



Biggest Wonder of the World : Kitchen of Lord Shri Jagannath

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The Mahaprasad or the divine food cooked in the divine kitchen of Lord Shri Jagannath Temple is one of the most interesting and intriguing things to know about the God in Puri, Odisha. The pilgrimage to the Temple are incomplete without the Mahaprasad. Nowhere in the world the Lord and the Divine Food offered to Him enjoy an equal status except in Sri Jagannath Temple, Puri, situated in the eastern parts of India, where worshipping Lord Jagannath and partaking Mahaprasad is regarded as a divine blessing and through it one gets salvation. The kitchen where food is prepared has enormous capacity to feed more than 1 lakh visitors per day. It is not the quantity but the quality and variety of food cooked inside the temple kitchen is simply unbelievable. 56 types of food item alone are directly offered to Lord which is meant for Him and for His ritual functionaries. Another set of food is prepared with an eye for

public consumption which is separately prepared and after offering to the Deities, is open for sale to the general public. This stupendous task involves the participation of more than thousands of people who are engaged in various activities.



The World famous temple of Lord Jagannath situated at Puri

Introduction

The first thing that baffles the pilgrims, coming to Puri is that everything associated with this place is expressed in superlatives. Like the God is Mahaprabhu, Goddess is MahaLaxmi, Lord

Balabhadra is Badathakur, the temple is Badadeula, the sea is Mahodadhi and the Prasad offered to Lord is Mahaprasad and the kitchen where the food is cooked is treated as the biggest kitchen in the world.

Indian subcontinent has four shrines which is declared as holiest of the holies as it is believed to have been liked by Lord Vishnu intimately. They



have been christened as Dham (Abode of Lord). These places are Rameswar in south, Dwarika in west, Badrinath in north and Puri in east. It is believed that He takes His bath at Rameswaram, meditates at Badrinath, dines at Puri and retires at Dwarika. Therefore, a lot of importance is given to the Mahaprasad at Puri.

Skanda Purana, the scripture on Lord Jagannath explains the value of Mahaprasad in eloquent words. All sins are destroyed when Mahaprasad is taken even if it is stale, dried and brought from a long distance. Any one, whether impure, immoral or committing mental sins should take it, the moment one gets it, without any thought.

Historical Background

Lord Jagannath is regarded as Daru Bramha, life force hidden inside the wood. He is also known as Sabda Bramha life force in all sound and vibrations. He is treated as Nada Bramha, the primal sound of Om; He is also regarded as Aham Bramha, life force in man. He is respected as Anna Bramha, the life force in rice. The old scriptures vividly describe the Mahaprasad, which is the offering to Lord Jagannath as Lord Jagannath Himself. There is no distinction between the Lord and His Mahaprasad. The subject matter of this paper is the kitchen inside the Puri temple and the people associated with it, their economic status. The economic status of the people associated with it has not been covered in an elaborate manner previously. However there is reference to the kitchen and preparation of Mahaprasad in the Madala Panji, regarded as the chronicle of the temple.



The trinity Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra, Lord Jagannath and Lord Sudarshan.

The Place, The Lord and The Divine Food Mahaprasad

The majestic temple of Lord Jagannath is a major attraction for the tourists visiting Puri, the town situated in the eastern part of India. The present Jagannath temple, known as white pagoda, dates back to the 12th century. Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra are the main deities popularly named as Trinity to whom the food of different varieties named as Mahaprasad cooked in the divine kitchen are offered at different intervals from morning to midnight. The visitors to Puri and specially to the temple crave for this divine food and the demand for the Mahaprasad has made the temple not only as a religious place but a food industry !

Why it is called Mahaprasad ?

In most temples of India, the holy food offered to Lord is named as Prasad but only at Puri, the holi food is named as Mahaprasad. The various reasons ascribed to this naming are as under.

The dictionary meaning of Maha is great. The holy food offered to Lord Sri Jagannath is named as Mahaprasad.



Sankhudi Mahaprasad (Rice, Dal, Curry and other gravy items)

There are 26 old scriptures (Puranas) where the Mahaprasad has been held in high esteem. It has been said that partaking Mahaprasad is equivalent to having Darshan of Lord Jagannath. By partaking Mahaprasad all sins are washed away. Having Mahaprasad one gets salvation after death. Mahaprasad is so powerful that irrespective of caste, creed and sex all can eat together from one pot.

It is said that Goddess Mahalaxmi herself cooks for Lord Jagannath in disguise and it is prepared in most sacred manner.

The kitchen fire is called Vaisnavagni, because it is the fire in the kitchen of Lord Jagannath are used to serve Vishnu Himself, it is never put out. Charcoals are kept burning day and night by one worshipper called Akhand Mekap.

Another name of Mahaprasad is called Kaibalya that which gives Mokshya, salvation or liberation. It is said that, if one takes this food of Lord Jagannath, he will have no rebirth.

Even today the taste of Mahaprasad cannot be duplicated outside. It is also the direct

experience of devotees inside the temple that when the cooked food is carried from kitchen to the temple it has no fragrance, no sweet aroma but after the offering when it is carried from the temple to Anand Bazar, the place of sale smelled divinely sweet.

Mahaprasad is so intimate to the day to day life of a devotee that it is taken in all major events of life. It is taken and distributed at the time of a child's birth, at every holy ceremony throughout his life and even after and at the time of death also Mahaprasad is needed.

Types of Mahaprasad

There are three types of Mahaprasad.

1. **Sankhudi Mahaprasad** includes items like rice, ghee rice, mixed rice and dishes like dal, plain dal mixed with vegetables, mixed curries of different types of leafy vegetables porridge etc.
2. **Sukhuli Mahaprasad** consists of dry sweetmeat and cakes like khaja made of maida, Gaja made of wheat flour, Ladoo made of wheat, sugar and ghee, kanti, rice flour and ghee etc.



Sukhuli Mahaprasad (Dry Mahaprasad sweetmeat, cake etc.)



3. **Nirmalya**:-Besides Sankhudi and Sukhila Mahaprasad, another type of dry Mahaprasad is called Nirmalya. In spiritual recognition Nirmalya is equally important as Mahaprasad. Nirmalya is commonly understood as dry rice i.e. cooked rice dried up in hot sun inside a separate place earmarked for drying. This is further packed in small cloth bags. In the absence of Sankhudi or Sukhila Mahaprasad, Nirmalya is treated at par and is invariably found in every Hindu's house as it is needed on all occasions.

All these are offered to the Lord in a ritualistic way except Nirmalya. Every day 56 type of Prasad are offered to the Lord during the time of worship and all these are prepared in the kitchen of the temple.

Four types of cooking are done in the kitchen of Srimandira. They are Bhimapaka, Nalapaka, Sauripak and Gauripaka.

In the kitchen of Srimandira, four types of rice are prepared. These are Salianna, Khiraanna, Dadhianna and Sitalaanna. Fine variety of rice (Sunakhila rice) cooked with ghee, orange slice, and salt to get Salianna rice. For Khiranna rice, Basumati rice is mixed with cow milk, ghee and salt. For Dadhianna rice, plain rice is mixed with Curd. For Sitalaanna rice, the rice is mixed with lime juice and salt.

VARIETIES OF MAHAPRASAD

The popular items of Mahaprasad are described as under :

Rice Preparations

1. Sadha Anna - simple rice water, 2. Ghee Anna- rice mixed with ghee, 3. *Kanika*- rice, ghee, and sugar, 4. Khechedi rice mixed with lentils, 5, *Dahi Pakhal*- curd rice and water,

6. *Mitha Pakhal*- rice and sugar water, 7. *Ada Pakhal*- rice mixed with ginger and water, 8. *Odia Pakhal*- rice, ghee, lemon and salt, 9. Thali Khechedi- lentil rice with sugar and ghee.

Sweets

10. *Khaja*- made of maida, 11. Gaja- made of wheat and sugar, 12. Ladu- made of wheat, sugar and ghee, 13. Magaja Ladu, 14. Ladu, 15. Jagannath Ballava- made of wheat, sugar, and more ghee, giving it a black colour, 16. Khuruma- made of wheat, ghee and salt, 17. Mathapuli- made of ghee, ginger, and a kind of bean ground into a thick paste, 18. Kakara- made of ghee and wheat, 19. Marichi Ladu- made of wheat and sugar, 20. Luni Khuruma- made of wheat, ghee and salt.

Cakes, Pancakes and Patties

21. *Poda Pitha* made of Rice, Urad Dal, coconut, jaggery and ghee, 22. *Chittau* - rice, coconut, sugar, ghee, 23. Jilli- rice flour and ghee and sugar, 24, *Kanti*- rice flour and ghee, 25. *Manda*- made of rice, coconut, jaggery, cheese and ghee, 26. Amalu- made of wheat, ghee, and sugar, 27. *Puri*- made of wheat and ghee and deep-fried like a small thin pancake, 28. Luchi rice flour and ghee, 29. Bara- made of curd, ghee and a kind of bean, 30. *Dahi Bara*- urad dal, and curd, 31. *Arisa*- a flat cake made of rice flour, ghee, jaggery, 32. Tripuri- another flat cake made of rice flour and ghee, 33. Rosapaik- cake made of wheat and ghee.

Milk Preparations

34. *Khiri*- milk and sugar with rice, 35. Papudi- prepared only from cream of milk, 36. Khua- prepared out of pure milk slowly boiled over many hours to a soft custard -like



consistency, 37. *Rasabali*- made of milk, sugar, and wheat, 38. *Tadia*- made of fresh cheese, sugar and ghee, 39. *Chhena Khai*- made of fresh cheese, milk and sugar, 40. *Malpua*- made of maida, milk, sugar and ghee, 41. *Khira* - made of milk, cheese, sugar and ghee, 42. *Sarapulli*- this is the most famous and most difficult milk dish to prepare made of cream, milk, and sugar.

Dal and Other Dishes

43. Sweet Dal, 44. Biridal, 45. Chana dal, 46. *Muga dal/muga dalama* (the above three preparations are types of lentil dal), 47. *Dalama* - this is one of the most typical dishes in an Odishan home. It is a combination of dal and vegetables, usually eggplant, bean, sweet potato, but no tomatoes, as tomatoes are not used in Jagannath temple's food preparations. Coconut and a dried root vegetable known as *Bodhi* which looks like a mushroom and is high in protein are added. 48. *Mahura*- mixed vegetable curry, 49. *Besara*- mixed vegetable curry with black mustard seeds, 50. *Saga* - a spinach dish 51. *Potala Rasa* - an Odian vegetable, potato, with coconut milk, 52. *Goti Baigana*- small eggplants with a shredded coconut sauce, 53. *Khata* - a sour side dish made of cooked mango, or apple, and grape mixed and cooked together. 54. *Raita* a yogurt-like dish with cucumber and radish.

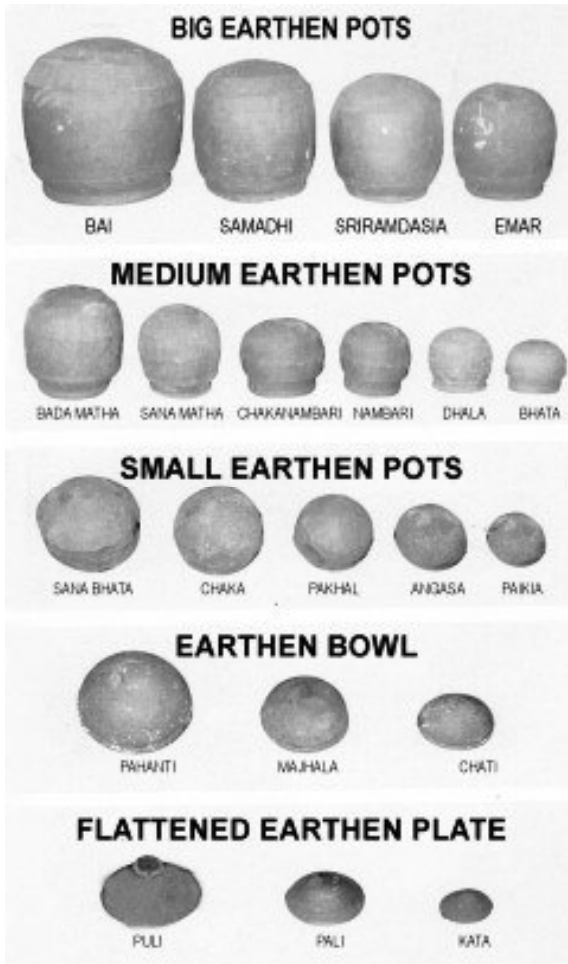
Why for cooking of food in earthen pot is preferred ?

Cooking is done in earthen pots inside the kitchen of the temple. The earthen pots are used once only for cooking that means everyday new earthen pots are required by the owner of the hearth. The main reason for sticking to earthen pot is as follows:

- 1) Earthen pot is a bad conductor of heat. Therefore the food cooked in an earthen pot remains hot for a longer period. It has been observed that in case of rice pot, even if the top portion gets cool the bottom portion remains warm for a longer period.
- 2) There is flexibility in cooking in earthen pot. If there will be sudden excess flow of crowd, then additional number of earthen pots can be used to cook more Prasad. Since every time the cooking pot has to be new, it is not possible to use the metallic pot or utensils.
- 3) As per the study in Ayurveda, the food cooked in earthen pot is tastier and healthier than the food cooked in metallic pot.
- 4) If one cooks in metallic pot there is problem of cleaning everyday for its re-use but in case of earthen pot since it is a disposable system this problem never arises as every time the cooking pot has to be new.
- 5) The earthen pots are bio-degradable materials hence environment - friendly.
- 6) The earthen pots are prepared and supplied by the local villagers and they are getting an alternative source of employment to support their family.
- 7) The cost of the earthen pots is very less in comparison to the metallic utensils.
- 8) The fire ovens or *chullas* are specifically designed for cooking in earthen pots in which less quantity of fire wood is used.⁶

Types of earthen pots used in the temple

Various types and size of earthen pots are used in the temple kitchen for cooking of food



Earthen pots for daily cooking and serving

and also for selling and distribution of the Mahaprasad to the pilgrims.

For the convenience of the pilgrims the earthen pots have been named like Karma Bai pot, Dasia Math pot, Samadhi pot, Emar pot, and Numbari pot etc. Each pot has the capacity to feed a specific number of average devotees on the basis of their average consumptions.

Why the colour of the earthen pot is red ?

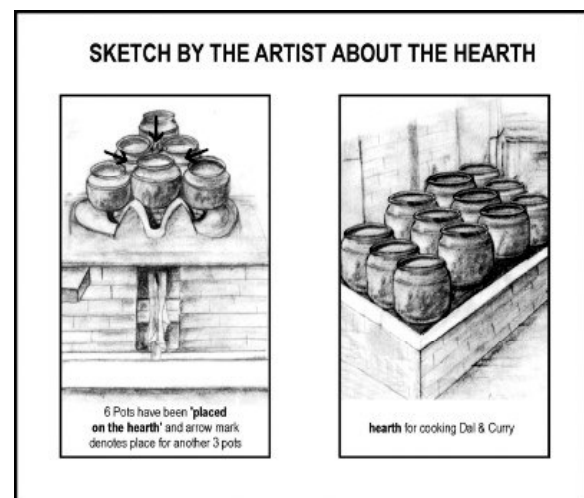
The potters give the heat to the clay pots while making the pots ready for cooking. A longer

period of heat treatment is given to make it black and a smaller time is required for making them red. It is believed that red pots are able to withstand heat and the cooking is done at a record possible time. In the hearth of Srimandira kitchen *Rosha griha*, in one hearth 9 (nine) pots are placed in a planned manner at a time for cooking and firewood is placed below the hearth for cooking. As per the ancient belief red colour is the symbol of Satwik culture which is very sacred in Hindu religion.

The Hearth (Fire oven)

There are three types of hearths (fire oven) in the kitchen of Srimandir. They are Anna Chuli, Ahia Chuli and Pitha Chuli. The dimension of the hearth where rice is prepared is known to be Anna Chuli is of length 3ft, breadth 2.5 ft and height 3.5 ft.⁷

Each hearth can accommodate 9 earthen pots at a time which is sufficient for 100 people. They are not dug out in the ground. At the base triangle shaped structures are built and firewood is placed inside it in two stages. Around 20 to 30 kg of firewood can be given at a time.





The other type of hearth is rectangular in shape which accommodates 27 earthen pots at a time. The sizes of this type of hearths are (9' x 3'). Here the hearth does not need any firewood. These hearths are called Ahia chuli where the remnants of burning wood from the rice hearth are used for preparing dal and other curry items. There are 45 numbers of Ahia ovens in the kitchen. The balance 20 hearths are used for preparation of cakes and other food items for the Raja Bhog or Kotha Bhog. The first two categories of hearth is basically meant for offering to Lord and then it is available for the devotees and visitors. The last category of hearths is for exclusive cooking for the Lord for different rituals starting from early morning to late night as per the pattern and tradition of rituals. This food after being offered to Lord is distributed among the ritual functionaries; it is a part of their remuneration and called as Khei. Normally 200 kgs of firewood is required daily for the preparation of *kotha bhoga* or *raja bhoga*.

The fire in the kitchen is called Vaisnabagni because it is the fire in the kitchen of Lord Jagannath and the foods prepared is believed as per the scriptures to serve Lord Vishnu Himself.

Firewood used in the kitchen

The wood to be selected should not have been eaten by pest, and nails must not have been pierced into the wood and they should not be very hard. The variety of local wood are preferred but casuarina is the most preferred wood.

Water used in the kitchen

Water is drawn from two wells inside the temple premises towards the northern side of the kitchen. They are named as Ganga and Jamuna

as per the two famous perennial rivers in India. These wells are very old, probably they were dug during the construction of the temple itself.

The Holy Kitchen

The Holy kitchen where the Mahaprasad is prepared is an institution by itself. It is not only vast, well organized, and disciplined but also permanent in nature. Basic features and old values are scrupulously prescribed here. The fire in Holy kitchen never extinguishes. It is a continuous process. Traditionally it is believed to have been continuing since time immemorial.⁸



The temple kitchen from a distance.

The width of the kitchen is 80 feet and length is 100 feet. There are 240 hearths in it. The hearths are of 3 categories. For cooking Rice only there are 175 hearths, for Dal and curry 45 hearths and for preparing cakes and other dry Mahaprasad 20 hearths are used.

Vegetables not allowed for cooking in the temple

Usually Potato, tomato, drumsticks, ladies finger, onion, garlic, green chillies, red chillies, cauli flower, cabbage, bean, bitter gourd and capsicum is strictly prohibited for use in the kitchen while preparing this Mahaprasad.



Hygienic maintenance of the kitchen

To keep the kitchen hygienic and make the food preparation as holy offering to the Lord strict discipline is maintained inside the kitchen. The following principles are followed strictly inside the kitchen.

- a) The cook has to come inside the kitchen only after taking bath.
- b) The cook has to wear neat and clean cloth.
- c) The cook cannot grow moustache or beard.
- d) The cook cannot wear iron ring or thread round the arm.
- e) They cannot chew paan (Betel) or any type of intoxicating material.
- f) They should not sing or shout or crack jokes inside the kitchen.
- g) While carrying cooked food they have to wear a cloth mask around the mouth.
- h) Mobile and other electronic devices and camera is strictly prohibited for use inside the kitchen.

Can more than 1 lakh people take food on a single day?

This is a pertinent question which baffles the general public. If scientific and mathematical analysis is made it is proved to be correct. Sri Biswanath Samantara, the Secretary of the Badu Suar Nijog (Secretary, Temple Cook Association) in course of interview confirmed that rice inside the kitchen takes 12 minutes to get prepared and dal as well as curry also takes 13

to 15 minutes to get ready once they are placed on the hearth.

As per the procedure, on one hearth for cooking rice 9 Matha kudua (pot for food intake for 10 to 12 persons are placed and after 12 minutes the cooked rice is put from Matha kudua to the Bai handi (Biggest pot which can feed around 100 people). If we take the process of cooking and transferring to the bigger pot as 15 minutes then the numbers of people who can be fed in 15 minutes are 100. There are 175 hearths of this type which means in course of 15 minutes rice gets ready for 17,500 people. Similar is the case for dal and varieties of curry. They are placed on a rectangular hearth on the burning charcoal taken from the rice hearth as the base for cooking and surprisingly the dal and curry gets ready within 15 minutes from the 45 hearths where the number of pots that can be kept is 1215 (45 hearths x 27 pots per hearth) which can be consumed by 300 to 400 people.

This means that the food that can be prepared within a span of 15 minutes can be offered to 1750 people. The kitchen starts at 9 AM and the Prasad for general public to be supplied after it is duly offered to Lord is fixed at 11.30 AM which means the cooks get around 2 hours and 30 minutes. If in each 15 minutes the kitchen can cook food for 17,500 people then mathematically within a span of two and half hours food can be made for 1,75,000 people. Thus there is no exaggeration to the saying that the biggest kitchen can feed more than 1 lakh people.

On an average 25,000 to 30,000 people visit Puri temple daily. On Saturdays and Sundays and other holidays it goes up to 40,000 to 50,000. But on special festive days the pilgrims' entry exceeds 1 lakh. This happens on the marriage



days or sacred thread ceremony days when there is special request for food for mass eating. One order can be for more than 1000 people. Order also comes from nearby rural areas who take it to the village to serve to the guests on various social occasions.

CONCLUSION

Mahaprasad having the divinely distinctive features has kept the inflow of pilgrims for hundreds of years. This flow has been increasing year after year. The persons associated with the Mahaprasad have been immensely benefitted from sale of Mahaprasad. There is no scope in bringing reforms in the cooking system as the food is prepared with utmost devotion and sincerity following the cleanliness standard as per Gods own requirement. However there exists a scope to modernize the eating and marketing place called Anand Bazar, which needs lot of improvement and modernization.

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