

CULTURE OF ODISHA

Shree Mandir

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • July 13, 2017 • 10 min read

Puri's Jagannath Temple is a significant Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Jagannath, a manifestation of Vishnu. It is located on India's eastern coast in the town of Puri in the state of Odisha. The temple is a popular pilgrimage destination and one of India's four great 'Char Dham' pilgrimage sites. King Chodagangadeva initiated the construction of the Jagannath temple (known for also building the Sun temple of Konark and several major Shaivite temples). It was completed in the late 12th century by his grandson Anangabhimadeva.

The temple is well-known for its annual Rath Yatra, or chariot festival, during which the temple's three principal deities are pulled by enormous and ornately decorated temple cars. Unlike the stone and metal icons found in the majority of Hindu temples, Jagannath's image is made of wood and is replaced ceremoniously every twelve or nineteen years by an exact replica.

The temple is considered sacred by all Hindus, but particularly by those who follow the Vaishnava tradition. Numerous great saints were associated with the temple, including Adi Shankaracharya, Ramananda, and Ramanuja. Ramanuja also established the Emar Mutt near the temple, as well as the Govardhan Mutt, which is home to one of the four Shankaracharyas. It is also significant for followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, whose founder, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, was drawn to the deity Jagannath and spent several years in Puri.

Table of Contents

01	The Temple's Origins	3
02	Legends	3
03	Indradyumna's prayer to Lord Brahma	4
04	Legend surrounding the Temple origin	4
05	Shree Mandir's Structure	5
	Chakra Nila	6
	The Singhadwara	6
06	Temples of minor importance	7
07	Mandapas	8

The Temple's Origins

According to recently discovered copper plates from the Ganga dynasty, the current Jagannath temple was commissioned by Kalinga's ruler, 'Anantavarma Chodaganga'. During his reign (1078 - 1148 CE), he constructed the Jaga mohan and Vimana portions of the temple. However, it was not until 1174 CE that the Oriya ruler Ananga Bhima Deva rebuilt the temple in its current form.

The temple continued to worship Jagannath until 1558, when Odisha was attacked by the Afghan general Kalapahad. The temple was later consecrated and the deities reinstalled when Ramachandra Deb established an independent kingdom at Khurda in Orissa.

Legends

According to legend, Lord Jagannath was originally worshipped as Lord Neela Madhaba by a Savar king (tribal chief) named Viswavasu. After learning of the deity, King Indradyumna dispatched a Brahmin priest, Vidyapati, to track down the deity, who was worshipped secretly by Viswavasu in a dense forest. Vidyapati made every effort but was unable to locate the location. However, he eventually married Viswavasu's daughter Lalita. Viswavasu took his son-in-law blindfolded to a cave where Lord Neela Madhaba was worshipped at Vidyapati's repeated request.

Vidyapati possessed a high degree of intelligence. On his way, he strewn mustard seeds across the ground. After a few days, the seeds germinated, enabling him to later locate the cave. After hearing from him, King Indradyumna immediately embarked on a pilgrimage to Odra desha (Odisha) to see and worship the Deity. However, the deity had vanished. The king expressed disappointment. The Deity was concealed in the sand. The king was adamant that he would not return without having a darshan of the deity and fasted unto death on Mount Neela. Then a celestial voice cried out, 'thou shalt see him.' Following that, the king sacrificed a horse and constructed a magnificent temple for Vishnu. Sri Narasimha Murti was installed in the temple by Narada. The king had a vision of Lord Jagannath while

sleeping. Additionally, an astral voice directed him to collect the fragrant tree on the beach and fashion idols from it. As a result, the king commissioned the carvings of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Chakra Sudarshan from the divine tree's wood and installed them in the temple.

Indradyumna's prayer to Lord Brahma

King Indradyumna erected the world's tallest monument in honour of Jagannath. It stood 1,000 cubits tall. He invited Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe, to dedicate the temple and its images. Brahma descended from Heaven specifically for this purpose. Upon seeing the temple, he was overjoyed with him. Brahma inquired of Indradyumna how he (Brahma) could possibly fulfil the king's desire, as he was extremely pleased with him for erecting the most beautiful Temple for Lord Vishnu. With folded hands, Indradyumna prayed, "My Lord, if you are truly pleased with me, please bless me with one thing: that I be childless and the final member of my family." If anyone remained alive after him, he would take pride in being the temple's owner and would not work for the society.

Legend surrounding the Temple origin

According to legend, the Lord Jagannath temple originated when the original image of Jagannath (a deity form of Vishnu) manifested near a banyan tree near the seashore in the form of an Indranila mani or the Blue Jewel at the end of Treta yuga. It was so dazzling that it could grant instant moksha that the God Dharma or Yama attempted and succeeded in concealing it in the earth. In the Dvapara Yuga, King Indradyumna of Malwa desired to locate that enigmatic image, and in order to do so, he underwent severe penances. Vishnu then instructed him to travel to the Puri seashore and locate a floating log from which to create an image.

The King discovered the piece of wood. He performed a yajna in which God Yajna Nrisimha appeared and instructed that Narayana be expanded fourfold, with Paramatma as Vasudeva, Vyuha as Samkarshana, Yogamaya as Subhadra, and Vibhava as Sudarsana. Vishwakarma manifested as an artisan and fashioned images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and

Subhadra from the tree.

When Narada saw this glowing log floating in the sea, he instructed the king to carve three idols from it and place them in a pavilion. Indradyumna persuaded Visvakarma, the God's architect, to construct a magnificent temple to house the idols, and Vishnu appeared in the guise of a carpenter to carve the idols on the condition that he be left alone until the work was completed.

However, after two weeks, the Queen developed severe anxiety. She assumed the carpenter was deceased, as there was no sound emanating from the temple. As a result, she requested that the king open the door. Thus, they went to see Vishnu at work, which resulted in the latter abandoning his task, leaving the idols incomplete. The idol lacked hands. However, a divine voice instructed Indradyumana to incorporate them into the temple. Additionally, it has been widely believed that despite the idol's lack of hands, it is capable of watching over the world and serving as its lord. As a result, the idiom.

Shree Mandir's Structure

The massive temple complex encompasses an area of more than 400,000 square feet (37,000 m²) and is encircled by a fortified wall. Meghanada Pacheri is the name given to this twenty-foot (6.1 m) high wall. Another wall, referred to as kurma bedha, encircles the main temple. [25] At least 120 temples and shrines are located there. It is one of India's most magnificent monuments due to the sculptural riches and fluidity of the Oriya style of temple architecture. The temple is divided into four distinct sections, namely –

1. The Deula, Vimana, or Garba griha (Sanctum sanctorum) is the location of the triad deities on the ratnavedi (Throne of Pearls). In the style of Rekha Deula;
2. Mukhashala (Frontal porch);
3. Nata mandir/Natamandapa, also known as Jagamohan (Audience Hall/Dancing Hall); and
4. Bhoga Mandapa (Offerings Hall).

The main temple is a curvilinear structure crowned by Vishnu's 'srichakra' (an eight-spoked wheel). Additionally referred to as the "Nilachakra," it is crafted from Ashtadhatu and is considered sacred. [28] The temple of Shri Jagannath is the tallest of all the temples in Orissa. The temple tower was constructed on a raised stone platform and towers 214 feet (65 metres) above the inner sanctum, which houses the deities. It dominates the surrounding landscape. Like a ridge of mountain peaks, the pyramidal roofs of the surrounding temples and adjoining halls, or mandapas, rise in steps toward the tower.

Chakra Nila

The Nila Chakra (Blue Discus) is the discus mounted on the Jagannath Temple's top shikhar. Each day, a different flag is waved on the Nila Chakra in accordance with tradition. The flag affixed to the Nila Chakra is referred to as the Patita Pavana (Purifier of the Fallen) and is equivalent to the deities' images in the sanctum sanctorum.

The Nila Chakra is a disc with eight Navagunjaras carved around the perimeter, each facing the flagpost above. It is 3.5 metres (11 feet and 8 inches) high and has a circumference of approximately 11 metres. It is made of an alloy of eight metals (Asta-dhatu) (36 feet). The Archaeological Survey of India repaired and restored the Nila Chakra in 2010.

The Nila Chakra is distinct from the Sudarshana Chakra, which is located in the inner sanctum with the deities.

In the Jagannath cult, the Nila Chakra is the most revered iconic symbol. The Nila Chakra is the only physical object whose markings are considered sacred and used as a sacrament in Jagannath worship. It represents Shri Jagannath's protection.

The Singhadwara

The Singhadwara, which translates as The Lion Gate in Sanskrit, is one of the temple's four gates and serves as the main entrance. The Singhadwara received its name from the presence of two enormous crouching lion statues on either side of the entrance. The gate faces east and leads directly onto the Bada Danda, or Grand Road. The Baisi Pahacha, or

twenty-two-step flight, leads to the temple complex. On the right side of the entrance, a Jagannath idol known as Patitapavana is painted. Patitapavana means “Savior of the downtrodden and fallen” in Sanskrit. When untouchables were not permitted inside the temple in ancient times, they could pray to Patita Pavana. On either side of the doorway are statues of the temple’s two guards, Jaya and Vijaya. Just prior to the start of the Rath Yatra, this gate is used to remove the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra from the temple. They must ceremonially appease Goddess Mahalakshmi, whose statue is carved atop the Gundicha Temple’s door, upon their return from the Yatra. The Goddess will then grant them permission to enter the temple. In front of the main gate, a magnificent sixteen-sided monolithic pillar known as the Arun stambha stands. On the top of this pillar is an idol of Arun, the charioteer of the Sun God Surya. One noteworthy feature of Arun stambha is that it was originally located in the Konark Sun temple; later, the Maratha guru Brahmachari Gosain relocated it from Konark. Maratha emperor Shivaji also rescued the Puri Jagannath Temple from being plundered by the Mughals during his reign.

Temples of minor importance

Within the Temple complex, there are numerous smaller temples and shrines where active worship is regularly conducted. The Vimala Temple (Bimala Temple) is one of the most important Shaktipeeths because it marks the location of the Goddess Sati’s feet. It is located within the temple complex, near Rohini Kund. Food offered to Jagannath is not considered Mahaprasad until it is offered to Goddess Vimala.

Mahalakshmi’s temple plays a significant role in the main temple’s rituals. Mahalakshmi is said to supervise the preparation of naivedya as an offering to Jagannath. Kanchi Ganesh Temple is dedicated to Ganapati Uchchhishta. According to legend, the King of Kanchipuram (Kanchi) gifted the idol to Gajapati Purushottama Deva when he married Padmavati, the Kanchi princess. Additionally, Muktimandap, Surya, Saraswati, Bhuvaneshwari, Narasimha, Rama, Hanuman, and Eshaneshwara have shrines.

Mandapas

Within the temple complex, there are numerous Mandapas or Pillared halls on raised platforms dedicated to religious congregations. The most notable is the Mukti Mandapa, which serves as the congregation hall for the holy seat of selected learned brahmins. [38] Significant decisions about the conduct of daily worship and festivals are made here. The Dola Mandapa is notable for its intricately carved stone Torana or arch that is used to construct a swing for the annual Dol Yatra festival. The idol of Dologobinda is placed on the swing during the festival. The Snana Bedi is a rectangular stone platform used to bathe the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra during the annual Snana Yatra.

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