

Appearance of Lord Jagannatha

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The Ratha-Yatra festival, the parade of the chariots of Lord Jagannatha, Subhadra and Balarama, is yearly celebrated at the home of Lord Jagannatha in India called Jagannatha Puri. At Jagannatha Puri, Lord Jagannatha is worshiped in one of the oldest temples in India. The story of how Lord Jagannatha appeared is a very interesting episode in Vedic history.

King Indradyumna was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu 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 told him about an incarnation of Lord Vishnu named Nila-madhava. King Indradyumna became very inspired and sent different brahmanas in different directions to search for and inquire about Lord Nila-madhava. All of them, however, were unsuccessful, except for one priest of the name Vidyapati. After wandering in many places, Vidyapati finally came to a district whose population was of a non-Aryan type called Sabara. There he took shelter in the house of a local of the name Visvasu. When he arrived, the master of the house was not there, but his young daughter, Lalita, 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 brahmana guest. For some time Vidyapati stayed there, and later, by the special request of the Sabara, he married the Sabara's young daughter.

While Vidyapati lived in the house of the Sabara, he noticed some peculiarity in his host's behavior. Every night the Sabara 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. Vidyapati inquired from his wife about the reason for this, and she informed him that her father would go out to a secret place to worship Sri Nila-madhava.

After that day, Vidyapati's joy knew no bounds. Actually Lalita had been ordered by her father not to tell anyone about Sri Nila-madhava, but she overstepped that order by telling her husband. Vidyapati immediately became eager to see Sri Nila-madhava, and finally one day, by the repeated request of his daughter, the Sabara Visvasu bound the eyes of Vidyapati and took him to see Sri Nila-madhava. As they were leaving, Vidyapati's wife secretly bound some mustard seeds in the border of Vidyapati's cloth, and so while passing on the path he threw them down to mark the way. When they reached Sri Nila-madhava the Sabara removed the blindfold, and Vidyapati, seeing the

unprecedented beauty of the Deity of Sri Nila madhava, began to dance in ecstasy and offer prayers.

After Vidyapati finished his prayers, the Sabara kept him near the Deity and went out to collect roots and forest flowers for worship. While the Sabara was out, Vidyapati 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 brahmaṇa 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 brahmaṇa, since you have been able to see Sri Nila-madhava, you should before all else inform King Indradyumna." Thus the brahmaṇa climbed down from the tree and waited.

The Sabara soon returned carrying forest flowers and roots and started his daily worship of Lord Nila-madhava. 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 Sabara heard this, he thought, "I shall be cheated from the service of Sri Nila-madhava!" Therefore he bound his son-in-law Vidyapati and kept him in his house. After a time, however, at the repeated request of his daughter, he freed the brahmaṇa and allowed him to go. The brahmaṇa 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 Sri Nila-madhava. From the mustard seeds thrown along the path by Vidyapati, small plants had grown. So by following these plants the King was able to trace the path to Sri Nila-madhava. 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 Sabaras and arrested the Sabara named Visvasu. Suddenly, however, a voice in the sky said to the King, "Release this Sabara! On top of Nila Hill you should construct a temple. There as Daru-brahman, or the Absolute Truth manifest in a wooden form, you will see Me. You will not see Me as Nila-madhava."

To build the temple, King Indradyumna made arrangements to bring stone from a place called Baulamala by building a road from there to the Nila-Kandara Hill. The holy abode of Sri Ksetra, or Puri, is in the shape of a conch, and in the navel of that conch the King established a town of the name Rama-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 kalasa, 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 for Lord Brahma to consecrate the temple, traveled to Brahmaloaka 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 Galamadhava took over as the kings of that area. It was Galamadhava 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 Brahma's abode. Indradyumna claimed that he had constructed the temple, but Galamadhava put forward the claim that he was its constructor. In a banyan tree near the temple, however, lived a bhusaṇḍi crow who had been living through many ages, constantly singing the name of Lord Rama. 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 Galamadhava had later merely uncovered the temple. Because King Galamadhava had concealed the truth, Lord Brahma 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 Brahma to consecrate the temple and the surrounding area, known as Sri Ksetra which gives the highest type of liberation. But Lord Brahma said, "This Sri Ksetra 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 Jagannatha 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 Sri Nilamadhava. Deciding that his life was useless, he lay down on a bed of kusa grass, being determined to give up his life by fasting. At that time Lord Jagannatha 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 Daru-brahman at the place called Baṅkimuhan." 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 Daru-brahman, or woody Brahman, they couldn't even budge it. But that night in a dream Lord Jagannatha again spoke to the King, saying, "Bring My previous servant Visvasu, who used to serve Me as Nila-madhava, and place a golden chariot in front of Daru-brahman!"

The King began to work according to the instruction of that dream. He brought the Sabara Visvasu and put him on one side of Daru-brahman, and on the other side he put the brahmaṇa Vidyapati. Placing a golden chariot before the Daru-brahman, he then started kirtana, chanting of the holy names of the Supreme Lord. Then the King caught hold of Daru-brahman and prayed for the Lord to mount the chariot. Daru-brahman was then easily placed on the chariot and taken to an appointed place. There Lord Brahma began a sacrifice and established a Deity of Lord Nrsimhadeva 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 Nrsimha Deity now standing at the western side of the Mukti-maṇḍapa in the temple compound is that original Nrsimha Deity.

To carve the Deity of Lord Jagannatha from the Daru-brahman, King Indradyumna called many expert sculptors. None of them, however, was able to touch Daru-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 Maharana. [According to the Narada Puraṇa (Utkala Khaṇḍa 54.22–65), the artist Visvakarma, the architect of the demigods, carved the Deities in pursuance of the desire of Lord Vishnu, who had assumed the form of an old brahmaṇa.] 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 other artists were engaged in making three chariots. The old sculptor then took Daru-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 was unable to hear the sounds of the artist's tools, and so he became full of anxiety. Although his minister again and again forbade him, the King, on the advice of his queen, by force opened the door of the temple with his own hand. Inside, the King did not find the old sculptor, but instead he saw that Daru-brahman was manifested in three forms, as Lord Jagannatha, Subhadra and Balarama. 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 Jagannatha Himself and that because the King had broken his promise by opening the doors seven days too soon, Lord Jagannatha 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 kusa grass and began fasting. When half the night had passed, Lord Jagannatha appeared to the King in his dreams. The Lord said, "I am eternally situated here in Nilacala in the form of Lord Jagannatha as Daru-brahman. In this

material world, I descend in twenty-four Deity incarnations with My abode. I have no material hands and 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 Jagannatha 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 Syamasundara, 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 Svetasvatara Upanisad (3.19):

*apaṇi-pado javano grahita
pasyaty acaksuḥ sa sr̥ṇoty akaraṇaḥ
sa vetti vedyam na ca tasyasti vetta
tam ahur agryam purusam mahantam*

"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 Jagannatha takes His form without hands and legs. Still, Lord Jagannatha 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 Jagannatha 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 Jagannatha, slightly smiling, replied, "That shall be. " Then Lord Jagannatha said to the King, "The descendants of Visvasu, who used to serve Me as Nila-madhava, should generation after generation serve Me. They may be called My dayitas. The descendants of Vidyapati born from his brahmaṇa wife should perform the Deity worship for Me. And his descendants born from his Sabari wife, Lalita, should cook My food. They shall be known as suyaras."

Then King Indradyumna said to the Lord Jagannatha, "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 Jagannatha replied, "Tathastu, 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 Jagannatha replied, " Tathastu, so be it."

Thus the merciful Lord Jagannatha, Subhadra and Balarama appeared in this material world to benefit all living beings. What is the benefit They bestow? That is stated in the Narada Puraṇa (U. Kh. 52.12):

*pratimam tatra tam drstva
svayam devena nirmitam
anayasena vai yanti
bhavanam me tato narah*

The Supreme Lord Narayaṇa tells Laksmi-devi, "In that great abode known as Purusottama-ksetra, which is rarely achieved among all the three worlds, the Kesava 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 Jagannatha is delivering the whole universe, especially as He rides on His cart before the eyes of all.