



The Car Festival of Lord Jagannath : Unique in many respect

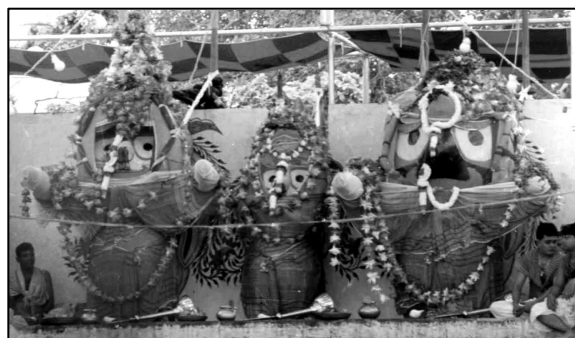
Dr. Sidhartha Kanungo

The Ratha Yatra or Car Festival of Puri, dedicated to Lord Jagannath, is the most famous and the most spectacular of festivals which attracts countless pilgrims from all over India and also from abroad. This festival takes place in Asadha Sukla Dwitiya when the images of Lord Jagannath, along with siblings are taken out of His sanctum sanctorum in a grand procession on three separate chariots along the Badadanda from Shrimandira to Gundicha Mandira.

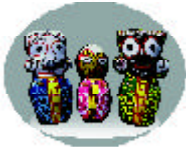
The whole cycle of the Car Festival consists of the following : (i) Snana Yatra or The Bath Festival, (ii) Anasara, (iii) Netra Utsab, (iv) Naba Jaubana Darsana, (v) Pahandi or the ceremonial procession of images (vi) “Chherapanhara” or the sweeping of the floor of the chariots with a golden broom by the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri, (vii) Stay of the Deities in “Gundicha Ghar” for 7 days, (viii) “Bahuda Yatra” or the return journey of Gods (ix) The final return of the Lords to the temple.

As stated earlier, the Ratha Yatra takes place on the Second day of the bright fortnight in the month of Asadha. But the actual preparation starts much earlier from the Magha Saptami with the cutting of trees in distant Daspalla and nearby areas for providing the wood necessary for construction of chariots. On the third day of the

bright fortnight of Baisakh, i.e. Akshaya Tritiya, starts the auspicious construction of chariots on the Badadanda (Grand Road) of Puri. This day also bears enormous socio religious significance. Farmers start agricultural activities on this day. It also marks the beginning of the sandalwood festival or Chandan Yatra, which lasts for three weeks. In this festival, the representative images of the presiding deities are given a ceremonial boat ride in the Narendra tank everyday.



The full moon day of the month of Jyestha, popularly known as ‘Snana Purnima’ marks the beginning of the Car Festival. On this day the three deities - Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra are taken to an open platform known as ‘Snana Bedi’ (bathing platform). Here they take a prolonged bath with one hundred and eight pitchers of perfumed water drawn from a



temple well once in a year. After the Snana Yatra, the deities are supposed to fall ill (fever) and do not return to their throne. Then they stay away from public view for a period of 15 days. This period is popular as 'Anasara'. During this period, no public worship is performed. On the New Moon Day of the month of Asadha the deities reappear in their Nabayaubana Veshha. The seclusion finally ends when, after 15 days of isolation, the Lords come out of the temple in a colourful procession to board their respective Chariots and thereafter begins the journey known as "Ratha Yatra."



The Ratha Yatra falls on the second day of the bright fortnight of Asadha. On this occasion the images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana are installed on three separate chariots in a grand procession called "*Pahandi*". It is the most colourful show of the Car Festival in which the idols are held tightly in the arms by Daitapatis and pulled from behind and the front alternatively with the ropes tied firmly to Their bodies. Each image is made to jump from place to place and advance. It is worthwhile to mention here that the kind of emotional upsurge seen

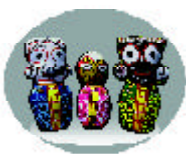
among the crowd during the Pahandi of Sri Jagannath is seldom observed when the other deities i.e. Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan are carried in Pahandi to the Chariot.



After all the deities are seated in their respective chariots starts the Chhera Pahanra another attraction of the festival eagerly awaited by devotees inspite of the scorching heat or rain as the case may be. The Gajapati King of Puri brought to the chariots in a decorated Palanquin and here the king sweeps the floors of the Chariots with a golden broom. This is known as Chhera Pahanra. It presupposes that no labour is detestable if it is required for social purpose.

Then comes the most exciting part of Ratha Yatra the pulling of chariots by thousands of devotees without distinction of caste, colour, sex or religion. First moves the Chariot of Balabhadra, next Subhadra and finally Jagannath's Chariot. Usually they reach the Gundicha temple the same evening. The deities enter the Gundicha Temple on the next day in the usual Pahandi style and stay there for seven days.

Goddess Laxmi gets angry for not being allowed to go along with Lord Jagannath and



proceeds to the Gundicha Temple to meet Lord Jagannath on the Hera Panchami Day, the fifth day from the Ratha Yatra. After having a stealthy look at Her Lord, She returns to Shri Mandir, damaging a part of Jagannath's Chariot in anger and disgust.

As stated earlier, the Deities stay at Gundicha Temple for a period of seven days. Then starts their return journey or Bahuda Yatra. On His way back, Lord Jagannath stops for few minutes at Mausima Temple or the temple of aunt to take His favourite rice cake or Poda Pitha. On the next day, i.e. Bada Ekadasi, the Deities are attired in costumes of Glittering gold and are worshipped by thousand of devotees. This form of the deities is known as Suna Vesha.

On the day after Ekadasi, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, Goddess Subhadra and Sudarshana return to the temple with the usual fanfare and in the Pahandi Style. Thus ends the Ratha Yatra, the grand festival of the Chariots.

It will not be out of place to mention something about the Chariots that the Lords mount. Without a strong determination, it is indeed very difficult to construct these Chariots within a short span of 58 days.

Lord Jagannath's Chariot is known as Nandighosa. It has a height of 45 feet. It has sixteen wheels, each of seven feet diameter and is decked with red and yellow coverings of cloth. The Sarathi or the Charioteer made of wood is known as Dahuka. "The Four horses attached to the Chariot are known as Samkha, Rochica, Mochica and Jwalani. They are painted white. The name of Ratha Pala is Shri Nrusingha. At the crest of the Chariot are the wheel and the image

of Garuda. The name of the flag of Nandighosa is Trailakyamohini. It may be pointed out that 832 pieces of wood are used for construction of Nandighosa. Nandighosa is draped in yellow cloth.

The Chariot of Lord Balabhadra, called Taladhwaja, has fourteen wheels each of seven feet *diameter with red and blue cloth*. It has a height of forty-four feet. The name of the Sarathi is Sudyaumna. The four wooden black horses attached to the Chariot bear the names of Sthira, Dhruvi, Sthiti and Siddha. The Rathapala is Ananta and 763 pieces of wood are used in this Chariot. The name of the flag of the Chariot is Wnnani.

The Chariot of the Subhadra is known as Darpadalana; its height being forty three feet with twelve wheels, each of seven feet diameter. This Chariot is covered with red and black cloth. The name of Sarathi is Arjuna. Four wooden horses fixed to the Chariot are known as Prajha, Anuja, Ghora and Aghora. The Rathapalika is Vana Durga. 539 pieces of wood are used in this Chariot and the name of the Chariot is Nadambika.

The Ratha Yatra is being celebrated at Puri since long. It is indeed very difficult to say since when it exactly started. The festival will continue so long as the Sanatana Dharma exists on the earth.

Dr. Sidhartha Kanungo, Joint Secretary to Govt.,
Finance Department, Bhubaneswar-751001.

