

# JAGANNATH CULT



## LORD JAGANNATH : THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE

The Indians, particularly the people of Odisha, owe a lot to Lord Jagannath. He is the Lord of the Universe, about whom the Vedas are silent. Sometimes people are puzzled about the mystery that surrounds the Lord. He is a great 0. You add 0, with 0, the result is 0. You deduct 0 from 0, the result is 0. You multiply 0 with 0, the result is also 0. Zero is nothingness. It is also the fullness; it represents the completion of a process. The Lord is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He is all pervading and is the Lord of the Universe. The Holy Trinity, Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra represent three races; black, white and yellow being the colour of the races. They are of three qualities (*Gunas*) : *Sattwa*, *Tamas* and *Raja*. Jagannath Cult transcends all barriers of caste, community and religion. It preaches the cult of equality, fraternity and brotherhood. Therefore, the annual Car Festival of Lord Jagannath is gaining popularity in the country and abroad.



People of almost all religious faiths find their own ideas and concepts in the Jagannatha Cult.

Lord Jagannatha has drawn devotees from all faiths and creeds. Saints and prophets have bowed to Lord Jagannatha. Nanaka, Adiguru Sankaracharya and Shri Chaitanya have visited Puri to get the mercy of Lord Jagannatha. Puri has also been visited by Ganapati Bhatta of Maharashtra, a devotee of Lord Ganesha, who wanted to see Ganesha in Lord Jagannatha. The Lord fulfilled the desire of the saint, and on Devashana Purnima every year, He appears in 'Ganapati Vesh'.

Lord Jagannatha is the Lord of the Universe. Salabega, a Mohammedan, was very dear to the Lord and has written a number of *bhajan*s and *janan*s expressing his deep devotion to Lord Jagannatha. Dasia Bauri was born to a lowly family. The Lord had extended His great arm, 'Baliar Bhuja' to take a coconut offered by a low-born man. Hadi Dasa, a blacksmith was a great believer. It is heard that the Lord would go to Chhatiabata (In Badachana Police-Station of Jajpur district) to dwell there for a few days as He was highly pleased with the devotion of Hadi Dasa.

There are many such stories. It is believed that Lord Jagannatha goes to Badrika (Jammu and Kashmir) early in the morning to take his bath. He then proceeds to Dwaraka (Gujarat) for His early *vesha* or morning adornment ; at noon He proceeds to Puri for His lunch and in the night, after witnessing

Devadasi dance and hearing *Gita Govinda*, which is dearest to Him, goes to sleep at Rameshwaram (Tamil Nadu). Saints and devotees of all faiths including Nanak Panthis, Ramananda Panthis, Shri Rama Krushna Mission and a host of others have established their Ashramas at Puri. Adiguru Sankaracharya has established four *dhamas* in different parts of the country. One at Badrika (Jammu and Kashmir) another at Dwaraka (Gujarat) a third at Sringeri (Kerala) and of course one at Puri. During the Car Festival, the Gajapati Raja does *Chhera Pahnra*, (Cleaning the chariots with a golden handle broom). Except him, Shankaracharya of Puri alone is permitted to visit the holy Trinity in their respective chariots.

What about Lord Jagannatha, Who is a mysterious God ? Why is He black ? Some people believe that Lord Jagannatha is a great void. In their opinion, as the colour of the sky is black and as Lord Jagannatha is a great void, He dwells in 'Mahasunya'. Therefore the colour of Lord Jagannatha is black. Another question comes to the mind that why Lord Jagannatha is immovable (*Madala*) ? The answer is that the *Jiva* performs *karmas* but Param Brahma does not. As Lord Jagannatha is Param Brahma, He has neither hands nor legs and He does not perform any *karma*. Therefore He is static. Why are the eyes of Lord Jagannatha round shaped ? As He is Mahasunyabasi and looks to the entire world through this 'O', His eyes are round - shaped.

What has He not done to keep the prestige of the Odias during the Kanchi war ? The two brothers, Lord Balabhadra and Lord Jagannatha, had to perform the role of ordinary soldiers. They had to mortgage a gold ring with Manika Gauduni, from whom they had to drink curd on their way to Kanchi. At last Gajapati Purusottama Deva won the battle.

It is said :

*Dolescha Dolagovinda Chapescha Madhusudana, Rathetu Bamanam Drustwa Punarjanmam Na Bidyate.*

If you behold Lord (Dolagovinda) in the wooden palanquin during Dola festival, in boat in the Narendra pond during Chandana Yatra (Madhusudana) and Lord Jagannatha (Bamanam) in the chariot, there will be no rebirth and you will be free from the cycle of birth and death.



*Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra at Snana Vedi*

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Centuries of myths, legends and history have all blended into a grand composite culture centred round Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe, one of the most revered and ancient of the deities of the Hindu's pantheon. The earliest references of Lord Jagannath are found in the Puranas and ancient literature, though details of His origin and evolution are still shrouded in mystery. Legendary sources suggest that Jagannath was originally worshipped by the tribals, the Sabaras. The most important evidence of this belief is the existence of a class of Sevakas called the Daitas who are considered to be of tribal lineage and who still play a major role in the various services to Lord Jagannatha in the temple.

In course of time, the cult of Jagannath took an Aryanised form. Various major faiths like Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism were assimilated into the concept of Jagannath as an all-pervasive and all-inclusive philosophy, symbolizing unity in diversity.

Some scholars think that the three main images of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra represent the Jaina Trinity of Samyak Jnana, Samyak Charitra and Samyak Drusti. Many others say that the three images represent the Buddhist triad of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. It is widely believed that the soul of Jagannath most secretly ensconced within the image of Lord Jagannath is no other than the tooth Relic of Lord Goutam Buddha. The philosophy of Tantra, which in course of time became an integral part of Buddhism, too has significantly influenced the rites and rituals of the Jagannatha temple.



The philosophy of Lord Jagannath thus defies all definitions and is yet comprehensive enough to perceive unity among beliefs of all sects and castes.

### Nava Kalevar

As a man discarding worn out clothes takes other new ones, so also the embodied soul, casting off worn out bodies enters into others, which are new. In the light of this truth from the Bhagavat Geeta, Nava Kalevar can be interpreted as a ceremony for entering into new bodies, when Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsan cast off their old bodies and take new ones, it is called Nava Kalevar.

The year, which has two months of ASHADHA, is regarded auspicious for Nava Kalevar ceremony. It usually occurs in 8 to 19 years. The new bodies of the deities are made out of the newly cut Neem trees. It is said that Brahmadarua was first visible in the year having two months of Ashadha. The Previous Nava Kalevars were in 1733, 1744, 1752, 1771, 1790, 1809, 1828, 1836, 1855, 1874, 1893, 1912, 1931, 1950, 1969, 1977 and 1996.