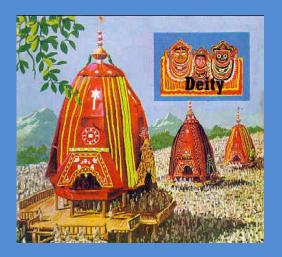
# Ratha-Yatra



Ratha Yatra (Oriya: ରଥଯାତ୍ରା) or the Car Festival is a huge Hindu festival associated with Lord Jagannath held at Puri in the state of Orissa, India.

This annual festival is celebrated on Ashad Shukla Dwitiya (second day in bright fortnight of Ashad month). In 2012 it falls on the 28th of June.

The festival commemorates Lord Jagannath's annual visit to Gundicha mata's temple via aunt's home (Mausi Maa Temple which is near Balagandi Chaka in Puri).

As part of Rath Yatra, the idols of Lord Puri Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Subhadra are taken out in a procession to Gundicha Temple and remain there for nine days. Then the idols or Rath Yatra returns to Puri Jagannath temple. The return journey of Puri Jagannath Rath Yatra is known as Bahuda Yatra.

#### The Festival

Three richly decorated chariots, resembling temple structures, are pulled through the streets of Puri called Badadanda. This commemorates the annual journey of Lord Jagannath, Lord

Balabhadra, and their sister Subhadra to their aunt's temple, the Gundicha Temple which is situated at a distance of 2 km from their temple. This is the only day when devotees who are not allowed in the temple premises such as non-Hindus and foreigners can get their glimpse of the deities. During the festival, devotees from all over the World go to Puri with an earnest desire to help pull Lords' chariot with the help of other priests pulling the chariots with ropes. They consider this a pious deed and risk their lives in the huge crowd. The huge processions accompanying the chariots play devotional songs with drums, tambourines, trumpets etc. Children line the streets through which the chariot will pass and add to the mass chorus. The Rath carts themselves are some approximately 45 feet (14 m) high and are pulled by the thousands of pilgrims who turn up for the event; the chariots are built anew each year only from a particular type of tree. Millions of devotees congregate at Puri for this annual event from all over the country and abroad. It is also broadcast live on many Indian, foreign television channels as well as many of the websites telecast jagannath ratha yatra live.

# Description

Ratha yatra, the Festival of Chariot: Chariots of Shri Jagannath is celebrated every year at Puri, the temple town in Orissa, on the second (dwitiya) day of shukla pakshya (waxing cycle of moon) of Ashadh Maas (3rd month in Lunar Calendar). The presiding deities of the Jagannath Temple, Puri main temple, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra, with the celestial wheel

(Sudarshana Chakra) are taken out from the temple precincts in an elaborate ritual procession to their respective chariots. The huge, colourfully decorated chariots are drawn by multitude of devotees on the bada danda, the grand avenue to the Gundicha Temple (Gundicha - King Indradyumna's Queen), two miles away to the North.

On their way back from the Gundicha Temple, the three deities stop for a while near the Mausi Maa Temple (Aunt's abode) and have an offering of the Poda Pitha, which is a special type of pancake supposed to be the Lord's favorite. After a stay for seven days, the deities return to their abode.

# Holiness and Its Significance

The festival is also known as Gundicha Jatra, Ghosa Jatra, Navadina Jatra, Dasavatara Jatra and by a variety of other names. Rathe tu vamanam drishtwa punarjanmam na vidyate: A glimpse of the Vamana, the dwarf form, an incarnation of Lord Jagannatha, is sure to ensure emancipation, release from the cycle of birth and death. Jatra is an essential part of the ritual of the Hindu system of worship. Jatra literally means travel or journey. Normally, it is the representative deities of temples more popularly known as Utsava Murti in south and Chalanti Pratima or Bije Pratima in Orissa, partake in these journeys. The Jatra for the Ritual Journey take two forms - one involving the short circumbulation around the temple and other involving a longer journey from the temple to some other destination. The Jatra is considered as an important part of festivities and ceremonies of each temple and is considered as a special and sacred occasion. Rath Jatra being unique among all Jatras is the grandest festival of the supreme divinity who has manifested himself in the Kali Yuga to emancipate humanity and to relieve them from their sufferings. Lord Jagannatha is identified fully with Krishna. In his original manifestation as Nilamadhaba, he was worshipped in a sacred Nyagrodha Briksha or banyan tree. The branches of the tree had spread for several miles and anyone entering this area was instantly emancipated and was relieved of the travails of the birth and rebirth. In fact, the influence of Yama, the God of Death, is supposed to have been curtailed in the sacred city of Puri — Srikshetra on account of the presence of Lord Jagannatha and therefore it is also called the Yamanika Tirtha.

A glimpse of Lord Jagannatha on the chariot is considered to be very auspicious and saints, poets and scriptures have repeatedly glorified the sanctity of this special festival. The sanctity of the festival is such that even a touch of the chariot or even the ropes with which these are pulled is considered enough to confer the results of several pious deeds or penance for ages. In fact, there is a famous Oriya song which says that on this occasion, the chariot, the wheels, the grand avenue all become one with Lord Jagannatha himself.

The concept of the chariot has been explained in the Kathopanishada in the following words-

Atmaanam rathinam viddhi shareeram rathamevatu Buddhim tu saarathim viddhi manah pragrahameva cha. The body is the Chariot and the soul is the deity installed in the chariot. The wisdom acts as the charioteer to control the mind and thoughts.

The **Skanda Purana** glorifies the sanctity of the Rath Jatra in the following words-

Gundicha mandapam namam jatrahamajanam pura Ashwamedha sahasrasya mahabedi tadadvabat. Those who are fortunate to see the deities of the Srimandira in the Gundicha Temple, the final destination of the procession of the chariots, derive the benefits of a thousand horse sacrifices, an immensely pious deed. Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja in his famous Vaidehisa Vilasa mentions that the Lord comes out from his sanctum for participating in the Gundicha Jatra, another name of the Festival of Chariots, only for redeeming the fallen, the patita jana who get the opportunity to behold their dearest god at close quarters on this occasion. Similarly, saint poet Salabega waxes eloquent in praise of the dark Lord Jagannath and says that the Lord swaying and moving like a wild elephant arrives at the Grand Avenue and rides his chariot and destroys in a flash all the sins of his devotees, even if these may be grave or unpardonable.

#### The Chariots

The three chariots of Balarama, Subhadra and Jagannatha are newly constructed every year with wood of specified trees like phassi, dhausa, etc. They are customarily brought from the ex-princely state of Dasapalla by a specialist team of carpenters who have hereditary rights and privileges for the same. The logs are traditionally set afloat as rafts in the river Mahanadi. These are collected near Puri and then transported by road.

The three chariots are decorated as per the unique scheme prescribed and followed for centuries stand on the Bada Danda, the Grand Avenue. Covered with bright canopies made of stripes of red cloth and combined with those of black, yellow and blue colours, the huge

chariots are lined across the wide avenue in front of the majestic temple close to its eastern entrance, which is also known as the Sinhadwara or the Lion's Gate.

Lord Jagannatha's Chariot is called Nandighosa. It is forty-five feet high and forty-five feet square at the wheel level. It has sixteen wheels, each of seven-foot diameter, and is decked with a cover made of red and yellow cloth. Lord Jagannatha is identified with Krushna, who is also known as Pitambara, the one attired in golden yellow robes and hence the distinguishing yellow stripes on the canopy of this chariot.







Nandighosa Rath

Taladhwaja Rath

Dwarpadalana Rath

The Chariot of Lord Balarama, called the **Taladhwaja**, is the one with the Palm Tree on its flag. It has fourteen wheels, each of seven-foot diameter and is covered with red and blue cloth. Its height is forty-four feet.

The Chariot of Subhadra, known as **Dwarpadalana**, literally "trampler of pride," is forty-three feet high with twelve wheels, each of seven-foot diameter. This Chariot is decked with a covering of red and black cloth - black being traditionally associated with Shakti and the Mother Goddess.

Around each of the chariots are nine Parsva devatas, painted wooden images representing different deities on the chariots' sides. Each of the

chariots is attached to four horses. These are of different colours — white ones for Balarama, dark ones for Jagannatha, and red ones for Subhadra. Each chariot has a charioteer called Sarathi. The three charioteers attached to the chariots of Jagannatha, Balarama and Subhadra respectively are Daruka, Matali and Arjuna.

#### DESCRIPTION OF CHARIOTS

1) Chariot of Jagannath
NANDIGHOSHA/GARUDADHWAJA/KAPIDHWAJA

Number of wheels: 16

Total Number of wooden pieces used: 832

Height: 44' 2"

Length and breadth: 34'6" x 34'6"

Wrappings: Red, Yellow colour cloths

Guarded by: Garuda

Name of the charioteer: Daruka

The flag: Trailokyamohini

The horses: Shankha, Balahaka, Suweta, Haridashwa

The rope: Sankhachuda Naguni

Presiding Nine Deities: (i) Varaha

- (ii) Gobardhan
- (iii) Krushna, Gopi Krushna
- (iv) Nrusingha
- (v) Rama
- (vi) Narayan
- (Vii) Trivikrama
- (viii) Hanuman

# (ix) Rudra

### 2) Chariot of Balabhadra - TALADHWAJA

Number of wheels: 14

Total Number of wooden pieces used: 763

Height: 43' 3"

Length and breadth: 33' x 33'

Wrappings: Red, Bluish green colour cloths

Guarded by: Basudev

Name of the charioteer: Matali

The flag: Unnani

The horses: Tribra, Ghora, Dirghasharma, Swornanava

The rope: Basuki Naga

Presiding Nine Deities: (i) Ganesh

- (ii) Kartikeya
- (iii) Sarvamangala
- (iv) Pralambari
- (v) Hatayudha
- (vi) Mrutyunjaya
- (vii) Natamvara
- (viii) Mukteswar
- (ix) Sheshadeva

# 3) Chariot of Subhadra DARPADALANA/PADMADHWAJA/DEVADALANA

Number of wheels: 12

Total Number of wooden pieces used: 593

Height: 42' 3"

Length and breadth: 31'6" x 31'6" Wrappings: Red, Black colour cloths

Guarded by: Jayadurga

Name of the charioteer: Arjuna

The flag: Nadambika

The horses: Rochika, Mochika, Jita, Aparajita

The rope: Swarnachuda Naguni Presiding Nine Deities: (i) Chandi

(ii) Chamunda

(iii) Ugratara

(iv) Vanadurga

(v) Shulidurga

(vi) Varahi

(vii) Shyamakali

(viii) Mangala

(ix) Vimala