

The Līlās of **LORD JAGANNĀTHA**



IN CARE OF
MADHAVANANDA DASA
PLEASE RETURN

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Lord Jagannātha and Goddess Carcikā

Not only do people from all over the world come to see Lord Jagannātha, but so do gods and goddesses. It is believed that these *devas* are most fond of seeing the last ceremony of the day known as *Pahuda*, in which Jagannātha retires to bed. This occurs some time after midnight. Three beautiful beds made of ivory and decorated with the sweetest smelling flowers, especially white jasmine, are brought before the Deities. Flowers are scattered all over the beds to the sound of devotional music, and the miniature golden forms of Jagannātha, Subhadrā, and Balabhadra are laid down on the beds to sleep. Then *ārati*—the offering of a lamp—is done, and flowers are scattered all around overhead to be collected by the gods and goddesses as a token of Lord Jagannātha's blessing. So it is also the duty of all the gods and goddesses to be present at the time of this ceremony every night.

One day goddess Carcikā of the distant village of Banki arrived late to the function. She was excused by Jagannātha, who excuses all mistakes, but Balabhadra did not excuse her. "Mother, do you think that the rituals of this temple should take place according to your convenience? You have become too proud these last few days. Get out! You cannot come to see the *Pahuda* ceremony any more."

Carcikā was not prepared to take this rebuke from Balabhadra. In anger she replied, "I am not the proud one. You are the one who is ostentatious, being gorgeously dressed, bedecked with royal robes, golden ornaments, and sweet-smelling flowers. I have eight hands, but You with no hands think you are doing everything. Who is the proud one? You please let me pass so that I may meet my Lord. Why are you ostracizing me for such a little offense?"

After that Balabhadra became even angrier and lost his temper: "Your misbehavior to Bhitarcha Mahāpātra, the chief priest is of grave concern. I am ordered by him to prevent you from entering the temple any more. How can you go and protect your area of Banki, even with your eight hands with weapons, if you have no discipline?" Carcikā replied, "Oh, then please go ask him to forgive me! I will not have any peace if I am deprived of the Lord's vision. I will be happy again only when I am redeemed."

Carcikā was left standing there at the bottom of Baishipabacha, the twenty-two steps leading to the temple. The whole night was passing and her heart became very agitated. It was almost morning. The *sevakas* were coming from the temple. *Devas* from all corners of the world had come that night, as was the custom every night, to consult with Jagannātha, the Lord of the universe. Now they were going out to execute His will. Only Carcikā was left standing at the gate. If a *deva* neglects his duty, he may cause harm to others, and must be replaced. The sin of too much pride is almost irremediable. Just as Carcikā was remembering this, Balabhadra came back with the sad news not to allow her inside. Balabhadra delivered the message of Lord Jagannātha: "A proud *deva* should not be admitted. If you wish to redeem yourself, render service in the home of Bhitarcha Mahāpātra, the head priest to whose function you came late, and not to Me. Bhitarcha Mahāpātra alone can exonerate you, if he so desires and is pleased with your service."

Baladeva explained, "By the practice of virtuous deeds an ordinary man ascends upwards and may eventually attain the status of a demigod. Such a good soul may be regarded as equal to God Himself, but only because of his goodness, not his high position. Do you know this, Mother?" Carcikā replied, "Yes, I have done wrong. I myself will take on the task of serving this man Bhitarcha Mahāpātra, even though I am a goddess of the highest order. It is the right punishment for a degraded goddess. I will be serving a man who is himself a servant of Lord Jagannātha. Let me leave this place before the others come out."

Disguising herself as a young widow in a white sari, Carcikā left the temple for the house of Bhitarcha Mahāpātra. As she approached, she saw the old man sitting on his front steps, so she quickly covered her face with her sari piece and respectfully stood at some distance. The old man looked up and thought, "Who is this lady? I can see only half of her face, but she looks so young and radiant! I have never seen her in this area before." Thinking like this, he called to her, "Mother, have you come to our house or are you looking for someone in this neighborhood? The soft motherly appearance of Carcikā made Bhitarcha Mahāpātra regard her as a mother.

Carcikā pleaded, "I pray that you accept me in your house as a servant, as I have no other means of survival, Father. As I lay flat on the ground before Lord Jagannātha, He Himself ordered me to serve here in your house." The old man was astonished and with tears in his eyes answered, "This is your own home. You are so like my own mother. A son can never be reluctant to provide shelter to his mother."

Thus Carcikā became the maidservant of the head priest Bhitarcha Mahāpātra. Gradually she became accustomed to the household affairs of the family and took full charge of the *pūjā* room herself, cleaning the brass *pūjā* articles, changing the dress of the Deities daily, and lighting the lamps. So perfectly did she act out the role of mother that Bhitarcha Mahāpātra hardly thought of his own mother, who had just recently died.

Time passed. Bhitarcha's wife was old and ailing, and so she was very pleased with Carcikā's help and good manners. Sometimes people wondered about Carcikā, "Who was she? Where did she come from?" Sometimes Carcikā would be overcome with feeling when there was talk of Lord Jagannātha. What was the reason for this?

They would ask her, "Why don't you go to the temple and have *darśana* of Lord Jagannātha? When so many people come from far away to see Him, you are nearby and do not go?" Carcikā said sadly, "It is a matter of luck. Sometimes one is not destined to meet Him. I will visit the Lord whenever He showers His mercy on me."

One day a huge storm hit Purī with heavy rain. The whole town was enveloped in darkness. Bhitarcha Mahāpātra struggled to find his way home and finally reached the door, knocking loudly. Carcikā responded anxiously, "Oh, what a treacherous night to be out! When it fell dark I lit a candle and sat waiting, expecting you at any moment. That candle has just now gone out."

Mahāpātra had come from the temple and was completely rain-drenched. He handed over the *mahā-prasāda* to Carcikā and went to change his dress. But there were no matches to light a candle in his room. Neither did he bring a candle from the temple, as it was raining too heavily. With surprise he asked, "How did you light that candle, when there were no matches and all the neighbours had already gone to bed?"

Can you light another one?" Carcikā replied, "Yes, there is a way. Allow me to light the room." She immediately assumed her original form, stretching one of her legs to the top of the temple where a lamp was burning, and with it she lit the priest's candle.

On seeing this divine vision, Mahāpātra almost fell senseless. He could not believe his eyes. How could this maidservant assume such a divine miraculous form? And so vast and glorious it was. The whole town of Puri could be accommodated within the space between her feet. A deep sense of awe and wonder overcame him. Carcikā came back to her normal form in a moment's time, and the room was lit. Mahāpātra felt as if his eyes had betrayed him and he was going mad.

"Do not worry, Father," Carcikā said. Bhitarcha Mahāpātra fell flat before her, pleading, "Oh Mother! Please reveal your real identity. I will not leave your feet until you do so!" Such a rare display of God's divine grace thrilled the priest through and through. He became benumbed. So Carcikā disclosed everything to him, especially the reasons why she was cast out of the temple.

Bhitarcha exclaimed, "Oh Mother, please go back to your original abode. I will get due permission from the Lord for your reinstatement." With such assurance, Carcikā disappeared from Bhitarcha's house. It was after midnight. The rain had stopped. It was as if everything had occurred according to God's plan.

Carcikā once again approached the main gate of the temple and Balabhadra offered her a welcome smile. Because of this, Carcikā realized that one cannot retain even his position as a demigod if he does not fulfil his assigned duties and commitments for the upliftment of the world, for these are the duties of a demigod.

Lord Jagannātha ordered, "I am now very happy with You. I will assign you an additional responsibility, that of caring for my own car during Rathayātrā, the great festival of chariots. Even though the regular *sevakas* are there to look after Nandighoṣa, you will be its *deva*."

Carcikā was silent and only nodded her head affectionately, then left. It was already morning, and Bhitarcha Mahāpātra appeared before the Deities to offer his regular service.

This event occurred in the year 1368. Before Goddess Carcikā left the house of the head priest, Bhitarcha Mahāpātra, she asked him what he wanted. He answered that he had no demands for any worldly things, but only wanted to see her again. She said, "Go to your *pūjā* room!" and then vanished. He went there and saw protruding from the floor a framed stone image of the *devī* herself.

Even today, some six centuries later, this holy image is there and *pūjā* is still being done to it daily by the descendants of Bhitarcha Mahāpātra.

Lord Jagannātha and a Proud Devotee

In the year 1727 Dhananjay Mehta, a very wealthy man from the city of Hyderabad in South India came to Puri. He was very proud because of his wealth. He had come along with his family, though personally he had no faith in Jagannātha. While there he decided to challenge this strange image made of wood.

In the temple, food is offered to the Deities three times daily. Dhananjay Mehta publicly declared he would make a donation of 100,000 rupees to Jagannātha if the temple cooks could spend all of it to prepare one offering of *prasāda*. In those times fruits and vegetables were very cheap. Even one hundred rupees was enough to buy the ingredients for one *bhoga*, or food offering. One thousand rupees was too much. Therefore no one in the temple could even imagine what to purchase for 100,000 rupees. This became a great problem for the worshipers of the famous temple of Lord Jagannātha. They were undoubtedly sad to see such a challenging attitude on the part of a so-called devotee.

The priest debated, "Should he be told that such a huge amount is absolutely too much? Should we tell him to give a smaller donation. Will this be too embarrassing to ask of him? We know Jagannātha is great—His temple is majestic, His rituals are mystic and divine—so how can we tell this man to give less! How can we tell him to make a smaller offering so that we ordinary mortals can handle it?"

At that time, butter was the most costly of all ingredients, so what type of *prasāda* could be prepared from only ghee? The most delicious and costliest *prasāda* could easily be prepared with butter and coconut palm sweets within 10,000 rupees. But this millionaire from Hyderabad wanted to offer *prasāda* costing 100,000 rupees!

Since the origin of Jagannātha Temple itself, lakhs of people had been served *mahā-prasāda* in the Ānanda Bazar of the temple. Many types of delicacies were in abundance there. In fact, Jagannātha Temple is the only temple in the world to have always treated *mahā-prasāda* as more valuable than even *darśana*, or the sight of the Deities. All can eat it, regardless of caste, color, or creed. Yet never before had such a problem arisen. The temple cooks were at their wits' end! There was no *prasāda* that could be prepared that would cost 100,000 rupees! Finally they decided, "Let this problem be communicated to the Lord Himself, and

let His will prevail. Lord Jagannātha is not a man of flesh and blood to be prayed to for a simple response. Let there be a *dharaṇā*, or group prayer, before Him. Nobody can prevail over His wish." So the *pāṇḍa*, or head priest, made a heart-felt prayer, "Oh Lord, please choose which food You desire."

At the same time, the wealthy man was anxious to return to his business affairs in Hyderabad. He did not want to stay in Purī any longer. Therefore, he asked the *pāṇḍa* to come to him in the morning to inform him about their decision concerning the *prasāda*. The *pāṇḍa* replied that he was waiting for the Lord Himself to give them an answer. This was exactly to the wealthy man's liking, so he did not mind extending his stay in Purī. In this sweet way, the Lord was teaching him. One should first learn what is the wish of God, and then act.

100,000 rupees was a pittance for the Lord who reigns over innumerable universes. In due time the Lord answered the head priest's prayer, speaking to him in a dream, "Let this wealthy person offer Me one piece of *pān*. But the betel nut within the *pān* leaf must be smeared not with lime, but with the powder of a finely ground pearl. Moreover this pearl must be from inside an elephant's forehead."

Now, one piece of *pān* could be purchased so cheaply, even today it is only 50 paisa or less, but with this rarest of ingredients inside, the cost would be excessive. Immediately, the *pāṇḍa* rushed to the wealthy man and narrated the entire episode. "Is this not a great thing? Jagannātha wants a mere betel nut to be offered to Him, but it must be prepared with the pearl from a bull elephant's head."

Hearing this, the wealthy man's face paled. He thought, "A mere betel nut! Nothing more than that!" It is said that an elephant is worth one 100,000 rupees, dead or alive. How many bull elephants would have to be killed to find one pearl? Not every bull elephant has a pearl inside its forehead. It is a rare phenomenon. Indeed, one in a million has a pearl in its forehead. The man's head began to reel. He was defeated. He was incapable of offering even a single betel nut to Lord Jagannātha. Unknotting his turban and removing his sandals, he went running to the Lord with a purse full of 100,000 rupees in his hands. A huge crowd followed.

Everyone stared at this strange sight. The Lord had defeated the millionaire at his own game of dollars and cents. At last his human pride was crushed. He started sobbing, reaching out to Jagannātha, with unrestrained childlike cries. In total devotion and defeat he prayed, "Oh Lord, I have made a stupid human blunder, for I am totally incapable of offering You even a single betel nut. What else can be offered to you? Oh Lord, pardon me. I am a fallen man, insignificant before You, but made wise before You also. Everything is Yours and You are everything. Take whatever I have. Please accept only the sweet-smelling red betel nut of my heart."

Jaya Jagannātha!

Lord Jagannātha and Captain Beadle

The ship had just left Chandanpur and was a few miles out to sea in the Bay of Bengal. The first mate was surveying the ocean through his telescope. Suddenly his eyes fixed on a particular point. Could that be a giant whale, or some monstrous sea animal big enough to swallow the whole ship? It was amazing. The mere beating of its tail could smash the ship into splinters. The mate saw that the ship was heading directly towards the creature. Preventative measures had to be taken to prevent a catastrophe.

Without a moment's delay, he called out, "Captain! All alert!" The French captain was taking a reading of the ship's course from the chart in the control room. Hearing the call, he rushed out, a little perplexed. "What is the problem?" he inquired. The speechless mate pointed his finger towards the whale. Captain Beadle observed the approaching whale through his binoculars. There was also an impending storm on the horizon. The winds were gusting and tearing at the sails.

The captain first thought of releasing the lifeboats from the ship. But could the small boats even reach the shore in such high winds. There might be heavy loss of life. The captain realized the gravity of the situation, but was haunted by a sense of helplessness. Huge waves were making the sea turgid and black. The more he observed the approaching danger, the more frightened he became. He had no idea what course of action to take.

Finally, he decided the only thing to do was ring the warning-bell. He shouted to the crew to look out for themselves. There was no way to avert this imminent disaster.

The French ship had set sail for Pondicherry, in South India, from France two months before. It was to have been a routine journey. In the 1650's much trade of spices such as cardamom, clove, and cinnamon was going on between India and the European continent. Only a few days more were left to complete the journey. "To see Baruna, the next port, right now would make me so happy," mused the Captain sadly. "It would look so lovely and inviting to me right now. Oh how I wish we could leave behind us the awful fury of this storm. Then there would be only three stops more till port in Madras and Pondicherry."

Most of the crew and passengers of the ship were French. They were going to the small French settlement of Pondicherry, a short distance south of Madras. A special bell for the Pondicherry Church was on board the ship. Unloading the cargo at Pondicherry, the ship was then to return to France.

Now, in the wake of this storm, Captain Beatle was running about the ship frantically. He was encircled by all the frightened passengers. Any hope to save even lady passengers was thin. Beatle was an experienced sea captain, having spent eighteen years at sea. Yet now he was completely bewildered. Then a lady passenger ran towards him and appealed, "Oh Captain, I don't mind if I die, but please save my baby!" The baby was of angelic appearance, about one year old, and gave a foolish look at its mother's face, without sensing anything. Tears ran down the captain's cheek, and the little baby began to cry along with its mother. The captain was beside himself, having no way to console them. The shadow of death loomed large, a transition between life and death about to be violently enacted. Everyone was panicking. Some were crying, while others were taking half-measures to save their lives. Only a few moments remained before the unavoidable end.

Only one man was sitting quietly and without anxiety. He was looking at a picture of his worshipable Lord and keeping it close to his heart, whispering something to himself. His mind was fixed on that picture. He was an old Indian man, who had boarded the ship at the last port. Captain Beatle rushed past him many times, still he was hardly noticed. The ship was about to be battered by the storm. Captain Beatle ran to the upper deck of the ship and snatched the binoculars from a deck hand so he himself could see their approaching fate. He muttered to himself, "Oh dear God, we are so close to that deadly whale! What a harrowing sight!" He felt as if his blood was about to clot, seeing death itself approaching steadily. Now only the touch of death remained to be felt.

The captain's relatives were all far away in Europe, and a sense of deep despair overcame him. He was unable to act at all. Then again he caught sight of the old man, sitting still amidst all the fright and confusion. Captain Beatle bent over to see the picture which the old man held. It

was a hand-drawn painting, with three Deities sitting close to each other. One was black, one yellow, and the third white. "The eyes of that black Deity look so big and terrible," thought the captain. "They remind me of the eyes of the whale, two huge eyes in a black face, looking straight at you, so prominent and overpowering."

"What are you doing?" shouted the captain. Straightening up, the poor man stared at him. Each eye was adorned with a tear.

"I am praying to Lord Jagannātha to rescue us from this catastrophe," he said quietly.

"Jagannātha? Who is He? Where is He? What can He do for us? Can He kill the whale with a weapon? Can He save the ship?" retorted the captain.

A trace of a smile came over the old man's wizened face. He appeared so calm and collected in this moment of crisis. "Lord Jagannātha is my only resort. Danger is dispelled if one prays to Him," the old man said passionately. "He makes a human response. His mystery is inscrutable, even to the demigods, what to speak of mere human beings. Yet when we call to Him, He comes and helps us."

"Can He save our ship from the clutches of death?" asked the captain in disbelief. "He will do the needful, that is His work," replied the man simply. "What power does your God have to do that! Can He act as a controlling force over nature?" asked the captain. "If He can save the ship, I will offer Him all the treasures on board the ship and myself as well."

Then the old man returned to his praying. The captain rushed to the upper deck of the ship again, and to his greatest surprise he saw the whale change its direction! The whale's forward movement was slowing down and slowly he veered out to deep sea. The more the captain observed this, the more his face was filled with amazement. But the ship never stopped tossing about from the onslaught of the storm. "One danger is removed, but still there is another with its own fury," thought the captain. It seemed the ship might be wrecked within a minute's time. The old man's curious picture began flashing before Captain Beagle's eyes. Then he prayed, "Oh Jagannātha, you controlled the whale, but are You able to check the storm?"

A huge thunderclap was heard and a bolt of lightning flashed across the sky, so powerful that it seemed as if the whole world would be destroyed. But all at once the storm died down and the ship was saved. The captain announced in a joyous booming voice, "We are saved! We are saved! Go ahead. God has freed us from all danger!" The captain rushed to the old man's side and embraced him tightly. The old man was still doing his prayers before the picture of Jagannātha. "The Lord of the universe has answered our prayers," he said simply. A benign smile appeared on the old man's tired and time-worn face. Tears filled the captain's eyes and his voice choked. "No one is foreign to your God. He protects all as His very own." Saying this, Captain Beatle ordered that all the diamonds, precious gems, gold ornaments, and even the old French church bell be taken from the ship storeroom and given to this old man's temple. Then he announced to all, "Our ship has been saved, due to the mercy of God." Happily he saw all the vast treasures leave the boat and asked, "Do they have a storeroom in their temple spacious enough to house all these treasures for the Lord?"

Then the ship set sail again. Captain Beatle ran to the upper deck to observe whether any shore was in sight. The top of a huge temple, looking like a Blue Mountain, was clearly visible. His mate told him, "That is the earthly home of Lord Jagannātha of Puri." Captain Beatle lowered his head in token of respect to the Lord.

Jaya Jagannātha!

Even now you can see the old French church bell in the old courtyard of the original office of the temple, known as Garad.

Lord Jagannātha and Princess Viṣṇupriyā

An incurable disease mocked all the years of medical research of doctors of Rajasthan. The astrologers had given their prediction, and although all the sacrifices and *pūjās* to the gods had been performed for divine healing, the Queen's disease was getting worse day by day.

King Jayasinha of Kota in Rajasthan was very concerned for the health of his beloved Queen, Candravatī. He felt it was useless to live if she passed away. Due to this constant worry, the King became lax in his royal duties. He devoted all of his time to the well-being of the Queen. Despite all efforts, her death was imminent.

Her face pale and forlorn, the young princess, Viṣṇupriyā, sat by her mother's side. Her prayers went unanswered, as if all the gods had turned to stone.

One day Viṣṇupriyā heard the sweet voice of a beggar singing on the road outside her mother's window. She sent one of the lady attendants out to ascertain who it was. "A yogī from the distant holy place Śrī Kṣetra is singing songs to Lord Jagannātha. He gave a grain of *mahā-prasāda* from his bowl when we inquired about his intentions," the attendant informed the princess. "Our Queen might be cured if she takes it; Lord Jagannātha will respond if He is prayed to earnestly."

Immediately, the Princess' sorrow lifted. With a glad heart, Viṣṇupriyā accepted the single grain of *mahā-prasāda*. Although she had never gone to the distant state of Orissa to visit the great temple of Lord Jagannātha, she thought, "Yes, Jagannātha is transcendental, and food that has been offered to Him is just as transcendental." She approached her mother with the Lord's *mahā-prasāda*. The Queen looked like a skeleton. The rosy color of her body had turned colorless and ghostly, her face was pale, with hollow cheeks and eyes sunken deep in their sockets. Death was at the door.

Viṣṇupriyā bent over her mother's face and said loudly, "Please, Mother, open your mouth. This is *mahā-prasāda* from Lord Jagannātha, the supreme doctor of everyone."

Suddenly a ray of sunshine passed over the mother's face. She opened her eyes and ate the morsel of *mahā-prasāda*, even though her tongue

could not taste anything. A divine sensation shook her body. As the blessed food passed down her throat, her body became purified, for all her sins had been exonerated. An inexplicable cheerfulness reigned over her face, as though she was victorious and fearless in the face of death. That evening the Queen's illness became acute and she passed the entire night in pain. The Queen's daughter sang devotional songs about the childhood of Lord Kṛṣṇa, as she sat by her mother's side.

Lord Jagannātha is a citadel of mystery, insurmountable even by the gods. Mortal man is too frail to grasp His majesty. His grace and mercy are inscrutable and infinite.

Once the Queen had gone with the King to Purī for several days, hosted by the King of Purī himself. The Queen began to reminisce, "My daughter Viṣṇupriyā was born with the blessings of Lord Jagannātha." While visiting Purī, the Queen had prayed to have a daughter resembling the Lord's own appearance, so that the Queen could spend the rest of her days in good company. "May I be so fortunate to have a daughter and may Lord Jagannātha Himself become my son-in-law," she prayed.

All night the Queen was attended by her maid-servants. By morning, she was feeling slightly better. While Viṣṇupriyā passed the night in vigil, she dreamt Jagannātha was standing with His hands outstretched, waiting to be garlanded by her. He was trying to hide the half smile playing on His lips. Viṣṇupriyā felt as if she was being drawn to Him and embraced by Him. What ecstasy to be in the intense embrace of Jagannātha! A divine happiness suffused her being. If only she could be that fortunate! Viṣṇupriyā's sleep was broken and she became conscious of her mother, advising her to take some rest, or she would be feeling ill also.

After this the Princess had many sleepless nights. Only when called by her mother would she come out of her dream. She took some time to collect herself, but the dream she had these last few nights could not be erased from her memory. She wondered how she could be a servant of Lord Jagannātha and how He could be her all in all.

After these incidents in her own house, Viṣṇupriyā was convinced that Jagannātha was Śrī Kṛṣṇa incarnate, the Supreme Lord of all. Otherwise, how could His mahā-prasāda cure her dying mother? A long

period of time elapsed. Whenever anyone from Purī arrived in the kingdom he was treated like a king, so much was the devotion of the royal family towards Lord Jagannātha.

Once the head priest of Jagannātha Temple, Taluchha Mahāpātra, came to this distant place of Kota in Rajasthan, near the border of Kashmir. He had come to distribute mahā-prasāda in the King's district. As mahā-prasāda is said to be cooked by Mahā-Lakṣmī Herself, who is the wife of Jagannātha, and blessed by Vimalā, the mother goddess of the temple for all healing and purification, it has a sweet heavenly taste, and even the fear of death can be dispersed at the slightest taste of it. Knowing the princess' deep love for Lord Jagannātha, Taluchha Mahāpātra arrived with mahā-prasāda.

Tasting it this second time, Viṣṇupriyā had another vision. With an ecstatic smile on His face, she heard the Lord Himself say, "I, Lord Viṣṇu, am yours because you are My beloved." A tide of inexplicable happiness swept over her. From this time on, she always kept a picture of Lord Jagannātha close to her heart. She often felt as if she was being embraced by a strong superhuman force. The more she felt this presence with her, the more she was freed from hunger and thirst. She became completely lost in this awareness, and was constantly filled with delight and a sense of surrender at being in the embrace of Lord Jagannātha's divine arms. Her cheeks turned rosier every day, being so happy to be kissed by His resplendent lips. She began to experience divine phenomena in her young body, unbelievable to finite human imagination. When these divine experiences and visions passed, she felt the greatest anguish. Therefore she wanted to have such dreams always.

After a short stay, Taluchha Mahāpātra prepared to leave. The Queen gave him various gifts for Lord Jagannātha. He also asked the princess if she would like to give any offerings for Jagannātha.

Princess Viṣṇupriyā mused, "At least this should be communicated to Him, that I am completely surrendered to Him and am always waiting for Him to appear so that I may fall at His feet. I have no other offering because Jagannātha is the repository of all cosmic wealth." So she started writing a letter to the Lord with a musk-scented gold pen: "He is everywhere like space, and there is sufficient room in His outstretched

arms for all. You do not have to go anywhere for Him to be with you.” This was the only Sanskrit *śloka* that came to her mind, so she wrote it down and handed over the letter with ten gold coins.

On his way back to the temple, Taluchha Mahāpātra grew curious to know the contents of the letter sent to the Lord. With much anticipation and some apprehension, he opened the letter and began reading. He thought, “What is this? Although she is the well-educated daughter of a king, she has scribbled such nonsense. Why should I carry such trash to Lord Jagannātha?” So he threw the note down on the roadside and continued on his way.

Totally exhausted, the head priest reached his home in Purī and immediately took rest. While asleep, Lord Jagannātha spoke to him in a dream, “You brought the coins offered by Viṣṇupriyā, but not the letter. You treated it as trash. However, it was not a letter meant for you. Was this doing your duty? To your worldly little mind that note was a piece of childish scribbling, but to Me it was more valuable than gold itself, written as it was with so much love and affection for Me. When you come to the temple in the morning, check and see where the letter is. I picked it up the very next moment you threw it away and am now holding it close to My heart.”

Taluchha Mahāpātra immediately awoke from this disturbing experience. After finishing his morning ablutions, he rushed to the temple and opened the sealed doors himself. He was humbled: in deep shame, fear, and apprehension he went to Jagannātha. Seeing the letter pasted right against the Lord’s chest he fell flat before Lord Jagannātha and prayed, “Oh Lord! I have committed a terrible blunder out of ignorance. To err is human and to forgive is divine. Please forgive me!” By that time the devotees began to sing the morning prayers. Lord Jagannātha was enjoying this, taking everything in. “His blackish face looks more beautiful than ever. His is a dark beauty, a black beauty like the sky itself, a mystery to all, but an eternal delight,” thought Taluchha Mahāpātra.

In this way, the head priest of Jagannātha Temple came to know what real devotion is. Viṣṇupriyā herself was oblivious to all these things. She passed the rest of her short life, immersed only in thoughts of the Lord.

Jaya Jagannātha!

Lord Jagannātha and Gītā Pāṇḍa

Have you no feeling? Your three children have suffered from hunger for the last three days! How long can they live without food? Stop reading those useless epics! Do not dally in this scorching sun. Go and beg for food in five villages today!"

Though he was being ordered by his wife to go and beg for food since early morning, the *pāṇḍa* made no response. After his morning bath, he went on reciting the *Bhagavad-gītā*, as was his daily habit. But this time his wife cried out loudly, "What a shameless creature you are! Your constant chanting only finds a response in the pitiful cries of these starving children! Even then you continue reading the *Gītā*. Can we be fed by that? Go out and beg immediately! Otherwise, you will be taken hard to task."

The *pāṇḍa* shouted back, "O Jagannātha!" "What a heartless woman you are! Won't you even allow me to finish the daily recitation? It is immaterial if the *Gītā* is valueless to you. At least, let others be given a chance to read it! Simply because I am married to you I shall not be allowed to read the *Gītā*!"

The wife retorted, "Just throw that book away! Why did you marry me if you are so habituated to this, and moreover, why did you beget three children?"

Gītā Pāṇḍa replied, "Please remember this. Man did not make this book. Lord Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Jagannātha, delivered this *Gītā* Himself on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. This is no cheap novel. Once you begin it, you must complete it. This is the Lord's own words. Have patience and let me finish it."

The wife started crying at this counter reply. "How could there be such a cruel man as you in this world? Oh, what will be our fate? You are a priest, a big *pāṇḍa*. You have just given me some advice, but I know a little of the *Gītā* also. In the *Gītā*, the Lord insists that we do our duty first. Does this mean only reciting *Gītā*?"

Gītā Pāṇḍa replied in irritation. "The *Gītā* says that everything must be surrendered to God—this is the main point of *Gītā*—be it pleasure or pain, vice or virtue. He is the real doer of everything. Nothing is independent of Him. There is no reason to worry in hard times, neither should you feel happy amidst plenty. He is the only providence, so there

will be no sense of gain or loss. Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else can refute this argument. Why are you talking so crazy? I cannot refute the truth written in the ancient palm leaf scripts."

His wife said in a fit of rage, "Give me a pen! I will strike out those lines!" Her husband handed her a pen and challenged her to strike out any lines. She did and replied nonchalantly, "Oh, see how easily it can be censored and erased!" Seeing this offensive behavior of his wife, Gītā Pāṇḍa cried out, "It is wrong to rewrite the lines delivered by the Lord Himself to suit your own purposes. It will incur divine wrath. All my virtues and good acts of recitation are thrown to the wind by this childish and devilish act! Gītā Pāṇḍa laid down flat on the floor with the book on his chest, being depressed and haunted by sorrow and anger. Tears ran down his cheeks. His wife started sobbing, and then all the children followed suit.

The wife begged her husband's forgiveness for the blunder she made in a moment of anger. Still, she was unable to sleep at night. Would she ever be pardoned by Lord Jagannātha? She had a family of five to look after, two girls, one boy, and her husband, who took to begging and reciting the Gītā on the twenty-two steps at the main gate of the temple, known as Baisipabachha. They were suffering under the whip of acute poverty.

Can any scripture be equal to the Gītā, which emanated from the mouth of the Lord Himself? That is why the husband read and exclusively recited the Gītā on the streets. He became known as a *paṇḍita*, a great teacher, of the Gītā, and so people called him Gītā Pāṇḍa.

All this happened in about the 15th century when there occurred a severe drought in Gītā Pāṇḍa's area. The rainy period passed without even an inch of rain and subsequently with a great loss of harvest. Many people became beggars. No one in any of the surrounding villages could afford to give alms. It was a period of shortage and sorrow for all. Gītā Pāṇḍa had no shelter to approach but God. He had intense faith in divine providence, so he did not mind begging in these worst of times. However, his wife was in a lot of anxiety.

Gītā Pāṇḍa lived in the abode of the Lord, Nilācala-dhāma, the Blue Hill, which is now known as Purī. Blue was the color of infinity; in Purī everything had a blue cast to it, be it temple, sky, or sea. Gītā Pāṇḍa knew

that Lord Jagannātha inside this temple made provision for every creature. Also the goddess of wealth, Mahā-Lakṣmī lived inside this temple. So how could there be any fear of starvation at this holy place?

As Gītā Pāṇḍa was dreaming all these things, somebody knocked at his door. On opening the door, his wife saw to her surprise a man standing there with a load of rice, ghee, dahl, curd, cheese, tumeric, and mustard on his shoulder. She asked respectfully, "Sir, kindly tell me whose house you are looking for and I will direct you there."

"Is this the house of Gītā Pāṇḍa?" replied the bearer.

"Yes, it is," acknowledged the wife.

"This food has been sent to him. His friend Jagu has sent it. I was hired to bring it because no other person in our neighborhood could be trusted." Unloading the heavy bag, the bearer gave a sigh of relief. "Please take it." The wife, in a state of shock and disbelief, carried all the food inside. What a strange thing! Gītā Pāṇḍa's house was suddenly full to the brim!

"What is your caste? You don't look like you could carry this heavy load such a distance," asked the wife.

"Kind Mother, I am a dairyman and the younger son of Vrajarāja. You do not know me. But your husband knows me very well. His friend arranged all this food to be sent to you. I lost my way, otherwise I would have reached your house in time for the evening meal. Now let me bid you farewell. I have other engagements also."

"Oh, how wonderful he talks," thought the wife. Then she told the bearer, "Pāṇḍa is sleeping. Please allow me to prepare you a meal. You have labored so hard for us! Eat something in our house before continuing your journey."

"No, Mother. Thank you, but I have no time to spare. Besides I cannot eat anything because my tongue is scratched!" The bearer answered, then showed the wife his scratched tongue.

"Oh what a pity," she cried out. "Who did this?"

"Please do not ask. The pāṇḍa already knows. He will not mind if I leave without eating."

The wife could not persuade him to stay, so she went to prepare a meal for her children. The bearer immediately disappeared, without any delay.

The meal was ready just when Gītā Pāṇḍa awoke. This particular morning he felt as if he was possessed by the Lord. He was surprised to see his wife cooking and asked, "How is it that without rice you have prepared a meal?" "One of your friends, Jagu, sent it through a bearer. Come and take a look. Our kitchen is full to the rafters with food! Unfortunately, the bearer disappeared without eating anything because his tongue was badly scratched," she said innocently.

A thrill passed through the body of Gītā Pāṇḍa. He looked at his wife in astonishment. "We must go immediately to the temple," he said. Together they entered the inner sanctum of the *mandira*. The *pāṇḍa*'s wife was still bewildered. "Oh my Lord!" cried the *pāṇḍa*. "Go and look closely at Lord Jagannātha sitting on the altar," he told his wife. They were both able to clearly see the Deity of Jagannātha. They even saw His tongue. It was scratched and bleeding. Both husband and wife pressed their heads against the wall and prayed, "Oh Lord, we are fallen, please forgive us!" They heard a voice echo within the inner sanctum walls, "I help those who pray to Me."

Jaya Jagannātha!

It is useless to ask whether Dasia Bouri was a madman or of sound mind to offer such a little thing as a coconut to the Lord, and then ask, "Please return it to me, if the Lord does not accept it happily." What a strange man he was! Is there such a God who can take offerings in His own hands from devotees?

We too offer mangos, bananas, coconuts, and other delicacies to the Lord. But it is supposed to be sanctified through many rituals before the offering is made. How is it that a coconut was taken directly to the Lord Himself, as if He were in dire need of it? Dasia Bouri instructed, "Let it be offered as it is. Otherwise, it is to be returned."

The chief priest of Dasia Bouri's village entered the temple a second time with the coconut in his hand. Already he had had *darśana* of the Lord, and all the *bhoga*, or food, had been offered. However, the priest had forgotten the coconut. Just for the sake of formality, he was going to show the coconut before the Lord to fulfil Dasia Bouri's request and then return it to him.

Inside the inner sanctum of the temple, there was a big rush. Near the Garuḍa-stambha there was a little free space. So the priest moved there to have a clear view. He prayed, "Oh Lord, accept this offering from Dasia Bouri from the nearby village of Baligram. He is of a caste that is excluded from the temple. But he has requested that if You don't accept it in Your own hands, then it must be returned unoffered." While people were crowding around him, the priest held up the coconut before Lord Jagannātha. He felt as if his hands were frozen around it. Suddenly the coconut began slipping out of his grasp! Then it disappeared miraculously! The priest and everyone else were awe-struck by this miracle.

"Dasia Bouri is a devotee of colored caste, an untouchable, a fallen one. Even slight contact with him required a purification ritual. How was it possible in this age of Kali Yuga for the Lord to take such a man's offering in His own hands," the priest queried.

Suddenly, another priest near Lord Jagannātha's altar shouted, "Oh, what a catastrophe! Pieces of coconut shell are falling all around here!"

The details of this incident quickly became known by all. Everyone wondered about it, and thought it was a trick. But this mattered little to

the Lord and His devotee. "You cannot realise God, except through faith," Dasia Bouri's father had told him.

Dasia belonged to the nearby village of Baligram, which exists even today some 30 miles from Purī. Life in the village goes on much as it did then in the 1790s. Dasia had a wife but no children. He was a weaver by occupation. Usually, he sang hymns to the Lord in the evening in his simple hut. Singing was spontaneous to him and new songs to Jagannātha were always pouring from his lips, even though he could not read or write. He felt the reverberations from these songs throughout his body. He often felt as if he were being embraced by God and once heard the utterance, "I have created everybody. All are My sons and daughters. There is no untouchability and no separation between Me and anyone."

The time of the Chariot Festival was nearing. Jagannātha would come outside so that people of all castes and religions could see Him. Eagerly that morning Dasia Bouri also set out on foot for Purī, 30 miles away. He sang sweetly all the way, charming his fellow pilgrims with his devotional songs. When the group arrived, it was already time for the pulling of the chariots to begin. So he waited near Balagandi Street, halfway down the Grand Road of Purī, instead of going nearer to the temple. It is the fervent belief of devotees that one can be purged of all sins at the slightest touch of the ropes used in pulling the chariots. Dasia Bouri felt as if he were being pulled towards the chariot of Lord Balabhadra, instead of himself pulling it. Then as if in a vision, he saw Subhadrā's chariot approaching. To his God-intoxicated mind, Subhadrā's chariot appeared to be running ahead.

Decorated in gorgeous colors, the chariot of Lord Jagannātha followed last, to the resounding thunder of cymbals and conchshells. The chariot was headed by four white wooden stallions and was being pulled vigorously by tens of thousands of devotees.

"What a gracious countenance! What large, loving eyes! Oh, such a face! It is like the dark sky itself! How inviting His smile, reaching out His big arms to embrace us all!" Dasia Bouri thought. He wished to go up to the chariot, but his wish could never be fulfilled, for he was an untouchable. "Is it an offense to touch Jagannātha, who is Lord of the entire cosmos?" Dasia's only consolation was that he was seeing

Jagannātha before him on the best of days and in the Lord's best mood. To be near His divine presence was all Dasia could think of.

The Deity of Jagannātha originally belonged to hill tribesmen of Orissa. He was discovered there by Vidyāpati, a messenger of King Indradyumna and subsequently was brought to Purī to be worshipped in the great temple there. But descendants of these hill people were given the sole privilege of taking care of Lord Jagannātha during the Chariot Festival. They were now sitting on the chariot beside Jagannātha, as the chariot neared the summer home at the Guṇḍicā Temple.

The Lord's image still fully held Dasia Bouri's attention. He was overwhelmed with feelings of intense love and devotion. In such a state, Dasia Bouri walked back to his village, with the Lord's songs on his lips and the Lord's image imprinted on his heart.

His wife was waiting for him. She had prepared simple rice water for his meal. In the middle of the bowl of white rice, one dark leaf of spinach was floating. In his highly elated state, Dasia saw it as one of the big round eyes of Jagannātha.

The entire atmosphere of the home was saturated with the Lord's divine presence. Seeing her husband dancing, the wife thought he must have become possessed by some ghost.

"The food resembles my Lord! How can I eat it?" was all Dasia could reply.

Then Lord Jagannātha appeared to Dasia Bouri and spoke, "Oh Dasia! I am always with you. I have no need for a diamond pedestal. Ask whatever you like. I am prepared to bless you!"

At bedtime, Dasia Bouri whispered to Lord Jagannātha "Oh Lord I only ask this. Please accept my offerings of Your own accord, whenever I offer anything to You." The Lord gave a nod of agreement and disappeared.

The next morning Dasia Bouri procured a coconut from his landlord, bartering a piece of cloth for it. The coconut must be offered to the Lord, only then could his dream be verified. But how could the coconut be sent to Jagannātha? By the Lord's arrangement, the head priest of his village happened to be going that very day to Purī with a group of devotees bearing many offerings. Dasia humbly approached the *brāhmaṇa* priest, asking, "O friend, please take this to Lord Jagannātha on my behalf, as

I am unable to go inside the temple. If He does not take it, please return it to me when you come back."

After the illuminating incident in the temple, all realized, including the village priest himself, that the Lord and His devotee are inseparable. "Where there is a pure devotee, I Myself am present."

Once Dasia Bouri went to Purī on his own with a basket of mangos for the Lord. On arriving in Purī, he envisioned the image of Jagannātha sitting inside the blue wheel on top of the temple, called Nīla-cakra. Jagannātha accepted the fruit of His own accord, and the basket was immediately emptied. A group of temple priests saw this miraculous disappearance of the mangos and rushed to Jagannātha to ascertain the genuineness of the incident. To their utter amazement, they found mango skins and pits lying on the altar, and drops of mango juice running down the face of Jagannātha!

Who will label such a devotee as "low" or "untouchable." There was such complete union between this devotee and Lord Jagannātha, like a lover and his beloved! Is not such a person blessed?

Jaya Jagannātha!

After the death of Dasia Bouri, the King of Purī granted his descendants a role in the annual Chariot Festival. They alone would be allowed to carry the wooden horses and the three charioteers to the chariots. This service is performed to this day only by members of his family.

Lord Jagannātha and Salabega

The chariot of the Lord stood still in spite of all the pushing, pulling and shouting from the vast crowd. It stood motionless like a huge mountain. The chariot of the Deity, Subhadrā, sister of Lord Jagannātha, had already approached Balagandi, half-way down the Grand Road of Purī. This created great apprehension among the people and was threatening to interrupt the great Chariot Festival. A momentary silence reigned. Was it time for a rest or were the charioteers trying to evoke a more passionate response from the public by this delay?

Just then, someone was heard singing a prayerful song to the Lord. A rumor began circulating through the crowd that it was the son of a Muslim and that he should be stopped. "Who is going to listen to his song? Can he start the chariot again? How can he presume to be the Lord's devotee?" Such rumors made the scene very tense.

In what is now Pakistan, the Muslim who was his father abducted a Hindu girl. Later on, she became one of his concubines. Out of hatred for Hinduism, the Muslim had destroyed many temples. Paradoxically enough, the Muslim begot a son by the Hindu girl who became a great devotee of Jagannātha. His name was Salabega and from childhood he began singing songs full of devotion to Jagannātha. Once the son was even jailed by his own father when it was found out that he was a staunch supporter of the Vedic culture. To sing the glories of Jagannātha was Salabega's only concern.

He became overwhelmed with an intense passion to see Jagannātha. "What a cruel fate! I am a Muslim, barred from ever entering the temple. I cannot get the mercy of God."

In time Salabega's beautiful songs to Jagannātha were being sung on every street corner in the town of Jalana, Pakistan. One day Salabega heard that Lord Jagannātha comes outside the temple in a chariot with his brother and sister once a year to ride the huge chariots during Ratha-Yātrā festival. "Here is the golden opportunity to actualize my greatest longing!" thought Salabega. So he journeyed to Purī.

On the morning of the Chariot Festival, Salabega hurried to the front of the Lion's Gate of the temple. People easily identified him and cast aspersions on his character. He was driven back, "Cannot my soul be redeemed and find salvation?" he cried.

He had no chance even to be an onlooker and was forced half-way down the main road of Purī. In the meanwhile, the chariot of Balabhadra, elder brother of Lord Jagannātha, passed by him, to the sound of cymbals and huge rumbling wheels. Salabega felt as if he were taken within. Like a crying child, he ran towards the advancing chariot with tearful eyes.

Then the chariot of Subhadrā moved forward, but it passed him by without halting even for a moment's glimpse inside. "Can't I even touch the chariot?" sobbed Salabega.

After some time, the much-awaited chariot of Lord Jagannātha advanced, with a thundering roar from the vast crowd. It sent a thrill through Salabega's whole body. Knowing his heart's desire, the chariot of Lord Jagannātha halted for awhile by the side of Salabega. This historic halt of the chariot in the year 1489 testified to Salabega's spiritual purity. Salabega looked at the face of the Lord to his heart's content and sang deep soul-stirring songs about the glory of God. He felt as if he were being embraced by Lord Jagannātha. "Oh my Lord! Your outstretched arms embrace all. There is no barrier to God, be one an untouchable or otherwise. Everyone is a part and parcel of unlimited God."

He then composed on the spot one of his greatest songs, "Ahe Nīla Śaila, Oh Great Blue Mountain:"

Oh great blue mountain of God,
Like an elephant You come out of the temple,
To remove the dense forest of our suffering.

Plucking it like a tiny lotus in Your trunk,
You crush all our sorrow into the earth.

The huge crowd of people had run out of patience. Hours had passed, and still Lord Jagannātha's chariot stood still, in spite of all attempts to pull it. Many who had been critical of his conduct previously began to praise Salabega. Finally, the chariot started to move forward even without public participation. The entire atmosphere was surcharged

with the glory of God, and the chariot of Lord Jagannātha proceeded towards its destination. The crowd followed, but Salabega stood still, rooted in one spot with folded hands and tears in his eyes, still experiencing the powerful contact of this meeting with his Lord.

Jaya Jagannātha!

Even today the songs of Salabega, which number more than fifty, are among the most popular songs sung by devotees on the Grand Road of Purī and inside the temple as well. There were many other wonderful incidents in the life of Salabega. He contracted leprosy and was made to suffer even greater ostracism. But at death he was buried in the spot where he had stood that day of the Chariot Festival, half-way down the Grand Road of Purī. A small mosque is standing there in his memory even to this day.

Lord Jagannātha and the Yoginī

Her soft smiling face was the cynosure of all eyes, as if eyes were meant only for such a vision. People moving about the courtyard of the temple always cast side-long glances at her. Her face was so nectarean that it arrested pilgrims on the path hurrying for *darśana* of Lord Jagannātha.

But Jñānādei continued weaving her garlands for the Lord, her face downcast. On the arrival of a customer for garlands, she simply placed it by his side in a packet made of banana leaf. Nobody ever saw her touching anybody's hand, even unconsciously. But once the young son of the head priest snatched a garland as she was packing it.

Immediately the flowers fell from his hand and lay scattered here and there. With a sharp cry, he felt his hand cramping and all the energy being drained out of it. People gathered around, seeing the lad in such a pitiable condition. But the *mālinī*, the lady florist, continued her work, although her face became more grave and collected. Had the young chap committed some offense and was he now paying for it with this mishap?

After this incident, it became a popular fancy among people going to the Jagannātha Temple to try to touch the *mālinī*. At times, they dared to inch forward within reach of her, but their courage evaporated into thin air. A feeling of awe and wonder overpowered them, as if they were frozen on the spot. If they touched her, might they burn up or melt away? So in a moment of indecision and fear, they inched back from her shining face, that always appeared like a fresh flower.

It was the thirteenth century, and the King of Purī himself, Mukunda Deva, came to the temple, to the sound of Begul instruments and the welcome-salute of the worshipers. The sound of cheers broke the stony silence around the lady florist who looked up towards the King. King Mukunda Deva gave her a regal look. On looking directly into her eyes, he felt as if he was being taken within by the power of her blue eyes set in her soft face. Somehow he controlled himself and stepped into the inner sanctum of the temple.

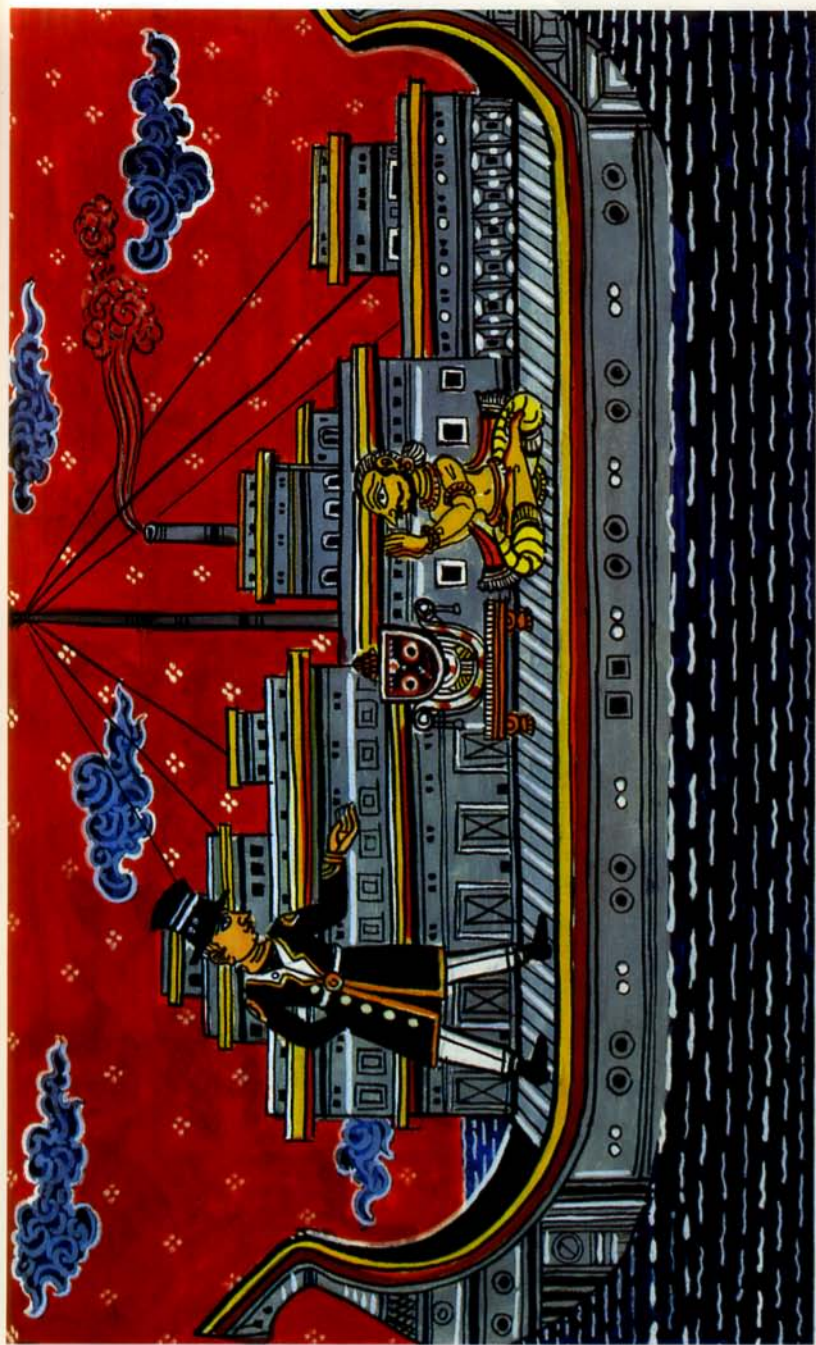
There are vivid descriptions of womanly beauty in the classics, but they grow pale and insignificant when compared with the resplendence of Jñānādei's face. There arose a popular speculation among the townspeople that she had come to Śrī Kṣetra-dhāma only to be a temptress, so



She immediately assumed her original form, stretching one of her legs to the top of the temple where a lamp was burning, and with it lit the priests' candle. (see page 4)



Indue time the Lord answered the head priest's prayer, speaking to him in a dream, "Let this wealthy person offer Me one piece of pān." (see page 7)



"Can He save our ship from the clutches of death?" asked the captain in disbelief.... "If He can... I will offer Him all the treasures on board the ship and myself as well." (see page 11)



The Princess wrote, "He is everywhere like space, and there is sufficient room in His outstretched arms for all. You do not have to go anywhere for Him to be with you." (see pages 15-16)



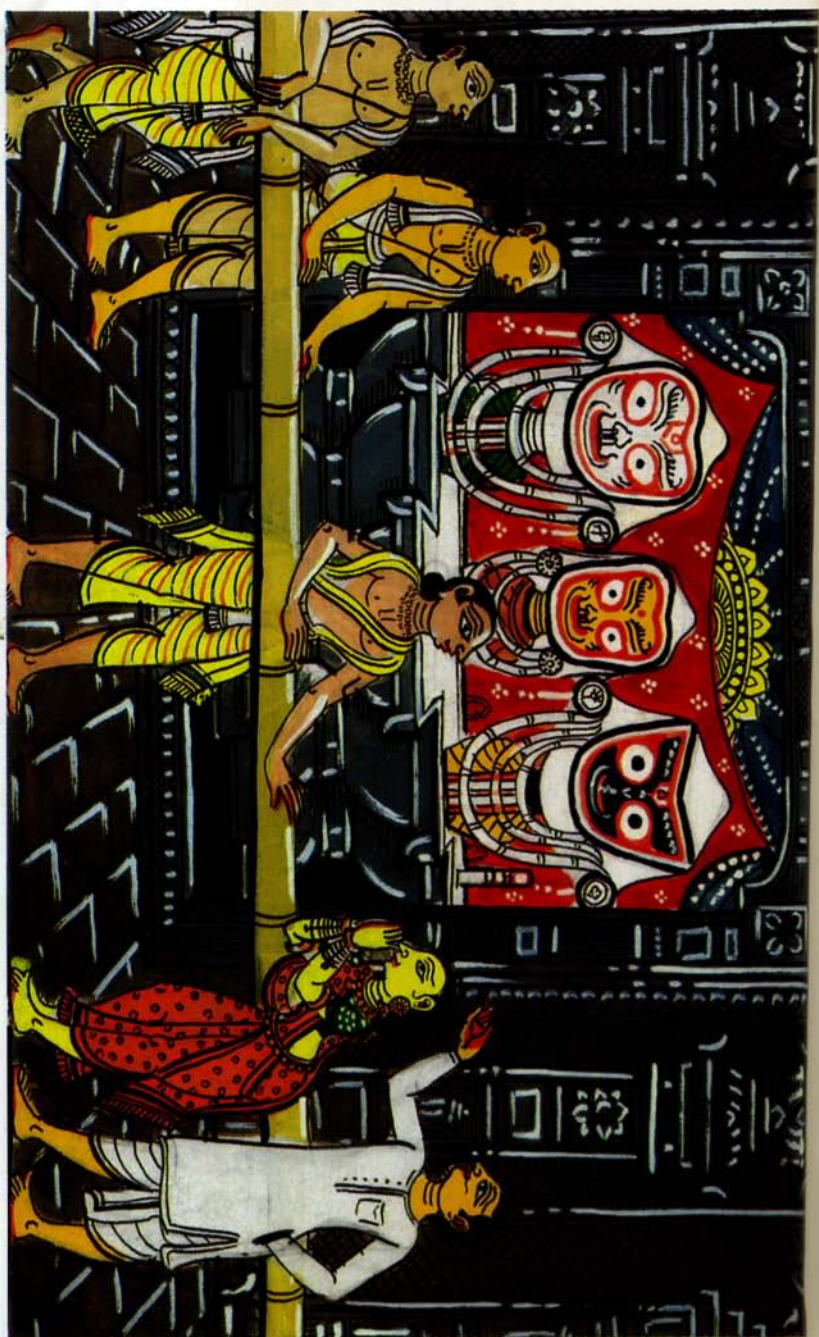
"This food has been sent to him. His friend Jagu has sent it. I was hired to bring it because no other person in our neighborhood could be trusted." (see page 19)



The sound of cheers broke the stony silence around the lady Florist who looked up towards the King. (see page 28)



"O Rāja! Please allow my Khechaḍi dish, a type of tice pullāo, to be offered as if it were prepared by Mahā-Lakṣmī, the wife of Lord Jagannātha Himself." (see page 38)



"Is the one with the black face Jaganātha? Can He hear prayers and answer them?" (see page 42)

attractive was her appearance. Her curly and luxuriant hair was combed and twined with scented flowers, adding more luster to her charms. Her eyebrows were delicately bow-shaped, and under her broad forehead, her big kohl-darkened eyes drew one irresistibly to her, like a piece of iron to a magnet. Her tightly-bound breasts were full and shapely, like two cups of the richest mother's milk, inviting the child in all to come and drink. Such was the excellence of her beauty.

Jñānādei had taken over the temple flower service of her foster father. Once he had a dream that he would come upon a small girl the next morning. As he was growing too old to do the job of temple florist, she would come and help him. So it was that Jñānādei came to live in the house of her foster father. The old man was wifeless and childless, moreover, he had no money to see Jñānādei married. After his death, the *mālinī* trained many domestic animals like sheep and parrots. She taught the parrots to sing the names of Lord Jagannātha, so the silent atmosphere of the house became resonant with the utterance of the Lord's name.

To the surprise of neighbors, hoof prints were detected around her house. That started the rumor that some rich paramour had come on horseback the night before. As a result of this washerman gossip, Jñānādei's heart was upset, as she never looked at anyone. People nearby kept watch and sometimes spent sleepless nights trying to discover the truth, but all in vain. They could not trace either the coming of a horse or the identity of that illicit lover.

What was it to her if these people went crazy over this matter? So Jñānādei continued her service and again became unmindful of the public conspiracy surrounding her. In the course of events, the King was informed of this so-called illicit affair of hers and he ordered a probe; lest she should have any dealings with a foreign enemy.

But the secret agents sent by the King were themselves undone. They attempted to enter the house secretly, but it was in vain. They felt hypnotised and powerless to step through the doorway. So they hid outside her house and overheard what sounded like flirting sounds inside in the middle of the night. Then came the puzzling, dubious chanting and singing, "Jaya Jagannātha! Oh Subhadrā, save us!" This confirmed that Jñānādei was simply praying in solitude. The King learned about the

genuineness of Jñānādei after obtaining this final report from his spies, and then decided to meet the *yoginī* himself.

The story as it has been passed down to us goes like this. It was the year 1268, at a time when worship of Śiva was very popular. The utmost importance was attached to tantric practices.

Once, in the month of November, it was raining as Jñānādei was on her way home without an umbrella. Even so, no rain touched her body, as if an unseen umbrella was over her head. Seeing such magical feats going on around her, people believed that she was a *yoginī* who had special powers. This made women approach her home for treatment of diseases. "We won't leave until you heal us. Do not pretend you can't, as you can bring nectar from heaven if you wish."

Then Jñānādei would give in and tell them, "Please take water from this can and sprinkle a little over your children for their good health and vigor." Unfortunately, the more that were cured, the more would gather daily outside her house.

The traditional Śiva worshipers became jealous and decided to use their mystic powers to stop her some how or other. Necromancers were employed to make her dumb. They were unsuccessful and returned to the Śiva priests, lamenting, "She has already attained enlightenment, and her soul is part of limitless space!"

"Oh, we are foiled!" cried the priests. "You could have at least made the sheep dumb!"

But the messengers answered, "There were no sheep as such. Rather they were just master tantrics in sheep's skin. They took the form of sheep in the day but became tantrics at night!" A sense of frustration and defeat overpowered the Śiva worshipers. They brought grave allegations against Jñānādei before the King. They charged that she was plotting to make their temples powerless and their priests mute. The King felt stunned on hearing that Jñānādei kept five tantrics in sheep's disguise. He ordered, "Let her house be raided and boarded up!"

Before the arrival of the soldiers, a parrot flew out of its cage and informed Jñānādei of the King's order. Jñānādei remained nonchalant and prayed to Lord Jagannātha to take her side and protect her.

"Be fearless and strong to brave even the harshest weather," she heard from above. "I descend whenever necessary, even though I am transcendental to this material world. My appearance is for the upliftment of devotees like you. Even Sitā, the most chaste lady, had to bear the brunt of public blame. So what to speak of a mere lady like you! You will have to face a fire ordeal also. Why have you transformed tantrics into sheep? You have become an eye-sore to the simple man. Cream is the condensed form of milk. But a baby cannot live on it; it must be given milk. However, do not worry, I am with you. Put aside your special powers, and call on Me alone. I am always with you. Is it not My duty?" whispered the soft deep voice from above.

This loving whisper consoled Jñānādei, who sat alone in her house. Even her sheep had been left hungry since morning. Calmly Jñānādei watched the King's soldiers encircle her house. She walked to the door and told them to take her to the King, even before they had time to read out the order. Surrounded by soldiers, Jñānādei proceeded to the King's palace with her five sheep.

No one knew how a sheep could be turned into a man, or vice versa. Suspense filled the air. "She could do that to all of us, if she so wishes," they feared. "What kind of woman is she? If she has been spending her nights with five young men, how can the Lord wear a garland strung by her? Others took Jñānādei's side and replied, "Do not utter a word against the integrity of her character. Have patience and wait for the King's verdict."

The group was nearing the royal palace. The crowd was constantly changing its impression of her. Was she mystery incarnate? No, she was an ordinary florist. Others said her character was pure and faultless.

The King himself was a worshiper of Śiva. Jñānādei was made to stand before him with hands folded and head lowered. The King could not look at her face as it was so resplendent.

"I am called Jñānādei Mālinī, the learned florist."

"Once the Prince of Suvarṇapura met you. What for?" asked the King.

"Yes, your Majesty. He came to me to learn the practice of certain mystic meditations. Now he stays with me as well."

"Can I see him?" questioned the King.

Jñānādei immediately looked behind her and patted the back of one of her sheep. At the twinkling of an eye, it was transformed into a young man. The Prince bowed before the King. All were stunned! Then the other four sheep were also transformed back into men.

The stalwarts of the Śiva temples clamoured to punish the lady, saying, "You see, our allegations are well-grounded!"

The King ordered them to be silent and gave an inquiring look at the face of the Prince of Suvarṇapura. The prince responded, "Oh, King! Mystic science demands some secrecy and privacy. Ordinary minds will otherwise be misled. This lady had no wrong intention"

"What about the other four?" questioned the King. "Is it true that you are plotting to make all Śiva temples powerless?"

"Not in any way," they replied vehemently. "They are simply jealous of this woman's spiritual gifts. Their own plot backfired on them. That is why some have now lost their speech."

"Can you make them regain their power of speech?" the King turned to Jñānādei and asked.

"Things can take any shape, if my Lord Jagannātha so wishes. He can do or undo anything." said Jñānādei quietly. With folded hands, she prayed. After some time, a shadow descended down upon them and appeared to take the shape of Lord Jagannātha. Seeing this, all began singing the glory of God, and the Śaivite priests regained their power of speech instantly.

The King came down from his throne humbly; a small king covered by the shadow of a great one. Then the huge shadow disappeared.

Jñānādei returned from her trance-like state and went immediately to the temple. There she began stringing the most beautiful garland of tulasī. It was twelve feet long, known as *dhanva mālā*, which would fully stretch from Lord Jagannātha's one outstretched arm to the other. And she presented this *dhanva mālā* to the Lord, for showing her His greatness in her hour of need.

Jaya Jagannātha!

Lord Jagannātha and the Golden Tray

Bandhu Mohanti was a non-*brāhmaṇa*, but he was a great devotee of Lord Jagannātha. As poor as he was, he believed that Lord Jagannātha was his true friend and would come to help him in his hour of need.

Bandhu Mohanti used to spend most of the day only reading about Lord Jagannātha, forgetting his wife and children. His wife did not even know that her husband was a devotee of Lord Jagannātha. She only thought that he had some local friend known by the name of Jagannātha. She was much annoyed when Bandhu Mohanti wanted to spend more time with his friend than with her. One day the wife asked, "Who is that friend?"

"You do not know and you cannot know. He is very rich, having a great building. He is a king and His dress, His behavior, His life style, everything about Him is royal. He is also very kind," replied Bandhu Mohanti.

"Let us go to see him some time!" the wife asked.

"How can you go in such a poor dress?" the husband answered. "If we want to go we must take with us some gifts, and our children must wear good clothes. You must wear a gold necklace and bangles, otherwise the gate keeper of my friend's house may not allow us to enter. Since I have no money to buy such things, I am not going to meet Him," he added. Bandhu Mohanti's wife replied, "If your friend is true and faithful, he will respect you and accept you in whatever dress you wear. Since you are so poverty stricken, why don't you approach him for help?"

Bandhu Mohanti paid no attention to what his wife said, and so his wife became very angry again. Even more difficult times were coming. The whole village was suffering from a bad harvest, as no rain had come, many might die of starvation. It was the year 1392, like Bandhu Mohanti, most of the villagers were farmers. All were greatly worried. Bandhu Mohanti was often telling them "My friend is rich. If He wishes, we can be saved." So his wife forcibly made Bandhu Mohanti go and meet this great friend.

It was after dark when Bandhu Mohanti, accompanied by his wife and three children, started out for Puri to meet Lord Jagannātha. The wife was thinking, "If we come to any town, at least someone will give the

children some food." So they came walking from the village Shatapada to Purī, nearly 30 miles away. Only a few grains of rice were shared with them by the pilgrims who passed them on the road that night.

After three days, they finally reached Purī. Bandhu Mohanti took them straight to the temple of Lord Jagannātha, but as it was the middle of the night, the doors were closed. So they rested at Pejanala on the southern side of the temple. This is the outside watering trough where cows come to drink the rice water drained from the temple kitchen.

"Where is he, your rich friend here at Purī? Where is his house? When are we going there?" asked the wife anxiously.

"He is very nearby now." Bandhu Mohanti replied. He did not wish to tell her that he meant Lord Jagannātha was his friend. The children were hungry and crying. So the wife gave them rice water to drink from Pejanala, where the cows come to drink. Afterwards they went to sleep. Bandhu Mohanti also slept. But as the wife was feeling so worried for the children, she woke up. Suddenly she saw a young dark *brāhmaṇa* carrying many different types of food over his head on a golden tray. He came near shouting "Where is Bandhu Mohanti? Where is Bandhu Mohanti?" The wife heard this, as he was shouting in a loud voice. "Yes, We are here. What is the matter?" she asked.

The young *brāhmaṇa* smiled mysteriously and said, "The friend of Bandhu Mohanti has sent him this food. Please take it as I have a lot of other work to do." The wife was not in a position to know what to do. Bandhu Mohanti was fast asleep. She did not think it proper to disturb his sleep after such a long journey. The young *brāhmaṇa* was about to leave, so she had no time to ask anything. She accepted all the food on the golden plate and woke her children. They all ate this huge feast, then fell asleep again, their stomachs finally satisfied.

When Bandhu Mohanti awoke, he was told everything. He began to cry profusely, "Why didn't you wake me up? You are blessed to see Him. I am unfit to ever meet Him!" His mind was reeling from the magnitude of what had just happened to them. The wife did not understand what the matter was. As she was more worldly-minded, she could not grasp the deep meaning of this incident.

Bandhu Mohanti, in great ecstasy, ate from the golden tray all that was left by the children. "But what should I do with this gold plate?" he asked himself. He cleaned it and with deep devotion he placed it under his pillow that night, lest it be stolen.

In the morning, there was much commotion inside the temple. The costly golden tray used by Lord Jagannātha was missing. The matter was immediately reported to Virakiśora, the King of Purī, who is considered to be the "moving Jagannātha" and sole authority on matters of the Jagannātha Temple.

The police caught Bandhu Mohanti as he slept that morning outside the temple walls. The golden tray was returned to the temple, and the King was about to deliver harsh punishment. Bandhu Mohanti's wife and children cried and pleaded. "It was all the doing of Bandhu Mohanti's rich friend!" the wife said, trying to defend her husband. Bandhu Mohanti could not help but cry also. Never did he expect that such a calamity would happen to them! The King announced that he would give the sentence the next day.

That night the King of Purī had a miraculous dream. Lord Jagannātha Himself appeared in the dream, saying, "Oh King, if a friend comes to your house, is it not right that you greet him with a fine meal? Bandhu Mohanti is My friend, so what fault have I done to give him food on My golden tray. Will you sentence Me also? Please, release him at once!"

The King was astonished to see Lord Jagannātha come in his dream and tell him all this. He released Bandhu Mohanti forthwith. He also ordered that Bandhu Mohanti and also his descendants be allowed to serve in the temple itself! Even now in the temple, descendants of Bandhu Mohanti cook the first meal of the day for Lord Jagannātha. It is a preparation of sweet rice and ghee, known as *khecheḍa*. After cooking this *prasāda*, Bandhu Mohanti himself was given the privilege of carrying this offering on that very golden tray to the Deities. After the food was offered, he would lead the procession of *mahā-prasāda* being taken to the devotees, carrying the golden tray over his head. Even today there are cooks in the temple with the surname of Mohanti who are direct descendants of Bandhu Mohanti, still carrying out this service.

What is astonishing is that Bandhu Mohanti was a *non-brāhmaṇa* and never held any hereditary service in the temple before. Of the more than 15,000 worshipers of the Jagannātha temple today this can only be said of him. He had simply considered Lord Jagannātha to be his friend.

Jaya Jagannātha!

All were deeply worried, as the rituals of the temple had abruptly stopped. No offering to Jagannātha was accepted by Him. No one knew what the reason was. As a last resort, the King of Purī was informed that no offering to Jagannātha was being accepted.

King Virakiśora Deva was greatly concerned when he heard that Lord Jagannātha was angry enough to refuse the food offered to Him three times daily. In spite of sincere *pūjā*, no sign of acceptance was given in the drop of water in the priest's hand. It is said that Jagannātha accepts the offering when His image can be seen in that drop of water at the time of *bhoga* offering. Simply, the food was spoiled on the spot. Suddenly, the King remembered a dream he had the night before, as if Jagannātha was trying to tell him something, "Oh King! Have you forgotten Me? What arrangements do you make for those who come to Me? Are you taking good care of My devotees? Perhaps you think I cannot feel their sorrows as if I am only made of wood. But I feel everything that any mortal being is feeling. Karmabāi from Maharashtra is My dear devotee. She is now in much difficulty in Purī, but nobody is taking care of her. I care for her as she has totally offered herself to Me. Unless her sorrow is removed, I will not accept anything from the priests."

Now King Virakiśora Deva was in a great dilemma. He realized that the dream was true, as the head priest of the temple had had the same dream. A thorough search was made to find Karmabāi. The King gave the order for her to be brought to Him, wherever she was. Many tried to find her, but in vain.

Baḍu, one of the searchers, arrived at a hermitage and observed that the offering made there to Lord Jagannātha reflected the deep devotion of the devotees. So he knocked at the door.

"Whom are you searching for," asked Indrasvāmī, the guru. "I am searching for a lady named Karmabāi." The entire atmosphere of the place was saturated with an air of divinity and grace. Baḍu fell into a deep meditative state. "Oh Baḍu! I Myself am here in intimacy, though not in splendor and plenty." It was the voice of the Lord.

Just then, Karmabāi came out of the hermitage kitchen. A dear devotee of Lord Jagannātha, she was staying there with her master Indrasvāmī. Baḍu saw some delicious foods being offered to Jagannātha,

with such juicy aroma as is usually found only in food offered in the temple. Feeling blessed by the Lord's grace, Karmabāi and Indrasvāmī had not gone back to Maharashtra, even though they had come to Purī for only a short pilgrimage. "Jagannātha is everything to her," said the old *guru*.

The more Karmabāi learned about Jagannātha, the more enriched she felt. So they had made a decision not to leave this place, even at the cost of much physical hardship, or even life itself.

Once, while Karmabāi was in the temple, the most delicious *prasāda* for Jagannātha was itself declared unfit to be offered. Karmabāi immediately rushed towards Jagannātha and cried, "Why do you do such mischief? Perhaps you want *prasāda* from my hand!" Karmabāi quickly brought a pot of food to offer to the Lord. She totally forgot the proper rituals, as the rituals of the heart are superior.

Now Baḍu Mahāpātra was standing before her in the hermitage. He said, "You are ordered to meet the King as soon as possible. I cannot take *mahā-prasāda* here, since no offering is worthy of the name if it has not been offered to the Lord in the temple first, and that too with the proper formalities observed there."

Upon seeing Karmabāi in his palace, the King ordered that the exchequer arrange for her daily maintenance. Then Karmabāi requested the King, "Oh Rāja! Please allow my *Khecheḍī* dish, a type of rice *pullāo*, to be offered as if it were prepared by Mahā-Lakṣmī, the wife of Lord Jagannātha Himself."

"It is neither desirable to decline her request, nor is it practical to concede to her wish," mused the King. "Let His will prevail."

Everybody was filled with a sense of anticipation to see the outcome. "Will I be blamed and ostracized by Him for this audacity?" lamented the poor lady. "The *gopīs* in Dvāpara-yuga sacrificed everything for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and their longing never ceased." Many doubts filled her mind.

The *ārati* bell began ringing inside as the food was being offered. The chief priest would declare the offering accepted if the image of Lord Jagannātha could be clearly discerned in the drop of water he held up in his hand. After some time, the priest emerged from the inner sanctum

of the temple and told the huge gathering, "The Lord is eating."

Tears of love and gratitude flowed down Karmabāi's cheeks. In accepting her offering, the Lord had acknowledged her as His very own. To this very day, one of the fifty-six items of food offered daily in the temple and given out as *mahā-prasāda* is called Karmabāi's *Khecheḍi*.

Jaya Jagannātha!

Lord Jagannātha and the Wish Fulfilled

In the year 1973 the author of this book personally experienced one of the spectacular *līlās* of Lord Jagannātha. The author is an actual priest in the temple, for the service is passed down from father to son.

All the *khuntīās* serve as bodyguards to the Deities, and without their permission, devotees cannot enter the door of the inner sanctum of the temple to have *darśana*, or sight of the Deities. The *khuntīās* accept any offerings like fruit, cloth, or money to be given and only they can take these offerings up to the altar to the Deities.

The author was then a young man of twenty-eight years and it was his first full day of service to Jagannātha.

Taking bath, putting on a new holy thread, white *candana* on his forehead and a *tulasī mālā* around his neck, he went with his father to the temple at 4 AM. Talking to Lord Jagannātha just like to a human person, he prayed, "Well, Jagannātha. I know You like to give your servants many fine things, but this is my first day. Please do not give me anything today; I am here to serve You." Even as he was praying like this, an old lady called to him from behind, "Oh young man, are you a *pūjārī* of the temple? You must be new today. You just take this five rupee note to the Deities, and then take it home."

"Oh Jagannātha, what should I do? I have just promised You not to take anything for myself today, but now with the very first offering You are giving me money. Are you testing me?" Without touching the money, the author called to one of his brothers to come and take it to the Deities. The old lady protested, "No, no! I am giving *you* the money. Here is another five rupees! You take it!" Again the young man looked at Jagannātha in doubt. He felt like he was quarrelling with an elephant. Finally, he gave in and touched the ten rupees and gave it to his brother, so as not to offend either the old lady or the Lord.

It was just dawn. Throughout the day, many people wanted to give money in thanks to the young worshiper, but he would not accept. If he had, he would have earned 1,000 rupees that day. Finally, the last rituals were about to take place. It was after midnight, and he had avoided accepting any money.

Again looking at Lord Jagannātha, he said, "Now You are defeated. I win. If You had really wanted, I would have received at least something without my knowledge. But now I am victorious in Your service."

The very next minute, the *khuntīā* saw a young bus driver standing some feet away. The devotee immediately called to the author, "Are you a priest of the temple?"

"Yes, I am, but what do you want?" he replied, a bit worried. "Do you not see I am wearing the dress of a priest? What do you want me to do?"

The bus driver replied, "I have some silver coins here. Touch them to Lord Jagannātha and take them home." At that time a silver coin was worth thirty times its present day value. The writer protested, "You come back in tomorrow morning and make this offering. Now is not the right time because the last rituals are beginning."

The bus driver's face fell, "But my bus is leaving immediately with pilgrims to Badrinath. I can't wait until morning!" The young *khuntīā* turned and started walking away, but the driver threw the silver coins at him from behind! When the *khuntīā* looked back, the bus driver had vanished! The *khuntīā* was now alone in the temple with the Deities. All the other temple priest had gone home. The coins were lying on the floor at his feet.

"Oh Jagannātha, what can I do? You have given me coins, in spite of my stubborn refusal." So he picked up the silver coins and went home. It was almost 3 AM in the morning. When he gave the 20 silver coins to his wife, she became very happy. She had asked her husband the night before to please collect enough silver donations to make silver anklets for their new baby daughter. The husband had remained silent, but Lord Jagannātha had given it to her anyway.

The young *khuntīā* went to change his clothes. One more silver coin fell out on the floor, making a big sound! The young man was dumbfounded. He had been given one rupee, without his knowledge. So the elephant always wins, and the ant is defeated.

Jaya Jagannātha!

Another Wish Fulfilled

On that first day of the young man's service in the temple, yet another spectacular "līlā" occurred. When he was standing before the Deities in the evening, a newly married couple who came from the state of Bengal met him. The man's name was Deepen Ghosh and the wife's name was Shubhashree.

The husband asked the author, "Is the one with the black face Jagannātha? Can He really hear prayers and answer them? Perhaps not, because He is made of wood and has no ears to hear with. You, being the priests of Jagannātha, only cheat the innocent pilgrims who come from distant places. You are only interested in taking money from them in His name. But He never answers any of our prayers."

As this was only his first day in the temple, the young *khuntīā* could not understand what Mr. Ghosh meant. He simply replied, with much feeling, "Yes, Jagannātha does hear, if your prayer is sincere."

Deepen Ghosh was a wealthy businessman and he was very skeptical of these ancient traditions. So he sarcastically rebuffed the young man, "I am sincere, but you are not. What is the use of doing *pūjā* and prayer to that log of wood? The father has told the son to do this, and the son has told his son. Like that, it goes on and on. The one whom you call Jagannātha can never hear you."

When the man became more adamant to challenge Jagannātha, the young priest consulted with the head priest, who was decorating Lord Jagannātha with flower garlands at that time. The head priest advised, "Tell him to come again for the *Candana Lāgī* Ceremony of Jagannātha after midnight. At that time, Jagannātha's forehead is smeared with sweet-smelling sandal before He retires to bed. If any person prays to Him at this particular hour, He grants the prayer."

When Mr. Ghosh again began to abuse Lord Jagannātha with sarcastic remarks and loud laughter, his young wife bowed her head in prayer. When he left the temple, she silently followed. To the amazement of all, this same Mr. Ghosh and his wife turned up for the *Candana Lāgī* ceremony that very night. He met the author there and put the same question again, "So, is this a good time for Jagannātha to listen? If so, I have something to ask Him." The young priest inquired as to what he wanted. Mr. Ghosh retorted, "Can He give it to me? You ask Him first!"

The author, being disgusted with this difficult man, told him, "Yes, He will grant it to you, just tell Him what you want."

Mr. Ghosh looked a moment at his beautiful young wife. Her skin was light and her face shone like that of a goddess. She was wearing a rich Benares silk saree and her face was half-covered with its cloth. Indeed, she looked like a young Queen. He loved her dearly, but had an inner yearning for God also. So, half in joke and half out of deep sincerity, he turned to Lord Jagannātha and asked, "Tell Him to give me salvation. Tell Him I am asking for His *mokṣa*."

The young *khuntīā* went to the head priest, who was putting sandalwood paste on Lord Jagannātha's forehead at that moment. It is but natural that at such an enjoyable moment Lord Jagannātha would in a good mood and happy to grant anything asked for. The *khuntīā* communicated all the details about the man to the head priest. His name, his native place, his wife's name, and the prayer itself.

Then in a big voice so that the man himself could hear, the priest asked Lord Jagannātha, "Oh Jagannātha, this man Deepen Ghosh from Bengal asks You to grant him salvation. Please grant this."

The writer returned and told the man that his prayer would be granted.

Mr. Ghosh replied, "Hah! This wooden deity! It granted my prayer! Wonderful! Don't cheat me, please! Don't cheat me. Don't think I am so stupid, I can't be fooled so easily!"

Months passed. This incident slipped from the author's mind. Some six months later, he was returning home from his work at school. As he passed by the main East Gate of the temple, he heard his name announced over the temple loudspeakers.

"Śrī Somanātha Khuntīā, please come to the information counter because a lady from Bengal has come to meet you."

The *khuntīā* was very surprised. "What lady wants to meet me?" He went quickly to the information counter. On seeing the lady, he could not recollect ever meeting her before. She was wearing a plain white saree, without any makeup or gold ornament. She was a widow in mourning. More than this, he could not gather.

Seeing the author coming, the lady rushed to him and fell at his feet out of respect for a priest of the temple. She also put 101 rupees at his feet.

In tears, she said, "Actually, your Jagannātha is very great. He hears just like a man. And now I am a widow, as my young, husband Deepen Ghosh died suddenly only last month!" The writer stood speechless.

Jaya Jagannātha!

The Appearance of Lord Jagannātha

The Ratha-yātrā festival, the parade of the chariots of Lord Jagannātha, Subhadrā and Balarāma, is yearly celebrated at the home of Lord Jagannātha in India called Jagannātha Purī. At Jagannātha Purī, Lord Jagannātha is worshiped in one of the oldest temples in India. The story of how Lord Jagannātha appeared is a very interesting episode in Vedic history.

King Indradyumna was a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu and was very eager to meet Him face to face. One time, by the Lord's arrangement, a devotee of the Lord arrived in the court of King Indradyumna, and in the course of discussion he began to talk about an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu named Nīla-mādhava. After hearing these topics, King Indradyumna became very inspired and sent different *brāhmaṇas* in different directions to search for and inquire about Lord Nīla-mādhava. All of them, however, were unsuccessful and returned to the capital city of the King, except for one priest of the name Vidyāpati. After wandering in many places, Vidyāpati finally came to a district whose population was of a non-Aryan type called Śābara. There he took shelter in the house of a local of the name Viśvāsu. When he arrived, the master of the house was not there, but his young daughter, Lalitā, was there alone. In a short time the master of the house returned and instructed his daughter to render all service needed for hospitality to the *brāhmaṇa* guest. For some time Vidyāpati stayed there, and later, by the special request of the Śābara, he married the Śābara's young daughter.

While Vidyāpati lived in the house of the Śābara, he noticed some peculiarity in his host's behavior. Every night the Śābara would go out, and on the next day at about noon he would return to the house scented with various fragrances such as camphor, musk and sandalwood. Vidyāpati inquired from his wife about this, and she informed him that her father would go out to a secret place to worship Śrī Nīla-mādhava.

After that day, Vidyāpati's joy knew no bounds. Actually Lalitā had been ordered by her father not to tell anyone about Śrī Nīla-mādhava, but she overstepped that order by telling her husband. Vidyāpati

immediately became eager to see Śrī Nīla-mādhava, and finally one day, by the repeated request of his daughter, the Śabara Viśvāsu bound the eyes of Vidyāpati and took him to see Śrī Nīla-mādhava. As they were leaving, Vidyāpati's wife secretly bound some mustard seeds in the border of Vidyāpati's cloth, and so while passing on the path he threw them down to mark the way. When they reached Śrī Nīla-mādhava the Śabara removed the blindfold, and Vidyāpati, seeing the unprecedented beauty of the Deity of Śrī Nīla-mādhava, danced in ecstasy and offered prayers.

Here it is clearly seen that Śrī Nīla-mādhava was a Deity incarnation of the Supreme Lord. Deity incarnations are called *arcā-vigraha*. The Lord appears in Deity forms to benefit His devotees, especially those who are less advanced. Since the Lord cannot be seen by any but the most advanced devotees, He appears as the Deity to accept worship. Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.34),

*man-manā bhava mad-bhakto
mad-yājī maṁ namaskuru*

“Always think of Me, become My devotee, worship Me and offer Me your obeisances.” Therefore He appears as the Deity to accept the worship and obeisances of His devotees. He puts Himself in the hands of His devotees to receive their service and help them develop love for Him. This is an aspect of Kṛṣṇa's great mercy and His desire to free all the conditioned souls from bondage in this material world. Thus Vidyāpati personally witnessed the mercy of Śrī Nīla-mādhava.

After Vidyāpati finished his prayers, the Śabara kept him near the Deity and went out to collect roots and forest flowers for worship. While the Śabara was out, Vidyāpati witnessed an astounding thing. A sleeping crow fell off a branch of a tree into a nearby lake and drowned. It immediately took a four-armed Vaikuṇṭha (spiritual) form and started back to the spiritual sky. Seeing this, the *brāhmaṇa* climbed up the tree and was about to jump into the lake, following the liberated crow.

As he was about to jump, however, a voice in the sky said, “O *brāhmaṇa*, since you have been able to see Śrī Nīla-mādhava, you should

before all else inform King Indradyumna." Thus the *brāhmaṇa* climbed down from the tree and waited.

The Śabara soon returned carrying forest flowers and roots and started his daily worship of Lord Nīla-mādhava. As he was engaged in the service of the Lord, the Lord spoke to him, saying, "I have for so many days accepted the simple forest flowers and roots offered to Me by you. Now I desire the royal service offered to Me by My devotee King Indradyumna."

When the Śabara heard this, he thought, "I shall be cheated from the service of Śrī Nīla-mādhava!" Therefore he bound his son-in-law Vidyāpati and kept him in his house. After a time, however, at the repeated request of his daughter, he freed the *brāhmaṇa* and allowed him to go. The *brāhmaṇa* then immediately went to King Indradyumna and informed him of the discovery.

The King, in great ecstasy, went forth with many people to bring back Śrī Nīla-mādhava. From the mustard seeds thrown along the path by Vidyāpati, small plants had grown. So by following these plants the King was able to trace the path to Śrī Nīla-mādhava. When they reached the spot, however, they did not find Him.

Not being able to see the beautiful form of the Lord, King Indradyumna besieged the village of the Śabarās and arrested the Śabara named Viśvāsu. Suddenly, however, a voice in the sky said to the King, "Release this Śabara! On top of Nīla Hill you should construct a temple. There as Dāru-brahman, or the Absolute Truth manifest in a wooden form, you will see Me. You will not see Me as Nīla-mādhava."

To build the temple, King Indradyumna made arrangements to bring stone from a place called Baulamāla by building a road from there to the Nīla-Kandara Hill. The holy abode of Śrī Kṣetra, or Purī, is in the shape of a conch, and in the navel of the conch the King established a town of the name Rāma-Kṛṣṇa-pura and constructed the temple. The temple extended 60 cubits beneath the earth and rose 120 cubits above the surface. At the top of the temple the King built a *kalāśa*, or round pinnacle, and on top of that a *cakra*, or disc. He also had the temple decorated with golden ornamentation. Then King Indradyumna, desiring Lord Brahmā to consecrate the temple, traveled to Brahmāloka and

spent a long time there waiting for him. During that time, the temple, which is very near the sea, became covered with sand from the shore.

When King Indradyumna was away, first Suradeva and then Gālamādhava took over as the kings of that area. It was Gālamādhava who raised the temple from within the sands, where it had been buried for a long time. Shortly after the temple was uncovered, however, King Indradyumna returned from Lord Brahmā's abode. Indradyumna claimed that he had constructed the temple, but Gālamādhava put forward the claim that he was its constructor. In a banyan tree near the temple, however, lived a *bhūṣaṇḍī* crow who had been living through many ages, constantly singing the name of Lord Rāma. From his abode on the branches of that banyan tree, the crow had seen the whole construction of the temple. Therefore he made it known that actually King Indradyumna had constructed the temple and that in his absence it had been covered by sand. He further said that King Gālamādhava had later merely uncovered the temple. Because King Gālamādhava had concealed the truth, Lord Brahmā then ordered him to reside outside the grounds of the temple, on the western side of the lake called Indradyumna-sarovara.

Indradyumna then prayed to Lord Brahmā to consecrate the temple and the surrounding area, known as Śrī Kṣetra which gives the highest type of liberation. But Lord Brahmā said, "This Śrī Kṣetra is manifested by the Supreme Lord's own internal potency, and the Supreme Lord manifests Himself. Therefore it is not within my power to install the Lord here. Lord Jagannātha and His abode are eternally situated in this material world by His own mercy. Therefore I shall simply place a flag on top of the temple and give this blessing: anyone who from a distance sees this flag and bows down, offering his prostrated obeisances, shall easily become liberated." After some time, King Indradyumna became discouraged at so much delay in seeing Śrī Nīla-mādhava. Deciding that his life was useless, he lay down on a bed of *kuśa* grass, being determined to give up his life by fasting. At that time Lord Jagannātha spoke to him in a dream as follows: "My dear King, don't be anxious. I shall come floating in from the sea in My wooden form as Dāru-brahman at the place

called Bāṅkimulān." With a company of soldiers, the King then went to that place and saw on the shore a huge piece of wood marked with a conch, disc, club and lotus. Although he engaged many men and elephants to move that Dāru-brahman, or woody Brahman, they couldn't even budge it. But that night in a dream Lord Jagannātha again spoke to the King, saying, "Bring My previous servant Viśvāsu, who used to serve Me as Nīla-mādhava, and place a golden chariot in front of Dāru-brahman!"

The King began to work according to the instruction of that dream. He brought the Śabara Viśvāsu and put him on one side of Dāru-brahman, and on the other side he put the *brāhmaṇa* Vidyāpati. Placing a golden chariot before the Dāru-brahman, he then started *kīrtana*, chanting of the holy names of the Supreme Lord. Then the King caught hold of Dāru-brahman and prayed for the Lord to mount the chariot. Dāru-brahman was then easily placed on the chariot and taken to an appointed place. There Lord Brahmā began a sacrifice and established a Deity of Lord Nṛsimhadeva on the raised platform of the sacrifice. It is said that the place where the present temple stands is the place where the sacrifice was performed and that the Nṛsimha Deity now standing at the western side of the Mukti-maṇḍapa in the temple compound is that original Nṛsimha Deity.

To carve the Deity of Lord Jagannātha from the Dāru-brahman, King Indradyumna called many expert sculptors. None of them, however, was able to touch Dāru-brahman, for as soon as they started, their chisels broke and fell to pieces. Finally the Supreme Lord Himself came in the disguise of an old artist who introduced himself as Ananta Mahārāṇa. He promised that if he were allowed to work behind closed doors for twenty-one days, the Deity would be carved. Immediately preparations were made. According to the old sculptor's directions, all the others artists were engaged in making three chariots. The old sculptor then took Dāru-brahman into the temple and closed the doors, after making the King promise that the sculptor would reside alone and the King would not open the doors of the temple even slightly before the twenty-one days were up. After fourteen days had passed, however, the King had

heard no sound of tools, and so he became full of anxiety. Although his minister forbade him again and again, the King, on the advice of his queen, forced open the door of the temple with his own hand.

Inside, the King did not find the old sculptor, but instead he saw that Dāru-brahman was manifested in three forms, as Lord Jagannātha, Subhadrā and Balarāma. Going forward in front of these three Deities, he saw that Their fingers and toes were unfinished. The King's wise minister then informed him that the architect was none other than Lord Jagannātha Himself and that because the King had broken his promise by opening the doors seven days too soon, Lord Jagannātha had manifested Himself in that way.

Then the King, thinking himself a great offender, decided to end his life. Thus again he lay down on a bed of *kuśa* grass and began fasting. When half the night had passed, Lord Jagannātha appeared to the King in his dreams. The Lord said, "I am eternally situated here in Nīlācala in the form of Lord Jagannātha as Dāru-brahman. In this material world, I descend in twenty-four Deity incarnations with My abodes. I have no material hands nor feet, but with My transcendental senses I accept all the items offered in service by My devotees, and for the benefit of the world I move from one place to another. You have broken your promise, but that is just a part of the sweetness of My pastimes to manifest this Jagannātha form, which protects the eternal words of the *Vedas*. Anyway, those devotees whose eyes are smeared with the salve of love will always see Me as Śyāmasundara, holding a flute. If your desire is to serve Me in opulence, then from time to time I may be decorated with hands and feet made of gold or silver. You should certainly know, however, that My limbs are the ornaments of all ornaments."

The *Vedas* assert, specifically in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (3.19):

*apāṇi-pādo javano grahītā
 paśyaty acakṣuḥ sa śṛṇoty akarnaḥ
 sa vetti vedyam na ca tasyāsti vettā
 tam āhur agryam puruṣam mahāntam*

"Without legs and hands, He moves and accepts. Without eyes He sees, and without ears He hears. He knows all that is knowable, but no one knows Him. They call Him the original Supreme Person." To

protect this assertion of the *Vedas*, Lord Jagannātha takes His form without hands and legs. Still, Lord Jagannātha is able to accept fifty-six different types of food, offered eight times daily, and He tours the world in His splendid carts.

Hearing the words of Lord Jagannātha in his dream, the King became satisfied and prayed to Him as follows: "My Lord, grant that those who appear in the family of the sculptor who manifested Your form may age after age assist in constructing the three carts."

Lord Jagannātha, slightly smiling, replied, "That shall be." Then Lord Jagannātha said to the King, "The descendants of Viśvāsu, who used to serve Me as Śrī Nīla-mādhava should generation after generation serve Me. They may be called My *dayitās*. The descendants of Vidyāpati born from his *brāhmaṇa* wife should perform the Deity worship for Me. And his descendants born from his Śabarī wife, Lalitā, should cook My food. They shall be known as *sūyāras*."

Then King Indrayumna said to Lord Jagannātha, "My Lord, kindly grant one favor to me. Let the doors to Your temple be closed for only three hours a day. The rest of the time, let the doors be open so that all the residents of the universe may have access to see You. Further, let it be that all day long Your eating may go on and that Your lotus-fingers may thus never become dry."

Lord Jagannātha replied, "Tathāstu, so be it. And for yourself, what benediction do you ask?"

The King replied, "So that no one in the future will be able to claim Your temple as his own property, I desire to be without descendants. Kindly just grant me this one benediction."

Lord Jagannātha replied, "Tathāstu, so be it."

Thus the merciful Lord Jagannātha, Subhadrā and Balarāma appeared in this material world to benefit all living beings. What is the benefit They bestow? That is stated in the *Nārada Purāṇa* (U.Kh. 52.12):

*pratimāṁ tatra tāṁ dṛṣṭvā
svayaṁ devena nirmītam
anāyāsena vai yānti
bhavanam me tato narāḥ*

The Supreme Lord Nārāyaṇa tells Lakṣmī-devī, "In that great abode known as Puruṣottama-kṣetra, which is rarely achieved among all the three worlds, the Keśava Deity, who was fashioned by the Supreme Lord Himself, is situated. If men simply see that Deity, they are easily able to come to My abode." In this way Lord Jagannātha is delivering the whole universe, especially as He rides on His cart before the eyes of all. Therefore I offer my prostrated obeisances to Lord Jagannātha, Subhadrā and Balarāma on the occasion of Their chariot ride and pray for Them to forgive me for any offenses I have committed in my clumsy attempt to describe Their glorious appearance.

Nava-kalevara-Yātrā:

The Rites of Transformation

The *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā* of Lord Jagannātha occurs only every twelve years. Sometimes as many as 300,000 come from all parts of India and the world to see this great festival. The budget exceeds \$500,000, ten times that of the annual Chariot Festival, or *Ratha-Yātrā*. In this special year, not only are new chariots for the three Deities of Jagannātha, Balabhadra, and Subhadrā made, but so also are the Deities Themselves. Many rituals are performed in connection with this transformation from the old Deities to the new. The actual rites to be followed can be traced back to ancient Sanskrit manuscripts written on palm leaves. These are kept in the temple and the three head priests have the sole responsibility of reading and interpreting them. They are:

1. *Nilādri-mahodaya*—*Nilādri* means “Blue Mountain,” and *Mahodaya* means “Great Rising.” It deals with the origin of the temple.

2. *Rudra-yamala*—*Rudra* refers to Lord Śiva and *yamala* is a book of rituals. It tells of the rituals connected with the Deity Balabhadra.

3. *Tantra-yamala*—*Tantra* refers to esoteric forms of worship and mystic practices having spiritual power. In it are contained many diagrams that draw these powers down through their visual forms. Every day in the temple such diagrams are drawn in front of the Deities where the offering of food is placed. It also contains instructions on the worship of Subhadrā.

4. *Brahma-yamala*—This deals with the rituals to be followed in the worship of Lord Jagannātha.

The exact date of these palm leaf manuscripts is undetermined. It is known that ancient sages wrote them after attaining deep meditative states, and did not consider themselves the authors. The following rituals of transformation have been drawn from these sources and are given in the actual sequence that they are performed in the temple. Up to the present time they have been kept well-guarded secrets inside the temple community itself. It is not usually permissible to discuss these

sacred rites with outsiders. As Jagannātha must be made of wood, at the time of *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā* the priests must first locate an appropriate tree. No ordinary tree can be used. Certain extraordinary requirements must be met.

- In the palm leaf manuscript *Nilādri-mahodaya*, it is stated that the holy tree will be found in a particular village every 12 years. The name of this village is actually given for every 12 year cycle. Suppose the year is 1993. The name of the village where the wood will be found has been mentioned thousands of years before. But for verification, it must also be confirmed in a dream revealed to the head priest while on the search.

- Only the Neem tree is suitable for carving the Deities. Its Sanskrit name is *Dāru*. One of the main *ślokas* to Lord Jagannātha ends with this prayer:

brahma-dāru namāmi
brahma-dāru namāmi
brahma-dāru namāmi...

“I offer my respectful obeisances unto the Supreme Lord who appears in a form of Neem wood.”

Actually Neem wood will not decay for more than thirty years. As such it is the longest-lasting wood of any tree in India. Jagannātha is perhaps the only Deity in the world that must always be made of wood. That special Neem Tree must be growing in a cremation ground. According to the *Vedas*, a cremation ground is the place where everyone is equal; there all are reduced to the same ashes.

- A Śiva temple must be nearby. Śiva is one of the important demigods. His name means “auspicious,” so his temple should be nearby to add auspiciousness to the upcoming events.

- A pond or tank must be near the temple. The tank is necessary for ritual bathing and for use in the ceremonies to be performed.

- Three other types of trees that are very rare must be growing beside the Neem tree. The leaves, branches, bark, and roots of these trees has some powerful divine influence. They are:

1. The *Varuṇa* tree—If you sit under the branches of this tree, even if you were surrounded by 1,000 snakes, they would not attack you. It is said that this tree has the power to destroy all anger and pride. People today often carry a piece of *varuṇa* bark with them if they must meet a belligerent person.

2. The *Sahada* tree—This tree gives the power to forget oneself. It is said the great sage Nigamānanda sat under this particular tree and attained *nirvāṇa*, or enlightenment.

3. The *Vilva* tree—It is said that this tree has the power to cure any disease, even heart disease, cancer, and leprosy. The cure is affected by chewing its leaves.

All three trees are very rare, whereas the Neem tree is very common. Lord Jagannātha is the Supreme Lord. He has spectacular transcendental powers. Therefore, he chooses to appear from the wood of these auspicious trees. If you touch the Deity of Jagannātha, you will feel something special. If you approach or touch Him with a mind free from mundane thoughts, you will be drawn to Him, as was Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

- The particular Neem tree must have only three or four branches. If the tree has three branches, it indicates that Lord Jagannātha saves His devotees from *tapa-traya*, the three types of suffering. They are:

1. *Ādhyātmika*—suffering caused by one's own body or mind.

2. *Ādhibhautika*—suffering caused by others.

3. *Ādhidaivika*—suffering caused by supernatural powers, such as accidents and natural catastrophes.

If the tree has four branches, it indicates that Lord Jagannātha grants His devotees four types of boons:

1. *Dharma*—He helps us fulfill our duties in the world despite any danger or opposition.

2. *Artha*—He helps us realize financial gain.

3. *Kāma*—He fulfills our desires.

4. *Mokṣa*—He grants us salvation.

- If any birds have nested in this tree, it is considered impure and unusable.

- A *homa* or fire sacrifice must be performed under this tree before it is cut down.
- This tree can only be cut down with a golden axe from the temple.
- The tree's appropriateness can be ascertained by special auspicious signs in its bark. The four weapons of Lord Viṣṇu must be clearly visible on its trunk: 1. *śaṅkha*—a conchshell; 2. *cakra*—a discus; 3. *gadā*—a mace; 4. *padma*—a lotus flower.

Nava-kalevara-Yātrā is carried out every twelve years, but only if it is also a leap year in which the month of July has 28 or 29 days. The last *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā* occurred in 1969. Twelve years later, in 1981, it was not a leap year. Therefore the *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā* was not performed. As such, the up-coming *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā* is much awaited by all. It will probably be in 1993. Its exact time is kept secret until one year before the Chariot Festival.

As is true during the annual Chariot Festival, the original worshipers of Jagannātha are in charge of the rituals of transformation. Descendents of the Viśvāsu, Vidyāpati and Dayitāpati families will serve Him during that time, except that it is for two months instead of one. With their permission, the priests go to the jungle in search of the tree. Only members of the Daityāpati family have the right of carrying the huge log back to Purī. They drag it to the temple on a wooden cart.

The transformation ceremony of Lord Jagannātha remains secret even today. No one but this select group of *sevakas* can witness it. The following is the complete list of the activities connected with the *nava-kalevara*.

1. The search party which will go to find the holy tree out of which the new Jagannāth will be carved must consist of 1 member of the Pati Mahāpātra family, 20 Dayitāpatīs, 1 Lenka, 9 Mahārāṇas, 16 Brāhmaṇas, 3 Deulkaranas, 30 police officers, and 3 inspectors of police.

2. This function will start after the big midday meal is offered to the Deities.

3. The Blessings of Lord Jagannātha must first be given. On that day a twelve foot garland, called *dhanva-mālā*, is offered to each of the three

Deities. The head priest of the temple will give the dhanva-mālā of Lord Jagannātha to the oldest member of the Pati Mahāpātra family. He will lead the procession on foot, carrying this huge mālā in his arms or on his head. On finding the sacred Tree, the garland is placed on top of a coconut offering in front of the holy fire sacrifice.

4. Descendants of the Bhirachha Mahāpātra family, Dayitāpatis, and the Pati Mahāpātra will bind a piece of Jagannātha's garments on their heads as a turban, indicating that Lord Jagannātha Himself is going with them.

5. The Mekap family of the temple will touch Lord Jagannātha's sandals to the foreheads of all members of the search party.

6. Another priest in the temple of the Pattajosee Mahāpātra family will give cloth used by Jagannātha to the Lenka family representative and the nine Mahārāṇas who accompany the group. They are the actual carpenters who build the new chariots every year and who will make the new Jagannātha Deities as well as. They are descendents of the first wood carver who sculpted the original Jagannātha for King Indradyumna in ancient times. It is said this man was a divine being sent for this one task only. He agreed to carve the Deities on one condition, that he would not be disturbed until finished. The King became impatient and before two weeks, he opened the door. The sculptor immediately vanished, leaving the Deities half-made, and so it is that this half-made form is worshipped today. The Lenka and Mahārāṇas also wear cloth from Jagannātha as a turban on their heads.

7. The procession begins from the altar in front of the Deities. Then it proceeds to the palace of the King half-way down the Grand Road of Puri to get the King's permission to go.

8. The procession continues to the gardens of the temple, known as Jagannātha-vallabha, a ten minute walk down Grand Road from the King's palace. They stay here for two days to do meditation and prayer. All their needs during their stay are provided for by the head of this monastery.

9. After two days, the search party starts out for Kakatpur, a village about 50 miles from Purī on the road to Konarark via the town of Pipli.

They may rest in a monastery known as Deuli Maṭha if they are tired. It is some 30 miles from Purī. The group must go first to Kakatpur, because the only temple to Mother Vimalā outside the temple itself is located there. She is Vimalā, but her name is Maṅgalā, meaning "Auspicious one." After reaching the village, they take rest for several days while the oldest Dayitāpati sleeps inside the temple. He must have a dream during this stay in which goddess Maṅgalā tells him the exact location where the trees can be found, the tree for each of the four Deities will be in a different place.

10. When the search party locates the places, they may find many Neem trees, but the sacred symbols will be found on only one. The search may take from fifteen days to one month. During this time, they eat the *prasāda* of goddess Maṅgalā, and sometimes provision is made for mahā-prasāda to be brought from Purī. They go back to the Vimalā temple at night to sleep.

11. When the tree is found, a great holy fire sacrifice is performed there to invite all the gods and goddesses to come and give their blessings at this auspicious time.

12. Nearby they must construct a small thatched hut in which they will now reside.

13. After the day of the fire sacrifice the actual cutting of the tree can begin. The Pati Mahāpātra will touch the tree to be used for Lord Jagannātha with a golden axe. Then the Dayitāpati will touch it with a silver axe. Lastly, the head wood carver of the Mahārāṇā family will touch it with an iron axe. During the tree cutting, mantras from all the Vedas will be recited. Then they will recite the names of God 108 times. These will be different names for Pātāla Nṛsiṃha, who was worshiped before the appearance of Jagannātha. His name is recited at all auspicious moments because He saves devotees from all problems; prayer to Him ensures that all will end well.

14. The whole uncut trunk of the tree is then brought to the temple. It is placed on a wooden cart made at the Jagannātha Temple for this occasion and dragged back to the temple by the Dayitāpatīs with the help of the other members of the group.

15. The logs are kept inside the temple in a place known as Koila Vaikuṇṭha. Koila means "burial ground" and Vaikuṇṭha means "Heaven." It is the place where the old Deities will be buried and the new ones made. It is located near the Elephant Gate of the temple on the north side.

16. The three oldest wood carvers will be the main sculptors for the Deity of Lord Jagannātha. Three others will do Subhadrā; and three others, Balabhadra. More than 50 others will assist.

17. Nobody is allowed to go to this place during these 21 days or so when the new Deities are being made, not even the head priest of the temple. There is a very strong door and thick outer walls. The carpenters close the door from inside and work all day, although it is open to the sun overhead. The wood carvers are not allowed to eat or drink water inside this holy place, so they go to the temple courtyard to eat and sleep at night. During these 21 days they do not leave the temple.

18. They will sing devotional songs outside the main door of the Koila Vaikuṇṭha day and night throughout this period. Such constant singing of devotional songs is called *akhanda-bhajana*. While this is done by *devadāsīs* and temple musicians, ślokas from the Vedas are chanted continuously by brāhmaṇa priests.

19. When they make the new Deities, They will be carried inside the Inner Sanctum of the temple and placed in front of the old Deities, facing them. At this time nobody can go inside for darśana, not even the temple priests. The three new Deities are carried inside only by descendants of the Dayitāpati family. Once they are safely inside, only the three eldest Dayitāpati members can stay. No pūjā is done at this time, no food is offered. Of the four Deities, Jagannātha is the biggest and heaviest. His height is 5' 7", and His outstretched arms measure 12 ft. across. He weighs so much that when they carry Him, 5 persons must be on each arm, 20 on His backside, and more than 50 in front pulling. Balabhadra is a bit lighter. His height is 5' 5" and His arms are also 12 ft. across. Subhadrā is less than 5', and light. Sudarśana is in a long log-shaped form only. However, this log is 5' 10" in length.

20. Only the three oldest members of the Dayitāpati family are present

inside the temple on the most holy day of the Great Transformation Rite. Lord Jagannātha was worshiped by them first, so only they can transfer Brahman from the old Deities to the new. Not even the usual head priest who attends to Lord Jagannātha can be present.

a. This ceremony takes place three days before the great Chariot Festival.

b. The three Dayitāpatīs must be blindfolded.

c. They must bind a piece of Lord Jagannātha's cloth around their hands before the transfer can begin.

d. They should not have shaved since the first day of the search party procession. This is considered to be the *disappearance* ceremony of Jagannātha also. Traditionally, after a member of the family passes away, the son does not shave for ten days, out of respect for the deceased. The house is also whitewashed after the death of any family member. So, all Dayitāpati families whitewash their houses at this time, as Lord Jagannātha is considered the head of their household.

e. The children and all Dayitāpati family members wear new clothes on this day of the "transfer." This rite is considered to be the most auspicious ritual of all in Jagannātha Temple. It is this ceremony itself that is the actual *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā*, or Transformation Ceremony of Lord Jagannātha. The three Dayitāpati members fast and meditate the whole day inside the temple. Only after midnight does the transfer of the "Life Force" occur, and that in total silence. When asked of their experience at this time, the Dayitāpatīs say, "It is very difficult to express what *Brahman* is. It can't be seen or touched because our eyes are blindfolded and our hands covered with cloth when we carry it. Yet a powerful feeling is very much present, like a rabbit jumping in our hands. This is our experience. Beyond this, exactly what this *Brahman* is that is so powerfully felt, nobody is allowed to say."

21. The old Deities are carried on the shoulders of the Dayitāpatīs and buried in the Koila Vaikuṇṭha before dawn. It is felt Brahman should not be burned in the usual cremation ceremony. The old Deities were the abode of Brahman for at least 12 years, even though Brahman is not present there now. So they are simply buried, and not burned. There are three

separate graves for the three Deities, but all the previous Jagannāthas are laid to rest in the same grave, one on top of the other. At other times of the year devotees may go inside the Koila Vaikuṇṭha, but the actual spots of the graves are unmarked.

22. It is said that if anybody from outside this select group happens to see any of this ceremony, be it from a rooftop or otherwise, they will surely die. For this reason, the government of Orissa orders a full blackout of light this one night in the town of Puri.

23. On the morning of the second day, the whole town of Puri will seem lifeless, as if in morning. The beloved old forms of Lord Jagannātha, Balabhadra, and Subhadrā are now gone, and people have yet to see the new ones.

24. The new Deities are immediately seated on the altar, known as *ratna-simhāsana*. On this second day, the daily routine of the temple finally begins again, after a lapse of nearly 58 days. Sweet-smelling flower garlands and new garments are given to the new Deities, *bhoga* is offered, and *pūjā* is done. Devotees can again come inside for *darśana*.

25. On the third day, the new Deities emerge from the temple for the biggest Chariot Festival of all. The annual Chariot Festival may draw 50,000 people, but on this most sacred occasion, more than 300,000 people will be present. *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā* is so holy, it draws more people to it every 12 years than any other festival of India, except the grand Kumbha Melā, which draws slightly more and is held every 12 years in Prayag, Allahabad.

26. The last *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā* occurred in the year 1969. The wood for Sudarśana was collected from Baharana village near Nimapara, about 60 miles southeast of Puri. The wood for Balabhadra was collected from Bhakara Sahi, a street in the village of Banamalipur, which is 70 miles south of Puri. Subhadrā's holy wood came from Govindapur village, which is 80 miles south of Puri in the same district as Banamalipur, but some 20 miles further. Lord Jagannātha's holy wood was collected from Tapanga village, near Khurda Road, which is 90 miles east of Puri. All the four sacred logs of wood had the four sacred signs imprinted on their bark.

The next *Nava-kalevara-Yātrā* will be held again, probably in the year 1993. It will be announced to the devotees at the time of Car Festival one year before. The actual location where the wood for the Deities will be found will again be revealed in a dream, as it has happened for centuries.

Jaya Jagannātha!

Questions and Answers About Lord Jagannātha

The following questions are among those most frequently asked about the famous Jagannātha Temple of Puri. These questions and answers about the fascinating history and daily life of the temple take one deeper into the mysteries surrounding the temple and the particular outlook on life of the people who live and serve there today.

1. Q: Who is Lord Jagannātha?

A: Lord Jagannātha is an abstract Deity of Lord Kṛṣṇa. *Jagat* means "world" and *nātha* means "Lord." Jagannātha is the Lord of the universe, the Lord of everyone, and therefore worshipable by everyone. The form of Lord Jagannātha is identical with the eternal, blissful and youthful form of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Absolute Truth.

2. Q: What is the height of Jagannātha temple?

A: 215 feet from the road level, more than the height of a ten story building.

3. Q: What is the length and width of the boundary wall around the temple?

A: 665 feet by 640 feet, more than one and a half times the area of one city block.

4. Q: How old is the temple?

A: No one actually knows. It is said to be at least 2,000 years old, but history traces the main construction of the temple back to the year 1174.

5. Q: Who built the present temple?

A: Rumor says that Anaṅgabhīma Deva built it, but history is totally silent about him.

6. Q: How many gates does the temple have?

A: It has four main gates: on the east, Lions' Gate; on the west, Tiger Gate; on the south, Horse Gate; and on the north, Elephant Gate.

7. Q: How many cooks are there in the temple?

A: There are 5,000 cooks, but they cook in rotation. About 150 cooks prepare *prasāda* in the temple kitchen daily.

8. Q: What is *mahā-prasāda*?

A: Cooked rice and other preparations when ordinarily offered are known as *prasāda*, but when they are offered to Lord Jagannātha they are called *mahā-prasāda*.

9. Q: Why aren't non-Hindus allowed into the temple?

A: Hindus are *expected* to follow strict rules and traditions laid down in the *Vedas*, but non-Hindus can see Jagannātha outside the temple during the famous Chariot Festival held at Purī every year in late June or early July.

10. Q: What are the names of the chariots, and who sits in each?

A: Jagannātha rides in Nandighoṣa. *Nandi* means *ānanda*, or bliss and *ghoṣa* means "tumultuous sound." The sound of the wheels of Jagannātha's moving chariot is like thunder, and if heard even once, it is said to give one bliss.

Balabhadra rides in Taladhvaja. *Tala* means rhythm and *dhvaja* means ensignia or distinguishing symbol. Rhythms are said to have originated from Lord Śiva's cosmic dance. The rhythm created by Balabhadra's huge moving chariot is said to produce an equally powerful and blissful sound.

Subhadrā rides in Devadalana or Darpadalana. *Dalana* means "crushing" or "destroying." Thus Subhadra is the goddess who rids us of *darpa* or pride. Before approaching the Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Jagannātha, we must first approach Subhadrā to rid ourselves of pride.

11. Q: How many wooden horses are there on each chariot and what are their names?

A: There are four horses on each chariot. Their names are as follows.

On Jagannātha's chariot: 1. Śaṅkha—purity, 2. Śveta—honesty, Hṛdaikya—equal-mindedness, 4. Balataka—ever-readiness.

On Balabhadra's chariot: 1. Tivra—strength, 2. Ghora—constancy, 3. Dīrgha—timelessness, 4. Śrama—work

Subhadra's chariot: 1. Rocikā—attraction, 2. Mocikā—salvation, 3. Jitā—victory, 4. Aparājitā—that which is beyond the mind.

12. Q: Why is Jagannātha black, Balabhadra white, and Subhadra yellow?

A: God can be any color He chooses. Black represents inscrutability; white, enlightenment; and yellow, goodness. The Supreme Lord comes in different incarnations of different colors in order to attract the minds of the conditioned souls in this world.

13. Q: What is the height of each chariot?

A: Jagannātha's chariot is 45 feet high, Balabhadra's chariot—47 feet, Subhadra's chariot—43 feet.

14. Q: Who are the charioteers of the three chariots?

A: Mātali, the one who decorates, is the charioteer for Jagannātha. Dāruka, the one who takes care of all, is in charge of the chariot of Balabhadra. Arjuna, who is always ready to fight for righteousness, is in charge of Subhadra's.

15. Q: Who pulls the chariots?

A: Devotees come from all over the world for the chance to pull the chariots. It grants *mokṣa*, or liberation in this lifetime.

16. Q: Are new chariots made each year?

A: Yes.

17. Q: Are new Deities made every year?

A: No. New ones are made every twelve years.

18. Q: Which Deities are on each chariot?

A: The Deity of *sudarśana* rides with Subhadrā on the middle chariot. *Sudarśana* is the wheel of time and the discus of Lord Viṣṇu. The Deity of *sudarśana* is in the shape of a pillar upon which is carved the image of a *cakra*. Jagannātha is Parabrahma, the Supreme Absolute Truth. In *Kṛṣṇa-līlā* He is the self-same Lord Kṛṣṇa. Balabhadra is Saṅkarṣaṇa, the all-accomodating aspect of the Absolute. In *Kṛṣṇa-līlā* He is Balarāma, Lord Kṛṣṇa's elder brother. Subhadrā is *yoga-māyā* or the spiritual power of God. In *Kṛṣṇa-līlā* She is Kṛṣṇa's sister.

19. Q: How many wheels does each chariot have?

A: Jagannātha's chariot—14 wheels, Balabhadra's chariot—16 wheels, Subhadrā's chariot—12 wheels.

20. Q: What is the annual budget for the Ratha-Yātrā festival?

A: 500,000 rupees per year, (US \$50,000).

21. Q: How is the festival paid for?

A: By the government of Orissa.

22. Q: Why is so much money spent every year on the Chariot Festival?

A: The Chariot Festival brings together between 700,000 and 1 million people every year from all over the world to celebrate the victory of God and the brotherhood of man. The climax of the day is when everyone pulls the chariots together with one mind as the servants of Jagannātha, the Lord of the universe.

23. Q: What is *pahandi*?

A: *Pahandi* means walking and refers to the beautiful slow swaying movement of the Deities as they come in procession from the temple. The procession ceremony itself is also called *pahandi*.

24. Q: Where do the Deities go from the temple?

A: To a smaller temple called Guṇḍicā Temple, for a period of nine days. As people like to go for a summer outing, God likes to go too.

25. Q: What are the other names of the smaller summer home where the Deities go during the Chariot Festival?

A: Śrī Guṇḍicā Ghara is also known as Janaka Purī, Yajñavedī and Ādāpa Maṇḍapa. *Yajña* means sacrificial ceremony and *vedī* means altar. It was here that Lord Brahmā performed the first fire sacrifice for the temple of Jagannātha. Ādāpa Maṇḍapa is the *maṇḍapa* or pavillion in which the Deities are isolated for nine days.

26. Q: What is *Sunā-veśa*?

A: On their return to the main temple, the Deities are dressed with huge, solid-gold ornaments for all to see. They are adorned not only with golden crowns, necklaces, and belts, but with golden hands, feet and weapons.

27. Q: What is the daily routine of the temple?

A: 1. Opening of the doors, 2. Ārati (offering of lamps), 3. Changing the Deities' clothes, 4. Bathing the Deities, 5. *Darsana* of the Deities when the devotees can come close to see Them, 6. Offering breakfast to the Deities (No one can be present while the Deities eat, not even the three main priests.), 7. Offering the Deities their midday meal, 8. Changing the Deities' clothes, 9. Offering of a light evening meal, 10. Changing the Deities' clothes, 11. Dinner, 12. Final decoration of the Deities (This is usually the most elaborate and beautiful dress of the day.), 13. Putting the Deities to rest.

28. Q: What is the meaning of the word *Purī*?

A: *Purī* means fullness.

29. Q: What are the other names of Purī.

A: 1.) Jagannātha Dhāma—the abode of Jagannātha. 2.) Nilācala or Nilagiri—the blue mountain. *Nila* means blue, and *acala* and *giri* mean

mountain. 3.) Śaṅkha Kṣetra—*śaṅkha* means conchshell. *Kṣetra* means holy place. From the sky, the town of Purī has the shape of a conch. 4.) Puruṣottama Kṣetra—*puruṣa-uttama* is the Supreme Person, Jagannātha. 5.) Yamanika Tirthā—One who comes here attains *mokṣa* or liberation. 6.) Śrī Kṣetra—*śrī* means wealth or opulence and *kṣetra* means holy place. Purī is the most opulent place on earth. 7.) Martya Vaikuṇṭha—Purī is "Heaven on earth." 8.) Ucchiṣṭa Kṣetra—Only in this holy place can one eat the leftover food of others, for here there is no caste prejudice. 9.) Uḍiyana Pīṭha—Purī is the ancestral home for all Orissans. 10.) Vrauma Kṣetra—Vrauma was a dynasty of kings who ruled over Orissa long ago.

30. Q: What are the main festivals of Lord Jagannātha?

A: The main festivals are: 1.) *Nīlādri-mahodaya*—Held in the month of January, it commemorates the first installation of the Deities in the temple. On this full moon day, the Deities are decorated in gold like royalty. 2. *Candana-yātrā*—the summer sandalwood festival held in May. The smaller Deities representing Lord Jagannātha, that is, Madanamohana, who is Kṛṣṇa playing the flute, and Rama-Kṛṣṇa, are taken to Narendra Tank for a boat ride on these hot summer evenings. For twenty-one days people gather for picnic and devotional songs, and small boys take a swim in the tank also. 3. *Snāna Purnimā*—Held in June, this ceremony is held outside the walls of the temple. 108 pots of holy water are poured over each Deity. Afterwards Lord Jagannātha is said to catch a cold and suffer from fever for 15 days. So until the Chariot Festival 15 days later, there is no *darśana* inside the temple. 4. *Ratha-Yātrā*—the Chariot Festival which is famous all over India. It is held in late June or early July. 5. *Bahuda*—the Return Chariot Festival is held 9 days later. 6. *Hari-śayana Ekādaśī*—this is the Sleeping Ceremony of the Deities in July. On this day the Deities take rest in the afternoon when the day is longer than the night. 7. *Dakṣiṇāyana*—on this day the Deities are turned slightly to the right, like a person turning in bed while resting. 8. *Parśva Parivartana*—on this day the Deities change Their "beds" or altars on which They sleep. 9. *Hary-utthanā Ekādaśī*—the Deities stop sleeping in the daytime. At that time the night is longer than the day.

31. Q: What is the name of the flag on top of the temple?

A: *Patita-pāvana*, which means savriour of the fallen. This is because Jagannātha sanctifies those who are unholy.

32. Q: What are the kinds of food offered to the Deities daily?

A: There are 56 varieties of food offered daily:

Rice Preparations

1. Sadha Arna—simple rice water, 2. Ghee Arna—rice mixed with ghee, 3. Kanika—rice, ghee, and sugar, 4. Khechedī—rice mixed with lentils, 5. Dahi Pakhal—curd rice and water, 6. Miṭhā Pakhal—rice and sugar water, 7. Ada Pakhal—rice, ginger, and water, mixed, 8. Oria Pakhal—rice, ghee, lemon, and salt, 9. Thāli Khechedī—lentil rice with sugar and ghee

Sweetmeats

(usually shaped in small balls and deep fried)

10. Khajā—made of wheat, 11. Gajā—made of wheat and sugar, 12. Laḍu—made of wheat, sugar, and ghee, 13. Mā Gajā Laḍu, 14. Jurā Laḍu, 15. Jagannātha Ballava—made of wheat, sugar, and more ghee, giving it a black color, 16. Khuruma—made of wheat, ghee, and salt, 17. Mathapuli—made of ghee, ginger, and a kind of bean ground into a thick paste, 18. Kakara—made of ghee and wheat, 19. Marici Laḍu—made of wheat and sugar, 20. Luni Khuruma—made of wheat, ghee, and salt

Cakes, Pancakes and Patties

21. Suār Pithā—made of wheat and ghee, 22. Chadai Lada—made of wheat, ghee, and sugar, 23. Jilli—rice flour and ghee and sugar, 24. Kanti—rice flour and ghee, 25. Manda—made of wheat and ghee, 26. Amalu—made of wheat, ghee, and sugar, 27. Purī—made of wheat and ghee and deep fried like a small thin pancake, 28. Luchi—rice flour and ghee, 29. Bara—made of curd, ghee and a kind of bean, 30. Dahi Barā—cake made of a kind of a kind of bean and curd, 31. Ariṣa—rice flour and ghee, 32. Tripurī—made of rice flour and ghee, 33. Rosapaik—cake made of wheat and ghee

Milk Preparations

34. Khiri—milk and sugar with rice, 35. Papuḍī—prepared only from milk, 36. Khuā—prepared out of pure milk slowly boiled over many hours to a soft custard-like consistency, 37. Rasabālī—made of milk, sugar, and wheat, 38. Tadiā—made of fresh cheese, sugar, and ghee, 39. Chenapious—made of fresh cheese, milk, and sugar, 40. Papuḍī Kahaja—cream of milk, sugar, and ghee, 41. Khuā manda—made of milk, wheat, and ghee, 42. Sārapulli—this is the most famous and most difficult milk dish to prepare. It is made of pure milk, boiled slowly for hours, and spread into a large pizza-shaped pan in thin sheets. Only very few cooks of the temple today know the art of making this *mahā-prasāda*.

Curry with Vegetables

43. Dāli, 44. Biridāli, 45. Urid dāl, 46. Mugda dāl (the above three preparations are types of lentil dahl), 47. Dalama—this is one of the most typical dishes in an Orissan home. It is a combination of dahl and vegetables, usually eggplant and tomatoes, although tomatoes are not used in temple preparations. Coconut and a dried root vegetable known as Bodhi which looks like a mushroom and is high in protein are added. 48. Mahur, 49. Baser, 50. Sāg—a spinach dish, 51. Poṭala-rasa, 52. Goti baigana, 53. Khata, 54. Raitā—a yogurt-like dish with cucumber, 55. Pitta, 56. Baigini.

33. Q: Who are the main worshippers during the Chariot Festival?

A: The Dayitāpati families. The Dayitāpatīs take charge of the Deities when they come out of the temple for Chariot Festival. They actually take over care of the Deities 15 days before. Their families are descendants of the original worshipers of Jagannātha.

34. Q: What is the main duty of the king of Purī in the Chariot Festival?

A: He sweeps the three chariots in a ceremony known as *cīra-pahara*. It means sweeping. There is strict division of labor in the temple. A cook cannot decorate Jagannātha, nor can a family whose traditional duty it is to place garlands, cook. But there is no good work or bad work. To show

this, the king performs the duties of a sweeper by sweeping the chariots himself in front of huge crowds during *Ratha-Yātrā*.

35. Q: Why are the Deities of the temple incomplete?

A: Lord Jagannātha chose to appear that way in order to show that even when He apparently appears to be incomplete He is still the complete whole supreme worshipable Absolute Truth.

36. Q: How many pieces of wood are used to build each chariot?

A: Balabhadra's chariot—763, Jagannātha's chariot—832, Subhadra's chariot—593.

37. Q: What is the name of the flag on each chariot?

A: Balabhadra's flag—*Unmanī*, meaning "to uplift," Jagannātha's flag—*Triloka-mohinī*, meaning "to attract all people from all places" Subhadra's flag—*Nādāmbikā*, meaning "to arouse God realization in all who see it."

38. Q: Why are the Deities' forms abstract?

A: Lord Jagannātha shows us that His form is beyond our mental conceptions of how He should appear.

39. Q: Why doesn't Jagannātha have eyelids?

A: So that He can always be looking after the welfare of the world.

40. Q: Why are the Deities' arms projecting outwards?

A: Because Lord Jagannātha wants to embrace His devotees.

41. Q: What is the *mukti-maṇḍapa*?

A: *Mukti-maṇḍapa* is the holy place inside the temple where *brāhmaṇa* priests manage the duties of the temple and sit to bless the pilgrims.

42. Q: What is the *ratna-vedī*?

A: *Ratna* means jewel, and *vedī* means altar. *Ratna-vedī* is the altar upon which the Deities sit.

43. Q: What is Koila Vaikuṇṭha?

A: This is the place inside the temple grounds where the old Deities are buried after the making of new Deities every 12 years.

44. Q: What is *niyoga*?

A: *Niyoga* is a society or an organization that controls the daily rituals of the temple.

45. Q: What is *Nava-kalevara*?

A: *Nava* means new and *kalevara* means body. This is the festival of making new Deities of Jagannātha.

46. Q: In what way is Jagannātha the spring of culture for the people of Orissa?

A: Most song, poetry, drama, dance and art center around Jagannātha even today. Mahari dance, which is now known as Odissi, the classical dance form of Orissa, originated in the temple as a dance performance for the pleasure of the Deities and was never performed in public. Even today the main content of Odissi dance drama is the devotee's longing for God. The biggest festival of Orissa is the Chariot Festival, which is now celebrated all over the world. Lord Jagannātha is the main subject for painting. Traditional and modern literature is based on traditions of the temple, both the good and the bad aspects, and the resulting human conflicts and insights. The dress and decoration of Jagannātha is typical of that worn by the people of Orissa. The *mahā-prasāda* or sanctified food from the temple is available to all, regardless of color, religion or caste, and all may eat it together. It is the typical food in homes of Orissa, but with a unique taste that cannot be duplicated outside the temple kitchens, even though one try.

47. Q: Is Jagannātha of Buddhist origin?

A: No, Jagannātha was being worshiped before the appearance of Buddha.

48. Q: What is *sahana-melā*?

A: It is the time when all the devotees can go inside the temple to see the Deities.

49. Q: What is the *aruṇa-stambha*?

A: *Aruṇa-stambha* is the name of the tall stone pillar in front of the main gate of the temple. On top of it is seated Aruṇa, the charioteer of the sun god. Aruṇa looks towards Jagannātha, who is sitting at the same height inside the temple, looking out. Aruṇa is showing devotees that those who worship the Lord with due respect will be enlightened because He is the light of the universe who can remove all the darkness of ignorance.

50. Q: What is *garuḍa-stambha*?

A: It is the name of a pillar just in front of the Deities inside the temple. It is not made of stone, but from the log of a Neem tree as is Jagannātha Himself.

51. Q: Why are there two lions guarding the east gate of the temple?

A: The lion is the symbol of Vedic *dharma*. As the lion is victorious in the animal kingdom, Jagannātha's devotee is always victorious. (*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.31)

52. Q: Why are two tigers at the west gate?

A: This is the gate through which Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, as well as many great mystics and practitioners of *tantra* used to pass. The tiger is a tantric symbol, as he roams about alone and unafraid at night in the jungle.

53. Q: Why are there two elephants at the north gate?

A: The white elephant is the symbol of Buddhism. A king of Nepal was the first to discover the Deity of Jagannātha among the tribal peoples (*Śabaras*) of Orissa. Even today if the king of Nepal comes to Purī, he has the right to perform *pūjā* to Jagannātha.

54. Q: Why are there two horses at the south gate?

A: Kings traditionally enter the temple by this gate.

55. Q: What is the stone buried under the Deities called? What is special about it?

A: It is *sālagrāma-silā*. *Sālagrāma* is not ordinary stone. It is a self-manifested form of the Supreme Lord Nārāyaṇa and therefore requires no installation ceremony as does Jagannātha.

56. Q: How does *mahā-prasāda* heal people and give liberation?

A: *Mahā-prasāda* is not ordinary foodstuff. Because it is the remnants of food offered to Lord Jagannātha it is imbued with transcendental potency. In fact, it is completely transcendental like the Deity Himself. When food is offered to Jagannātha, it becomes identical with Him, just as the wood of the Deity of Jagannātha is identical with Jagannātha Himself. Therefore by honoring *mahā-prasāda* one is purified in every way.

57. Q: Why do devotional singers of Orissa beg for a particle of dust from the Grand Road of Purī or rice water left over from the temple kitchen that the cows drink?

A: The dust of the Grand Road of Purī is sacred. So many saints, seers, and great men having mystic powers have walked on it, besides being traversed by Lord Jagannātha in His Chariot Festival.

58. Q: What is a *jhūlā*?

A: Jagannātha in His original form as the cowherd boy Kṛṣṇa played on a lovely flower-decorated *jhūlā* or swing, and all his childhood friends,

called *gopīs*, enjoyed pulling the ropes. To relive those pastimes, the Swing Festival is observed in the month of August in all of the more than 700 *maṭhas* and *āśramas* of Purī.

59. Q: How does the life of the people of Purī revolve around the temple?

A: The Jagannātha Temple inspires the people of Purī with *bhakti*, or devotion to God. This atmosphere of the temple permeates the entire town. The people of Purī are devotees of Jagannātha. They do not think of Jagannātha as some remote God, but as a member of their family, their nearest and dearest friend and confidant. No one passes by the main gate of the temple on his way to work in the morning without a moment's pause to remember this. Among the community of worshippers, all the rituals and *pūjās* of the temple are observed in a smaller way in the home.

60. Q: Is service inside the temple difficult?

A: One who has love and devotion finds no difficulty. However, for a worldly person, to work over hot fires in the temple kitchen for 10 to 12 hours a day without a single fan or light bulb would be a great trial indeed. Everyone works without salary, except for a token stipend given by the government each month. It is felt to be the greatest blessing to be engaged in direct service to the Lord. Since the time of Śrī Caitanya some 500 years ago, *sevakas* have felt the main purpose of life is to serve Lord Jagannātha. As for money and other worldly pleasures, that will be worked out by Him.

61. Q: Why is a worshipper only allowed to do his traditional duty in the temple?

A: Discipline and purity of service are maintained in this way. The traditional family duty has been taught by father to son for generations. One family of devotees climbs the ten-storied temple to put the flags on top three to five times daily, even at night. No one has ever fallen. They believe they are protected by Jagannātha, and that if anyone else dared to climb, they would fall to their death.

62. Q: A community of more than 5,000 worshippers serve in the temple regularly. How are personality problems dealt with in the temple service?

A: The work of the temple is so vast, no one family has more than a minute part. There has not been such a problem in hundreds of years. The only time the sevā is stopped is when it is felt that Jagannātha is displeased. There will be certain signs that the offering of food is not accepted by Him. This has rarely happened, but when it does, the food prepared must be thrown out and cooked again. All worshipers involved must bathe again, put on clean clothes, do proper *pūjā* to purify the body and place and pray to Lord Jagannātha to accept their humble, if faulty, service.

63. Q: Why is Jagannātha's horoscope read daily in the temple, and why does He get sick, if he is God?

A: God does not get sick, nor does He need a horoscope reading to know the future. In fact, God needs nothing—He is supremely independent. Yet He appears in His Deity form as Jagannātha to give the conditioned souls in this world the opportunity to serve Him. By rendering these human-like services to Lord Jagannātha one gradually becomes purified and develops unbreakable devotion and affection for Him.

64. Q: How is the architectual beauty of Jagannātha's temple?

A: Since ancient times the majesty of the Jagannātha Temple has been sung about by poets and sages. At night it stands lit up against the dark sky, and can be seen from five miles in any direction. Its intricate architecture is beyond the ability of modern architects. Every inch of the temple walls and grounds is covered with delicate sculptures that remind us of man's ultimate relationship with God.

65. Q: Why are so many people attracted to the unusual form of Lord Jagannātha?

A: Because of our material conditioning we see the form of Lord Jagannātha as quite different from the form of Lord Kṛṣṇa. But when our

eyes are anointed with the salve of unalloyed love, upon looking at Jagannātha we will directly see the form of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

66. Q: Is modern life a hindrance to service in the temple?

A: A true worshipper of the temple, a *prākṛta pāṇḍa*, does not know what modern life is. He only knows his home and the temple. Going to the temple and serving the Deities is his main purpose in life. This feeling is reflected in the state of Orissa as a whole. When asking what kind of work one does, one asks, "What is your service?"

67. Q: Why do temple families always hope to have a son?

A: Because their traditional right to do *sevā* in the temple will then be continued.

68. Q: Can ladies do service in the temple?

A: No, but *devadāsīs* used to sing and dance in the temple, and some ladies string flowers for the Deities. They cannot perform active rituals in the temple, but do so in their homes.

69. Q: Why do people light a *dīpa* or lamp for a sick person?

A: Giving a lamp is man's easy way to please God. It is, of course, symbolic. Our soul is like a lamp shining with the warm flame of devotion. When we offer a lamp we symbolically offer ourselves to the Lord.

70. Q: What does the word Jagannātha mean?

A: Jagannātha means the Lord of the universe.

71. Q: What does the word Subhadrā mean?

A: Subhadrā means one who is very gracious and good.

72. Q: What does Balabhadra mean?

A: Balabhadra means one who is strong in a good way, not to oppress but to help others.

73. Q: Why do the people of Purī offer three garlands or light lamps to the Deities before ordinary travel or going to work in the morning?

A: Work for oneself is without merit or benefit. But when one dedicates one's work to the Supreme Lord, his work becomes all-successful. One should make a living by God and for God. Therefore people pause and bow their heads at the Lions' Gate of the temple on their way to work in the morning. The only traffic jam in Purī is at this main gate of the temple.

74. Q: Why is devotional music played on loudspeakers all over Purī day and night?

A: Purī is a spiritual place. The people of Purī are always fixed on Jagannātha, thinking of Him. Therefore, late into the night, devotional music is played on the Grand Road of Purī, especially at evening time, when the Bhāgavatam is sung nightly.

75. Q: What is the Bhāgavatam?

A: It is the chief of the sixteen Pūrāṇas. Its Tenth Canto describes the childhood pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Although a child in Purī might be illiterate, he will learn these stories by heart. He will be expected to chant the verses of the Bhāgavatam to his dying father to give him supreme happiness.

76. Q: Why is a taste of *mahā-prasāda* given to a dying person?

A: One who tastes *mahā-prasāda* at the time of death will not be born again.

77. Q: In the marriage ceremonies of the temple community of Purī, why does the wife lead the husband around the holy fire?

A: Usually in Indian marriages, the man leads, and the wife follows around the fire. The highest esteem is given here to ladies. They are depicted in the *Vedas* as the creative force. When this force is worldly, it is called *māyā* and is avoided. But when it is directed towards God it is divine and given first place. The bride is supposed to represent this divine energy of God and therefore leads the groom around the fire.

78. Q: Purī is one of the four holy places of India. What are the other three and in what way is Purī unique?

A: The four holy *dhāmas* are: 1.) Purī, on the eastern coast of India—the presiding Deity is Jagannātha, 2.) Badrīnātha to the north—the presiding Deity is Badrīnārāyaṇa, 3.) Dvārakā on the west coast of India—the presiding Deity is Dvārakānātha, 4.) Rāmeśvaram, at the southern tip of India, the presiding Deity is Rāmanātha. Purī is unique because Jagannātha is worshipped by the whole world in Kali-yuga. Badrīnātha was worshiped in Satya-yuga, Rāma in Tretā-yuga, and Dvārakānātha in Dvāpara-yuga.

79. Q: Why is the last evening decoration of Jagannātha the most beautiful?

A: It is called *baḍā śṛṅgāra veśa*, the most lovely outfit. When Jagannātha retires, he sleeps with his wife Lakṣmī. Both are covered with the sweetest-smelling flower garlands and the most gorgeous silk garments. The most important part of the day for the husband is when he is with his wife, so also for the devotee when he is with God.

80. Q: Why is Jagannātha bathed only once a year on Snāna-Pūrṇimā Day?

A: Being made of wood, more frequent bathing might damage Him. After His bath He is said to catch a cold and goes into seclusion for 15 days. This gives the priests time to repaint the Deities so that they are fresh-looking for the Chariot Festival.

81. Q: Why does the famous temple *bhajana* “Thaka Mana Chella Jiba” say, “O tired mind, come, let us go to the Jagannātha Temple of Purī?”

A: The author of the song wishes to point out that the mind becomes exhausted by material life, but if it takes shelter at the feet of Lord Jagannātha it can find rest.

82. Q: At the main gate of the temple there are 22 steps up which one must climb to enter the inner temple. What do they represent?

A: Before meeting Lord Jagannātha we must become purified of the

5 worldly fetters, that is, lust, anger, jealousy, greed, and pride. This can only be done slowly, in steps. The first 5 steps represent the 5 outer sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin. The next 5 steps represent the 5 *prāṇas* or life airs—*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, *samāna*. The next 5 steps represent the inner senses or *tan-mātras*: *rūpa*—sight, *rasa*—taste, *gandha*—smell, *śabda*—sound, *sparsa*—touch. Then the next 5 steps are the *pañca-mahā-bhūtas*, the five great elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether. The last two steps represent *buddhi* or intelligence, and *ahaṅkara* or false ego, the false conception of the self. One by one all these must be purified before passing into the Inner Sanctum of the temple and meeting Lord Jagannātha.

83. Q: If Jagannātha is God, why is He treated in such a familiar way as if He were a member of the family?

A: This is a very old tradition in Purī. Lord Jagannātha is the center of everything in Purī. Even the daily family life is centered around Lord Jagannātha and His worship. Therefore they feel that Lord Jagannātha is part of their family.

84. Q: How does the Jagannātha Temple differ from the Vatican in Rome?

A: Jagannātha was worshiped before Christianity existed. The Vatican is the headquarters for the Catholic hierarchy. The pope rules his church from there. The Jagannātha Temple is the place where the devotees get an opportunity to serve the Lord throughout the day by the different temple rituals. There is no pontiff who rules over the worshipers of Jagannātha other than Jagannātha Himself.

85. Q: Do the elaborate rituals of the Jagannātha Temple, even more elaborate than those of the Catholic Church, help or hinder closeness to God?

A: They help. The purpose of rituals is to invite God, to honor Him, to petition Him, a way to come to know Him, to spend time with Him, to realize Him, and to feel Him. When recited regularly, the meanings

and sounds of a *mantra* create a closeness with God. The great *mahā-mantra* of Purī Temple, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare; Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, is chanted continuously day and night 365 days a year at the Rāma shrine beside the East Gate of the temple.

86. Q: Why does Jagannātha eat so much?

A: The food offered to Jagannātha is the typical food of the people of Orissa. However, the amount cooked in the temple kitchen surpasses that of any great hotel of India. Indira Gandhi once called Jagannātha Temple "the greatest hotel of Mother India," because of the huge quantities of food prepared in its kitchen. Jagannātha is not an austere God, he likes to enjoy his creation. It is the right of God as the creator and proprietor of the world. Besides, whatever we offer to Him to eat He always leaves as *mahā-prasāda* for us to eat.

87. Q: What is the Sanskrit poem *Gītā-govinda* about and why is it considered so holy that it is sung every night in front of the Deities in the temple?

A: *Gītā-govinda* is a poem written by Śrīla Jayadeva Gosvāmī. It describes the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This poem epitomizes the stage of pure love of God in which one experiences union with and separation from Kṛṣṇa.

88. Q: Why is Jagannātha called the black elephant hiding in the blue cave of the temple?

A: Jagannātha is black and the elephant is a royal symbol. Sometimes Jagannātha is shown seated, with eyes staring as if in yogic trance. The blue cave is actually the temple of the heart. When Jagannātha is installed there, ignorance vanishes.

89. Q: What is *pādukā* and what is its power?

A: *Pādukā* is the sweet-smelling holy water that was used to bathe

Lord Jagannātha. Throughout the year Jagannātha is bathed by pouring water upon His reflection in a mirror. But on Snāna Pūrṇimā day He is actually bathed. If one takes even three drops of this *pādukā* one accrues immeasurable spiritual benefit.

90. Q: What is the medicine given to Jagannātha when he is sick with fever for 15 days after Snāna Pūrṇimā?

A: It is called *amṛta* or nectar of immortality, and is prepared from the roots of rare herbs and trees in the jungles of Orissa and from a kind of fruit known as Jaiphal. Only a few temple priests know its mixture, but it has been administered to Jagannātha since Vedic times. He is also given a mixture of coconut water, camphor, and sandalwood paste mixed with water and yogurt during this "convalescence."

91. Q: Why does a devotional song of Purī say that *candana* put to Jagannātha before going to bed will heal the world?

A: Because God is the root of existence, whatever is done for Him benefits everyone, as much as watering the root of a plant benefits the branches, leaves and flowers.

92. Q: What is the dying wish of people in Purī?

A: "Oh Jagannātha, help my son do Your service. He is stupid. Please help him. Please save me. If I am born again, let it be in Purī, and specifically, in the community of worshippers who serve You."

93. Q: Why do so many people come to take sea bath at Purī.

A: The sea is holy because all rivers touching all holy places eventually flow into the sea. While bathing one prays, "By taking bath in the sea itself, into which all holy rivers come, may my life be purified."

94. Q: Why are the walls of the temple so thick? Even the sound of the sea does not come through.

A: That was the current practice when the temple was built. If the walls were not thick and strong, they could be destroyed easily. The

temple is the fort of Jagannātha. The thick walls serve two purposes: to protect Jagannātha from outside invaders, and to keep Him locked securely inside so that He does not leave us.

95. Q: Why have so many great saints, like Ādiśaṅkara, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, come to Purī? Why are there so many *maṭhas* and *āśramas* here, more than 7000?

A: Purī is a shelter for the world-weary and the spiritually needy. They come to find out about Jagannātha, some eager, some doubtful, some curious, but they are all won over.

96. Q: Why is the *pūjā* done to Jagannātha done to Lakṣmī also?

A: They are a couple. How can one honor the husband without also honoring the wife?

97. Q: What is unique to the *pūjā* of Purī temple?

A: Many rites are secret and not found in any other temple of India, especially those connected with the transformation of Jagannātha in the *Nava-kalevara* ritual. Ten *mahā-mudrās*, or mystic hand movements, are used at the time of offering food to entreat the Deities and all the *devas* to be present.

98. Q: How is the daily life of the people of Purī, especially that of the worshipper community, different from those living outside Purī?

A: It can be said that life in Purī does not revolve around the temple, it is the temple. All family celebrations, such as marriages, holy thread ceremonies for little boys, and cultural festivities are part of the grand festivals of the temple. All the great musicians and dancers of India pray to perform before Jagannātha at least once in their lifetime. All parades and processions, such as Rāma's appearance day celebration and the spring festival of Candana-yātrā, begin from the temple and return there. When the body of Jagannātha is buried once every 12 years, all the worshippers whitewash the inside of their homes, just as if the father of the family had died. Worshippers of the temple spend the whole day

inside the temple. Traditionally, it is said they know only two places, the temple and the home. Whenever food is needed for some special occasion, no one looks for a hotel to cater, but arranges to get *mahā-prasāda* from the temple.

99. Q: If Jagannātha's arms are always open to embrace all, why is it said He is impossible to please? Why is it often said by people of Orissa that the more you pray to Jagannātha, the more problems you get?

A: Problems and sufferings help us remember Hari. It is said in Orissa, Jagannātha does not allow His devotees to become too rich so that they do not forget Him.

100. Q: The devotional songs say His round eyes are all- seeing, all-knowing. If you go to Jagannātha, will you hear Him talk to you?

A: If I am with a stranger, will he talk with me? Most likely he will only stare at me. But if I am friendly with him, he will talk with me. Jagannātha can talk with us, but we do not have spiritual ears to hear Him.

101. Q: If Purī is such a spiritual place, why do people suffer from cold and fever here like everywhere else?

A: To fall sick is the result of our previous *karma*. The people of Purī should suffer more than others because of their close proximity to Jagannātha. He speeds up their *karma*, and worldly distractions are more quickly abandoned. Even within the temple walls, it is said one can tell a temple cook from a temple priest simply by appearance. A temple cook will look plump and still enjoy feasting, but a priest who is constantly near Jagannātha will be thin and disinterested in eating.

102. Q: What does the Sanskrit verse, *raso vai saḥ* mean and how does it apply to Lord Jagannātha?

A: In Jewish tradition, God is felt to be an angry, punishing father. In Christian times, devotees became martyrs for a loving God and service meant suffering. In Islamic thought, by doing one's duty one can experience oneness with God. In Purī, Jagannātha is said to be *raso vai*

sah, sweetness itself. The daily events and festivities of the temple are a re-creation of the sweet pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa's youth. Since the time of Śrī Caitanya some 500 years ago, service to God has been felt to give greater happiness than liberation itself.

About the Author

Mr. Somanath Khuntia, M.A., B.Ed., is a widely published poet and writer on the Jagannātha Temple, as well as a priest who serves in the temple. He has written another booklet entitled "*The Transformation of Lord Jagannātha*." An educator in a government teacher training institute in Purī, he has also written a collection of stories for children based on the *līlās* of Lord Jagannātha, actual miracles that have occurred in the temple over the centuries. Never before recorded, they were passed down orally from grandfather to grandson within the temple community. (This book contains these two booklets, as well as other material.)

Mr. Khuntia is also a regular radio and T.V. commentator and one of the host announcers on All-India Radio during the annual Car Festival in Purī. During the past twenty years, Mr. Khuntia has guided many visitors from India and abroad around the temple, including diplomats, palm leaf scholars, foreign tour groups, and writers like Graham Greene.

About the Artist

Mr. Narayan Harichandan is a resident of Purī. His training in art was based on the traditional style of Purī which has its own manuals and texts for guidelines. The front and back cover and inside illustrations were done by him in that traditional style.

