



## The Ratha Yatra of Shri Jagannath

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Orissa the Land of festivals is known world-wide during the monsoon for the spectacular festival, Ratha Yatra or the Car Festival of Shri Jagannath. Among twelve major festivals, viz. the Snana Yatra, the Ratha Yatra, the Sayan Yatra, the Dakshinayana Yatra, the Parswaparivartan Yatra, the Utthapana Yatra, the Pravarana Yatra, the Pusyabhisheka Yatra, the Uttarayana Yatra, the Dola Yatra, the Damanaka Yatra and the Akshaya Trutiya Yatra are celebrated inside the temple of Lord Jagannath ; The Ratha Yatra or the Car Festival of Lord deserves special mention. This festival draws millions of tourists both in-land and foreigners to the Grand Road. And the deities come down from the main temple to the Grand Road to meet the ocean of pilgrims.

Preparations for the festival start much before. Every year new chariots are constructed. Only the 'Sarathi' (charioteer), Ghoda (horses), Kalasa (Crowning element) and Parswa devatas are not made new every year. They are prepared on the year of Navakalebara (New-body ceremony). In terms of the provisions laid down in the Puri Car Festival code, it is the responsibility of the Forest Department of Govt. of Orissa to supply the required timber for construction of the Rathas free of cost every year. As a matter of practice, the Divisional Forest Officers of Nayagarh and Khurda have been supplying 72 Nos. of Fasi, 729 Nos. of Asan, Dhaura timbers and 274 Nos. of

Green timbers respectively. Beside the D.F.O. Nayagarh have been supplying 3 Nos. of Simuli timbers for last some years. Now a days the availability of Fasi species of trees has become a problem in Nayagarh Division, as a result of which the D.F.O. Nayagarh has to procure the Fasi trees from other Divisions to supply the same to the Temple Administration. Like previous years the D.F.O. Nayagarh sends first truck load of timber before 'Basanta Panchami' and the rest of the timbers reaches in a phased manner.

The construction of the Rathas starts on the Akshaya Trutiya day. The progress of construction is monitored regularly by a team of officials. The Executive Engineer, R & B, Puri Division, Puri is reviewing the progress from time to time. Total number of 92 Maharanas, 81 Bhois, 22 Kamars and 22 Rupakaras are engaged in the construction work of the Rathas. To cover the Rathas 14 number of Darajis (tailors) prepare the Rath Mandani.

Allied materials in connection with the car festival are collected by the temple administration well in advance. The car ropes are supplied by the Kerala Coir Corporation. The clothes for Rathmandani are procured from the Orissa Textile Mills. The *laji* cloth of the Lords are prepared by the traditional weavers where as Basunga Patta (Silken thread) are arranged by the State Tassar and Silk Co-operative Society. Salresins are procured locally, Til oil is supplied by Consumer Co-



operative Federation. Sandal wood stock has been procured from the Karnataka Govt. and musk is given from the office stock.

Arrangements for the car festival is reviewed in the Temple Co-ordination Committee and the time table for the great festival is approved in the Temple Managing Committee meeting. As specified in the Puri Car Festival Code, meetings of the District level Co-ordination Committee under the chairmanship of the Revenue Divisional Commissioner (CD) are held in regular intervals wherein thread-bare discussions relating to arrangements of all the line Department are held. The District Collector takes the meeting of a group of dedicated officers very often who are kept in charge of supervision of allied arrangements, viz. sanitation, drinking water, light arrangement, temporary shed, distribution of essential commodities, transport arrangement etc. The Superintendent of Police take care of the police arrangements.

All the three chariots after being constructed and decorated traditionally are dragged to the Lions gate in the afternoon of the day preceding Sri Gundicha. The S.P. Puri provides man power for the same. On the day of Sri Gundicha 'Ratha Pratistha' is performed by the 'Deul Purohita' and then the divine procession of the deities start from the temple to the cars, which is known as 'Pahandi'. Thousands of people buy tickets and go inside the temple to have a *darshan* of the Lords during their 'Pahandibije'. First 'Sudarsana' is carried to the Car of 'Subhadra' and then comes 'Balabhadra' in a procession. 'Subhadra' is taken to her Car like 'Sudarsana'.

Finally Lord Jagannath leaves his abode towards his Car and is held tightly by the Daitapatis in their arms and pulled from the behind by other *sevakas*. The floral head-gear gives an enchanting look when the deities make their way to the Cars placed on the Grand Road. Then 'Madanmohan' is taken to the Cars by the 'Mahajan' Sevakas. Then the police picket waiting near the palace of Maharaja escort the 'Gajapati Maharaja' to the Cars, where, as the first *sevaka* of the Lord, he performs 'Chhera Pahanra' and after offering his prayers he goes back to his palace.

The Chariot of Lord Balabhadra is called 'Taladhwaja'. Its height is 13.2 metres. It has got 14 wheels. Matali is the charioteer of this Car. Four wooden horses of black colour fixed to the chariot are known as Tibra, Ghora, Dirghasrama and Swarnanabha. Vasuki serves the Car as Car rope. The Car is wrapped in red and green clothings.

The Chariot of Goddess Subhadra is known as Deva Dalan, Darpadalan or Padma Dhwaja. Its height is 12.9 metres. It has got 12 wheels. The name of the Sarathi is Arjun. Four wooden horses of red in colour attached to the Chariot are called Rochika, Mochika, Jita and Aparajita. The Car rope is called Swarnachuda. The Car is wrapped in black and red clothings.

The Chariot of Lord Jagannath is called Nandighosha. It has a height of 13.5 metres. There are 16 wheels in this Car. The name of the Charioteer is Daruka. Four white wooden horses fixed to the Car are known as Sankha, Balahaka, Sweta and Haridaswa. Sankhachuda serves as Car rope in this



Car. The Car is wrapped in red and yellow clothings.

When the Cars are dragged from Rathakhala to the Lions Gate, the Car of Lord Jagannath moves first. When the Cars are dragged on the Grand Road with the deities mounted, the Car of Lord Balabhadra is dragged first. At Gundicha Temple when the Cars are made ready before the return journey, the Car of 'Subhadra' is taken first.

When the wheels roll on the Grand Road people forgetting their caste, creed and sex extend their hands to just touch the Car-rope and pull it. Time here in Orissa does not sleep in the ancient caves, it rolls through these wheels of progress.

The trinity along with 'Sudarsana' stays at the Gundicha Temple otherwise known as the 'garden house' by many till Navami. Millions of people visit Gundicha Temple to have a *darshan* of the Lord. This temple is also known as Adhapa Mandap, Jagna Mandap, Jagna Vedi and Janakapuri. On the 10th day of the Asadha, the return journey begins. Goddess Lakshmi who has not escorted the Lord in this journey meets Him near the palace of the Gajapati Maharaja. On the next day, the deities are nicely decorated in golden costume and millions of people gather here to have the *darshan* of the Lords in this costume. Then after two days the Lords return to Their abode after purifying the sinful and thus the Ratha Yatra come to an end.

Though the 'Daitapatis' have got a

major role to play in this grand festival, other *sevakas* viz. Pati Mahapatra, Mudirasta, Pujapanda, Puspalaka, Mahajan, Bhitarachha, Mekap, Pratihari, Akhanda, Muduli, Khataseja, Garabadu., Changeda, Khuntia, Mukha Pakhal, Darpania, Pania Apat, Ghatuari, Bhandar Mekap, Suar Badu, Dhopakhal, Rosa Paika, Lenka, Patri Badu, Suddha Suara, Ballav Jogania, Mahasuara, Kothabhoga Pania, Pradhani, Hadap Nayak, Bidia Jogania, Ghantua, Bajantri, Chhatara, Kahalia, Talichha, Asthan Pratihari, Badu Suara, Bindua, Pagua, Tolabadu, Chanapua, Thali Suar, Biribuha, Handi Jogania, Amalu Suar, Bidua, Pantibadu, Bahara Pantibadu, Bahar Deuli Suar, Datta Mohapatra, Olhar, Chatara, Kanti Mahasuar, Tadhau Karana, Deula Karana, Deula Purohita, Dayanamali, Bimanbadu, Parba Jatra Jogania, Maharana, Bhoi, Rupakara, Chitrakara, Daraji, Dahuka etc. have got certain roles to play either in connection with the performance of the rituals or construction of the chariots. Even the Gajapati Maharaja is associated with certain rituals.

Now since the Car festival of Lord Jagannath has become an international festival, it is observed in more than 60 countries. In spite of that millions of people road their way to Puri to have a *darshan* of the Lords on the Car. Millions of people switch on their T.V. sets to have a glance of the festival through direct telecast.



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