

Presentations from the ISKCON India Scholars Board to
Maharaja Dibyasingh Deb and Scholars of the
Jagannatha Shreemandira on the question of allowable
dates for celebrating the Jagannatha Ratha-yatra

20 March 2025

Bhubaneswar, Odisha, INDIA

Table of Contents

Prabhupāda directed his disciples to celebrate Ratha-yātrā in January, or on Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī By Krishna Kirti Das (Convenor)	1
Prabhupāda's Successful Application of Dharma in Adhārmika Countries By Vidvan Gauranga Das	2
Perspectives of Madhva and Ramanuja Scholars on the Uniformity of Ratha-yātrā Dates By Chaitanya Jivana Das	3
The authenticity of Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions regarding the dates of observance of Ratha-yātrā By Dr. Arjuna Sakha Das	6
Meeting with Dr. M.A. Alwar, 16-March-2025, Mysuru By Sridhara Srinivasa Das	7
Let's pull the Ratha By Rama Aprameya Das	10

Prabhupāda directed his disciples to celebrate Ratha-yātrā in January, or on Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī

By Krishna Kirti Das (Convenor)

With regard to ISKCON's celebration of Ratha-yātrā on dates not given in *śāstra*, there are some considerations:

- 1) In a letter of 2 December 2024, learned members of the Śrīmandira observed that ISKCON's Founder-Ācārya A.C Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda himself had observed the Ratha-yātrā on dates on or near the dates followed by the Śrīmandira.
- 2) But they did not know that Prabhupāda had also directed his students to observe the festival in the months of January and February, as in the case of Durban and Melbourne, or on Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī, as in the case of a city adjacent to San Francisco, so that attendance at either city's Ratha-yātrā would not be compromised.

This new information shifts the Śrīmandira's opprobrium towards Prabhupāda's disciples over to Prabhupāda himself, since he himself had given this guidance. If the Śrīmandira continues to stand by its objections, even after considering these new facts, then it has officially objected to Prabhupāda's legitimacy as an *ācārya*.

Given Prabhupāda's vast scholarship, as seen in his translations and commentaries of the *Gītā*, *Bhāgavatam*, and more than 70 other books. And given his exemplary activities and success in spreading Vaidika Sanātana Dharma throughout the world. And his success in having spread the cult of Shree Jagannatha through the Ratha-yātrā festival to all major cities on the planet—especially at a time when hardly any Indians lived outside of India—we feel that the learned scholars of the Śrīmandira should reconsider their own judgment.

As a learned and exemplary *ācārya*, Prabhupāda at the very least should be considered a *śiṣṭa brahmana*. According to *Manu-saṁhitā* 12.108 and 109, a *śiṣṭa brahmana* has the authority to decide points of dharma for circumstances not addressed by the *śrutis* and *smṛtis*. Whatever he says is to be considered dharma: *sa dharmah syād aśaṅkitaḥ*. In preaching Sanātana Dharma all over the world, so many unforeseen circumstances not discussed in *śāstra* arose that required his decision.

The *śiṣṭa's* adhikara to decide uncertain points of dharma pervades the history of Sanātana Dharma. In *Skanda Purāṇa*, in the 33rd chapter of the "Puruṣottamakṣetra Māhātmya," the entire Ratha-yātrā from building the *ratha* to its conclusion at Guṇḍicā is described. As per the *śāstra*, building the *ratha* is a very complex and expensive effort. Even if the Śrīmandira still follows this, no one else in the world can.

This means two things: 1) all the *vidhis* in the *Skanda Purāṇa* for Puruṣottamakṣetra may not be fully followed elsewhere; and 2) an *ācārya* decided that a *śāstra vidhi* had to be adjusted or not followed. Otherwise, the Ratha-yātrā could only be performed in Puri and nowhere else. Our Prabhupāda had to make similar adjustments to the *śāstra vidhis* not only for Ratha-yātrā but for many other things.

Prabhupāda himself explained the principle by which he made such adjustments. First, fix the mind on Kṛṣṇa, then all the rules and regulations of Vaidika Sanātana Dharma will follow. This is confirmed in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.1.32), *tasmāt kenāpyupāyena manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet*, and also in the

Padma Purana: *smartavyaḥ satatam viṣṇur vismartavya na jātucit, sarve vidhi-niṣedāḥ syur etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ.*

Prabhupāda once said, “I did not give too much stricture on this point because by such stricture they might be annoyed, and whatever Krishna Consciousness they are trying to develop might have been checked.”

Hence, if Prabhupāda had directed his disciples to observe the Ratha-yātrā on dates other than the Puri date, and he sometimes did, then he did so according to this principle—*manaḥ krsne niveśayet.* As a *śiṣṭa*, he decided that any *śāstra vidhi* enjoining a date for the Ratha-yātrā’s could be adjusted or set aside in order to give people a chance to first remember Jagannātha and be elevated to the stage of becoming authentic followers of Vaidika Sanātana Dharma.

Prabhupāda’s Successful Application of Dharma in Adhārmika Countries

By Vidvan Gauranga Das

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda was instructed by his spiritual master, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, to spread the teachings of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam to the Western world. To prepare, he translated and annotated the Bhāgavatam’s first Skandha into English and carried copies with him to America in 1965. He was confident that even those immersed in tamogūṇa and rajo-gūṇa could attain spiritual progress by sincerely following the Bhāgavatam’s teachings. His confidence proved correct, as he successfully founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) within a year, attracting dedicated followers who embraced principles of vairāgya, jñāna, and bhakti.

Prabhupāda’s reliance on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam was well-founded. The Bhāgavatam is the natural commentary on the Vedānta-sūtra, clarifies the Mahābhārata, elaborates on the Gāyatrī mantra, and encapsulates the essence of the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and Purāṇas. It is the most authoritative source on pramāṇa, tattva, sādhyā, and sādhana, making it the ideal scripture for Kali-yuga. Prabhupāda followed the precedent set by his scholarly predecessors in applying its teachings.

When introducing Deity worship in ISKCON, Prabhupāda ensured it aligned with the Bhāgavatam’s emphasis on kīrtana, the propagation of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s glories, as the central practice in Kali-yuga. Similarly, when organizing Jagannātha Ratha-yātrās worldwide, he adjusted the festival’s details to maximize its preaching effectiveness. He determined the dates based on their suitability for spreading Lord Jagannātha’s glories, prioritizing the Bhāgavatam’s principles over rigid adherence to external ritualistic formalities.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam defines dharma as that which is prescribed in the Vedas and adharmā as that which is prohibited. Engagement in dharma should lead to vairāgya, which ultimately should lead to pure devotional service to Kṛṣṇa. Thus, Prabhupāda established absolute renunciation of meat-eating, intoxication, illicit sex, and gambling as prerequisites for initiation into bhakti-yoga. Despite these strict conditions, thousands of sincere followers adopted these principles due to his extraordinary spiritual influence. They also followed a rigorous sādhana-bhakti routine for every day, including chanting the holy names, hearing Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, and engaging in devotional practices.

Prabhupāda emphasized that practicing bhakti-yoga cultivates the four legs of dharma—truthfulness (satyam), purity (śaucam), self-discipline (tapas), and compassion (dayā)—bringing true auspiciousness to the world. By his example, he guided his disciples in following the thirty universal duties outlined in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, which include nonviolence, simplicity, self-control, charity, scriptural study, and devotional service to Kṛṣṇa.

Some critics claim that Prabhupāda did not adhere to a directive in the Skanda Purāṇa regarding the specific tithi for Ratha-yātrā at Puruṣottama-kṣetra. They argue that failing to observe this date globally constitutes sevāparādha. However, this argument is flawed. Firstly, it is debatable whether a regulation meant for Puruṣottama-kṣetra applies universally. Secondly, the Skanda Purāṇa must be understood in light of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, as established by Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī's Tattva-sandarbha. Thirdly, if Prabhupāda had committed a grave offense, how could his sincere followers have achieved verifiable spiritual progress according to the Bhāgavatam's standards? Phalena paricīyate—one is judged by the results of one's actions.

The positively transformative effect of Prabhupāda's teachings is undeniable. His disciples and later followers embraced bhāgavata-dharma, adopting a life of moral and spiritual purity. Their success has convinced impartial scholars worldwide that Prabhupāda's movement including its Ratha-yātrā practices faithfully adheres to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam's teachings.

Perspectives of Madhva and Ramanuja Scholars on the Uniformity of Ratha-yātrā Dates

By Chaitanya Jivana Das

Introduction

My essay primarily presents the opinions of esteemed scholars from the Madhva and Ramanuja traditions, along with insights from revered experts at Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Tirupati. It explores topics related to *Utsava Vighraha* and *Mūla Vighraha*, the uniformity of *Ratha-yātrā* dates across temples, and other related discussions.

As a resident of Tirupati, I had the privilege of personally meeting three esteemed scholars—two from the Madhva tradition, **Prof. Narayana Pujar** and **Prof. Shri Hari Ācārya**, and one from the Ramanuja tradition, **Prof. K. Devanathan**. The original discussion with them took place in Sanskrit, but in the essay, I have provided the translated versions of their quotations. Below is a brief introduction to these scholars.

Scholar Introductions

K. E Devanathan is the former Vice-Chancellor of Karnataka Sanskrit University, Bangalore, and Shri Venkateshwara Vedic University. An erudite and renowned scholar of *Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedanta*, *Nyaya*, and *Mimamsa*, he has authored and published 23 books, including two international publications. He currently serves as a senior professor of *Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedanta* at Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth (RSV).

Prof. Narayana Pujar is the Head of the Department of *Dvaita Vedanta* at Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth. He received his traditional education in the *gurukula* system at PoornaPrajna Vidyapeetham, where he studied all *Sarvamula Granthas* of Madhvācārya. He has authored several articles on *shastric* topics and has written a few books.

Shri Hari Ācārya, a highly respected scholar in the Madhva community, holds a PhD in Dvaita Vedanta. He is a professor at RSV and conducts online classes on Madhvācārya's Sarva Moola Granthas.

Discussion on Ratha-yātrā Date Uniformity

I asked each of them the same questions and recorded their responses. I will present their opinions, exact words, or quotations from each professor as relevant.

Mūla Vighraha and Utsava Vighraha

When asked about the difference between the *Mūla Vighraha* (primary deity) and the *Utsava Vighraha* (festival deity), as well as whether the *Mūla Vighraha* can be taken out during processions, the professors responded as follows:

K. Devanathan (hereinafter referred as KD) stated: "Traditionally, the *Mūla Vighraha* (main deity), after the *pratiṣṭhāpana* (installation) ceremony, remains permanently fixed inside the *Garbha Griha* (sanctum sanctorum) and is never moved outside. In contrast, the *Utsava Vighraha* (festival or processional deity) is specifically meant for processions and festivals outside the temple." This distinction is clearly mentioned in *Vaikhanasa Agama Shastras* and observed in South Indian temples, including those established by Madhvācārya, Ramanujācārya, and in *Divya Deshams*.

Shri Hari Ācārya (hereinafter referred to as Hari) also reaffirmed the same point: "The primary distinction is that the *Mūla Vighraha* is *achala* (immovable) and remains within the temple's sanctum, allowing devotees to have *darśana* within the temple. The *Utsava Vighraha* alone is taken out of the temple to bless devotees during festivals and processions."

KD stated, "Jagannātha Deities are *Utsava Vighrahas* since they come out during Ratha Yatra. *Mūla Vighrahas*, on the other hand, never leave the *Garbha Griha*."

"In the case of Lord Jagannātha, there is no traditional *Mūla Vighraha* (fixed main deity); instead, there is only a *Mūla Sthānam* (primary sanctum). The Jagannātha deity is a *Chala Vighraha* (movable deity) or *Utsava Vighraha*, brought outside for processions," said Hari.

Worship of Utsava Vighraha Without Mūla Vighraha

The next question posed was whether an *Utsava Vighraha* alone can be worshiped in a temple without a *Mūla Vighraha*. All of the professors answered yes. Narayana Pujar (hereinafter referred to as Narayana) stated, "Worshiping only an *Utsava Vighraha*, without a *Mūla Vighraha*, is acceptable in temples." A relevant example is the Rādhā-Ramaṇa Deities in Vṛndāvana, where only an *Utsava Vighraha* is present and worshiped, with no *Mūla Vighraha*.

Uniformity of Ratha-yātrā Dates

When asked whether the dates of *Ratha Yatra* should be uniform across all temples where Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadra are worshipped, they responded:

Regarding the dates of Ratha Yatra, KD emphasized, "Festival dates can vary even within the same *sampradāya* and *Āgama* traditions. The rituals mentioned in the *Skanda Purāṇa* are not necessarily mandatory for all *sampradāyas* to follow exactly as they are.

For example, in the *Rāmānuja Sampradāya*, different temples observe *Brahmotsavam* on different dates based on local traditions, allowing each temple the flexibility to set its own festival schedule.”

Narayana stated, "In the Madhva Sampradāya, festival dates can vary across temples, with each having the autonomy to decide its own schedule. There is no strict rule requiring all temples to follow the date observed at Udupi Krishna Temple."

He further clarified, "ISKCON follows a different sampradāya and has the freedom to celebrate Ratha Yatra based on its ācāryas' guidance, considering time, place, and circumstances. No Agama Shastra or scriptural authority mandates a universal date for Ratha Yatra or any festival. The notion that the Puri temple can dictate another sampradāya's practices contradicts the principle of sampradāya autonomy.”

He also emphasized, "ISKCON and the Puri tradition belong to different sampradāyas, making ISKCON independent of Puri temple regulations, including those related to Ratha Yatra. This distinction extends to deity worship, customs, and rituals—for example, ISKCON follows the Urdhva Pundra Tilak tradition, while the Puri tradition uses Tripundra Tilak.

Ultimately, the authority to determine festival dates and practices lies with the ācāryas of each *sampradāya*. As a distinct *sampradāya*, ISKCON has full autonomy to establish its own dates and methods of celebration, guided by scriptural interpretation and the instructions of its ācāryas.”

Variations in Worship Rituals

When asked whether the rituals and procedures of deity worship vary from temple to temple, they responded:

Both **Prof. Narayana Pujar** and **Shri Hari Ācārya** stated:

All **Madhva temples** are expected to follow the rituals outlined in the *Tantra Sāraḥ*, the primary scripture for Madhvaites, which is mandatory across all temples. However, minor variations in worship rituals are permitted based on regional customs, the specific deity, and particular circumstances. The rules allow flexibility according to time, place, and situation.

For example, in **Udupi**, if a priest touches a wall, he is required to bathe again, whereas in other locations, such strict regulations may not be enforced, demonstrating this adaptability. Despite these variations, the foundational guidelines for deity worship in the **Madhva tradition** remain firmly rooted in the *Tantra Sāraḥ*.

Rituals in Puri vs. Other Temples

Additionally, Narayana Pujar also stated:

The rituals mentioned in the *Skanda Purāṇa* are specifically applicable to **Puruṣottama Kṣetra (Puri)**.

Narayana explained that the worship procedures detailed in the *Skanda Purāṇa* pertain specifically to the rituals and deities in **Puri**, where residents must strictly follow these rules to avoid incurring sin. However, in other places where **Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadrā** are worshipped, there is no strict requirement to adhere to the same rituals, festival schedules, or elaborate practices observed in **Puri**. Even partial adherence to these traditions outside **Puri** does not lead to sin or any issues.

Shri Hari Ācārya stated, “In places outside **Puri** where **Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadrā** are worshipped, the primary emphasis is on **devotion, fostering community among devotees, and spreading Hari Nāma Sankīrtana**, especially to those unfamiliar with Lord **Jagannātha**. Since these

gatherings outside Puri are devotional rather than formal or official, partial adherence to the original traditions is acceptable.”

The authenticity of Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions regarding the dates of observance of Ratha-yātrā

By Dr. Arjuna Sakha Das

1. Multiple Authorized Dates for Ratha-yātrā

From the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Brahma Purāṇa*, we understand that Ratha-yātrā has been prescribed on various tithis, including Māgha Pañcamī, Caitra Śuklā Aṣṭamī, Āṣāḍha Śuklā Dvitiyā, Uthāna Ekādaśī, Phālguna Pūrṇimā, and the equinox (*viṣuva*). The *Brahma Purāṇa* confirms that celebrating Ratha-yātrā on these dates grants liberation and a place in Viṣṇuloka.

2. Those tithis are not for preparatory activities of the Guṇḍicā Festival

Contrary to some claims, these tithis are not for preparatory activities like chariot construction but are designated specifically for Ratha-yātrā itself. Authorities such as Vācaspati Miśra affirm that Ratha-yātrā should be celebrated on these tithis *independently*.

3. Chariot Construction Begins on Akṣaya Tṛtīyā

The *Vāmadeva Saṁhitā* and *Nīlādri Mahodaya* confirm that the construction of chariots begins on Akṣaya Tṛtīyā in Vaiśākha, not on Caitra Aṣṭamī. This suggests that the tithis mentioned in point 1 are independent dates for Ratha-yātrā.

4. Pañcarātra Śāstra Allows Ratha-yātrā on the Ninth Day of Mahotsava

The Pañcarātra Śāstra (*Praśna Saṁhitā*) states that in all temples, the mahotsava (festival) should be celebrated on the deity installation tithi (date), and the Ratha-yātrā should be performed on the ninth day of the mahotsava. Therefore, all the ISKCON temples where Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadra-devī are being served can celebrate the mahotsava (festival) every year on the deity installation tithi and perform the Ratha-yātrā on the ninth day of the mahotsava.

5. Supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu

The *Skanda Purāṇa* declares that no deity is equal to or greater than Lord Viṣṇu, reinforcing Śrīla Prabhupāda's conclusion.

6. Right of Vaiṣṇava Dīkṣitas to Enter Jagannātha Temple

The *Skanda Purāṇa* states that even a caṇḍāla, upon receiving Vaiṣṇava-dīkṣā and bearing sacred marks, attains the status of a brāhmaṇa initiated into a yajña. Therefore, all initiated Vaiṣṇavas should be allowed to enter the Purī Jagannātha temple, supporting ISKCON's stance on inclusivity.

This evidence collectively supports the flexibility in Ratha-yātrā dates, validates ISKCON's celebrations of Ratha-yātrā in different days.

Sri Vaishnava Scholar and author-Dr. M.A.Alwar

Dr. M A, Alwar is a traditional Sanskrit scholar and professor at Maharaja Sanskrit College, Karnataka Sanskrit University and HOD of theoretical foundations of Ayurveda at the University of Trans-

disciplinary Health sciences & Technology. He also specializes in Sanskrit literature, Nyaya and Visistadvaitavedanta systems of philosophies. He learnt Darsanas from illustrious Guru, Mahamahopadhyaya Panditaratna K.S.Varadacharya, a stalwart scholar dedicated to unearth the hidden truths of the Darsanas and their relevance. MA Alwar is most sought after for his works on specializing in documenting, cataloguing and publishing ancient palm leaf manuscripts on Indian system of medicine, critical edition, translation and publication of over 8 books and 100 plus articles on various works pertaining to inter-disciplinary research of the traditional Indian Knowledge systems.

Meeting with Dr. M.A. Alwar, 16-March-2025, Mysuru

By Sridhara Srinivasa Das

The following are Dr. M.A. Alwar's opinion on the issue related to the dates for Jagannatha Ratha Yatra mahotsava.

1. ISKCON follows Nārada Pañcarātra tradition, which is different from Puri's own traditions. Hence, ISKCON is not bound by Puri temple's regulations, including Ratha Yātrā Mahotsava festival. Even in the event of different temples following the same *āgama* tradition, there can be variations in the observance of specific festivals according to time, place, and circumstances. The numerous Tirupati Bālājī Deities, established all over South India according to either Pañcarātra or Vaikhānasa āgama traditions, have their own Brahmotsava on different dates. Arjita Brahmotsava is a concept wherein a temple may conduct special Brahmotsava festivals upon the requests of sponsors.
2. Dr. Alwar's opinion on Śrī Jagannātha Sevayat Sammillanī's opinion (A 1) regarding the dates for Guṇḍicā Yātrā mentioned in the Skanda Purāṇa:
 - a. Verses II.29.31, 32 recommend 3 dates for conducting the Ratha-Yātrā festival. Absence of prohibition or *niṣedha* is evidence for performing that festival on other dates.
 - b. The section 2 called "Puruṣottama-kṣetra-māhātmya" and hence the rites mentioned in chapters under that section viz. "Chapter 32 - The Rite of Jyeṣṭha Pañcaka," festivals including Guṇḍicā Yātrā described in chapters 33 to 43, and "Chapter 44 - Description of the Jyeṣṭhapañcaka Vrata," are all very specific to the place of Jagannātha Puri Kṣetra. Such detailed rites of festivities are not mandated worldwide wherein Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadrā Deities are installed.
 - c. Skanda Purāṇa is not necessarily compulsory for all *sampradāyas* to adopt "as they are." Not everything mentioned in the Skanda Purāṇa is actually being adopted and followed as it is by any *sampradāya*.
 - d. M.A. Alwar agreed that all the details mentioned in Skanda-Purāṇa are limited to Puri Kṣetra as per *adhyāya-saṅgati-mīmāṃsaka* principle.
3. Regarding Caturdhā Dāru Vighras of JBS as Mūla-vighraha (A 2,3,4):
 - a. According to the Vaikhānasa Āgama śāstras, a Mūla-vighraha is rooted to the ground via Aṣṭabandhanadravyam paste and cannot be moved. (Ref:

<https://tirumalaturupatitraya.in/tirumala/utsavams/astabandana-balalaya-mahasamprokshanam/>)

- b. In case of repair work, the worker comes inside the *garbha-grha* to perform the necessary work.
 - c. When Śrīraṅgam temple was attacked by the Mughals, the Mūla-vigraha was surrounded by a brick chamber.
 - d. *Mūla-vigraha* and *calanti-vigraha* are both presiding deities.
4. Alwar says: the scriptural evidence (A5) fails “grain of rice” test:
- a. Use of *Bhagavad-gītā* 16.24 as an injunction to follow the *śāstras* “as it is” would mean that the Puri temple should be strictly following the *varṇāśrama-dharma* as mentioned in Manu and other *dharma-śāstras*. Even within Puri, no one observes all the rules mentioned of *varṇāśrama-dharma*, not to mention that trying to follow some of the *varṇāśrama-dharma* regulations can lead to conviction under the IPC and being deemed guilty until proven innocent.
 - b. Use of Brahma-sūtra (“*śāstra-yonitvāt*”) is out of context because that *sūtra* clearly is used in the context of establishing that the knowledge of the Supreme Lord is not based on inference but is based on *śāstras*.
5. On the question of whether an Ācārya can adjust the observances of festivals in accordance with *deśa-kāla-sthita* considerations, for example, Śrīla Prabhupāda conducting the Ratha-yātrā in the West on varying dates with the purpose of enabling everyone to chant the Holy Name of the Lord, Dr. Alwar agreed that:
- a. Śrīla Prabhupāda, as a great devotee, a great messenger of Sanātana Dharma, and an Ācārya, travelled worldwide to establish the Hari-Nāma-saṅkīrtana so that people regardless of status and lack of knowledge of Lord Jagannātha could become dedicated Vaiṣṇavas worshipping various forms of Kṛṣṇa.
 - b. The following statements from ŚB 8.23.16 are applicable to ISKCON performing Ratha-yātrā on alternative dates owing to the fact that the chanting of the Holy Name by devotees and onlookers alike is sufficient to nullify all deficiencies:
 - i. *mantratas tantrataś chidraṁ | deśa-kālārha-vastutaḥ || sarvaṁ karoti niśchidraṁ | anusankīrtanaṁ tava ||* [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 8.23.16]
 “There may be discrepancies in pronouncing the mantras and observing the regulative principles, and, moreover, there may be discrepancies in regard to time, place, person and paraphernalia. But when Your Lordship’s holy name is chanted, everything becomes faultless.”
6. Commenting on the newspaper article (<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2013/Nov/08/devotees-wont-be-allowed-to-climb-chariots-says-seer-535217.html>) M.A. Alwar concludes:
- a. Compared to serious śāstric violations regarding allowing the *arcā-vigraha* and *mūla-vigraha* to be touched during the Ratha-yātrā festival, conducting the Ratha-Yātrā festival on alternate dates is certainly not a serious violation.

The following are my specific points:

1. The Bhāgavata perspective of the word saṁkīrtana means congregational chanting of the Holy Name. Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu exemplified this principle of chanting the Holy Name of the Lord during the whole of Guṇḍicā-yātrā. On this basis, it can be stated that the focus of Ratha-yātrā is Hari-Nāma-saṁkīrtana. When we study closely the verses of *Skanda Purāṇa* (II.29.30 to 34), we find that the word *saṁkīrtana* appears in verse 29.30. From the Gauḍīya Ācāryas' explanation of the word saṁkīrtana and Lord Caitanya's personal example, the word saṁkīrtana in verse 29.30 can refer to both the glorification of the Ratha-Yātrā and the congregational chanting of the Holy Names of the Lord, both of which yield one the most cherished goal of human life.

guṇḍicākhyāṁ mahāyātrāṁ prakurvīyāḥ kṣitīśvara | yasyāḥ saṁkīrtanādeva naraḥ pāpādvimucyate
// Sk. Pu II.29.30 ||

Therefore, the statement of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* B 8.23.16 and the Ācāryas' commentaries to that verse state that while following Pañcarātri-vidhi, especially during festivals, any discrepancy due to time, place, and circumstances, the chanting of Hari-Nāma or Holy Name nullifies all such faults.

2. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.4.25, it is stated that women, śūdras, and dvijabandhus are not allowed to hear the Vedas, but are allowed to hear the Mahābhārata, which includes Viṣṇu-sahasranāma and Bhagavad-gītā. Some still contest that *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.4.25 allows the women, śūdras, and relatives of the twice-born to only hear the Mahābhārata and Viṣṇu-sahasranāma, but not actually recite them. Yet, the great authority of recent times among the Advaitins, Kānci Chandrasekhara Śaṅkarācārya, allowed his female disciple M.S. Subbulakshmi and other women to recite Viṣṇu-sahasranāma for the sake of spreading Viṣṇu-sahasranāma chanting on a very large scale.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandrashekharendra_Saraswati_VIII ,
<https://www.indiavine.org/content/topic/1535146-can-ladies-recite-sri-vishnu-sahasranamam/>)

- a. If *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.23.16 is not the basis then what is the śāstric basis for introducing this change?
- b. If not the fact that Ācāryas like Śrīla Prabhupāda can introduce or adjust the śāstric principles in terms of their application, which is not against śāstric injunctions, what is the basis for Kānci Chandrasekhara Śaṅkarācārya to introduce such changes?

M.A. Alwar's opinion (2.b above) regarding the rules and regulations of Ratha-yātrā festival being very specific to Puri Kṣetra is also supported by Puruṣottama Gosvāmī, descendant of Vallabhācārya, Vallabha Sampradāya, in his grantha *Śrī Puruṣottama-granthāvalī* (vol. 5), utsava-prathānaḥ, Jyeṣṭha-māsotsava, Jyeṣṭhābhiṣekotsavaḥ, pg. 185–186. Therein, he comments that the very mention of a particular well under a particular tree wherein the water for ablution is to be drawn means that all details, including the mention of Āṣāḍha Dvītīyā for Ratha-Yātrā mentioned in Section II of the Skanda Purāṇa, are specific to Puruṣottama-kṣetra.

Let's pull the Ratha

By Rama Aprameya Das

1. Deity worship is an integrated part of the traditional Vedic system. The Lord is worshipped by rules governed by *nigamas* (Vedas) and *āgamas* (Tantras).
2. *Nārada Purāṇa* mentions that Śrī Kṣetra Pūjā is according to the system of Pañcarātra.
3. The detailed system of worship has been collected from *śāstras* and formulated into a book by King Gajapati Purushottama Deva in the 15th century. It is called *Gopālārcana-vidhi*, also known as *Nilādri Mahodaya*.
4. It contains a detailed information on the appearance of Jagannātha, His worship and festivals. This book similar to other literatures like *Skanda Purāṇa* are specific to worship and procedures of the Puruṣottama Kṣetra.
5. The discussions of Snāna-yātrā and Rātha-yātrā are detailed from chapters 14.
6. Verse 14.10 highlights the lenience on the rituals. This is further emphasized in 14.11

ततश्चतुर्थं पूजान्ते शयनं रचयेद्धरेः ।
उत्सवेषु च सर्वेषु न काल नियमो भवेत् ॥ - 14.10

Lord Hari is given rest after the fourth worship. There are neither hard and fast rules nor is there a stipulated time for these procedures to be performed.

काल व्यतिक्रमो दोषो नास्त्यत्र नृपसत्तम
मार्कण्डेयं प्रति श्रीमान् भगवान् भूतभावनः । - 14.11

Lord Bhūtabhāvanā tells to Markaṇḍeya Ṛṣi "there is no fault in missing the right time here (in the worship of Jagannātha)".

Hence although *Nilādri Mahodaya* does mention about the *tithis*, it also advocates flexibility.

It has been also quoted from *Nilādri Mahodaya* by the **Puri administration** that *akāla pūjā* will give results to the *rākṣasas*.

कर्तव्याश्चेत् तदा तांस्तु नगृह्णाति स्वयम् ।
तत्सर्वं राक्षसैर्ग्राह्यम् सत्यमेतन्न संशयः ॥

How to understand that the Lord in the *ratha* is not given *śayana*, people offering *akāla āratī* in the night and hug and massage the Lord (some of them may be contaminated also).

The Ratha-yātrās in ISKCON ensure that only *pūjāris* handle the Lord. The Lord is given *śayana* in the night and no *akāla pūjā* is done. If *akāla* just means different dates, it will result in *avyāpti doṣa*.

7. Just like there are two tracks for a train or there are two sides in a chariot (the right and the left side). There is no question of which side is needed.

8. The Puri *paramparā* preserving the tradition and its rituals are the left wheels of Nandighoṣa, and ISKCON by preaching gathering youth force are the right ones.

9. By the influence of Kaliyuga, more and more people are moving away from God.
10. When foreign (Muslim) invaders attacked, they would convert people forcibly. Today the influence is subtle because of the atheistic education system. The rigid Vedic society with its difficult *prayāścittas* provided no entry point for such people who moved away from dharma leading to mass conversions of people.
11. The Pañcarātra Āgamas preached by Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Caitanya Mahāprabhu, his followers like Rasikānanda Prabhu etc., provided an entry point into Vedic dharma for those outside Vedic culture. That greatly arrested the problems of people leaving for adharma that was faced before.
12. This is when the bhakti cult rose all over India. It created a revolution of devotion for Lord Hari.
13. The baton of preaching Bhakti was handed over to Prabhupāda with the turn of the 20th century. He took it all over the world, into uncharted waters and drew the chart.
14. However just recruiting individuals without a strong cultural backing by elders will not help.
15. By preserving the traditions and rituals, the Purushottama kshetra management is doing a great service to preserve the Vedic culture of India.
16. By preaching *Kṛṣṇa bhakti* all over the world, the Krishna consciousness movement is bringing more and more people on the path of bhakti and dharma.
17. When the end result is something good, there has to be some compromise, especially when there are differences.
18. Whereas the Krishna consciousness movement is not pressing for a change in tradition (Vedic or Tantric) that the Puri administration follows, it would be similarly unexpected from them to impose a change in the *pañcarātra sampradāya*.
19. It would similarly not make sense for the Puri administration to propose changes in the process of preaching which the Krishna consciousness movement is doing based on its *pañcharātra āgama śāstras*. Such a preaching is providing an entry point for many youngsters on the path of bhakti.
20. You would be the left wheels of tradition and we would be the right wheels of preaching for the *ratha* of Jagannātha which would then be pulled for His pleasure.
21. Debating on whether tradition is needed or preaching is needed is like debating on whether the left side wheels of the ratha are needed or the right side wheels. That will not make Ratha-yātrā successful.
22. Leniencies in the muhūrtas indicated in texts like Nīlādri Mahodaya do give hints about the mood of Jagannātha.
23. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “*iṣṭāsyām iti me matiḥ.*” One who preaches is very dear to Him.
24. Let your *sampradāya* protect the traditions specific to Śrī Kṣetra. Let us, with the help of our *pañcarātra śāstras*, preach the same, attract more youngsters to the lotus feet of Jagannātha, and in this way, there would be less room for interference in the practices of each sampradāya.
25. Final proposal: Considering the opinions of scholars from different *sampradāyas*, it would make sense to accept that Jagannātha can come out on temple *utsavas* like *rathotsava*, etc., in order to give mercy to all. The festivals at Puri Kṣetra would follow the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Nīlādri Mahodaya* in toto, as the discussions of the festival in those granthas are specific to Puri Kṣetra. The *utsavas* outside the

Puruṣottama Kṣetra don't follow the system in toto, like Nyagrodha Kupa, Snāna Yātrā, Guṇḍicā, Yajña, etc., but are performing *Rathotsavas* (similar to *Brahmotsavas*), which will be guided by the Pañcarātra Āgama Śāstras that the specific *sampradāyas* follow. It would not make any sense for one *sampradāya* to interfere with others and create a disturbance in our *guru-paramparā*, our faith in *ācāryas*, and our zeal for preaching.

Let's not discuss which wheels of the *ratha* are needed and which are not. Since both are needed, let us become the two sides of the *ratha* and let Jagannātha be pulled. "*Jagannātha svāmī nayana-patha-gāmī bhavatu me...*"