



Rathayatra of Puri

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India is a land of temples and festivals. With several cultures, castes, creed and religion every part of India has some significance and is famous in its own way. The most attracting feature of Orissa is its vast coast line and the temple of Lord Jagannatha in Puri. Lord Jagannatha is the heart of Orissan culture and people of Puri are engaged throughout the year celebrating several festivals of Lord Jagannatha. But amongst all these festivals one of the most spectacular festivals takes place at Puri is the Rathayatra.

The world famous Rathayatra of Lord Jagannatha takes place in 'ashdha sukla dwitiya' i.e the second day of the fortnight of ashadha (June-July) every year. As the name justifies the deities Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra adorning three chariots namely Nandighosha, Taladhwaja, Darpadalana respectively make a nine-day trip to Gundicha Mandir from Srimandir. There is a beautiful folktale behind this festival.

"Once upon a time there was a king, called Indradyumna and his queen Rani Gundicha ruled over Orissa. One night Rani Gundicha, in her dreams, saw Lord Nilamadhava saying her to build a temple for him as he no more wants to stay in the woods in the caves of Nilagiri hills. Relying on her

dream, the King sent messengers to all the nooks and corners of his kingdom. Finally his young charismatic Minister Vidyapati, got the location. This blue coloured idol of Lord Nilamadhav was already under the possession of a tribal king and they were worshipping the God only by offering fruits and vegetables of the forests. But to bring the idols of the God from the tribal king was not that easy for Vidyapati. He tried his level best to win his trust and afterwards got married to the tribal Princess Lalitha. With the help of Lalitha and by his intelligent approach, he manages to see the deity. But when he came back with force to take the idols of the God he found the idols had already disappeared. Afterwards again the queen dreamt of a big log floating in the sea shore with a lotus, a wheel and a crunch engraved on it and also got the instructions to locate that log. In the meantime the King who had already made a huge temple, called upon many carpenters to make the idols. But none of them even made scratch on that log. One day a very old man came and promised the king to make the idols single handedly, but with a condition. The condition was no body will disturb him for 22 days and he would make the idols in a closed room. After ten days, the queen was impatient. She tried to hear if

anything was going on inside the closed room. The old man did not eat for ten days and there was no sound coming from within. She repeatedly coaxed the king to open the door, the king ultimately yielded. When they entered, the craftsman had already disappeared and the images were incomplete. The king was puzzled if the unfinished images should be enshrined. Finally he did install the incomplete images."

This was the story of establishment of Puri Jagannatha temple. Lord Jagannatha was very happy with the King and asked the king to give a favour as a Baradan. The king asked the God to make him childless to stop the family rule and wanted no body in his family to feel proud about his achievements and thinks the Puri temple as their family property. Looking at the King's honesty and soberness Lord Jagannatha promised the king that every year he will be the guest of Rani Gundicha and stay in her place for nine days and in these nine days the "daitapati", children of Vidyapathy and Lalitha will take charge of Lord Jagannatha. Even today this practice is followed in Puri. This symbolises a happy blending of tribal people with the Brahmins, which is a rare thing to be seen in main stream worshipping method in Indian culture.

The preparations for this chariot festival starts actually two months before from the day of Akshaya Tritiya. About one month after Akshaya Tritiya the Snanayatra takes place. Snanayatra ceremony is held on "Jyesthapurnima", when the main deities along the Sudarsana are brought to the Snamandapa (a platform for bathing, Snaana means bathing) and are bathed around mid-day. One hundred and eight pots of water is poured on the Deities. The water is brought from a sacred well which is dear to the Goddess Sitala.

After bathing the Deities are put on Elephant masks, which are called as Ganesh Vasha. Then the Deities are offered Bhog (Cooked Food) and Arathi. The Deities are then taken back to the temple in a procession and stay in retirement for fifteen days. The deities are placed in the passage between the inner and outer shrine in a semi-horizontal position. Here in this ceremony the general public can see the food Offerings to the Deities, which is not possible any time in the year. Anavasara Festival after Snana Yatra Lord Jagannath becomes sick and suffers from fever. He is therefore moved to his private stay, there He is offered drugs which are prepared by the fruit juice. Navayauvana Festival is held for the purpose of renovation of the Lord Jagannath's body. After being washed the body of Lord Jagannath needs repainting, which takes two weeks to complete. Then the Lord Jagannath is fully restored to youth (Nava Yauvana). Netrotsava ceremony is performed in the inner shrine where the Deities are placed in semi-horizontal position. They have been fully painted, except their eyes. In this ceremony the eyes of the Deities are painted by their respected Pujaries and the Puja (worship) is started in the temple. After completing the above said ceremonies the Deities are taken out from the temple and placed in their respective chariots on the Rathayatra day. The procession of the Deities from the temple to the chariot is the most colorful aspect of the Rathayatra. The Chariots are brought and kept in front of the Sinha Dwara, facing north side before Rathayatra begins. In a traditional ceremonial manner first Sudarshana is brought from the temple and placed on the Chariot of Lady Subhadra, followed by Balabhadra first as the elder in the family placed in his chariot, then followed by goddess Subhadra and Lord Jagannath. As

the deities are very heavy it takes a lot of time to bring them on to the chariots. This ceremony is called as 'Pahandi bije'. After pahandi the Oriya king Raja Gajapati comes to sweep the chariots which is called as "Chhera panhara". For every occasion there is a folk story and each story has got beautiful tinge of devotion, loyalty and selflessness. Every folk tale is so well tailored that seems as if lord Jagannath is always there to help people in several ways, but one has to keep faith on the Almighty. One notable thing in Puri is every people has got a strong sense of devotion in his mind that his life is not his own, his life is controlled by Jagannath.

People usually spent the whole day in the Badadanda, the grand road where this event takes place and the most beautiful thing is you don't feel bored of even after spending the whole day under the scorching sun and very humid atmosphere, this is the charisma of Rathayatra that you forget yourself. You are bound to think that how vast this world is and how tiny you are. What all the yogis and sanyasis taken together could not teach you, you could learn within no time. As the residents of Puri we usually come to see when the chariots start moving. Thousands of people draw the chariots from Srimandira to Gundicha temple which is about 2½ to 3 kilometers distance. One striking feature of the Rathayatra is the huge wooden chariots. Nandighosh Chariot is of Lord Jagannath, it is 45ft (13.71mts) high and having sixteen wheels. The fabric of the roof is in Red and Yellow colour. Taladhvaja chariot belongs to Balabhadra. The height of this chariot is 44ft (13.2mts) and consists of fourteen wheels. The fabric colour of the roof is Red and Green. Darpadalana is Goddess Subhadra's chariot. It is 43ft. (12.9mts) in height and consist of

twelve wheels. The fabric of roof is in Red and Black colour. Now-a-days live coverage of the whole thing is coming on the national channel, but the feeling one could get there is really wonderful. When this huge chariot passes very close, you feel as if with the chariot your whole body, mind and heart going out with the chariots.

After this the deities stay in the Gundicha temple for nine days and returns back to Srimandir adorning the same chariots. In between thousands of rituals take place, lakhs of people keep pouring in to Puri every day. As there is no barrier for any caste creed or nationality, to be close to the deities, most foreigners usually come to see this festival. All the leading companies usually open their stalls in the of two sides the grand road. Artisans and craftsmen from nooks and corners of Orissa come here to display their craft which include the hand woven silk sarees, dress material, applique work, pattachitra (painting on tussar canvass), horn carvings, filigree work and so on. Apart from all these, there is a beautiful beach in Puri which can easily figure in World map amongst one of the beautiful beaches. To attract people many sand artists make sand figurines in the golden sands of the beach. This is a time whole Puri is decorated to welcome the tourists.

Other than this spectacular festival Puri has got a treasure of beautiful places better known as the Golden triangle of East i.e Puri, Bhubaneswar (Temple city of Orissa) and Konark (World Famous Sun Temple). All these 3 places are within an hour's drive from each other.

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