

To

The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India
Government of India, New Delhi-110011

Sub: To set up a Central University in Puri Dham on the line of BHU

Dear Esteemed Prime Minister:

We would like to humbly request that the Government of India establish a central university in Puri (Odisha) on the line of BHU (Banaras Hindu University) with all the modern disciplines as well as cross-cutting disciplines that interface with traditional Indian knowledge, arts, culture and heritage.

Sir: Puri is the abode of Lord Jagannath. It is one of the four dhams revered by Hindus (and Indians in general), and considered the meeting ground of all branches of Indian philosophy and all kinds of sects and religions from time immemorial. Famous sages visited (and some stayed over) Puri and left their imprint on Puri. This includes, Adi Shankaracharya, Narahari Tirtha, Nimbarka Acharya, Jayadeva, Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and Vishnuswami, Madhvacharya.

In ancient times, Puri was known as Purusottam Kshetra and its greatness at that time was covered in various Sanskrit works such as Skanda Purana, Padma Purana, Narada Purana, Niladrimahodaya, Matsya Purana, Brahma Purana, Kapila Samhita, Niladri Mahadaya and Bamadeva Samhita. In Skanda Purana (Vaishnav Khanda), sage Jamini explained the location of Purusottam Kshetra to an assembly of sages by the sloka: *Odra desha Iti Khyate Barshe Bharatsanjnake Dakhinyadadhestire kshetram Sripurusottamam* (Sloka 23 Ch. 7 Skanda Purana).

Puri is also known as Shrikshetra (Land of prosperity), Sankha Kshetra, Bhouma Kshetra, Purusottam Kshetra (land of the supreme being), Neelachal (blue hill), Jamanika Kshetra, Uddiyana Kshetra, Martya Baikunth (Paradise on earth), Caritrapura, Dasavatarakshetra, Dibyakshetra, Jagannathkshetra, Jagannath Puri, Neeladri, Nilagiri, Nilakandara, etc.

Puri is one of the Char Dhams (Four pilgrimage centers) institutionalized by Adi Sankara and revered by Hindus. A Hindu is enjoined to visit these places at least once in a lifetime. Situated across the length and breadth of the country these are, Badrinath in the North, Dwarka in the West, Puri in the East and Rameshwaram in the South. The four kshetras of the Char Dham represent each of the four Yugas (Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and Kali Yuga or the present age). Badrinath is related to the first Yuga, the Satya Yuga, Rameshwaram is related to Treta Yuga, Dwarka is related to Dwapara Yuga and Puri is related to the present Yuga, the Kali Yuga. Adi Shankara (788-820 A.D) selected Purusottam Kshetra (Puri) and established his monastery Bhogabardhana (Gobardhan) pitha to preach the doctrine of Advaita vedanta (monism) to people.

Puri is the abode of Lord Jagannath. The PIB article [1] mentions Raja Jai Singh saying the following about Puri in 1580: “*The pious land of Lord Jagannath, Orissa is not a land to be conquered but to be worshipped because it is above the aspirations of human being it is the land of Gods*”.

There are several copper plate inscriptions, which established the idea of Lord Jagannath as a paramount deity of the entire country. The concept of Lord Jagannath is not only confined to Hinduism but also extends to both Jainism and Buddhism. Lord Jagannath is the Kalpa Bruksha (boon giving tree), Yogamurti of the Siddhas, Bishnu for the Vaishnavites, Shiva for the Shaivites, Mahabhairab for the Tantrics, Buddha and Anupurusha (void) for Boudhas and Ganesh for the Ganapatya. Maa Subhadra, Shri Jagannath and Shri Balabhadra represent the Trinity of Hinduism, i.e., Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar.

Lord Jagannath and his philosophy have left deep imprint on other cultures of the world. One of the significant manifestations of Lord Jagannath is the human culture. Jagannath-consciousness is so all pervading that it has the capacity to provide nurture to all levels of human existence—rich or poor, learned or ignorant, sinner or virtuous, male or female, well bred or ill bred, foreigner or a native. Thus, besides Hindus, Jains, Budhists, Christians, Sikhs and other minor religious groups by different means have justified their association. Jagannath consciousness has been presented in visual art, painting, architecture, sculpture, performing and in other different art forms like dance, music, specialization in food habits, uniqueness in dress material, and varied and colorful celebration of festivals. In 2015, a national conference on Jagannath Chetna (consciousness) in the art and culture of India was held in Puri with themes such as: *Philosophical interpretation of Jagannath consciousness; Jagannath consciousness in Sanskrit language and literature; Presentation of Jagannath in art, architecture and other art forms; Diffusion of Jagannath consciousness in other religious practices; and Jagannath consciousness as vehicle of world peace*. Temples of Lord Jagannath are present in all parts of the world and the Chariot Festival (Ratha Yatra) of Lord Jagannath at Puri has smaller versions in all parts of the world. The Puri Ratha Yatra of Lord Jagannath gave the word “Juggernaut” to the English language.

Puri has been a center of knowledge formation, agglomeration and dissemination from its ancient days. There are records of 752 mathas (monasteries), and many Kotas, Jagas, Akhadas and ashrams (hermitages) in Puri. Various priests, preachers, tourists, poets, saints, seers, teachers, devotees and thinkers of the world visited Puri and many established their knowledge centers at Puri. It was universally believed that the Jagannath cult is the confluence of all religious faiths. The precepts of different sects paid visit to the holy land of Puri and disseminated their philosophical doctrines. They preached their philosophy, got themselves involved in the ritual services of Jagannath temple and established their monasteries (mathas). The Mathas were originally founded with the purpose of imparting education to disciples and give shelter to pilgrims, and feeding travelers. Gobardhan matha is one of the oldest Mathas in Puri founded by Adi Sankaracharya in the 9th century A.D. Tradition assigns some mathas like the Vrugu Ashram and the Angira Ashram to earlier dates. The Vaishnava Mathas belonging to

different Sampradayas or sub-sects of the cult are numerous at Puri. Prominent among the Goudyamathas are Radhakanta, Gangamata and Kathabhogo, whereas the Oriya, Sisu and few other mathas belong to the local sect of Utkaliya Vaisnavas. The Gobaradhana and the Sankarananda mathas are saiva, and the Kabir chaura matha located in their vicinity belong to the followers of Kabir. The Bauli and Mangu mathas belong to the followers of Nanak. Jaga, Akhada, Kota, and Goda are the other traditional institutions of Puri whose core principles are that gymnastics for the body and music for the soul are to be nourished.

Puri has made and continues to make major contributions in the field of art (various forms: dance, music, painting, sculpture making etc.), architecture, literature, science (especially, astronomy), religion and tradition. Gitagovinda by Sri Jayadev was composed in Puri. The classical dance form of Odissi as well as the classical music form (also called) Odissi was nourished in Puri. The patta painting form evolved, nourished and flourished under the cult of Lord Jagannath. The Kalinga style of architecture has its origin in Puri. Pathani Samanta, an astronomer of the rank of Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Brahmagupta and Bhaskaracharya was from Khandpada, in the greater Puri district (now in the recently carved out Nayagarh district). He fabricated ingenious instruments out of wooden sticks and bamboo chips and attained great accuracy in measurement. His scientific investigations are recorded in his astronomical treatise “The Siddhanta Darpana” composed in Sanskrit Verse, in Odia script, and on palm leaves. Konark, also in Puri district, is an UNESCO world heritage site and is known for its art and architecture. Puri continues to churn out knowledge in all these fields. Recently, Mataji Parama Karuna Devi, founder and director of the Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Center, has written a multi volume book titled Introduction to Vedic knowledge.

During pre-independence era Jayee Rajaguru of Birharekrishna Puri (a village situated in the vicinity of Puri town), and Chandan Hazuree of Puri town fought against Britishers to upkeep the sovereignty of the soil. An unique experiment in the field of education was made at Satyabadi, Puri with the establishment of Satyabadi bana vidyalaya (on 12th August 1909) in the midst of mango and bakul groves by the great freedom fighter, social worker and poet Pt. Gopabandhu Das and his followers Pt. Nilakantha Das, Pt. Krupasindhu Mishra, Pt. Godabarish Mishra and Pt. Acharya Harihara Dash; together called as “Pancha sakha”. Later the school became an active center of the non Co-operation movement.

Puri also has an important maritime tradition. The Archaeological excavation at Manikapatna (in Puri district) provides a running chronology of historical habitation as a port or trade center from 1st century A.D. to 18th century A.D. It serves as a benchmark to study the settlement pattern and trade route of Puri. Abul Fazal described Manikapatna as a seaport where taxes were collected. Manikapatna is the only site along the sea coast of India from where varieties of ceramics including Chinese Celadonware have been reported. The presence of pottery, artifacts and coins indicates the impact of early sea trade between Odisha and the Mediterranean world. The existing temple of Lord Jagannath was known to international sailing community as an important landmark while moving in the Bay of Bengal.

In conclusion, Puri has been and is a special and revered place in India with global recognition. It continues to be a knowledge center of classical art, culture, language (Sanskrit) and Vedic knowledge. Considering the importance of cross-pollination of these Indian knowledge forms with modern knowledge and its impact on “Brand India” and “Make in India”, it is imperative that *a Central University along the lines of BHU be urgently established in Puri. It is our humble prayer to the honorable Prime Minister that he establishes such a Central University in Puri.*

Sincerely,

Various Signatories.

(See attached list of Names, Signatures and Pledges towards a corpus fund for this university, to be paid, after the university is established by the Central government.)

References: The letter contains thoughts and text from the following articles and pages.

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2. http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Jagannath_Puri
3. Various articles in <http://odisha.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2012/June/engpdf/12-13.pdf>, June 2012, Odisha Review
4. <http://www.shreekhetra.com/puri2.html>
5. <http://www.indianscriptures.com/sacred-places/char-dham/char-dham-an-introduction>
6. Various articles in <http://odisha.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2010/July/engpdf/july%202010.pdf> July 2010, Odisha Review, Vol. LXVI NO. 12.
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10. Conference announcement at http://ignca.nic.in/PDF_data/Concept_note_Puri_Conf_March2015.pdf
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17. <http://odisha.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2012/Jan/engpdf/35-45.pdf>, Odisha Review, January 2012
18. Puri, the Home of Lord Jagannatha, by Parama Karuna Devi. Amazon.
19. Puri, The Divine Destination. Sunil K. Patnaik. Mayur Publications, Bhubaneswar.