

## **SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN A RELIGIOUS MILIEU: THE SEVAYATS OF THE JAGANNATH TEMPLE AT PURI**

### **Abstract**

In face of present day forces of industrialization, urbanization and changing social configuration, personal worship, worship in temple, guidance of spiritual authorities and pilgrimage, though popularly assumed otherwise, continue to inform and shape the values of Indians. A case in point is the Shri Jagannath Temple, at Puri, Orissa (constructed after 1135 A.D.), prominent and popular till today, upholds the composite culture of India for more than 900 years. This paper is about the Sevayats of the Jagannath Temple at Puri, the ritual functionaries of the temple. For around nine centuries, in the face of social, economic and political ups and downs, the Sevayats have survived and emerged as the most faithful and the truest upholders of this enigmatic religious tradition. This paper primarily concentrates on all these Sevayats of Jagannath Temple. It also tries to describe in today's context, their socio-economic status, their view about themselves and the temple, and their position in the temple and the society. This paper is not intended to provide a historical account of the temple, nor does it try to analyse the temple as a whole. Looking at the broader society the paper tries to establish the linkages between the Sevayats and the greater society, and how the Sevayats are responding to the broader forces of change. The focus is on the nature of the changing organisation and functioning of the Sevayats, where the past will be used only as a point of reference.

**Keywords:** Sevayats, Jagannath Temple, Indian reality, *niryogas*

### **Introduction**

History of human kind shows us that religion has played a vital role in the formation of civilization and has influenced the course of its events. But in the informed world of today, the influences of industrialization, colonization, world wars, nationalism and social transformation have affected faith and are reshaping our worldview.

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1 E-Mail: rg.wbsu@gmail.com, rg.wbsu@yahoo.in

Often, social commentators have argued that religious organizations of today are the decadent relics of the past, and then have equated them with a particular religion. But this line of argument tends to get ignored by the society, in general. Religion is normally acquitted of any blame, not reproached for creating any degeneration in a particular religious organization because it is thought to be not capable of doing so. The logic behind such a line of thought is religion and religious organization cannot be equated, as the latter is only a method of religious attainment, therefore is a finite and determinate mediating institution. Further, scholars in today's society find religious organizations to be too narrow and parochial to inform the society about religion that could ensure equity and justice within society, thus found the authority of such moral agency waning. Instead, they stated, that there has been a shift in the location of the moral agencies to the secular institutions and processes of the society, as well as in the thoughts and behavior of the individual beings. However, going by what we are experiencing in our daily life in India, there is no point in underestimating the importance of religious organizations, rituals, pilgrimage, or festivals in our life. These, I suppose, have to be understood to be human work from which we derive spiritual benefit of being and self, as well as find it to be a moral security net in the times of crisis.

Notwithstanding the rationality and "affective-neutrality" of contemporary society, it remains inadequate in reinforcing the good will and commitment in human beings that are background conditions for its survival. Religion is still thought to have more value to humans than their other earthly bonds that are mostly forced, transitory, and provisional in nature. Therefore, contrary to the expectation of religion being an anathema in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it continues to play a fundamental role in the society.

Here, it is not the task to ask whether God exists or not, or the truth of a religious doctrine, rather it aims to provide a sociological analysis of meaning of religious activities in the society and the place of religion in the life of human beings. Therefore, instead of depending on the textual understanding of transcendental static social structures, or universal theories of religion, or analysis of universal cultural norms, effort is to understand the dynamic interrelationship between religious organizations, the agent, and the present society involved in constantly producing codes and representations, thereby, analyze the nature and composition of social life.

To grasp the Indian way of life, the European Colonizers, Western scholars and following them the Indian scholars, with a few exceptions, have drawn simplistic generalizations, neglecting "multitude of agents involved in the production of culture" (Banerjee Dube: 2001, p. 06) Epistemological assumptions of concepts like caste society, Asiatic Mode of Production or Oriental Despotism that try to explain Indian society are at best partial and mostly distorted. Unilinear evolutionary models of continuum with two polar types have been used for

understanding Indian reality but has the difficulty of comparison between entities of different order. (Indradeva and Shri rama., 1999: p. 22) Radically opposed models, such as sacred - profane, pure and impure, right and left, readily used for understanding Indian society are at best useful tools in the analysis of particular cases but are not ends in themselves. Temple has always been relegated to a subordinate place in comparison to caste, lineage and village, though it presents "an alternative locus from which to consider these larger issues" (Appadurai, 1981: p. 08-09). Though temples and sacred places have worked as unifying forces of all - Indian tradition - but the methodological insulation amongst the Sociologists, Indologists, Historians and Social Anthropologists have led to a situation where in dichotomically isolated concepts have been juxtaposed to show the cultural developments of India. To fix the nature of Indian culture in particularistic terms exhibit less delicate sensibilities on the part of the researchers towards the distinctive pattern of 'continuous and fluid process of accretion' that has taken place in the growth of Indian culture (Eschmann, et. al. 1978: p.xiii).

In face of present day forces of industrialization, urbanization and changing social configuration, personal worship, worship in temple, guidance of spiritual authorities and pilgrimage, continue to inform and shape the values of Indians. A case in point is the Shri Jagannath Temple, at Puri, Orissa, prominent and popular till today, upholds the composite culture of India for more than 900 years.

The present temple complex was constructed after 1135 A.D. by the Ganga King Anantavarman Chodagangadeva (1078-1147) on the ruins of an earlier temple built by the Kesari King, Yayati Kesgari. Since then, for around nine centuries, in the face of social, economic and political ups and downs, the Sevayats have survived and emerged as the most faithful upholders of this enigmatic religious tradition that is designed as a symbol of universal brotherhood and synthesis of diverse religious trends, besides acting as a message of peace.

It was Anangabhimdeva (1211 A.D.) who foresaw the need for disciplined administration of the Temple and introduced the system of 'Chattisa Niyoga' (thirty six types of Sevayat) in the place of original nine types of Sevayat. Niyoga are an association of each category of Sevayat with distinct duties, organized for effective execution of daily rites and rituals within the Temple. Proportionate to their ritual functions Sevayats enjoyed part of the 'Amrit Mahoni' (rent free land) and 'Khei' (Kotho Bhog offering).

In the course of time, increasing endowments made to the Temple necessitated greater elaboration of ritual services and worship. This led to a subdivision and bifurcation of the various niyogas to independent niyogas. In the Record of Rights (L. Panda, 1955) 119 categories of Sevayats are indicated but the census of the Sevayats conducted by Sri Jagannath Temple Administrative Committee 1988 showed 63 types of Sevayats were present.

The Sevayats of different castes, regardless of their contemporaneous social rank

were accorded equal status and importance considering their association and engagement in the Temple. Though this did not affect their ethos, the unique method of organization among the Sevayats in the Jagannath Temple reflected a virtual liberalism and imparted a democratic character to the entire organization.

Puri, over a millennium, has been important to the population of this subcontinent due to the location of Sri Jagannath temple there. This paper undertakes to explain the purpose and motivation of the singularly important human element that upholds this religious institution, their current situation and future expectations. This can in the process can help us understand the underlying strands of integration that binds Indian society still.

### **Method**

This paper primarily deals with the Sevayats, who are part of a complex religious organization, centering round the Jagannath Temple, at Puri. The Jagannath Temple at Puri remain embedded in the Indian way of life because of two reasons, namely, due to the ritual specialists (here the Sevayats), who by effective execution of daily rites and rituals within the Temple have upheld the faith of the masses and held them around the holy symbols, and due to the pilgrim's undying devotion towards the God despite all odds.

Therefore, the endeavor here is a detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of units, their conditions and their relationships. In this investigation the object is to study in depth by using a variety of data gathering methods that is expected to produce evidence leading to understanding of the phenomenon and fulfill the research objectives that targets to unravel a limited number of events, conditions and their inter-relationships.

Data that was collected were qualitative and also quantitative in nature. It was felt that to understand the rationale underlying the relationships in this study could be sufficiently understood only if the collected quantitative data is reexamined in context of qualitative data so that the findings are mutually corroborated and supported. Tools to collect data included direct interviews, observation, and collection of information from related sources. Due to the unique nature of the field, the investigator had to be flexible in approach in order to accommodate unforeseen changes in interaction pattern, missed appointments by the respondents, or lack of proper environment. The investigator also had to be sensitive about the fact that the respondents despite of their faith and rapport with the investigator may have a niggling un-surety about the purpose of the current study, and of what this study will ultimately bring out for them. Repeat interviews, of focused and brief in nature, with the sampling units were necessary number of times to gather additional information, clarify contrary responses, re-ascertain key observations and sometimes to simply cross-check a claim.

This paper is based on the study where the population comprised of all the Sevayats of Jagannath Temple, whose total population size was 3802 numbers (Temple Census, 1988). All the units were male and hereditarily attached to the Temple, with specific seva (ritual functions). There are 63 categories of Seva or Sevayats presently performing ritual functions within the Temple. For this study, out of these 63 categories of Sevayats, 18 categories are the primary sampling units which were randomly selected, constituting more than 28% of the total representative population. Further, from these 18 categories, 5% of the units were randomly selected from each category as the secondary sampling unit, based on the Census, 88. Thus we reached the sample size of 145. The reasons why such a method of sample selection was adopted were the constraints of data availability as well as the nature of the study, which does not want to singularly restrict itself only to quantitative analysis of data. The method of data collection from each sampling unit was done with help of an interview schedule that included both close ended and open-ended questions. The mediating factors for successful administration of the interview schedule were also possible because of the personal background of the investigator. For better insight, a whole lot of other people involved with the temple in some way or other, be it in the administration or related businesses or informed private individuals, were discussed with. Also, the investigator was able to gather a lot of information by Non-Participant observation of the Sevayats' activities, and by listening to the discussions that the Sevayats have in their leisure period within the Temple complex. So while analyzing, all these information were used to enrich and interpret the data collected through the interview schedule.

It is expected that we will understand not only the changing nature of the differences in the social status among the Sevayats in present times, but also examine the attitude of the Sevayats towards the changes that are taking place in the greater society in the present times, and their perception about the consequent factors that are affecting their life. Though importance of caste in the social lives of the Sevayats and the nature of interrelationship among the niyogas and Sevayats within the Temple are issues that have a determined effect on their lives but it is far more important to consider whether there has been any change in the strength of the religious faith and conviction among the Sevayats, over the years. To gain an insight about the future condition of their community, here we will try to see whether the attraction of the younger generation of the Sevayats towards their hereditary ritual occupation in the temple has changed and if so, the factors behind their changing perception. Related to this, we need to examine whether the minimum economic security provided by the hereditary ritual occupation in the temple works as a de-motivating factor for the younger generations to seek alternative secular occupation. Keeping the changes in last six decades in India, we do need to see whether religious consideration play a role in the political participation of the Sevayats, and has there been any change

in the economic condition of the Sevayats presently, in comparison to the past.

### **Socio-Economic Background of the Sevayats**

For analysis of the data, the sampled Sevayats were categorized into three categories, according to their ritual function within the temple, which are as following:

- Category A, sixty-two (62) in numbers comprising of Sevayats who perform ritual function within sanctum sanctorum.
- Category B, sixty eight (68) in numbers comprising of Sevayats who perform ritual function outside the sanctum sanctorum.
- Category C, fifteen (15) in numbers comprising of Non-Brahmin Sevayats and those who trace tribal lineage.

The mean age of the sample is 50 years, and the distribution of the sample in three age groups - Young (15 – 35 years) covering 24.14%, Middle (35 – 55 years) covering 34.48%, Old (55 & above years) covering 41.38%.

In terms of education the Sevayat community is yet to achieve the level that could give them capacity to bring a substantial change in their quality of life. Though mean effective years of education of Sevayats are just 07.64 years, but if compared to age and their children's education then we see that there is a very distinct intergenerational transformation is taking place among them. There is an inverse relation between age and education, which means that among Sevayats, in last fifty years more and more people have gone for secular education. Significantly, among respondents below the age of 35 years, there is no illiteracy, and those who have children, all are into education. Illiteracy is acute among the aged, and it seems illiteracy breeds' illiteracy. When education and niyogas are compared, we see that illiteracy is most acute among the third category of Sevayats, i.e. the non-Brahmin Sevayats. Less than one-fourth Sevayats in category A and just more than that in category B, whereas more than half of category C are illiterates.

Among the respondents who have married and have adult children show that the next generation is better qualified than their parent's generation irrespective of gender. But it was observed that Sevayats still do not recognize that women need to go for much higher education because they do not foresee their daughter to have much activity beyond their home. Further, education still does not count much in the 'marriage-market' for the sevayat community which can be seen as a reason for their girl children not pursuing higher education to the extent in comparison their male counterpart in the family.

For The Sevayats of Sri Jagannath Temple it was seen that Niyoga identity is unique and provide them a status level in the greater society that is better than Jati identity. They take advantage of the society's ignorance about the

presence of non Brahmin Sevayats in the Temple. Further, as Sevayats they are accorded equal status among themselves, therefore, in terms of their interrelationship they find *niyoga* as more suitable for their activities. As far as marriage and taking up of secular occupation are concerned Sevayats do give importance to caste consideration as well as to their status as Sevayats. In case of matrimonial alliances they prioritize partnership from sevayat community, otherwise among *jatis* that are considered of equal or higher plain. They were firm that because of their *Jati* consideration and especially their hereditary occupation in the Temple, notwithstanding an individuals academic or technical qualification or economic compulsion, if somebody goes singularly for secular occupation outside the Temple, they should refrain from taking up 'menial jobs' as they are considered incompatible to their *Jati* and *Niyoga* status. It is interesting to note that a sevayat youth will readily accept a job of a peon in a government office yet would not accept a management trainee in a hotel because he has to perform jobs in the laundry section or in the kitchen/restaurant. The social pressure on the family is also enormous which forces them to not to take up such occupation. It can be inferred that *Jati* and *Niyoga* membership as a whole, irrespective of all the independent variables, is an impediment for the Sevayat community to take up secular occupations compatible to their level of qualification and skill. In case of accepting *daan* or gifts from pilgrim patrons they do not discriminate on these lines.

Another interesting finding in this regard, is the fact that *Jati* or *niyoga* membership in no way affects their political decision making process. As a group Sevayats of Jagannath Temple can swing a party's fortune in elections of Puri town. From Puri, known for its religious heritage, never a political party with religious ideals or affiliations has ever won an election. In fact, they were found to be skeptical in their attitude towards political parties with religious ideals or affiliations. Also they are very conscious in dealing with their *Jajman* because in no way they are ready to jeopardize their prospect of earning.

Monthly income as stated by the Sevayats shows that, in today's standards Sevayats have pretty low income. Around 43% of Sevayats earn between 0-4000 rupees per month, and around same percentage earn between 4000-8000 rupees per month. But here a few considerations, as observed, have to be factored in for better understanding of the situation. First, Sevayats are in habit to exhibit exaggerated accounts of their misery to the pilgrims. Second, their humble lifestyle and unscheduled dispersed income style many times do not allow them to even realize their actual income. Third, a lot of perquisite that comes with the job is taken for granted by the Sevayats and are not included by them in their income. Fourth, while calculating income in terms of the standards of today's world, even then, it has been observed that Sevayats as a whole belong to low-income category. When income was understood in relation to education, *niyoga* and family size, it was seen that formal education does not have a very

significant impact on the income of the Sevayats. In most of the niyogas as well as between the niyogas income distribution is uneven and polarized. In comparison to the family size, per head income distribution is pretty low. Income, therefore, has to be understood in terms of the importance of the ritual function within the temple, and from sources that are external to the temple though may directly or indirectly related to the temple. Importance of the ritual function within the temple generates better revenue from the pilgrim patrons or creates condition that results in better probability of getting a pilgrim patron. Hospitality business, sale of Mahaprasad, and local craft and textile are various other avenues that the Sevayats exploit for their own income.

Majority of the Sevayats (75.17%) agree that their income has gone up. The reasons shown for rise in the income are: a) more pilgrim visitors; b) people's contribution has gone up; c) better communication facility; d) increase in the fame of the temple; e) *puraskar* from the temple administration; f) improved employment & business opportunities. Though most of the Sevayats consider their income to have gone up, yet they are conscious of the fact that in real term it has gone down. Reasons shown for their feeling that rise in income has not been real so as to affect their lives are: a) division of *jajmans* amongst brothers; b) increase in number of dependents; c) areligious attitude of people; d) rise in the population of the Sevayats; e) outsiders working in the temple; f) vestment by the State Government of landed property held by the Sevayats; g) value of money has gone down due to inflation.

Further, as because they distinguish between what they earn and the value of their earning in terms of market prices, we can say that Sevayats are getting influenced by the consumerist trends and necessities, evident from the fact that use of modern amenities and accessories by the sevayat families.

### **Group Interrelationship: Dynamics**

The Sevayats are of the view that though ideally they supposedly should enjoy equal status and importance, but in reality among them there is wide level of difference in every aspect of their activity. They feel that it is the economic considerations and consequent power that it generates which creates the differences. The rich and the powerful Sevayats are in a position to manipulate the Niyogas decisions in their favor. Thus, they take a leadership position within the niyoga. Pilgrims, who are outsiders, also get influenced by the economic might and resources of these Sevayats who are able to cater better service to them. Better position within the niyoga and patronage from the pilgrims naturally provide these few Sevayats with higher economic returns. The Administration with their motive to singularly ensure timely performance of rites and ritual keep these Sevayats in good humor so that through them they can control the Sevayat community better in their duties. Also they know that the powerful Sevayats have

more nuisance value and can create trouble within the Temple.

Sevayats agree that these factors do not work in isolation rather are complementary in nature creating differences within the Sevayat community. Most of the Sevayats were of the view when asked about the interrelationship among themselves, that compared to past, the relationship among Sevayats has taken a turn for worse; the past was better because the relationship was more intimate, free, frank, and did not trample anybody's credulity. At present the relationship stands more on mistrust, selfish motivation and hegemony. Apparent bonhomie and organized conflict is the real state of relationship among Sevayats. On a general plain the Sevayats agree that they are a divided lot because of differential ritual importance within the temple, uneven economic income, uneven official patronage, and limited opportunity and resources that ultimately results in subordination – super ordination between the niyogas.

The issue of differential importance given/attached to the various ritual functions assigned to particular niyogas is though thought to be a major reason for difference in influence and power between the niyogas. But it seems the Sevayats are divided on the issue. Though more than half of them consider it is the ritual function that they perform within the temple as the cause of difference but almost the other half of the respondents feel that it is factors like income, number of jajmans, combined with the nature of ritual function that affects the cause.

Despite all the difference between them the Sevayats also unite in times of self – interest or exigencies. Image of the temple being their only capital for survival, Sevayats always want to keep the pilgrims in good humor. Contradiction towards this end creeps in because they also want to extract maximum revenue from the pilgrims. Mass participation as witnessed in the temple gives ample opportunity for unhealthy practices, but Sevayats on their own do ensure the security of the pilgrims.

The niyogas are vigilant about the activities of the administration, and they contest all one-sided actions. They are mostly conscious of the fact that if the administration is given a free hand, their sphere of influence may get contracted. But mostly the administration does take any action that affects the hegemony of the Sevayats within the temple.

In case of disputes, the secretary and other leaders of the concerned niyoga try and resolve it; otherwise, it is referred to the temple administration who then resolve it. The general impression is that, the solution or justice is mostly unfair, often tilting in favor of the high and mighty. As the administration has to run the show hassle free, expediently it takes side of those who can influence their reach within the temple. Administration also takes advantage of Sevayat's disunity due to which they have a weak bargaining power.

In this section, it becomes evident that the Sevayats are a divided lot, who for short term gains and mutual benefit go along with each other. Economic

consideration is the major factor that divides them as well as brings them together. Deep seeded mistrust results in unbridgeable schisms and factionalism that hinders their collective welfare. Taking advantage of this, the outsiders and administration of the Temple can get away with a lot of acts of omission and commission. They realize that it is necessary for them to unite for the betterment of the lot but they cannot bridge the gap because of vested interest. It is observed that the interdependency *simultaneously* encourages contradictory processes as well as unite them in their daily activities.

### **Changing Perception: Organization and Profession**

The Sevayats are conscious of the fact that the quality of performance of rites and rituals has gone down. They are of the view that age and experience does give a sevayat more efficiency, but mundane considerations like income of the temple, providing maximum access to the pilgrims, political pressure, commercial compulsions many a times forces a sevayat to compromise with the quality. Further, the under trainee Sevayats are bred with inadequate training. Overall we can conclude that the Sevayats agree that ritual performance, compared to past, is of lower quality.

Though majority of the Sevayats feel that dedication and sincerity of the younger generation remain unchanged, but when seen in relation to age it was seen that more than 83% of the aged Sevayats feel that dedication and sincerity of the younger generations have gone down.

Despite of all the changes that the Sevayats are experiencing as members of the sevayat community as well as a part of the greater society, they feel that the young Sevayats continue to have faith in the institution, irrespective of factors like age, education, or income. This is one major reason why continuity of the temple and ritual performance within it continues without much hassle.

Irrespective of age, income, education and *niyoga*, the Sevayats mostly want their future generations to continue in their hereditary profession. But they also mentioned that their future generation should also seek supplementary source of income. They feel if not all, at least one son should remain engaged in this profession. They consider that this profession is the result of their good fortune and the good deeds of their past life, secular occupation under no circumstance they can forgo this.

Sevayats those who directly deal with pilgrims are of the view that sevayat-pilgrim interrelationship is apparently cordial and friendly. Yet, the level of confidence in this relationship, according to the Sevayats, seems to have waned. They feel that Sevayats do not portray a sophisticated image that is in consonance with present day sensibilities. Economic compulsions of the Sevayats (mostly the *dhulias*) also force many of them to haggle with the pilgrims for *dakshina*, which leaves a lasting negative impression about them.

The respondents agreed that the visitors'/pilgrims' religiosity have gone down from past; with changed social environment and changed priorities in life the visitor/pilgrim have very limited interest in rituals (which is where the Sevayats have a role to play), and are skeptical about the Sevayats, who lack sophistication in articulation, but are high-strung to earn as much as possible, mostly giving a wrong impression about themselves.

Strikingly, every respondent showed that they do not understand the meaning of the word 'role' (here roughly meaning boomika/abadaan) nor have the imagination to grasp it. On the contrary, uniformly and generally they have expressed their life situation, which according to them is: the position of the Sevayats in today's society is bad, rather despicable.

Religious performance in today's society is as materially motivated as any other enterprise, where depending on the surety and quantum of returns, people engage and spend. Secular occupation except as a means of show-off, people hardly are committed towards ritual performance. In light of the above, therefore it is but natural that the Sevayats are merely a necessary evil, a residue, mechanically upholding a highly acclaimed tradition, but are unsure of their standing. It is this neglect that is further cloistering their life.

This hinders their progression and adjustment in tune with the attitude of the society. They brood about their past, regret about the missed opportunities, aware about the rot within the community, yet unable to shrug-off the inertia they are in. Isolated and uncertain they are, but they have to interact daily with the greater society for their own survival as well as to uphold the bestowed hereditary tradition – where in they are looked down upon.

The Sevayats of Jagannath temple at Puri are gradually realizing that secular occupations are more remunerative and socially more acceptable. Education is a significant factor for the younger generations in their realization that only depending on the temple for their survival will not allow them to have a life that is at par with the present day social trends. Yet, they are of the view that because of their slowness in the attitude change, education has not yet made the necessary impact that can raise their overall income or can change their ethos and life style. They accept that education does de-motivate the younger generation towards their hereditary occupation. Those who excel in education, by far very nominal in number, do of course continue pursuing it further and mostly tend not come back to their hereditary occupation until they retire from these pursuits. At the same time a considerable number of Sevayats feel that low education and high unemployment among the Sevayats results due to the low priority given to any thing that is not connected to the temple. Further, at the back of the mind it is always there that if something does not work out, they always can fall back upon the temple and their hereditary occupation that at least will ensure subsistence level income. 'No income/work' is not a scenario that a sevayat can visualize as the temple always attracts pilgrims by its huge and diverse activities. Therefore

they mostly tend to see secular occupation complementary to their hereditary occupation.

Though Sevayats from the young age group overwhelmingly disagree, but the middle aged and old Sevayats feel that the economic security provided by the ritual occupation actively works as a deterrent for the youngsters to go for the needful qualification required for competing in the open market for secular occupation. Those who have better education they do not consider that ritual occupation actively works as a deterrent for the youngsters to go for the needful qualification, whereas the Sevayats with less effective years of education tends to agree with this view. The view of the Sevayats on this subject and the nature of their ritual function in the temple are inversely related, i.e. the more important is the nature of ritual function in the temple the more is the disagreement with the view that that ritual occupation actively works as a deterrent for the youngsters to go for the needful qualification.

### **Conclusion**

The status, behavior and values of the Sevayats have undergone a major change in the context of the changed social milieu at the macro level. Changes in the administration had started taking place from the time of British rule and culminated under the Government Administration in the post independent India. Under the British rule although the administrative power remained with the King, steps were taken for the proper account of the earnings, and wealth of the Temple and its protection. For proper execution, the Temple organization was streamlined and reoriented in accordance with the tradition. The British refrained from getting involved in economic liability and performance of rites and rituals. Nevertheless we can conclude that the British rule had brought an element of discipline into the Temple organization, which collapsed immediately after the country gained political independence.

It was decisive intervention by the Government that took over Temple administration in 1960 that stemmed the rot. Three major changes, took place, which consequently affected the social configuration around the Temple. First, clear-cut demarcation among rituals, rites and duties were made. Second, the administration undertook measures to collect financial resources directly from the Temple via various means as Hundi. The other sources of earnings, (such as property) of the Temple were recorded and audited. The Government officials in charge were made accountable to the Managing Committee that included the King, the administrator, learned people and representative of the Sevayats. Thirdly, the effect of land reform measures led to dwindling patronage from the Kings and the landlords. Naturally, the Sevayats were the hardest hit since they were the actual landlords of the Lord's land donated by the Kings, and had enjoyed the part of the proceeds with impunity. The redistribution of the land for

actual cultivation or its vestment with the Government eliminated this income and the social security thereof. The Sevayats were suddenly left with their only 'secondary' source of income-patronage of the pilgrims. Naturally, the fight and bid for "dakshina" and donations from the pilgrims became sought after for sheer economic reasons, a trait that is attributed to this group of society. Even today improved transport and communication facilities have altered the composition and character of the visitor in several fundamental ways. Not only has it extended the visitor's market but the quantum of influx for the whole year has also spiraled up. Education, changes in values and religions experiences, changed the priorities and the life-style of the visitors. This has in turn drastically affected the profession of the Sevayats and the conditions under which they practice.

It is clear that present day society is not only skeptical about the Sevayats, but find their 'sales talk' dubious and 'tasteless'. It is also rather easy to stigmatize them or term them conveniently as losers in the changed social structure, but it would be objective if we try to understand them at the micro level, in context of the changes in social structure at the macro level.

Analytically, we can distinguish between the spiritual complex, where pan-Hindu devotion to Lord Jagannath is pivotal, and the ritual complex, where the Sevayats are its focus, with their specific beliefs and modes of worship. To the visitors, such organizational differences are as immaterial to them as all the ritual acts to acquire merit. Though Brahminical Sanskrit texts positions the Brahmins at the top of the hierarchy, but in reality the Sevayats are perceived to be illiterate, ill-behaved, devious and dangerous'. However, historical changes have affected the value orientations of the Hindus and this explains the contradiction of the Sevayats being tolerated by the visitors, not withstanding their ill repute.

Like every religious center, amongst the Sevayats of Lord Jagannath Temple, there is a 'front stage' for rituals and belief, and a 'back stage' of conflicts over petty interests. The changes at the macro level have created a completely impersonal pilgrimage market (visitors to the Temple for instance are no longer pilgrims, but tourists). A break away from the past has taken place where the jajmani relation between patrons and the Sevayats has been diluted to a great extent. More and more visitors to the Temple are unattached or are oblivious of their traditional relations. The economic security provided by such relations is therefore waning. With clear cut demarcation and identity, and accretive group like the Sevayats often try to bring about internal cohesion but always fail to close their ranks. The growing ranks of ' Dhulias' among the Sevayats, who only give ritual service in lieu receive fees is a major development that has taken place during the last thirty years. Another marked trend has been for the few Sevayats, who were able to keep their property to not only try and monopolize on the entire inflow of pilgrims with the help of 'gomastas', but also diversify into other fields of economic activity as opportunities increase. This is a major cause of conflict and jealousy, which clearly shows the mental makeup of the Sevayats.

The centrality of financial transactions and the vital role played by middlemen has naturally resulted in the impoverishment of majority of Sevayats and relative success of a few Sevayats.

If we have a close look at the life style of the Sevayats, in the light of the above factors, we find that the majority of the Sevayats are stagnating and failing to utilize the expanding economic opportunities. With a dwindling income and a definite loss of traditional sources of income, the picture of Sevayats haggling to extract money from visitors, has become commonplace in this society. The meager amount of 'puraskar' and 'Khei' does not relieve the Sevayats much. In such a compelling economic situation, the role of government officials in charge of the Temple is more opportunistic, who rather than create unnecessary hassles and conflicts with the powerful Sevayats tend to concentrate on the disciplined performance of rites and rituals. Therefore, we should not expect to see any far-reaching changes under Government Administration, only efforts to maintain the status quo and business as usual.

Generally, though, the religious organization is continuing and its halo is spreading across the world, but the two most important social groups bound to the organization, the Hindu visitor and the Sevayats, seem to live with a perpetual sense of wrongful deprivation. The visitors are harassed and duped continually in the name of religion while the struggle for the Sevayats and their activities are primarily based on survival. What is really required, as in the temple, with its daily rites and rituals, the Sevayats should also be taken care of. It may be practical if a system of registration of all visitors is introduced and the whole sequence of 'Puja- dakshina- prasad' becomes scheduled. This would ensure that the visitors do not get duped and every Sevayat would be given an equal opportunity. This may seem revolutionary but in the last 900 years, the Lord, the Temple and the Sevayats have witnessed a lot of catastrophes, inventions and epochal changes. They have survived and have remained open to the developments in society.

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## Рамануџ Гангули

### ДРУШТВЕНА ДИНАМИКА У ВЕРСКОМ МИЉЕУ: СЕВАЈАТИ У ЏАГАНАТ ХРАМУ У ПУРИ

#### Резиме

Супротно данашњим снагама индустријализације, урбанизације и променом друштвене конфигурације, лично богослужење, богослужење у храму, вођење од стране духовних власти и ходочашће, иако се популарно претпоставља супротно, и даље настављају да информишу и обликују вредности Индијаца. Бавимо се Шри Џаганат храмом у Пури, Ориса (направљен после 1135. године наше ере), који је и данас популаран, и који и даље одржава културу Индије и то више од 900 година. Овај рад се бави Севајатима у Шри Џаганат храму у Пури, дакле о верским функцијама храма. Око девет векова, упркос друштвеним, економским и политички успонима и падовима, Севајати су преживели и постали највише верујући и најискренији спроводиоци верске традиције. Овај рад се концентрише на све Севајате из храма Џаганат. Такође покушава да опише савремени концепт, њихов друштвено – економски статус, њихово мишљење о њима самима и храму, и њихову позицију у храму и друштву. Рад неће указивати на историјску перспективу храма, нити ће покушати да описује сам храм. Гледајући на шире друштво овај рад покушава да успостави везу између Севајата и друштва и како Севајати реагују на силе промена. Фокус је на природи мењања организације и функционисања Севајата, где ће прошлост бити кориштена само као референтна тачка.

**Кључне речи:** Севајати, Џаганат храм, индијска реалност, *нијогас*

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