopped performing the ritual. Since there is no system of recruiting new people from outside the sevayat community, the system stopped functioning.

b) There were some sevas which was very minor in nature and did not have sufficient amount to earn a source of living could not be carried out properly.

c) Sevas like Devdasi seva which needed the adoption of new Devdasi by the old Devdasi also did not materialize with the changed scenario (Acharya, 2012).

d) Pilgrims and devotees come to Lord Sri Jagannath from every nook and corner of India and world. Due to some emotional attraction the number is increasing day by day. Particularly they
gather in large numbers and sometimes in a non manageable limit during the festivals like Car Festival, Durga Puja, Kartika Puja, Srabani Mondays, Jhulan, Govinda Dwadashi, Snana Purnima, Navakalebara and so on. Their main attraction is Lord Sri Jagannath, Mahaprasad (sacred food of temple) and Puri sea beach. All the people those are working as Sevakas are really getting their livelihood for providing different services to the devotees, tourists and God throughout the year on different occasions. A large many of the Sevakas are engaged and employed for this purpose through generations and some other through hereditary arrangements.

References:


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Nabakrushna Choudhury Centre for Development Studies, 2013. Socio-Economic Census of Sevayats of Shri Jagannath Temple, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. p.4-10.

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