



## Newsletter Archives

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### Sri Jagannath The Supreme Godhead of Puri

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Indian mythology is as pulsating, vibrant and colourful as the land itself. Comprising several thousands of deities, Indian mythology, especially Hindu mythology, abounds with the tales and legends of numerous Devatas and their avatars or incarnations. Needless to say, most of these tales centre on the Divine Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

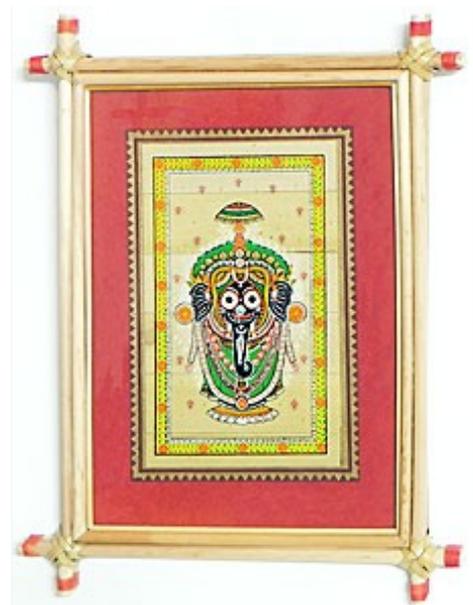
Each region in India has its own particular Ishta-Devata or favourite deity. For instance, the people of Northern India mostly worship Devi Durga, a form of Goddess Parvati. People hailing from Maharashtra in Western India worship Vitthala (a form of Lord Krishna) and Gauri (again, a form of the Devi). Gujaratis largely worship Srinathji, an aspect of Krishna.

Much of Eastern India considers Jagannath, the presiding Lord of Puri, as the Supreme Divinity. Though there is a strong influence of Goddess Durga here too, Puri Jagannath is also venerated as the Absolute Deity. This month, we bring you a feature on Sri Jagannath, the reigning deity of Puri.

## The Jagannath of Puri

Lord Jagannath is a transcendental Hindu deity, predominantly worshipped by the people of Orissa, as also a large part of West Bengal. Jagannath, an aspect of Lord Vishnu or Krishna, to be more precise, is worshipped as a part of a triad, that is, along with his brother, Balabhadradeva and sister, Devi Subhadra.

The image of Jagannath is essentially made out of a wooden stump and, unlike other deities in Hinduism, is not portrayed in human form. This wooden stump is carved to show two large and rounded wooden eyes. Two additional stumps at either side of the main stump functions as hands of the deity - the legs are conspicuously absent. The stump is then ornamented further, to create the complete detailing of Lord Jagannath.



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**JAGANNATH**

## Evolution of Jagannath Worship

The concept of Puri Jagannath and the iconography of the deity do not conform to ancient Hindu tradition. The main image of the deity in the temple of Puri in Orissa, is made of wood. This is an exception in itself, as the icons of Hindu deities are usually carved in stone.

Further, none of the rituals or practices of worship of Jagannath conform to puja vidhis mentioned in ancient Hinduism. Hence, the origin and subsequent evolution of the concept of Jagannath worship has been a subject of much academic debate among scholars.

Jagannath has not been given any reference in the Vedas, nor does he feature in the Dashavataras of Vishnu. However, certain Oriyan literary creations refer to him as the Ninth Incarnation of Vishnu. This treatise substitutes Jagannath in place of Buddha, in the Dashavataras.

Jagannath is a non-sectarian entity and has as such, never been associated with any sect of cult of Hinduism. However, one can find flashes of similarity here, between Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Jainism and so on.

The term, "Jagannath", means "Master (or Lord) of the Universe". In Orissa, Jagannath is given many other names, such as Jaga, Jagbandhu (Friend of the Universe), Kalia (the Black-coloured One), Darubrahma or Daruedabata (the Wooden Deity) and Cakaakhi, Cakadola or Cakanayan (the Round-eyed One).

Some experts believe that the Sanskritized name, "Jagannath", took its origins from a tribal deity, Jaganaelo, literally meaning, "made of wood".

## Jagannath as an Avataree

Jagannath is believed to be the cause of the Avatars and is not an actual Avatar. Hence, he is described as being an Avataree. Followers believe that all incarnations emanate from Lord Jagannath and that he is the cause of all material creation. Hence, Jagannath is not associated with the legends and Lilas (miracles) that other Avatars such as Rama, Krishna and all the other deities are connected with.

## Physical Attributes of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra

The Jagannath temple at Puri, Orissa, is one of the most significant shrines of the Lord. Here, Jagannath is part of a triad of deities that includes Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra. In this temple, Jagannath is also worshipped along with his Sudarshana Chakra (Discus), Madhava and his Consorts, Sridevi and Bhudevi. The idols are placed in the Ratnavedi (or the bejewelled platform), in the innermost sanctum sanctorum of the temple.



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**BALARAM, SUBHADRA AND JAGANNATH**

The idols and the Sudarshana Chakra are made of neem wood. The three images have massive square heads, which merges with the chest, without any demarcation of the neck region. The upper portion of the deities' heads is triangular in shape. The eyes are very large and round and the arms are placed in line with the upper lip. The idols are portrayed only till the waist. Some myths state that the idols lack identifiable arms or legs, as they are yet unfinished.

The idol of Jagannath is roughly about six feet tall. The eyes are made up of three concentric circles, with the outermost circle being red, the middle being white and the innermost circle being black in colour. The image of Balabhadra is also about the same height. His face is white and the eyes are oval-shaped. His arms are placed at eye-level. Subhadra's idol is yellow in colour and is about five feet tall. Her eyes are oval in shape. The Sudarshana Chakra is around the same height as that of the male deities and is red in colour.

## The Nila Chakra

The Nila Chakra or the Blue Discus, which is mounted on the topmost Shikhar of the temple is considered to be the most iconic symbol. The flag hoisted on the Nila Chakra is referred to as the Patita Pavana (uplifter of the downtrodden) and is considered equivalent to the deities in the sanctum sanctorum. This also symbolizes the protection offered by Jagannath to his devotees.

## Legends on the Origins of Jagannath

There are several legends regarding the origins of Lord Jagannath. These appear as early as the Skanda Purana, Narada Purana, Brahma Purana, Padma Purana, Kapila Samhita and so on. This indicates that the deity had tribal as well as Brahminical links.

Some legends associate King Indradyumna of the Mahabharata with Jagannath. But the fact remains that Indradyumna is a mythological figure and that there is no real historic evidence of his existence. There are others who believe that Yayati I, a predecessor of Indraratha, built the Jagannath temple at Puri.

Here are some of the popular legends regarding the origins of Jagannath:

### The Traditional Legend of the Nila Madhava

According to the Purushottama Mahatmya of the Skanda Purana, during the Satya Yuga, Indradyumna was the King of the Somavamsa or the Lunar Dynasty. One day, a travelling pilgrim appeared before Indradyumna and described the great Lord Nila Madhava, the Blue-coloured Vishnu, who was worshipped at Nilachal, the Blue Mountain, at Odra (the then Orissa). After narrating the story, the pilgrim suddenly disappeared from sight.

At the king's request, his priest and his younger brother Vidyapati went in search of the Divine One. Vidyapati reached the Savardvipa forest, spreading along the banks of the river, Mahanadi. The Savara King, Visvvasu, welcomed Vidyapati and promised to show him Nila Madhava the next morning. Vidyapati decided to undertake a fast before seeing the Lord. He bathed in Rohini-kunda and sat under the Kalpa tree. Then, Vidyapati saw Nila Madhava being worshipped by the Devas. Vidyapati returned to Avanti, the capital of King Indradyumna.



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**VISHNU**

After listening to what Vidyapati had to relate to him, Indradyumna left for Nila Madhava along with the priest, Vidyapati, and some of his followers. Unfortunately though, Nila Madhava had disappeared on the same day that Vidyapati had returned to Avanti. The Lord had left from there, but to their utter surprise, they found the whole region covered with the

golden sand of the coast. A disappointed Indradyumna was then informed of the message that Brahma gave by way of Narada, that he should perform one thousand Aswamedha Yagnas and only then would he be able to get darshan of the Lord.

The King was further informed that he would not be given darshan of the Lord in the form of Nila Madhava, but as four forms, namely, Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and the Sudarshana Chakra. He was asked to wait near the Chakra Tirtha, till a large, fragrant, red log came floating by. The log would have Vishnu's signs, the Sankha (Conch), Chakra (Discus), Gada (Mace) and Padma (Lotus) all over it. The King was to gather the log and make the four forms out of it. He would then be able to worship the Lord in that form. The Lord himself then took the form of Viswakarma (the Divine Carpenter) and made the idols of wood. After that, Brahma himself installed the holy idols at the ordained hour, on Vaishakha Shukla.

Though this version is the most often heard; it lacks enough historical evidence. For that reason, it is only considered a myth. However, there is a town called Kantilo in Orissa, which houses a shrine dedicated to the worship of a deity named Nila Madhava. But the origin of this temple too, is unclear.

## The Vaishnavite Legend of Jagannath



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**KRISHNA - TRIBAL STYLE**

The Vaishnavite version of Jagannath is slightly different from the traditional version. According to this legend, Krishna appeared before King Indradyumna, and ordered him to carve a diety from the log of wood, which would wash up on the shore at Puri. Once Indradyumna found the said log, he started looking for a craftsman to carve the four idols, as ordained by Krishna.

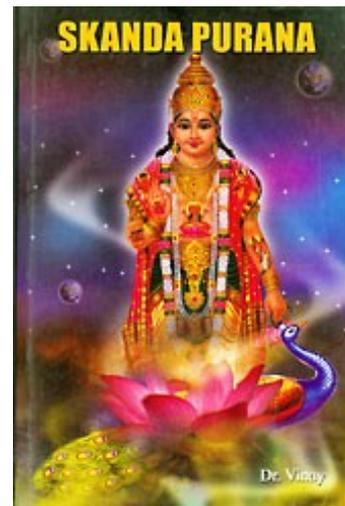
Within the next few days, an old Brahmin carpenter appeared before him and agreed to undertake the work. Actually, this carpenter was the divine craftsman, Visvakarma, in disguise. The mysterious Brahmin demanded to work in solitude, without anyone coming over to disturb him while working on creating the images of the deities. He also insisted that no one should enter the temple complex while he was at work inside.

The carpenter never once came out when he was carrying out the carving work. Everybody started getting anxious and would wait outside the temple doors to hear the carpenter at work. The soundly came to an abrupt halt after a few days. The Queen, being anxious and worried for the carpenter, opened the temple doors, before its time. On entering inside, she found half-finished images of the deities. The carpenter had vanished without a trace. Ever since, the deities have remained in this unfinished state, without arms and legs.

## The Puranic Legend of Jagannath

According to the Skanda Purana, King Indradyumna arrived at the Purushottama Kshetra, after giving up Samsara (material life). Visvvasu and Vidyapati took him to the Neelachal mountain and showed him the Rohini-kunda and the Kalpa tree, where Jagannath's idol had once been installed. It now lay hidden beneath a mound of sand. Narada instructed Indradyumna to build a Jagannath temple at the self-same spot.

There was a tree there that had only four branches on it. Following Narada's instructions, Indradyumna ordered for the tree be uprooted and installed on the mahavedi located inside the temple. Once that was done, Lord Vishnu manifested on the altar as an old carpenter, Vishwakarma. After this point, the legend almost the same as the Vaishnavite version mentioned above.



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SKANDA PURANA

## Buddhist Origins of Jagannath

The origins of the imagery of Jagannath continued to remain a mystery and even came to be considered as a pagan idol among the people of Europe. Even during the advent of the British Raj in India, the Jagannath temple at Puri was given special consideration and treatment, for both economic and political reasons. The temple posed severe restrictions on non-Hindus and banned them from entering the temple complex, due to which even expert archaeologists had not much idea about the origins of the temple.

However, these experts still continued to keep track of the strange rituals taking place at the temple. The annual Kar Seva, where Jagannath and his divine companions were brought out of the temple premises and were carried around in a heavily ornamented chariot, invited the attention of many Western experts. Since the caste rules were suspended during the Kar Seva, many non-Hindus crowded around to witness this great occasion.

Many of these experts mistakenly estimated that the Jagannath cult originated from the Buddha and that the Jagannath triad was actually the Buddhist triad. There was a reason for this misunderstanding. The Buddhist ruler, Indirabhuti's Jnanasiddhi, mentions about the place where Jagannath resides. King Indirabhuti described Jagannath as a Buddhist deity in this narrative, wherein Jagannath was worshipped by the Savaras in one of the Buddha Viharas. Since many anti-Buddhist campaigns started to get underway during King Sasanka's rule, the Buddhist Jagannath was taken away from there. Where the idol was later buried still remains a subject of controversy. According to some versions of the story, Yayati recovered the buried wooden images of Jagannath from the Sonepur district of Orissa and reconstructed them.

Some of the greatest Jainas worshipped Jagannath as the almighty Buddha, who is full of wisdom and is as vast as the sky. The Bajjajanis consider him to be omniscient and most benevolent, granting devotees all that they can ever wish for. Many of the ancient Oriyan poets also described Jagannath as a Baudhabatara or an incarnation of the Buddha. This culture eventually influenced Buddhism in Tibet and Nepal. Even today in Nepal, Buddhadeva is also worshipped as Jagannath.

## Tribal Origins of Jagannath

Many experts believe that the Jagannath cult actually had tribal origins. There are many reasons for this belief:

- The shape of the Jagannath idol is similar to a pillar. The Savaras, the earliest tribal people of Orissa, were essentially tree worshippers. They used to sing and

dance before the Jaganata or the Kitung, which was their God. The Kitungs were always in a triad of two brothers and one sister, Ramma, Bimma and Sitaboi. It was believed that these Gods created the Savara lineage. It is possible that the later generations also adopted the worship of the Jagannath triad, which finally evolved and changed to what it is today.

- The Daitas, again a class of tribal servitors, used to worship Jagannath. They used to oversee several rites and rituals connected with the deity. This trend probably grew in the ensuing years.
- The idols of the Jagannath triad are made of neem wood and are not in human form. Both these aspects are not related to traditional, Brahminical Hindu deities. Besides, there is no caste distinction associated with Jagannath worship. This too, makes it significantly different from Vaishnavism.
- Certain tribal people residing deep within the forest area in Orissa used to worship a Blue Stone as the Nila Madhava. One can draw a parallel to Jagannath worship in this manner as well.

## Tribal Origins of Narasimha

- Some experts even believe that the concept of Jagannath metamorphosed from being an ancient tribal deity to one of the major deities of Hindu mythology. It is believed that the imagery of this tribal God must have evolved through centuries, transforming into the very popular Narasimha (half-man half-lion avatar of Vishnu), also one of the Purushottam forms of Vishnu, during the medieval era. There is archeological evidence to prove the same. During the 8th Century, the Magadh Queen, Vasata, built the famous Lakshman temple (made out of brick) at Shreepur, on the banks of Mahanadi. Shreepur was then the capital of the kingdom of Dakshin Kosala. The temple plaque first offers salutation to Purushottam, also referred to as Narasimha. This indicates the ughra (intense) nature of Vishnu, who finally also evolved as Jagannath, who was revered as Purushottam, till Narasimha became popular from the end of the 13th Century.



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**NARASIMHA**

- In one of the villages of the Anantpur district at Andhra Pradesh, Narasimha is worshipped as a pillar, probably describing the Hiranyakashipu episode wherein Narasimha jumps out of a pillar and attacks the cruel demon-king. The pillar in question is attached to a sheet, which is shaped in the form of a lion's head. Since Narasimha is a fierce deity, his eyes are large and round, expressing his krodh (anger). The Jagannath image can be associated with Narasimha, as his eyes too are big and round and the jawline is given more prominence than that rest of the face. Also, the figure of Jagannath is non-human.



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**NECKLACE WITH JAGANNATH PENDANT  
SHOWING FACE WITH LARGE EYES**

## **Jagannath's Evolution as Being Part of a Triad**

The original Neela Madhava had been worshipped as a single deity and not as a triad. So how and when did Jagannath emerge as part of a triad?

During the era of Emperor Kharavela, there was only a single deity, Kalinga Jina, who was worshipped as the Supreme. Even the Vaishnavite legend of Indradyumna does not mention Jagannath as part of a triad. Hence, one can probably assume that the triad emerged as the result of the later Vaishnavite tradition of Krishna, Balarama and Subhadra. Interestingly, the Shaivite triad of Shiva as Samkarsana Balarama, Krishna and Ekanamsa also emerged around this time. There is also a Buddhist triad or the Buddhist Triratna of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

The Sudarshana Chakra, it is believed, was also a later addition, in order to give more validation to Jagannath as an aspect of Krishna consciousness.

## **The Implications of the Jagannath Triad on Other Sects**

- In the Jagannath temple at Puri, the Lord is worshipped as Purushottam or Vishnu. Here, Balabhadra is considered as Lord Shiva and Devi Subhadra, as the Adyashakti Durga. The Sudarshana Chakra, also one of the major deities in the temple, embodies the wheel of the Sun's Chariot, which attracts the Sauras to the cult. The "Four Fold Form" or the "Chaturdha Murty" signifies the unified power of all these four deities.
- According to some scholars, the Jagannath triad represent the Jain Trinity of Samyak Jnana, Samyak Charita and Samyak Drusti. It is also believed that the soul of Jagannath, which lies hidden inside the idol, is the Tooth Relic of Lord Buddha. It is worth noting here, that Buddhist Tantra philosophy, which has now become a part of Buddhism, has cast its influence on Jagannath worship and rituals. Interestingly, the Buddhist chant the mantra, "Om Namoh Jagannath Buddhaya". They claim that the Jagannath Rath-Yatra is very similar to the Rath-Yatra of the Buddha. Just like the Ananda Bazar of the Jagannath cult, Buddhists too do not believe in casteism.
- According to Saivas, Jagannath is identified as Lord Mahabhairav. Jagannath sits on the Sri Yantra and has the Vijamantra of "Klim", which is also the Vijamantra of Kali or Shakti. Shaivas believe that the original shape of Jagannath was in the form of a Linga. Hence, one can see a clear connection between Jagannath and the Saiva and Shakta cults as well. Here, Balarama is worshipped as the Seshanaga or Samkarshana. He is also referred to as Shiva or Ananta Vasudev. Devi Subhadra embodies the Shakti element and is worshipped with the Bhuvaneshwari mantra. According to the Shakta tradition, Subhadra is the Goddess Vimala.
- According to Jainism, "Jagannath" was derived from the name "Jinanath", which is that name for their Lord. For Jains, the black colour of Jagannath signifies Shunyata (nothingness), Subhadra symbolizes energy and the white colour of Balabhadra represents the phenomenal universe. The Sudarshana Chakra is compared to the Dharma Chakra of the Jains.

## **The Legend of the Kanchi Conquest**

The Kanchi Ajivana (or Conquest of Kanchi), also termed as Kanchi-Kaveri, is one of the most popular legends associated with Jagannath. According to this legend, the daughter of the King of Kanchi was betrothed to the Gajapati of Puri. When the Kanchi King saw the Gajapati sweeping the area where the chariots of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra were maintained during the Rath-Yatra, he considered that as a deed unworthy of a King and hence, cancelled the wedding of his daughter to the Gajapati. Deeply insulted at this, Gajapati Purushottam Deva attacked the Kingdom of Kanchi, but was defeated in the battle.

The Gajapati returned home and prayed to Jagannath, the deity of land of Kalinga. Moved by his prayer, Jagannath and Balabhadra, left the temple and started to Kanchi on horseback. Jagannath was on a white horse and Balabhadra on a black horse. In the Oriyan culture, this legend is so deep-rooted, that just the mention of the white horse and black horse brings the imagery of Kanchi conquest of the Lord.



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#### JAGANNATH, BALARAM AND MANIKA THE MILKMAID

A war ensued between the Jagannath-led power of Orissa and that of the Ganesh-led army of Kanchi. The former won the war and the Gajapati brought the princess to Puri. Some experts opine that the Gajapati also brought images of Uchista Ganesh (Bhanda Ganesh or Kamada Ganesh) and enshrined at the Jagannath Temple.

Though there is no clear historical evidence of this legend, it still forms an important aspect of Oriyan culture. At present, there is a prominent relief in the Jagamohana (prayer hall) of the Jagannath temple that depicts this scene. The Kanchi Abhijan is also a major motif in Odissi dance.

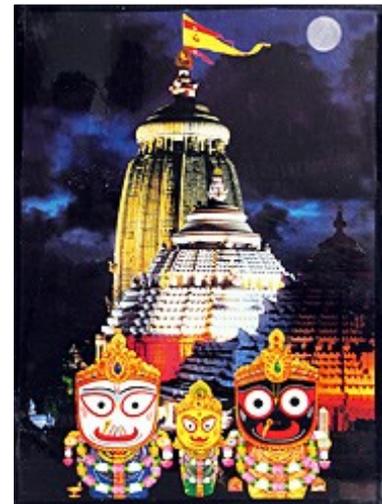
## The Jagannath Temple at Puri

The Jagannath Temple at Puri, known as Shri Mandira to devotees, is one of the most famous Hindu temples in India. It is regarded as one of the Char Dham or sacred Hindu pilgrimage places in India.

It is built in the Kalinga style of architecture, with the Pancharatha (Five Chariots) type consisting of two anurathas, two konakas and one ratha. The Jagannath temple has a pancharatha type of structure. "Gajasimhas" or "Elephant Lions" are carved in recesses of the pagas; the "Jhampasimhas" or "Jumping Lions" are also placed in their appropriate locations. This is the best example of a perfect Pancharatha temple developed into a Nagara-rekha temple with unique Orissan style of subdivisions like the Pada, Kumbha, Pata, Kani and Vasanta.

The Jagannath temple is made up of four distinct structures, namely:

1. The Vimana or the Deula, which is the sanctum sanctorum. This is where the triad deities are installed on the Ratnavedi
2. The Mukhashala or the frontal porch
3. The Jagamohana, also called the Nata Mandira or Natamandapa, which is the Audience Hall or the Dancing Hall
4. The Bhoga Mandapa or the Offerings Hall



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#### JAGANNATH TEMPLE AT PURI

The temple's historical records (Madala Panji) maintain that the temple was originally built by King Yayati, on the site of the present shrine. However, historians believe that the Deula and the Mukhashala were built in the 12th century A.D. by King Anangabheemadeva and that the Natamandapa and Bhogamandapa were constructed by Gajapati Purushottama Deva and Prataprudra Deva respectively. Further, according to Madala Panji, the outer prakara was built by Gajapati Kapilendradeva and the inner prakara, referred to as the Kurma Bedha (Tortoise encompassment) was built by Purushottama Deva.

The Jagannath Temple is built on an elevated platform and is higher as compared to the Lingaraj and other temples belonging to this category. The above-mentioned four structures were built along with the main temple. There are also other smaller shrines on the three outer sides of the main temple. The Deula consists of a tall shikhara or dome, and it houses the garbhagriha or the sanctum sanctorum. A pillar made of fossilized wood is used for placing lamps as offering.

The Singhadwara or Lion Gate is the main gate to the temple and is guarded by the two deities, Jaya and Vijaya. The Aruna Stambha, a 16-sided, 11-meter high granite monolithic columnar pillar, bears Aruna, the Charioteer of Surya, facing the Lion Gate. This column was brought to this temple from the Sun temple of Konark.

Housed within the main compound of Jagannath Temple at Puri, are over one hundred shrines of lesser importance. These mini shrines are dedicated to the demigods in charge of universal affairs. In the midst of these lesser shrines is the main temple, called the Bada Deula (The Big or principal Temple), in which the predominating deity Jagannath appears.

Non-Hindus are strictly forbidden from gaining entry into the Jagannath temple at Puri.

There are many other temples of Jagannath, situated all over India. Most famous among them are the temple at Hauz Khas at New Delhi and the one at Ahmedabad. There is also a lesser-known, though ancient temple, in Kurseong at Darjeeling. This temple is more than 300 years old.

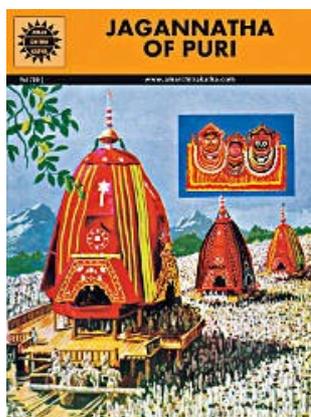
Outside India, an ancient Jagannath idol can be found in the Besakih temple in eastern Bali, Indonesia.

## **Festivals Celebrated at the Jagannath Temple**

Several traditional festivals are observed at the Jagannath Temple at Puri. The most important festivals are as follows:

1. The Rath Yatra, which is the most significant
2. Niladri Mahodaya
3. Snana Yatra or Sri Gundicha
4. Sri Hari Sayan
5. Uttapan Yatra
6. Parswa Paribartan
7. Dakhinayan Yatra
8. Prarbana Yatra
9. Pusyavishek
10. Uttarayan
11. Basantika Dola Yatra
12. Damanak Chaturdasi

## The Rath Yatra at the Puri Jagannath Temple



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**RATH YATRA AT PURI TEMPLE  
JAGANNATH OF PURI  
(COMIC BOOK)**

Annually, during the month of Asadha (around June/July), the Jagannath triad, which is normally housed only inside the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, is brought out onto the Bada Danda or the main high street of Puri. The deities travel 3kms to the Shri Gundicha Temple, in huge Raths (chariots), thereby allowing the public to have their Darshan. This festival, known as the Rath Yatra, is the most famous in Orissa. The Raths are huge wooden structures with great big wheels, which are built anew every year. The heavy Raths are pulled by the devotees for the entire distance.

The chariot for Jagannath is about 45 feet high and 35 feet square and takes about 2 months to construct. The artisans of Puri assemble to decorate the cars and paint elaborate designs on them. This Rath Yatra is also termed as the Shri Gundicha Yatra.

The most important aspect of the Rath Yatra is the chhera pahara. In this ritual, the Gajapati King wears the costume of a sweeper and sweeps all around the deities and chariots. He cleanses the road with a gold-handled broom and sprinkles sandalwood water and powder all along the route the Rath is scheduled to take. This ritual indicates that all are of equal status in front of the Lord and are humble servants of his.

The ritual of Chera pahara is held on two days. On the first day of the Rath Yatra, the deities are taken to the garden house at the Mausī Maa Temple. On the final day, the deities are ceremoniously brought back to the Shri Mandir. During the Rath Yatra, the three deities are housed for seven days at the Gundicha Temple.

There is another interesting ritual that takes place during the Rath Yatra. When the deities are taken out from the Shri Mandir to the Chariots in Pahandi Vijay, devotees are allowed to offer derogatory remarks and slaps to the images - Lord Jagannath is treated like a commoner in this ritual.

The ritual of the Rath Yatra has been mentioned right from the time of the Puranas. Several ancient Puranas talk about this elaborate ritual in great detail. While the original Rath Yatra at Puri is a sight one cannot afford to miss, there are similar processions organised all over the world, at the same time that this festival takes place in Orissa.

## A Word about Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

Here, we would like to introduce to you an influential figure of Vaishnavism, who is also closely associated with the Jagannath Temple. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a Vaishnava saint and social reformer, who came from eastern India. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who was also referred to as Krishna Chaitanya, was a notable proponent for the Vaishnava school of Bhakti yoga, based on the philosophy of the Bhagavata Purana and Bhagavad Gita.



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**CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU AND GAURANGA SING PRAISES  
OF RADHA AND KRISHNA**

Krishna Chaitanya especially worshipped the forms of Radha and Krishna and popularised the chanting of the Hare Krishna maha mantra, which is most prevalent at ISKCON centers, all over the world. A renowned scholar and composer, he also composed the Siksastakam in Sanskrit. His line of followers, known as Gaudiya Vaishnavas, revere him as an actual avatar of Krishna in the mood of Radharani, who incidentally, was prophesied to appear in the later verses of the Bhagavata Purana.

Owing to his light skin complexion, Krishna Chaitanya was also referred to as Gaura. Since he was born under a neem tree, he was also called Nimai. Out of all the biographies available, giving details on Chaitanya's life, the most prominent ones are the Chaitanya Bhagavata of Vrindavana Dasa and the later Chaitanya Charitamrita of Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami. Both these were originally written in Bangla, but now they are available in English and other languages. One other work portraying Chaitanya's life and times, is the Chaitanya Mangala written by Lochana Dasa.

## **Sri Chaitanya's Birth and Life**

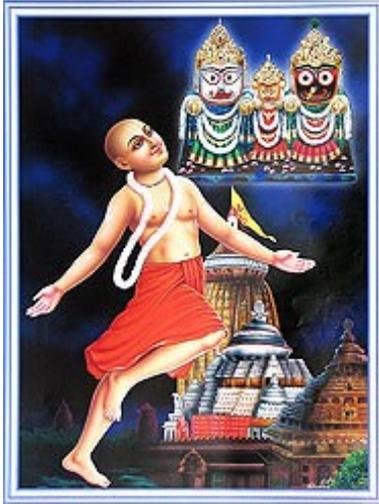
According to the Chaitanya Charitamrita, Nimai was born on the full moon night of February 18, 1486, at the time of a lunar eclipse. His parents named him Vishwambhar. Sri Chaitanya was the second son of Jagannath Mishra and his wife Sachi Devi who lived in the town of Nabadwip in Nadia, West Bengal. Chaitanya's ancestry is still a mystery, as he had family roots both in Jajpur and Orissa. His grandfather, Madhukar Mishra had later emigrated to Bengal.

During his youth, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was primarily known as a scholar, whose learning and skills in debating were unparalleled. From a very tender age, Chaitanya was always chanting and singing the name of Krishna. However, this was perceived as being secondary to his interest in acquiring knowledge and studying Sanskrit.

While traveling to Gaya to perform the shraddha (annual death ceremony) of his departed father, Chaitanya met his Guru, the ascetic Ishvara Puri. The Guru initiated him to chant the Gopala Krishna mantra. This meeting was the turning point in Mahaprabhu's life. Upon his return to Bengal the local Vaishnavas, headed by Advaita Acharya, were stunned at his sudden change, from scholar to devotee. Very soon, Chaitanya became the leader of their Vaishnava group within Nadia.

Chaitanya took up sanyasa, in accordance of Keshava Bharati's order. He then journeyed for several years, covering the length and breadth of India, constantly chanting the divine names of Krishna.

He spent the last 24 years of his life in Puri, Orissa, dearly worshipping the Jagannath idol in the Puri temple. The Suryavanshi Hindu emperor of Orissa, Gajapati Maharaja Prataparudra Dev, was an enthusiastic patron of Chaitanya's sankeertan party. It was during these years that Lord Chaitanya is believed to have attained various samadhi states, through his utter Bhakti and love for the Lord. He is also believed to have performed several lilas (miracles) during this period.



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**CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU AS A  
DEVOTEE OF JAGANNATH**

According to his followers, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu united in himself two aspects of divinity - as the ecstatic devotee of Krishna and Krishna himself in inseparable union with Radha. On many occasions, he is also believed to have exhibited his Universal Form, which was identical to that of Krishna. This form, he has revealed mostly to Advaita Acharya and Nityananda Prabhu.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is believed by many to have been merged into the idol of Jagannath in the Puri temple, thus uniting his soul with his deity.

## Teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

In his Siksastakam or "eight verses of instruction", Chaitanya talks about the Das Mula or the ten root maxims of leading life. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Krishna is the Supreme Absolute Truth.
2. Krishna is endowed with all energies.
3. Krishna is an ocean of rasa or theology.
4. The jivas or individual souls are all separated parts of the Lord.
5. The jivas, in the material state, are under the influence of matter, due to their tatastha nature.
6. In the liberated state, the jivas are free from the influence of matter.
7. The jivas and the material world are both different from and identical to the Lord.
8. Pure devotion is the practice of the jivas.
9. The ultimate goal is pure love for Krishna.
10. Krishna is the only lovable blessing to be received.

## Krishna Chaitanya's Cultural Heritage

Though Chaitanya had been initiated into the Madhvacharya sect and took sannyasa in accordance with the Shankara tradition, Chaitanya went on to develop his own philosophy and tradition, in spite of being in the Vaishnava framework. Both his Gurus, Isvara Puri and Kesava Bharathi, came from the Sankarite order of Advaita. Hence, one can see some marked differences in the theology and practice of his followers, as compared with those of the Madhavacharya sect.

Chaitanya's Sistastakam, which were recorded by one of his close colleagues, are considered to contain the complete philosophy of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in condensed form. Chaitanya requested a select few among his followers (who later came to be known as the Six Gosvamis of Vrindavan) to present the theology of bhakti he had taught to them. These six saints, who were responsible for systematizing the Gaudiya Vaishnava theology, were Rupa Goswami, Sanatana Goswami, Gopala Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha dasa Goswami and Jiva Goswami.

Later, Narottama Dasa Thakur, Srinivasa Acarya and Syamananda Pandit, who trained under Jiva Goswami, were among the stalwarts of the second generation of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. They spread the teachings of the Goswamis throughout Bengal, Orissa and other regions of Eastern India.

Through festivals such as Kheturi, the leaders of the various branches of Chaitanya's followers assembled together and exchanged notes about their particular traditions and theologies. They then started family lineages to further spread the teachings of Chaitanya among the masses.

From the very beginning of Chaitanya's bhakti movement in Bengal, both Hindus and Muslims were allowed to participate. This openness received a boost from Bhaktivinoda Thakura in the late 19th century and was institutionalized by Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati in his Gaudiya Matha in the 20th Century.

Further, in the 20th Century, the teachings were taken to the West by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, a representative of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura branch of Chaitanya's tradition. Bhaktivedanta Swami founded his movement known as the "ISKCON" or "The International Society for Krishna Consciousness" to spread Chaitanya's teachings throughout the world.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is much revered by Saraswat Gurus and Acharyas, members of the Goswami lineages and several other Hindu sects. His followers span major Vaishnava holy places, such as West Bengal, Orissa and Mathura. The movement has also established several temples dedicated both to Krishna and Chaitanya outside India. What is more, the concept of Vaishnava Bhakti is now being studied academically, as a subject termed as Krishnology, in many academic institutions internationally.



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**SWAMI PRABHUPADA SAMADHI MANDIR**

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