



The Story of Jagannath Temple and Car Festival at Ranapur



Braja Paikaray

There were six districts and twenty six Princely States in Orissa when it became a separate state on 1st April 1936. Ranapur was one of the Princely States. India achieved its independence on 15th August 1947 and after merger of Princely States with Orissa in the year 1948 Ranapur Gadjat became a Tahasil of Puri district under Nayagada subdivision. After the 1993 re-organisation Ranapur has become a Tahasil under Nayagada district.



Settlement operations of the Ranapur Ex-State area in the district of Puri (1943-1952 A.D) observes and writes as follows : "Udhab Singh built a temple of Lord Jagannath at Ranapur and his wife built the Mukhasala. He then built the temple of Maninag Durga on the top of the hill. He started twelve Jatras of Jagannath at Ranapur for his darsan. This Raja died in 1363 A.D. So the temple of Lord Jagannath and Maninag Durga were built towards the middle of 14th century."

In the Pre-independence era when Ranapur was a Princely State, the present Jagannath temple and the temple of Maninag Durga at the top of Maninag hill were built in the middle of 14th century during the reign of Raja Udhab Singh Narendra (1324-1363 A.D.).

Regarding the construction of Lord Jagannath temple at Ranapur, Mr. G.N.Singh in his Final Report on the Survery and

It would not be out of place to mention here an interesting legend regarding the establishment of Sri Jagannath temple at Ranapur which is as follows.

" Raja Udhab Singh Nerendra was a great devotee of Lord Jagannath of Puri and use to go to Sri Khetra on horse back from Ranapur every day for darsan of the Lord. From Ranapur the King goes to Puri enroute Jankiagada on horse back and there he changes



the horse for Puri and after having the darsan of Sri Jagannath returns back to Ranapur. Once open a time the king went upto Jankiagada but due to flood in the river could not be able to go to Puri for darsan of the Lord. But while the river became normal the king proceeded to Puri and sat for 7 days under the banyan tree in the temple premises without taking any food and water and prayed Lord Jagannath to remove all obstacles from his way which debarred him for darsan of the Lord. Lord Jagannath became pleased with the sincere and deep devotion of the Raja of Ranapur. The Lord ordered Gajapati Prataparudra Dev in a dream that out of 16 divine Kalas of Lord Jagannath one Kala would go to Ranapur as a work of boon in favour of King Udhav Singh and the devotee Raja would build a Jagannath temple at Ranapurgada and would observe the seva puja of the deities as per the custom and tradition of Puri Jagannath temple. The next morning Gajapati Prataparudra Dev met the Raja of Ranapur in the premises of Puri Jagannath temple and offered him the duty of Madhab Goswami and honoured him with Pata saree on his head and the title of "Narendra" as per the order of the Lord."

Therefore we can come to the conclusion that during the reign of Udhav Singh Narendra the temple of Lord Jagannath was built and the Nitis of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Ma Subhadra and their Seva Puja are observed accordingly since that period till today. It is also very interesting to note here that besides the aforementioned bigrahas of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra three small deities also adorn the golden throne who are known as "Ghar babus".

As per the version of Sri Rabi Nanda, the present Chief Sevayat of Ranapur Jagannath temple, at 7.30 A.M. the "Abakash" or "Nitya Karma" of the deities are being

observed and at 8 A.M. the "Ballav Dhup" is offered in which the "Curd" and "Lia Muan" are included. At 12.30 P.M. the "Sakal Dhupa" is offered to the deities which comprises of Rice, Dal, Curry, Sag, Besar, Mahur, Pickle and Payas. The deities go for "Pahuda bije" after the "Sakal dhup" and wake up at 3 P.M.

At 7 P.M. in the evening the "Alati" is made as per the custom and tradition of the temple. The Bramhins called "Patri" and "Padhiary" use to provide Alati stick, Pidha, Ghanti and mirror, where as the Samanta Bramhin chants Mantra and observe Seva Puja of the deities. A person belonging to Mali Caste use to clean the temple precinct and provides water and Tulasi at the time of Sevapuja of the deities.

At 8 P.M. the deities are offered "Sankhudi Bhoga" in which Puli (a special type of cake prepared out of cheese, ghee, Biri and coconut) and "Enduli" are included. After 9 P.M. the "Bada Singhar dhupa" is offered to the deities which comprises of "Sarapuli" and "Khaja". At 10 P.M. the deities use to go to bed which is called as "Pahuda bije".

As per custom and traditions of Ranapur Jagannath temple, out of the total Bhog Prasad, the sebayat famlies are entitled to get fifty percent, the royal family gets twenty-five percent and rest of "Bhog Prasad" is meant for common devotees of Lord Jagannath. This costum is still in vogue in the temple of Sri Jagannath of Ranapur.

That besides the deities of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Maa Subhadra the deities of Sri Harihareswar, Brundaban Behari Dev, Braja Behari Dev, Radhakanta Dev, Mahalaxmi, Saraswati and Sri Ganesh have also adorned their respective temples and places as "Parswa Devatas" or "associate



deities" in the Jagannath temple precinct of Ranapur. The Devasnan Mandap is also existing in the Jagannath temple premises meant for bathing of the Lords.

Following the customs and traditions of Puri Jagannath temple twelve Jatras are being observed at Ranapur Jagannath temple. Though the Samanta Bramhins were honoured by the Raja of Ranapur, the Pujari Bramhins were not provided with any thing for their service to the Lord. Further the king was compelling the Pujari Bramhins to perform "Suar Bethi".

Some times while the king was remaining absent from Ranapur palace and was staying at Chandapur place in festive occasions the Pujari Bramhins were walking the whole way from Ranapur to Chandapur carrying the "Bhog Prasad" in the night after the "Sandhya Dhup" of Jagannath temple. They were also carrying the "Bhog Prasad" to the residence of Agadhu Routray of village Jadupur who was the Dharma Putra (god son) of Ranapur King.

In 1943, Bamadev Rath, the then Dewan and Superintendent of Ranapur Princely State had abolished the "Suar Bethi" custom due to the royal power vested on him. Because, after brutal killing of the British Political Agent Major R.L. Bazelgette on 5th January 1939 by the mob, the king of Ranapur was divested of his royal power by the British Govt. and due to imposition of Court of wards the Dewan and Superintendent was enjoying all the powers of the king in Ranapur from the year 1941 to 1945.

During the reign of Raja Sarangadhar Bajradhar Narendra Mohapatra (1727-1754 A.D.) the Car Festival of Ranapur had started for the first time and is continuing till the present time.

For manufacturing the chariots the "Katha Anukul" is performed on the day of "Akshay Trutiya" in the month of Jestha. The holy timbers are generally collected from the jungle of Barbara, Randa, Girinda, Bandhamunda and Jamuganda under Ranapur.

After the merger of Ranapur Princely State with Orissa it became a Tahasil and the Tahasildar is acting as the ex-officio Executive officer of Jagannath temple who is responsible for the smooth management of the Car Festival at Ranapur. Therefore under the direct control and supervision of Ranapur Tahasildar the customs and traditions of Car Festival is organised and maintained. The Tahasildar after providing the required holy timbers for manufacturing of the chariots, the concerned carpenters of Ranapurgada, Siko, Rajsunakhala, Lekhanpur, Gopalpur and Majhian Khand are called for to start the building of Rathas. The carpenters complete the building of full fledged chariots before the day of Srigundicha. The Tahasildar also provides the holy ropes and other necessary articles for pulling of the chariots. The Raja of Ranapur comes out from the palace in a procession alongwith *Chhatra*, *Chamar*, and *Masal* with royal splendour on the day of Srigundicha and performs the holy *Chhera Panhara* in the chariots of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Maa Subhadra.

During the reign of the kings when Ranapur was a Princely State, the subjects were compelled to perform "Ratha Bethi" for two months till the end of Ratha Jatra. (*Bethi* means compulsory wage-free labour done by the subjects of Ranapur and other Princely states of Orissa). No body can think of *Bethi* in a democracy. But in the pre-independence period the evil practice of *Bethi* was prevalent in all the Princely States including Ranapur.



The subjects who perform *Bethis* were called "*Bethia Praja*" and those ill-fated persons were compelled by the royal administration to collect and carry the holy timbers on their own shoulders and bullock-carts meant for manufacturing of the chariots for car festival. The *Bethia Prajas* were also collecting the ropes meant for pulling the holy chariots of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, Sudarsan and Madan Mohan. During the reign of the Kings five chariots were built in Ranapur Princely State. The Sepoys of the king were free to beat the "*Bethia Prajas*" mercilessly at their own sweet will for swift pulling of the chariots. The rich and respected subjects of Ranapur were bribing the Chowkidars, sepays and Darogas to exclude them from "*Ratha Bethi*".

For abolition of the evil practice of "*Ratha Bethi*", "*Suar Bethi*", "*Sadak Bethi*", "*Paridhi Bethi*", "*Palace Bethi*", Bheti, Nazarana and human Sacrifice before "*Maninag Durga*" and to protect and preserve the human dignity of the subjects the young revolutionary leader, Dibakar Parida and Raghunath Mohanty had raised their voice against the tyrant King, Dewan, Daroga and Amalas and had organised the *Ranapur Praja*

Andolan. In course of events the British Political Agent interfered in Ranapur agitation and was killed by the mob. The young leaders were hanged due to the joint conspiracy of the British Government and the then king Krushna Chandra Narendra Bajradhar Mohapatra.

But the life sacrifice of Saheed Ragh-



Dibakar have yielded the result of human dignity in Ranapur. The Jagannath temple is very well existing at Ranapurgada and the Car Festival is performed with much enthusiasm by the people at

present but the evil custom of "*Ratha Bethi*" and "*Suar Bethi*" are no more there in Ranapur area.

Reference:

1. *Ranapur Bidroha*, Satyabadi Baliarsing.
2. Final report on the Survey and Settlement Operations of Ranapur Ex-State area in the districts of Puri (1943-1952), G. N. Sing.

Braja Paikray is the Additional Government Pleader. He lives at 342/B, Jagamara (Barabari), Bhubaneswar-751030.

