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His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

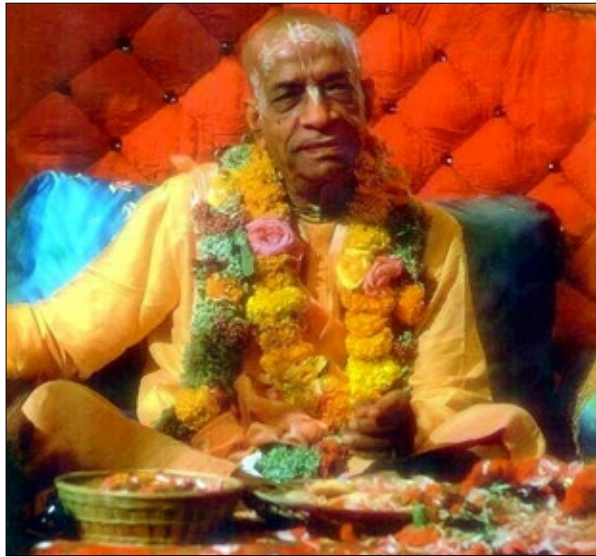
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THE PURPOSE OF VARNASRAMA

His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

The *varṇāśrama* system is for convenience sake in the material world. It has nothing to do with spiritual life. Acceptance of *varṇāśrama* means a little easy progress to spiritual life, otherwise it has no importance to us. For example, all my European and American disciples have no *varṇāśrama* position, but spiritually because they have followed the rules and regulations and also my instructions, their advancement spiritually is being appreciated by everyone.

Always remember that *varṇāśrama* life is a good program for material life, and it helps one in spiritual life; but spiritual life is not dependent upon it. After all, the system of *varṇāśrama* has to be realized before accepting spiritual life; and the renounced order of *sannyāsa* is the last stage of *varṇāśrama*. 🌸

— Letter to Hansadutta. 19 Oct. 1974.

THE MEANING AND PRACTICE OF ODANA-SASTHI

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada has written in his purport to *Cc. madhya* 16.78:

At the beginning of winter, there is a ceremony known as the *oḍana-ṣaṣṭhī*. This ceremony indicates that from that day forward, a winter covering should be given to Lord Jagannath. That covering is directly purchased from a weaver. According to the *arcana-mārga*, a cloth should first be washed to remove all the starch, and then it can be used to cover the Lord. Pundarik Vidyanidhi saw that the priest neglected to wash the cloth before covering Lord Jagannath. Since he wanted to find some fault in the devotees, he became indignant.

In his purport to *Caitanya-bhāgavata antya* 10.88, Srila Baktisiddhanta Saraswati says that *oḍana* means “to wear”, and *ṣaṣṭhī* means “sixth”. In Jagannath Puri, starting from the sixth day of the bright half of the month of *Mārgaśīrṣa* (November-December) up to the day of *Vasanta Pañcamī*, Jagannath Baladeva and Subhadra are dressed in warm cloth. This day is

considered to be the beginning of the winter months. The occasion is also known in Puri as *Prāvaraṇa-ṣaṣṭhī*. *Prāvaraṇa* means “covering” or “upper garment”. The dress is called *ghodalāgi-veśa*. *Ghoda* means covering. *ghodalāgi-veśa* is a cloth that covers the entire bodies of Jagannath, Baladev and Subhadra like a shawl, leaving only their eyes and mouth to be seen. On this day the *ghodalāgi*, the covering of the deities, begins. In Puri, after the deities are offered *ghodas* and silken cloth on the main altar, six pieces of gold ornaments are also offered.

The *Nīlādri-mahotsava*, also known as *dvādaśa-yātrā-vidhi*, is an annual cycle of twelve main festivals that are observed in Puri for Lord Jagannath. *Oḍana-ṣaṣṭhī*, also known as *prāvaraṇa-ṣaṣṭhī*, is the seventh on the list.

According to the local tradition in Jagannath Puri, the practice of offering this dress to the Lord began when there was once an argument between Jagannath and the personified winter season. Jagannath is *puruṣa*, the supreme male, while winter is *prakṛti*, the feminine energy. The winter once applied her power of severe cold to the Lord, which Jagannath responded to by wearing a simple thin cloth. The winter was defeated and offered prayers, “My dear Lord, I am created by you and am your eternal servant. Please accept my service and forgive me for my offenses.”

Jagannath was pleased with her prayers, but he gave one stipulation to winter, “Don’t apply your cold to my devotees or *sādhus* doing austerities in the Himalayas.” Winter happily agreed to this and stayed at the lotus feet of Lord Jagannath.

It is said that to commemorate this pastime, Lord Jagannath accepts the *ghodalāgi-veśa*. The cloth is eighteen hands long by seven hands wide and is offered to the Lord during the time of year when the winter cold is the most severe. During that period the Lord accepts special offerings called *pahili-bhoga*. Generally it is considered that Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, personally cooks for Jagannath in Puri, but during the time of *Oḍana-ṣaṣṭhī* it is said that Mother Yashoda personally cooks the items in Puri. [For more details about these offerings see the two articles in this issue, “Mother Yashoda’s Offering”, and “Pahili-bhoga Items”.]

Observances begin on the day before *Oḍana-ṣaṣṭhī* with a preliminary procedure known as *adhivāsa*. The *adhivāsa* ceremony for *Oḍana-ṣaṣṭhī* is also known as *vastrādhivāsa*, (*vastra*, meaning cloth, indicating the

special dress during this time). At the time of the *adhivāsa*, twenty-one new sets of clothes of white, black, and red color are brought for the ceremony. The priests in Puri chant mantras to purify those clothes, then they worship various demigod devotees of the Lord to establish auspiciousness.

On the next day, *ṣaṣṭhī*, after Lord Jagannath has been bathed, the new clothes are carried in a procession three times around the temple and then taken to Jagannath’s altar. Jagannath’s servants then dress the deities in the *ghodalāgi-veśa* and decorate them with ornaments. *Bhoga* is then offered, and then various prayers are recited to the deities. From *Oḍana-ṣaṣṭhī* up to the day of *Vasanta Pañcamī*, Lord Jagannath wears different colored cloth on different days of the week corresponding to the planet that rules that particular day. Every Sunday he wears orange or gold color (associated with Surya, the Sun), on Monday he is clad in white clothes with black spots to show a connection to the moon, on Tuesday he wears red (the color associated with Mangala, Mars), on Wednesday, green (associated with Budha, Mercury), on Thursday,



Nāma-tattva

EVEN UNINTENTIONAL CHANTING

Bṛhan-nārādiya Purāṇa
quoted in *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 10.328

*anicchayāpi dahati spr̥ṣṭo huta-vaho yathā
tathā dahati govinda-nāma vyāḥād apīritam*

Just as touching fire causes one to be burnt, even if it is done unintentionally, by chanting the holy names of the Supreme Lord, even while calling the names of one’s children, all of one’s sinful reactions are vanquished. [Note: This assumes that the names of one’s children were chosen because they were the holy names of the Supreme Lord.]

— Sanatan Goswami. *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. English translation by Bhupati Das. Rasbihari Lal & Sons. Vrindavan. 2005.





Jagannath, Baladev, Subhadra of ISKCON Bhubaneswar on the day of Oḍana-ṣaṣṭhi

yellow (associated with Brihaspati, Jupiter), on Friday, pink or crystal color (associated with Shukra, Venus), and on Saturday he wears cloth that is black, blue or purple in color (associated with Shani, Saturn).

One unusual feature of this dress is that it is purchased directly from the weavers without removing the starch. Per *śāstra*, prior to offering any cloth to the Lord you are supposed to first remove the starch. Although this feature of Oḍana-ṣaṣṭhi is extraordinary, it takes place by the desire of the Lord.

[Since the meaning in Sanskrit of the word *oḍana* is boiled rice or grains that are mashed and cooked, this may have become *oḍana* in Odia language to refer to the mashed grains that constitute starch.]

In the *antya-līlā*, chapter ten (texts 88 to 177) of his Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata, Srila Vrindavan Das Thakur, tells the story of Pundarik Vidyanidhi, the intimate devotee of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Vidyanidhi was a strict observer of Vedic *sad-ācāra*, formal etiquette. When Pundarik saw that they were offering the cloth without first washing out the starch, he became unhappy, thinking that the cloth was impure and therefore unsuitable for offering to Jagannath. He spoke about the issue with Swarup Damodar Goswami, who told him that although it was not considered appropriate,

it was the custom in Puri which was accepted by Lord Jagannath. Pundarik replied, that the Lord may accept whatever he likes, but he expressed doubt as to how the servants of the Lord could touch such impure cloth. In this way he found fault with the devotees of Jagannath. That night, Jagannath and Balaram came to him in a dream and began slapping him on his cheeks.

Pundarik called out, *kon aparādhe more mārāha gosāñi!* — “O Lord, for what offense are you beating me?”

Jagannath replied, *tora aparādhera anta nāñi* — “There is no end to your offenses.” (CB. *antya* 10.131)

Lord Jagannath went on to say:

*mora jāti, mora sevakera jāti nāñi
sakala jāñilā tumi rahi' ei ṭhāñi*

“I do not belong to any caste, and My servants also do not belong to any caste. You should have learned this while staying here. (132)

*tabe kene rahiyācha jāti-nāśā-sthāne
jāti rākhi' cala tumi āpana-bhavane*

“Why then are you staying in a place where you will lose your caste? If you want to protect your caste, you better go home. (133)

*āmi ye kariyā āchi yātrāra nirbandha
tāhāte o bhāva anācāreṇa sambandha*

“I have inaugurated the observance of this festival. How then can you think that there is any improper behaviour in it? (134)

*āmāre kariyā brahma, sevaka nindiyā
māṇḍuyā-kāpaḍa-sthāne doṣa-dṛṣṭi diyā”*

“You accept me as the Supreme Brahman, but you offend my servants by finding fault in their dressing me with starched cloth.” (135) 🍌 — MD

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MOTHER YASHODA’S OFFERING

Just as common people eat more during the cold winter to maintain themselves, from *Dhanu-saṅkrānti* to *Makara-saṅkrānti*, which includes the period beginning with *Odana-sasthi* during which the special warm cloth is offered, Lord Jagannath is also offered extra items to eat. This special offering is called *pahili-bhoga*, and there is an enchanting story about its origin:

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Once, Dwarkadish Krishna was standing at his palace window with a heavy heart, remembering Mother Yashoda in Vrindavan. He became so absorbed in thinking of his mother’s intense *vātsalya-rasa* that he took on the form of Bala Gopal and became baby Krishna.

Just then, Narada appeared there and humbly inquired from Dwarkadish why he had manifested that form. Krishna told Narada about the pure *vātsalya-prema* of Yashoda Mata, and he sent Narada to Vraja to receive first-hand experience about the depth of his *mātā*’s love.

Narada thus went to Gopa-pura Vrindavan. He arrived early in the morning and saw Mother Yashoda feeding baby Krishna and Balaram. *Mātāji* held the two brothers on her lap and had a variety of foodstuffs there that little Kanai and Balai nibbled on with great pleasure.

Since Narada Muni saw this charming scene in the early morning, it became known as *pahili-bhoga*, “the first offering of the day”. To commemorate this pastime in Jagannath Puri, the *paṇḍās* offer the same kinds of foodstuffs to Shyamasundar Jagannath in the early morning as Yashoda-mayi makes for her baby boys.

Pahili-bhoga is very famous in Odisha. All the temples of Krishna or Jagannath make this morning offering daily in the period just after the month of *Kārtika*. 🍌 — MD

PAHILI-BHOGA ITEMS

The *pahili-bhoga* offering consists mainly of what are considered to be “light preparations” in Odisha. The items include *baḍajhilli* (soft *panir* cake fried in ghee and soaked in sweet milk), *baḍi* (dal and spices ground and dried in the sun), *endurī* (paste of rice, urad dal, coconut, *guḍa*, and small amounts of camphor, rolled inside of a turmeric leaf and steamed), *baḍabaḍā* (a donut-shaped dal savory fried in ghee), *kākeri* / *kākarā* (balls of wheat flour / semolina with coconut, *guḍa*, soft *panir*, and a little camphor inside, fried in ghee), *ārisā* (a paste of rice flour and *guḍa*, spiced with cardamom, black pepper, and camphor, fried in ghee), *mugei* (sprouted mung dal), *caḍinedā* (rice flour and *guḍa*, fried in ghee), *laḍu* (a paste of chickpea flour and water put through a slotted spoon, fried in ghee, then soaked in syrup made of water and *nabāta*¹ and rolled into balls), *gajā* (squares of white flour and milk, fried in ghee, and soaked in *nabāta* syrup), *gainthā* (rice powder cake steamed and soaked in milk sweetened with *nabāta*), *maṇḍā* (rice paste balls filled with coconut, *guḍa*, and camphor and then steamed), *chatu* (dry-roasted wheat kernels, flat rice, chick peas, and peanuts ground to a powder), *cuḍāpuā*, (soaked flat rice). 🍌

— Information translated by Prabhupada Priya Sevaka Das from Asutosh Nayak’s Śrī Jagannātha Parvaparvāṇi Sevā-pūjā. Published by Bijoy Shankar Patra. Cuttack. 1999. Oriya.

Notes

¹ *Nabāta* — dried hard sugarcane juice, similar to mishri or natural rock candy.