

Name of the element- Rath Yatra

Region- Odisha

Brief Introduction -

Since time immemorial, Shree Jagannatha, Lord of the Universe, is worshipped in Shreemandira at the sacred Dhama Shree Kshetra, Puri with Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Chakraraj Sudarshana. Devotees from around the world, irrespective of caste, color, religion and nationality Congregate here for Ratha Yatra. This annual event is the grand finale of almost four-month long Festivals when the deities travel from Shreemandira to Gundicha temple, traditionally identified as their birth-place, for a seven-day stay and return on the ninth day. The annual sojourn is preceded by a series of preparatory festivals like Snana Poornima, bathing in public view on a sacred platform, followed by a fortnight of secret ritual convalescence or Anabasara ending in a renewed youthful appearance (Naba-Yauvana) of the Deities.

Simultaneously, wooden chariots are constructed afresh and finished with resplendent decorative embellishments following hoary traditions of elaborate rituals. The chariots are consecrated (pratistha) by temple priests following Vedic fire sacrifices, before kalasha (pots) and flags are mounted on the top. A step-by-step ritual procession from inside the temple, called Pahandi, follows. The deities, carried in gentle swaying movements front, back and sideways by designated servitors, climb ramps and are seated on their Chariots- a most captivating and blessed sight. Next the Gajapati King cleans each Chariot in Chhera Pahanra ritual, a display of total surrender and devotion. Finally, after tying wooden horses and the stout ropes, pulling of the Chariots takes place one by one to reach the Gundicha temple, before being carried to their sacred platform for worship.

The deities return on the ninth day (Bahuda) and stay for three more days on their chariots, appearing once in their golden attires (Sunabesha), an ineffable dazzling spectacle that attracts over a million devotees. Finally, they return to their bejeweled throne, in a ceremonial

procession, known as Niladri-Bije.