

Shree Jagannath Temple (Conservation & Protection)

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72-M dated 3.2.1975 published in the Gazette, Part-II, Section 3 (ii) dated 23.2.1975.

This magnificent edifice was covered with a thick coat of lime plaster during the reign of king Prataprudra Dev of Suryavamsa to save the structure from ravages of nature, saline weather and wear

and tear of ages. (Rajendralal Mitra's *Antiquity of Orissa*) The temple was covered with lime plaster during the period from 1504 to 1532 AD to prevent further structural damages mainly caused by the stress corrosion of iron clamps and dowels used for reinforcement of the structure. This was due to the oxidation of such metals caused by penetration of saline atmosphere xxx observes, eminent scholar Chittaranjan Das. (Some Aspects of conservation Shree Jagannath Temple - 'Shree Mandir', Car Festival issue, 1991). An inscription on the wall of upper floor of Shree Mandir Garbhagruha says that the temple was plastered in the 28th Anka (1778 AD) of Maharaja Birakishore Dev. According to the sources of Archaeological Survey of India, some works were done for the conservation of the temple during the period from 1713 to 1718 AD and the temple was covered with lime plaster during the period from 1763 to 1768. All these

Shree Jagannath temple is the holiest of holy shrines of Hindus. This Grand Edifice is the highest temple in Odisha and probably, the tallest living temple in India. This splendid temple dedicated to Mahaprabhu Shree Jagannath was built by king Chodaganga Dev (1112-1148 AD) in Shreekshetra Puri on the east-coast of India. The exact geographical location of this temple is Latitude 19° 18' 17" and Longitude 85° 51' 39".

This super structure is constructed on a 20 feet high elevated platform from the ground level. The temple (214 ft. 8 inches high from the road level) is a fine specimen of the 'Pancharatha' style of Odishan temple architecture. Superior quality Khandolite stone was used for construction of this imposing edifice. This architectural marvel has been declared as a monument of national importance under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 by the Government of India Notification No.2/34/



works have been done to save the temple from decaying process caused by saline atmosphere. The Government records show that during the British rule some works have been done for the conservation of this temple at the time of Raja Ramchandra Dev (1817-1855 AD). It is understood from Shree Jagannath Temple Administration sources that when Rajkishore Das was the Manager of Shree Mandir (1903-1911) some works were undertaken for the conservation of the temple.

Seeing the plain smooth surface of the plastered wall of Shree Jagannath temple, western scholars like Ferguson commented that the huge temple structure was plain because there was degradation of artistic skill of Orissan artists who built magnificent Mukteswar temple in the 8th century, Rajarani temple in 9th century and Lingaraj temple in 11th century. But this was proved baseless when the deplastering of the temple unveiled the intricate artistic carvings on the outer wall of the temple.

By enactment of Shree Jagannath Temple Act, 1954, the Odisha Government entrusted the Administration of the temple to a statutory committee constituted under this Act on 17.12.1960 for proper conservation and better management of the temple. This Shree Jagannath Temple Managing Committee has undertaken some repair works of the temple in the year 1969.

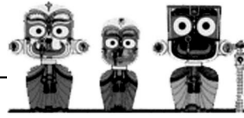
In 1972-73 a crack on the upper part of portion joining the main temple and Mukhasala and rain water seeping there were observed. The Temple Managing Committee requested the Archaeological Survey of India to take up necessary steps for its repair. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) experts headed by its Director General visited the spot and took necessary steps for its repair. In 1973 the A.S.I.

constituted an expert committee headed by its Director General M.N. Despande for conservation of Shree Jagannath Temple. This Expert committee and Temple Managing Committee decided to entrust Shree Mandir conservation work to the ASI in 1974. Puri Jagannath Temple was declared a National Monument by the Government of India on 3.2.1975 and the ASI took over responsibility of the conservation of Jagannath temple.

In accordance with the direction of the Orissa High Court, an agreement was made between the Shree Jagannath Temple Managing Committee and the Archaeological Survey of India on 22.8.1979. By this agreement the conservation of Shree Jagannath Temple, its Kurma Bedha, 95 subsidiary shrines in the Bedha, Meghanad Prachir was entrusted to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The experts of the ASI opined that removal of the thick coat of plaster was necessary as the plaster had become spongy and porous and failed its purpose of preventing leakage of water. Rather the plaster had put heavy pressure and weight on the temple.

Accordingly the ASI took up deplastering of the temple and its subsidiary shrines. Dr. Ajodhya Das and some other persons filed a case in the Orissa High Court in 1978 against this deplastering work of ASI complaining that deplastering of the temple will cause damage to the temple structure due to bad effect of saline climate. The Hon'ble High Court by an Order stayed the deplastering work. The stay order was vacated in 1985. An appeal was preferred in the Supreme Court of India challenging this and the Hon'ble Supreme Court rejected the plea in 1986. So the ASI resumed the deplastering work after about 7 years.

The deplastering work undertaken by the ASI unveiled many artistic and iconographic



features on the outer wall of the temple. The wealth of sculptures and decorative designs unveiled by deplastering presented the temple as a veritable museum of art and architecture. After deplastering beautiful images of Siva, Brahma, Kali, Ganesh, Nataraj, Surjya and 24 forms of Vishnu came to light. Archaeologists say that 24 forms of Vishnu are not depicted in any other temple in India.

In course of deplastering the main temple was found to have been plastered having nine distinct thick layers. The cracks, structural weakness detected were repaired and replaced by newly carved stones.

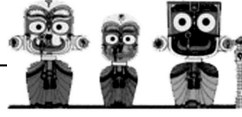
While the deplastering and chemical treatment of the deplastered wall of the main temple and subsidiary shrines were in progress, a huge piece of stone measuring about six tonnes fell down from the Amla Bedha of Jagannath temple on its western side on 14.6.1990. The expert committee recommended for filling the void by fixing a new piece of stone. Good quality khondalite stone block was procured from Tapang of undivided Puri district and after proper dressing and carving as per the original design, the new piece was brought inside the temple Bedha and lifted to a height of about 180 feet by heavy lift, iron ropes and jacks and placed in the original position on 28.2.1991.

On 13.8.1992 two pieces of corbel stones weighing about one tonne fell inside Garbha Gruha in front of Ratna Simhasana. This created grave concern in the minds of the devotees and gave rise to suspicion at Government level and in the minds of public alike about the sincerity and efficiency of the A.S.I. regarding protection and conservation of the Grand Temple of Shree Jagannath. The very next day on 14.8.1992 Chief Minister Shri Biju Patnaik urged Prime Minister Shri P.V. Narasingh Rao to take immediate steps

for protection and safety of Shree Jagannath temple. The 'White paper on repair and conservation of Shree Jagannath temple complex at Puri' placed in the Orissa Legislative Assembly in 1992 by the Orissa Government reads "Hon'ble Chief Minister vide his D.O. dated 14.8.1992 requested the Prime Minister to direct the Director General of A.S.I. to rush to Puri immediately with a team of experts to make an on the spot study and take up the repair work including preventive measures as a safeguard against recurrence of such accidents. The timely intervention by Hon'ble Chief Minister set the A.S.I. on its heel and toe; a team of experts headed by the Director General, A.S.I. reached Puri on 15.8.1992, inspected the Garbha Griha where the last fall of stone had taken place and as an emergent measure provided support to the interior abode of the holy deities by erecting scaffolding on all sides."

In coordination with the Central Government, experts from different parts of India were invited to examine the structural stability and other problems relating to conservation. On 13.9.1992 an expert committee comprising experts, scientists and engineers from Structural Research Centre, Ghaziabad, Central Building Research Institute, Roorkee, National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad; Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur and Regional Research Laboratory, Bhubaneswar, Archaeological Survey of India and Orissa Government examined the temple and determined the course of action and steps needed for repair and conservation.

The Expert Committee stressed that the Deities should be shifted from Ratna Simhasana in order to facilitate repair of the Garbha Griha. After much deliberation it was decided that the Deities would be shifted to a new temporary pedestal. A temporary pedestal was constructed



below the 'Anabasar Pindi' near 'Bhitarkatha' or Chandan Argali in Jagamohan. The Deities were shifted from the Ratna Simhasan to the newly constructed temporary pedestal on 29th November 1992 noon.

The repair and conservation work was taken up on a war-footing from 4.12.1992 and the 'Garbha Gruha' was handed over to the Temple Administration on 31.5.1993 after completion of the repair and conservation work. Mahaprabhu Shree Jagannath, Devi Subhadra, Badathakur Shree Balabhadra and Shree Sudarsan were not on the Ratnasimhasan in Shree Mandir from 29th November 1992, Sunday to 2nd July 1993, Friday. During this period Shree Jagannath's Snana Jatra, Rath Jatra and Bahuda Jatra were celebrated.

The deplastering and chemical treatment of the main temple undertaken from 1975 were completed in 1996. In the meantime conservation of Mahalakshmi temple, Bimal temple, Nrusimha temple, many other subsidiary shrines in the Shree Mandir Bedha, the Garuda Stambha in Natamandap, the kitchen of the temple have been done by the ASI. Recently fall of a stone block from the Paschima Dwar Gumut (Western Entrance Gate Dome) and serious damages detected in the Simha Dwar Gumut (Lions Gate Dome) have created suspicion in the minds of the public as well as some sections of the Sevayats, of the temple about the sincerity of the A.S.I. in protecting the Shreemandir. But work for the repair of these damages have been taken up immediately by the A.S.I. Every year during Ratha

Jatra period when the Deities are in Gundicha Mandir, the Garbha Gruha of Shree Mandir is being meticulously examined and necessary repair and conservation works are being done by the A.S.I. There might have been some lapses and slackness in taking adequate measures for conservation of the temple here and there.

Simple conservation and repair works will not serve the purpose of protection of the temple. In the background of terrorists onslaught on Akshar Dham in Gandhi Nagar, Parliament House, Kasi Viswanath temple in Varanasi and Taj Hotel, Nariman House, Oberoi, Trident Hotel and Chhatrapati Shivaji Rail Terminus in Mumbai, possibilities of external aggression on Puri Shree Jagannath Temple can not be ruled out. So adequate measure should be taken for the safety and security of Shree Mandir. This is the urgent need of the day.

Shree Jagannath temple is not simply or tower of beautifully carved stones. This is the 'Bada Deula' - the 'Grand Temple' majestically enshrined in the heart of the son of the land. The pages of history show that never in the past any ruler and administrator of this sacred land have dared to neglect this shrine. They are very much conscious that any negligence towards this Grand Edifice will surely throw them out of the throne by the people of the land.

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