

PURI'S JAGANNATH TEMPLE: Why non-Hindus and Foreigners Can't Enter Here

Indian Express

Paper - I
(Art & Culture)

Odisha's Governor Ganeshi Lal has said he believes foreigners should be allowed to enter the Temple. It's an old debate that has repeatedly triggered controversy— even Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was denied entry.

Odisha Governor Ganeshi Lal has backed the entry of foreign nationals inside the world-famous Jagannath Temple in Puri, wading into a debate that has lasted for decades and periodically triggered controversy. “If a foreigner can meet Gajapati, servitors, and Jagatguru Shankaracharya, he/ she should also be allowed to meet eyes with the Chakanayana (the name of Lord Jagannath). It is my personal opinion irrespective of whether people will appreciate it or not,” Governor Lal said at Utkal University in



Bhubaneswar. Servitors at the 12th-century shrine and researchers of Jagannath culture have expectedly opposed the suggestion, saying that the traditions and practices of the Temple should not be broken.

The Jagannath Temple

The Temple is one of the four dhams (Char Dham) where Lord Jagannath, a form of Lord Vishnu, is worshipped along with his elder brother Lord Balabhadra and sister Devi Subhadra. Only Hindus are allowed inside the shrine to offer prayers to the sibling deities in the sanctum sanctorum. A sign at the Lion's Gate (main entrance) of the Temple clearly states: “Only Hindus are allowed.”

Why no non-Hindus?

It has been the practice for centuries — even though there is no clearly articulated reason for it. Some historians believe that multiple attacks on the Temple by Muslim rulers might have led the servitors to impose restrictions on the entry of non-Hindus. Others have said that this was the practice from the time the Temple was built.

Patitapaban darshan

Lord Jagannath is also known as Patitabapan which literally means “saviour of the downtrodden”. So all those who are barred from entering the Temple because of religious reasons get the privilege of a darshan of the Lord in the form of Patitapaban at the Lion’s Gate.

When the Lord emerges

Jagannath, Lord of the Universe, comes to Bada Danda (the Grand Road) along with his siblings during the nine-day Rath Yatra (car festival) in June-July every year— an occasion when non-Hindus can have His darshan. As the deities go on a sojourn to the Gundicha temple, their birthplace, devotees from around the world throng Puri for a glimpse of the Lord.

Past controversies

In 1984, the servitors famously opposed the entry of Indira Gandhi inside the Temple, saying she had married a non-Hindu. The Prime Minister of the time was forced to offer prayers from the Raghunandan Library nearby.

About Shri Jagannath Temple:

- The Shri Jagannath Puri Temple is one of the most impressive monuments in the Indian state of Odisha, built by Ananta Varman Chodaganga Deva, a legendary king of the Ganga Dynasty, in the 12th century at the seaside Puri.
- The Jagannath Puri Temple is also called 'Yamnika Tirtha', where according to Hindu beliefs, the power of 'Yama', the god of death, was extinguished due to the presence of Lord Jagannath in Puri.
- The Shri Jagannath Puri Temple was also called the "White Pagoda" because of its white color and is a part of the Char Dham pilgrimage i.e. Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri, and Rameshwaram. The temple festival includes the world-famous Jagannath Rath Yatra and Bahuda Yatra.
- The temple has four main gates namely 'Singh Dwar' in the east, 'Ashwa Dwar' in the south, 'Vyaghra Dwar' in the west, and 'Hasti Dwar' in the north. Opposite the entrance of the temple is the Arun Stambha or Sun Pillar, which was originally installed in the Sun Temple at Konark.

Other Information

- Jagannath's eyes are round. The round eyes, like those of a fish, symbolize that Lord Vishnu or Jagannath is always active and alert. Day, night and fatigue have no meaning for them. Sun and Moon are the two eyes of Lord Vishnu. Therefore, His eyes are round in shape ("Shashi Surya Netram", Gita).
- Birds cannot fly over Jagannath Scientists and researchers believe that since the Jagannath temple is located in the coastal region of Odisha, the winds are extremely strong which makes it difficult for birds to fly at high altitudes. The height of the Jagannath temple is about 1000 feet.

In November 2005, Thai Princess Maha Chakri Srinidhorn, who was on her maiden visit to Odisha, viewed the Temple from the outside because foreigners are not allowed. In 2006, Swiss citizen Elizabeth Jigler was denied entry because she was Christian, even though she had donated Rs 1.78 crore to the Temple.

In 2011, a proposal by Pyari Mohan Mohapatra, then adviser to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, supporting the entry of non-Hindus into the Temple to boost Odisha's tourism potential, triggered a major controversy. Mohapatra had to withdraw his statement.

Expected Question

Que. 'Nobo Koliboro' ceremony is associated with which of the following temples?

- (a) From Puri's Jagannath Temple
- (b) From Sun Temple of Konark
- (c) From Tara Tarini Temple
- (d) From Lingaraj Temple



Answer : A

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: Puri's Jagannath temple is once again in news regarding the entry of non-Hindus. Throw light on the importance of Jagannath temple of Puri from the point of view of art and culture.

Answer Format :

- ❖ State the points of discussion.
- ❖ Explain the importance of Shri Jagannath Temple from the point of view of art and culture.
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion keeping in mind the controversies and traditions.



Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.