

Lord Jàgannatha: A Cult of Mass Appeal

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(Lord Jàgannatha, His Temple in Puri, Odisha (India) and its other icons have been hypothesized in the Indian myths and legends in many ways. Jagannatha represents an assimilation of all religious cults, creeds and sectarian philosophies that come under the purview of Hinduism in the broadest sense of the term. Here is an attempt to decipher the cultural, historical and religious dimensions of Lord Jàgannatha. – Editor)

The Jagannath cult incorporates the influences of various religious creeds and sects to become a converging point of the divergent shades of the Hindu Religion. Lord Jagannath is regarded as the complete manifestation of the Lord Supreme: “Param Brahma” or Vishnu or Narayan. Lord Jagannath is represented along with “Balabhadra” and “Subhadra” installed in the inner sanctuary of the great shrine at Puri on a raised platform called “Ratnavedi”. All the deities are represented only up to the navel and the portion beneath is missing. Instead of having proper arms, palms and fingers, the images of Balabhadra and Jagannath have two stumps each rising from their heads. The image of Subhadra is represented as an arm-less and leg-less deity. Jagannath is identified as Vishnu, or Krishna. Neither the images of Lord Jagannath nor his divine associates bear a benign look to inspire the devotion of the worshippers. Facial colour of Lord Jagannath is Black and eyeballs are disproportionately large, pupils are round and black and the nose is pointed out. The image of Lord Jagannath does not confirm to the aesthetic sense of a worshipper to be meditated upon, nor does it correspond to the “Dhyana” in which the deity is conceived during the process of “Puja”

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