



Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

तव कथामृतं तप्तजीवनम्
tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam

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Highlights

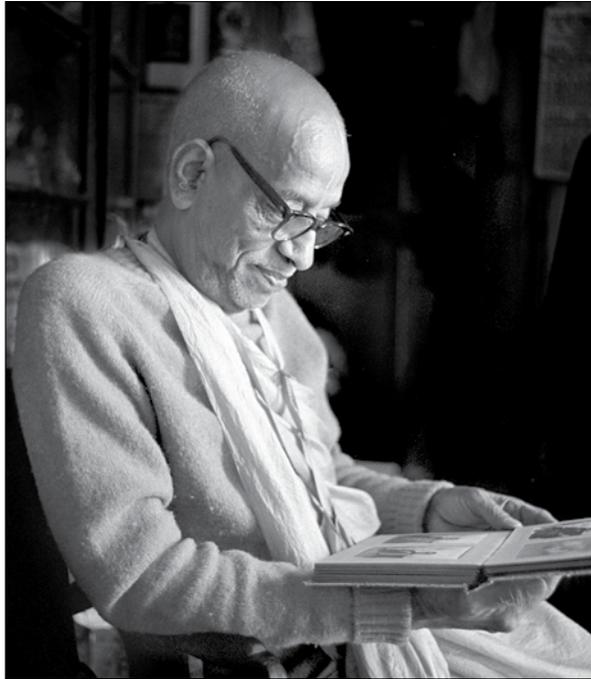
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IN EVERY CENTER

His Divine Grace A. C.
Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Regarding the number of ashrams, our temples are already listed above. The deities worshiped in the temples are Jagannath Swami with Balaram and Subhadra, and Radha Krishna. When we first start a temple we start with Jagannath Swami. My guru maharaja recommended temples of Jagannath in these countries, so I was inspired to establish first of all Jagannath Swami because he is kind even to the *mlecchas*. Then, when there is opportunity, I establish

Radha Krishna *murtis*. So generally in all our temples, Jagannath Swami and Lord Chaitanya *sankirtana* pictures are invariably there, and gradually we are installing Radha Krishna *murtis* in each and every center. ❧

— Letter to Hanuman Prasad Poddar, 5 February 1970.

ABODE OF CRYING

Sri Srimad Gour Govinda Swami Maharaja

Navadvīpa-līlā is *vipralambha*. Mahaprabhu is crying. Therefore Mahaprabhu went to Purushottam Kshetra, which is *vipralambha-kṣetra*, the place of crying. There, Krishna in the form of Jagannath is crying for Radha, and Krishna in the form of Mahaprabhu is crying for Krishna. Both are crying. It is *vipralambha-kṣetra*. But Vrajabhumi is *sambhoga-kṣetra*. There is no crying, only union. Rupa Goswami has written about *prema-vaicittya*. Although union is there, still, for a short time Radha and Krishna are feeling separation — two opposites. This is *prema-vaicittya*. ❧

— Mathura Meets Vrindavan, p. 229. Lecture, New Vrindavan, 29 May 1995.

LORD JAGANNATH'S RETURN RATHA-YATRA

Part One: The Common Understanding in Odisha

Many devotees ask how they should understand the *Bahudhā-Ratha*, the Return *Ratha-yātrā* of Lord Jagannath (referred to as *Uṭṭā-Ratha* in Bengal). If, as *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* state, we consider the *Guṇḍicā-yātrā*, the *Ratha-yātrā*, to represent the residents of Vrindavan taking Krishna home from Kurukshetra, how, then, to perceive the return *Ratha-yātrā*? Is it a festival celebrating taking Krishna away from Vrindavan?



British painting of Jagannath Ratha-yatra in the 1700s

There are two answers that can be offered to this question. To understand them, one first needs to consider something about the nature of Sri Jagannath Puri Dham. In his book, *The Embankment of Separation* (chapter 7), Srila Prabhupada's Odia disciple Sri Srimad Gour Govinda Swami describes Lord Jagannath as *aiśvarya-mādhurya-yugala-milana*, the combination of opulence and sweetness. Srila Sanatan Goswami says in his *Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta* (2.5.212) that Jagannath Puri Dham also contains a combination of seeming opposites, including opulence and sweetness:

*śrī-kṛṣṇa-devadā priyaṁ tat
kṣetraṁ yathā śrī-mathurā tathaiva
tat-pāramaiśvarya-bhara-prakāśa-
lokānusāri-vyavahāra-ramyam*

Just as his abode of Mathura-Vrindavan is eternally dear to Sri Krishna, so, too, is his abode of Purushottam Kshetra, Jagannath Puri. In Puri, Krishna displays supreme opulence, while at the same time he presents pastimes that are full of sweetness.

This may strike our learned readers as confusing, for in terms of *siddhānta* there is a vast difference between the qualities of *aiśvarya*, opulence, and *mādhurya*, sweetness. When *jñāna* and *aiśvarya*, knowledge of the

Lord's opulence and position, are present, then *rati-saṅkucita*, love is shrunken. Srila Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami has described (*Cc madhya* 19.194):

*aiśvarya-jñāna-prādhānye saṅkucita prīti
dekhiyā nāmāne aiśvarya—kevalāra riti*

When opulence is prominent, love of Godhead is shrunken. According to *kevalā* devotion, however, even though the devotee sees the unlimited potency of Krishna, he considers himself equal to Krishna.

How, then, do we comprehend Jagannath Puri and the return *Ratha-yātrā*?

A few years ago we wrote an article in our printed *Sri Krishna Kathamrita* journal (issue 13) entitled "Only Hindus Allowed" that addressed the subject of why Jagannath doesn't allow foreign devotees inside of his temple. In the course of discussing that topic from various angles, another topic came up which is very central to the return *Ratha-yātrā* — the marriage of Lakshmi and Jagannath.

The Gundicha temple is said to be the place where Lord Jagannath was originally carved by Visvakarma and where he was initially installed by Lord Brahma. Hence, Gundicha represents the sweet home of Krishna's Vrindavan.

What many devotees do not know is that the events leading up to the *Ratha-yātrā* actually begin many days before the *Ratha-yātrā* day. On the *Śukla Ekādaśī* day of the month of *Jyaiṣṭha* (May-June), better known to devotees as *Pāṇḍava-nirjalā Ekādaśī*, the festival of *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* or *Rukmiṇī-vivāha* takes place inside the Jagannath temple. At that time the priests ceremoniously marry Goddess Lakshmi with Lord Jagannath.

It is a romantic festival, part of which includes the ceremonial tying together of the cloths of Jagannath and Lakshmi. Four days later is the day known as *Snāna-Pūrṇimā* wherein Lord Jagannath has a public bathing festival called *Snāna-yātrā*. *Snāna-Pūrṇimā* is considered to be the day that the deity of Lord Jagannath was first installed by Lord Brahma.

According to the local tradition, after his public bath with hundreds of pots of water and other substances it is considered that Lord Jagannath falls sick. He then goes into seclusion to regain his health. This time is called, *anavasara*. During this period the newly-wedded Lakshmi acts as the ideal wife, and for the next fifteen days she doesn't sleep but only nurses her beloved husband.

After fifteen days without rest, Lakshmi eventually falls asleep. (You can't blame her!) At that time her newly-married husband quietly unties the knot in their cloth and leaves to go to see his girlfriends, Radharani and the *vraja-gopīs*. We call that *Ratha-yātrā*.

Lakshmi Devi wakes up a few days later to find her husband gone. When she inquires where he is, Jagannath's servant nervously explains that he went to see his girlfriends. Hearing this, Lakshmi leaves the altar and goes to stay in the storage room of the Jagannath temple. She refuses to take bath or eat any opulent food, and dines like poor Odia people on simple village rice and spinach.

In Odisha there is a *sthala-purāṇa* known as the *Vāmadev-saṁhitā*. This book describes many aspects of the worship and activities of Lord Jagannath and is one of the main texts followed by the priests in the Jagannath Mandir. Chapter sixteen therein offers many details of the *Ratha-yātrā* (for a more elaborate exposition of the contents, interested readers can see our article in *Sri Krishna Kathamrita* issue 13). It states that after a few days Lakshmi Devi goes to ask advice from Goddess Bimala inside of the temple. To paraphrase things, she basically tells Bimala, "This is not right! I'm a newly wedded wife! Why did my husband leave me? I was being so good and was taking care of him. And he took Subhadra with him! At least he could have taken me!"

Bimala Devi offers some womanly advice, saying something to the effect of, "Yes, I understand. All men are like this." Bimala then offers some magic *churna*, powder, to Lakshmi, which she says will "help restore your husband's intelligence".

The following morning, on the fifth day of Jagannath's departure, Lakshmi wakes up in a sulky mood. She finally has a bath and puts on ornaments. Then, collecting some of her associates (traditionally represented by the *deva-dāsīs*), she is carried on a palanquin to the Gundicha Mandir to see her newly-wedded husband. This festival is known as *Herā-pañcamī*. *Herā* means "to behold" while *pañcamī* means "the fifth day". The festival is also sometimes called, *Lakṣmī-vijayotsava*, or "the victory celebration of Lakshmi".

Angry and jealous, Lakshmi Devi is in the mood of an *adhīrā-nāyikā*, a restless, aggrieved heroine. By the time she arrives at the Gundicha Mandir, Lord Jagannath is already inside with his brother and sister. Lakshmi and her girl friends then harass the *pandas* outside who are taking care of Jagannath's cart and they break part of the cart.

In her angry mood, Lakshmi then goes into the temple to see her husband. She does not speak to Jagannath, but merely comes before him and bows her head. Then she blows the magic powder at the Lord that she received from Bimala Devi. Finally, still without speaking, her and her girlfriends depart from the temple.

She tells some of the servants of Lord Jagannath, "Tell your master that his wife has returned to their palace."

Perhaps this makes Lord Jagannath transcendently nervous, as two days later he decides to return to the Jagannath Mandir to see Lakshmi. While Jagannath is returning, the king of Puri performs an important function and goes to see Lakshmi Devi. This ceremony is called *Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇa Bheṭ*, meeting of Lakshmi and Narayan, and the king acts as a kind of go-between marriage counselor.

He shows Lakshmi that her husband has returned, "See his cart!" And tells her that he loves her and she should forgive him. Jagannath then, traditionally, but not followed any more, sends an elephant for Lakshmi to ride on to come to see him.

Still in a sulky mood, Lakshmi refuses, and when Jagannath requests her a second time she finally comes out of the temple, surrounded by her girlfriends, on a palanquin (not by the elephant sent by her husband).

She goes to Jagannath's cart, circumambulates her husband, and then quietly goes back inside of the temple. This generally takes place on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Āṣāḍha*.

Jagannath wears a special dress the next day known as *sunā-veśa*. That day is known in Odisha as *Bahudhā Ekādaśī*, the “return *Ekādaśī*”. Having returned to the Sri Mandir, Lord Jagannath wants to pacify his sulky, newly-wedded wife. Some say that it is for this purpose that on the evening of *Bahudhā Ekādaśī* he wears the *sunā-veśa*, golden dress. This most opulent of all Jagannath's dresses consists of solid gold hands and feet, and many, many gold necklaces, earrings and various gold ornaments. It's said that on this day, between the three deities, they are wearing more than one ton of gold — an appropriate dress to pacify the goddess of fortune and assure her that he has left his girlfriends and the simple village of Vrindavan.

The following day, the deities go back inside of the Sri Mandir. First Balaram and Subhadra return to their places on the altar. However, when Jagannath is about to get down from his cart to go inside, Lakshmi's maidservants slam the Lion Gate shut and bar Jagannath's entry. Following this there is a dialogue carried out in the form of Sanskrit songs between



Unknown artist. From an old Bengali almanac

Jagannath Baladev and Subhadra

a representative of Jagannath and a representative of Lakshmi. Jagannath's spokesperson goes to the gate and loudly proclaims something to the effect of, “Jagannath loves his wife Lakshmi very much. He feels very bad and is begging for her forgiveness.”

Many things take place after this, which would make our article unnecessarily long. Suffice it to say that after many sweet words (and gifts!) from Jagannath, Lakshmi finally relents and allows her husband back inside. (It's not only foreign devotees who are barred entry into the temple!)

Jagannath's triumphant return to the Sri Mandir is called the *Nilādri Vijaya* and commemorates the day that he was first installed in the temple by Lord Brahma. Once he has returned inside the temple there is another final ceremony wherein they again tie together Lakshmi's and Jagannath's cloth.

The couple is finally reunited.

This is a brief description of the common understanding in Odisha of the return *Ratha-yātrā*. With the blessings of Hari, guru and the *Vaiṣṇavas* we intend to present something in part two of this series about the *Gauḍīya* understanding of the return *Ratha-yātrā*. [To be continued.]

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