



Next to Snana Yatra (Bathing Ceremony), Sri Gundicha Yatra or Ratha Yatra (Car Festival) is the second important Yatra of Lord Jagannath. The Gundicha Yatra of Puri, however, is recognized as the most famous of the twelve festivals. It has inspired Sanskrit and Odia poets to compose various works, of which Vasantotsava Kavyam of Haladhara Mishra, Gundicha Campu of Vakravaka Chakrapani Pattanaik, Gundicha utsava Varnanam of Bhagavata Brahma and Gundicha Vije of Brajanath Badajena deserve a special mention. Then, 'Narahari Panda' in the 'Brahma Prakash Tika' of Meghaduttam has successfully interpreted the theme with the



Sri Gundicha Yatra of Puri

Dr. Janmejy Choudhury

Gundicha Yatra of Jagannath in a grandiloquent style.

The popularity of the Gundicha Yatra dates as far back as the Puranas. The Brahma Purana, delineating the Yatra, highlights its unique significance. The Padma Purana and the Skanda Purana, offer vivid descriptions of the Yatra. Also, the references to the Yatra are found in Kapila Samhita.

The Ratha Yatra (Car Festival) is also known as Gundicha Yatra. Some critics maintain that the term 'Gundicha' has been derived from 'Gudisa' or 'Kundija', which in turn means 'Daru'. They argue 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 the queen of king Indradyumna, who built the Jagannath 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 Darshana of Lord Jagannath (in His Chariot) and thus attain salvation. Gundicha Yatra has been aptly named after queen Gundicha. Dr. H. K. Mahtab suggests that the word 'Gudisa, in Telegu means a cottage (Kutira). Incidentally, the word in this sense has not been used anywhere in literature, though some of the Puranas do refer to Gundicha Mandapa.



Again, Mandapa does not mean a cottage. Hence, we cannot accept that the word 'Gundicha', was derived from 'Gudisa' under Dravid influence.

In the language of the 'Savaras', 'Kun' means 'He' and 'Dija' stands for the stem of a tree. Accordingly, Dr. Beni Madhab Padhi 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', Dr. Padhi seeks to prove the Savara origin of the Yatra.

Gundicha House is at a distance of a mile and a half from the Jagannath temple. Now-a-days it is known by various names, such as, Gundicha Mandapa, Gundicha House, Janma Sthana, Mahavedi as the birth place of Jagannath's trinity. It was the place, where Indradyumna performed thousands of sacrifices. It is also known as Nrusimha Kshetra. Jagannath assures Indradyumna in the Purushottama Mahatyma that He would come to stay for seven days at His birth place, situated on the bank of Indradyumna Sara. Now we see the same Indradyumna Sara at Gundicha House. And the deities, Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are charioted 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. Their return journey is popularly known as 'Bahuda Yatra'. In the Hindu tradition, Asadha is esteemed as a sacred month, since Vishnu sleeps on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of this month. Moreover, while the Buddhist festival is held on the thirteenth day of Vaisakha, the Car Festival at Puri is held on the second day of the bright fortnight of 'Asadha'.

The rationalism of the Gundicha Yatra of 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 Lord. Consequently, the evil of untouchability disappears, at least during the time of the festival. In this context, the Puranas avert that anybody who has Darshan of the Lord on the chariot, goes to the 'Vaikuntha Bhavan' of Hari. It has become so famous that million of people from India and abroad assemble at Puri every year to watch Lord Jagannath on this occasion with worship in their eyes.

Dr. Janmejaya Choudhury, Lecturer in History,
Sri Jagannath College, Kaipadar, Khurda.

