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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NAVAKALEVARA RITUALS – ANALYTICAL RIVIEW

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Abstract

Lord Jagannath is an ancient deity of the Hindu religion in the sub – continent .He symbolizes the Lord Krishna and Lord Vishnu. This article illustrates about the Navakalevara Ceremony of Lord Jagannath in the grand temple of Jagannath at puri in Odisha. There are two kinds of re-embodiment Ceremony. The first kind involves making of the idols,S their installation , change of the Brahma padartha and the second kind is known as shree-angafita . Both the kinds involve some traditional rituals. This is a very grand and unique ritual which is not found in any other Hindu shrine and temple in india and elsewhere in the world. This is a non - recurring ritual which takes place once in every 8 th or 19 th year when intercalary Odia month of Asadha falls. As per the tradition of the Jagannath Temple in puri during this period it is convenient to perform the Navakalevara Ceremony of the Chaturdha Murty i.e . Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sri Sudarshan Which are Worshipped as the main deities of the temple, The deities are made up of Neem Wood Which necessitate renewal of the deities within a definite time span through performing the Navakalevara Ceremony. This write up broadly narrates about how a series of rituals are observed during the Banayaga Journey which continues for nearly three to four months in searching and identifying four sacred Neem trees from which the four idols of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra , Subhadra and Sudarshan are constructed .Thereafter, the core ritual of Ghata Paribartan i.e transforming of Brahma Padartha or the soul substance takes place secretly inside the main temple in the midnight in closed door by the intimate servitors of Lord Jagannath such as Pati Mahapatra and Daita Servitors . Apart from this, it throws light upon the social cultural and religious significance of Navakalevara Ritual and how the great ancient tradition is maintained till date.

Keywords: Navakalevara, Puri Dham, Jagannath, Daru, Banayaga Yatra, Bada, Deula, Padma, Nashville, Omaha

Introduction

Purushottama Kshetra or Sriksheeta or Puri Dham is the holy land of Lord Jagannath- the Lord of the Universe, the Lord without hands and feet and still the centre of every Odia's cultural, religious and aesthetic quest. Lord's temple at Puri is very unique in many ways. The origin and genesis of the temple create a sense of awe and wonder in every human heart. More interesting are the festivities, ceremonies and devotional practices associated with the temple. Readers, scholars and viewers not only get startled by making an analysis of the rites and rituals which centre round the Lord but also get absorbed and deeply influenced by a divine impulse. There is in fact no end to such analysis and discussions. With such a perspective, if we analyse and examine the importance of the re-embodiment ceremony or Navakalevara of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Sudarshan, we are bound to be exhilarated and awed by a rewarding sense of wonder.

Lifespan of Idols

Referring to the books on the techniques involved in the art of idol-making, one becomes aware of the fact that the longevity or lifespan of the idols depend primarily on the material with which the idols are made. The longevity of idols made from gem, metal, wood, chitra (picture) and soil is ten thousand years, one thousand years, twelve years, one year and one month respectively. The idols of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Sudarshan are made from woods (Daru) and hence their lifespan is only twelve years. That is why there has been the necessity for re-embodiment or Navakalevara of those deities.

Materials of Idol making

At this point, one question baffles and intrigues our mind why did the king who could construct such a huge temple of stones, allow the idols to be made from wood? An answer to this question would compel us to throw light on the significance of using wood for making the idols. According to the scriptures, the worship of idols made from wood is more fructifying than the idols made from other materials. One cannot

ignore at the same time the fact that in ancient times, much before man learnt the use of metals, he treated trees as the manifestation of eternity. Tree-worship was very much in the vogue in those times. The tree-worship originated from the fowler or tribal tradition. In ancient books the only industry, the importance of wood idol-making practices had been variously discussed. Barahamihir in his much acclaimed book Bruhat Samhita has mentioned that the worship of idols made from wood or earth or soil, bestows longevity, beauty valour and victory. He also stated that the worship of idols made from gem, gold, silver, copper and stone would sanction well-being, health, fame, issues or children and possession of landed property respectively. Kashyap Silpa and Vishnu Samhita, two ancient scriptures also assert similar views. The significance of the worship of idols made from wood has been recorded in Vaikhanus Agam. It is known from Sanskrit and Odia classics like Skanda Purana, Darubrahma Gita and Deula Tola that the king Indradyumna got a piece of wood or daru from the mouth of the sea at Banki, Banki Muhana from which, as he was advised in a dream, he ordered the idols of Lords to be made of. Thus the reasons which impelled the king to go for the idols from the wood are clear indications of what have been emphasized in the scriptures.

Types of Wood

In an unpublished palm leaf manuscript of Pothi, entitled Pratima Lakshan Soudhagam it has been mentioned that although idols can be made from the wood of the trees like sal, mundimundi, sinshapa, teak, kendu, khairs, casurina, gambhari, yet the idols made from the neem wood remain the best.

Importance of Neem Daru

The Neem tree tastes sour and bitter and hence it remains unaffected and uninfected by worms and insects. The neem fruit or seed and its bark have medicinal effect. According to Agamshastras trees are of three types- the male, female and the neuter. The Neem tree is identified as a male tree and hence its wood is strong and the best. That is why it is the best kind of wood for making the idol of Lord Vishnu. Bamdeva Samhita attests this fact." In the Bhabisyaya

Purana it is specified that the neem wood is worshipped by all castes and races: "Nimbadya Sarvabarnan Bruksha Sadharanasamutah Lord Jagannath, the Lord of Universe, is being worshipped by all types of people, with no social or religious barriers. So neem wood is the best for the idols of Lord Jagannath. As the idols of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Sudarshan are made from the neem wood, and as the longevity of the wood is twelve years or more, the re-embodiment or Navakalevara ceremony of the Lord generally takes place in every twelve years.

Kinds of Navakalevara

There are two kinds of re-embodiment ceremony. The first kind involves making of the idols, their Installation, change of the Brahma padartha and the second kind is known as Shree-angafita the attire on the body of the deity. Both the kinds involve some traditional rituals. The change of Brahma padartha is done on the krushna chaturdashi or 14th day of the declining moon. During the Shree-angafita, only minor repair works of the idols are done. The Brahma padartha posited in the idols is not touched during this repair work.

Preparation of Navakalevara

The re-embodiment or the Navakalevara ceremony is observed in two phases. In the first phase, the daru or the tree is identified after conventional ritual worship of the forest. The process of identification of the tree, its felling and transportation to the temple must be completed before the full moon day of Jaishtha or Devasnana Purnima. The second phase includes making of the idols, their installation, saptaabharan, khalilagi (flour-paste), khadilagi (white colour) and banakalagi (colour). This entire process must be completed before Netrotsava or Asadha Amavasya. The second phase takes about forty five days. The year which experiences two Asadhas, maintaining equilibrium between Chandraman masa and Souramana masa, the re-embodiment ceremony takes place this month is considered to be more sacred than all other months, and it is known as Adhi masa or Mala masa. This phase of forty five days is also known as Maha Anasara. Even if people strongly believe that the re-embodiment

ceremony takes place in every twelve years, but the astrologers advance the view that twin Asadhas (June-July) can appear in every 8,11,19, and 27 years. According to Braharspatya calculation, between 1001 AD to 1996 A.D.the twin Asadhas occurred 73 times. From these, in the gap of 8, 11, 19, and 27 years the twin Asadhas occurred for 22, 16, 34 and 1 times respectively. It is practically difficult to say in which of these years the re-embodiment ceremony took place. Verifying the records and journals from the 19th to 21st century one comes to the conclusion that the re-embodiment ceremony took place in 1809, 1828, 1836, 1855, 1874, 1893, 1912, 1931, 1950, 1969, 1977, 1996 and 2015.

Banayaga Yatra

The journey for searching and procurement of the daru following elaborate rituals is known as Banayaga Yatra. It is so to say an initial stage of Navakalevara ceremony. A team consisting of Daita Sevaks, Pati Mahapatra Sevak, Deula Purohit Rajguru and other Brahmins, Deula Karana, Tadau Karana Sevaks, Lenka and Viswakarma Sevaks and some others set out in search of the sacred trees for the purpose of procurement of daru.

On the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra (March-April) after the midday worship in the temple, Patimahapatra, a Brahmin Sevak, who happens to be the head of the Daitapa niyog (association) ascends to the Simhashana (pedestal) of the deities in the 'Garvagriha' and takes out four Agyan Malas (garlands of order) from the four deities seated on the pedestal Agyan Mala is a flower garland of the deity, which signifies order or permission of the deity to do a particular ritual. Patimahapatra hands over the Agyan Malas of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra to the main Daita Sevaks of the respective deities and he keeps for himself the garland of Lord Sudarshan. These Daita Sevaks are known as Badagrahi Daitas. Afterwards, they assemble in a place called Anasara Pindi Bhitarchha Mahapatra, another main sevak of the temple, ties Khandua (silken saree of certain length) around their heads. He also ties sarees around the heads of Daita sevaks there who participate in the Banayaga Yatra. At the nearby Jaya- Vijaya Door, other Sevaks like Deula Karana, Tadau Karana,

Lenka, Viswakarma (Carpenters) and Beharakhuntia receive sarees from Bhitarchha Mahapatra in the same manner. The sarees of Lenka and Viswakarma are cotton sarees. All these sarees of different lengths and fabrics were previously used by the deities. In the meantime, the Brahmins associated with the Banayaga do certain auspicious beginning of the rituals in the Koili Baikuntha, a place in the northern side of the outer compound of the temple.

Construction of Image and Pratistha

On the outskirts of the temple's north side, Koili Baikuntha is situated. According to Smritishastra, Uttare Sarbadevata, Uttare Sarbatirathani". That's why Koili Baikuntha is considered to be one of the most sacred and auspicious places among the Naba Baikunthas. Because of the sanctimony attached to Koili Baikuntha, the logs are kept here for making of the idols. Even after the installation of these idols, and with the transplantation of the Brahman on the 14th day, the old idols are buried here. On the full moon day of Jyestha the idols are given a sacred bath on the bathing altar. Under the supervision of Pustakacharya, the process of installing the idols begins. The Acharya, Pustakacharya, Samidhacharya, Charu, Brahma and royal representatives are cordially felicitated. After the ritual bath, Daita and Patimahapatra take Laxmi Nrushingha from the southern chamber to the Nrushingha mandapa where cot and bed are spread. Ritualistic prayers are offered to Lord Jagannath in the meantime. In the Jagnyashala every Jagnya is performed and sacrifices are offered in the form of Kantipitha (one type of cake). A sacrifice of fish is conducted secretly by these Sevakas. On the fourteenth day, tila payas is also offered as sacrifice. Then the new idols are given a ritualistic bath with the help of herbal water. The Jagnya is performed once again to implant the life spirit in the sleeping idols. Viswakarma, uttering Srisukta mantra and Purushasukta mantra gives sacred bath to the new idols. The Jagnya comes to a close with the arrival of the Gajapati King of Puri. Patimahapatra takes charge of these new idols.

In the midnight of the 14th day, the Ghata or Brahma Padartha gets transplanted very secretly. This is known as transfer of Brahma Padartha. In the

evening of this day, the doors of the temple remain closed, after the Badasinhara vesh of the Lords. No one except Daitas and Patimahapatra would remain inside the premises of the temple. On the Baishi pahach of the temple the Deula Karana guards along with Lord's main cutlass or patakhand. The Daitas are also given charge of the other deities of the temple.

Changing of Brahma Padartha or Life Substance

In the midnight, the Brahma from the old idols is removed and implanted in the new idols. Before it is implanted this Bruhma is surrounded by flowers, musk, tiny basil leaves and jasmine Bowers. Three Badagrahi Daitas assist Patimahapatra in this process of transplantation of Brahma. Then the sacred place where the Brahma is placed is covered by a cloth which is known as Bajra kocheni.

Burial of Image

The old idols are taken to Koili Baikuntha for the burial where a 9 feet deep and 6 feet wide pit is dug by Kothasuansia. Like the funeral rites performed in the families the Daitas also observe certain rites after the burial of the old idols. In the temple of Mangala a lamp is lit. On the 9th day of the declining moon, the Daitas massage oil on their bodies. Near the Markanda pond they shave themselves and take bath. Putting on new clothes they come to the main temple and at the twenty two steps (Baishi Pahach) they wash their feet with turmeric water (haladi pani) and take mahaprasad at night. After the fourteenth day, the Saptabarana ritual (the ritual of painting and dressing) begins. This is followed by the ritual of Banakdagi or purna sriangaraga which is performed by the painter Dutto Mahapatra. The rituals like Netrotsava and Navajauvan darshan lead to the Nabadina Jatra or car festival.

Thus it is evident that the process of Navakalevara or re-embodiment process is cumbersome, arduous, yet interesting and magical. It proves the immortality of the soul. The transplantation of the Brahma is in itself a manifestation of what is described in the Gita as the transfer of the soul from one body to another when the former becomes old and outworn.

Conclusion

This much could be said that Lord Jagannath is a symbol not of any particular religion but involving with all religions and all religious values. What is striking in the rituals of the re-embodiment is the intimate relationship that exists between the devotees and Lord Jagannath, who is not simply a God, an outsider, but who is immaculately an insider, an intimate member of our family. This process of re-embodiment eminently asserts that down the ages, through speckless devotion only the Odias have discovered in the Lord a God who is seminally human, a God who has been humanised to protect our hearths and homes, our bodies and our souls, the keeper and the caretaker of nur being and becoming.

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