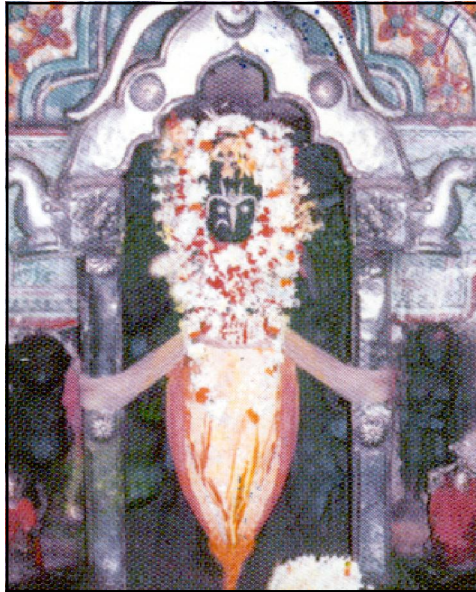


Nilā Mādhava at Puri

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Introduction

The Lord Nilā Mādhava is considered as the earliest deity of Nilāchala, because before the emergence of Jagannātha Trinity, Lord Nilā Mādhava was being worshipped as the presiding deity of this kshetra. The present shrine of Nilā Mādhava is situated on the north-west corner inner enclosure of the Jagannātha temple complex at Puri. It is also closely located to the Bhubaneswari temple. M.M. Ganguli has referred that Puri is variously mentioned in the Purānas as Nilācal, Nilagiri, Nilādri, Purusottam kshetra, Sriksheṭra and Sankha kshetra.¹ According to Pandita Surya Narayana Das, God Nilā Mādhava is the earliest presiding deity of Nilāchala.² From the religious point of view, Lord Nilā Mādhava is equal to the present Jagannātha Trinity of the kshetra. So those devotees who come to visit Lord Jagannātha, they have also to visit the shrine of God Nilā Mādhava, the earliest presiding deity of the kshetra.



The earliest reference regarding the cultural importance of Nilāchala is found in the Skanda Purāna, which tells that the kshetra(Puri) is situated on the northern side of the Ocean and the southern side of the river Mahānadi in the Odra country. The place is also known as Tirtharāja, the king of all places of pilgrimage. At the middle portion of the kshetra, there is Nilāchala or the 'Blue mountain', which is a bestower of Salvation.³ R.L. Mitra has also mentioned that the most ancient name of the Puri town was Nilāchala or 'Blue hill' given it to enoble one of the sand ridges in the centre of the kshetra, barely 20 feet high, on which the temple of the divinity now stands.⁴ Pandita Sadashiva Rathasarma has referred that Lord Nilā Mādhava was the tutelary deity of ancient Savara tribe of Orissa and according to whose name, the *gotra* of Vishvavasu came to be known as Nilāgotra. He further mentions that the name Nilāchala has been derived from the name of Lord Nilā

Mādhava.⁵ It is known that the place (Nilāchala) was an important cultural centre of ancient Orissa.

The legend says that a tribal was worshipping Nila Mādhava in the Nilasaila or Nilagiri (i.e. Nilāchala). At that time the place was unknown to everybody. It was Vidyāpati who was the priest of Rājā Indradyumna, came to this place first in search of the God Nila Mādhava. The place was turned into a sand strove. King Indradyumna guided by Nārada came to this place but could not see the Lord. He had seen the image of Narasimha in a dream. He also performed Asvamedha (sacrifices) here. As per the advice of the Lord, king collected a log of wood, which was floating in the sea and placed it in the Guëòicā temple, Visvakarmā in disguise of an old carpenter assured Rājā to make the image. The condition was he would not open the door for 21 days. After 15 days the king could not hear the sound of the carpenter. He thought that the old man perhaps passed away inside the room. On the request of his queen, the king could not control his emotion. When the door was opened king looked the deities in the incomplete form of the present. Then king constructed the temple and placed the Lord inside.⁶ (Stories and parables form the bedrock of Hindu religious belief). Thus, Lord Nila Mādhava is transformed into the present Jagannātha Trinity.

The Skanda Purāna mentions that Lord Nilamādhava was in the form of four images in the beginning. While the Brahma Purāna tells that the image of Nilamādhava was one form in the beginning but it subsequently became Trinity deities such as Jagannātha, Subhadrā and Balabhadra respectively.⁷

Different scholars suggest their personal views regarding the transformation of the

image of Lord Nila Mādhava to the Lord Jagannātha 'Trinity'. They are being mentioned as follows-

Pandita Surya Narayana Das has referred that the image of Nila Mādhava is one, which is mentioned in different works.⁸ R.K.Das has mentioned that from the very beginning of all the things, Jagannātha in other words Vishnu, dwelt on the Nilāchala Hill in the Utkal Desha, in the form of Nila Mādhava.⁹ On the basis of the Skanda Purāna, Pandita Sadashiva Rathasharma has identified that the present Chaturdhāmurtis Jagannātha, Subhadrā, Balabhadra and Sudarsana) were earlier in one form of Lord Nila Mādhava. In course of time this deity (Nila Mādhava) became famous as Chaturdhā murti.¹⁰

Kedarnath Mohapatra also refers that prior to the wooden images of the Jagannātha triad the Vishnu images in Orissa, invariably known as Mādhava and Nila Mādhava, were carved out of black Chlorite or blue, being the physical hue of Lord Vishnu. In here, Vishnu is shown in standing form with four arms.¹¹ Sachitananda Routray has referred that the God Nila Mādhava is a combination of three deities such as Nila+Mā+Dhāba. Nila means blue i.e. Jagannātha, Mā means Subhadrā and Dhāba means Balabhadra. The place of Nila Mādhava is also called as Nilāchala.¹² According to K.C. Mishra, this assimilation of Nila Mādhava with Purusottama Jagannātha appears to have been a remarkable feature of Orissan Vaishnavism.¹³ Most probably Lord Nila Mādhava was originally worshipped in one form before the emergence of Jagannātha Trinity.

On the basis of the Purānic reference, Balarama Mishra has mentioned that, due to the existence of the shrine of Lord Nila Mādhava, this kshetra has become famous as

the Baikunthapura for the Hindus.¹⁴ G.C. Tripathy has referred that the Nila Mādhava image is carved on black Chlorite and the shrine of Nila Mādhava was exactly located on the top of the Nilāchala.¹⁵ Jagabandhu Padhi says that here existed a mountain, either blue in colour of Nila by name, where Lord Vishnu used to reside with his consort Lakhmi. It is on this mountain that the present city of Puri has grown up, although no traces of the mountain are visible now.¹⁶ It is known from the different sources as well as the views of some eminent scholars that Lord Nila Mādhava is the original presiding deity of the kshetra (Nilāchala) and it subsequently transformed into the form of Lord Jagannātha-Trinity in this place.

Temple of Nilamādhava

There is no authentic historical evidence regarding the condition of the earlier shrine of Nila Mādhava except present Jagannātha temple. Due to the earlier importance of Lord Nila Mādhava of this kshetra, one of the rulers of the Ganga dynasty constructed a temple for the God Nila Mādhava which has existed till today. This temple was probably constructed after the erection of the main Jagannātha temple. The present temple of Nila Mādhava consists of two structures such as the Vimāna and the Jagamohana. It is built in sandstones which is locally called as Baulamālā and Kandā patharas respectively. This temple faces to the east.

A. Vimāna

The Vimāna or the main deula of the Nila Mādhava temple is a Saptaratha Rekhā order structure and its height is about 50 feet from the ground of the temple. It has four vertical parts such as *pistha*, *bāda*, *gaëoi* and *mastaka*. The structure of the Vimāna is erected on the

plinth of 2 feet in height. The *pistha* of the Vimāna consists of three horizontal mouldings. The *bāda* is triangle type i.e. having three fold divisions such as *pābhāga*, *jangha* and *bāraëöä*. The *pābhāga* of the *bāda* consists of the conventional mouldings of Khurā, Kumbha, Pattā, Kāni and Basanta. The Jangha of the *bāda* is decorated with khākharā muëois i.e. (miniature khākharā order deulas). The three side central niches of the *bāda* are housed with pārsvadevatā images of Varāha, Narasimha and Trivikramā.

Pārsvadevatās

The four handed image of Varāha is the pārsvadevatā of the southern side. He has been installed on the double petalled lotus pedestal. He holds chakra in the right upper hand, hand of a female figure, possibly pāthvi in the right lower hand, conch in the left lower hand and the left uplifted elbow bears the figure of Goddess pāthvi. The background slab of the deity is decorated with a flower medallion. The upper two corners of the slab are carved with flower designs. The image of Narasimha is the pārsvadevatā of the back or western side wall of the presiding deity. The four handed disfigured image of Narasimha has been installed on the double petalled lotus pedestal. All the hands of the deity are completely broken. The image of Trivikrama is the pārsvadevatā of the northern side. He has been installed on the decorated pedestal. He displays chakra in the right upper hand, flower (lotus) in the right lower hand, Conch in the left upper hand and Gadā in the left lower hand respectively. His right leg firmly sets of on the ground (pedestal) and the left uplifted leg is touching the image of Brahmā. There is an apsarā figure carved on the left side top corner of the background slab of the deity.

The bāraëòā of the bāòā consists of three horizontal mouldings, which are devoid of decorative ornamentations.

The *gandi* of the Vimāna is surmounted by the curvilinear superstructure and it exhibits seven pagas or *rathas* to outwards. All the *pagas* of the *gandi* are mostly undecorated. The *jhāpasimhas* are only projected on the middle portions of the three sides central *rāhā* pagas of the *gandi* except the eastern or the front *rāhā*. The base of the eastern side *Rahāpaga* is decorated with an *angasikhara*, which is crowned by *Gaja-krānta* (Lion on elephant) motif. Two small *pidhā* deula designs are flanked on either side of the central *angasikhara*. The *Garuda* figures are finely inserted in the four cardinal directions of the *beki* above the *rāhās*. *Dopichhā* lions are completely absent on the top of the *Kānika* pagas.

The *mastaka* of the Vimāna consists of *beki*, *amalakasilā*, *khapuri*, *kalasa*, *āyudha* (*chakra*) and *dhvajā*.

The sanctum preserves the image of Nila Mādhava as the presiding deity of the temple. The four handed image Mādhava has been installed on the double petalled lotus pedestal. He displays conch in lower upper hand, *chakra* in right upper hand, *gadā* in right lower hand and the left lower hand being marked with a lotus on the palm.¹⁷ The image of Nila Mādhava is made of black chlorite and it indicates the fine workmanship of the Ganga Art. An image of Lord Krishna is being worshipped on the left side of the presiding deity. Daru image of Lord Jagannātha is also being worshipped on the right side of the Nila Mādhava image. G.C. Tripathy has referred that by the side of image of Nila Mādhava, we can see a small image of Lord Jagannātha, which indicates that there is no distinction

between Nila Mādhava and Jagannātha and they are in one form and same.¹⁸ Some scholars wrongly say that the present Nila Mādhava image is the original image, which was made during the period of king Gālmādhava. This information has been referred by Pandita Surya Nārāyana Das.¹⁹ M.M. Tripathy has referred that here the image of Jagannātha is worshipped as Nila Mādhava by the *Daitāpati Sevakas*.²⁰ All the above images are installed on the *simhāsana* of 2 feet in height. The backside head of the presiding deity is decorated with the trefoil *Makara* head arch. The inner walls of the sanctum are completely covered with China plates.

The sanctum of the Vimāna has one doorway towards the *Mukhasālā*. The doorjambs of the sanctum are excellently decorated with the *Nāgabandhas*, lotus petalled designs and *jali* works (bordered elements). The centre or middle portion of the doorway lintel is carved with an image of *Ganesha*. Two flying *apsarā* figures are carved on either side upper portion of the doorjamb and they are displaying garland of flowers in hands. The figures of *Navagrahas* are carved on the architrave above the doorway lintel. They are all in seated postures with usual attributes in hands. The figures of *Jaya* and *Vijaya*, the two conventional *dvārapālas* of the deity are carved in standing posture on either side of the doorjamb. There is a *Lakṣmī* image carved on the single petalled lotus pedestal found above the *Navagraha* slab. The entire temple of Nila Mādhava has been deplastered by the Archaeological survey of India, circle of Bhubaneswar in 1980s.

B. Jagamohan or Mukhasālā

The *Mukhasālā* of the Nila Mādhava temple is a flat roof structure and its height is

above 12 feet from the surface of the temple complex. The outer walls of the Mukhasāla are completely plain. The inner walls are depicted with the paintings of the images of Brahma, Shiva, Garuda stambha, Jagannātha Trinity and the scene of the some Brahmanas who are carrying abhadā (Mahāprasāda) with earthen pots. The Mukhasāla of the temple is constructed in much latter period. It was probably built after the first half of the twentieth century AD.

It is known from the above discussion that Lord Nila Mādhava has been worshipping as the original presiding deity of this kshetra from the very beginning. Although the architectural features of the temple is not so important like Jagannātha temple, but from the religious points of view, Lord Nila Mādhava is equal to Lord Jagannātha Trinity of the kshetra. The cultural importance of the shrine of Lord Nila Mādhava exists from the time (period) of Indradyumna of Mālvā. The ancient name of the place (Nilāchala) is now famous as the Purusottama or Jagannātha kshetra of Orissa. The glory and sanctity of the Jagannātha Dhāma is being increased day by day due to the existence of Lord Nila Mādhava, the earliest presiding deity of the kshetra. So the temple of Nila Mādhava is an important Vaishnavite shrine of Orissa.

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