

The Worship of Lord Jagannath in *Skanda Purana*: An Analysis of His Wooden Form and Sacred Ablution Process

Dr. Pitambar Sahoo

Lecturer in Sanskrit

DGBK College, Kasarda, Cuttack

Abstract:

The *Skanda Purana* presents detailed rituals associated with the worship of Lord Jagannath, emphasizing the sanctity and significance of his idol in the form of wood. This research paper explores the various procedures for the sacred ablution of the Lord, as mentioned in Chapter 31, *Puruṣottama-kṣetra-māhātmya*, of the *Skanda Purana*. It highlights the spiritual symbolism, religious practices, and the integral connection between the deity, the sacred site, and the devotees. This paper delves into the process of the Lord's consecration, the role of his wooden form, and the rituals of purification, bathing, and offerings, drawing connections to the broader concept of divine embodiment and ritualistic practices in Hinduism. Through this exploration, the paper aims to shed light on the continuity and relevance of these ancient rituals in modern worship.

Keywords:

Jagannath, *Skanda Purana*, Wooden Idol, Sacred Ablution, Rituals, Hindu Worship, *Puruṣottama Kṣetra*, Narasiṃha, Divine Form, Religious Practice

Introduction:

The *Skanda Purana*, one of the major *Puranas* in Hinduism, contains significant narratives and guidelines about the worship and veneration of Lord Jagannath. Chapter 31, entitled "The Lord in the Wooden Body," outlines the procedures related to the ablution and the preparation of the sacred wooden idol of Lord Jagannath. The significance of this ritual is multifaceted: it not only highlights the devotion of the devotees but also connects the physical form of the deity with the divine presence, bridging the human and the spiritual realms. Through detailed descriptions of the rituals of purification, the involvement of various deities, and the role of sacred water from the horse-sacrifice lake, this chapter provides invaluable insights into the practices and beliefs surrounding the deity's wooden manifestation.

The Sacred Ablution of Lord Jagannath

The text describes the procedure for the sacred ablution of Lord Jagannath in his wooden form, emphasizing the spiritual sanctity of both the idol and the rituals. The devotee, having completed the necessary preparations, proceeds to the holy lake, a place with deep connections to the horse-sacrifice. The devotion involved in these acts reveals a profound understanding of divine connection and purification.

कृतकृत्यं तदात्मानं मन्यमानस्ततो ब्रजेत् ।

अश्वमेधांगसंभूतमिन्द्रद्युम्नसरः प्रति ॥

यस्य तीरे निवसति नरसिंहाकृतिर्हरिः ।

नरसिंहमनुप्रार्थ्य तत्र स्नायाद्यथाविधि ॥ ¹

"Feeling contented that he has accomplished what has to be accomplished, the devotee should

thereafter go towards the lake Indradyumna which originated as a part of the horse-sacrifices. It is on its bank that Hari dwells in the form of Narasiṃha (Man-Lion). After praying to Narasiṃha, he should take his bath therein in accordance with the (prescribed) injunctions."

The Importance of Narasiṃha's Blessings

The role of Narasiṃha in these rituals is integral. The devotee prays to Narasiṃha at the lake's shore, invoking his blessings for purification and the removal of sins accumulated through countless lifetimes. The ritualistic bath, followed by the recitation of the five Vāruṇa mantras, symbolizes a spiritual cleansing of the devotee and a preparation to approach the deity.

नरसिंह नमस्तुभ्यं यस्य ते क्षेत्र उत्तमे ।
सहस्रं वाजिमेधस्य क्रतोश्चक्रे नृपोत्तमः ॥
इन्द्रद्युम्नः प्रसादात्ते तस्य क्रत्वंगसंभवे ।
सरसि स्नातुमायातो मामनुज्ञापय प्रभो ॥
ततस्तीर्थतटं गत्वा कृतशौचाचमक्रियः ।
प्रार्थयेदंजलिं कृत्वा इमं मंत्रमुदीरयेत् ॥
अश्वमेधांगगोकोटिखुरक्षुण्णमहीतलः ।
तन्मूत्रफेनादानांभः पूरिताखिलपावनः ॥
स्नातुं तवागतः पुण्ये सर्वतीर्थमये जले ।
पूर्वजन्मसहस्रोत्थं पापं स्नानाद्विमोचय ॥²

"Obeisance to you, O Narasiṃha. In your excellent holy place, by your favour, the excellent king Indradyumna performed a thousand horse-sacrifices. I have come to take my holy bath in the lake that originated as a part of the horse-sacrifice. Grant me permission (to do so), O Lord."

The Role of the Wooden Idol

The idol of Lord Jagannath, made of wood, holds a central place in this narrative. It is not simply a physical object but is considered to be a divine embodiment, sanctified through a ritualistic process. The connection between the idol's material form and its spiritual significance reflects the Hindu belief in the immanence of the divine within the physical world. The *Skanda Purana* details how the idol is to be treated with reverence, ensuring its preservation and the continuity of divine blessings.

यस्योच्चारणमात्रेण तुष्टो भवति केसरी ।
अनेन दारुवर्ष्मापि ब्रह्मणा संप्रतिष्ठितः ॥³

"Lord Narasiṃha becomes delighted merely by the utterance of this (Mantra). It is by means of this Mantra that the Lord with wooden body (idol) was installed by Brahmā."

The Rituals of Offering and Purification

The process of offering various items such as fragrant flowers, sweetmeats, milk pudding, and fruits forms a key component of the ritual. These offerings are part of a larger process of maintaining the idol's divine power, ensuring that the deity is worshipped in the most sacred and proper manner. This practice emphasizes the sanctity of food, offerings, and purification in connecting the physical and spiritual worlds.

पूर्वोक्तैरुपचारैस्तु पूजयेन्नरकेसरिम् ।

जपाप्रसूनैररुणैरन्यैश्चैव सुगंधिभिः ॥
चंदनागरुकपूरैर्लेपयेन्नरकेसरिम् ।
पायसं सितया युक्तं सौरभेयेण सर्पिषा ॥
कर्पूरखण्डसंयुक्तान्मोदकान्धृतपाचितान् ।
संयावान्धृतपूपांश्च फलं नानाविधं तथा ॥
शर्करादधिसंयुक्तं शाल्यन्नं विनिवेदयेत् ।
दृष्ट्वा स्पृष्ट्वा नमस्कृत्वा संपूज्य नरकेसरिम् ॥
स्वान्स्वानभीष्टानाप्नोति नरो वै नात्र संशयः ।
देवत्वममरेशत्वं गंधर्वत्वं च भो द्विजाः ॥
ईशित्वं च वशित्वं च सार्वभौमत्वमेव वा ।
यद्यत्कामयते चित्ते तत्तदाप्नोत्यसंशयम् ॥ ⁴

"The devotee should worship Narasiṃha with all the offerings and services mentioned before. *Japā* (China rose) flowers of tawny colour and other sweet-smelling flowers also should be used."

The Consequences of Disrespect

A noteworthy aspect of the chapter is the emphasis on the consequences of disrespecting the idol or the rituals associated with it. Those who treat the idol carelessly or fail to follow the prescribed procedures face spiritual and physical repercussions. This serves as a reminder of the sanctity of divine worship and the importance of adhering to established religious practices.

नयेयुरप्रमाद्यंतो भगवंतमानदिताः ।
प्रमादतो यदि भवेत्पतनं मुरवैरिणः ॥
बलस्य वा सुभद्राया राज्ञो राज्यस्य भीतिकृत् ।
अपि पातयतां हानिः संततेर्बहुदुःखिता ॥
नरके नियतं वासो भवेत्तेषां दुरात्मनाम् ।
विमुह्यंतश्चिराद्दारुमयीयं प्रतिमा कथम् ॥
तिष्ठेदविश्वसंतो ये भगवद्बोहिणस्तु ते ।
नरकं प्रतिपद्यंते सर्वकर्मबहिष्कृताः ॥
मूढानां नास्तिकानां च कृतघ्नानां हतात्मनाम् ।
धर्मकृत्येषु जायंते अविश्वासस्य युक्तयः ॥
अदृष्टं यस्य यावद्धि स तु तेन विनिर्मितः ।
तदंते तस्य क्षीयंते प्रासादप्रतिमादयः ॥
न चायं निर्मितः केन द्रुमः सोऽपि प्रवर्द्धितः ।
वरं ददाति या नूनं न चासौ प्रतिमा मता ॥
निर्मितायां प्रतिकृतौ पुरा मन्वंतरादिषु ।
व्यतीतेष्वपि वर्द्धंते जनानां च सुपर्वणाम् ॥

भक्तयस्तादृशो विप्राः सर्वेषां पृथिवीक्षिताम् |
स्वारोचिषेऽतरे चैव आविर्भूतः कृपानिधिः ॥⁵

"Those wicked souls will have certainly to go to hell. Those who are deluded and do not have any faith or belief and say, 'How can a wooden idol remain for a long time,' are inimical to the Lord."

Conclusion:

The *Skanda Purana*'s depiction of the rituals surrounding Lord Jagannath's wooden idol reveals a profound connection between the deity, the devotee, and the sacred space of *Puruṣottama Kṣetra*. Through rituals such as the sacred ablution and the offerings made to the Lord, the text not only highlights the sanctity of the idol but also emphasizes the importance of purity, devotion, and discipline in worship. The wooden idol, far from being just a lifeless object, is seen as the living embodiment of Lord Jagannath, through which the divine blessings flow. The rituals, detailed in the *Skanda Purana*, ensure the continuous sanctification of the idol, and by extension, the liberation and spiritual elevation of the devotees who partake in them.

References:

1. *Skanda Purana*, Chapter 31, Verses 1-2
2. *Ibid*, Verses 3-7
3. *Ibid*, Verse 16
4. *Ibid*, Verses 17-22
5. *Ibid*, Verses 43-51

Bibliography

1. Donaldson, Thomas E., *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, Vol. 1, Leiden, Brill, 1985.
2. Mahapatra, Jitendra Narayan, *The Skanda Purana: A Study in the Socio-Religious Aspects of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar, Jagannath Publications, 1998.
3. Mishra, Prafulla Kumar, *The Cult of Jagannath: A Syncretic Tradition*, Bhubaneswar, Jagannath Cultural Academy, 2000.
4. Tripathy, Gaya Charan, *Jagannath in Indian Literature and Culture*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1985.
5. Panda, Bhagabana Charan, *Jagannath: The Wooden God with a Soul*, Cuttack: Utkal Prakashan, 1973.