

Sacred Space On Earth : (Spaces Built By Societal Facts)

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ABSTRACT: *To the Hindus the whole world is sacred as it is believed to spring from the very body of God. Hindus call these sacred spaces to be “tirthas” which is the doorway between heaven and earth. These tirthas(sacred spaces) highlights the great act of gods and goddesses as well as encompasses the mythic events surrounding them. It signifies a living sacred geographical space, a place where everything is blessed pure and auspicious. One of such sacred crossings is Shrikshetra Purosottam Shetra or Puri in Orissa.(one of the four abodes of lord Vishnu in the east). This avenue collects a vast array of numerous mythic events related to Lord Jagannatha, which over the centuries attracted numerous pilgrims from different corners of the world and stand in a place empowered by the whole of India’s sacred geography. This sacred tirtha created a sacred ceremonial/circumbulatory path with the main temple in the core and the secondary shrines on the periphery. The mythical/ritual traditions are explained by redefining separate ritual (sacred) spaces. The present study is an attempt to understand their various features of these ritual spaces and their manifestations in reality at modern Puri, a temple town in Orissa, Eastern India.*

KEYWORDS: *sacred geography, space, Jagannatha Temple*

I.

Introduction

Puri is one of the most important and famous sacred spaces (TirthaKhetra) of the Hindus. The myth of supernaturalism of Lord Jagannath attracts numerous pilgrims. The temple of Lord Jagannath is on the main focal point of the sacred circle (mandala) with a considerable temple as a subsidiary establishment giving an interesting “Conch Shell” (sankha) shape. Thus the mental construction of the sacred space at Puri got established.

Point of Interest- Sacred Space is one of the modern concepts of space in geography. It is a resultant of interaction of physical space & mental construction influenced by the myth & holiness of the area. The sacred space has a great impact on the culture, socio-economic condition, food habit, business etc. of the existing population. Sacred space also supports our oldest tradition of unity in diversity by attracting pilgrims & tourist irrespective of caste & creed. *So, Puri, one of the important sacred spaces is being chosen as research area to find out the essence of the term “sacred geographical space” and its effect upon the physical and Socio-cultural landscape of Puri.*

Objective- To study the- 1.Culture & history of Puri

2. Sacred geography of Puri and its relation with the physical and Socio-economic space.

Methodology- Methodology involves mainly collection of primary & secondary data & their analysis to fulfill the above objectives-

Primary Data-(A).Data regarding temple structure and administration. (B). Survey of Temple History.

Secondary Data- (A). Ancient maps of Puri town—both physical and cultural. (B).Traditional story/fact about the different temples and sites. (C).Religious texts of different types—both ancient and modern.

For Hindus, pilgrimage to the tirtha has been an important unifying force, not only for sects and regions, but for the wider Hindu perception of what constitutes the land of India. Everyone knows how diverse India is, in race, language, religion and sect. in its long history there have been few centuries of political unity until modern times. But one thing Hindu India has led in common is a shared sense of its sacred geography. It is that land stretching from badrinath in the north, to Rameshwaram and Kanyakumari in the south, Dwarka in the west and Puri in the east.

One of these sacred sites is Puri, the abode of lord Jagannatha who occupy the core area of the town surrounded by several deities at the border forming the sacred circle of a cosmic map called a mandala. Puri is such sacred space which condenses the whole of India into a great sacred circle, a geographical mandala.

Before analyzing the morphology of the town, which is totally based on religious fervor, the concept of sacred space needs to be attempted first; it is this temple of lord Jagannatha which is at the centre of the town and the sacred shrines distributed around the town contribute to the creation of religious morphology and a sacred space.

II. Sacred Space

Sacred Spaces evoke a feeling of a sacredness of space and time, where Heaven seems to touch Earth and we find ourselves aware of the Holy, and filled with the Spirit. A higher energy is resides in a sacred space, a power beyond human control which is part of the feeling of "awe". To find ourselves in the midst of great natural beauty is an awakening into moments of heightened spiritual consciousness

This feeling of "sacred" invokes a connectedness, a presence of the blessing of existence. It is "sacred" when it becomes for us a "window to the Kingdom of God" and a reminder of the sacredness of all space as space created by God.

Sacred spaces present creation to us as a window to this kingdom of God, a glimpse of heaven here in this lifetime. It's an experience of the divine in life itself, in the very landscape of all things. We see all things as interdependent within an "inclusive community" and we experience a feeling of harmony as the process of having achieved balance.

This experience comes to us so clear, so inviting, and so welcoming, like good hospitality. At the same time shadows of unknown drift off in all directions. They remind us of the Unknown who is far more than we ever dreamed. We leave the sacred space with the new knowledge that life is far more than we dreamed. Our souls go deep into the rivers of the Spirit. The glory of sacred spaces is not just in enjoyment of that which is created, but in seeing and feeling God's very presence in creation.

Religions may elevate particular objects in the landscape to a holy position. Two kinds of places may be endowed with holiness. Places with distinctive physical characteristics--- such as mountains, rivers, or stones--- and places with natural features associated with human events in the religious development or diffusion. These holy places are known as **shrines**.

Physical features in the landscape may be endowed with religious significance in the rituals of a particular religion. Natural features could include holy locations or distinctive objects found in the landscape.

III. Impact Of Religion On The Landscape:

Religion leaves a permanent record on the landscape. The earth's surface is transformed in accordance with religious principles that require the carrying out of certain prescribed practices. Different religions transform the landscape in different ways including the construction of sacred structures and the arrangement of land in particular patterns.

SACRED STRUCTURES:

All of the major religions have sacred structures, but the functions of the buildings influence the arrangement of the structure across the landscape. Some religions require a relatively large number of elaborate structures; others have more modest needs.

CONCEPTION OF SPACE IN THE SACRED TOWN OF PURI:

It is believed that the land of Puri is so infused with the divinity of Jagannatha that a fistful of sand from the seashore is worth a lifetime's earnings. The co relation of material wealth with spirituality typifies the temple's cosmology and worldview, where property, power, ritual and privileges are linked and energized by a dynamic of sacredness. "When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophant", writes Mircea Eliade, "there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of absolute reality, opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding universe. The revelation of the sacred orients the surrounding space, imbuing it with a sense of order. On the contrary, "profane" space is homogenous and relative, a conglomerate of "neutral spaces" where man lives and moves, governed by the ever-changing needs of a secular society.

The city with its divine inhabitants may be likened on the symbolic structure of the mandala.

The Puri town with all its divine inhabitants is one such mandala or sacred circle.

The holy town of Puri is conceptualized as a conch-shell (sankha), which is one of Vishnu's symbols. This conch-shell is said to extend partly into the sea and to consist of seven concentric folds, the innermost of which is the platform or bedi on which the main gods of the temple stands.

This area is about 10 miles (5 Koshas) in extent of which nearly 2 miles (1 Koshas) is submerged in the sea. The other six folds are guarded by sets of Siva and Durga and include holy bathing place, hermitages, trees and the sea. All these place fall into the luminal Category of tirtha or fords, where a "crossing over is possible". The pilgrims, the residents of Puri, the temple servants and along with them, the images of the gods and their weapon circumbulate these folds of the town on certain fixed dates. For example, every year on the fifth day of the bright part of the Hindu month Marghasira (Oct-Nov) a festival called Sri KsetraParikrama takes place, which celebrates the birth of the conch-shell of Vishnu. Sri Ksetra literally means "the holy field" and refers to the temple town having the shape of a conch shell, while Parikrama means the act of walking around a holy space. The participants of this approximately 25Km long walk around the town are the members of different monasteries, who move in groups consisting of the devotees of a particular sect. The participants walk barefoot

from sunrise to sunset in a circular and clockwise movement around Puri, always keeping their Puri right side towards the Jagannatha temple. They halt at certain monasteries, hermitages and temples located in the fields and in the villages. If the sacred institution belongs to their own sect, they receive food, which is first being offered to the gods by the abbot. The temples visited by the participants are most dedicated to Shiva and Mahabir.

Both gods are regarded as protectors of the sevenfold of the town and therefore their shrines are distributed like watch posts along the border of Puri. In the centre of the Ksetra lies Jagannatha temple on a hillock called Nilgiri and eight Shiva temples guarding the eight quarters (Sahis) radiating from it. The hillocks called Nilgiri where the temple stands (popular belief) and Baba Danda (GT Road) connecting to Sri Gundicha temple being the spine and the bottom of sankha and Lokanatha (Shiva) is being the top portion of the sankha.

The broad end of the Sankhashetra lies to the west where the temple of Lokanatha is located and on the apical end or tail in the east is located the temple of Nilkantha. The devotees walk from one temple to the next and show their respect to the gods. This movement can be interpreted as a creation of a magical circle around the town which literally gives "birth" to the conch shell. From a sociological point of view this festival has several meanings. Like the border itself, the participants, who have become temporary aesthetes, and the hermitages and monasteries visited by them, are characterized by liminality. The movement along the border establishes a community between the devotees of a particular sect and between the different sects. The most important effect, however, is the distinction between an inner and an outer space. The inner realm has a higher value, because it is associated with the city of the gods and the right side, while the outer space is linked to the world of the humans and the left side. The religious town extends from the point core (temple of lord Jagannatha) and forms an entire web of settlement. The movement plays a vital role in the form of

---- Circumbulation around the centre

----- Linear movements or ceremonial paths

This concept of sacred Circumbulation is also a part of the ritual in Puri town. It touches all the main guardian gods of the town, and in the process, the shape of the sankha or conch shell is derived. The sacred circumbulatory path in town of Puri starts from:

--Lokanatha

---Moving along the banks of River Bhergabi

----Mukteswar

-----Bhudeswar

----Northern compound of Indradyumna

----Bileswar

-----Bay of Bengal

-----Sea Beach of Chakratirtha

-----Then again reaching Lokanatha.

Other folds of the city are marked by processions of sacred images and objects, in particular by Nrsimha and Sudarshana. They can be classed as linear movement in the town mainly in the form of sacred ceremonial paths. These paths usually signify the movement of gods, people or material during the festival time. The significant sacred ceremonial paths of Puri town are:

BadaDanda: the BadaDanda or the Grand Road is the path connecting the Jagannatha temple with the Gundicha. This is the road of RathaYatra. BadaDanda is physically the main spine of the city of Puri where all types of socio-economic activities takes place.

The path connecting Lokanatha with Jagannatha is another important sacred path. This path is used by image of Jagannatha (Sudarshana) to visit Shiva in Shiva Ratri night.

The path connecting Jagannatha to Swargadwara: This path consists of many subsidiary shrines associated with Jagannatha. Each fortnight the images of Lord Jagannatha visit these temples to eat Prasad.

Another important ceremonial path is the path connecting **Jagannatha to Narendra Tank**. This path is used during ChandanaYatra.

IV. Ratha Yatra And The Sacred Space Of The City:

The reference to Car festivals is available in various scriptures like those of the Buddhists, Jains and Hindus. Many scholars connect Jagannatha as Buddhist god. It is generally believed that the temple was built on Buddhist pagoda. The car festival according to General Cunningham is the once-conscious reproduction of the tooth festival of the Buddhists. Puri was probably the place where the famous tooth relic of Buddha was worshipped and it is pointed out that the wooden image of Jagannatha contains these relics. The Jagannatha cult is the universal cult and not caste specific. The many rituals of Jagannatha is handled by Daitas who claim to be the descendants of Viswabasu, the tribal who first worshipped Him.

The precise time when the Grand festival of RathaYatra started as part of Jagannatha Cult is not known. It is believed that during the reign of AnangaBhima Deva, when the temple was renovated, the concept of RathaYatra was propagated. The entire RathaYatra was symbolic humanization of God. All rituals associated with the festival demonstrate an attempt to bring the God down from His pedestal of glory to a more human level. This annual festival has now acquired a grand scale and has become the identity of the town of Puri. The most splendid of the innumerable festivals celebrated round the year in the holy city of Puri, the RathaYatra is the grand culmination of a series of celebrations spread over the summer and the monsoon months. The festival is celebrated in the June –July on the second day of the bright fortnight in the month of Ashadha. People from all across Orissa and from various parts of India come to take part in this auspicious occasion. Orissa witnesses the inflow of about 7 to 10lakhs of pilgrim during this festival.

UTILIZATION OF THE SACRED SPACE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RATHA BEFORE THE FESTIVAL:

Each year three new chariots (Ratha) are constructed for the car festival. Construction of chariots begins on day of Akshaytritiya (April). Near the entrance of the temple complex, the assembling of chariots begins. About 175 carpenters including helping assistants and specialist team of carpenters who have hereditary rights to build the chariots starts the carpentry work of different parts of the chariots along BadaDanda. The construction of chariots completes in two months' time.

ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED/UTILIZATION OF SACRED SPACE:

The construction of chariots starts near the south side of main entrance of the temple i.e.Singhadwara (Lions Gate).

The logs of wood are stored at different go downs along BadaDanda, after purification acts.

The carpenter built different parts and assembles the whole near the main entrance.

V. Sacred Urban Morphology

If, we consider the Sankhashetra as a mandala which comprise of several concentric circles the morphology of the town can be conceptualized and analyzed from another perspective.

The temple of lord Jagannatha which is the central point of the town and from where growth of the entire town starts remains bounded on all sides by several guardian deities. If one looks into the temple of Jagannatha, we can find that the trio is placed at the centre of the temple and is surrounded on all sides by various other deities. A close look at it will show (as shown in the diagram) that the three lords are encircled by a ring of female deities followed by a ring of male deities. These are Shakti and Shiva shrines that are regarded as the protector of Lord Jagannatha. At the temple compound inside the sanctum one can see the pictures of female as well as male deities on the walls which forms a close circle encircling the trio. Not only that, this arrangement of the sacred sites can also be seen in the entire town.

Likewise the temple of lord Jagannatha, the temple itself is surrounded by eight sacred circles spreading outward from the core area; it comprises of Shakti and Shaiva shrines which are placed at the peripheral zones creating a sacred circle protecting the temple of the Universal lord. The temple of the guardian deities is placed at nodal points in such a way that if all these sacred shrines are joined it will create a sacred mandala guarding the temple which is just centrally placed.

Thus the morphology of the town is itself built on the basis of the eight sacred circles or mandala which covers the entire town with the temple at the centre. So the total town is a sacred space with temples spread evenly all over the sacred space that are related to one another. The presence of these Shiva and Shakti temples as well as the temple of Lord Hanuman and Nrsimha in the peripheral zones truly indicates that the entire town morphology has grown up surrounding the temple of Lord Jagannatha. The construction of the temples of the guardian deities at the boundary zone reflects the creation of sacred space by the people of the town. The temples are creating in such a way so that they can act as protective boundary of the main shrine at the centre. So the entire planning of the town is based on religious fervor and guided by religious sentiments.

The sea which is situated on the boundary area of the town is marked by the development of the temple of Lord Hanuman nearby, since it is believed that it is Lord Hanuman who restricts the entry of the sea water inside the temple of Lord Jagannatha and disturbs him. Hence the temple of Bedia Hanuman (a very important temple of Puri) is located near the sea coast. The construction of all the temples are guided by historical and religious believes which creates sound religion morphology of this sacred site.

The morphology of a town is guided by many principles such as concentration of economic activity, availability of resource, capital etc; but here the religious sentiment and beliefs are the guiding principle behind the morphological set up of the town of Puri making it a sacred urban space which falls in the field of sacred geography. All the major zones of economic activity is centered round the core area which is considered as the most sacred location, followed by areas around the seashore, which is the second most important sacred zone of

the town. The sahis (colonies) are built in such a way that they are connected with the core area and the sahis are also named after the gods and goddesses.

Every town is planned on the basis of certain parameters. The religious town of Puri is planned on the basis of its religious parameters highlighting the sacred spots and connecting those places with the main sacred area of the town. Thus the entire area can be thought of as a sacred space created by the people, who considered this space to be holy, auspicious and sacred. Thus the entire town morphology can be studied on the basis of the sacred space, which gives a new identity to the town, as a greatest religious institute.

It's very rare that the entire morphology of a town is developed on the basis of its religious beliefs, which makes this place distinct from all other sacred sites. The entire town is blessed by the sacredness of Lord Jagannatha and so the entire planning here is related to the temple of the lord.

Every bit of planning and arrangements of the town are made focusing on the temple of the lord which would benefit the temple, which is the forerunner of this entire area.

Sacred Space is one of the modern concepts of space in geography. It is a resultant of interaction of physical space & mental construction influenced by the myth & holiness of the area. The sacred space has a great impact on the culture, socio-economic condition, food habit, business etc. of the existing population. Sacred space also supports our oldest tradition of unity in diversity by attracting pilgrims & tourist irrespective of caste & creed. So, Puri, one of the important sacred spaces is being chosen as research area to find out the essence of the term "sacred geographical space" and its effect upon the physical and Socio-cultural landscape of Puri.

VI. Conclusion

So it can be said that the entire morphological development of the temple town of Puri is surrounded and dependant on the Temple of Lord Jagannatha and its surrounding areas. So it is of utmost importance to study the temple of Lord Jagannatha in particular, to know how this temple has been able to hold the economy of the town and contributed to its growth and development.

Puri is one of the sacred spaces which is shaped and fashioned on the basis of its religious structure and the relative positions of the temple which in turn has contributed in shaping the morphology of the entire town of Puri, the greatest religious institute of eastern India.

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