



*Drawing of Subha Stambha,  
Jajpur, 10th-11th Century A.D.*

## The Pillars of Homage to Lord Jagannatha

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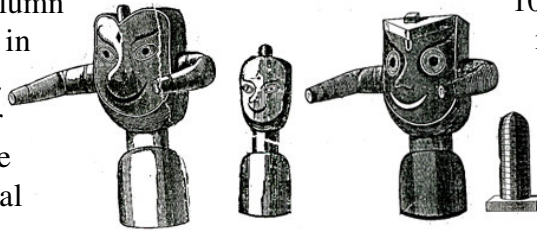
**B**uilt in the 12th century, the temple of Lord Jagannatha at Puri has the distinction of having two unique pillars, namely, the *Garudastambha* and the *Arunastambha*. In Sanskrit the pillar or a column is called a stambha and in Oriya it is called *khamba*. The objective of this paper is to throw light on the significance and historical perspectives of the pillars.

### Garudastambha

Garuda, in Indian traditions is considered as the vehicle of Vishnu. Lord Jagannatha is considered identical with Vishnu and Krishna. Hence his *Vahan-stambha* is placed in the nata-mandira of the temple. The tradition of erecting pillars in honour of Vishnu goes back to 2nd century B.C. There is a pillar in honour of Vasudeva at Basnagar (Vidisha) in Madhya Pradesh. It is known from the inscriptions that "this Garuda column of Vasudeva (Krishna), the God of Gods is erected here by Heliodorus, his worshipper." He was an inhabitant of Taxila and he came as Greek Ambassador from king Antialkidas to Kasiputra Bhagabhadra. It is thus evident that Heliodorus was a Vaishnava, even though he was a Greek. In Orissa with progress of

Vaishnaism Vishnu temples were erected. The Nila Madhaba temple at Gandharadi of Boudh district in 9th century A.D. ruined Vishnu temple at Ganeshwarpur of Cuttack district in 10th century may be cited as notable examples. Jajpur, which was primarily a Shaktapitha dedicated to Viraja, also has numerous Vishnu images. In Jajpur there is beautiful column, which according to James Fergusson, originally seems to have supported a figure of Garuda, the vahana of Vishnu and a detached figure of Garuda is also found in Jajpur and it is said to be an identical one. Fergusson assigned the pillar to the 10th or 11th century. This pillar locally called *Subhastambha* indicates the existence of a Vishnu temple at Jajpur.

The temple of Lord Jagannatha was constructed by Ananta Varman Chodagangadev in the middle of 12th century. The temple complex consists of *Deula*, *Jagamohan*, *Natamandira* and *Bhogamandapa*. The presiding deities on the Ratnabedi or Jewelled-dias are the Chaturdha-darumurthi i.e. wooden statues such as Balabhadra, Subhadra, Jagannatha and Sudarshan. The images are made out of the wood of the Neem Tree (*Melia*





Garuda from Madhabababda temple, Madhaba 13th century

*Salagrama* means the "village where the Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*) grows." The *Salagrama shilas* are found in the bed of Gandaki River, a tributary of the Ganga. It is also found in the Narmada river.

In the Natamandira of the temple on the eastern side a unique Garuda stambha is located. In the first sight it looks like an ordinary stone column surmounted by a Garuda figure on the top. But on examination its shaft seems to be a remnant of a plant of a past geological era. The shaft bears the impression or traces of a Sal tree shorn of its bark. The impression of the Sal tree is readily preserved. The total height of column along with the pedestal and the Garuda capital is about 10 feet. The height of shaft is about 7 feet. The column is not made up of an ordinary stone but a *Salagrama* stone. It is the largest *Salagrama* stone, unique in the fossil record of India. This Garudastambha, made up of fossil, is quite harmonious to the chaturdha-darumurthis on the ratnavedi made of *salagrama* stones.

The erection of Garudastambha in Vishnu temples became quite popular in the Ganga

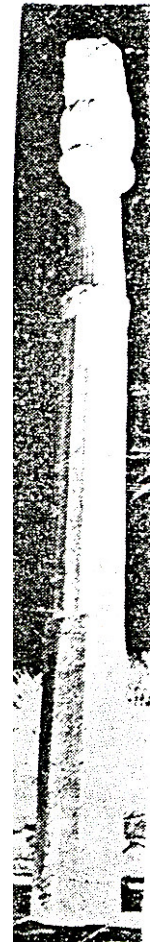
*azardicata*). These are renewed every 12 years, the ceremony being called the *Navakalebar*. The *Ratnavedi* is said to contain *Salagrama* or ammonite fossils. It is taken to be a stone and worshipped by the followers of Vishnu.

period following the model of Jagannatha temple. We find Garuda stambhas in later temples such as Madhavananda temple (13th century) at village Madhava in Cuttack district and Ananta Vasudeva Temple in 1278 A.D. at Bhubaneswar. Inside the Jagannatha temple the Garudastambha is considered very holy and it has its own rituals and devotees usually have a *darshan* of the lord from this place. They used to place lamps in honour of Lord by which pillar becomes smoke stained. It will be worthwhile to discourage this practice.

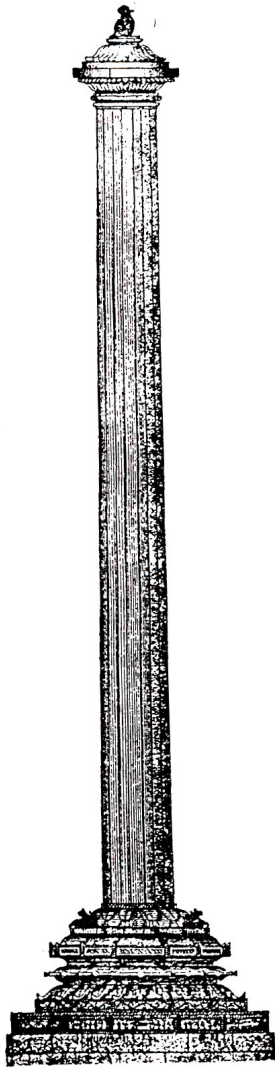
### Arunastambha

In addition to the Garuda column inside the Natamandira in front of the *Singhadwar* (eastern gateway Jagannatha Temple), there is a monolithic pillar of chlorite crowned by a squatting figure of Garuda. The total height of the pillar is 33 feet 8 inches. The pillar has a magnificent base carved with military scenes and other figures. The monolithic shaft of the chlorite is 16 sided. The capital, decorated by a series of lotus petals, is 2 feet 6 inches and the whole pillar is a monument of great beauty. Aruna is the charioteer of the Sun God. Hence the pillar is called the Sun Pillar or *Arunastambha*. Originally this beautiful pillar was erected in honour of the Sun God at Konark.

King Narasinha I built the famous temple of Sun God



Heliodorus  
Garuda Stambha,  
Vidisha, Madhya  
Pradesh



Arunastambha

at Konark in the 13th century. The temple, consisting of the *Deula* and *Jag Mohan* was in the form of a solar chariot provided with 24 wheels. In front of the eastern gateway of Jagamohan there was this beautiful pillar called Arunastambha.

In the 16th century, Abul Fazal, the court historian of Moghul Emperor Akbar, while giving the description of the sun temple mentioned the "octagonal column of black stone" which evidently represents the Arunastambha. When the Konark temple was deserted and worship ceased there, this pillar was brought to Puri in the last quarter of the 18th century. The

*Madalapanji* records that during the time of Divyasinghadev, the Maratha guru, Brahmachari Gosain brought this pillar from Konark and reerected it at the singhadwar of Jagannatha temple. A drawing of the Arunapillar, prepared on 26th April 1815 at Puri, is now in the India Office library, London.

Andrew Sterling, a British officer, who was in Orissa from 1818-1822, has mentioned that the pillar has been brought from the famous "but now deserted, temple of the Sun at Konarak, about sixty years ago, by a Brahmachari inhabitant of Puri, of great wealth and influence." The placing of Arunastambha in front of the temple of Lord Jagannatha is quite appropriate as from the Vedic times, the Sun God is considered identical with Vishnu.

#### Bibliography :

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2. K.S. Behera, "*Konark - The Heritage of Mankind*", Vol.I, 1996, New Delhi.
3. James Fergusson, "*History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*", 1994, Delhi.
4. N.K. Sahu (ed.) "*A History of Orissa*", by W.W. Hunter, Andrew Sterling, John beams, Vol.II, 1980, Delhi.

#### Illustrations :

- \* The Heliiodorus Garuda Stambha, Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh.
- \* Drawing of Chaturdha-darumurti (from R.L. Mitra).
- \* Drawing of Subha stambha, Jajpur, 10th-11th century A.D. from Fergusson.
- \* Garuda from Madhabananda temple, Madhava 13th century from K.S. Behera (ed.) *Prachi Mahatmya*.
- \* Drawing of Arunastambha from W.W. Hunter.

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