

Lord Jagannath : Presiding Deity of Nilachal Dham - the Lord of the Universe

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Kabibar Radhanath Ray, the architect of modern Odia poetry describes Odisha in a Sanskrit hymn "Bharat Gitika" as

*"Bharat Pankaj-dalamidam
Utkal-Mandal Miti Veditam."*

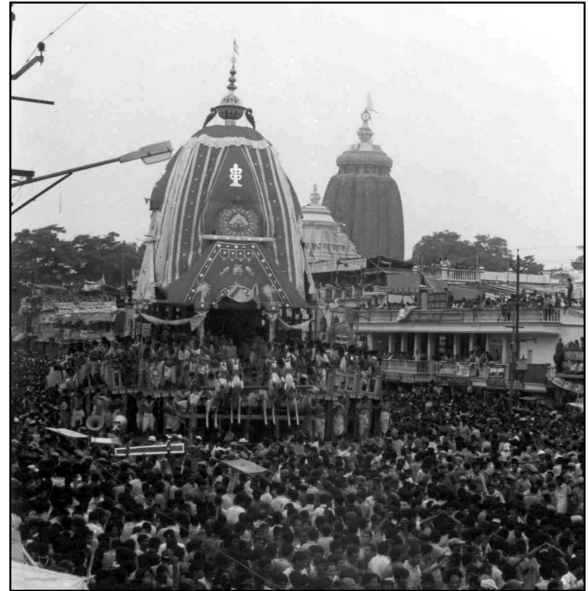
It means this land of Utkal is well known as a petal of lotus Bharat. Here the tone is one of reverent adoration and admiration for the serene beauty that is called 'Utkal' or 'Odisha'.

Making a continuity of Kabibar Utkalmani Pandit Gopabandhu writes -

*"Jagat Sarase Bharat Kamal
Ta Madhye Keshara Punya Nilachal."*

(India is a lotus in the pond of the world and Nilachal is the stalk of that lotus.)

The presiding deity of Nilachal Dham, Lord Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe is the most revered and ancient deity of Hindu pantheon who has mesmerised and bewildered crores of devotees, scores of scholars, research analysts, poets and saints down the years. While three Dhams in different centres of India represent 3 different sects viz - Badrika-Vishnu, Dwarika-Krishna, Rameswar-Shiva, the fourth Dham i.e. Nilachal Dham symbolises as the holy place of one and all. Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Neelachal Dham is not a deity of any particular



sect. He is cosmopolitan and embraces spiritual thoughts of all sects signifying the symbol of unity in diversity. Four words in 'Jagannath' represent four deities. 'Ja' is Jagannath, 'Ga' is Balabhadra, 'Na' is Subhadra and 'Tha' Sudarsan, So Jagannath means the union of all deities which is all pervasive and often described as 'Purusottama.'

Some scholars putforth the view that Lord Jagannath and Buddha were the same God. The great Vaishnavite poet Jayadev accepts Buddha as one Avatar of Vishnu in his Dasavatara *sloka*, as enunciated in his magnum opus 'Geeta Govinda.'

*"Nindasi Jagnyabidhe Rahaha Shruti Jatan
Sadaya Hrudaya Darshita Pashughatam.
Keshaba Dhruta Buddha Sarira
Jaya Jagadisha Hare."*

The three images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra, are the identical representations of Buddha, Sangha and Dharma respectively of Buddhist Triad. Indrabhuti, the king of Uddiyan in 8th century A.D. wrote in his famous 'Gyanasiddhi'-

*Paranipatya Jagannatham, Sarvaina Varan
Chitam Sarva Buddhamayam Siddhi Vyapino
Gagano pamam.*

Lord Jagannath who is the same as the Buddha and who is all pervading Siddhi is compared to the sky. He is worshipped by all the highest Jinas. He is the giver of all, the Omniscient.

Famous historian Kedarnath Mahapatra suggests that Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath have taken their inception from Triratna of Jainism : (1) Samyak Jnana (2) Samyak Charitra (3) Samyak Drusti. Bhakta Salabega who is a Muslim is also known as one of the greatest worshipper of Lord Jagannath. Down the years his soul-stirring Bhajans have influenced the cultural and social ethos of Odia people and would continue to sway the emotions and sentiments of generations to come.

Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Kabir, Sri Chaitanya and Guru Nanak have also visited Nilachal Dham and were greatly influenced by the eclectic philosophy of Jagannath cult which later moulded and shaped their teaching and preaching to a great extent. Dasia Bauri, an untouchable, Hadi Das, a blacksmith, Jagannath Das, the famous poet of Bhakti movement and Bandhu Mohanty an ardent devotee of the Lord are gifted with the divine blessings of the God.

There is a popular belief and saying that the chariot of Lord Jagannath did not move despite all out effort by lakhs of devotees as Balaram Das could not make it to the pulling of chariots.

In Jagannath Temple, Jagannath is worshipped as Purusottama or Vishnu, Balabhadra as Shiva and Devi Subhadra as Adya Shakti. Some scholars identify Lord Jagannath as Krishna, Balabhadra as Balaram and Subhadra as the sister of Krishna who married to Arjun. Everywhere Krishna is worshipped along with Radha whose divine love has been immortalised by the great poet Jayadev. But here at Puri temple His sister Subhadra beholds the centre place with the two brothers.

But the attempt to co-relate Lord Krishna with Lord Jagannath has been strongly refuted by the great poet Dibakar Das. According to him Jagannath is the Param Brahma and Avatari whereas Krishna is only one Avatara. From Jagannath crores of Avatars are created.

*"Parambrahma Jagannatha
Avatari Ethu Jata
Koti Koti je Avatara"
Etahun huanti bahara.*

(Jagannath Charitamruta)

He says emphatically

*"Jagannatha je sola kala
Tahun kalae Nanda bala
Kalake sola kala kari
Gope bihare Narahari."*

(Lord Jagannath contains all the 16 attributes and Krishna had only one. By multiplying the only attribute he had, to sixteen, Krishna flourished in Gopa)

The various Avatars (incarnations) which appear in different sects and beliefs are only partial manifestations of Lord Jagannath. It is generally

believed in Hindu pantheon that visit to any sacred place or Tirthasthan may fulfill one aspect of spiritual life but it can complete the whole circle by getting Moksha or salvation if one visits only the Nilachal Dham.

Lord Jagannath is the Lord of humanism. All the beliefs, faiths, rituals, customs and socio-religious traits have been assimilated in Jagannath cult. During the Rath Yatra which is being held in a year the Holy Trinity move from Jagannath temple to Gundicha Mandir in three colourful wooden chariots pulled by lakhs of ardent devotees who throng the holy town from all parts of the world. The festival does not differentiate between religion, caste, creed or sect. It symbolises the philosophy of a casteless and classless society where all members present have only one identity i.e. devotee of the Lord. The Gajapati Maharaja of Puri who is privileged to be the foremost servitor does the "Chhera Pahanra" (Cleaning the chariots with the broom having a golden handle). Nowhere we can see such a sight. It means before the Lord all are equal. The Maha Prasad of Lord is shared between one and all and is used in many sacred occasions like marriage, birthday and also death.

It is popularly said :

*"Dolescha Dola Govinda Chapescha Madhu
Sudana - Rathetu Bamanam Drustwa
Punarjanman Na Bidyate"*

(If you behold the Lord Dola Govinda in the wooden palanquin during Dola festival, in boat in the Narendra pond during Chandan Yatra (Madhu Sudan) and Lord Jagannath (Bamanam) in the chariot there will be no rebirth and you will be free from the cycle of birth and death.

In continuation of Kabibar Radhanath Ray it may be aptly said that if Odisha is the petal of a lotus called Bharat, Lord Jagannath is the presiding deity over that lotus with universal love who engulfs the spiritual gamut of every human being and who embraces the whole humanity with His "Baliar Bhuja". And we Odias are privileged enough to have a Lord who is the "Lord of the Universe" and who has given an identity to us in the whole world.

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