



The Legend of the Origin of Sri Jagannatha and His Temple

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The origin of Sri Jagannatha and especially his unique iconography is shrouded in mystery. Scholars have tried to find a satisfactory explanation to this but most have ended with speculation based on their own theories and there is hardly any consensus among them. Three ancient texts, the *Skanda Purana*, the *Niladri Mahodayah* and the *Bamadeva Samhita* are considered the three important ancient texts for the study of the Jagannatha faith. Of these the *Sri Purushottama Mahatmya* in the *Utkal Khanda* of the *Skanda Purana* is an important source for the legendary account of the origin of Sri Jagannatha and his temple, Srimandira. A critical edition of this text has since been published by the temple administration along with a prose rendering in Odia. Given below is an English rendering of the legend as found in this text. It is neither a word by word nor a literal translation of the text but rather a simple and free flowing translation of the content in brief. There are other accounts of the origin of Sri Jagannatha in Odia literature, especially the *Mahabharata* of Adi Kavi Sarala Dasa and *Deula Tola* of Sishu Shankara Dasa. No comparative or critical study of these is intended here. The English version of the original Sanskrit text of an important source material is provided so as make this accessible to a wider audience.



Jagannatha, the Supreme Divinity

Sri Jagannatha the primordial God, the Supreme Divinity who is ageless and is ever present, has no end or beginning. He is the maker of the entire universe and it is impossible to fathom his great mystery. He deigns to appear in different aeons in different manifestations as an act of Grace and a part of his divine play or *leela*. He has manifested in the present body made of wood (*darabatanu*) and is worshipped in his foursome appearance in the Srimandira at Srikshetra Puri giving ineffable delight and succour to his innumerable devotees.

Transmission of the legend as recorded in the Skanda Purana

The tale of the mysterious appearance of Sri Jagannatha has been transmitted and recorded in the *Purushottama Kshetra Mahatmya* of *Utkala Khanda* of *Skanda Purana*, a major scripture of the Indian heritage. The great sage Jaimini recounts this legend to an assembly of ascetics this legend of the manifestation of Jagannatha in four figures with bodies of wood. Initially Shiva or Maheswara had told the sacred account to his son Skanda, also known as Kumara and Kartikeya who in turn recounted the same in an assembly of Siddhas and deities residing in the holy Mandara mount where sage Jaimini overheard it.

The sacred geography of Purushottama Kshetra

Explaining the sacred geography of the region of appearance of Sri Jagannatha, Jaimini mentions that this sacred site at Purushottama Kshetra or Srikshetra Puri is like the body of the Supreme Divine and is the holiest of all holy sites and is justly famous on account of its association with the name of his present manifestation,

Jagannatha. This sacred region spreading over ten *yojanas* is an elevated ground rising from the sea and is surrounded by golden sands all around. The Blue Hill, Nilachala located at its centre appears from far like a breast of Mother Earth who had been rescued from the nether worlds by Vishnu in one of his incarnations. Recalling this episode Brahma felt sad and prayed to the Supreme Divinity to release him from the task of creating the living beings again and again after each apocalypse. In answer to his prayers the Lord of the Universe, the supreme divine Jagannatha appeared before him and revealed the events to be. Reassuring Brahma, Jagannatha declared that the land from Ekamra Kshetra, Bhubaneswar extending towards the Southern Sea is most sacred and of the holiest of holy site surrounding the Blue Hill is most secret and not even accessible to Brahma, let alone the gods, *asuras* and men. There in the Purushottama Kshetra, I will bodily appear and reside for ever going beyond the limits of existence. The Kshetra is not affected by the cycles of creation and apocalypse or the great deluge. Behold the sacred signs of my sacred discus. Here you can see me near the sacred ageless banyan tree or the Kalpa Bata in the interiors of the blue region. On the banks of the sacred water of the Rohini tank next to it you can see me with bare eyes. Proceed now to this sacred secret site. By the influence of my divine *maya* or cosmic illusion, the site had remained unrevealed in the Vedas, Puranas and Shastras. Pleased with your prayers I will now reveal myself there. Having declared thus the supreme divinity Purushottama disappeared from the vision of Brahma.

Brahma visits Purushottama Kshetra

Brahma then proceeded to the sacred Purushottama Kshetra where he found the



Supreme Divinity Sri Jagannatha present as Blue Madhava made of dark hued precious stone and decorated with many sparkling jewels. As he was offering his obeisance to the Nilamadhava, a crow fell in the Rohini Kunda and after praying to the deity assumed a four armed shape and ascended to heaven. Yama, the God of Death who was also a witness to this miraculous event became worried about the curbing of his influence in this sacred arena and prayed to Nilamadhava to restore his influence over mortals. Madhava just smiled and glanced at Mahalakshmi who consoled Yama saying that his prayers were of no avail. On account of the eternal presence of Sri Purushottama in this sacred site even beyond the *kalpa* or aeons ending with the great cataclysm and deluge, every creature entering this domain would be freed from the bond of mortal existence. Yama or Death could not have any influence here. Mahalakshmi then narrated what she saw earlier at this holy ground. During the end of creation, *Pralaya* when the great deluge spread huge oceans of water all over the earth, the ageless Rishi Markandeya could not find any ground for shelter for seven aeons and at last saw a great Banyan tree appearing in this island of Purushottama Kshetra looking like a boat floating in the vast waters. As he swam ashore, he heard a strange boyish voice inviting him. Mahalakshmi informed him that the huge tree found in the centre of the island like some great sacrificial post is indeed the body of God and even during the raging storms of *Pralaya*, its branches and leaves do not so much as flutter. As the great sage was struck with awe and wonder at this strange tree, he beheld me and Narayana in his four armed appearance as Madhava. As he offered his prayers, the Lord advised him to look at the boy sleeping on the cup like leaf, he the very Soul of Time itself and to seek shelter within its wide open

mouth. Following these instructions the sage climbed the great tree and feasting on the nectarine beauty of the divine child entered its mouth and passing through the throat, stepped inside its stomach. There to his utter surprise the sage found the fourteen worlds, Brahma and the guardians of the directions, *Siddhas*, *Gandharvas*, gods and goddesses, rivers, forests, cities, villages, the earth with all its oceans, the nether worlds and the serpents therein and in fact the entire universe. Wandering around inside the divine body the sage could not find its end and in great joy and bewilderment prayed once again to Nilamadhava seeking to fathom the great mystery of what he saw.

Sanctity of the sacred region

Mahalakshmi then elaborated upon the sanctity of this sacred region. Its area extends up to five *krosas* from the sea shore but out of this the portion within two *krosas* of the sea is most sacred. It is covered by golden sands and the Blue Hill stands in its middle portion. In order to worship Jagannatha, Visvesvara Mahadeva who is indistinct from Narayana has himself made his abode in one end of the sacred site and as the region has limited the influence of Yama, Shiva here is known as Yameswara. Worshipping him here bestows the benefits of worshipping Kotilingeswara or ten million Shivas, another name for Taribhubaneswara, the presiding deity of the Ekamra Kshetra. The entire region is shaped like a giant conch and Shiva, the Lord riding the Bull, known here as Nilakantha or the Lord with the blue neck, resides at its head fulfilling all the prayers of his devotees. The area extending from the beach up to Kalpa Bata, the wish-fulfilling ageless Banyan tree is the belly portion of the giant conch shaped land washed by the waters of the sacred ocean. Being attached to the most sacred



site, the ocean here has acquired the sobriquet of Teertharaja or the emperor among the *teerthas*. Death in this sacred site or a bath in the sea here provides instant emancipation and freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Shiva who had severed the fifth head of Brahma could not get rid of it until he reached here and was thus cured of the terrible sin of *brahma hatya* or the killing of Brahmana. He is therefore known in one of his manifestations here as Kapalamochana. A prayer and Darshan of Kapalamochana reduces one's sin of Brahma Hatya and death anywhere south of his manifestation bestows emancipation. In the third circle surrounding the Blue Hill is manifest the primordial Mother known as Bimala who bestows both prosperity and release from the mortal existence. In the navel portion of the region shaped as conch are the water tank called Rohini Kunda and the holy banyan tree. Between these and Kapalamochana is installed the mother goddess manifest as Ardhasini. As she sucks in half of the entire rising waters of the great deluge during apocalypse from her position inside the Sankha Kshetra, the goddess has become famous as Ardhasini or Ardashoshini. She too bestows great benediction on those who visit her and pray to her.

Antarvedi and Nrusimha

The seat of the Supreme Divine is known as Antarvedi and all in the three worlds hanker after the Lord who is manifest here with the conch and the discus. This is superior to all the sacred sites as here one gets instant emancipation in their mortal bodies. Mahalakshmi then describes the presence of Nrusimha, the essential divinity manifest in his terrible appearance rending the heart of the arrogant demon Hiranyakashipu. A Darshan of his auspicious countenance dissolves all sins and bestows riches and release from mortal existence.

Ashta Shakti, Ashta Shambhu

Mahalakshmi also tells sage Jaimini how she herself is present in her eightfold manifestations as Ashta Shakti in eight directions to protect this most holy site. These deities named Mangala, Bimala, Sarbamangala, Kalratri, Marichika, Chandarupa, Ardhasini and Alambare present the energy of the primordial mother and are truly her aspect as Gauri the spouse of Shiva. The latter also known as Rudra too has his eightfold manifestations such as Kapalamochana, Yamesvara, Markandeya, Nilakantha, Batesvara etc. within this sacred region.

Future Events, Indradyumna

Thereafter Mahalakshmi gives an indication of the future events. A king named Indradyumna would rule during the Satya Yuga. He would perform a thousand horse sacrifice in prayer to the Divine who pleased with his devotee would appear in his foursome form made from a single log of wood. Visvakarma, the divine architect-builder would make these figures in wood. Then addressing Brahma, she said that he would be installing these divine figures after acceding to the solicitations of Indradyumna. Soon Yama and Brahma returned to their own abodes.

The images made of wood

Addressing the assembly of sages Jaimini said that the Supreme Divine, the one with a visage blue as the dark clouds has assumed the body of wood along with brother Balarama, sister Subhadra and the celestial wheel Sudarshana and resides in the deep caverns of the Blue Hills to redeem the devotees with his infinite grace. He added that he should not be considered just as figures made of wood but the sacred wood imbued with essential divinity or Brahma and hence known as Daru Brahma who has been so



referenced in the Vedas. Jaimini then exhorts the sages to seek shelter at the feet of the Lord of the Blue Hills. He then recounts the tale of Ambarisha and Pundarika two worldly mortals immersed in sinful acts were advised by a Vaishnava to worship Sri Jagannath with the conch, discus, mace and lotus and having prayed to him they were absolved of their sins by the grace of the most compassionate Lord made of wood and embellished with golden ornaments at Purushottama Kshetra. On the request of the sages Jaimini then described the sacred geography of this Kshetra and the sanctity of the land of Utkala. He emphasizes that the entire expanse of land stretching from the land between the rivers Rishikulya from the point it meets the Southern Ocean till Subarnarekha with Mahanadi in between is the extent of Sri Purushottama Kshetra that on account of its great sanctity and is considered verily as heaven on earth.

Indradyumna

The sages then urged Jaimini to tell them about the great king Indradyumna. Responding to their request, he said that Indradyumna was the fifth generation descendant progeny of the creator Brahma himself. He was truthful, pious, virtuous loving his people like his own children and ruled with absolute fairness. He had already performed a thousand-horse sacrifice. The land was prosperous and peaceful and his capital Avanti was like a second Amaravati, the heavenly city where Indra ruled. He was a great Vishnu *bhakta* who respected the ascetics, Brahmins, itinerant sages and pilgrims. Once in he asked the assembly in his royal court if any one of them was aware of the manifestation of the supreme god Jagannatha whose very sight bestowed instant release from mortal existence.

A wandering ascetic present there, responding to the king's enquiry, said that he had indeed visited the site and stayed there in the serene sacred site for a year. Indicating its location he referred to Odradesha where along the southern sea, the Blue Mountain or Nilagiri stood in the middle of Purushottama Kshetra. Dense vegetation covered the area surrounding the hill and in its centre was the wish-fulfilling banyan tree, the Kalpa Bata, its branches spread one *krosa* all around. Anyone who entered the shadow of the tree was absolved of even the heinous crime of killing a Brahmin. Next to it was the Rohini Kunda, the tank filled with primordial waters of immense sanctity. Vasudeva, the Supreme God made of blue precious stone had his earthly abode here. Those fortunate ones who beheld God in this most secret and sacred site got the benefits of a Sahasra Ashwamedha Yagnya or a thousand-horse sacrifice. A hermitage called Sabara Deepaka was located at its one end and it was surrounded by habitations of a tribe of hunters known as Sabaras. A narrow foot path, just enough for a single person to pass through led from here to the interiors of the Blue Mountain where Lord Vishnu had his abode and had manifested as Jagannatha. The gods from heaven visited the Supreme Divine every night to offer worship. The old ascetic also spoke about the legend that he had heard from the people there about the crow getting release from its avian existence after taking a dip in the Rohini Kunda. So saying, he disappeared from the royal court.

The king, Indradyumna, felt restless and expressed his eagerness to visit this sacred site and have an audience of Jagannatha. He asked if anyone could help him in locating the place so that he could proceed there immediately. The head priest of the royal court responded by saying that



his brother Vidyapati would immediately proceed on a reconnaissance of the site and as soon as he returned with the good news, the king could visit the place.

Vidyapati visits the Blue Mountain

Vidyapati considered himself very fortunate to have got the opportunity and to have been given this sacred mission. Without any further delay he prepared himself for the journey. He selected an auspicious moment and commenced his travel in a chariot after a ceremonial send off. After several days he reached the borders of Odradesha and proceeded further. He rested for a while on the banks of Mahanadi and then crossed over to enter the Ekamra Vana, the most sacred forest that was home to a manifestation of Shiva. Proceeding further towards the Sothern Ocean, he became aware of a great peace and joy that surcharged the environs. Anon he sighted from afar the Blue Mountain and was overjoyed, knowing that he was not far from his destination. He continued his journey in that direction and soon reached the borders of the wooded foothills of the sacred mountain. He tried in vain to find a way to go forward towards the interiors of the hill. As he wondered how to cross the dense vegetation and rough terrain surrounding the hill, he found near the Sabara Deepaka, an old tribesman returning from inside the deep forest with all the materials for worship. The old man disclosed his identity as Visvvasu, the Sabara chief. He greeted Vidyapati who looked like an aristocratic Brahmin and asked him what he was doing in this remote region and about his welfare as he looked greatly tired and exhausted. He offered him a seat and some food and enquired about the purpose of his visit. Indradyumna disclosed his identity and the reason for his visit. He requested Visvvasu to take him inside the

forest to so that he could have a Darshan of Vishnu present there. He refused to accept any food or drink till he completed his mission of locating the manifestation of the supreme god inside the Blue Mountain.

On hearing Vidyapati Visvvasu was in great dilemma. On the one hand the deity was indeed the protector of his tribe and was worshipped in secret and if he showed him to Vidyapati, his presence would be revealed to the entire world. On the other hand, not doing so would make the Brahmin priest unhappy and he might curse him and his tribe and moreover he being a guest, one had to fulfil his request. So he had a grave crisis of conscience and did not know how to resolve this knotty problem. As he was mulling over the issue he remembered the popular belief among his people that once Nilamadhava disappeared underneath the surface of the earth, a valiant king named Indradyumna would arrive here with his people and perform a thousand-horse sacrifice. He would proceed in his mortal frame to the Brahma Loka, the world of the supreme divine and in due course would ceremonially install here the foursome manifestation of Vishnu in bodies of wood. If indeed the Brahmin seeking the Lord was the fortunate one facilitating this event to happen, the Lord would definitely reveal himself again after his disappearance. So thinking he decided that he would let Vidyapati see Achyuta made of precious blue stone. Since this seemed to have been decreed by divine dispensation, it was beyond the limits of human abilities to resist what was bound to happen.

Visvvasu then told Vidyapati that he had already heard of popular belief that king named Indradyumna would come and set up his residence here. Since you will get to see



Nilamadhava before him, you are indeed more fortunate than your king. Let us now proceed further. So saying he led Vidyapati by hand through the narrow dark path overgrown with thorns and rough stones and barely adequate for one person to pass through. Soon he led the priest to the Rohini Kunda and exhorted him to see Jagannatha, verily the essential divinity present deep inside a leafy arbour. O fortunate one, behold the Lord and be absolved of all your accumulated sins and do not grieve any more of your worldly existence. Vidyapati took a dip in the Rohini Kunda and full of joy he had the audience of Hari from a distance. Completely oblivious of all the fatigue of journey, hunger and thirst he sang the praise of Jagannatha with folded hands. The divine sight filled him with ineffable ecstasy and he felt blessed. Visvvasu then held his hand and gently led him out of the Blue Hill to his own abode in the village of the Sabara tribe. There he offered to his guest a variety of fruits, sweets and cooked food, such as had never been seen by Vidyapati. The latter wondered how a hunter living in deep forest could prepare such sumptuous fare and gently asked his host to unravel the mystery of this royal feast. Visvvasu explained that these items were actually offered by the gods to Purushottama when they made their daily visit to the abode of the Lord in the Blue Hill. Vidyapati was awe-struck by the great good fortune of the tribal family who were partaking the divine food offerings daily at this remote corner of the earth. He then expressed his desire to be a friend of Visvvasu.

Vidyapati also indicated that his king Indradyumna would visit the Blue Hill and reside here for worshipping the Lord and he would need

to make elaborate arrangements for the same. After going back to Avanti I would mention to the king the suitability of this site for his needs. Visvvasu again told about the old belief among his people about the visit of Indradyumna to the Blue Hill and that he would not be able see Madhava on his arrival there as the Lord by then would have been covered by golden sands. The Lord has promised Yama that he would disappear from view and therefore Indradyumna cannot see him here. Do not however under any circumstance reveal this prophecy to the king my friend, said



Visvvasu to Vidyapati. You are the fortunate one who could get to see the Lord with your mortal eyes, he added. As the king cannot find Madhava, he would perform great penance and sacrifice. The Lord will instruct him through his dream and eventually Brahma will install the images made of wood and the king would worship the same. As long as the Lord resides here our progeny will live on. Saying so, Visvvasu requested Vidyapati to take rest for the night. The following morning after performing his morning rituals with a bath in Mahodadhi, the great ocean, Vidyapati along with Visvvasu again visited the abode of Madhava.



After they prayed to Nilamadhava and sang hymns and *mantras* in his praise, Visvvasu gave Vidyapati a garland already offered to the Lord in worship. Accepting this Nirmalya Mala, the divine garland, Vidyapati hugged his friend, the tribal chief Visvvasu and after bidding farewell to him, he climbed his chariot and left for Avanti.

After Vidyapati left when the gods visited the Blue Mountain in the evening for their daily worship of Madhava, suddenly the wind started blowing with a fierce force and they could not keep their eyes open. The golden sands started spreading all around with great rapidity and anon the entire area was covered completely. After the storm abated when the Gods opened their eyes, they could no longer see Madhava or the Rohini Kunda. The gods felt greatly distressed. They cursed their fate and loudly lamented the disappearance of Madhava from their sight. Just then they heard a voice from the sky that from that day the Lord would no more be visible here but the sanctity of the site was such that if anyone prayed to the Lord here he would surely be released from the cycle of birth and death. The voice further exhorted them to proceed to Brahma and pray to him if they were desirous of fathoming the mysterious turn of events. As directed by the heavenly voice, the gods proceeded to Brahma who told them about the Lord's promise to him and the later manifestation of the Lord in bodies of wood. Having heard this divine message they all went to their own abodes.

Vidyapati having left the Blue Hill decided to go round the Purushottama Kshetra in circumambulation of all the important sacred sites. Having completed the same, he proceeded on his way home. As he neared the capital city of Avanti, messengers carried the news of his arrival to the king. As he arrived at the gates of the palace,

Indradyumna himself came forward to receive him and led him inside the royal court that was in session. After honouring him suitably the king requested him to take his seat. Vidyapati offered to the king the Nirmalya Mala of Madhava. Indradyumna received the divine garland with great humility and felt himself blessed and fulfilled with the touch of this garland as if he was in proximity to the Lord himself. He then offered his prayers to Madhava and requested Vidyapati to describe the experience of his visit to Purushottama Kshetra.

Vidyapati recounts his visit to Indradyumna

Vidyapati then recounted the joyous experience of his journey to the Purushottama Kshetra and the Blue Mountains. He described how the seat of the Lord spread over an area five *krosas* in all directions was surrounded by dense vegetation with the Blue Hill in its centre like its navel with the Teertharaja, the southern seas washing its border on the east formed by the golden sands on the beach. He mentioned the Kalpa Bata, the wish fulfilling banyan tree spread over one *krosa* all around and the Rohini Kunda next to it. Close by was a platform made of precious stones covered by the branches of the Nyagrodha tree. Atop this bejewelled platform was installed the blue bodied four-armed Madhava bearing the conch, the wheel, the mace and the lotus. With a height of eighty one cubits he was standing on a golden lotus and was protected at the back by the fully extended hood of the divine serpent Ananta spread like a large umbrella. A beautiful flower garland adorned his wide chest that sported the Kaustubha jewel reflecting all the fourteen worlds. Mother Lakshmi with a lotus in her hand was on his left in close embrace. The most enchanting visage of Madhava attracted immediate attention and held captive the heart of



the beholder spontaneously pulled towards the divine presence. He declared that any one beholding the most enchanting blue image of Vishnu would be released from the mortal existence and would reside in his heavenly abode. Vidyapati narrated his journey and his audience of Nilamadhava in considerable detail and he requested the king to take further action as he deemed fit.

Enter sage Narada and his advice to Indradyumna

Indradyumna declared his desire to shift to Purushottama Kshetra with his entire people and build a new city and fort and reside there so that he could offer daily worship to Sripati, the spouse of Sri or Mahalakshmi. Right then Maharshi Narada, the son of Brahma arrived in the court all of a sudden. Indradyumna got up from his seat and received Narada with utmost respect. After greeting him appropriately, he offered him a seat on a throne very next to his own and enquired about his welfare. Narada in return praised the virtuous king whose reputation had travelled across the three worlds. He then explained the various nuances of devotion to Vishnu. Indradyumna revealed his intense desire to behold Nilamadhava and invited Narada to join him in the chariot to proceed to the Blue Mountain within the Purushottama Kshetra. Narada was greatly pleased to hear the resolve of the king and offered to take him there and show him all the sacred places including the manifestations of Shakti and Shambhu. He added that pleased with the devotion of the King the supreme god would reside there in a foursome appearance.

Indradyumna visits the Blue Mountain

After selecting an auspicious day the king with all his courtiers, priests, soldiers, people of various vocations and other citizens, started the

journey full of pomp and ceremony as befitting a royal personage. After travelling for several days he reached the borders of Utkala wherein the mother goddess with a garland of heads was manifest as Charchika. On the advice of Narada, the king disembarked from the chariot and prostrated before the mother goddess. He worshipped her and sought her blessings to enable him to get an audience of the supreme god residing in the blue region. He then proceeded further and halted for the evening on the banks of Chitrotpala Mahanadi inside the deep forests. After completing his evening ablutions and prayers, he finished his dinner and spent some time enjoying dance performances. He then heard Narada explain the nature and benefits of Vishnu Bhakti. Just at that time a messenger informed him that the King of Utkala had arrived there to greet him. Indradyumna immediately got up from his seat and went up to the entrance of his camp to receive the king. After usual exchange of greetings Indradyumna enquired about Nilamadhava. The Utkala king responded by saying that he had heard about the Nilachala Kshetra located on the shores of the southern seas and that it was covered by dense forest. Ordinary people have no ability to enter there and even gods found it difficult to access this site, he added. He then mentioned rumours about the entire area having been covered by sands on account of a cyclonic storm. His own people were also facing severe drought and epidemics. He hoped that the arrival of a pious king like Indradyumna certainly meant that good times would return soon. After sometime the king of Utkala took farewell and returned. On his departure, Indradyumna expressed his apprehensions about the success of his mission to Purushottama Kshetra. Narada consoled the king and told him not to worry. He assured that the king would definitely behold with his mortal



eyes the supreme god. He added that Prajapati Brahma, the creator had engaged him to assist the king in his mission and that after they arrived in the Purushottama Kshetra, he would narrate more about this. Indradyumna felt relieved and reposing faith in the grace of the supreme lord he retired for the night.

The next morning Indradyumna crossed the Mahanadi and led by the king of Udradesha proceeded further. Soon he reached the Ekamra Kshetra and crossing the river Gandhabati, around the time of the midday worship he reached the temple of Kotilingeswara, another name of Tribhubaneswara Lingaraja. The king also heard the sound of trumpets, gongs, drums, conches and other musical instruments played during ceremonial worship of deities and assumed that they were in close proximity of the Blue Mountain. Narada explained that his destination was still some distance away and in any case the Enemy of Mura or Vishnu there was manifest in a very secret location. It was almost three yojanas far from their present location. He added that the sound he heard was from the Ekamra Kanana, the abode of Shiva. He then narrated an interesting episode about Shiva who had granted a boon to the king of Kasi or Varanasi to enable him to defeat Krishna-Vishnu. This boon however did not work because the Pasupata Astra of Shiva became ineffectual before the Sudarshana Chakra, the celestial wheel of Vishnu. Shiva was repentant and full of remorse, he prayed to Purushottama who told him about the great sanctity of his own Kshetra on the shores of the southern sea. He also told him that he had made his abode there in the foursome appearance made of precious Blue stone. Shiva prayed to Nilamadhava to become the protector of his home in the Purushottama Kshetra and was granted his wish. Indradyumna felt blessed to have heard the sacred story of the

mysterious ways of Vishnu and his *maya* or cosmic illusion. Along with Narada Indradyumna completed his ablutions in the Bindu Sarovara and beheld Purushottama in a temple on its banks and then proceeded near Kotilingeswara. He offered Mahasnana or the great ceremonial bath to Tribhubaneswara and worshipped him. Kotilingeswara assured the king that his mission would be successful and told him that he, Shiva is present at the end of the Sankha Kshetra as Nilakantha. He revealed to the king that the blue bodied Vishnu had already disappeared from view. He advised the king to prepare the arena for worship of Nrusimha and conduct the thousand-horse sacrifice there. There you would find the ethereal divine tree from which the divine architect Visvakarma would prepare the four statues, he said. I will surely be present when the deities would be ceremonially installed by Brahma, he added. So saying Shiva himself vanished. So assured by Shiva, the king then continued his journey further. On his way the king and his entourage worshipped Kapoteswara and Bilweswara and constantly chanting the name of Vishnu residing in the Nilachala hills, they moved on towards their destination. Jaimini then recounted the background of the episode relating to Shiva because of which his manifestations had the name of Kapoteswara and Bilweswara.

As per the advice of Kotilingeswara, Indradyumna reached the limits of the Purushottama Kshetra and arrived at the temple of Nilakantha. The king saw some omens foretelling some evil or misfortune. On his being agitated, Narada reassured him that all great deeds were fraught with obstacles and he need not worry on this account. He then disclosed that this Kshetra was like the body of Vishnu himself and the king being extremely virtuous would surely



succeed in his mission. However, the blue-bodied manifestation of the supreme god for whom he had travelled so far had disappeared Narada added. On hearing this terrible news the king fainted and fell on the ground. After much effort he could be revived. The king made loud lamentations and bemoaned his misfortune. He cried aloud to the supreme lord to pardon him for any omission on his part on account of which this happened. Narada consoled the king and told him about the unfathomable cosmic illusion created by Narayana and further added that this disappearance of Vishnu had already been foretold by Brahma to him. Brahma had in fact assured that in due course, after the king completed the thousand-horse sacrifice, he himself would persuade the supreme lord to come from the Shweta Dvipa. At that time he would manifest here in his foursome appearance in figures made of wood in place of the images made of precious stones. Saying these words Narada suggested that they should start preparations for the sacrifice.

Led by Narada the king and his followers reached the top of the Blue Mountain. There they were met by a strange and unexpected site. Under the shade of a Dark Agar plant was manifest the dispeller of all fear, Nrusimha, in the man-lion form, the primordial form of Vishnu whose sight instantly dissolves the heinous sin of Brahma Hatya bearing his fierce aspect. Looking terrible he had golden mane like matted hair overflowing his face. He had on his lap the demon (Hiranyakashipu) whose heart the Lord was seen rending with his sharp nails hard as thunderbolt. He had a reddish brown body with a golden glow. Wearing a shining crown, wielding the conch and the wheel in his hands and with his outstretched tongue, he was seen making loud deafening laughter. The eyes emitting sparks flying in all directions, he had struck the ground with a fierce force pushing the very

earth downwards. Keeping Narada in front all bowed down before the primordial form of Vishnu from a distance. The king thanked Narada again and again for the great fortune of beholding the rare site of the supreme divine in this man-lion form. He also felt somewhat relieved that ultimately his mission of visiting the Purushottama Kshetra would be successful. He offered his prayers again to Nrusimha prostrating before him with great humility.

Worship of Nrusimha and performance of Aswamedha Yagnya

On the advice of Narada the king and his followers then proceeded to the site where Nilakantha was worshipped. There they found the son of Visvakarma with his tools and equipment and ready to start work. Anon he made a beautiful temple facing west in that site. Narada soon brought Nrusimha in a chariot near the new temple built for him. This time however Nrusimha was manifest in his pleasant aspect and delighted the beholders by his benign presence. In due course Nrusimha was installed in this temple and everyone paid their obeisance to the primordial manifestation of Vishnu and started worshipping him.

Having installed Nrusimha, the king then started preparing the site for the thousand-horse sacrifice. He built a suitable platform for sacrifice. He invited Indra, the king of heaven, all the gods, the mortal kings from all over, the sages and ascetics and several Brahmins. He provided suitable facilities for all of them. He made royal arrangements for their comfortable stay and arranged sumptuous feasts for all. With great humility he sought their consent to start the Aswamedha Yagnya so that as foretold, Madhava would reappear and reside again in the Blue Mountain. Indra and all those present commended



the pious act of the king and assured him their help and cooperation in this noble task. The king with the help of the priests started the sacrifice following prescribed rituals and released the horse duly sanctified in the fire sacrifice ceremony. The fire sacrifice proceeded without any obstacle and soon the time for releasing the thousandth horse in the sacrifice arrived.

Just before that the king, during his meditation, had a vision of the supreme god in the Shweta Dvipa residing in the ocean of milk, protected by the thousand hoods of the serpent Ananta and Brahma standing on his side with folded hands. There he found a bejewelled throne and atop it the blue bodied lord bedecked with a garland of forest flowers and holding conch, wheel, mace and lotus. Also on his right side was Lakshmi in a benedictory posture. The king offered his prayers to Vishnu and sang his praise in many words. Having seen the supreme lord in his dream early in the morning, the king described this to Narada.

Appearance of the sacred tree and making of the images

As the main sacrifice of the Aswamedha Yagnya neared completion, preparations were made for the purificatory bath or Ababhruta Snana near the temple of Bilweswara on the shores of the southern ocean. Just then some of the persons engaged for this supplementary ceremony noticed a divine tree floating in the sea. Reporting this to Indradyumna they said that a great tree was floating close to the great ocean, its top on the seaside and the roots facing the shores. The entire tree was crimson coloured and has the marks of conch and wheel on it. Such a tree has never been seen before, O king, they added. Its halo bright as the sun itself has lit up the surroundings and its sweet fragrance has permeated the entire beach.

This is surely a divine tree or some divine being come here in shape of a tree, they said.

The king was greatly excited and asked Narada about this unusual tree and how it had arrived there. Narada advised the king to offer Purnahuti or the final oblations of the sacrifice. He added that the Lord whom the king had seen in his dream had manifested as the sacred divine tree having created this from a hair fallen from his divine body. It is your great fortune to behold this other worldly tree. After completing the Ababhruta Snana, do install the divine tree, the very manifestation of the Yagnya Purusha or the presiding deity of this great sacrifice, on a special platform.

The King soon proceeded to the shore where the sacred tree had been sighted along with those present in the sacrifice arena. He saw the divine tree with four branches similar to the four armed Jagannath he had seen in his dream. He felt greatly fulfilled and blessed on appearance of the tree and got over his grief on account of the disappearance of Madhava from the Blue Mountain. The beach soon resounded with the sound of auspicious music, singing of *mantras* and hymns and all present there hailed the divine presence with full throated singing of the lord's name in chorus. The king arranged to bring the divine tree ashore and it was carried in a grand procession to the platform near the site of the great sacrifice and ceremoniously installed there. As the king was wondering how the figures of Madhava would be made from this tree, he heard a divine voice that the lord was unlike anything in this world and beyond comprehension of humans. Therefore the king need not worry at all as the lord will would secretly manifest himself. The voice added that an old craftsman who was already present in that assembly with his tools would carve the images



of the deities. The voice added, please let him enter the chamber for preparing the images and close the door. Make loud auspicious sounds outside this chamber so that none can hear what is going inside, the voice instructed. When the king looked around the old craftsman-carpenter suddenly appeared before him and assured that he would indeed prepare the images of the deities in the same form the king had seen in his dream. So saying he disappeared into the special chamber made for the preparation of the divine figures.

Jaimini then narrated the events to the assembly of sages in the following words. Anon various auspicious signs of the divine presence were heard and seen. The heavenly flower Parijata rained from the skies along with waters of the Ganga, sweet divine music filled the ears and the presence of Airabata, the celestial elephant could be felt. All the immortals who had assembled for the great sacrifice started worshipping Hari as they had done in the Blue Mountain. As fifteen days passed the supreme god himself made his own images in four figures and revealed himself as Janardana, Balarama, Subhadra and Sudarshana. While Janardana had the conch, wheel, mace and lotus in his four arms, Ananta manifest as Balarama had mace, pestle, wheel and bolt in his hand and was in addition covered by the umbrella like seven shining hoods. Subhadra of beauteous countenance held lotus in one hand while her other hand was in the benedictory posture. Mahalakshmi herself had appeared in this form and was none other than the divine mother who during the manifestation of Krishna had been born of Rohini. On the appearance of these four figures, a heavenly voice exhorted the king to firmly cover the four images with silken cloth and paint them with different colours. Vishnu should be painted dark blue, while Balaram should be painted

conch-white, Sudarshana in the colour of blood and Subhadra in glowing saffron. Indradyumna beheld the heavenly sight of the manifestation of the divine in the figures of wood. He was overcome with ecstasy and his voice choked. He enjoyed the sight with half-closed eyes and again and again offered his salutations to lord of the universe. Narada encouraged the king to have an eyeful of this ineffable sight and gently asked him to sing the glory of the lord. Indradyumna praised the supreme divine for his bounteous compassion and his infinite grace in blessing him with his presence in this Purushottama Kshetra and sang many hymns and recited many *mantras* hailing the glory of the Lord. Narada and all the earthly kings, sages and Brahmins too joined the king in singing the praise of Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana with appropriate invocations and chanted special incantations for each of them.

Origin of Indradyumna tank

Jaimini then described the origin of the Indradyumna tank. The king had presented hundreds of thousands of cows suitably adorned with various ornaments to the Brahmins present in the sacrifice. The hoof marks of these cows created a huge crater and the water spilled during the ceremonial donations filled it making it into a huge lake. On account of the holy deed of the great sacrifice that resulted in the formation of this lake its waters acquired untold sanctity and the lake became a great *teertha*. It got identified with the name of the great king, Indradyumna who conducted this sacrifice.

Construction of the new temple

Indradyumna bade farewell to the various craftsmen and workers and their supervisors after making handsome payments and to the assembled



guests after offering them suitable gifts. Soon the king started worrying about building a suitable temple for the foursome manifestation of the supreme divine. He ordered stones and other building materials for this new temple and declared his resolve to spend all the wealth he had earned as a king throughout his life for constructing a suitable abode for the supreme divine manifest there.

Just then a scholarly Brahmin well versed in the Vedas and Vedanta appeared before the king and explained that the sacred log that had been found floating in the ocean was not related to the humans. On account of your great devotion only the supreme has appeared in the form of wood and taken the foursome appearance, he said. Narada added that this manifestation of the divine was no different from what has been mentioned in the Upanishads and was famous even earlier in the Vedas. They were capable of granting instant emancipation at their very sight. Now that the divine has manifested I will now proceed to the heavens and invite Brahma for their formal installation, he added and exhorted the king to complete building the temple in the meantime. The king expressed his desire to accompany Narada on this mission and requested him to wait until the Garbha Gruha or the sanctum sanctorum was completed and dedicated. The king took keen interest in the expediting this work and soon the sanctum could be completed and dedicated. He also took suitable steps to ensure that the tall temple was protected from lightning and other disasters and completed the *nyasa* ceremony by sealing inside the top portion various items including precious stones and jewels as prescribed in the canons of temple building. The temple had a soaring spire and was a gorgeous structure the like of which had not been seen anywhere in the

three worlds. Even the gods and the immortals praised it in many words. The king then offered his respects to Narada prostrating before him and praying for the everlasting glory of this abode for the supreme divine built by him. Narada assured him that Jagannatha was pleased only with pure and unalloyed devotion and the king should continue to pray to the lord with all sincerity and arrange for his worship in a befitting manner. He then invited the king to accompany him to proceed to Brahma Loka, the abode of Brahma in heaven.

Indradyumna and Narada invite Brahma

Narada and Indradyumna made a circumambulation of the lord and sought his permission to proceed to Brahma Loka. They then climbed the chariot of Narada and moved heavenward. Within no time they crossed the world of the Sun and the stars including the pole star known as Dhruba Mandala and reached the gates of Brahma's abode. They found many gods and other heavenly beings already waiting for an audience of Brahma. Seeing Narada, the son of Brahma they greeted him and let him enter the inner chamber where Brahma was present. However, Indradyumna was asked to tarry a while till they received the permission to admit him inside. After greeting his father and the creator, Narada informed him of the visit of the king and received an indication that he could enter inside. As Indradyumna went inside, the other heavenly beings waiting outside were somewhat surprised. So was the sage Durvasa who could enter straight into the presence of Brahma. On his intervention Brahma let the gods and others also enter inside. Just then the king after paying obeisance to Brahma had made a request to him to come to earth and preside over the ceremony of dedicating the new temple for Jagannatha and for ceremonial installation of the deities. Brahma replied with a



smile and informed the king that much time had elapsed since the king had left earth. None of the descendants of the king were alive now, the kingdom itself was no more in existence and millions of kings had ruled on earth and had perished since the king left the earth. Nothing that you had seen is in existence except the supreme divine and the temple you had built for him, he added. In fact many aeons have lapsed and currently the early part of the period of second Manu Svarochisha is in progress, said the creator. So 'O' king return to earth and secure the deity and the temple. I will follow you and reach the site soon.

Brahma then turned his attention to the assembled gods and other heavenly persons and enquired of them the purpose of their visit. Gathering courage the gods asked Brahma about the disappearance of the blue-bodied manifestation of the supreme god and why he had since manifested himself in bodies of wood. Brahma replied, O gods, this is a cosmic mystery that I have not revealed before anyone till now. However I am now going to tell this most secret affair of the supreme lord. Earlier Janardana, the supreme divine in his blue-bodied form had stayed for one *parardha*, equivalent of several billion human years. After that now in the early part of Sveta Baraha Kalpa during the time of Swayambhuva Manu, he has manifested himself made of wood on the earth. He will remain in this form till the end of my present existence. He is none else than Purushottama who is eternally present in the Dvipa and shows great reverence to Yoganidra. The sacred tree with the signs of the conch and wheel is but a strand of hair from near his navel. Earlier when I was fatigued after completing a cycle of creation, I had prayed to the supreme Lord to relieve me from bearing this burden again and again. Taking compassion on

me he has taken the form of wood to relieve the entire creation and to provide succour to all. Addressing the gods again, Brahma asked them to proceed to earth and assist the king who was now without his kingdom, his men and wealth so that he could finish the incomplete task of installing the deities in the new temple. Brahma added that the king would also find it difficult to even establish his claim of having built the new temple.

Having heard the words of Brahma, the king offered his prayers to Jagannatha and hailed his infinite grace and compassion. The gods too joined him in praising the supreme divine in many words. In sometime the king and the gods proceeded to earth and reached the arena of Nrusimha in Purushottama Kshetra. All then with folded hands prayed to the man-lion manifestation of Jagannatha. They then proceeded along with Padmanidhi to the foothills of the Blue Mountain to prepare for the dedication ceremony of the temple and rituals for installing the deities made of wood. They found that the spire of the temple soared towards the sky in its regal majesty. The king who had only seen the temple when only a part of it had been completed was taken by surprise as it went beyond all his imagination and expectations. He asked the assembled gods and heavenly beings to indicate the various items required for the dedication and installation ceremonies. Even the gods found themselves unequal to this task as such a temple had never been made before.

Installation of the deities

Just then Narada arrived in the scene and all of them looked up to him for guidance. Narada then gave a list of required accessories and accoutrements for this grand ceremony. He advised Padmanidhi to prepare a grand shed with a golden platform for conducting the dedication



and installation rituals. He also advised to prepare suitable accommodation for various guests like gods, heavenly beings, kings, ascetics, sages and other mortals. Brahma also advised them to make three chariots for transporting the foursome figures in wood from the Nrusimha Kshetra to the temple in the Blue Mountain. He then gave detailed instructions regarding the chariots of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Made with sixteen, fourteen and twelve wheels these were to be colourfully decorated and embellished with ornaments and flowers. A formal installation ceremony including a fire sacrifice was to be conducted for each of the chariots before these could receive their divine passengers and before commencing their journey. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas would carry the deities on to the chariots to the accompaniment of recitation of hymns from the Vedas, singing of auspicious incantations and playing of many musical instruments befitting this grand occasion. The chariots are to be pulled by horses, bullocks or dedicated devout men along flat land without uneven patches, he added. So guided by Narada the images of the supreme divine were brought to the new temple in specially made chariots.

At that time a king named Gala was ruling on earth. He had earlier installed an image of Madhava in this temple and was worshipping him with appropriate rituals. Finding this Indradyumna removed the image of Madhava to a small temple and installed him there. Having heard this from a messenger Gala became angry and rushed there with his soldiers and others in great haste with the intention of fighting the intruder and restoring the Madhava image inside the temple. However on reaching the Blue Mountain and seeing the grand heavenly arrangements, he realized that Indradyumna was no ordinary king.

There having learnt that to install the deities made of wood he had come from Brahma Loka and that Brahma himself would preside over the ceremonies, he was chastened. He decided to assist Indradyumna in every possible way and also to follow his footsteps in organizing many festivals for the deities every year as well as take the responsibilities for continuing the worship in the temple and maintain it in a befitting manner. He hoped that Indradyumna would surely grant him the permission to do so. So he came near Indradyumna and greeted him with great humility and offered to assist him in his noble work in every possible manner. Indradyumna was happy to learn of his desire and from his side asked him to take charge of continuing the worship of the deities after his own departure to Brahma Loka. Gala then enthusiastically arranged for all the requirements of the sacred ceremonies. In a short time all could see an unusually bright halo rushing towards the earth from the skies and soon Brahma looking radiant in a carriage borne by snow-white swans arrived in the scene. He was received near the *bimana* by which he had descended from heaven. Indradyumna and all assembled at the site greeted him with folded hands and greeted him with utmost respect and offered salutations to the creator. Brahma then proceeded near the chariot of Jagannatha and after completing a circumambulation, he prayed to the supreme divine with appropriate hymns, mantra and incantations. He then repeated the same ritual around the chariot of Balabhadra. At last he went round the chariot of Subhadra and offered prayers to the divine mother as well as the celestial wheel Sudarshana seated therein.

Brahma was then led to the platform where preparations had been made for the dedication and installation ceremonies. He was seated in a



special throne with a footrest. Then as per directions of the creator the king ceremonially chose, invited and honoured Bharadvaja, a great *rishi*, to perform various rituals connected with the ceremonies. Accepting the request of the king the sage Bharadvaja completed the preliminary rituals and requested Brahma to take up the main ceremonies relating to the dedication of the temple and the installation of the deities therein after completing the ritual breathing of life to the figures made of wood.

At last Brahma got up to conduct the final rituals of this sacred event. The air was soon filled with the sweet sound of auspicious songs sung by the *gandharvas*, the heavenly *apsaras* started dancing in joy and the sound of other worldly music made with conch, trumpet, drums and flute etc. resounded in all directions. Brahma along with the gods gently brought down the figure of Narayana from the chariot holding his two sides, his arms, his feet and supporting his head while resting him from time to time on soft cushions. The assembled sages and ascetics sang hymns in praise of Jagannatha. Similarly Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana were also brought down from the chariots. Fragrant water sanctified with *mantras* was used for symbolic ablution of the deities through their reflections in mirrors. Brahma adorned the deities with various ornaments made of precious stones and colourful garlands of sweet scented flowers and after completing the prescribed rituals installed them on the bejewelled platform. In a short while the deities together took the appearance of Nrusimha, the man-lion manifestation of the supreme god in his fiercest form. All present were terrified and could not understand the reason for the same. Brahma then explained that only those who are fortunate are able to behold the primordial form

of the supreme lord. Moreover the lord of the universe, Jagannatha also wanted everyone to understand that though he had taken the manifestation in four figures made of wood no one should mistake this for anything other than the essential divine appearing on the earth out of his infinite compassion for his devotees and to provide succour to them in their mortal existence. He and Indradyumna again prayed to Nrusimha with many hymns and *mantras* and as mysteriously as the lord had taken his fierce form so only in a few moments he assumed his pleasant aspect and again became visible in his foursome appearance. The devotees who behold the manifestation of the divine in this body made of wood are released from their mortal life and the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Brahma then duly worshipped the four figures of wood installed on the bejewelled throne. He prayed to Baladeva in the *mantra* of twelve syllables, Narayana with the *mantra* of Purusha Sukta, Subhadra with the Devi Sukta and Sudarshana with his *mantra* of twelve syllables. Brahma then beseeched the installed deities to bless Indradyumna. Pleased with his prayers Jagannath, even in his manifestation in wood, gently smiled and spoke thus in a grave tone. Addressing Indradyumna, the divine image told that he was pleased with the deeds he had performed without any desire for any rewards and that the king was indeed very fortunate to do so. I grant you the boon of always harbouring in your heart unwavering devotion towards me for ever. I will never abandon this site even if the temple is damaged or if ever some other person establishes another temple in this location. Even then such a temple will be only considered your achievement. I do declare this to be true again and again. Even if the present temple is completely destroyed I will remain in this body of wood here till the



completion of the second half of the term of Padma Yoni, Brahma.

Birthday of Jagannath and his festivals

Jagannath then declared that he had appeared in the present form on the full moon day of Jyestha in the summer of the first year of the second four *yugas* of Svayambhuba Manu's term. Thus this is to be considered as his birthday. Jagannath then gave detailed instructions about celebrating his birthday with a ceremonial bath on a special platform and taking him back inside the temple thereafter. He also advised him to celebrate the Gundicha Festival. This was to be celebrated by carrying him along with Rama (Balarama) and Bhadra (Subhadra) to the Gundicha Mandapa where they would stay for seven days. On account of the performance of the Aswamedha Yagnya performed by you that place with the Mahavedi near the Nrusimha Kshetra is equally dear to me as the Blue Hill. Jagannath then indicated the great sanctity of this *kshetra* that bestowed great benediction on devotees fortunate to get his audience there. After so saying and blessing everyone, Jagannath then assumed his silent appearance once more. Sage

Jaimini then described the twelve major festivals of Jagannath to be celebrated round the year including complete details of the Ratha Yatra ceremony. Indradyumna followed these prescribed rituals and celebrated all these festivals with great sincerity and piety.

Indradyumna leaves for Brahma Loka assigning Sveta Raja the worship of Jagannath

In due course Indradyumna asked Sveta Raja, the then ruler on earth, to note the details of these festivals. He advised him to perform these festivals with due care and attention. He explained that Jagannath in his appearance in the form of wood was none other than the supreme divinity and was the fulfiller of every wish like the Kalpa Vrikshya. Do worship Nrusimha in this form and avail *nirvana* in time. Sveta Raja accepted the responsibility with great humility. Indradyumna then offered his prayers to Purushottama and proceeded to Brahma Loka with sage Narada.

Dr. Subas Pani, former Chief Secretary, Odisha.



Narayana Basudeva Vasha of deities at Keonjhar