



Lord Sri Venkateswara of Seven Hills and Lord Sri Jagannath of Blue Hill



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It is essential to point out that both presiding deities-Lord Sri Venkateswara of the seven hills at Thirupati (A.P.) and Lord Sri Jagannath at Puri (Orissa)-represent the same omnipotent and omnipresent Almighty who is,

*“Purnamadah Purna Midam
Purnat Purnam Udacyate
Purnasya Purnam Adaya
Purnam Evavasiyate.”*

(“The invisible is the infinite, the visible too is the infinite. Form the infinite, the visible universe of infinite extension has come out. The Infinite remains the same, even though the infinite universe has come out of it.”)

And

“Tad ejati tan najate tad dure tadvantike,
Tad anterasya sarvasya tadu sarvasyasya tahyatah.”

(It moves and it moves not. It is far away and it is very near. It is within all this and it is also outside all this.)

It is Upanishadic version of Almighty. He is changeless Chaitanya Shakti from which ever changing universe has come into existence.

Almost every Hindu, atleast in one of his innumerable births and rebirths, realizes and seeks salvation. This is ultimate Jnanam. In fact Upanishads mention the Almighty as Jnana

Purusha or Jnana Shakti. There is no second to this ultimate truth. Everything including you, is “Swarupa Bheda”, i.e. manifestation of the ultimate in different shapes. The waves of the sea are “Swarup Bheda” of sea water. The waves in motion contain the same salt water as the sea which is steady. The waves are bound to fall and merge into the sea. Another analogy is different gold ornaments-be it bangles, chain or ring etc. are all “Swarup Bheda” of the same gold. Goldsmith values only the gold in the ornaments, but not shape. This is Jnanam. He, who sees the same god in everything in this ephemeral world is fit for salvation.

But, however, duality (dwaitam) exists due to “Maya” which envelops this world. Bhagwadgita suggests “Bhakti” Marga (path of devotion) as one of the paths towards salvation to overcome Maya. In “Bhakti” you assume yourself to be different from Him. He is Lord and you are his devotee, seeking bliss. Bhakti is full of emotion (Bhavapurnam). The angle of perception of the same ultimate truth is deviated due to emotion of Bhakti. Hence worship differs depending on the degree of feeling intimacy with God, the method of worship and the customs that are observed in temples are different from one another. Thus the customs, the rituals, the observance of different Pujas, car festivals and



the idols at Jagannath Temple are unique and in no way similar to other Vaishnava temples. The customs at Jagannath Temple coined in one word, “Jagannath Culture”.

Jagannath culture is different. It is a blend of Aryan and non-Aryan culture. Primordial people realize the presence of ultimate by instinct, if not by the knowledge, gained by reading religious texts like Vedas and Upanishads. They are innocent and less materialistic when compared to urban people. They identify themselves with the Almighty. They offer food to god, if not with traditional orthodoxy.

One of the important aspects of Jagannath Culture is identifying Jagannath as incarnation of God with all characteristics of human being. Thus He is Purushotham.

The original idols were installed at Puri by the king, Indradyumna. According to the instructions of Lord Jagannath Himself in a dream, the king had sent one by name Vidyapati to the forests where the tribal head by name, Viswabasu was worshipping Neelamadhab in a secret place. (The entire story is not described due to lack of space).

The shape and placement of idols on a platform, known as “Ratna Simhasana” attracts Upanishadic interpretation of Ishwara. Lord Sri Jagannath is with his elder brother, Sri Balabhadra at his right and in between them is placed their sister, Sri Subhadra. Sri Subhadra has no hands at all, but one hand of each brother appears to be her own. Jagannath and Balabhadra have two hands each which are blunt without palm. None of the three idols has legs, but rests on the base of the wooden body.

Lord Sri Jagannath is not with his consort, Lakshmi, but with his sister, Subhadra. Again placement of the three idols is such that if a

devotee stands at the centre from a distance, he will see full view of Subhadra and half view of Jagannath and Balabhadra.

The structure of idol of Subhadra, its placement, and her sister relationship with Jagannath, suggest that Subhadra is considered to represent Maya. Maya, according to Upanishads, makes her presence with Ishwara at the same time. Thus Ishwara and Maya coexist and they are inseparable. But Maya has an end while Ishwara is infinite and hence He is “anadianantam”. Maya exists due to “avidya” or ignorance of Jeevatma. Maya disappears or vanishes if once jnanam is drawn on Jeeva. The fact that Subhadra has no hands and it is a small idol in comparison to other two suggests that she has no independent existence just like Maya. The whole Jagat is only due to projection of Maya. In this mundane world we meagerly see the presence of God in the form of Dharma, truth, love and humanity. This fact is suggested to the viewer as he can see half view of Jagannath and Bhalabhadra at a distance.

The Vedas say that God has created this universe. But Upanishads which came to us latter say that God has not created this world, but Trigunas, viz. Satvic, Rajasic and Tamasic are responsible for the emergence of this Jagat. The Vasanas (impressions) in the form of pair of opposites, such as good and bad, sweet and bitter, love and hatred which are experienced by jeeva in the previous births, make room in the sub-conscious. They with the help of ‘Chit’ (mind), take the shape of birth. Thus Malina (impure) Chaitania or in other words Chaitania, covered by “Avidya” (ignorance) is responsible for the birth of jeeva and entangle in the cycle of births and rebirths, taking sorrows and pleasures as true and indulge in bondage. If this Upanishadic interpretation is believed to be true, the fact that



the idols of Lord Sri Jagannath and Sri Balabhadra, having no full hands, but blunt ones, is very well justified. Literally God has no hand in your karmic births, but He helps to fulfill your desires.

Krishnavatara appears at the end of Dwapara Yuga. Even at that time, people have no complete faith on God. There is a story, regarding Sakshi Gopal temple near Puri. Two Brahmin friends, in their pilgrimage to Brindavan, made a vow before Sri Krishna, that if they would be blessed with a daughter and a son separately to each, their off springs would get married. After having blessed so, the Brahmin of the boy had not kept his word. So the father of the girl had gone to Sri Krishna at Brindavan with a request to come with him to the village as a witness. Sri Krishna had agreed to follow him but with a condition that Brahmin should not look back. The Brahmin, while walking, was hearing the sounds of anklets of Sri Krishna. When the Brahmin could not hear the sound after some time of his journey, he got suspicious and lost faith in the words of Sri Krishna and hence he looked back to verify whether Sri Krishna was following him. As Brahmin lost his faith, Sri Krishna, who was in fact following him, had stopped to follow and turned to black stone idol, now known as ‘Sakshi Gopal.’

In Kali Yuga, the faith in God is further deteriorated. Who is waiting for God until justice is done to him ? The growth of terrorism and Naxalism is an example. How many murderers are taking place every moment as a result of revenge ? Lord Sri Jagannath and his brother have no legs as you do not believe that they would come to your rescue, but to those devotees who have faith in Him. He is Chaitanya Shakti or pure conscious. Isavasa Upanishad says,

“Anejad ekam manaso javiyo
N’ ainad deva apnuvan purvam arsat
Tad dhavato’ nyam atayeti”

(Though He is unmoved and undivided, He is faster than the mind and reaches before the mind arrives. So He is beyond the grasp of mind. Mightier Devatas, including Devendra cannot get Him.”)

The fact that idols of Lord Sri Jagannath and others, being devoid of legs, is irrelevant and hence to have no legs is not impediment to come to your rescue, provided you are having faith in him.

The idol of Lord Sri Venkateswara of Tirumala is prepared from black stone in traditional human form with Bhudevi and Sridevi. His consort in Kaliyuga Avatara, Sri Padmavati Devi is not with him at Tirumala, but She is in down hills at Alamelu Mangapuram, near Tirupati.

It is said that people in Bhuloka were suffering by the bad influence of Kali, as a consequence of which injustice and false-hood ruling the world. Bhrugu Maharshi went to Vishnu Loka to request Lord Sri Vishnu to incarnate in this world to save dharma from the clutches of Kali. Lord Vishnu at that time, had happy moments with his consort, Lakshmi and did not notice the presence of Bhrugu Rishi. The Rishi got so much annoyed with Vishnu that he had kicked Him on the chest, saying that He, being the saviour and sustainer of the whole jagat, was merely spending time, while people in Bhuloka were suffering from bad influence of Kali. Lord Vishnu, instead of getting offended and annoyed with Rishi for having kicked him, prayed for pardon and enquired whether his tender feet got hurt. The Lord Vishnu promised to take incarnation in the name of Sri R.Venkateswara at Seven Hills Tirupati — Tirumala.



Again coming to Puri Jagannath, there are two unique celebrations, viz., Nabakalebara utsav and car festival. When two Ashada months come in a calendar year, old moola vigrahas (old idols) are replaced by newly made wooden idols (made from neem tree). After transferring powers (Shakti) from old ones to new ones by rituals, the old ones are buried in the burial ground, outside the temple premises, thus completely identifying the god with one among us, reiterating the fact that any from in the Jagat is subjected to birth and death. (Ja=birth, gat=passing away).

The annual car festival and preceding rituals are very unique to Jagannath Temple. Every year on "Jestha Purnima (full moon day in the month of Jestha) the three gods are given water bath intensely, as result the gods are declared ill. The temple will be closed for general public until dwitiya day of Ashada month. During these days, the gods are offered only pepper and other chera moolicas (roots of medicinal plants) but not regular anna bhoga (offerings of cooked rice).

On the dwitiya day of Ashada month newly painted original idols are taken out of the sanctum sanctorum for car festival by a special ritual, known as, 'Pahundiyaatra'.

No where in any Vaishnava temple, including Sri Venkateswara Temple of Seven Hills, original idols (Moola Vigrahas) are taken out of sanctum sanctorum for the car festival.

First Sudarshan Chakra in the form of a pillar is taken out and kept in the chariot of Subhadra. Then Sri Subhadra, being in small size and also to give respect to the female identity, she is carried with hands and placed in her chariot, Darpadalana. Sri Balabhadra and then Sri Jagannath are taken out. It is very pleasant and emotional scene when these idols are brought to chariots amidst the sounds of conches and metallic

discs while Pandas (temple priests) dance ecstatically. The idols are tied with thick ropes, held by some Pandas in front while some hold at the back. When the idols are dragged forward, they swing forward on their bases, simultaneously Pandas at the back, pull the ropes so that idols slide forward without being toppled. This is known as 'Pahundi Yatra'. What a wonderful sight it is! The gods move forward while swinging back and forth as if they are nodding their heads in tune with the mood of devotees.

The Bhakti of devotees, gathered in lakhs in Badadanda (the name of the location of temple) reaches crescendo. At this stage, the difference between the god and devotees vanishes in such a manner that they touch, embarrass and make gestures and talk very intimately as if to their beloveds in love, forgetting themselves totally.

At this stage the Bhakti leads to jnanam, though these two are different paths of realizing the ultimate.

Once Sri Rajagopalachari, the writer of several religious books for children, while making comment on "Bhaja Govindam" of Sri Adi Sankaracharya, says that the paths of bhakti and jnanam, though appear to be divergent, they converge into the same ultimate. Bhakti is a belief and bhavapurnam, transforming the mind with ultimate reality, while jnanam is totally logical and beyond it without any emotion, rather you will realize the ultimate in absolute silence.

After the Lords take their seats in their respective chariots in the car festival of Lord Sri Jagannath, an unique function, called "Chhera Pahanra" takes place. Raja of Puri (even now) who is deemed to be the first citizen of Utkal, considers himself as the first servant of Lord Sri Jagannath. Therefore he sweeps three chariots one by one with golden broomstick while



sanctified water is sprinkled amidst the Vedic chants.

This act of the king signifies that he is only a means (Nimithamatra) of serving the people in the name of God, thus leaving his ego and submitting himself to God in the path of Karmayoga. It is a suggestion to all who are at the helm of affairs in legislature, executive and judiciary wings of our governments to execute their work properly and perfectly in the name of God.

The chariots of Sri Balabhadra, Sri Subhadra and lastly Sri Jagannath are drawn by devotees to their birth place, (Gundicha Mandir) where they stay nine days and come back to their original temple in a return car festival.

In the temple of Lord Sri Venkateswara at seven hills, there are no parallel rituals. The moola vigrahas are never taken out of sanctum sanctorum in a car festival. Only utsav vigrahas (idols) are taken out to a single chariot which is not built every year. Venkateswara, in the name of Malayappa, enjoy the chariot riding. The idols return on the same day. In Brahmotsavam, each day Sri Malayappa rides on a specific vahanam, like Garuda vahanam, Adishesha vahanam etc., there is also no Chherapanhanra by the head of the state as in Puri. There is also no change of moola vigrahas as in Nabakalebera Utsav in Puri Jagannath Temple.

Further no devotee is allowed to touch Lord Venkateswara or in any South Indian Vaishnava temples. But the practice of allowing any devotee to go into sanctum sanctorum and touch the moola vigrahas at Jagannath temple in particular timings is prevailing.

In car festival also people are allowed to touch the original idols. This seems to be very odd practice especially to those who are acquainted with the orthodoxy of Ayappa temple

at Sabarimalai in Kerala State. Even women are not allowed to enter the temple to have darshan of Sri Ayyappa.

But everlasting reality is that there is nothing in this universe in which the Almighty is not present. According to Isavasya Upanishad,

“Om, Isavasyam idam servam yatkin ca jagatyam jagat”

(Whatever there is changeful in this ephemeral world — all must be enveloped by Ishwara).

There is nothing in this universe which does not possess Almighty. The body moves because of Him. If He is not there, this body is dead. So who is touching whom? This is Vedantic perception of God. But one thing, how to know that a particular devotee, whether reached the status of a “Seer” who is expected to be devoid of doership. (Katrutvabhava) and enjoyership (Bhokrutvabhava) and enjoys the status of a “Sakshibhuta (a mere witness). People with pseudo concepts are many in this world. He, who touches the idols of sanctum sanctorum must realize that he is not doing so physically, but with pure conscious where the mind is completely subdued when he really feels the touch of almighty.

At the end of the day, after discussing so much about God and practices in the temples, what counts is only the realization of humanity and love.

Since He is present everywhere (Omnipresent), it is essential to realize “the whole world is Swarupbheda of the same Almighty. So

“Service to humanity is service to God”

And

“Serve everybody and hurt nobody”

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