



Shree Jagannath Dham and Religious Tourism

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Culture and Religion in India contribute a significant role in promotion of *ism*. It was the Indian religious culture, which made many foreign travellers to visit India in ancient times. India having a good reservoir of various colourful religions is unique in the world, which consists of so many hues of various cultures in such a small area. The religion causes lot of changes in the life and history of the any society and country. The same is the case in India too. On one hand, there are various religious temples having their own architectural style. On the other hand, there are a good number of traditions, beliefs, customs, rites and rituals that are living and vibrant. Puri is one such cultural and religious tourist destination, where one can get the flavour of pan- Indian religious beliefs and essence of cult and culture in the forms of rituals and customs. After all, Puri is a city where devout Hindus would like to die, and which a lot of salvation seeking foreigners would count among the 1000 destinations to visit before they die. For many NRIs, it represents an age-old link with their Indian roots. A foreign tourist generally looks for history, culture, shopping, entertainment and relaxation. In case of India, they also want a mystic experience. Overseas Holidayers and Travellers from across the globe have put India in the top five list of most attractive and satisfying holidaying destinations in the world as reported by 'Conda Nest Reader Travel award' survey. As such the

domestic tourism reached 500 million in India during 2006.

In travel and tourism, the destinations such as cultural centres and temple towns have something to reveal pack with myths and legends, ancient rituals, historical values and festivals, and Puri is evidently one such place. Long before the birth of modern term "Tourism", the ancient land Puri has experienced the glory, the din and bustle of a travellers town. Here pilgrimage has been taken into the fold of tourism in the course of time. Puri is a religious destination having distinctive brand and has an aura that has been created over hundreds of years.

The tourist destinations are often sacred places, be it a Tirtha or a pilgrim Centre or an archeological site or a place of historical significance, besides natural heritage sites. In Indian Tourism scenario, cultural sites are the main tourism product for the foreign nationals. About 47% of foreign tourists coming to India are interested in our cultural heritage. In India, today, there is a new breed of younger people who are re-discovering their tradition and culture. They've got money and are used to affluent lifestyle. If destinations such as Puri, Varanasi and Haridwar provide them with a spiritual experience set amidst the trappings of luxury, more and more people will be attracted. For people in the west,



there's a difference in approach to these places. While for Indians, it is a must take journey, for westerners, it is a combination of mysticism and mystery.

Puri is largely a pilgrim Centre, an eternal city, a holy land for liberation (Mokshya); of course, a classic tourist destination owes its origin to the lord of the Universe-Sri Jagannath.

In ancient India, religion and learning were very closely intermingled and each Tirtha or holy place was also a centre of learning and culture. Puri-one of the 'Dhams' was no exception to this general rule. Though Puri as a Tirtha first finds mention in the vanaparva of the Mahabharata and its sanctity and glory are elaborately described in the *Kurum Purana*, *Narada Purana*, *Padma Purana* and the *Utkal Khanda* of *Skanda Purana*, still its cultural history can be traced back from 7th century A.D. In another set of ancient scripture like *Tantra Jamala*, *Rudra Jamala*, *Bamadev Samhita*, *Niladni Mohodaya* etc, where one finds the references of this religious pitha. Some scholars opine that the *vedi* or *antarvedi* as referred to in the Mahabharata is nothing but the *ratnavedi* i.e., raised platform or pedestal on which the deities are seated in Sri Jagannath Temple. Jagannath is also known as *Daru Brahama* or the prime soul enshrined in wood. Some researchers co-relate this Daru with that of *Apurusham Daru* mentioned in Rig Veda (canto x. 155.3) and hold the view that worship of lord Jagannath started well before the Christian era. However, we get reference of Jagannath in the famous work "Jannasiddhi" of Indrabhuti the founder of Vajrayana sect of Buddhism flourished in Oddiyana or Orissa towards 7-8th century A.D.

Next, we come to the days of the great Sankaracharya (788-850 AD.), who in course of his spiritual conquest of the whole of India, stayed at Puri and founded one of his four pithas

called "Bhogavardhana Pitha" or Govardhana Pitha which has remained in existence till today. Establishment of a Pitha by Sankara at Puri forms a landmark in the history of Orissa, as it was followed by the revival of Sanskrit learning and literature in this area. Just few years after Sankara's visit to Puri, we find that the famous drama "Anargha Raghava Natakam" written by Murari was staged at Puri before an audience of learned people at the time of festival (Yatra) of God Purusottama, with the consort of Kamala, who was being worshiped in the 'Tamala' forest on the sea-shore.

After the days of Sri Sankara, the greatness and sanctity of Sri Purusottama in the sea shore near this sacred place spread throughout India which is corroborated in the Mahiar state inscription of 10th century A.D. found in the Saraswati Temple. This inscription clearly indicates that Sri Purusottama was worshipped in the sea shore of Udra or Orissa. This concept was held by millions of devotees in India.

The construction of the present Jagannath Temple in place of the small old dilapidated temple some time after the conquest and annexation of Orissa by imperial Ganga King Anantavarmana Chodaganga Deva in 1112 A.D. (Twelfth century A.D.). The earliest epigraphic record crediting Chodaganga with the construction of the temple occurs in Dasgoba copper plate inscription of Rajaraja III (1199 A.D.). During this time, the Ganga Empire was stabilized and the temple perhaps was completed. Towards 1230 AD., King Anangabhim Deva III, (1211-1239 A.D.) dedicated his Kingdom to God Purusottama-Jagannath of Puri and acknowledged the divinity of Puri both as the state deity of Orissa and as his divine overlord. Hence, onwards, Anangabhim Deva and his successors claimed to rule under divine order (*adesa*) worshipping Lord Jagannath.



Epigraphically, it was during the reign of King Bhanudeva II, the name of Jagannath appeared in inscriptions of Sri Kurumam (1309 A.D.) and Simhachalam (1319 A.D.).

Again during this period the Purusottama Jagannath trinity must have been a major interface with the established cult at one of India's most sacred kshetra. The dedication of the empire to lord Jagannath, combined with vast land donations to the temple at Puri and the formation of Jagannath cult must have earned the fame of a great *tirtha kshetra*. It was also said that during this period the "*Chhatisa Nijoga*" (36 categories of Sevakas) was introduced.

It can be safely said that from this period onwards, Puri became a famous centre of pilgrimage, and saints and seers, preachers and teachers, devotees and thinkers, and general visitors coming from far off as well as nearby places. They thronged this place during different occasions like rituals, festivals, and ceremonial observations for the purpose of offering worship and paying homage to the deity.

Puri became famous to such an extent that it was regarded as heaven on earth and the lord Jagannath as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. It was universally believed that the Jagannath Dharma/belief is the confluence of all religious faiths. Naturally, the precepts of different sects paid their visit to the holy land of Puri and influenced the rulers through their respective philosophical doctrines. While in Puri they 'preached' their philosophy and got themselves involved in the ritual services of Jagannath temple and also established their Mathas (monasteries). It was during the reign of Chodaganga Deva (1112-47 A.D.) the great Vaisnava saint of South India - Sri Ramanuja in between 1107 to 1117 A.D. visited Puri and stayed at Puri. The effect of his visit was the change of religious faith of king Chodaganga Deva who became "Parama

Vaisnava". In commemoration of his visit to Puri, Sri Ramanuja established a Matha. His disciple Govinda established "Emar Matha at Puri in front of Lions Gate, which is a great Matha (monastery) in Orissa at present. Visnu Swami, another famous vaisnava preacher of South India also visited Puri in second half of 12th century AD and established a Matha near Markandeswar tank. Many Vaishnava reformers of South came to Puri and established their Mathas. Of the five Matha of this sect at Puri, the "*Radha Ballav Matha*" standing in front of lions gate of Jagannath temple is note worthy. Madhava Acharaya or Ananda Tirtha, Narahari Tirtha had visited Puri in the last part of 12th century A.D. A lot of epigraphic records about the activities of Narahari Tirtha are found in the Srikurma and Simanchala Temples. The coming of these four famous reformers and vaisnava preachers of South India to Puri within a century (1112 to 1212 A.D.) greatly stimulated the cultural activities of this holy place which became the chief centre of Hindu religion in India. It is mentioned in *Padma Purana* that the *Pandits* all over India will accept no new faith unless it gets the approval of the Pandits of Puri.

During the middle part of 12th century A.D., the great celebrated poet Jayadeva-the author of *Gitagovinda* who was born at Kenduli (near Balipatna Dist-Khurda) introduced the Radhamadhav faith through his *Gitagovinda*. Due to influence of *Srimad Bhagavata* and *Gitagovinda* the composite images of Krishna and Visnu as Gopinatha became very popular. The long continued tradition of Dasavatara had a imprint on Jayadeva who popularized Dasa Avatara (ten incarnations of Vishnu) in lucid language, which could be put to music and dance. It was Sri Jayadeva who institutionalised the "Devadasi" (Temple dancer) system introduced from the time of Somavamsi Kings. *Devadasi* or *Mahari* were women dedicated to the deity in



the temple for performance of dance and music. The importance of this dancing service became so great that a separate structure called *Natamandira* was added to the *Deula* or *Jagamohana*, in Sri Jagannath Temple. Gitagovinda recitation before the deity was introduced as daily 'Seva' of the Gods. The glory of 'Jagadisha' or Jagannath was immensely enhanced by the immortal work "Sri Gitagovinda", while it gained popularity throughout India.

The climax of vaisnavism in Orissa was reached in the 16th century with the coming of Sri Chaitanya whose long sojourn at Puri till his death brought a miraculous change in the religious life of the people. Under Chaitanya's influence vaisnavism became the dominant faith of the people of Orissa and Jagannath came to be regarded primarily as a vaisnavite deity. The strict followers of Chaitanya are known as Gaudiya Vaisnavas who adore Krishna as their supreme Lord. Sri Chaitanya is remembered as the great teacher of the popular faith. Chaitanya taught his followers not to enter into the forest of philosophy but to utter the name of lord Krishna. He organized "*Samkirttana-mandali*" to establish that "*Nama-Sankirttana*" was the only path to attain mukti. Chaitanya's main principle was "*Premabhakti*" (devotion by love). The establishment of *Bhagavat-tungi* in the villages of Orissa was outcome of Chaitanya's preaching.

In Orissa, an eclectic form of vaisnavism had existed from the time of Chodaganga centering around Jagannath which did not completely eclipse Saivism and Buddhism and Sakti worship, rather it assimilated certain ideas from these faiths. Traces of this broad-based Orissan Vaisnavism can be found in the works of the great 15th century Oriya poet Sarala Das, who avows himself to be a Sakti, has shown remarkable tolerance and regard for other religious faiths. But, Orissan Vaisnavism finds its best expression in the writings

of Balarama Das, Jagannath Das, Achutananda Das, Yosabnant Das and Ananta Das, the five poet philosophers of Orissa, who are popularly known as panchasakha.

In the wide-ranging tradition of Jagannath, attempts have been made to accommodate and absorb the Neo-Vaisnavism of Chaitanya within its all-embracing fold. Yasavanta Das in his *Premabhakti Brahma Gita* describes Nilachala as the embodiment of all the holy places whose sanctity baffles description. Gokul, Mathura, Virndavan, Dwarka, Kasi etc., are all present here. Achutananda Das in his *Sunya Samhita* writes that all ten incarnations emanate from this Daru Brahman (Jagannath) and are again absorbed in Him. Krishna has not merely been identified with Jagannath by the Orissan Vaisnavas, but has been depicted by some as the *ansavatara* (part incarnation) of the latter. In *Jagannath Charitamruta*, a work of post-panchasakha period, Jagannath has been described as the supreme Lord or Purna Brahama, where as Krishna represents only a part of his glory.

The synthetic faith of Jagannath is an epitome of divergent religious creeds and schools of philosophy that prevailed in India at different periods of her long cultural history. In the historic process of adjustments, Jagannath assimilated strange contradictions in a manner that is most amazing in the history of religious thought. 'There is no discarding any in this religion of man', wrote Pandit Nilakantha Das, 'and all the gods and goddesses have found a place here and mingled here'.

Thus, the religious system developed centering around Jagannath faith attracts all the saints and seers, Kings and commons that become unique in many ways. The assimilation of religious faiths as we have discussed and its continuation with a huge temple at Puri has given



definite shape as a *Tirthakshetra*. The majestic temple of lord Jagannath at Puri was built during 12th century A.D. Anantavarmana Chodaganga Deva (1078 to 1147 A.D.) commenced its construction and Anangbhim III completed the construction. It is described in Madalapanji, the temple chronicle of Puri that Anangabhim constructed a temple of Srivatsa Khandasala type for lord Jagannath. The height of the present temple is 214 feet 8 inches.

The Brahamapurana, Narada Purana and Utkala Khanda of Skanda Purana describe vividly the construction of the shrine of Purusottama. Although, Brahma Purana mentions about the performance of Asvamedha sacrifice (Vedic rite performed by kings), Purusottama Mahatmya of Skanda Purana presents it more elaborately. The legend of Indradyumna and Visvvasu, which prevails till today, is more or less akin to the description of Skanda Purana.

The mode of worship at the Jagannath temple is an essential blend of *vedic*, *puranic* and *tantrik* rituals. The worship of the Jagannath may be divided under three heads (1) The daily rituals or 'Nitis' which are fixed and observed every day as routine course. (2) The special 'Nitis' according to the specialty of certain days like Amavasya, Ekadasi, Eclipses etc. (3) The various festivals are celebrated throughout the year both inside and outside of the temple.

Thus, here the deity symbolizes the King of Kings and is consequently offered regal honour, consistent with the concept of God as the supreme ruler of the universe.

Here, the temple town becomes a centre of vaishnava faith and elaborate arrangements have been made for the pilgrims since historical times. The Pandas or Sevayats were specially known as prathiharees were kept incharge of pilgrims traditionally. They used to contact and control the unit of pilgrims. They receive the pilgrims from

different festive occasions. In course of time other categories of *Sevayats* and *Brahmin Gumastas* entered into the pilgrim trade. The Pandas used to go or send their Gumastas to the different parts of the country to disseminate the Jagannath faith and culture and distribute the Mahaprasad. They also motivate different class of people to have a pilgrimage to Puri. Management of pilgrims by the Pandas have taken the trade and forms of family assets. The Pandas take care of pilgrims starting from their arrival to departure from Puri and hence Pandas are well known for their hospitality towards pilgrims. The pilgrims are also provided with accommodation either in the residence of Pandas or in the lodgings or hotels. The names and addresses of the pilgrim and their pre or post generations are being recorded in a book known as "KARIJA" and pilgrims may put their own signature in a register for the future generation of the pilgrim that could recognize the Panda.

In course of time, during the festivals particularly car festival, large congregation of pilgrims was felt. In the year 1810, Raja Sukhamaya Ray of Bengal had taken a leading step for construction of the Jagannath Road, which facilitated pilgrims to come easily. In 1901 Railway line was opened to Puri. It was during 1841 - 1891 and 1901 the pilgrim flow to Puri particularly during car festival as recorded is 1,12,000/2,00,000 and over 3 lakhs respectively. At present the tourist and pilgrim traffic to Puri is more than 5 million in a year (2006). During Car festival we receive about a million of tourist and pilgrims which is very good trend for tourism industry. We should prepare to showcase these potential for economic benefit as well as facilitate the tourist needs. The faith and belief are the dominant drivers in case of domestic tourists and the curiosity and the exotic appeal of our religion and culture is the attraction of foreign tourists. However, the need of the hour is social awareness



and change of mindset to the positive side of tourism, so that we can go ahead.

The other main attraction of Puri Tourism is the sea Beach known as 'Mahodadhi'. Mahodadhi is said to be the birthplace of Goddess Laxmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu (Jagannath), which is reflected in the rituals of Lord Jagannath. This can be felt in the observation of *sagar vije* ritual on the day of Amavasya when Lord Jagannath visits his in-law's house. Pilgrims take a dip in sea, particularly during Ganga Sagar Mela. The tradition is so rich that lot of pilgrims visit the sea and takes a dip in sea to get religious merit. Thus, the sea at Puri (Mahodadhi), is regarded as the most sacred and beautiful for which people gather here for ritual purposes as well as to enjoy the natural beauty; which constitute a major attraction of religious tourism of Puri. National Council of Applied Economic Research report that Tourism as defined by leisure travel or holidaying accounted for only 6% of all travel in the country. Religious travel accounted for more than double at 13%. The predominance of religious travel over holidaying means that when it comes to the most popular destinations for religious or leisure travel in the country, top 10 were pilgrim centres including Puri placed in the second spot only after Tirupati.

Whatever the pull factor, it is well known that religious tourism routes in India are buzzing with activity and every year millions of devotees travel huge distances to visit the pilgrim centres. Add to those numbers the new age pilgrims- both foreigners or well heeled NRIs-who are also increasingly hitting India's pilgrim trails. So from the sacred Hindu cities of Varanasi, Puskar, Puri, Rameshwarm, Mt Abu and Risikesh to the Buddhist circuit in Bihar, UP and Himachal, the sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar and Dargah in Ajmair, twin-track tourism is becoming the order of the day. Many of these pilgrim cities have

developed as diverse and multicultural centres where devout Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Buddhists rub shoulders with footloose foreigners in search of the mystic orientalism. Economic Times remarks "India has always been considered as the land of spiritual awakening. With the boom in the tourism sector in India, domestic travellers and those from across the globe are using this opportunity to explore the various religious destinations in the country to understand the myriad shades of the land". No doubt the spiritual journey in India today have come to mean more than just renunciation. They could signify anything from big profits to ethnic diversity and eastern mysticism. Thus, we should prepare to tap the twin-track tourism before it goes beyond.

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