



Flashback !

Akshaya Kumar Mohanty

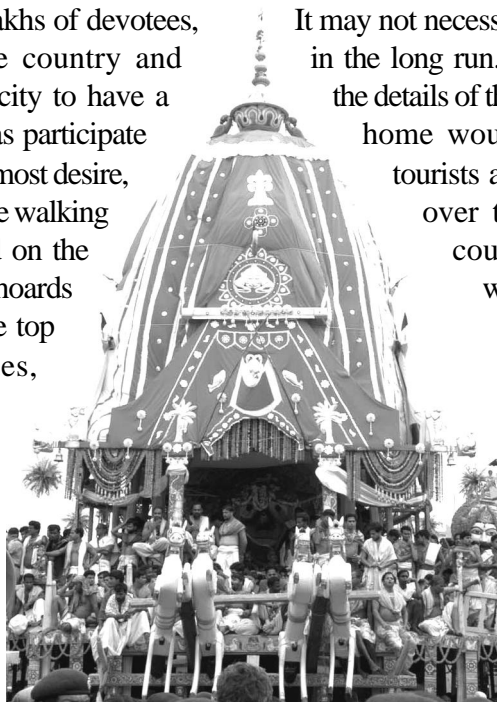
Ratha Jatra : A couple of days are left for this year's celestial festival of Lord Jagannath on earth. The grand edifice is smiling towards the crowd around- of course a welcome smile. A festival of this State that is Car festival of Lord Jagannath in Puri is known world over. Lakhs of devotees, tourists from whole of the country and overseas throng this temple city to have a glimpse of the Lord as well as participate in the colorful festival, with utmost desire, devotion and dedication. While walking amidst the maddening crowd on the grand road and looking at the hoards of camera arrangement at the top of the buildings both sides, glimpses down the memory lane become vivid.

D u r i n g Doordarshan's SITE Experiment i.e, in the year 1975-76, when this author along with the camera unit reached Puri to officially cover the festival for

Telecast, he had to face a stiff opposition. The servitors, Daitas, Pandas and all those related to temple and above all, the common public raised their voices against this coverage in the pre-festival discussion. There was a lot of hue and cry. The

then social leaders and front runners of such grand event started resisting this decision tooth & nail. A subdued grumbling prevailed all over. Their view was, if such an event would be telecast, then the festival in Puri in reality would lose its importance.

It may not necessitate people to join the festival in the long run. Once the provision to watch the details of the festival through TV sitting at home would be made available, then tourists and devotees would not come over to Puri from far off places/ countries. Hence apprehension was strong. The famous temple, housing the deity of Lord Jagannath, Puri –the land of the Lord and over all the state of Odisha the land of culture, might lose tourists, visitors above all revenue and importance, once they extend the opportunity to view and enjoy it through TV from their own places.



Such an apprehension was of course genuine and logical at that point of time. If we analyze the different factors of growth of this land we shall find that the financial, social, economical factors of Odisha and of Puri in particular rest on Lord Jagannath and the cult,



His temple and temple rituals, the crafts and handicrafts, the scriptures and literatures. Thus, this opposition was more of sentiment. But with much effort they could be pacified. The hurdle could be removed. Because of Government intervention the disgruntled opponents reluctantly were compelled to yield.

At that time the coverages used to be in 16 mm camera film format with Reversal Raw stock. These sort of coverage were immediately processed in Doordarshan's exclusive film processing plant (at that time in the studio premises in Tulsipur, Cuttack) and instantly edited to the requirement and edited/ or unedited air freighted to Delhi for Telecast at the earliest. The journey of TV coverage for this mega event between 1975-76 through 1991-92 was historic and challenging for popularising this event. After the SITE experiment when this TV station and x'mission was converted to a regular transmitting centre for Odisha, the gadgets and resources were improved and upgraded. For the first few years considering the importance, popularity of the event and demand of the viewers, a condensed version of the happenings of the festival used to be produced at our Kendra and telecast in the National Network of Doordarshan (the only channel existing then). When this documentary used to feature in the Network after the festival every year, then emerged a huge demand from all corners to have this festival live in the National Network of Doordarshan.

And it happened. The year 1992 to '94 were eventful because Doordarshan, besides this whole country, could take the festival in TV to other countries through DD International channel. Ah, Live Telecast, it is a massive arrangement. The threefold Live telecast of car festival in National Network of Doordarshan is an all time record in mass media history. The whole of this

country and overseas watched this mega event with running commentary in English & Hindi and whole of Odisha got the benefit of seeing it in Odia, all originating from the source i.e. Puri. The National commentators of Hindi & English came to Puri & gave commentary from location, which is the practice till now. Such was the impact and publicity that tourists from abroad tied up their travel plan with this event.

A point to note, in the beginning years following telecast of a short report, the number of visitors were added. But after the live telecast of this event got started, it became a huge crowd pulling event of the country thus the number of visitors got multiplied year to year. This is contrary to all apprehension that TV might lessen the number of visitors where as it showed an uncontrollable growth over the years. In course of time this festival has been adorned by thousands of scholars, researchers, performers, litterateurs who got engaged onto this cult, volumes of literatures are produced. Endless seminars, meetings, deliberation are still going on.

In the year 2002 more private channels like ETV came forward for telecasting this event-live. And slowly it got added with other channels. At present, around 7 to 8 channels are on the show. But why then visitors are still increasing? What is the role of this visual medium? Attraction towards this visual feast or distraction?

In between these years many things have happened. Our Daitas and other servitors have become more media savvy. By now they know about the Tally lights of the cameras. Accordingly they cover or expose the deities as per their will during Pahandi or Suna besha. The commentators/Comperes have become conversant, hence need no briefing and queuing for a break for commercials. Television in Odisha



has already seen two Nava Kalebaras. The deities have accordingly been reborn. The next Navakalebara is hardly two years from now. The entire Govt. machinery is gearing up since a couple of years to meet the event. Crores of Rupees in each front are budgeted to meet the festival need, be it Road, Rail, Residence, Hotel, Hospital everything.

Yes, at every front there is a preparation. Ahead is the challenge. At this point of time the issue that comes to my mind is media, more particularly Television. The channels, their huge gadgets, hundreds of cameras, vans, satellite disc antennae, above all the manpower involvement. It is expected to form a parallel crowd. Even now this visual media is performing in a chaos. Through passage of time they have increased and also with a promise that they will swell up in years next to come. Nobody has presumably given a thought to coordinate this aspect. Of course; this

chaos can be regulated if a thoughtful effort is made.

Today while walking on the Grand road pre-festival all these are coming to mind in flash back. How come the visitors are not getting minimized in spite of so many Live Telecast ? Who could be the motivator ? To me the answer comes – Television, the visual medium. It is TV and its Telecast which has persuaded, motivated to have a glimpse of the festival in person.

The mass media as a whole is preparing for the Great Grand event. My prayer to Lord Jagannath is that let there not be more cacophony than symphony in the name of TV coverage.

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The Omnipresent

Shyam Prakash Senapati
Trans. : Dr. Bhagaban Jayasingh

O Lord !
You manifest
in the lilting tunes of
flutes playing out
to the rhythm of waves
dancing against the beach.

You manifest
among the virtues and sins,
in the lush-green meadows,
or in the boundless intensity
of the deep forests,
or in the sonorous music
of the morning sea.

You manifest in
hate and envy
joy or bliss
in the inconsolable cry
of a hapless child,
or in the glittering warmth
of a mother's lap.



Dr. Bhagaban Jayasingh, 'Senapati Bhawan', Grand Road, Puri-1.