

**WPC 26236 OF 2011 LINK****REPLICA OF JAGANNATH TEMPLE**

By LALMOHAN PATNAIK | [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com) – Sun, Sep 25, 2011

Cuttack, Sept. 24: A public interest litigation filed in the high court has sought intervention to stop "construction of a replica of Jagannath temple in Puri for non-Hindus".

According to the temple rules, only those who are born Hindus are allowed inside temple. The 12th century temple has borne witness to tension several times in the past following entry of foreigners into its premises.

Foreigner devotees belonging to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iskcon) have been demanding their entry into the temple claiming that they are Hindus.

However, the temple priests and Hindu organisations have been opposing the demand. A few months ago, BJD leader and Rajya Sabha member Pyari Mohan Mohapatra had landed in a controversy when he suggested that both Hindus and non-Hindus should be allowed entry into the Jagannath temple.

Mohapatra had said that when Hindus were allowed into mosques and churches everywhere in the country and abroad, why should there be restriction on entry of people from other religions in the Puri temple.

As Lord Jagannath is the lord of the universe, the temple should be open to all, he had argued. However, temple priest and activists of Hindu organisations had staged demonstrations to protest against Mohapatra's statement.

Recently, filing a PIL, a resident of Mahamadia Bazar in Cuttack city Jayanti Das, 46, has alleged "the replica planned for construction at Jagannath Ballav Mutt in Puri by the Orissa Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) to entertain non-Hindus and foreigners is a clear intrusion into the privacy of religion of Hindus by the state government".

"The OTDC has made a mockery of the Hindu religion by planning the replica through which it proposes to illustrate and explain Jagannath culture to foreigners and non-Hindus along with a two-storey shopping mall for 140 vendors to sell articles related to Lord Jagannath," Das contends. The high court has not taken up the PIL for hearing so far. The PIL filed on Friday has sought quashing of OTDC's plan.

According to the petition, the OTDC has already submitted the plan to the Puri Konark Development Authority (PKDA). Chief minister Naveen Patnaik had approved the project last month. An amount of Rs 14 crore has already been sanctioned and OTDC has approached the chief minister for an additional Rs 15 crore from the next budget. The OTDC has no proposal to set up idols for worship at the replica temple

and instead plans to promote only the sculpture and design of the Jagannath temple in Puri.

"There are hundreds of Jagannath temples across Orissa which are in a pitiable condition and the state endowment commission does not even have a proper inventory of them. The nearly Rs 30 crore expenditure planned for the replica could be spent on protection and preservation of architecture of the existing Jagannath temples," the petitioner suggests.

The petition also expected the government "to spend an equal amount of money for the sanitation, security, and beautification of the Puri Jagannath temple". According to tradition, the logs used for construction of the chariots for the annual rath yatra of Lord Jagannath in Puri are generally used in the kitchen and for other activities in the temple.

"The government is breaking the age-old tradition by planning a miniature chariot for the replica temple for non-Hindus and foreigners," the petition argues seeking judicial intervention against the Jagannath temple replica project.

### **Replica of Jagannath temple to come up in Puri**

By: Courtesy Deccan Herald

The project is aimed at providing an opportunity to non-Hindus to feel the ambience of the temple

For nearly 10 centuries, Puri Jagannath Temple is out of bounds for non-Hindus. Even very powerful woman like late Indira Gandhi, the former prime minister, could not enter the temple as the authorities concerned ruled that she was a Parsi married to Feroz Gandhi. Despite being the prime minister, she could not enter the temple in her lifetime. In 1984, Indira Gandhi had to be content with seeing the temple from the nearby Raghunandan Library building.

However, some exceptions had been made a few centuries ago. Kabir, the saint and mystic poet, was initially barred entry to the temple when he came visiting in 1389 because the priests took him for a Muslim. Guru Nanak, who travelled to Puri in 1505, was denied entry because he was accompanied by his Muslim disciple, Mardina.

Both Kabir and Nanak were later escorted into the temple with full honours as Jagannath had appeared in the dreams of the then priests and kings and declared them as staunch devotees.

The plight of thousands of others is no different as the temple religiously follows the rule that it is only for Hindus. Having realised that a large number of non-Hindus coming to Puri were interested in visiting the temple, the Orissa Tourism

Development Corporation (OTDC) came up with a proposal to build a replica of the 11th century shrine at Puri.

However, the grand plan has already run into trouble with a Jagannath devotee filing a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Orissa High Court challenging the OTDC's move. A few local organisations and individuals in Puri have also expressed their anger over the proposal.

According to the proposal, the replica temple, which was to be called as Srikhetra, was to come up on a 42 acres belonging to the Jagannath Ballav Mutt, which is about 800 metres from the main Puri temple. The estimated cost was around Rs 29 crore and the government had already sanctioned Rs 11 crore.

According to sources in the state-run OTDC, the corporation would soon approach Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to sanction Rs 15 crore for the ambitious project. The chief minister is likely to oblige the corporation as he had reportedly given the nod for the proposal. The OTDC has already submitted the plan of the project to the Puri-Konark Development Authority for its mandatory approval.

“The primary reason behind the project is to give a feel of the main Puri temple to the foreigners and non-Hindus who are denied entry to the important shrine”, said an OTDC official.

In recent years, tension had prevailed in the Puri temple on several occasions after non-Hindus attempted to force their entry into the shrine. Many times non-Hindus, mostly Indians, have also been caught after entering the temple pretending themselves as Hindus. After such incidents, the three deities of the temple -- Jagannath, Balabhadra and their sister Subhadra-- go through a “purification” process called ‘Mahasnana’.

Apart from constructing the replica temple, the OTDC is also planning to build an “interpretation centre” where the Jagannath culture will be explained to the foreigners and non-Hindus. A two-storey mall with 140 shops will also come up near the replica temple for selling memorabilia of Jagannath.

The corporation is also planning to build miniatures of the three ‘Raths (chariots) that are used during the annual Jagannath Rath Yatra. They will be built with the dismantled logs of the three wooden Raths that were used during this year's annual religious event.

If legal hurdles are cleared, the OTDC hopes to implement the project within a year. However, it may not be that easy because of the opposition from different quarters including. It also depends on the outcome of the PIL filed by Jayanti Das, a Cuttack-based Jagannath devotee.

Seeking High Court's intervention, the PIL claimed that the corporation's plan to construct the replica of the Jagannath temple is a clear intrusion into the privacy of religion of Hindus by the state government. “The OTDC has made a mockery of the

Hindu

religion by planning the replica through which it proposes to illustrate and explain Jagannath culture to foreigners and non-Hindus," the petition said.

The critics feel that the OTDC could spend the funds on the protection and preservation of the existing Jagannath temples

Many feel that the OTDC plan to build miniatures of chariots of the temple's three presiding deities was against the age-old tradition. The wood of the dismantled chariots usually proceed to the kitchen of Puri temple for cooking of Mahaprasad. Everyday, the Mahaprasad of the Puri temple sells like hot cakes among lakhs of devotees who throng the popular shrine not only from Odisha but also from other states and abroad.

The feeling is gaining ground among various circles that the OTDC's grand plan may just remain on paper like many grandeur plans chalked out by government agencies. "I do not rule out the possibility of government and the OTDC scrapping the project in the coming days. How can a project like this take off if there is so much opposition to it? Those who are opposing the project are making a mountain out of a molehill", said an OTDC official who did not want to be quoted.

Source: <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/195081/grand-plan-runs-trouble.html>

Deccan herald

Grand plan runs into trouble S T Beuria in Bhubaneswar

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