

CULTURE OF ODISHA

Contributions of Marathas Towards Shree Jagannath Culture

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • May 24, 2022 • 6 min read

After the end of Mughal period the Marathas exercised their power in Orissa. Being Hindus they had a great respect for Lord Jagannath. They took a special interest in the temple administration of Lord Jagannath. In the time of Maratha rule there was no need to shift Jagannath from the temple to a secret area as was done during the Mughal rule. Due to internal stability, peace and security in the time of Maratha pilgrims from various parts of India came to Puri to give their tribute to Lord Jagannath of universe. The Maratha administration provided necessary facilities for pilgrims and encouraged them to visit Puri. The Maratha Govt. had taken all necessary steps for better management of the Jagannath temple. They gave respect for all rituals, customs, traditions, practices and faiths relating Jagannath culture. Maratha Government was not in favour of any change in the old customs of worship of Lord Jagannath. A conflict took place when the Vaisnavas removed the images of Sankar and Padmapada from the throne of Jagannath. The followers of Sankar strongly protested the antisocial and inhumane activities of Vaisnavas.

Jaganath Puri with Ratha Yatra in progress poster by Dominique Amendola.

As a result of this conflict the worship of Jagannath was stopped. Interfering immediately in this matter the Maratha Govt. of Orissa warned Laksmana Nath Krisna Goswami, the chief of Vaisnavas not to introduce any thing new in the Jagannath temple. Then the Maratha Govt. took step to reinstall the images of Sankara and Padmapada on the throne of Lord Jagannath.

The Maratha Govt. always encouraged the pilgrims to come to Puri in large number. Particularly Sambuhaji Ganesha had more interest to encourage pilgrims to visit the temple of Jagannath. Raja Ram Pandit, the Maratha Governor (1778-1793 A.D.) took special interest for the development of Jagannath culture and temple. During Maratha administration regular funds were provided to observe religious activities in the Jagannath temple. During that time many rich persons were encouraged to endow lands for the celebration of festival in the Jagannath temple.

The Maratha rulers were spending 20,000 kahanas of cowries or about Rs.6000 yearly for the charitable purpose in the Jagannath temple. This charity was known in the name of "Anna Chatra". The Maratha Govt. gave special attention for the safety of the pilgrims coming to visit Puri. The pilgrims in those days faced number of difficulties in their way to Puri. In spite of troubles the pilgrims were encouraged to visit Puri because of the interest taken by the Maratha Govt. to help them in their journey. Pilgrims from all parts of India mostly from Bengal, Banaras, Rajasthan, Central Province were coming to visit Lord Jagannath at Puri. The Maratha Govt. was also very liberal and broad minded in issuing passports to Muslims to visit Lord Jagannath at Puri. Jasrat Khan, the Naib Nazim of Deccan requested the Maratha Govt. to issue passport in favour of his Dewan coming to Puri to see Lord Jagannath. In order to have a Darshan of Lord Jagannath the devotees were coming from Deccan and in large number from the West Bengal to Puri during the period of the Maratha rule in Orissa. During the period of the Raja Ram Pandit the pilgrims were coming from Bombay, Gujurat, and Maharastra and they were given all assistance in Orissa for Darsan of Lord Jagannath.

During the Maratha rule the temple administration was supervised under the direction of the Raja of Khurda. The sources of income of the temple were the revenue collected from the "Satais Hazari Mahal" town duties and the sale of the Lord's sacred food Mahaprasad. The Satais Hazari Mahal- a vast area of landed property was donated by Raghuji Bhonsle of Nagpur in order to meet day-to-day expenditure of Lord Jagannath. In the beginning the financial management was very satisfactory. After some years the corruption in the financial activities of the temple that resulted increase the deficiency.

The revenue from the Satais Hazari Mahal was not collected in proper way. The Parichhas in that period were engaged in corrupt practice and had earned money in illegal way. No proper account was kept in the temple office in this regard. So Maratha Govt. was providing extra amount for proper management of Jagannath temple because of insincerity of the Parichhas at the time of the Maratha rule. The management of the Jagannath temple was vested on the hands of Parichhas. Maratha Govt. gave appointment four Parichhas with specific duties for the better management of Jagannath temple. First and third Parichhas were the Marathas and the second one was the man of local. He was called Jagannath Rajguru and also holding the right for the post of Deula Parichha. The third Parichha was known as Satais Hazari Parichha. His duty was to collect revenue from the Satais Hazari Mahals. The king of Daspalla supplied the log to Maratha Govt. Free of cost for the construction of chariots. So the king of Daspalla was exempted from paying any tribute to Maratha Govt. The Parichhas became corrupted as a result the Maratha Govt. had to pay additional amount to meet the deficiency that occurred in the temple treasury. The Maratha Govt. also imposed a tax on Parichhas in order to make up the loss. A pilgrim tax was collected from the pilgrims who were coming to visit Lord Jagannath.

Maratha Govt. collected more money as revenue from pilgrim tax. The moment when the pilgrims entered into the territory of Orissa, the tax was collected from them. When the pilgrims were to enter into the Puri town they had to cross a river named "Mittiani" in two places. The pilgrims from south, were to enter through the "Lokanatha Ghata" and the pilgrims of the North were to enter through the "Atharanala Ghata". The pilgrims were giving the tax in both the ghats.

The tax collected from the pilgrims in different places was very heavy for them. The pilgrims from northern side were giving Rs.10/- only as pilgrim tax but Rs.6/- collected as pilgrim tax from southern people. Another fee was collected from each man when the visitor entered the Jagannath temple. Jagannath temple was a source of income for the Maratha Govt. At the time of Anglo-Maratha conflict, a treaty was signed, which reflects the conditions that Jagannath temple and all the duties collected from the pilgrims shall remain in the hand of Maratha. The Marathas were giving more emphasis on the protection of the Brahmins and

Hindu deities. They also wanted to appoint a person of their own to supervise the Jagannath temple administration. After the decline of Maratha rule in Orissa their representative was continuing for some days in his own post of Parichha in the administrative system of the temple of Jagannath even when the British rule in Orissa. Within half a century in the rule of Maratha, they did a lot for the welfare of the temple. During the Marathas rule the Jagannath temple attracted the pilgrims at large all over India. The contribution of Marathas towards the Jagannath culture is remarkable and far-reaching.

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N.B.: Article First Published in Orissa Review (June, 2006 Issue)

Category: Culture of odisha, Medieval Odisha

Tag: Ratha Yatra

Source: <https://historyofodisha.in/contributions-of-marathas-towardsshree-jagannath-culture/>

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