



## Administration of the Puri Temple Through Ages

*Prof. Jagannath Mohanty*

Lord Jagannath is held in high esteem and great affection not only by the Hindus, but many saints and philosophers from other religions like Salbeg and Kabir from Muslims, Nanak and Ranjeet Singh from among Sikhs. His adoration is limited not only to Orissa but also to India, even the world through ISKON cult. Although it was well managed by the hundreds of people engaged under Chhatis Nijogi under the direct administration and supervision of Gajapati Kings belonging to various Hindu dynasties, Sri Jagannath's Temple was efficiently managed and all kinds of rituals and festivals were organised as per schedule. After construction of the temple now in existence since the 12th Century A.D., the famous Ganga monarch Chodaganga Dev confirmed the old endowments of Shree Mandir and laid the strong foundation of administration which continued smoothly till the time of Prataprudra Dev during whose reign administration of the temple declined gradually. However, on the death of Mukunda Dev, Orissa missed the last independent Hindu King in 1568 A.D. Then the Afghan power ruled Bengal including Orissa for a brief period. But in the year 1568 the revengeful Afghan General Kalapahad desecrated and plundered its treasures not only of the Shree Mandir, but also a large number of temples in the coastal districts.

The King Ramachandra Dev of the Bhoi Dynasty established a small Hindu Kingdom on the ruins of the vast Gajapati Empire with its Capital Khurda. He soon strengthened his position and kingdom and reinstalled Shree Jagannath in the temple at Puri. Due to his popularity he was called by the people as Abhinav Indradyumna. The successive Gajapati Kings continued to be the Superintendents of the Jagannath Temple and managed the administration of the Temple. Subsequently, Orissa came under the control of the Marathas who kept the management of the temple under their direct supervision. Of course, the day-to-day affairs of the temple were managed by the Parich as appointed by the Maratha Rulers.

The Britishers invaded Orissa in 1803 and the Temple management was taken over by the East India Company. But as in the past Parichhas managed the daily affairs of the Temple. In 1906 as per the Regulation-4, administration of the Temple was vested with the Collector, Tax nominated by the British Government. In 1809, the Superintendence of the temple was vested to an assembly of the three Pandits. After three years this management was transferred to the Raja of Khurda also called as Gajapati Raja of Puri



who was hereditary Superintendent of the Temple since 1840 with absolute authority subject to the control of the Britishers. In 1843 the British Government decided to get rid of the Temple Administration and transferred the full authority for the maintenance of the temple to the Raja along with an endowment viz. the Satais Hazari Mahal yielding a revenue of Rs.17,420 at the time of occupying Orissa, Some other villages under the Ekharajat Mahal were also transferred to Raja for the maintenance of the temple. By this the British Government also stopped payment of Rs.53,000 per annum required for the management of the temple. Besides maintenances the Raja was made responsible for preservation of peace and order in the temple.

Raja Birakishore Dev expired in 1859, but his widow Suryamani Patamahadei was empowered by his last will to manage the affairs of the Temple till the minor adopted son Dibyasinha Dev became major. The administration of the Temple was very good under the management of the Patamahadei. But after Dibyasinha Dev took over the administration of the temple on his assumption of majority, the condition of the management deteriorated badly. The situation turned from bad to worse and a case was instituted by the Government for declaring the office of the Superintendent vacant and obtaining decree to appoint new Trustees for management of the Temple. This suit was seriously taken by Rani and the people of Orissa as interfering in the administration of the temple. Particularly, Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das, in view of safeguarding the prestige of the Oriyas, championed the cause of Ranee Suryamani Patamahadei. Madhubabu pleaded the case so strongly that Government wanted to make a

compromise and prepare a deed accordingly which provided.- that Pattamahadei was required to appoint a manager for the Temple till her grandson Mukunda Dev attained maturity. The Temple administration, however, did not improve and Mukunda Dev died in 1921. Raja Ramachandra Dev succeeded him and removed a Government Officer in Gazetted rank from the management of the Shree Mandir. There were often complaints of law and order and misuse of power and property of the Temple.

After Independence it was felt imperative to take strong legislative measures for improving the management of Shreemandir. The then Law and Home Minister while introducing the Sri Jagannath Temple (Administration) Bill, 1952 in the Orissa Legislative Assembly observed, "In the absence of any guidance from the Raja and sufficient contribution from him, the regular expenses of the temple, the scheduled and disciplined performance of the Nitis has suffered beyond imagination and the Raja has practically lost all control over the different Sevaks and other temple servants. Specific-endowments are regularly misapplied and misappropriated." The Government of Orissa before taking a comprehensive legislation passed the Act for improving the temple administration and proper maintenance of temple properties. The Shree Jagannath Temple (Administration) Act, 1952 provided for the appointment of a Special Officer to consolidate and prepare a record of rights and duties of Sevaks, Pujaris and such other persons connected with Seva, Puja and management of the temple. He was also required to prepare a record of rights for the endowments of the temple. The Special Officer in the rank of a District Judge was appointed and he submitted his Report on the 15th March,



1954 that revealed serious problems in management of the temple. Subsequently, Sri Jagannath Temple Act, 1954 (Orissa Act II of 1955) was passed which laid the foundation of the present administration structure and endowments of the Temple.

According to this Act, all the Temple administration and management of endowments were vested in the Sri Jagannath Temple Managing Committee with the Raja of Puri as the Chairman, the Collector of Puri District as an ex officio member and Vice-Chairman and Administrator as Secretary of this Committee. The Administrator carry out the decisions taken by the Committee and is responsible to all records and property. There are often reports in the mass media about the misbehaviour of the Sevaks and Pandas towards pilgrims, undue delay in various rituals and untoward incidents tantamounting to security and discipline of the Temple. Particularly, after attacks of terrorists on the Hindu Shrines like Akshardham in Gujrat, Baishno Devi in Jammu, the security of the Puri temple has assumed more significance and urgency. In the meantime the position and powers of the Administration have been upgraded and personnel have been strengthened to ensure better management and peace as well as security of the Temple. The Puri Temple administration has faced certain challenges as follows :-

- (i) Paucity of funds for day to day management and improvement of the general administration.
- (ii) lack of security facilities -lapses and loopholes are there.

(iii) Difficulty in lease out to auction sale of land belonging to Jagannath Temple in and outside the State.

(iv) Unsatisfactory conduct of some Sevayats and Pandas towards pilgrims and among themselves.

(v) Beautification and renovation of Ananda Bazar and other aspects of the Temple with funds received from NALCO and other sources.

There are some other matters to be looked into by the Government. These are the problems to be sorted out by the Temple Administration with more concern and commitment.

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Prof. Jagannath Mohanty lives at 2935, Gouri Nagar, Bhubaneswar -2