



Ratha Yatra and Its Origin in Puri

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The Ratha Yatra of Jagannath, however, is recognized as the most famous of the twelve festivals. It is the second important Yatra of Lord Jagannath. It has become so famous that millions of people from India and abroad assemble at Puri every year to watch Lord Jagannath on this occasion with worship in their eyes. The Rig. Veda speaks of the Rathas that moved in the air. These were the three storeyed Rathas drawn by horses. Panini also refers to Ratha, while analyzing the word 'Rathastha, Rathaganak', etc. According to the Ramayana, the Ratha which is used in the games is called 'Pusya', while the Ratha employed by Gods is known as Marut. There is also descriptions of Ratha in Bhagavat, Mahabharat, Visnupurana, Kautilya-Arthasastra and Sukra Niti. The Buddhist Literature, especially, Lalita Vistara and Buddha-Carita also speaks of Ratha.

It has inspired Sanskrit and Odia poets to compose various works, of which Vasantotsava Kavyam of Haladhara Misra, Gundica Campu of

Bakrabak Chakrapani Pattanaik, Gundicotsava Varnanam of Bhagabat Brahma and Gundicha Vije of Brajanath Badajena deserve a special mention. Also, Narahari Panda in the 'Brahma Prakasika Tika' of Megha Dutam has successfully interpreted the theme with the Ratha Yatra of Lord Jagannath



in a good style. Ratha Yatra is celebrated at different places in Odisha, notably, at Puri. Konark holds a Ratha Yatra in honour of the Sun God, while every year is witnessed a similar festival of Lord Lingaraj. It may be presumed that the Ratha Yatra of Puri is existed anterior to the Ratha Yatra of Bhubaneswar. The popularity of the Ratha Yatra of Jagannath dates as far back as the Puranas.



The Brahma Purana, delineating the Yatra, highlights its unique significance. The Padma Purana and the Skanda Purana, also offer vivid descriptions of the festival. The references to the Ratha Yatra are found in Kapila Samhita. Some scholars opine that the Ratha Yatra owes its origin to Jainism. Some scholars have tried to link Ratha Yatra of Lord Jagannath with Buddhism as well. This Yatra at Puri begins on the 2nd day of the bright fortnight of Asadha. In the Hindu tradition, Asadha is esteemed as a sacred month, since Visnu sleeps on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of this month.

Ratha Yatra is also known as Gundicha Yatra. Some critics maintain that the term 'Gundicha' has been derived from 'Gudisa', or 'Kundija' which in term means 'Daru'. They argued that this word, in its present form, is used for Jagannath to suggest that He is 'Daru-Devata'. But according to an Odia legend, Gundicha was queen of King Indradyumna, who built this gigantic Temple. It is believed that the queen Gundicha requested the king to organize this festival, so that the sinners and the poor untouchables, who were not ordinarily allowed to enter the temple, might have Darshan of Lord Jagannath in His Ratha and thus attain salvation. Gundicha Yatra has been aptly named after queen Gundicha. Gundicha House is at a distance of a mile and a half from the Jagannath temple. Now-a-days it is known as by various names, such as, Gundicha Mandapa, Gundicha House, Janma Sthana (Birthplace), Janaka Puri and Mahavedi. Skanda Purana also speaks about Mahavedi or Gundicha Mandapa as the birthplace of Lord Jagannath. It was the place, where Indradyumna performed thousands of sacrifices. The images of three deities were made

at Mahavedi after the sacrifice, performed by Indradyumna. But when the God Nilamadhava was worshipped by the Savara, the Ratha Yatra of Lord was not known. It was only after the completion of the images the Ratha Yatra was organized to transport the deities to the temple. This legend was quite popular in the times of Puranas. It is also known as Nrsimha Ksetra. Jagannath assures Indradyumna in the Purushottama Mahatyma that he would come to stay for seven days at His birthplace, situated on the bank of Indradyumna Sara. Now we see the same Indradyumna Sara at Gundicha House. And the deities Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra come to this place once every year. Their journey commences on the second day of the bright part of the month of Asadha, and after staying here for seven days, they make their usual return journey to the temple on the ninth day. Dr. Benimadhab Padhi, the author of 'Daru Devata' remarks, 'in the beginning Jagannath was worshipped as the stem of a tree in Gundicha Mandapa. Then He was brought to the temple to be installed as the Trinity'. Thus, while suggesting the term 'Gundicha' to have been derived from the 'Savara' word 'Kundija'. He seeks to prove the Savara origin of the Yatra. Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab suggests that the word Guidisa, in Telegu means a cottage. Incidentally, the word in this sense has not been used anywhere in literature, though some of the Puranas do refer to Gundicha Mandapa. Some says that Mandapa does not mean a cottage. Hence, we cannot accept that the word 'Gundicha', was derived from 'Gudisa' under Dravida influence.

The Ratha Yatra is the source of amusement all over the Universe. The rationalism



of the Ratha Yatra of Lord Jagannath, celebrated every year at Puri, is essentially to offer an opportunity to all people, regardless of their caste, creed, or religion, to have darshan of the Lords. The Ratha Yatra, unmistakably, is the symbol of equality among all beings. It makes no discrimination between the Brahmin and Chandala. The Lord here grants equal right to all. The king of Puri himself acts as a sweeper on this occasion, thus removing ego from the mind of the ordinary people. (It is stated that 'Chhera Panhara' was introduced at the time of Anangabhima Deva in the 12th century when Jagannath came to be regarded as a state deity and the King as His servant) The pulling of the Ratha is the most interesting feature of the festival. Thousands of people lay their hands on the sturdy ropes to draw the Rathas, while the entire atmosphere resounds with the sacred name Hari. In the course of their journey, the deities are offered only fruits and cakes. On reaching Gundicha temple, the three

Deities are put in 'Dasaavatara Vesa', and are worshipped in the form of 'Sodasaupachara' with all the modes of daily worship like 'Sandhya Alati', 'Sandhya Dhupa', 'Sarvanga' and 'Badasinghara'. On the day of Bahuda, the three deities, following the usual order, come to their respective chariots. On the twelfth day (Dwadasi), the deities once again go through 'Pahandi' to reach Their seats on the "Bejeweled Throne". With the re-entry of Lord Jagannath into the temple, concludes the Ratha Yatra of Lord Jagannath. The evil of untouchability disappears, at least during the time of the Ratha Yatra. In this context, the Puranas aver that anybody who has darshan of the Lord on the Ratha, goes to the 'Vaikuntha Bhuvana' of Hari.

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