

Lord Jagannath: A Widespread Consciousness

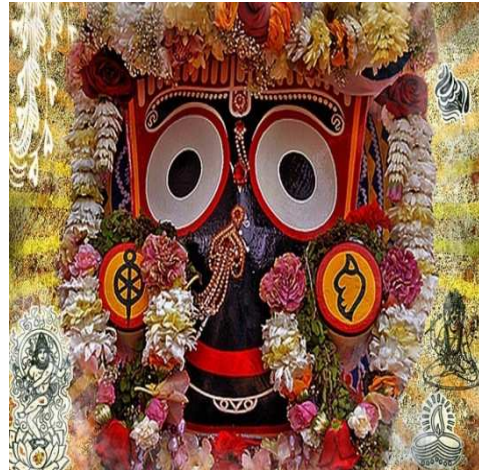
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The manifest of Lord Vishnu, Lord Jagannath is the presiding deity of Odisha. It is a deity worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists, mainly in the Indian states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam, Manipur and Tripura and by Hindus in Bangladesh. Jagannath is considered a form of Vishnu or his avatar Krishna by the Hindus. Jagannath is worshipped as part of a triad on the 'Ratnavedi' (*jewelled platform*) along with his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra. The word Jagannath itself signified that 'Lord of the Universe'.¹ From ancient times, Odisha has become the cradle of several religious faiths. This land witnessed the growth of various religions like Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism, Vaishnavism, Saktism etc. With gradual march of time all these faith were assimilated in one faith i.e. the cult of Lord Jagannath which is quite unique in the cultural heritage of this land.² From time immemorial, Puri the district of Odisha has been recognised *Srikshetra and Sankhakshetra* and the deity has been called *Jagannath, Purusottam*, the supreme consciousness. Periodical rituals have been performed near the deity with dignity and grandeur. It is believed that Jagannath is a super natural being, although the deity itself made of timbers. It is consider that an absolute being who is beyond human thinking. Sanskrit Puranas highlighted the Lord Jagannath as a Universal God and Universal consciousness. Bamana Purana, Skanda Purana, Shiva Purana, Bruhat Nrusingha Purana, Utkala Mahatmya, Tantra Jamala, Brahma Purana , Kruma Purana , Padma Purana, Narada Purana, Sarala Das Mahabharata etc highly glorify Purushottama kshetra and Sankhakshetra.³



Many Puranas describes Lord Jagannath is a Universal deity and *Srikshetra* as a most holy place on the earth. Shiva Purana says, "Purushottam is the only place on earth which can confer liberation from earthly bondage, it is the place where the Supreme Lord has assumed wooden form".⁴ The *Sankha Kshetra or Srikshetra Puri* is one of the most important centre of Vaishnavism in India. Hindu devotees across the country visited the *Purushottama Kshetra* to offer worship. Lord Jagannath has been accepted as the representative of Odishan people, an embodiment of love, a guiding force behind the cultural heritage of

this land, a synthesis of all the Hinduite faiths and finally as the God of the Universe.⁵ Jagannath is the symbol of unity and integrity of the all religions of the world. He neither represents any religion, division, caste, region nor any country. He is above all. Jagatguru Aadi Sankaracharya has given privilege to the four holy places of India Known as '*Chaturdham*'. In the east it is Puri, in the west it is Dwaraka, in the north it is Badrinath and in the south it is Rameswaram. In the concept of Aadi Sankaracharya, Puri is the prime and the foremost Dham among the four Dhams. The name of this Dham is otherwise known as '*Mukti Dham*' and '*Baikuntha Dham*' and it has its own special peculiarities. In this holy place Bhakta Salabega, Dasia Bauri, Bandhu Mohanty, Guru Nanak, Jayadev, Ganapati Bhatta, Adi Sankaracharya have their special emotions. This Dham of Lord Jagannath, Puri, has its own specialities which are not found in any other God or Goddesses of other religions. The special quality of this Dham is that it has no similarities with any Temple, Church, Masjid, Girja of any religion.⁶

The significance and uniqueness of this deity is that it is made up of a piece of *Neem* tree, what we called '*Daru*' or '*Mahadaru*' and the Lord is known as '*Daru Debata*', whereas other deities are made with rock, clay and metals. Except Lord Jagannath Dham in other places the Gods are worshipped with their co-partner as *Radha-Krishna*, *Rama-Sita*, *Laxmi-Narayan*, *Shiv-Parvati*, where as in this Dham Lord Jagannath is worshipped with his elder brother '*Balabhadra*' and younger sister '*Subhadra*'. It represents the universal brotherhood and human unity and integrity. It is unique that the deities have no specific form but Jagannath is the first and the last God to give '*Moksha*', that is why the sacred land Puri is universally popular as the '*Mukti Dham*'. The form signifies that it is a Universal deity. Its arm is called '*Mahabahu*', its eyes is called '*Chakka Aakhi*'. Two round eyes represent nothingness of the world. The nine planets immersed in the form of deity. In *Ashadha Sukla Dwitiya* the deities move to their "*Mausi Ghara*" by the chariots. The chariots have been pulled by the devotees irrespective of caste, creed and religion.⁷



Jagannath culture spread beyond the state into Tibet, Nepal, and Brahma Desh etc. Historian and archaeologists have given data about the Lord Jagannath that many places across India there is a Jagannath culture. Ancient *Prome* of Brahma Desh was named as *Srikshetra*. The *Peg* region of Burma told that the word *Ussa* which is the convert of *Odra* or *Odisha*. Again in *Balidwipa* Shiva was known as Jagannath and *Shankha Chakra Gadapadma*, Vishnu was treated as *Purushottama* and *Avatar*. In Nepal

there was also spread up Jagannath culture and consciousness. Still now there are many Jagannath temple found in Nepal. In sixteenth century A.D. a Tibet historian *Lama Taranath* said that there was Jagannath culture in Tibet. The rite and ritual of *Srikshetra and Rathayatra* observed till now. In America there are lot of Jagannath temple, worshipped by American people. Like *Srikshetra*, they are also observing Rathayatra with great enthusiasm and vigour. There was a saying Lord Jesus had came to Puri and stayed there for some time. In Bible, the life sketch of Jesus told that near about twelve years Jesus was vanished from Jerusalem. It is fact that Jesus was in the *Srikshetra* as said by the researcher. During his stay he learned what Sanatana Hindu Dharma is and spread it among the disciples. The book "*The unknown life of Jesus Christ*", "*Aquarian gospel of Jesus the Christ*" and "*The life and work of Jesus in India*" proved that Jesus was stayed in Puri.⁸

In spite of many cultural invasions by outsiders and cross cultural barriers by few insiders, Odisha is still maintaining its 'unique culture' i.e. 'Jagannath culture' of "Unity in Diversity". Odisha's traditional culture is a combination of varieties, so diversity is found in Jagannath culture. Diversity means difference. It means collective differences, such differences mark off one group of people from other. These differences may be biological, religious, linguistic etc. The cult of Lord Jagannath is a beautiful combination of worldly and cosmic realities. The speciality of the cult is that all the religions of the world have been merged within it to make it flexible, open and generous. Like all other religions it has not been narrowed down itself within certain idealistic values and principles. The cult is based upon peak ideals of democracy, humanitarian principle of equality, justice, honesty and integrity, which purely illustrates against the conservative outlook of castism, sectarianism and any such other barriers for attainment of complete universalism. Therefore, Jagannath has been called the Lord of the whole universe. There is no other religion in the world where a common man sees his Lord as his own family member who is an inseparable entity. It is based upon the beliefs of *Sarvajana Hitaya Sarvajana Sukhaya* that the cult is meant for the sake of well being of entire humanity of the universe.⁹



Lord Jagannath is known as *Parambrahma*. Brahma is the only Universal truth other things are illusion. As Aadi Sankaracharya said '*Brahman Satya, Jagat Mithya, Brahman Jibeiba Na Parah*'. But it is the

only truth that Brahma has no shape, no colour, no gender and out of imagination what Jagannath represents for.¹⁰ There is a controversy among the scholar and researcher regarding the evolution of Jagannath culture and its antiquity. Many religions of the world had been immersing in the Jagannath cult. It symbolises a highly eclectic spirit of synthesis of different Indian religions. Lord Jagannath is the God of all religions. The Jainas see him as *Jineswar* their beloved lord and the Buddhists see him as Buddha. Muslims like Kabir, Haridas, Salabega devoted their entire life before Lord Jagannath and sang Bhajans and Janana in praise of the Lord.¹¹ Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Kabir, Sri Chaitanya and Guru Nanak have also visited *Nilachal Dham* and were greatly influenced by the assorted philosophy of Jagannath cult which later moulded and shaped their teaching and preaching to a great extent. Dasia Bauri, an untouchable, Hadi Das, a blacksmith, Jagannath Das, the famous poet of Bhakti movement and Bandhu Mohanty an ardent devotee of the Lord are gifted with the divine blessings of the God.¹² The Puranic text *Purushottama Mahatmya* of the *Skanda Purana* Contains the *Indradyumna* legend and the origin of Jagannath's wooden idol at Puri. The Puranic texts corroborate that Jagannatha was originally a deity of the aboriginal tribes and was known as *Nila Madhava*, his image being made of some sort of blue stone. Later, the god manifested himself in the form of four wooden images that we worship now and came to be known by the present-day names in an atmosphere of Vedic re-orientation. Thus, Jagannatha is equally claimed by the aboriginal tribes and the Vedic Hindus to be their original deity of worship. With the visit of *Sri Chaitanya* Vaishnavism find itself in a larger era. Several festivals associated with Krishna cult like *Krishna Janma*, *Nandostava*, *Kaliyadalana*, *Vakasuravadha*, *Chandan Yatra* etc were intimately associated with the festival of the temple of Lord Jagannath.¹³ The Sikh Guru Nanak was influenced by Lord Jagannath for which he visited his temple at Puri. For the Sikh devotees two monasteries had been built by the Sikhs. The devotees come and stay there for sacred Darshan of Lord Jagannath. Even, the Sikhs have been allowed to perform certain rituals in the Jagannath temple. Santh Kabir and Hari Das two Muslim devotees had come to Puri to get the blessings of Lord Jagannath. In 1512 A.D. Kabir arrived at Puri and in remembrance of his visit *Kabir Chaura Monastery* was built up in the sea shore which is still standing there.¹⁴ Yavana Salabega had give importance to him. He had composed many bhajanas for Jagannath. The three images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra, are the identical representations of *Buddha*, *Sangha* and *Dharma* respectively of Buddhist Triad. Because of the popularity of Jainism in Odisha, Balabhadra, Jagannath, and Subhadra have been regarded as the three cardinal principles of Jainism like *Samyak Jnana*, *Samyak Charitra*, and *Samyak Drishti*. The concept of *Kalpa* tree in Jainism is regarded as the *Kalpavata* inside the sacred complex of God Jagannath temple at Puri. *Kaivalya Mukti*, one of the tenets of Jainism is identified with the *Kaivalya (Mahaprasada)* of Lord Jagannath.¹⁵

Even to-day, Lord Jagannath is honoured and worshipped by the followers of different religious sects in India and we Odias are fortunate enough to have a Lord who is the 'Lord of the Universe' and who has given an identity to us in the whole world. The *Chera Pahanra* by the Gajapati King of Odisha, in front of the Gods during Ratha Yatra in the presence of hundreds and thousands of devotees, proved the popularity of this cult not only in Odisha but also in different parts of the country and abroad.

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