

THE TEMPLE OF JAGANNATHA

The Puri temple is built on a gigantic raised platform in the heart of the city, The temple complex is enclosed by a wall about seven meters high -including the height of the platform. The area of this platform is more than 4,20,000 sq.ft. The wall is pierced by four gates ,facing the four directions. On the east-facing gate, there are stone images of two lions and it is called the Lions Gate. The north, south and west facing gates are similarly known as the Elephant Gate, the Horse Gate and the Tiger Gate (also called the Khanja Gate) respectively. The north gate is mainly meant for the God himself in as much as, the logs of wood out of which, the images are fabricated, make their entry into the temple premises through this gate, when the Navakelevara ceremony takes place. The east-facing Lions Gate is the main gate. There are pyramidal structures over the four gates, which are not very old.

As we arrive at the vast open area in front of the Lions Gate (eastern gate), we see a monolithic pillar about 10 meters high. This pillar is known locally as the Aruna Stambha. In Hindu mythology Aruna is the the charioteer of the Sun-god, The world famous Konarka temple was designed in the form of a stupendous chariot and this monolithic pillar with the beautifully carved Aruna seated on its top was installed right in front of the porch of that temple. When the temple was abandoned and there was no presiding deity in it, this pillar was removed from Konarka to Puri and was fixed in front of Jagannatha temple where we see it now.

Immediately after we get into the main gate and proceed forward, we find ourselves on a flight of steps. Locally, they are called Baisi Pahaca, which literally means, twenty-two steps. The history or rather the mystery of this flight of steps has not been unveiled. It is interesting to note that great reverence is shown to this flight of twenty-two steps. The parents bring their children & make them slowly roll over the steps from the top to the bottom ones in expectation of spiritual bliss in as much as countless devotees have walked on the steps which are believed to be throbbing with spiritual animation.

As we cross the main entrance on the east and ascend the flight of steps leading to the main temple, we find on the left-hand side, a vast kitchen area of the temple. Some tourists rightly observe that on account of this kitchen, the Puri temple may be described as the biggest hotel of the world. It can feed even one lakh persons with only two to three hours' notice. The method of preparation is most hygienic and the traditional process of preparation of food for so many people in so short a time, takes many by surprise. To the right, we have the Ananda Bajara which is the popular name of the food selling market within the enclosure. Ananda Bajara literally means, the pleasure market.

At the end of the steps, we are to cross another gate-way that pierces a second compound wall and then we are to turn to the left to proceed to the Ganesa temple. There are beautiful carvings on the sides of this entrance of the second or inner compound wall.

As we cross the gate-way, we see immediately before us, the first section of the Jagannatha temple. It is called the Bhoga Mandapa (Refectory). The ether sections that are located to its west contiguously are, the Nata Mandira, the Mukhasala and the Bada Deula. On the body of the gigantic Bhoga Mandapa, there are many pieces of sculptures that depict interesting stories from the mythological & historical works and they are highly appreciated by the art-critics and the

pilgrims 7. There are about 30 temples around the main temple and according to the established practice, a pilgrim has to go round the main temple in a process of circumambulation. If somebody wants to see the main temple within a very short time, he may visit at least three of the most important temples before seeing Jagannatha. They are (i) The Ganesa temple at the foot of the Kalpavata, a very old banyan tree (ii) The Vimala temple and (iii) The Laxmi temple.

The kalpavata is a very old banyan tree which is believed to be there ever since the installation of Jagannatha. In Hindu mythology, there is the description of a heavenly tree known as Kalpavata, which is believed to fulfill the desires of persons seeking mercy. Keeping the name of that celestial tree in view, this banyan tree has been named as such. The name, therefore, connotes that this tree is capable of fulfilling the ungratified desire of human beings. Pilgrims are required to stand at the foot of the tree for a minute or two to communicate their desire in mute voice to the Kalpavata.

At the foot of this tree, there is the Ganesa temple. Ganesa being the god who destroys all obstacles, a visit to this temple is considered absolutely necessary. The figure of the mouse(the mount deity or the vehicle of Ganesa) installed in front of the deity is a very interesting object. Millions of hands have passed over it as almost every pilgrim touches it, but the hair like thorny projections found on its body have not been rendered blunt.

From there, as we move towards the Vimala temple, we see to our left a raised platform with a roof above it. It is the famous Muktimandapa, the seat for the most learned scholars of Orissa. honored by the rulers of the State in a traditional manner. On important controversial issues pertaining to the rituals of the temple and to Hindu religious rites, practices and customs, references are made to this association of Pandits for a final decision.

The Vimala temple is one of the most important centers of the Sakti worship of India. The famous sixteen days period of Durga Puja takes place here every year in the prescribed manner. This temple plays a very important role in giving extraordinary religious and spiritual sanctity to the food offered to Jagannatha. The food is called simply Prasada when it is offered to Jagannatha, but after certain religious rites performed in the Vimala temple, this very Prasada becomes Mahaprasada.

From there, we may visit the Laksmi temple. On our way to the Laksmi temple, we may see to our left a small replica of the sanctum of the main temple. It is believed to be the model after which the main temple was built. We may also see the temple of Sarasvati and Bhuvaneshvari to our left. Finally, when we enter into the sanctum of the Laksmi temple, we see by the left side of the door-way, an image of Nrsimha with Sankaracarya standing at the feet of the god with his danda (bamboo stick which is held by the mendicants of the Sankara order). It is believed that the Sankata Nasana Laksmi-Nrsimha Stotra was written here by Sankara when he was in Puri. Laksmi is the female counter-part of Jagannatha.

From the Laksmi temple, we are to proceed towards the main temple and enter into the Nata Mandira through its north-facing entrance. As we start from the Laksmi temple towards it, we may visit a temple known as the Suryanarayana Mandira, where there is a deformed image placed behind the presiding deity in the sanctum sanctorum. It is strongly believed that this was the image of the Sun -god worshipped in the main temple at Konarka, which was removed to this place before that temple collapsed.

After entering into the Nata Mandira, we are to stand behind a monolithic pillar, about 10 feet high, at the top of which there is an image of Garuda, the mount of Visnu. Generally, visitors touch the pillar with both their hands and through centuries of such touches, the middle portion

of it has become thinner. The Nata Mandira is a long spacious hall decorated with the paintings and models of the most popular and didactic stories of the Hindu Puranic works, pertaining to the graceful deeds of Visnu and Krisna. From there, we proceed to the Mukhasala or the porch. The carvings on both the sides of the door- frame made of stone would remind us of the similar carvings on the corresponding door-frames of the Konarka temple.

From the porch, we move to the sanctum sanctorum. Many a time, when particular religious rites are in progress, we are advised to take a view of the deities from the porch and not to insist on immediate admittance into the sanctum. At other times, we are allowed to go into the sanctum, see the deities and are also allowed to go round the deities through a narrow passage behind the raised platform called Ratnavedi, on which the deities are seated. Finally, when we come out of the temple, we may like to see the Ananda Bajar where people would be busy in purchasing the Mahaprasada.

Very close to the Ananda Bajar is the Snana Vedi located in the north-eastern corner in between the outer wall and the inner wall. The dias is about 30 feet high from the ground level. The bathing ceremony of the wooden deities takes place here. From here, the visitors come to the Baisi Pahaca for their final exit.

It has already been said that there are about thirty temples inside the enclosure of the Puri temple. Earlier, it has also been said that those who have not much time at their disposal may see only three out of many temples and then finally have a darsan (view) of Jagannatha. The following is a list of the other worth - mentioning temples in the temple premises.

- ☐ Bisvanatha temple,
- ☐ Agneyesvara temple
- ☐ Satyanarayana temple,
- ☐ Kalpa Ganesa temple,
- ☐ Sarbamangala temple,
- ☐ Panca Pandava temples, (Note - It has been described in the Oriya Mahabharata written by Sarala Dasa in 15th century, that the Pandavas visited this place.);
- ☐ Ananta Vasudeva temple,
- ☐ Mahavajresvari temple,
- ☐ Kutam Chandi temple, (Note - It is said, originally the image of a dog, that is now found here was in the sanctum sanctorum of the main temple.

According to Tantric worship, when the goddess Bhairavi is invoked; food is offered to her and later a part of it is given to a dog. But at some time in history, when Vaisnavism dominated, this image of the dog was removed there from and brought over here. The Tantrics say that Jagannatha in the Puri temple is not Visnu or Narayana or Krisna. Instead, he is Bhairava, an expression of Siva and Vimala in the Puri temple premises is no other than Bhairavi),

- ☐ Surya Yantra temple,
- ☐ Ksetrapala temple,
- ☐ Nrsimha temple,
- ☐ Jalakrida Mandapa, (Note- All ceremonial baths of the deities are held here.),
- ☐ Jogesvara temple,

- ☐ Saksigopala temple,
- ☐ Kanci Ganesa temple,
- ☐ Khira Choragopinatha temple,
- ☐ Panchasakti temple,
- ☐ Nila Madhava temple,
- ☐ Laksminarayana temple,
- ☐ Navagraha temple,
- ☐ Sarya Candra temple,
- ☐ Goplnatha and Ramcandra temple,
- ☐ Patalesvara temple,
- ☐ Padapadma temple,
- ☐ Ramacandra temple,
- ☐ Caitanya temple,
- ☐ Hanuman temple,
- ☐ Caturdhama temple, (Note - This Caturdhama temple houses the four deities worshipped in the four dhamas of India and the images are in a miniature form.)

Apart from these temples, there are some more important places in the temple complex, two of which deserve special mention. (a) Koili Vaikuntha is located in between the outer and the inner compound wall of the northwestern corner. It is traditionally believed to be the place where Krisna was cremated after he was killed by Jara Savara. There fore when the Nava Kalevara ceremony takes place, new images are fashioned and the old ones are buried here only. (b) The Niladri Vihar is a small museum where we can see, with the help of colorfully painted models, the legendary emergence of Jagannatha as the presiding deity of the temple.