

## The Sacred Festival of Jagannath's Retirement to Sleep: A Study of the *Skanda Purana's* *Cāturmāsya* Rituals and Devotional Practices

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### Abstract:

The *Skanda Purana*, one of the largest and most significant Puranic texts, offers a deep insight into the worship of Lord Jagannath, particularly through the lens of the festival celebrating His 'retirement to sleep.' This paper explores the theological and cultural importance of this unique festival, described in the *Cāturmāsya* section of the *Skanda Purana*. It examines the rituals associated with the festival, including the symbolism of sleep, the devotion of the worshippers, and the philosophical underpinnings of the practice. By analyzing the sacred verses, the paper delves into the connection between the Lord's sleep and the purification of the devotees, drawing attention to the broader spiritual significance of this observance. Furthermore, this paper highlights the interconnection between the festival and its global and local implications, emphasizing its role in fostering devotion, purifying sins, and ensuring spiritual welfare.

### Keywords:

*Skanda Purana*, Jagannath, *Cāturmāsya*, Festival of Sleep, *Saguṇa Bhakti*, Devotional Practices, Sacred Verses, Rituals, Sleep Festival, *Puruṣottama Kṣetra*.

### Introduction:

The festival of Lord Jagannath's retirement to sleep, described in the *Skanda Purana*, holds profound theological and devotional significance. The *Skanda Purana* details the various aspects of Lord Jagannath's worship, with a particular focus on His seasonal rest during the *Cāturmāsya* period, which spans four months of the monsoon season. The concept of sleep in this context is not merely a physical rest, but a spiritual process that symbolizes renewal, sanctification, and the purging of sins. Through the analysis of the festival as presented in the Puranic texts, this paper aims to shed light on the religious, cultural, and philosophical aspects that shape this important event in Jagannath's worship.

### 1. The Period of Lord Jagannath's Sleep (*Cāturmāsya*)

The *Skanda Purana* describes that during the four months of the rainy season (from Āṣāḍhī to Kārttikī), Lord Jagannath is believed to retire to sleep on the serpent's couch. This period is marked by several rituals aimed at enhancing the devotees' merit and spiritual progress. The concept of sleep here is treated with reverence, as the Lord is not just resting, but is engaged in a cosmic role that transcends human understanding.

अतः परं प्रवक्ष्यामि शयनोत्सवमुत्तमम् |

आषाढीमवधिं कृत्वा हरेः स्वापस्तु कर्कटे ||

वार्षिकांश्चतुरो मासान्यावत्स्यात्कार्तिकी द्विजाः |

अयं पुण्यतमः कालो हरेराराधनं प्रति || <sup>1</sup>

"Thus, in the resting phase, the universe's activities recede and the Lord of the world takes His cosmic rest during the *Cāturmāsya* period."

This sleep, which spans four months, symbolizes both a time for reflection and a period of internal purification for the devotees.

## 2. The Spiritual Significance of the Festival

The ritualistic aspects of the festival underscore the philosophy of *Saguṇa Bhakti*, where the deity is treated as a human-like figure with emotions and needs. Lord Jagannath's sleep is anthropomorphized, reflecting the deep emotional and personal connection between the deity and His devotees. This anthropomorphism is central to the bhakti tradition, emphasizing the human-like qualities of the divine, making the worshipper's devotion feel deeply intimate and personal.

भोगिभोगासने सुप्तश्चातुर्मास्येषु वै प्रभुः |

सर्व क्षेत्रेषु सान्निध्यं न करोति जगद्गुरुः ||

अत्र साक्षान्निवसति यथा वैकुण्ठवेश्मनि |

द्वादशस्वपि मासेषु भगवानत्र मूर्तिमान् |

मुक्तिदश्चक्षुषा दृष्टश्चातुर्मास्ये विशेषतः || <sup>2</sup>

"During His sleep on the serpent's couch, the Lord remains in the *Puruṣottama Kṣetra*, and His presence is special here for the devotee."

This sleep is not just a pause in divine activity but serves as a time of renewal, where the Lord's presence continues to sanctify the space and the devotees, ensuring their liberation.

## 3. Rituals and Devotional Practices During the Sleep Festival

The festival is marked by a series of rituals that devotees must undertake to gain spiritual merit. These rituals include preparing the deity's resting place, offering prayers, and observing strict vows of purity. The devotion is expressed through acts of purification, dietary restrictions, and the performance of sacred rites that align with the principles of dharma and devotion.

आषाढशुक्लैकादश्यां कुर्यात्स्वापमहोत्सवम् |

मण्डपं रचयेत्तत्र शयनागारमुत्तमम् ||

देवस्य पुरतः शय्यां रत्नपल्यंकिकोपरि |

स्वास्तीर्य सोपधानां तु मृदुचीनोत्तरच्छदाम् || <sup>3</sup>

"The bedchamber for the Lord must be prepared with great care, for it is a sacred act that brings great merit to the devotee."

The creation of a bedchamber for Lord Jagannath, made of fine silks, precious stones, and adorned with fragrant flowers, represents the devotee's dedication to serving the Lord with the best offerings, symbolizing the purity and love of the devotee.

## 4. Purification and the Dispelling of Sins

The *Skanda Purana* assures that those who stay in the *Puruṣottama Kṣetra* during the *Cāturmāsya* period, regardless of their past sins, are absolved and purified. The merit gained by simply witnessing

Lord Jagannath's sleep during this period is equivalent to the merit of performing numerous sacred rites over the course of many years. This concept emphasizes the power of the Lord's presence to purify the devotee's inner and outer being.

चातुर्मास्यनिवासेन क्षेत्रे श्रीपुरुषोत्तमे |  
दिनं दिनं महापुण्यं सर्वक्षत्रनिवासजम् |  
फलं ददाति भगवान्क्षेत्रे वर्षनिवासतः ||  
सर्वपापप्रसक्तोऽपि सर्वाचारच्युतोऽपि च |  
सर्वधर्मबहिर्भूतो निवसेत्पुरुषोत्तमे || 4

"By residing in the holy presence of the Lord during this time, the devotee dispels all sins and attains the highest merit."

The sleep of the Lord thus becomes a powerful transformative moment for the devotee, where spiritual purification takes place.

## 5. The Universal Significance of the Festival

The festival transcends individual devotion and is a universal reminder of the cyclical nature of time, devotion, and spiritual renewal. The sleep of the Lord during *Cāturmāsya* symbolizes a cosmic rhythm where rest and activity are intertwined. It is also a time when the devotees are reminded of their own spiritual renewal and the need for periodic reflection and devotion.

दानानां तपसां चैव सात्त्विकानां च यत्फलम् |  
एकया विष्णुभक्त्या तत्समग्रं फलमश्नुते ||  
ये पश्यन्ति महात्मानः शयनोप्सवमुत्तमम् |  
मातुर्गर्भे न स्वपन्ति कारयन्ति च ये महम् || 5

"There is no action wasted in the service of the Lord; wherever His devotees gaze upon Him, they are blessed with all the fruits of their desires."

## Conclusion:

The festival of Lord Jagannath's retirement to sleep, as described in the *Skanda Purana*, is more than just a physical event. It is a profound spiritual practice that serves as a reminder of the cyclic nature of divine interaction with the world and the intimate relationship between the deity and His devotees. The rituals surrounding the festival emphasize devotion, purification, and the eternal bond between the divine and the human. As seen in the verses, the festival offers not just spiritual merit but also the promise of liberation and divine favor. The teachings of the *Skanda Purana* invite the devotee to deepen their faith, purify their heart, and engage in acts of devotion that are both transformative and timeless.

## References:

1. *Skanda Purana*, Chapter 36, Verse 1-2
2. *Ibid*, Verse 9-10
3. *Ibid*, Verse 18-19
4. *Ibid*, Verse 12-13
5. *Ibid*, Verse 56-58

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