

The Jagganatha Temple

The Jagganatha Temple is a major Hindu temple and religious shrine located in Puri. Puri is a city in the eastern Indian state of Orissa on the Bay of Bengal. Puri is the modern name of this holy city, yet a large number of pilgrims call it Jagganatha Puri. Jagganatha Temple is the most famous temple in Orissa, and one of the most famous in India (Fabri 103). The word Jagganatha refers to Natha (master) of Jagat (universe). The origin of the Jagganatha cult has been traced back to time of the Veda (Pasayat 5). The city and temple is considered by Hindus to be one of the four *dhams* in India. The *dhams* are believed to be the abodes of Hindu gods, and the holiest places of pilgrimage (Patnaik 1). The building of the temple was started by the Ganga king Chodagangadeva, but scholars are not unanimous regarding the period of its construction (Satapathy 46). Although the exact date is debatable, construction began sometime in the 11th to 12th century. The temple construction was finished by Chodagangadeva's descendant Raja Ananga Bhima Dev III (Pasayat 5).

Jagganatha Temple is a huge building that dominates the seaside town, and the tower can be seen from seven miles away (Fabri 148). The temple has a flight of stairs with 22 steps and measures 63 meters in height. The temple complex covers an area of over 400,000 square feet, and is surrounded by a high fortified wall. The outer wall is heavily decorated with carved divine figures and other floral and geometrical motifs and measures 202.7 x 196.3 meters (Patel 72). The complex contains at least 120 temples and shrines. The main temple is a curvilinear temple and on the top is the *srichaka* (an eight spoke wheel). The temple tower is on an 8 meter elevated platform (Patel 71). The temple has four gateways at each cardinal direction. The Singha Dwar (lion gate) is the eastern gate, the Aswa Dwar (horse gate) is the southern gate, the Vyaghra Dwar (tiger gate) is the western gate, and the Hasti Dwar (elephant gate) is the northern gate.

Centuries of whitewashing the temple has obliterated almost all evidence of its antiquity and art. The whitewashing has built up a layer of surface coating estimated at over a foot in depth which hides the facade (Fabri 103). The temple is built of Khondalite stone without the use of mortar; instead iron dowels have been used to keep the stone blocks in position. There has been profuse damage done to the temple structure overtime caused by the iron dowels oxidizing, water seepage and structural pressure (Patel 72). There have been a lot of conservation efforts in the recent years to repair damages to the temple. During the process of conservation the original look of the temple was maintained, nothing new was added nor was the original look disfigured at any time.

The temple is revered as the home of Lord Jagganatha, the Lord of the Universe; his origin and worship is shrouded by myths, legends and traditions (Mahalik 1). Lord Jagganatha is a revered and ancient deity, who was originally worshiped by tribes (Mahalik 1). In the temple there are wooden images or statues of the worshipped deities that exhibit strong tribal influences. The deities Jagganatha and his elder brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra, are carved out of wood and are peculiarly handless. The legend goes that a carpenter Vishwakarma carved the deities out of a log. He instructed everyone not to disturb him while he was in the temple carving. Unfortunately the queen got impatient and went in the temple before Vishwakarma was finished. He was so upset that he left without finishing and that is why the statues are unfinished. The deific images are carved out of wood from the specially-grown Daru (Neem) trees every 12 to 19 years according to the lunar calendar (Patnaik 4). When the old statues of Jagganatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra are replaced with new ones the *brahmapadartha* (the life substance) is taken out of the old statues and is placed in the new statues (Satapathy 159). The three deities are kept in the Garbhagrha (sanctum sanctorum) of the temple unless they are taken out for a festival

(Barik 19). The persons entrusted with the Sevapuja (ritual services/activities) of the deities are known as Sevakas. The tradition plays a pivotal role in the temple and the Sevapuja rites are not only numerous but also remarkably varied (Pasayat 6).

It is said that there are twelve important *yatras* (festivals) celebrated at the Jagganatha temple, but there are many more observed at the temple. The temple is most famous for the Ratha Yatra. The Ratha Yatra is one of the holiest rituals in Hinduism; it is also known as the Car or Chariot Festival. It is an annual festival held in Puri at the Jagganatha temple on Asadha Sulka Dwitiya, which is the second day of the bright fortnight of Asadha (June-July). On this day, the three deities are taken out of the temple and loaded onto very large wooden *rathas* (chariots). The deities are carried to their *rathas* in a traditional ceremonial manner called Pahandi when Lord Jagganatha and Balabhadra are swung back and forth. Tradition states that Lord Balabhadra comes out first, followed by Devi Subhadra and then Lord Jagganatha (Barik 20). Lord Jagganatha's *ratha* is known as Nandighosha; it has 16 *chakras* (wheels) and the colors of the fabrics that cover it are red and yellow. Lord Balabhadra's *ratha* is known as Taladhwaja; it has 14 *chakras* and the fabrics that cover it are red and green. Devi Subhadra's *ratha* is known as Debadalana; it has 12 *chakras* and the fabrics are red and black (Barik 20). Four small brass statues of the deities Sudarsana, Madanamohana, Lord Rama and Lord Krsna are also put onto the *rathas*. Once all the deities are placed on their respective *rathas* the floor of each *ratha* is swept by the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri. "This signifies that even the highest sovereign power of the state is only a *sevaka* (servant) before the almighty" (Barik 20). The *rathas* are then each attached to four horses and ropes are tied and then pulled by devotees irrespective of caste, creed, sect, religion or sex (Patnaik 4). The *rathas* are taken to Sri Gundicha Temple, which is about three kilometers away from the Jagganatha Temple, along the Bada Danda (Grand Road). The

festival ends once the deity statues have been brought back to the Jagganatha temple; the festival lasts for nine days. Another Jagganatha festival, the Chandana Yatra begins the construction of the *rathas*. It starts from Akshya Trutiya which is the third day of the bright fortnight of Baisakha (April-May) (Barik 18). And Niladri Mahodaya is celebrated on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Baisakha (April-May). The festival is to celebrate the day Lord Jagganatha was first worshipped in this Kshetra (holy precinct). For this festival, an *abhisek* (bath) is performed and 108 pots of consecrated water are offered to the deities (Barik 19).

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagannath_Temple_\(Puri\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagannath_Temple_(Puri))
<http://www.hvk.org/articles/0802/85.html>
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<http://www.indialine.com/travel/orissa/puri/jagannatha-temple.html>
<http://jagannath.nic.in/>
<http://www.veda.harekrsna.cz/encyclopedia/rathayatra.htm>

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