

BALIYATRA

(A Festival of Odisha's Ancient Maritime & Historical Glory)

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The literally meaning of **Baliyatra** is “**Voyage to Bali**”. Bali is an island of Indonesia and the Baliyatra festival is generally celebrated in the coastal Odisha on the day of “**Kartika Purnima**” which falls in the month of November every year. It is an unique socio-cultural event with history of 1000 years old which commemorates the past association of the people of Odisha with Bali and the glorious maritime tradition of trans-oceanic voyages they undertook to South East Asian Countries. The celebration of **Baliyatra** on the Bank of river Mahanadi takes us back to remember our ancestral cultural heritage and maritime legacy. During this period the traders of Odisha (Sadhabapuas) were undertaking voyages, along the sea trade route, on huge boats called “**Boita**” from this place on full moon day in the month of November (During the month of Kartika). So Kartika Purnima is an auspicious day for the people of Odisha as the Sailors used to start their voyage to the places like Bali, Java Borneo, Sumatra in Indonesia and Srilanka for a successful trade. Baliyatra is not only a ritual of sailing of Boats on Kartika Purnima day but it also represents the ancient maritime tradition of Odisha and economic glory.

The present Odisha once formed part of the ancient kingdom of “**Kalinga**” and the Kalinga sailors had command on maritime



activities of India in the past. This brave Kalingan Sailors were making during voyages to different far off lands of the world. So great was the fame of Kalinga as a maritime power in ancient times that “**Kali Das**” in his Raghuvansa referred to king of Kalinga as the “**Lord of Sea**”. By the beginning of the Christian era the merchants of Odisha or Kalinga established cultural and trade ties with countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Cambodia. Bali, Java & Sumatra were the ports most frequented by the merchants from Odisha. Maritime history of Kalinga sailors lies littered in this island Indonesia.

“**Boita Bandana**” or “See off” ceremony of the merchants in day of Kartika Purnima is observed throughout Odisha. On this day the women folk of Odisha sail small boats

made out of Cork, Colored paper and banana bark lit by lamp on all available water. Courses in the same fashion in which the ladies of yore used to send their men on voyages wishing them well.

In Kalinga (Odisha) & Bali (Indonesia), one can find the influence of each other culture to a considerable extent. Lot of similarities are found between the culture and life style of the people of both the countries. Both Bali & Odisha boast of the strength of their culture in tourism that includes graceful dance forms, art and handicrafts, temples monuments and distinctive style of architecture, tie & dye, weaving technique and elegant textile designs, specialties of their cuisine and tranquil spread of their coconut fringed golden beaches.

Besides, we may also find a big similarities between “**Boita Bandana**” event celebrated in Odisha with the celebration of “**Masakapan Tukad**” festival of Bali where similar floating of toy boats in memory of maritime ancestors is made. The “**LOYKRATHONG**” or “**LOY**” festival organized by Thailand in the month of December represents ritualistic floating of boats which has an adequate similarities with Odishan custom.

The legend related to “**Boita Bandana**” or **Baliyatra** festival signifies the association of Taa-poi & celebration of the ritual of Khudurukuni OSHA by every house hold of Odisha. The legend says Taa-poi was ill treated by her sister in-laws during the sailing period of her seven brothers but it was Maa Mangala- the sea goddess who punished them for their ill treatment.

Apart from other places, Baliyatra festival is celebrated with much pomp and grandeur in

the historic city of CUTTACK for seven days from Kartika Purnima on the bank of the river Mahanadi. Lakhs of people throng to this place to enjoy the fair by taking delicious food like Thunkapuri, Dahibara & other traditional food with a boat ride with their family & friend in the full moonlit night.

To revive & refresh the memories of Kalinga’s glory in general & to promote Tourism in particular, the Govt. of Odisha led by legendry Biju Patnaik made a humble effort for an expedition by boat to “**Bali**” on the day of Kartika Purnima of 1992. The aim was to woo tourists from South-East Asia. Lot of events related to Odishan Culture were organized by the artists of Odisha who had also travelled to Bali in a big delegation. The same was also reciprocated by the artists of Indonesia (Bali) when the delegation reached at Bali. This amalgamation of culture in the form of cultural exchange between two Odisha & Indonesia helped to promote the influx of South- East - Asian tourists to India & Odisha.

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