

THE RITUALS OF THE DEITIES

Jagannatha is regarded as the supreme god and the sovereign monarch of the Orissan empire. The entire ritual pattern of Jagannatha has been conceived keeping such twin aspects in view. The ritual system of the temple is very elaborate and complex involving a multitude of functionaries above one thousand spread over one hundred categories. The rituals of Jagannatha can broadly be divided into three parts - the daily , the occasional and the festive. In Jagannatha temple these rituals assume the term 'niti'.

The fixed nitis that are observed daily areas on of routine. The periodical nitis are observed on occurrence of some specific occasions like, Ekadasi, Sankranti, Amabasya, on eclipses and Nakhatras etc. Lastly there are various festivals observed during the year some outside the temple like the Snana Yatra, the Ratha Yatra, the Chandana Yatra etc. and some inside the temple like Jhulan Yatra or swinging ceremony etc. Each sevaka or the temple functionary. has his specified duty to perform in these nitis having terms and times specified. Unless, a particular niti is performed, the next one can not take place and consequently punctuality sometimes fluctuates to ensure attendance of various categories of sevakas required for a particular Niti.

The word 'Niti' in Sanskrit means a principle, a rule or policy. But this word is used in the Puri temple in a more general sense, signifying a particular religious rite performed in the temple.

The Nitis or rituals of the temple may be classified under three heads - (a) the daily Nitis, which are fixed and are observed every day as of routine course; (b) the special Nitis according to the specialty of certain days, months etc. or some mishaps in the temple, (c) the various festivals observed during the year.

The various Nitis, that are observed daily in the temple commence on about 5 A.M. and continue till midnight. They include in seriatim the Mangala Alati immediately after the doors of the temple are opened and an inspection made, Mailama (taking off the cloths and flowers of the previous night), Tadapalagi (putting on towels), Abakasa (cleaning of teeth and bathing) and Vesa (dressing). Then a public darsana called Sahana Mela is held, when the people are allowed to proceed near the Ratnavedi (jeweled throne), have a closer view of the deities and circumambulate. After the Sahana Mela, the deities again change their dress. In the meantime. Rosa Homa or an oblation to the fire is performed in the kitchen and the fire is used in all the hearths for cooking the food for the deities.

Then follow the Surya Puja and the Dvarapala Puja, or the worship of the sun-god and the guardian deities, after which the Gopala Vallabha Bhoga is offered. Next comes Sakala Dhupa, followed by Bhoga Mandapa Bhoga and the Madhyahna Dhupa, as mentioned earlier. The deities change dress at each meal time and after each meal betel nuts are offered. After the meals the deities enjoy a siesta, called Pahuda of the day-time. In the evening an Arati is performed to mark the beginning of the nocturnal functions. The next Niti is Sandhya Dhupa. Devotees are again offered an opportunity of Sahana Mela in the evening hours. Then the deities change their dress, wear special silken clothes, fresh flowers and ornaments, besmear sandal-wood paste and enjoy music and dance performed by specified Sevakas. This dress goes by the name Badasingara Vesa and the light food offered on this occasion is known as Badasingara Bhoga. Green coconuts are then offered and detailed arrangements are made for the sacred slumber of the deities (Pahuda), after which the light is put off and the door is closed and sealed.

But many more Nitis are performed on special occasions, For example, the Ekadasi Nitis are observed when a sebak of the temple services scales to the top of the temple (about 200 feet high) after night fall and burns a lamp there amidst the loud cheers of thousands of spectators. On-every Thursday, goddess Laksmi is washed, dressed and decorated carefully for a union with Visnu in the form of Jagannatha. On new-moon days the moving idols of Jagannatha visit the sea-god Varuna, said to be the father of Laksmi.

This apart, some purifactory or consecratory rites are performed when either a dog enters into the temple premises or a dead body is discovered some where in the temple area. Spilling of blood, sputum, urine etc. call for the purifactory rites. Special Nitis are also performed on eclipse days too.

The word 'Bhoga' (in Sanskrit and Oriya) means enjoyment. Thus, the materials enjoyed by the deities comprising of varieties of food offerings made to them, is known as Bhoga. This word is commonly used in Orissa in the context of offerings made to the deities in the temples.

Bhogas in the Jagannatha temple are broadly of two kinds. The first consists of preparations of boiled rice, dal and vegetables, excluding- in particular, gourds, laties, potatoes, tomatoes, onions, garlics, cabbages and some others. The other variety of Bhoga consists of preparations of flour, ghee, candy, etc. Everyday and throughout the year, fifty-six varieties of dishes are prepared and offered to the deities. This apart, several other varieties of dishes are prepared and offered on the occasion of various festivals. Similarly, on specific occasions, special drinks are offered to the deities. These dishes and drinks have great significance from the climatic considerations and health-requirements of the people of Orissa.

The Bhoga or Prasada of Jagannatha is called Mahaprasada, which can be eaten from the same plate by persons of all castes at a time without the least inhibition or hesitation. When Mahaprasada is served, all the participants are required to sit on the ground, remain neat and clean and not to sit on something like a mat spread over the ground while taking it.

As many as five times a day Bhogas are offered to the deities. The timings are as follows:

- Early Morning- The first Bhoga offered to the deities is called Gopala Vallabha. It consists of some sweet meats, fruits, curd, butter, green coconut etc. and is comparable to our breakfast. a. Morning- The offerings made in the morning is known as Raja Bhoga or Sakala Dhupa in which various preparations of black gram like Bada Kanti, Sana Kanti, Enduri, others preparations like Mathapuli, Hamsakeli, Kakatua, Jhili, Ada Pacedi, Saga, Khecedi, Pitha Puli, Bundia Khiri are offered.
- Midday - Preparations that are offered in this Bhoga called Madhyahna Dhupa include rice, pulses, vegetables and a variety of other items which we take during lunch. iv. Evening - It includes, among other things, varieties of puddings, confections and delicacies called Kanla Puli, Takua, Mathapuli, Bhogapitha, Gotali, Kakara, Amalu, Jhadeineda, Kadamba and Subasa-Pakhala. Rice is not offered.v. Night - At night, we have the Badasinghar Bhoga Preparations offered in this Dhupa include watered rice and some fries, fruits and sweets.
- The word 'Dhupa' is commonly used in the temple to mean the offering of a Bhoga to the deities, especially the Bhogas of the morning, midday and the evening, when the rituals performed are a little elaborate. Arati (waving of lamps) is offered at the end of each dhupa and also early in the morning and at the time of going to sleep.
- At the end of the morning dhupa, a special Bhoga is offered to the deities, in the Bhoga Mandapa (Refectory Hall) and it is called Bhogamandapa Bhoga. The Temple Administration . does not bear the cost of any part of this Bhoga. This Bhoga is traditionally done with a view to provide sufficient Mahaprasada to the various Mathas and other institutions as well as private individuals, who eat the Bhoga as their principal meal. The Suaras (authorised cooks) of the temple prepare sufficient quantities of food in the temple kitchen for the pilgrims on commercial basis and offer them the deities in this occasion. Bhogamandapa Bhoga is normally performed once a day, but on festive days, it is repeated according to necessity.
- Daily more than 10,000 people depend on the Bhogas for their meals. The market where the Bhogas are sold is known as 'Ananda Bajar'. Apart

- from a variety of puddings, cakes, confections, delicacies etc., the principal items of food sold in the market to provide principal food to the intending purchasers are - boiled rice, dal, vegetable curries, green-leaf preparations and an item of sour preparation (known commonly as Khata). On some festive occasions, several thousands people visit the Ananda Bajara for their principal meal and eat the Mahaprasada then and there only.
- For the performance of various Nitis in the temple, a large number of Sevakas (attendants of the deities) have been employed on hereditary basis. It is said that
 - king Anangabhimha of Ganga dynasty, a sovereign ruler of Orissa in this 13th century, who had initiated a well-knit administrative system of the temple had established Chatisa Nijoga, Le. 36 categories of temple attendants. In later years, the number of Nijogas in the temple has increased considerably, but the nomenclature of Chatisa Nijoga still persists. Over the years, the number of Sevakas has also increased.
 - The Raja of Puri is the first Sevaka of the Lord. He represents the sovereign rulers of Orissa, who had constructed the temple, installed the deities, arranged for the worship or Nitis, appointed the Sevaks and administered the establishment. During the foreign rule, they were the Superintendents of the temple.
 - Then there are Rajagurus, who once were functioning as Parichas, or high officials of the Temple Administration. Then there is Pattajoshi Mahapatra, who is the head of the Sevakas of all thirty-six Nijogas. He ensures that the Sevakas perform their Seva properly and the rites of the temple are-observed regularly. Bhitarcha Mahapatra sees to the sanctity of the Bhoga being offered to the deities and also to the cleanliness of the temple premises. Talucha Mahapatra likewise sees to the cleanliness of the kitchen. Mudiratha does all works of the Raja in the latter's absence as his representative. All the above Sevakas themselves perform Arati, Vandapan etc, of the deities at different times. The temple Purohita 'chants Vedic Mantras and performs Japa. Pujapandas performs the ritualistic Puja (worship), Puspalakas dress up the deities, smear sandal-wood paste etc. while Khuntias guard the sacred body of the deities. The Mekapas remain in charge of different store articles. Pratiharis keep guard over different strategic points, the suars cook the food offerings, the Karanas keep the accounts and the Devadasis sing songs before the deity. The Daitas perform all duties of the wooden deities during Snana and Ratha Festivals. They are said to be the descendants of the Savara

chieftain Viswvasu as mentioned earlier and hence close relatives of Jagannatha.