



Nabakalebara - Marketing Odisha to the World

Dr. Manmath Nath Samantaray, Dr. Prakash Ch. Dash

INTRODUCTION

People have come across with lot of hoardings and bill boards on the way to Puri, Odisha. These have put many questions in mind and generate curiosity to know the details of the programme. Many times it has been tried to explore the possibility of image creation through this ritual. Is it sending some message to the community? Does it lead to image creation?

The Nabakalebara 2015 is a celebration of the ancient ritual of Nabakalebara associated with most of the Jagannath Temples when the images of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan are replaced with a new set of images; the last such festival of events was held in 1996. It is a festival, the period of which is chosen according to the Hindu calendar conforming to the astrological planetary positions. The festival during 2015 involves several schedules, and it has started from 23 March 2015 with Banajaga Yatra¹ and will conclude with Rathayatra followed by Sunabesa² on 27 July 2015, with many other rituals being held in between on specific dates. More than 5 million devotees are expected to participate in these rituals held in and around the temple complex of the Jagannath Temple, Puri, Odisha.

NABAKALEBARA: BACKGROUND NOTE

The exact year of origin of when the ritual, Nabakalebara was started is not known. But on many occasions the deities had to be secretly buried or shifted from the temple when it was attacked by external forces. After the threat had passed, the images, though retrieved, had to be made anew and reinstalled. One such recorded event was in 1600 when king Yajati is reported to have conducted this ritual after he had retrieved the images from Sonpur where they had been buried during an attack by Muslim invaders. When the wooden statues were unearthed by the king he found them in a state of decay and therefore got new images carved and installed on altar of the temple.

Another version of the history is that after Muslims invaded Odisha, the iconoclasts had burnt the images on the coast. Even the Afghans defied the command of Akbar and had desecrated the Jagannath temple. Following this Man Singh had captured Odisha in 1578. However, Besara Mohanty, a Vaishnava wandering saint had gathered the charred remains of the image, known as "Brahma Padartha", and carried it to Kujang. Then, according to the



Jagannath temple chronicle sources, Ramachandra Deb, Raja of Khurda, took the sacred remains from Kujang and sanctified it within the new image of Jagannath.

Nabakalebara festival is a much bigger and of longer duration than the annual Ratha Yatra at Puri. According to Anncharlott Eschmann, it is a Sanskritized version of a tribal ritual of the Khond tribes. It is said that “prototypes” of this ceremony are practiced by the Kond.

The festival rituals are held over a long period of 65 days to replace the old images known as “Daru Brahma,” meaning Brahma (divine life force) in the shape of wood, of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, Goddess Subhadra and Sudarshana, by new ones made of neem tree wood; the search for the appropriate neem Datu Brahma wood, its carriage to the carving site precedes the start of the Nabakalebara festival. It is begun in the Hindu calendar month of Chaitra Shukla Dashami (10th day of bright half of Lunar month) day.

The rituals are held when an Adhimasa³ (intercalary month) of Ashadha (June/July). Such a rare occasion usually occurs once in 12 years, but the gap may range from eight to 19 years. In the 20th century, Nabakalebara was celebrated in 1912, 1931, 1950, 1969, 1977 and 1996. In the 21st century, the first Nabakalebara is being held for a period starting from 29 March 2015 and ending with Niladribije on 30 July 2015 as per schedule announced by the temple

administration. Lord Jagannath who is a central figure of the rituals is worshipped in the Jagannath Temple, Puri as the king of the Universe. He is hierarchically number one in the realm, while the Maharaja Gajapati of Puri holds the second position and is the chief servitor of the temple. The Maharaja would present gifts to Jagannath but also receive gifts from representatives of feudatory kings, and his jurisdiction extended to tribal areas. To the people of Puri, the gods took the unusual form of huge wooden stumps, since they had lived with the tribal people. While the king got the images deified in a Hindu temple after elaborate religious ceremonies of the Nabakalebara, its tribal incomplete form, called “virupa” was retained but encased with cloth and resin. As the images are made of wood, they would inevitably rot, similar to the human beings, and need replacement. It is this replacement which is performed with elaborate rituals called Nabakalebara. Navakalevara meaning “New Body or re-embodiment” is a composite of two words ‘Nava’ meaning “New” and ‘Kalevara’ meaning “Body”. It is only the body of the gods that is changed during the rituals as it would deteriorate with time but the Brahman or the “Brahmapadartha (soul-substance)” within the wooden body (called “Daru Brahma” or the “Prime-Soul enshrined in wood”) is transferred from the old images to the new through a secret religious rigmarole.

THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign for Nabakalebar has started with some slew of measure by Govt. of



Odisha. The integrated marketing campaign undertaken was covered through all media and created a buzz around the media.

The state government has collaborated with Doordarshan for real-time broadcasting of the festival. The festival would also be shown live on a number of private television channels. The live streaming of the festival also had been planned to be available in a few Odia websites such as *www.incredibleorissa.com*.

The state government had provided the wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) service to the public at Puri. The Government has planned that the service would be available on the entire 3 km stretch between the Jagannath temple and Gundicha temple. Apart from helping the thousands of devotees planning to visit the city for Nabakalebar festival, it would also help in making the festival available to a global audience. Many travellers, especially foreigners, would also want to update their profiles on social networks with posts of the festival.

The link of the webcast was planned to be available on the Nabakalebar mobile app through which the smart phone users could see the proceedings live. The link would also be streamed on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook pages of the festival.

The details on events, rituals, maps, helpline numbers and various public utilities available during the event were being regularly posted on the social networking sites. To make its online presence more visible on the day of Rath

Yatra, the state government also conducted a quiz competition. Every hour, a question related to the festival would be asked on the Twitter page and a lucky winner would receive a goody bag from the Tourism Department. The contest was planned to begin at 8am and 12 questions would be asked throughout the day.

The aim of the above campaign was to keep the audiences engaged and simultaneously educate them about Nabakalebar. To garnering ample interest from people around the globe, the various initiatives had been taken up by the Government of Odisha as part of their Digital Campaign, which was proving to be really helpful for anyone planning a trip to be a part of this historic Rath Yatra.

Leaving no stone unturned, with the help of latest technological trends, Mr. Pradeep Kumar Jena, Principal Secretary, Information Technology along with his able Team of IT Professionals had been busy in providing authentic information about this auspicious events through a well-built informative and educative website (www.nabakalebara.gov.in). Department of Information Technology (DoIT) had developed the website with the support of CSM Technologies Limited. The website, mobile app and Social Media handle with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google Plus etc were being dynamically obtained by a group of young professionals.

The Tech Savvy Bureaucrat, Mr. Jena sat down with the Team to source content from most authentic sources including Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA), District



Administration of Puri, State Administration, Departments like Tourism & Culture and Information & Public Relations which are uploaded on a daily basis, said a senior officer of Odisha Computer application Centre (OCAC). Mr. Jena regularly monitored the inputs and ensured that all departments supported the Government initiative to the maximum with a view to provide up to date and authentic information about the grand Festival to devotees, pilgrims and tourists.

Besides, a Ministerial Committee with the Ministers of Tourism and Culture, Information & Public Relations and Energy and Information Technology also provided necessary guidance to ensure maximum reach to the world through Digital Media. To make it even easier for tourists to visit Puri during the event, Nabakalebara Official app had been launched. The mobile app was available to download from the Google play store <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ionicframework.nabakalebara2015501818&hl=en>. It was developed for Android phone and iOS. So people could without any delay install and experience this app on their mobile phone.

Along with these two modes, there had been a large Social Media campaign running on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Not only with interesting facts and information, the social media pages kept the interest of audience with exciting contests providing mythological information to the masses, said Mr. Pratik Mohapatra, Head of

Prelude Digital, and engaged in Social Media Campaign of Nabakalebar mooted by the DoIT.

The Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik launched the digital campaign on 14 May 2015. Along with launching the official portal of the festival, a user-friendly mobile application in Android, iOS and Windows platforms was also started. Besides, the campaigning was also initiated through various social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google Plus.

Working towards building transparency between the various works undertaken by respective departments for this event, the website provided detailed information on the projects that each of the departments had been working on. These 16 departments included Commerce and Transport, Energy, Health & Family Welfare, Home, Housing & Urban Development, Information & Public Relations, Information Technology, Law, Tourism & Culture, Water Resources, Works, Fisheries & Animal Resources Dev, General Administration, Rural Development, Women & Child Development and Handloom, Textiles & Handicrafts.

Not just limiting the audience to Odisha or India, the IT initiatives had been truly able to make it a global event. With tourists expected from around the Globe, it became highly crucial to pass on critical and important information of tourists stay and safety during this seven day long event. Various route information on the temporary shelters, ambulance, police were also made



available in the website and app, said Mr. Pratik Mohapatra.

Efforts were made on to provide user required information on tourist amenities, accommodations, vehicle parking, route maps, health facilities, police assistance, road side assistance etc. to make visit to Puri a pleasant experience. The plan was to share information from the central control room on Rath Jatra day regularly in the digital space. Besides all important festivals like Rath Jatra, Bahuda and Suna Besha would also be webcasted through the official website.

The main aim of the Digital Campaign was to improve the tourist engagement, enhance the service offerings, and enable visitors and tourists to find relevant information about the Nabakalebara event, said Mr. Pratik Mohapatra.

The digital campaign for Nabakalebar launched by the state government gained momentum. Within a fortnight of its launch, the number of people liked its Facebook page increased rapidly and the number of followers on Twitter and viewers on YouTube were also escalated.

Updates posted on the official social networking pages of Nabakalebar throughout the day. The Facebook page had over 35,000 likes. Interestingly, the page gathered a lot of attention from youngsters. Around 61 per cent of the likes came from people belonging to the age-group 18 to 24 years. While 27 per cent of the likes had been gathered from people between the age group

of 25 to 34, the remaining 12 per cent were from people above 35.

A number of posts regarding the various developments associated to the festival were updated on the Facebook page regularly. That apart, the day-to-day Nabakalebar rituals, along with interesting facts related to the grand festival, were also posted. To attract more followers, a number of innovative initiatives were also being taken. "After the daru reached Puri, there was nothing much happening. So, we have started online quiz and exciting contests to keep the audiences engaged and simultaneously educate them about Nabakalebar," said Pratik Mohapatra, who headed the Prelude digital team, an extension of a Bhubaneswar-based organisation Prelude that drives the social media campaign.

The main purpose was to keep the online users updated on all the traditions and customs followed in the holy event of Nabakalebar. Details regarding events schedule, rituals, map, helpline numbers as well as various public utilities available during the event were also posted. The Nabakalebara mobile app provided important information related to hotels, hospitals, transportation facilities, tourist points and hospitals, hotels, banks and ATMs and nearby places in Puri.

A number of videos related to the festival had been uploaded on the YouTube page. Some of the videos that are mostly viewed are the animation film on Nabakalebar by sand artist



Sudarshan Pattnaik and the one featuring eminent singer Prafulla Kar.

While a number of other pages have also been created on various online platforms, one needs to recognise the pages run by the government to obtain authentic information related to the festival. “We added the term ‘official’ to every page so users do n’t gets confused,” added Pratik Mohapatra.

OUTLOOK

The mood at the Govt. of Odisha was upbeat following successful completion of Nabakalebara festival. The festival made its presence felt in the globe through integrated marketing approaches adopted by the state government. It was seen that people living across the world had shared photos, news and other items in the cyberspace. Tourism Secretary, Mr. Arabinda Padhi had said, “Social networking sites

have proved (to be) a good bridge for us to meet several people in our state and interact with them. We often get very good suggestions from many of the netizens and we often try to turn the best suggestion into action. Through Twitter I have personally known many people from our state who aim to boost tourism in our state.”

References :

1. A process of search to select the neem tree to make new images to replace the old ones.
2. A donning the new images of gods with golden attire.
3. As per the Hindu Calendar, when two lunar months of Ashadha (four lunar fortnights) fall in one year.

Dr. Manmath Nath Samantaray, Asst. Professor and Dr. Prakash Chandra Dash, Asst. Professor, Asian School of Business Management, Shiksha Vihar, Po: ASBM Bholu Chandaka, Bhubaneswar-754012.

