

# Nabakalebara Ceremony of Lord Jagannatha and the Hindu Doctrine of Rebirth: An Analysis

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**KEYWORDS:** Jagannath. Nabakalebara. Chaturdhamurty. Vanayaga. Nrusimha. Brahma.

**ABSTRACT:** Lord Jagannatha is a revered deity of the Vedic Hindu religion and faith in India. He is widely acclaimed as the Lord of the universe. Jagannath is worshiped with Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sri Sudarshan (weapon of Lord Jagannath) in the grand ancient temple of Jagannatha in Puri, Odisha, India. The four deities altogether are known as the Chaturdhamurty which are the centre of the Hindu religious worship in the Jagannatha Temple in Puri. This is an age-old religious institution of Vaishnavism where Lord Jagannatha is worshiped as Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna. All Hindus across the world visit the Jagannatha temple at Puri which is one of the Dharmas or Hindu Pilgrimage Centre in India apart from Dwarka in the West, Badrinath in the North and Rameswaram in the South. The worship of the sibling deities is unique and rare in the Hindu religious tradition in India. It is believed that, Lord Jagannatha as Daru-Brahma (i.e., Wooden idol having indwelling Brahma or Supreme Soul) is exhibiting His inimitable leela in the humanized divine form. The Nabakalebara, or Re-Embodiment Ceremony of the four deities such as Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sri Sudarshan is performed exclusively in the Jagannatha temple in Puri, Odisha which is not found elsewhere in any other Hindu temple in India and abroad. The Nabakalebara of Lord Jagannatha is analogous to the Hindu Doctrine of Rebirth. This article narrates about Nabakalebara Ceremony of the Chaturdhamurty and its distinct features in detail.

## INTRODUCTION

Lord Jagannatha is a primordial deity of the Vedic Sanatana Dharma in India. The name Jagannatha itself signifies that He is the Lord of the universe (Jagat Nath). Etymologically, “Jagannatha” means “Master, or Lord” (nâth) of the “World or Universe” (Jagat). The word “Jagannâtha” is “Jagat-gam” (to go), means (whatsoever is moving”) and “Nâtha” mean “the Lord, who gives shelter or refuge”. Though, Lord Jagannatha is broadly accepted by the different sects and religions, He is mostly worshiped by the Vaishnavas especially in the East Indian states like Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, Manipur and Tagore National Fellow, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India

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Tripura etc. The inferences drawn from many Hindu scriptures articulate that Lord Jagannath symbolizes the Lord Vishnu and the Lord Krishna and is worshiped in the grand temple at Puri, known as the sacred abode of Lord Jagannatha. Jagannatha is considered as the Supreme Divinity, the very essence of the entire creation whom even gods pay obeisance. He is not a mere incarnation but is the creator of the incarnations. Jaydev very succinctly presents this latter concept in the Dasavatara song *dasakirtitubhyamnamah*, O Krishna, creator of the ten incarnations, I offer my salutations to you (Pani, 2017).

The presiding deities of Srimandira, Shri  
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Jagannatha, ShriBalabadra, Devi Subhadra are known as the Trimurty (Triad). The triad together with the God Sudarshan (a weapon of Lord Vishnu) is called Chaturdhamurty. The Ratna Simhasan (Jeweled Platform) in the inner sanctum sanctorum is adorned by Chaturdhamurti along with three other small images - Bhudevi (Biswadhatri) and Shri Devi (Laxmi). The golden image of Sridevi and the silver image of Bhudevi appear on the left and right side of Lord Jagannatha respectively. Neelamadhaba is also placed on the left side. Except Shridevi and Bhudevi, the Chaturdhamurti and Neelamadhaba are wooden images. All these seven images together are called Saptamurti (seven deities) or the SaptadhaVigraha (Mahapatra, 2018). This paramount deity is seated on the RatnaSimhasan in the innermost part of the temple (Pattanaik, 2006). The physical images are unique in India, because they are made partly of wood and because they have a peculiar iconography not found outside Orissa (Hardenberg, 2001). This Jagannatha had developed into Sankhya (Yoga) Purusottama or the highest or the best Purusha, became in course of time, images of Neem wood worshiped as Vishnu at Puri (Das, 2008).

The holy land of Puri is one of the four Dharmas (Hindu Pilgrimage) in India apart from Badrinath-Dham in the North, Rameswaram in the South and Dwaraka in the West. So Puri remains a center of attraction for the saints, scholars, devotees and visitors across the world since ancient times. This national reverence for holy places has been for ages concentrated on the city of Puri, sacred to Vishnu under his title of Jagannatha, the Lord of the world (Hunter, 1872). There are a number of references to Puri as a place of pilgrimage in the Puranas such as Anargharaghava Nataka, a ninth century play by Murari Mishra, mentions the god Purusottama (later identified with Jagannath), on the eastern seashore. An inscription of Saradadevi temple at Mahihar in Madhya Pradesh (tenth century) also identifies the deity Purusottama with the Odra (Orissa) country i.e the area around Puri (Mubayi 2005). According to the Madalapanji (Chronicle of Jagannatha Temple, the first king of Keshari dynasty, YajatiKeshari rescued the idols from Sonapur where the sacred idols were buried since, 144 years and the king Yajati a built a temple of thirty eight cubc height and installed Parameswar Lord Jagannatha (Behera and Parida, 2009).

Lord Jagannatha is known as “the Lokayata Brahma” (God of the people) and His Dharma (religion) is Gana Dharma (religion of mass) disseminates the ethics of “Vasudheiva Kutumbakam” (one world one family) embodying the principles of equality, interreligious faith, tolerance, equanimity and harmonious co-existence of all. The Encyclopaedia Americana (1829) states that “the worship of Jagannatha as God of the people aim at catholicity with every form of Indian devotion and at the incorporation therein of every Indian concept of God”. Lord Jagannatha is worshiped by the people of all castes and classes without any difference and distinction. The most distinctiveness of the Jagannatha Culture include an unbroken tradition of ritualistic worship continuing since last 900 years by the ChhatisaNijoga (thirty-six genres) including 120 categories of the temple servitors, Mahaprasad, Chhapan Bhog (fifty-six varieties of food offerings to Lord Jagannatha) everyday in the temple. After all, Lord Jagannatha has taken the center stage of the global pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses and is presently worshiped in and around 3000 Hindu Temples across the world. The world-famous Rath Yatra or the Chariot Festival is one of the most widely celebrated festivals all over the world which signifies transnational significance of the Jagannatha Consciousness.

#### NABAKALEBARA: THE RE-EMBODIMENT OF THE CHATURDHAMURTY

Every living being who takes birth on this earth encounters death. The Hindus believe that the physical body is mortal whereas the atman (soul) within the body is immortal. During death the indwelling soul transmigrates leaving apart old body and enters into physical realm through a new body. Lord Krishna said in the Bhagbat Geeta that “*Jatasya hi dhrubo murtyu dhruba mjanm amrutasya*” which means that the death is due to birth and birth is due to death which denotes rebirth is inevitable. Further in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Bhagawat Geeta, Lord Krishna explained Arjun that “*Vasamsi Jirnani Yatha Vihaya Navani Grhnati Naro ‘Parani, Tatha Sarirani Vihaya Jirnany Anyani Samyati Navani Dehi*” which means as a man worn out old garments and put on new one, in the same analogy the individual soul accept new body

giving up the old one. The transference of the soul from one body to another is continuous and inevitable. In the same principle, the wooden icon of Jagannath, the supreme Lord of the universe undergoes renewal of his body like a common living being in every 11-19 years during Nabakalebara Ritual, which is fashioned strictly according to the prescriptions laid down in the ancient texts, out of the logs of Nimba trees brought from the forest (Tripathi, 2004). Through this ritual, the Lord gives message to the world that everything is mortal in this world except the soul which embodies the God. Sri Krishna addressed to Arjun in the Bhagwat Geeta that “*Since I am beyond the perishable world of the matter or khara, I am superior even to the imperishable soul; hence I am known as the Purusottama in the world and in the Vedas*”. The bodies of all beings are perishable while the Jivatma (embodied soul) is imperishable. The supreme person who controls and upholds the three worlds is imperishable and absolute. Some scholars assume that Lord Jagannath is the God of Gods. He is Maha Vishnu, who is Avatari i.e. the source of all Avatars (incarnations) who ever exists since the origin of the universe. The Hindu mythologies depict that Lord Jagannatha is worshiped as Purusottama in the Purusottama Kshetra Puri in Odisha since time immemorial. The Vedic Purusha is one and non-dual. It is therefore not likely that, Purusottama of Puri could be originally manifested in a fourfold form. Further the Purusottama or the Brahman is described as “*Strina Pumanna Sandah*” neither feminine nor masculine nor even neuter. It has transcended the jiva-dharma by transcending the genders (Rath, 2019).

The Nabakalebara Ceremony of Lord Jagannatha is a unique, grand and complex ritual of Puri Temple in Odisha. There is no such other temple or Hindu shrine elsewhere in India or the world where such kind of ceremony is observed. The word Nabakalebara is a unification of two Odia words ‘Naba’ (new) and ‘Kalebara’ (body), i.e. new embodiment. The presiding Chaturdha Murties made of Neem wood surprisingly go for periodic renewal through a ceremony called Nabakalebara. The shrine is esteemed highly sacred as being generally believed to be the Martya Vaikutha (the divine abode on earth) where all Puranic rituals and ceremonies of Lord Vishnu exclusively in the name of the Supreme incarnate Sri Krishna are being

performed in strict conformity with Hindu scriptures ever since its consecration by Maharaja Indradyumna (Mishra, 2005). The ceremony solemnizes when the deities of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan assume new bodies after relinquishing the old ones. However, the Brahma-Padartha (indwelling divine substance) of Sribigrahas of Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sudarshan are kept intact while transferring it to the new bodies from old ones known as Ghata Paribartan (transference of Brahma) which is parallel to the human life cycle. Thus, the essence of Hindu Doctrine of Rebirth is distinctly reflected in the Nabakalebara Ceremony.

The Nabakalebara or renewal of the body of the Divine vigrahas in Sri Kshetra is known as Brahmotsava. It precedes the famous Rath Jatra or Chariot Festival. Since the idols are made of wood, there is a need to change of the wooden frame prior to the inner decay and distortion (Padhee 2015). But, unlike the Car Festival of Lord Jagannatha which is celebrated every year, the Nabakalebara Ceremony is a much larger version of the car festival takes place periodically when the old wooden images are replaced by new wooden images, the old deities die and new ones are born (Marglin, 92). The Nabakalebara Ceremony is observed in the year when intercalary month of Asadha falls in every 8<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> year interval i.e. during the year having two Ashadhas as per Hindu calendar (Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathy 1978). As per the Jagannatha temple tradition, when a leap month of Asadha falls, it becomes convenient to perform Nabakalebara Ceremony. The Indradyumna, the king of Avanti installed the image in this month and since then Asadha is taken to be the month for this purpose (Mishra 2008). The extra month of Asadha known as Mala Masa or Purusottama Masa or Adhimasa which is considered highly auspicious for conducting the Nabakalebara Ceremony. The ceremony starts on the tenth day of bright full moon day of Odia month of Chaitra (March-April) and continues till the end of the Nabakalebara Rath Yatra which falls on 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of Odia month of Asadha (June-July) which continues nearly four months.

#### VANAYAGA YATRA: A HOLY EXPEDITION

The Nabakalebara Ceremony starts on the auspicious day of the *Chaitra Sukla Dasami*, a day

after Ram Navami when the Gajapati (king of Puri) the first servitor of Lord Jagannatha perform the *Gua-Teka* Ritual (handing over arcnut and coconut to Rajguru, the royal priest) which marks the commencement of the *Vanayaga Yatra*. On the very day, after the *Madhyanha Dhoopa* (afternoon oblation) of the deities, *Pati-Mahapatra* and three *Badagrahi* (chief) *daitas* offer their prayers to the *Chaturdhamurti* on the *Ratnavedi* and *Pati-Mahapatra* offers three *Ajnamalas* of Lord Balabhadra, Lord Jagannatha and Devi Subhadra to the three *Badagrahidaitas* keeping the *Ajnamala* of Sri Sudarshan with him as he serves as the *Badagrahi* of Sudarshan deity. The '*Ajnamala*' serves as the divine directive for the servitors to go in search of sacred neem tree from which the new bodies of deities are made. Aritual called *Sadhi-Bandha Ceremony* i.e tying of the *Geeta Govinda Khandua* silk cloth over the heads of the temple servitors or the Search Party like *Pati-Mahapatra*, *Badagrahidaitas*, *Deulakarana*, *Tadhau-karana*, *Lenka* and *Viswakarma* is done by *Bhitarcha Mahapatra* who is also a temple servitor at the *Kalahata Dwara* in the main temple. Some lines of *Geeta Govinda* are woven on the *Khandua* silk which serves as the protector of the search party going in search of sacred Neem tree during the *Vanayaga Journey* in the forest. It is believed that, Lord Jagannatha is fond of *Geeta Govinda* which is recited everyday in Puri Temple as a ritual service. After accomplishment of *Sadhi-Bandha Ceremony* in the temple the *Badagrahi Daitas* (chief servitor) along with other servitors move to the king's palace where the servitors like *Vidyapati* and *Viswavaasua* are offered arcnut and coconut by the *Rajguru* (royal priest) and then move to a monastery in Puri called *Jagannatha Ballav Matha* where the search party spend one night and start initial preparation for *Vanayaga Journey*. The servitors then move towards *Deuli Mathabare foot* where a *majana* (sacred ritual bath) of the Goddess *Mangala* which takes place in the temple of *Kakatpurto* appease the goddess in order to obtain dream indication about the right direction of the sacred neem tree.

The '*Vanayaga*' combines two words i.e '*Vana*' means forest and '*Yaga*' means *Yajna*'. So, '*Vanayaga*' means '*Yajna*' performed in the forest where the sacred neem tree is identified. During the

*Vanayaga Yatra*, the '*daitas*' servitors undergo abstemious journey and observe strict code of conduct and all kinds of sanctity to purify body and mind. They walk barefoot, eat *habisarnna* (eat vegetarian food once a day), sleep on thatched bed floor and live in temporary shelter made of leaves and bamboo called *savarpalli*. As per the tradition, once the servitors leave their home for this sacred journey, they do not return under any circumstances until sacred neem trees reach the Puri Temple. If anyone breaks the tradition, he is not further allowed to take part in this journey.

The prescribed features for identification of the sacred Neem Trees from which the *Chaturdhamurty* (four idols) are reconstructed are as follows.

- Tree must be very old having minimum four undamaged branches.
- Trunk of the tree straight up to a height of 7-12 cubits and branched not less than 12 feet from the ground.
- Tree should have the symbols of sankha, chakra, gada and padma.
- Tree should be located near a cremation ground.
- Tree should be located near a water source i.e river or a pond.
- Tree must be located near three stones or three hills or trijunction crossing.
- Tree must be located near a Shiva temple or a hermitage.
- Tree must be free from parasite plants or creepers.
- Tree must not have any birds' nests on it.
- Tree must be located near a *valmik* or a termite mound.
- Tree should not have been struck/damaged by lightning or natural calamity.
- There should be a snake hole symbolizing the presence of snake nearby.
- Tree should be surrounded by other trees like *varuna*, *bilwa*, *sahada*, etc.

- Tree must be away from human settlement.

#### RITUALS NEAR THE SACRED MARGOSA (NEEM) TREE

After the Neem tree or Daru Briksha is identified, the Acharya and the Brahmin Priests perform Vedic rituals like *Bhoomisudhi*, *Vanayaga Homa* (fire sacrifice), *Ankuraropana* and consecration of *Daru Sagadi* etc. While performing Fire Sacrifices the Brahmins recite Patala-Nrusingha Mantra. e “*Om Ugram Viram Maha Visnum Jwalantam Sarvatomukham Nrusimham Bhisnam Bhadram Mrtyu Mrtyu Namamyaham*” (*Nrusimhatapini Upanishad*). It defines that ‘*May my head be protected by the moon coloured one, who is the greatest among humans; my obeisance unto the ferocious and powerful, the great Vishnu, the fiery one, whose faces are on all sides, the fearful one, Nrusimha, who causes the death of even death personified, or who can overcome death.*’ *Skanda Purana* describes that during *Pratistha Yajna* of first daru in Sri Jagannath Temple, *Sri Nrusimha* being pleased with the worship of King *Indradyumna* appeared as ‘*Yajña-Nrusimha*’ According to Hindu mythology, the rituals conducted during the Nabakalebara are the symbolic representation of ‘*Ashwamedha -Yajña*’ which centers round Lord Nrusimha symbolizing Lord Jagannath. The Poornahuti (final oblation to the Yajna) is accomplished on the second of *Maha Yajña* (fire sacrifice) by the Acharya and Brahmin priests. Then the *Acharya, Pati Mahapatra, Viswvasu and Daitas* circumscribe the *Yajña Mandap* seven times and offer pusanjali (flower tribute) to the *Yajña-Devata*. All members of the *Vanayaga Party* and the *Yajña Jala* (sanctified water) is sprinkled on the *Daru-Briksha* offering prayer to Lord Vishnu to drive away the evil spirits, if any. The cutting of the sacred neem trees starts after touching the gold, silver and iron axes to the sacred neem tree by the Vidyapati, Viswvasu and Viswakarma respectively. The tree when finally fell down on the ground, the trunk of the tree is made *Chaupata* (quadrangle shape) for making the idols and remainder got the tree like the branches leaves and root etc. are made *Patali* (burial) which are restricted for other uses. The *Daru-Sagadis* are spokeless carts especially made

for transporting the sacred darus of Sri Sudarshana, Sri Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sri Jagannatha to the Puri Temple from the ritual places. After construction *Daru-Sagadis* are consecrated by the *Brahmins*. Then the *Darus* are lifted on the *Sagadis* and the *Geeta Govinda Khandua silkis* wrapped and tied with ‘*Patta-Basunga*’ (silken rope). The auspicious journey of *Daru-Sagadi* starts from the ritual place and are drawn by thousands of devotees towards Sri Mandira Puri which takes around three to four days. After, the *darusagadi* reached Sri Mandira, Puri the sacred darus are kept inside the Koili Vaikunth where *Antar-Vanyaga* starts by constructing eight mandapas (elevated platform) such as *Yajnasala, Nrusimha Mandap, Snana Mandap, and Adhibas Mandap*. Here the *Yajna* continues for 11 days along with the construction of the deities of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra Devi Subhadra and Sri Sudarshan. The *Viswakarma Servitors* (carpenters) while sculpting the *Sri Bigraha* use conventional measures according to his *Paba* (size of finger). On the 11<sup>th</sup> day the construction of idols is completed and then the *poornahuti* of *Yajna* is made by the *Gajapati King* of Puri.

#### GHATA PARIBARTAN: TRANSFERENCE OF THE SUPREME SOUL (BRAHMA)

According to the Vedic Hindu Philosophy, this world is a manifestation of the Brahman or the supreme spirit which is eternal, ever-existing and spiritual essence of the universe. Though, the Brahman is devoid of any form or any quality yet it can take any form or collation of many forms. When it appears in certain physical form such as Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva, or Shakti etc. it is accepted as God. Lord Jagannatha is the Purna Brahma, the absolute. According to *Adi Sankaracharya*, Sri Jagannatha is the centre of “*Adweitabad*” (non-duality) which reflects that *Atma* (individual Soul) and *Paramatma* (Supreme Soul) are one and inseparable. Whereas the *Daityabadi* (dualists) believe that, Brahman, the life force of divinity is separate from *jiva* (individual soul). Lord Jagannatha is the supreme manifestation of ‘*Brahma-Swarupa*’ symbolizing *Saguna Brahma* (definite form), so that the devotees or the seekers can perceive him easily without undergoing austerity and penance. Everything related to Brahman is sacred and secret

and is linked with Lord Jagannatha. The Lord is known as Daru-Brahma since an indwelling Brahma (Supreme Soul) exists within the Daru Bighraha (wooden body). His food offering Mahaprasad is called Arna-Brahma, the script associated with Lord Jagannatha is called Akshara-Brahma his Sankirtan (reciting God's name) is the Nada-Brahma etc. It is also believed that the eternal presence of Brahman is deeply felt in the whole surroundings including sky, earth, ocean and everywhere in the sacred land of Puri. As supreme Lord of the universe (Jagat Nath). He reveals himself as Jnana (Wisdom), Bala (Sandhini), Kriya (Hladini) through his tranasendentalleelas on the earth. The Hindu scripture "Bhagabata" says that, every inanimate object is subject to decay in this mortal world. But 'Atma' or Soul exists in all living beings is self-existent and permanent. In this analogy, 'Nabakalebara' is a spiritual metamorphosis of the divine deities of Sri Jagannatha, Sri-Balabadra, Devi Subhadra, and Sri Sudarsan-relinquish their old bodies and accept new ones. After construction of these four wooden idols the Ghata Paribartan or the transference of the Brahma or supreme soul from the old idols to the new idols is performed by the temple servitors called Pati Mahapatra and Badagrahidaitasin a highly conspicuous manner in the main temple of Jagannatha in Puri. The Ghata Parbartan (the transference of Brahma) is the core ritual of the Nabakalebara Ceremony which takes place secretly in the mid-night when the outsiders are strictly prohibited to enter inside the temple. The Nabakalebara is a very surreptitious ritual which is closely guarded secret and are known only to those who are directly concerned with it (Tripathi, 2004). The Brahma is the most mysterious substance which denotes the highest Universal Principle; the Ultimate Reality of the universe which is most efficient, formal and final cause that exists in the universe. Though there is curiosity among all to know what the 'Brahma' nobody is known or seen it yet.

Like common living beings the idols of *Chaturdhamurti* are presumed to be composed of flesh, skin, blood and bones etc. The Purna Rupa (complete shape) is given to the deities in the *Saptavaran Vidhi* (seven layers coating) which signifies 'Saptakosha' in the Indian Philosophy. As per the Sanskrit Literature, it is recorded in the

Madalapanji that human body is made up of seven elements. Thus, when the Lord's body is given the final shape, seven coatings are given to it (Bibudharanjan, 2008). The *Chaturdhamurti* carved in neem wood are covered with fine Cheheli Pata and some ancillaries such as Phuluri oil and Osha (mixing resin and Til oil) is smeared and then cotton clothes like Sri Mukha Ota, Rakta-Bastra, Ghanalagietc are pested on the idols. Besides, sandalwood paste, musk, camphor, resin etc are applied to the idols in seven layers such as Phulurilagi, Jhunalagi, Tailalagi, Khalilagi, Ghanalagi and Chaka Apasaralagi etc. This ritual is performed by a group of Daita servitors in the Anasara-Griha in the main temple during Anasara Ritual every year. Then, Dutta Mohapatra gives final touch by making Banakalagi (colouring of idols) and the deities give darshan to the devotees in the Purna Rupa (complete shape) called NabaYauban Darshan a day before Rath Yatra.

While exploring the mysteriousity of the "Brahman", the supreme soul of Lord Jagannatha different versions prevail. Adi Sankaracharya says it is the Hiranya Garbha or the Living Salagrami.e a 'Salagram' of rarest variety, Buddhist Saints says it is the tooth relics of Buddha and in early times Puri was called Dantapuri dominated by the Buddhists. Some says it is unburnt naval part of Lord Krishna. Some servitors of the temple state that inside the idol of Jagannath there might be remnants of idol of Jagannatha burnt by *Kalapahad* near riverside of Ganga at Hoogly which was brought by *Bisara Mohanty*, a devotee of Lord Jagannatha, hiding it in mridanga (drum) to *Kujanga Gada* of Odisha. Some scholars hold that the Eranka Stone is placed within hollow of a tree or wooden log and the tribal communities worshiped it considering as their Ista (presiding deity). When the log is destroyed it is replaced by a new one after certain time. The schoarssaythat Jagant or Jagaboi worshipped by the tribal community later worshiped as Lord Jagannatha. The legends illustrate that Brahma is Parasamani or Indranilamani which is a precious gem stone symbolizing Neela Madhav deity (earlier form of Jagannatha) which was worshipped by Viswvasu Savara secretly in a cave. The king Indradyumna with his royal counsel rescued Neelamadhab from Viswvasu and started worshipping Lord Jagannatha

keeping the precious stone within the wooden deity. The notions prevail that the Parasamania precious gem would transform any substance into Gold when it is touched, except wood, for which the Brahma is kept inside the wooden idols. After all, the God is intangible and invisible who is beyond all expressions and comprehensions. He resides only in the deep faith and devotion of devotees and seekers.

#### OBSEQUIES RITES PERFORMED BY THE DAITA SERVITORS

After *Ghata-Paribartan Ritual*, the new deities are placed on *Ratnavedi* and the old idols are considered lifeless and therefore made *Patalior Golaka Vishram Leela* (burial rites) in the Koili-Baikutha in the temple premises. The credulous servitors and devotees bewail and keep on mourning and weeping as the leader of their own clan is dead. Along with the departing idols, the Madhav and other peripheral deities of the Chariots like 'sarathi' (wooden charioteer), 'ashwa' (horse), 'dwarapala' (gate keeper), 'olotashua' (inverted wooden parrot), and articles of the deities are also buried. The term *Koili-Vaikuntha* constitutes two words i.e. 'Koili' means 'burial ground' and 'Vaikuntha' means 'Heaven'. It is also known as Kaibalya Vaikutha situated near northern side of the Jagannatha Temple, Puri. The daita servitors observe obsequies for a period of ten days as kinsmen of Lord Jagannatha. During this period, the daitas and their families don't accept food from others and no outsiders are permitted to their homes. Even they don't observe mourn if any family member dies during this time. The Daita servitors look upon Jagannatha as their forefather and therefore accomplish certain special rituals related to illness, death and renewal of the deities. All these rituals are performed very secretly inside the temple where outsiders are not allowed for which nothing has been illustrated in the Record of Rights of the Puri temple.

#### NABAKALEBARA RATH YATRA

The *Rath Yatra* of Lord Jagannatha in Puri is a world famous festival which is celebrated not only in India but all over the world today with intense passion and enthusiasm among the devotees. This festival is commonly known as Gundicha Yatra since, Gundicha, the queen of King Indradyumna built this grand

temple and initiated this festival. This festival commences on the auspicious day of *Asadha Sukla Dutiya*, i.e. second day of bright fortnight of Odia month of Ashadha (June-July). On this auspicious day, three beautifully decorated grand wooden chariots on wheels' covered in traditional colours of fabrics such as yellow, green and black mixed with red colour which are specially made for three sibling deities namely : (i) Nandighosa of Jagannatha, (ii) Taladhvaja of Balabhadra (iii) Devadalana of Subhadra. The significance of this festival is that the Mula-Bigrahas (original deities) come out of the inner sanctum-sanctorum of the main temple to the common masses in an elaborate procession called Pahandi and then set on the chariots where millions of devotees all across the world irrespective of caste, colour, sex or religion assembled on the grand road of Puri to have holy darshan of Lord Jagannatha. This is one of the rarest practices not found among any other Hindu temples in India, where only the Utsava-murtis (representative idols) are brought out in grand public procession. The *Gundicha* temple is known as the birth place of Lord Jagannatha where He was manifested. Down the centuries, this grand spiritual event attracts millions of devotees and scholars from all over the world. In the '*Koitha Upanishad*', the concept of chariot has been well explained as "*Atmaanam Rathinam Vidhi Shreeram Rathamevatu, Buddhimtu Saarathi Vidhi Manah Pragrabameva Cha*" Like the soul installed in the body so also the deity is placed on the chariot. The wisdom serves as the rider of chariot which controls the mind and intellect. On the auspicious day of Rath Yatra Lord Jagannatha with Sri Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra come out of the main temple to give darshan to the devotees, hug and haul them and remove their pains and sufferings by His divine touch. So this festival is known as *Patita-Pavana Yatra* or *Ghoshha Yatra*. After the deities are seated on their chariots, Gajapati, the king of Puri sweeps the floor of the chariots (Chera Pahanra) which signifies that even the King, the highest sovereign ruler of the country offers his services to the Lord as first servitor. The charioteers then seated and horses are tied with ropes to the chariots and are pulled by the devotees to the Gundicha temple on the Grand Road of Puri. The pulling of chariots rejuvenates mind and body of the devotees. On ninth day, the deities are again brought

back to the main temple called Bahuda Yatra (return journey). The International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) is popularizing this festival across the world.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NABAKALEBARA CEREMONY

The Nabakalebara Ceremony bears immense significance from scientific, spiritual and ethical perspective. The idols of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra and Sri Sudarshan made of Neem woods are considered very sacred in classic Indian Hindu tradition. The Nabakalebara of the deities is broadly of three types i.e. Purnanga Nabakalebara (Complete Renewal), ii) Ansika-Nabakalebara or Sri Angafita (Partial Renewal) and iii) Special Nabakalebara. The Sampurna Nabakalebara involves a series of rituals including identification of sacred Neem Tree, performing Yajna (fire Sacrifices), cutting of sacred daru and construction of new idols and finally transference of Brahma or Life substance of the idols. Secondly, Sri-Angafita or Partial Nabakalebara is the minor repairing of idols made as per necessity keeping the Brahma intact within wooden idols during Anasara Ritual. Thirdly, Special Nabakalebara Ceremony of Shri Bigrahas (body parts) takes place after external invasion. The Jagannatha temple never had a peaceful time in the past as the temple has been invaded many times and the deities were saved from external attacks by doing Patali (burial). The Nabakalebara of the deities were performed before reinstallation of the deities on the Ratna Vedi when special contingencies arise.

Srimad Bhagabat Mahapurana has prescribed eight types of images to be worshipped which include stone, wood, metal, painting, drawing, sand pictures etc. The "Bruhat Samhita" mentions that the worship of idols of wood or earth or soil bestows longevity, victory, beauty and valour etc. In view of resilience, durability and longevity of the materials, the deities need to be replaced within specified interval. The earth deity is worshipped up to maximum period of one month after which it is immersed in water. The durability of the images of painting or drawing is one year, for wooden image it is 12 years, for metal it is one thousand year and for stone it is 10 thousand years (Tripathy 2015). The reason of performing Nabakalebara of

Jagannatha is that the Daru Bigraha (wooden idols) has durability usually of 8<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> year. So, the change of the bodies of the four deities is an inevitable as the Kshara part (physical body) though remains intact for 8 to 19 years starts perishing thereafter. Further, due to frequent drawing, pulling, hanging, pushing, dragging, shouldering, poking climbing and throwing in course of Pahandiof of the deities during Snana Yatra and Rath Yatra every year the Sri Angas (body) of the Wooden Deities are damaged though the Akshara or the supreme Brahma-Padartha (divine substance) remain imperishable. The new wooden idols are constructed and the Brahma Padartha is shifted from old idols to the new ones by performing the Nabakalebara Ceremony. Scientifically, the Neem tree purifies the surroundings which is not generally perished or destroyed by the insects. The Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharata have correlated trees with Brahma. Neem is considered as auspicious for making the idols of Vishnu and especially Daru-Brahma Jagannath who can be worshipped by all class of people. Even though the Daru Brahma is a piece of wood, it is a Dev-Brikhya and is worshipped like Peepal tree or "Ashvattha". In Hinduism the roots of Peepal tree is defined as Brahma, the trunk as Vishnu and the leaves as Shiva. The Neem tree over a period of time becomes equivalent to Peepal tree. The word Daru is derived from Da-to remove, to give or to eliminate. Thus, the deities in the wooden form eliminating all miseries and are bestowing endless bliss (Das 2012). The 'Brihat Samhita' and 'Vishnu Samhita' mention that when God worshipped an *daru* (wood), all the four aspirations of worshipper, -*Ayu* (longevity), *Sri* (wealth), *Bala* (strength) and *Vijaya* (victory) are fulfilled.

The replacement of the deities in every 8<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> is also connected with some astronomical and astrological calculations. The Lunar calendar in every three years a lunar month is excluded from calculation to strike a balance between the lunar and solar years. The astrologers of Shri Mandira announce extra month of Ashadh for performing Nabakalebara Ritual after astrological calculation. Nabakalebara is performed according to the Daru Brahma Pratistha Vidhi by Agnichit Narasimha Bajapai written in 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The Daitas say that the Indra-Nilamani Puran, an ancient scripture narrates in detailed about how to



perform the Nabakalebara Ceremony. Besides, other religious scripture like Agni Purana, Mastya Purana, Brahma Purana, Narada Purana, Sakti Sangam Tantra, Narada Samhita, Pauskara Samhita, Jahakha Samhita, Sri Prasna Samhita and Vastu Shastra like, Aparajita Puchha, Mayamattam, Samarangana Sutradhara Viswakarma Shilpa, Viswakarma Samhita, Narada Samhita and Meru Tantra illustrate about the Nabakalebara Ritual. From historical point of views Nabakalebara is manmade. The Madala Panji (Temple Chronicle of Lord Jagannatha) narrates that due to repeated external attacks on Jagannatha Temple, the deities are replaced from Srikshetra and buried the idols (Patali), so their Sri Angas (bodies) were damaged which were the reasons for performing the Nabakalebara Ceremony of the four deities. All the times when there is external attack over the temple, the servitors took the deities to different places and made them patali (burial) in order to protect their iconic sanctity as well as to protect them from the eyes of the foreign invaders and subsequently Nabakalebara of the deities were performed when the deities undergo ritualistic worship before installation on the jeweled platform. Gradually this process has been turned into tradition. While performing the Nabakalebara Ritual though, there are distinctions between different categories of sevayats who accomplish their prescribed duties very neatly like Gajapati (Adya Sevak) initiates Gua-Teka, Daitas identify the neem tree, Brahmins perform Yajna (fire sacrifice) and other Vedic rituals, Viswakarmas construct the idols and Pati Mohapatra & Daita make Brahma Paribartan (transference of Brahma) and obituary ritual. The other servitors like the Lenka and Deula Karana help them in carrying the rituals of Nabakalebara smoothly. The Nabakalebara Ceremony is an important part of Jagannatha consciousness which exhibits perfect balance between the tribal origin and Brahminic Hinduism which was superimposed on it at later period. The observing of the Nabakalebara Ceremony is a scintillating experience for the researcher as well as for others who have participated in this grand event either as servitors or as devotees or visitors.

### CONCLUSION

Lord Jagannatha is the grand living heritage of the Hindu religious and cultural tradition in the Indian

subcontinent. The uniqueness of Lord Jagannatha lies in the fact that He is not merely a religious icon of Hinduism but an emblem of grand ancient legacy that revolves round Him facilitating unity and integration of the land. The immense significance of the Jagannatha Culture and Philosophy is that the diverse religious faiths and traditions in India have been widely assimilated within the grand spectrum of the Jagannatha Consciousness. One of the most distinct revelations of the Hindu tradition is that accepting Lord Jagannatha, as an idolized wooden stump with no human features as the Lord of the universe by elevating its status to a religion of universal appeal which deserves special recognition and attention the world. Though, Jagannatha Culture and Philosophy has harmonized the divergent religious and cultural traditions of the world, there still exists the core ethics of the Jagannathism which confers an easy and open access to an unadulterated, mass-based secular religion that stands high against the divisive conservative forces of the casteism, untouchability, class distinction and religious intolerance etc. In the broad religio-cultural discourses, Jagannatha has drawn all together unifying the lowest to the highest strata in the process of transformation representing the true spirit of Hinduism. The popularity of the Jagannatha is truly democratic and egalitarian in character. All are equal in the eyes of Lord Jagannatha and everyone on this earth is granted equal chance and opportunity irrespective of the caste, class, creed and culture etc. The integration of the little and great tradition is best exemplified in the Jagannatha Culture and Philosophy which has integrated all vital aspects of the regional, cultural development: literary, scholarly, sculpture, painting, culinary, architecture, music, dance, astrology, caste tradition, defence institution (akhada), art, crafts and even political consolidation—all cover round the overwhelming presence in Odisha. 'Mahaprasad, the holy offerings of Lord Jagannatha is the blessed food that consolidates the human bonding and intimate relationship, sanctifies all rituals from the time of birth till the death, marriage, thread ceremony and all other rituals and elevates the departing souls for the upward journey after life. Lord Jagannatha deserves all such providences and remains the most valuable possession of the state and nation. Lord Jagannatha

is the only God who comes down Himself during His Rath Yatra to bestow His divine grace upon the devotees. The Car festival of Jagannatha is a widely celebrated as a worldclass event which spreads the message of universal brotherhood, religious and cultural harmony, humanitarian love and compassion towards the humanity. Lord Jagannatha is not simply a religious icon but a magnificent divine force that binds all together in the thread of love and devotion and carrying the heritage, culture and identity of the land forward. Perhaps there is no other grand cultural matrix-national or international, where single divinity has shaped the destiny of the land over the centuries. Let us bow down before the Divinity and pray “Glory be to the conception which brought the Trinity into shape, Glory be to the architect that executed this monumental work of fame. Glory to the Raja (king) that perpetuated the Trinity worship (Servorum, 2015).

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#### *Glossary*

1. Ajnamaala: Before commencement of any ritual or sacred event inside or outside the Jagannatha Temple in Puri, the Ajnamaala of Lord Jagannatha is given or touched which indicates the divine directive or order is given to initiate the ritual or event.
2. Badagrahi: The chief daita servitors of the four respective deities of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra in the Jagannatha Temple in Puri, Odisha. The four servitors of the four deities belong to four Badas (Bansa or lineage).
3. Chaturdhamurty: The four wooden idols of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sri Sudarshan are together known as Chaturdhamurty which are the centre of religious worship especially in the Jagannatha Temple in Puri, Odisha, India
4. Chapan Bhoga/Mahaprasad: This is fifty six varieties of food offerings to Lord Jagannatha everyday in Puri Temple which is taken by all together without caste and class distinction.
5. Chatisha-Nijoga: Thirty-six types of ritual functionaries or the servitors offering different types of services to the deities in the Jagannatha temple at Puri in Odisha.
6. Chera-Panhara: It consists of two words Chera means Chandan or Sandalwood and Panhara means sweep. This is a traditional ritual service offered by the Gajapati or King of Puriduring Rath Yatra every year. The king used to sweep three chariots with a broom with golden band after which the sandalwood paste is sprinkled over the three chariots.
7. Daru-Brahma: Lord Jagannatha is known as Daru-Brahma since the wooden idol of Jagannath is having an indwelling supreme soul installed inside the wooden idol.
8. Daita: The Angalagi Sevak or the upkeepers of the wooden bodies of the deities of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra are the most intimate servitors of Lord Jagannath in the Jagannatha Temple in Puri. The servitors are believed to of same lineage of the Lord.
9. Ghata-Paribartan: This comprises of two words i.e Ghata means body and paribartan means change. This is core ritual of the Nabakalebara Ceremony of Lord Jagannatha when the Brahma or divine substance is transferred from old wooden idols to the new

- ones.
10. Gajapati Maharaja Seva: As per temple tradition, the Gajapati or King of Puri as the Adya Sevak, the first servitors of Lord Jagannatha offer some ritual services to Lord such as Gua-Teka and Purnahuti during Nabakalebara and Chera-Panhara during Rath Yatra every year.
  11. Geeta-Govinda-Khandua: The handwoven cloth in which the Geeta Govinda of poet Jaydev is interwoven. Geeta Govinda verse narrates about the divine love of Lord Krishna and Radha. Lord Jagannatha deity wears the Geeta Govinda Khandua every night.
  12. Jagamohana : It is an assembly hall especially in the Jagannatha temple in Puri, Orissa which is located between the temple entrance and Garbagriha or the heart of the sanctuary.
  13. Koili Baikutha: This is located near the North Gate of the Jagannatha Temple in Puri where the old idols of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra are buried here after transference of Brahma takes place during Nabakalebara Ritual.
  14. Mandap: A broad raised platform is called Mandap which are used for various purposes. Many Mandapas namely, the Nabhi-Kata Manadap, Chahani Mandap, Bhoga Mandap and Snana Mandap are found inside the Jagannatha Temple premises in Puri.
  15. Madala Panji: This is a chronicle of the Jagannatha Temple, Puri which describes about the historical events of Odisha related to Jagannatha and the Jagannatha Temple. The *Chronicle* dates back from the 12th century AD.
  16. Nabakalebara: The renewal ritual of wooden icons of the four deities i.e Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sri Sudarshan takes place in the Jagannatha Temple in Puri, Odisha, India when intercalary Odia month of Asadha falls once in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> Year
  17. Nrusimha: The deity is a fierce incarnation of Lord Vishnu with lion head and lower body part is like a human. Nrusimha is the main deity of the Nabakalebara Ritual.
  18. Purusottam: Lord Jagannatha is known as Purusottam who symbolizes Lord Krishna and Lord Vishnu. Besides, Purusottam is the name of household deity of the Ganga Dynasty.
  19. Pati Mohapatra: The servitor who performs the most core and secret ritual of the GhataParibartan or transference of Brahma (supreme soul) inside the Jagannatha Temple in Puri during the Nabakalebara Ritual
  20. Patita-Panban Bana: This is a flag hoisted at the top of the Jagannatha Temple at Puri, Odisha. The word Patita-Paban means sevir of the downtrodden. It is believed that the auspicious darashan or view of the flag gives relief from all pains and sufferings of life.
  21. Patali: The burial of the idols of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra is called Patali. During Nabakalebara the old idols are buried in Koili-Baikuntha in Puri temple. During the foreign invasions the servitors buried the deities at different places of Odisha.
  22. RatnaVedi: The Jeweled platform in inner sanctum sanctorum of Jagannatha Temple in Puri where the Saptadha-Bigraha or the seven idols of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra, Sri Sudarshan, Sri Devi, Bhu Devi and Madhab are worshiped.
  23. Sri Kshetra: This is a popular name of Puri which is known as the abode of Lord Jagannatha. Puri is well known in different names like Neelachala, Neelagiri and Purusottam-Kshetra.
  24. Sampurna-Nabakalebara: The complete renewal of the wooden bodies of the four deities keeping the Brahma or the divine substance intact while transferring it from the old wooden bodies of the deities to the new ones.
  25. Sri Anga-Phita: This is partial change or repairing of the wooden bodies of the idols. As Sampurna-Nabakalebara or complete change of the bodies is an expensive process, at times Sri Anga-Phita of the deities is done to fulfill the requirement and necessity.

26. Saptabarana: The holy trinity of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra are worshiped as humanized deities. So like Saptakosha in human body, the newly constructed wooden idols of Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra are covered with sandalwood paste, musk, camphor and resin etc. in seven layers which are presumed to serve as the flesh, skin, blood and bones of living being. In temple terminology the rituals are called Phulurilagi, Jhunalagi, Tailalagi, Khalilagi, Ghanalagi and Chaka Apasaralagi.

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