

# **Research on Authorized Dates for Observing the Jagannātha Rathayātrā around the world**

**ISKCON Founder-Ācārya His Divine Grace, A.C.  
Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda**

**ISKCON India Scholars Board**

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## **Continuity and Change in ISKCON Jagannātha Ratha-yātra**

Mukunda Datta dasa, ISKCON India Scholars Board

“Tensions arise when a self-consciously traditional movement, fixed by the mammoth literary canon of its founder, is confronted by the ever-changing conditions of time, place, and circumstance.”

These words of the late Tamala Krsna Gosvami<sup>1</sup> perfectly describe what sometimes causes conflict regarding ISKCON’s celebration of Jagannatha Ratha-yatras worldwide. ISKCON has always felt constrained to make time, place, and circumstantial adjustments around the world while attempting to introduce ratha-yatra in diverse, challenging, and sometimes even inimical situations. Sometimes these adjustments were even made by ISKCON’s founder-acarya, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada himself.

The esteemed Sri Jagannatha Temple Administration deserves to hear ISKCON’s justification of such changes at length, with reference to the standard Vaisnava authorities and siddhanta. We understand that ISKCON is primarily a preaching vehicle meant to share with the world the pure devotion taught by Lord

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<sup>1</sup> Gosvami 2012: 86. Tamala Krsna Gosvami was one of the closest and most dedicated and accomplished disciples of His Divine grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Svami Prabhupada, founder-acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. From 1967 on he was involved in or responsible for most of the society’s expansion and management on behalf of Prabhupada, until his own untimely demise in 2002. Always dynamic and at times also controversial, he was uniquely in a position to realize the weight of these words.

Jagannatha, Srimad-Bhagavatam, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and Srila Prabhupada.

I will not to try resolve the fundamentally incompatible philosophical positions taken by the Saṅkara Advaitins and Gaudiya Vaisnavas even though those views are relevant. Neither side will change on these fundamental, incompatible points. Yet there is much both sides have in common. Both accept srutis and smrtis as the topmost authority (sastra-pramana) and believe in the authority of sadachar. And, perhaps most important for this matter, both sides believe that sacred sastras are received from and understood through a self-realized acarya in guru-parampara from the great rishis who have realized the Absolute Truth. These principles of Sanatanaadharma are fundamental, necessary, and common to all Sanatanis. The dissemination of these principles in society at large in all countries all over the world is therefore in the best interest of all Sanatana-dharma-sanghas, despite whatever differences they may have; a rising tide lifts all boats.

To this end, we here attempt to explain how some essential aspects of ISKCON's root tradition relates to ISKCON's celebration of the Ratha-yātrā. ISKCON Founder-Acharya, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada was a self-realized acarya in the guru- parampara from Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, directly in the disciplic line from Srila Rupa Gosvami. We will show that his adjustments to dates of ISKCON Ratha-yatra, and which have been the object of opprobrium from certain quarters, was authorized and fully in line with the conclusions of his Gaudiya Vaishnava parampara. To be brief, will focus on a few

key references from Srimad-Bhagavatam and allied smrtis—even though other references are legion.

A perennial theme in Hinduism is continuity versus change. All major acaryas worked to spread Vedic wisdom far and wide. Any such effort must strictly represent its tradition in order to actually benefit others; every generation must replicate this effort faithfully with no unnecessary changes (*purvaih purvataram krtam*).<sup>2</sup> Likewise, to retain vitality, such effort must also be dynamic enough to continually convey its essential purpose effectively.

The prerogative of an authorized acarya is to translate the abstract principles of sastra into ground-level action that factually elevates people spiritually. It is clear that Prabhupada succeeded in doing this; his efforts have resulted in many thousands of non-Hindus all over the world dedicating their lives to the service of Lord Jagannatha. Unprecedented even among all previous Vedantacaryas, Prabhupada's unique example (and accomplishments) must be appreciated in terms of its situational character, which demands both acumen and a reflective equilibrium.

Regarding continuity and change, it has been said that Prabhupada was “creatively flexible” in his institutional and preaching efforts—and yet at the same time, he was “dogmatically conservative” regarding theological concerns.<sup>3</sup> This clearly represents what he learned from the last century or so of his own predecessor acaryas—especially, Bhaktivinoda

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<sup>2</sup> Bhagavad-gita, 4.15.

<sup>3</sup> Gosvami 2012: 87-113.

Thakura and Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, who envisioned organized Vaisnava preaching efforts comparable to that day's Christian missionary models.<sup>4</sup>

Prabhupada's personal purity and theological integrity led to his astonishing success. Prabhupada insisted not only on his disciples' full dedication to a life of devotion to Krishna, but also that his disciples simultaneously follow a strict moral code grounded in the brahminical principles of the Puranas and dharma-shastras.

One time, some of Prabhupada's disciples had rented a building in Texas, then a very conservative Christian culture. The neighbors raised complaints about the devotees, who they accused of being a public nuisance by singing loud songs (chanting Hare Krishna, etc.). The police came to take action against them, but the landlady of the property herself spoke favorably of them. She told the police, "They don't drink or smoke. They don't bring girls home. They are vegetarian, and they are also very clean." There many other such anecdotes, but today our time is too limited. However the transformation of Prabhupada's foreign disciples was perceptible, and to a great extent appreciated, by their own countrymen. This appreciation shows that the principles of Sanatana-dharma are universal.

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<sup>4</sup> Bhaktivinoda Thakura was magistrate in Puri. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura was born there, and later became Prabhupada's own guru.

Another essential part of Prabhupada’s success was his own strict adherence to shastra. His motto for ISKCON was: “Books are the basis. Preaching is the essence. Utility is the principle. Purity is the force.” He wrote to a disciple:<sup>5</sup>

Our preaching stands solid on these books. No other movement or cult has such vast background of authority, so we are not afraid to challenge anyone and everyone to defeat their philosophy on the basis of that authority. Krishna appreciates such strong preachers as His dearest servants. . . .<sup>6</sup>

In disseminating Kṛṣṇa-bhakti, Prabhupada also clearly inherited his intensity and innovation from his gurus. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami in particular has been described as “uncompromising in principles” yet “versatile in practice;”<sup>7</sup> his radical diligence and ingenuity even made him controversial in the early 20th century.<sup>8</sup> Yet without his example and very forceful instructions, few outside India could have ever accepted Lord Jagannātha.

Prabhupada’s utilitarian spirit faithfully represented a principle well-known to Rupa Gosvami—utilizing everything possible in devotional service by those with the wisdom and devotion to

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<sup>5</sup> Upendra dasa, on December 8, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> C.f., *Bhagavad-gīta*, 18.68-69.

<sup>7</sup> Svami, 2009. 157.

<sup>8</sup> Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Prabhupada was criticized because in order to reach distant audiences, he sometimes travelled in automobiles—something unheard of for a sannyasi at that time. When preaching outside the matha, he sometimes also dressed almost like European gentlemen whose association he sought rather than shunned; he reasoned that even if such audiences were initially attracted by such superficialities, they would eventually mature through hearing from and associating with advanced and genuinely unattached devotees.

appreciate such potential. Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu (1.2.256) says:

prapancikataya buddhya  
hari-sambandhi-vastunah  
mumuksubhih parityago  
vairagyam phalgu kathyate  
anasaktasya visayan  
yatharham upayunjatah  
nirbandhah krsna-sambandhe  
yuktam vairagyam ucyate

When persons eager to achieve liberation renounce things related to Lord Hari considering them material; their renunciation is called incomplete. But given that they are related to Krsna, appropriately engaging such things without attachment is called proper renunciation.

The ramifications of this principle remained widely unknown until the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century; Bhaktivinoda Thakura certainly saw the need to rectify that lacuna,<sup>9</sup> and trained his son to become the accomplished preacher Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. He in turn saw like potential in Abhayacarana De,<sup>10</sup> instructing him to preach to the English speaking world and print books on the science of Krsna.

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<sup>9</sup> At that time that he could hardly find a single copy of Caitanya-caritamrta anywhere in Bengal.

<sup>10</sup> This was the family name of ISKCON founder and acarya, His Divine grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.



Such “yukta-vairagya” potentially applies to everything in this world—including ratha-yatra. ISKCON’s global Ratha-yatras cannot always be celebrated strictly according to Puri conventions. When Prabhupada improvised a ratha-yatra<sup>11</sup> in order to engage the citizens of San Francisco in Krsna-bhakti, that first-ever Western ratha-yatra in 1967 used a decorated flatbed truck instead of the traditional ratha; this was simply what could be done. But Prabhupada’s primary concern was that such efforts always strictly conform to its spiritual essence: pure devotional service unto Lord Krsna. The ever-changing demands of global preaching usually necessitate such adjustment, while the paramount interest is to compassionately engage everyone, even nondevotees, in as much spiritually uplifting activity as possible.

This principle of “yukta-vairagya” was applied by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu Himself. While spreading the sankirtana movement all over the world, some would oppose Him. Lest they disqualify themselves from accepting His message, Mahaprabhu decided to take sannyasa at the young age of 24—even though sastra technically prohibits sannyasa in Kali-yuga. The sannyasa order was at that time respected, so people would first offer their namaskara to him as a sannyasi, and thus benefit themselves.

In this regard, Prabhupada comments<sup>12</sup>:

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was an ideal *ācārya*.

An *ācārya* is an ideal teacher who knows the purport of the revealed scriptures, behaves exactly according to their

<sup>11</sup> Even in his childhood, he was known to organize small ratha-yatras among the neighborhood children.

<sup>12</sup> Sri Caitanya-caritamrita, Adi-lila, 7.37

injunctions and teaches his students to adopt these principles also. As an ideal *ācārya*, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu devised ways to capture all kinds of atheists and materialists. Every *ācārya* has a specific means of propagating his spiritual movement with the aim of bringing men to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, the method of one *ācārya* may be different from that of another, but the ultimate goal is never neglected. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī recommends:

*tasmāt kenāpy upāyena manañ kṛṣṇe niveśayet  
sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syur etayor eva kiñkarāḥ*

An *ācārya* should devise a means by which people may somehow or other come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. First they should become Kṛṣṇa conscious, and all the prescribed rules and regulations may later gradually be introduced. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we follow this policy of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Yet even from a purely ritualistic point of view, this adjustment has scriptural sanction in Srimad-bhagavatam (4.8.54):

*mantreṇānena devasya  
kuryād dravyamayīm budhaḥ  
saparyām vividhair dravyair  
deśa-kāla-vibhāgavit*

This [mantra: om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya] is the twelve-syllable mantra for worshiping Lord Kṛṣṇa. One should install the physical forms of the Lord, and with the

chanting of the mantra one should offer flowers and fruits and other varieties of foodstuffs exactly according to the rules and regulations prescribed by authorities. But this should be done in consideration of place, time, and attendant conveniences and inconveniences.

Prabhupada's commentary clearly demonstrates how he understands the words *deśa-kāla-vibhāga-vit*: he explains that such efforts cannot remain stereotyped, nor exactly the same everywhere. He says, "One has to consider the particular time, country and conveniences. What is convenient in India may not be convenient in the Western countries." Moreover, "If someone does go and preach, taking all risks and allowing all considerations for time and place, it might be that there are changes in the manner of worship, but that is not at all faulty according to *śāstra*." Then he also cites Viraraghavacarya: "Caṇḍālas, or conditioned souls who are born in lower than śūdra families, can also be initiated according to circumstances. The formalities may be slightly changed here and there to make them Vaiṣṇavas."

Prabhupada's commentary then continues:

Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu recommends that His name should be heard in every nook and corner of the world. How is this possible unless one preaches everywhere? The cult of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu is *bhāgavata-dharma*, and He especially recommends *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, or the cult of *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. He recommends that every Indian, considering this task to be *para-upakāra*, or welfare activity, take the Lord's message to other

residents of the world. . . . The principle that only Indians and Hindus should be brought into the Vaiṣṇava cult is a mistaken idea. There should be propaganda to bring everyone to the Vaiṣṇava cult. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is meant for this purpose.

Undeniably, Prabhupada realized this. But moreover, his above words make the very purpose of ISKCON clear.

A relevant consideration here is that in Kali-yuga, Deity worship (arcana) is subordinate to the yuga-dharma, hari-nama-sankirtana, such that any flaw in the former is erased by the latter (Srimad-bhagavatam 8.23.16):

mantratas tantrataś chidraṁ  
deśa-kālārha-vastutaḥ  
sarvaṁ karoti niśchidram  
anusaṅkīrtanaṁ tava

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.

Statements like this one don't condone deliberate or needless neglect of arcana-vidhi, but they do contextualize those vidhis by emphasizing the primacy nama-sankirtana. Prabhupada was primarily interested in encouraging people to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa—anywhere, everywhere, and always—and he practically saw how this yuga-dharma is the most effective spiritual means for all people; traversing the globe fourteen times in ten years, he

witnessed its spectacular effects on diverse peoples' lives. We can even say that Prabhupada's entire interest in establishing ratha-yatra globally—or in doing anything else—was simply to engage others in this way.

As indicated above, an acarya must somehow or other find the most appropriate ways and means to bring people to God consciousness.

Caitanya Mahaprabhu especially requested all Indians to fully assimilate Krsna consciousness, and to then help the rest of the world do likewise.<sup>13</sup> Being virtually the only Indian willing to take that responsibility to an international level in the late twentieth century, Prabhupada was uniquely qualified as an acarya.<sup>14</sup> The results of his effort fairly proves this, but Caitanya-caritamṛta confirms:

kali-kalera dharma—krsna-nama-sankirtana  
krsna-sakti vina nahe tara pravartana

The fundamental religious system in the Age of Kali is the chanting of the holy name of Krsna. Unless empowered by Krsna, one cannot propagate the sankirtana movement.

taha pravartaila tumi,—ei ta 'pramana'  
krsna-sakti dhara tumi,—ithe nahi ana

<sup>13</sup> Caitanya-caritamṛta, *Adi-lila*, 9.41.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, other sources also verify Prabhupada's authority as an acarya; cf., *Apastamba-sutra*, 1.1.1.14, *Srimad-bhagavatam* 7.11.7, *Manu-samhita* 2.140, etc., etc.

You have spread the sankirtana movement of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore it is evident that You have been empowered by Lord Kṛṣṇa. There is no question about it.

On these lines, Prabhupada shares his own guru's comments:

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura explains that unless one is directly empowered by the causeless mercy of Kṛṣṇa, one cannot become the spiritual master of the entire world (jagad-guru). . . . The true acarya presents Kṛṣṇa to everyone by preaching the holy name of the Lord throughout the world. Thus the conditioned souls, purified by chanting the holy name, are liberated from the blazing fire of material existence.<sup>15</sup>

As such, since the founder-acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness has given his deliberated instructions and example regarding its celebration of ratha-yatra, his opinion warrants deferential respect instead of criticism. At the very least, one cannot expect his disciples and followers to shift their allegiance to anyone or anything else.

As a final evidence to show that Prabhupada was empowered by his own guru and by Krishna, here is a report from 1970 as to how the American people so warmly received Lord Jagannatha at His Ratha-yatra:

Rathayatra festival was celebrated in three major cities—San Francisco, London and Tokyo—with great pomp and

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<sup>15</sup> Caitanya-caritamṛta Antya-līla 7.11-12

grand success. The transcendental festivities organized for large public participation have drawn admirable comments from the city authorities regarding their unprecedented joyous nature shared by otherwise unmanageable numbers of people. The San Francisco Rathayatra was given all facility by the full cooperation of the City and public advertisement was extended by the City via the newspapers, radio and television and posters in all the public transportation vehicles as well as large banners lining the main streets. Over 20,000 persons attended for a full day of chanting and dancing as they eagerly drew the Ratha cars five miles to the sea. At the end of the procession Prasadam was sumptuously distributed to everyone and the distribution of Prasadam was extended through the next several days. Also at the end of the procession route a capacity attendance filled a standing auditorium to attentively hear the spiritual master speak. His reception was well mannered and very enthusiastic including participation in dancing sankirtana.<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted that at this time, there was hardly an Indian diaspora in America. The 20,000 people in the letter are all Americans. No acarya before or after Prabhupada has enthused foreigners to take up devotion to Jagannatha on the same scale Prabhupada did. This is further testament to Prabhupada's having received the mercy of his own guru and that of Jagannatha to spread the Harinama Sankirtana Movement and

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<sup>16</sup> Prabhupada, letter to Nevatiaji, 16 July 1970.

Lord Jagannatha's glories all over the world, in every town and village.

Genuine authorities concur, and most of them immediately quote the following time-tested guideline from Mahabharata:

tarko 'pratiṣṭhaḥ śrutayo vibhinnā  
 nāsāv ṛṣir yasya mataṁ na bhinnam  
 dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām  
 mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ

Argument is baseless; even the śrutis vary. One whose opinion doesn't differ isn't [even considered] a ṛṣi. The truth of religious principles is hidden in the heart of a self-realized person. Whatever path the mahajana has taken—that is the real path.<sup>17</sup>

Considering all of the above points, and especially given the paucity of time allotted to us today, it seems eminently reasonable and necessary that ISKCON and SJTA may discuss this topic further in order to consider all these statements—provided this final principle (i.e., fidelity to guru and parampara) is first respected by all those concerned. After all, ISKCON's success is due entirely to faithful obedience to its gurus, especially Prabhupada. We thus hope to resolve any undue conflict.

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<sup>17</sup> Vana-parva 313.117



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## Did Prabhupāda approve of dates for Rathayātrā not mentioned in śāstra?

By Kṛṣṇa-kīrti Dāsa

Since 1967, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), established by its Founder-Ācārya A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, has arranged for and celebrated the Jagannātha Rathayātrā in a grand fashion in thousands of locations throughout the world. While Prabhupāda's attendance at these festivals was on or near the traditional date given in *śāstras* such as the *Skanda Purāṇa*, his other centers sometimes observed the festival on dates that had no apparent sanction in *śāstra*. To some followers of *Sanātana Dharma*, this appears to be against *śāstra* and tradition.

From this perception a doubt arises: Did Prabhupāda sanction these unorthodox dates? The short answer is, "yes, he did." But he also chose dates in accordance with *śāstra* and tradition. He did both.

An eye-witness during the planning for ISKCON's first Rathayātrā in San Francisco in 1967 noted the following:

The Swami [Prabhupāda] consulted his lunar calendar and chose a date: In 1967, Krishna and His brother and sister will go to the beach on July 9 and vacation there until July 16.<sup>1</sup>

This date, July 9, happens to be the exact date on which the Rathayātrā in Puri was held that same year. And subsequent festivals attended by Prabhupāda were on or near the day the Rathayātrā was held in Puri.

But Prabhupāda also instructed his disciples to observe the Rathayātrā festival at other times. For some temples, Prabhupāda recommended the Rathayātrā be celebrated in the month of January-February.

In a letter to his disciple Riddha Dāsa, dated 15 June 1976, Prabhupāda wrote:

Concerning the Rathayatra festival, you can hold it in the warm months, just like in Melbourne, the festival is held in January. Pusta Krsna Swami is going to arrange to have Jagannatha Deities sent from Puri if there is no one expert enough to make Jagannatha Deities in South Africa.

The January-February time recommended is a half-year from the date of the Aśadha-shukla-dvitiyā (June-July), the date given in the *Skanda Purāṇa*. The adjustment appears to have been made to make it better attended by the local people, because mid-Summer in the Northern Hemisphere is mid-Winter in the South.

Prabhupāda also recommended dates primarily for ensuring that one Rathayātrā festival not interfere with the attendance of a Rathayātrā conducted in a neighboring city. In a letter to Rāmeśvara Dāsa, dated 17 April 1977, Prabhupāda recommended observing the Rathayātrā on Janmāṣṭamī day.

Why not hold the Rathayatra on Janmastami? It comes at about the same time as you are planning and it will be very much appreciated. For Gaura-Nitai alone, Rathayatra is not at all recommended because They are playing the part of devotees. But as you are having three large carts you may arrange the following: Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai in the first ratha, Sri Sri Radha-Krsna in the second ratha and Sri Jagannatha, Balarama and Subhadra in the third ratha. I have received a letter from Caru dasa from Berkeley. He is worried that due to your Rathayatra no devotees will attend the San Francisco Jagannatha festival. This must not happen. Due to competition one program should not be diminished for

<sup>1</sup> Shyamasundara Dasa, *Chasing Rhinos with the Swami* (Bhaktivedanta Library Services, 2025), 127.

another. San Francisco Jagannatha festival is established for many years, and it must be maintained and increased in the same grand style. As far as possible all of the devotees should attend it, as has been done in the previous years. You may also hold Rathayatra as described above in Los Angeles. In this way both festivals can be performed very grandly.

Although Prabhupāda himself chose dates for observing Rathayātrā according to *śāstra* and tradition, he also sometimes instructed his disciples to observe it on other dates. Since Prabhupāda's time more than 50 years ago, his disciples and granddisciples have followed his example in planning the observance of the Rathayātrā festival all over the world.

## Prabhupāda as a Śiṣṭa

As to Prabhupāda's own authority, he functioned as a *śiṣṭa-brāhmaṇa*. As per *Manu-saṁhitā* 12.108 – 109, a *śiṣṭa-brāhmaṇa* is one who is sufficiently faithful and learned in Vedic literature and who, in the absence of evidence from the *śrutis* and *smṛtis*, has the authority to say what is dharma. As per tradition, Prabhupāda in composing his own books went to great lengths to quote many *śāstras* and great *ācāryas* to substantiate his message. In his commentary to Bhagavad-gītā 17.15 (*anudvegakaraṁ vākyam*. . .), he says, "The process of speaking in spiritual circles is to say something upheld by the scriptures. One should at once quote from scriptural authority to back up what he is saying." The entire corpus of his writing and recorded conversations exemplify this principle. His translations and commentaries on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Śrī Īsopaniṣad*, and so many other classic *śāstras* should leave no doubt as to his qualification.

Those who find some doctrine or statement of Prabhupāda's to be discordant with their own understanding should consider that on many points there has always been disagreement among even the most learned followers of the Vedas. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa at the start of the eighteenth chapter of the *Gītā* (18.3) gives an example of this, wherein he notes that some say sacrifice, charity and penance should be given up as faulty and that others say they should never be given up. *Nāsāv ṛṣir yasya mataṁ na bhinnam*.

As an *ācārya*, Prabhupāda had to make decisions in light of circumstances that in *śāstra* and tradition were unprecedented. Such circumstances include observing the Ratha-yātrā festival in countries outside of India among people who are not followers of Vedic principles, in order to make them followers of Vedic principles. In order to obtain success in his preaching, Prabhupāda necessarily had to adjust many rules and regulations according to the Sanātana Dharma principle of *yukta-vairagya*, which our senior colleague Mukunda-datta Prabhu has already explained at length in his own essay.

## Harināma saṅkīrtana is the heart of Rathayātrā

Prabhupāda gave more importance to celebrating the Rathayātrā in as grand a fashion as possible than he did to dates stipulated in *śāstra*. Why? It is because *saṅkīrtana* is the the most important aspect of the Rathayātrā.

The *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā*, thirteenth chapter describes how Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu observed the Rathayātrā. From the description, it is evident that the harināma saṅkīrtana conducted by Mahāprabhu Himself was the heart of Lord Jagannātha's Rathayātrā. It also happens to be the yuga-dharma.

In the chapter, it is said that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu arranged seven ecstatic saṅkīrtana groups, each with singers, dancers, and two mṛdaṅga players, producing a “tumultuous” sound that “filled the three worlds.” Devotees adorned with “flower garlands and sandalwood pulp” experienced such joy during the saṅkīrtana that tears fell “like rain.” Moving among the groups, the Lord chanted “Hari, Hari!” and proclaimed, “All glories to Lord Jagannātha!” Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself appeared *simultaneously* in all the seven kīrtana groups, and only the most confidential devotees of the Lord could witness this miracle.

Early in the chapter, in describing the Ratha itself, it is said:

Everyone was astonished to see the decorations on the Ratha car. The car appeared to be newly made of gold, and it was as high as Mount Sumeru.<sup>2</sup>

In his commentary to this text, Prabhupāda notes how people today in other countries are similarly astonished with the Ratha’s appearance.

In the year 1973 there was a gorgeous Ratha-yātrā festival in London, England, and the car was brought to Trafalgar Square. The London daily newspaper *The Guardian* published a front-page photo caption: “ISKCON Ratha-yātrā is rival to the Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square.” The Nelson Column is a very impressive statue of Lord Nelson and can be seen from a good distance. Just as the residents of Purī compared the Ratha-yātrā car to Mount Sumeru, the residents of London considered the car rival to the Nelson Monument.

Also described is Lord Jagannātha’s own satisfaction with the saṅkīrtana:

Everyone was astonished by the dancing of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and even Lord Jagannātha became extremely happy to see Him. The car came to a complete standstill and remained immobile while Lord Jagannātha, with unblinking eyes, watched the dancing of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. The goddess of fortune, Subhadrā, and Lord Balarāma both felt great happiness and ecstasy within their hearts. Indeed, they were seen smiling at the dancing.<sup>3</sup>

Although important events like Pāhandi Bijē, the procession of Lords Jagannātha, Baladeva and Subhadrā Devī from the mandir to the Ratha are also described, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s performance of *saṅkīrtana* leaves no doubt as to the superlative importance of *harināma* in the Rathayātrā.

## Some vidhis are more important than others

In conducting a ritual or observing some event, it is the tradition of Vaidika Sanātana Dharma that an *ācārya* decides that some *vidhi* enjoined in *śāstra* is adjusted in some way or even set aside. A likely example of this is found in the Skanda Purāṇa. In chapter 33 of the *Puruṣottama-kṣetra Māhātmya* in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, instructions for how the entire *yātrā* should be observed are given. And instructions for how the Ratha should be built are given at the very beginning.

It begins like this (texts 2 – 10)<sup>4</sup>:

The third day in the bright half of the lunar month of Vaiśākha is destructive of sins. If it is in conjunction with the constellation Rohiṇī, the king should perform the *Saṅkalpa*-rite (for the following *Vrata*):

Remaining pure (in body and mind), he should choose a preceptor as well as one or three carpenters whose work has been seen (and found all right). He should choose the carpenter with great respect, offering garments, ornaments etc. for the purpose of *Vanayāga* (sacrifice in the forest).

Along with the carpenter he should go to the forest full of excellent trees. (The preceptor) who is conversant with Mantras should repeat *Mantrarāja* and kindle the fire in the middle of the forest. He should then offer one

<sup>2</sup> Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta *Madhya-līlā*, ch. 13, text 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, texts 98 – 100.

<sup>4</sup> “Wisdom Library.” *The Skanda Purana*, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/the-skanda-purana/d/doc370753.html>. . Accessed 14 Mar. 2025.

hundred and eight *Āhutis*. He should (then) smear the roots of the trees severally with ghee mixed with the residue of ghee from the *Homa*.

He should offer oblation to the Guardians of Quarters, and animals unto the Kṣetrapāla. Then he should offer a hundred *Āhutis* to the larger forest-tree in the form of cooked rice mixed with milk.

Thereafter, the preceptor should take up the axe. Repeating the Mantra and meditating upon Garuḍa-embled Lord (Viṣṇu), he should cut off small bits from the roots of the trees and the places where the sacred ghee was smeared.

In the midst of sounds of musical instruments and auspicious songs the preceptor, after engaging the carpenter there, should return home.

Or (he should stay there) and when the logs of wood are (hewn) and kept in their places ready for the work of making the chariot, he should consecrate them in accordance with the injunctions for the consecration mentioned (in the scriptural texts). He should perform the rite in the fire assigned (for it).

It is self-evident that building Jagannātha's Ratha in this way is an onerous, complicated, and very expensive undertaking. Nor does the chapter appear to provide an option for making the cart in another way. This is what is enjoined in the śāstra. Even if the Śrī Mandir strictly follows this injunction to the letter, no one else in the world can.

Two important implications follow from this observation. One is that the rules and regulations found in the *Skanda Purāṇa* pertaining to Jagannātha's Rathayātrā apply specifically to Puruṣottamakṣetra, as others elsewhere simply cannot be expected to follow such injunctions to the letter. My colleague Caitanya Jīvan Prabhu had mentioned to me that for the worship of Kṛṣṇa in Udupi, their regulations are such that if a *pūjārī* touches the wall inside the mandir, then he must go take bath before he can do *pūjā*. So, to worship Udupi Kṛṣṇa in other places outside of Udupi in a like manner, adjustments necessarily must be made to even allow for it, as such a standard is hardly possible anywhere else. My colleague will say more about this in his own presentation.

The other implication is that an *ācārya* has the authority to adjust the rules and regulations of the *śāstras* even where no allowance for the adjustment is self-evidently manifest in the *śāstras* themselves. This necessarily means that some rules and regulations in the *śāstras*, or from tradition, are more important than others. There is hierarchy among the *vidhis* and *niṣedhas* in the *śāstras*; it is not that every rule is as important as every other rule. And the *ācārya*, who is an expert in understanding these rules, applies these rules according to these principles, just like a physician who prescribes medicine according to the need of the patient.

## Fixing the mind on Kṛṣṇa is the most important vidhi

Perhaps the most important rule that Prabhupāda applied throughout his mission in the Western countries is *tasmāt kenyaṅpyupāyena manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet*, which means, in whatever way possible, one must fix the mind on Kṛṣṇa. This comes from *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 7.1.32, in which Śrī Nārada Muni explains to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira how it was possible that Śiśupāla, who from his own birth had been a great blasphemer of Kṛṣṇa, nonetheless attained liberation despite being otherwise fit for going to Hell.

In the *śloka* previous to this, Nārada Muni gave five examples of people who were elevated on account of thinking of Kṛṣṇa. His examples include the Gopīs of Vṛndāvana by lusty desire; Kāmsa by fear; Śiśupāla and others by envy; the Vṛṣṇis, Kṛṣṇa's own family members, out of family affection, the Pāṇḍavas, out of personal affection, and the general body of devotees, like Nārada, by means of bhakti yoga. Mahārāja Vena, however, went to Hell, because he could not fix his mind on Kṛṣṇa in any of these five ways.

When explaining or defending some policy of his, along with citing *manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet*, Prabhupāda often cited this śloka from Padma Purāṇa:

*smartavyaḥ satataṁ viṣṇur vismartavyo na jātucit  
sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syur etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*

Lord Viṣṇu should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the śāstras should be the servants of these two principles.

The hierarchy here is self-evident. The most important rule is to always remember Lord Viṣṇu and never forget Him. All other rules are subordinate to this rule. In the effort to make persons who are not followers of Vedic principles followers of Vedic principles, this rule is very practical. Prabhupāda induced non-devotees to simply chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, to dance in saṅkīrtana, to eat sumptuous Kṛṣṇa prasādam, and to hear something about Kṛṣṇa. By explaining who is Kṛṣṇa and how wonderful He is, people become attracted to Kṛṣṇa and become Kṛṣṇa-bhaktas.

Once ordinary people become Kṛṣṇa's devotees, they next want to live their lives according to His instructions. No matter whether someone was born in India or not, at this stage he has faith in Kṛṣṇa. He now takes Kṛṣṇa's instruction to heart and wants to follow all the rest of His instructions—*tasmāc chāstraṁ pramāṇam te kāryākārya-vyavasthitau*. He believes it because he has faith in Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa said so. It's that simple.

Prabhupāda explained this policy many times. In his commentary to *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Adi-līlā, 7.37*, he writes:

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was an ideal *ācārya*. An *ācārya* is an ideal teacher who knows the purport of the revealed scriptures, behaves exactly according to their injunctions and teaches his students to adopt these principles also. As an ideal *ācārya*, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu devised ways to capture all kinds of atheists and materialists. Every *ācārya* has a specific means of propagating his spiritual movement with the aim of bringing men to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, the method of one *ācārya* may be different from that of another, but the ultimate goal is never neglected. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī recommends:

*tasmāt kenāpy upāyena manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet  
sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syur etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*

An *ācārya* should devise a means by which people may somehow or other come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. First they should become Kṛṣṇa conscious, and all the prescribed rules and regulations may later gradually be introduced. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we follow this policy of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. For example, since boys and girls in the Western countries freely intermingle, special concessions regarding their customs and habits are necessary to bring them to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The *ācārya* must devise a means to bring them to devotional service. Therefore, although I am a *sannyāsī* I sometimes take part in getting boys and girls married, although in the history of *sannyāsa* no *sannyāsī* has personally taken part in marrying his disciples.

In the context of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, although the śāstra has said *sannyāsa* is forbidden in the Age of Kali, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu nonetheless accepted it. And today, many people still accept it despite the explicit prohibition.

Similarly, Prabhupāda, noting differences in the culture in the Western countries also had to make some adjustment, just so that the people there would get a chance to fix their minds on Kṛṣṇa. In some cases, he personally had to perform the marriage rites despite being a *sannyāsī*, who, according to śāstra, is forbidden to do such things. Prabhupāda also received criticism for this.

According to the same logic, Prabhupāda also made the decision to observe the Rathayātrā on dates not mentioned in the śāstra. Giving everyone a chance to hear about, talk about, sing about, and remember Kṛṣṇa is the most important principle—*tasmāt kenāpyupāyena manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet*. As per śāstra—*etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*—all other principles are subservient to this. Everything else that is proper follows from this. So, we are not surprised to still be receiving criticism for things that Prabhupāda directed us to do.

# Prabhupāda's Successful Application of Dharma in Adhārmika Countries

by

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[1]

It is a well-known fact that His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (“Prabhupāda” hereafter) was instructed by his spiritual master His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Ṭhākura to spread the teachings of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam to the Western world. In preparation, Prabhupāda began the project of translating and annotating the Bhāgavatam into English, and once he finished his translation and annotation of its first Skandha, he arranged for copies of the same to be brought with him to America in 1965. He was confident that anyone, even those in the West who were absorbed in tamo-guṇa and rajo-guṇa, can, by sincerely following the procedures taught in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, surrender themselves fully to Lord Kṛṣṇa and become free from the influence of the three guṇas of māyā.<sup>1</sup> He was result-oriented through and through, and his confidence was well founded, for he was able to found the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in a year's time with an increasing number of volunteer-disciples who had begun to accept the principles of vairagya, vidyā and bhakti as taught in the Bhāgavatam.<sup>2</sup>

[2]

Prabhupāda's focused dependence on the teachings and methodology of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam was for a number of good reasons: It is an elaborate work. It is the natural commentary (*akṛtrima-bhāṣya*) of the Vedānta-sūtra. It clarifies the Mahābhārata, is an elaborate commentary on the Gāyatrī-mantra, and exhaustively presents the import of the Vedas. It is the sum and substance of the Purāṇas and appears in the format of a Purāṇa.<sup>3</sup> It extracts the essence of the Upaniṣads and is spoken by the topmost and undisputed transcendentalist Śrī

<sup>1</sup> See his poem [Mārkinē Bhāgavata-dharma](#) (“Bhāgavata-dharma in the West”) which quotes Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.17-21: शृण्वतां स्वकथाः कृष्णः पुण्यश्रवणकीर्तनः। हृद्यन्तःस्थो ह्यभद्राणि विधुनोति सुहृत्सताम्॥ नष्टप्रायेष्वभद्रेषु नित्यं भागवतसेवया। भगवत्युत्तमश्लोके भक्तिर्भवति नैष्ठिकी॥ तदा रजस्तमोभावाः कामलोभादयश्च ये। चेत एतैरनाविद्धं स्थितं सत्त्वे प्रसीदति॥ एवं प्रसन्नमनसो भगवद्भक्तियोगतः। भगवत्तत्त्वविज्ञानं मुक्तसङ्गस्य जायते॥ भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः। क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि दृष्ट एवात्मनीश्वरे॥

<sup>2</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.2.43-44: भक्तिः परेशानुभवो विरक्तिरन्यत्र चैष त्रिक एककालः। प्रपद्यमानस्य यथाश्रतः स्युस्तुष्टिः पुष्टिः क्षुदपायोऽनुघासम्॥ इत्यच्युताङ्गिं भजतोऽनुवृत्त्या भक्तिर्विरक्तिर्भगवत्प्रबोधः। भवन्ति वै भागवतस्य राजंस्ततः परां शान्तिमुपैति साक्षात्॥

<sup>3</sup> Garuḍa Purāṇa, quoted in Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī's Tattva-sandarbhā 21: पूर्णः सोऽयमतिशयः। अर्थोऽयं ब्रह्मसूत्राणां भारतार्थविनिर्णयः॥ गयत्रिभाष्यरूपोऽसौ वेदार्थपरिवृंहितः। पुराणानां सामरूपः साक्षाद्भगवतोदितः॥ द्वादशस्कन्धयुक्तोऽयं शतविच्छेदसंयुतः। ग्रन्थोऽष्टादशसाहस्रः श्रीमद्भागवताभिधः॥

Śukadeva Gosvāmī.<sup>4</sup> It is most suitable for the populace of Kali-yuga.<sup>5</sup> It clarifies the teachings of the Itihāsas and all of the other Purāṇas.<sup>6</sup> Thus it is the most authoritative summary of the entire body of Vedic knowledge on pramāṇa, tattva, sādhyā and sādhanā.<sup>7</sup> It has also been analyzed and explained in voluminous detail by a number of his scholarly predecessors.<sup>8</sup>

[3]

And so, when Prabhupāda introduced aspects of Deity worship (*śrī-vigrahārādhanā* or *arcana*) into ISKCON, he naturally made sure that, as a whole, they conformed to the mood, emphasis and balance of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.<sup>9</sup> Of the nine types of kṛṣṇa-bhakti enunciated in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, kīrtana or propagation of the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa is meant to be given a central and primary role, especially in Kali-yuga.<sup>10</sup>

[4]

Consequently, when Prabhupāda introduced Jagannātha Ratha-yātrās in ISKCON around the world, he ensured that the details concerning these festive events were adjusted to maximize the propagation of the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa – the central teaching of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam – *and not the other way around*. Therefore, he took into consideration the dates convenient for preaching the glories of Lord Jagannātha in each locality and arranged the Ratha-yātrā dates.

<sup>4</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 12.13.15: सर्ववेदान्तसारं हि श्रीभागवतमिष्यते । तद्रसामृततृप्तस्य नान्यत्र स्याद्रतिः क्वचित् ॥ 1.2.3: यः स्वानुभावमखिलश्रुतिसारमेकमध्यात्मदीपमतितितीर्षतां तमोऽन्धम् । संसारिणां करुणयाह पुराणगुह्यं तं व्याससूनुमुपयामि गुरुं मुनीनाम् ॥ 1.19.30: स संवृतस्तत्र महान्महीयसां ब्रह्मर्षिराजर्षिर्देवर्षिसङ्घैः । व्यरोचतालं भगवान्यथेन्दुर्ग्रहर्क्षतारानिकरैः परीतः ॥

<sup>5</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.3.43: कृष्णे स्वधामोपगते धर्मज्ञानादिभिः सह । कलौ नष्टदृशामेष पुराणार्कोऽधुनोदितः ॥

<sup>6</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.3.41: सर्ववेदेतिहासानां सारं सारं समुद्धृतम् ॥

<sup>7</sup> Tattva-sandarbhā 22: तदेवं परमार्थविवित्सुभिः श्रीभागवतमेव साम्प्रतं विचारणीयमिति स्थितम् ॥

<sup>8</sup> The seven sandarbhas of Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī – Tattva-, Bhāgavat-, Paramātma-, Kṛṣṇa-, Bhakti-, Prīti- and Krama-sandarbhās – present the most exhaustive analysis of the teachings of Śrī Bhāgavatam conducted till date. In line with this, Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī has presented a detailed commentary on the entire Bhāgavatam. The Tenth Skandha of the Bhāgavatam has additional commentaries by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava leaders: Daśama-ṭippanī by Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī, Laghu Vaiṣṇava-toṣaṇī and Bṛhat Krama-sandarbhā by Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, and Vaiṣṇavānandinī by Śrī Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura presented a summary analysis of the Bhāgavatam in the form of his Bhāgavatārka-marīci-mālā on the topics of pramāṇa, tattva, sādhanā and sādhyā. And Prabhupāda's revered spiritual teacher Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura presented a fine exposition of the Bhāgavatam in Bengali; it included the entirety of Śrī Viśvanātha's and Śrī Madhva's commentaries and translations of portions of the Krama-sandarbhā.

<sup>9</sup> Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī's Bhakti-sandarbhā 274 summarizes the significance of preaching the chanting of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's holy names in Kali-yuga: तदेवं कलौ नामकीर्तनप्रचारप्रभावेणैव परमभगवत्परायणत्वसिद्धिर्दर्शिता ॥

<sup>10</sup> Bhakti-sandarbhā 270-217: कृते यद्भ्यायतो विष्णुं त्रेतायां यजतो मखैः । द्वापरे परिचर्यायां कलौ तद्भरिर्कीर्तनात् (12.3.52) इति । यद्यत्कृतादिषु तेन तेन साधनेन स्यात्, तत्सर्वं कलौ हरिकीर्तनाद्भवतीति । अन्यत्र च — ध्यायन्कृते यजन्यज्ञैस्त्रेतायां द्वापरेऽर्चयन् । यदाप्नोति तदाप्नोति कलौ सङ्कीर्त्य केशवमिति । अत एव — कलिं सभाजयन्त्यार्या गुणज्ञाः सारभागिनः । यत्र सङ्कीर्तनेनैव सर्वस्वार्थोऽभिलभ्यते (11.5.36) । गुणज्ञाः कीर्तनप्रचाररूपं तद्गुणं जानन्तः । अत एव तद्दोषाग्रहणात्सारभागिनः सारमात्रग्रहणाः कलिं सभाजयन्ति । गुणमेव दर्शयति — यत्र प्रचारितेन सङ्कीर्तनेनैव साधनान्तरनिरपेक्षेण तेनेत्यर्थः । सर्वो ध्यानादिभिः कृतादिषु साधनसहस्रैः साध्यः ॥ Bhakti-sandarbhā 273: यदन्यापि भक्तिः कलौ कर्तव्या, तदा तत्संयोगेनैवेत्युक्तम् — यज्ञैः सङ्कीर्तनप्राथैर्यजन्ति हि सुमेधसः (11.5.29) इति । अत्र च स्वतन्त्रमेव नामकीर्तनमत्यन्तप्रशस्तम् — हरेर्नाम हरेर्नाम हरेर्नामैव केवलम् । कलौ नास्त्येव नास्त्येव गतिरन्यथा ॥ इत्यादौ । तस्मात्साधूक्तं कलिं सभाजयन्त्यार्या गुणज्ञाः (11.5.36) इत्यादित्रयम् ॥



This is exactly what followers of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam would need to do, and as the teacher of Bhāgavata-dharma, he did that – successfully.

[5]

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam defines dharma and adharmā as that which is prescribed in the Vedas and that which is prohibited in them respectively.<sup>11</sup> It also notes that engagement in dharma is meant to lead one to vairāgya, which itself is meant to lead one to pure devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa.<sup>12</sup> In response to the question, what is the ultimate essence of all the Vedic scriptures, the answer is given: the essence is engagement in spiritual dharma and this dharma leads one to pure devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Prabhupāda placed absolute renunciation of the most adhārmika activities of meat eating, intoxication, illicit sex and gambling *as prerequisites* for initiation into bhakti-yoga, and yet, his sincere followers, who quickly grew by the thousands by dint of his extraordinary spiritual prowess and purity, complied with this.<sup>14</sup> They also accepted a daily routine life of sādhana-bhakti as taught in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam which included chanting and singing the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa, hearing Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and so on.

[7]

Prabhupāda also often pointed out to his followers that sincere engagement in bhakti-yoga will help them develop truthfulness (satyam), purity (śaucam), self-discipline (tapas) and compassion (dayā), the four legs of dharma, and thus bring about true auspiciousness to the entire world.<sup>15</sup> By his personal example, he also taught his disciples how to carry out the thirty duties that are enlisted by Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam *as common to all human beings*:

These are the general principles to be followed by all human beings: truthfulness, mercy, austerity (observing fasts on certain days of the month), bathing twice a day, tolerance, discrimination between right and wrong, control of the mind, control of the senses, nonviolence, celibacy, charity, reading of scripture, simplicity, satisfaction, rendering service to saintly persons, gradually taking leave of unnecessary engagements, observing the futility of the unnecessary activities of human society, remaining silent and grave and avoiding unnecessary talk, considering whether one is the body or the soul, distributing food equally to all living entities (both men and animals), seeing every soul (especially in the human form) as a part of the Supreme Lord, hearing about the activities and instructions given by the Supreme Personality of Godhead (who is the shelter of the saintly persons), chanting about these activities and instructions, always remembering these activities

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<sup>11</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.40: वेदप्रणिहितो धर्मो ह्यधर्मस्तद्विपर्ययः ॥

<sup>12</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.23.56: नेह यत्कर्म धर्माय न विरागाय कल्पते । न तीर्थपदसेवायै जीवन्नपि मृतो हि सः ॥

<sup>13</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.6: स वै पुंसां परो धर्मो यतो भक्तिरधोक्षजे । अहैतुक्यप्रतिहता ययात्मा सुप्रसीदति ॥

<sup>14</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.17.38: अभ्यर्थितस्तदा तस्मै स्थानानि कलये ददौ । द्यूतं पानं स्त्रियः सूना यत्राधर्मश्चतुर्विधः ॥

<sup>15</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.18.12: यस्यास्ति भक्तिर्भगवत्यकिञ्चना सर्वैर्गुणैस्तत्र समासते सुराः । हरावभक्तस्य कुतो महद्गुणा मनोरथेनासति धावतो बहिः ॥ The four legs of dharma are discussed in Chapter 17 of the First Skandha of the Bhāgavatam.

and instructions, trying to render service, performing worship, offering obeisances, becoming a servant, becoming a friend, and surrendering one's whole self. O King Yudhiṣṭhira, these thirty qualifications must be acquired in the human form of life. Simply by acquiring these qualifications, one can satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead.<sup>16</sup>

[8]

Sometimes there are accusations that Prabhupāda did not carry out a particular directive of a particular scripture, the Skanda Purāṇa, for instance. It has been pointed that Puruṣottama-kṣetra-māhātmya, a portion of the Vaiṣṇava-khaṇḍa of the said Purāṇa, has specified the tithi on which the Ratha-yātrā should take place at Puruṣottama-kṣetra. It is then argued that that should be the tithi for conducting Ratha-yātrā all over the world. Since Prabhupāda didn't conduct the Ratha-yātrās for Jagannātha on that particular tithi, it is alleged to be a grave defect in his mode of worship of Lord Jagannātha, a sevāparādha.

The argument is unsustainable.

First of all, it is debatable whether a directive on how Śrī Jagannātha is to be worshipped and served at Puruṣottama-kṣetra is meant to be applied to places outside of Puruṣottama-kṣetra – in any case, a discussion on this is beyond the scope of this paper, for other papers by other scholars deal with this.

Secondly, the Skanda Purāṇa should be understood not independently or directly, but *in terms of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* for the reasons already mentioned earlier in this paper; interested readers can consult Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī's Tattva-sandarbha.

Thirdly, if Prabhupāda had actually committed such a grave offense as alleged, how is it possible for his sincere followers to have upgraded themselves to a moral, sāttvika and spiritual status in a manner that is verifiable according to the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam? Phalena paricīyate.

[9]

The fact that Prabhupāda's disciples and later followers have accepted a morally and spiritually pure life of bhāgavata-dharma has convinced unbiased scholarly observers throughout the world that *all aspects of Prabhupāda's movement* were genuinely in line with the teachings of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

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<sup>16</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.11.8-12: सत्यं दया तपः शौचं तितिक्षेक्षा शमो दमः । अहिंसा ब्रह्मचर्यं च त्यागः स्वाध्याय आर्जवम् ॥ सन्तोषः समदृक्सेवा ग्राम्येहोपरमः शनैः । नृणां विपर्ययेहेक्षा मौनमात्मविमर्शनम् ॥ अन्नाद्यादेः संविभागो भूतेभ्यश्च यथार्हतः । तेष्व्वात्मदेवताबुद्धिः सुतरां नृषु पाण्डव ॥ श्रवणं कीर्तनं चास्य स्मरणं महतां गतेः । सेवेज्यावनतिर्दास्यं सख्यमात्मसमर्पणम् ॥ नृणामयं परो धर्मः सर्वेषां समुदाहृतः । त्रिशल्लक्षणवात्राजन्सर्वात्मा येन तुष्यति ॥

# Jagannatha Ratha-yatra Festival dates – Vaishnava Scholars' opinion

– Sridhara Srinivasa dasa

In this write-up we will present the opinions of some Vaishnava scholars of recent times and from the recent past on the details of the festivities, observance dates, and other rituals in connection with the Jagannatha Puri Ratha-yatra Mahotsava.

Herein we present the opinions of Vaishnava scholars from Sri Vaishnava and Vallabha sampradayas in addition to including the gaudiya perspective. The Sri Vaishnava perspective is presented by Dr. M.A. Alwar, son of the well-established scholar and initiating acharya M.A Lakshmi Tattacaraya of Melkote, through the personal interview held on 16-March-2025 at Mysuru.

The Vallabha sampradaya opinion is extracted from the writings of Prushottama Goswami (16<sup>th</sup> century), descendant of Vallabhacharya, Vallabha Sampradaya.

The Gaudiya perspective on this topic is presented by my humble self.

## 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.

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

1. ISKCON follows the Narada Pancaratra tradition which is different from Puri's own traditions. Hence, ISKCON is not bound by Puri temple's regulations including Ratha Yatra Mahotsava festival. Even in the event of different temples following the same agama tradition, there can be variations in the observance of specific festivals according to time, place, and circumstances. The numerous Tirupati Balaji Deities, established all over South India according to either Pancaratra or Vaikhansa agama traditions, have their own Brahmotsava on different dates. Arjita Brahmotsava is a concept wherein a temple may conduct special Brahmotsava festivals upon requests of sponsors.
2. Dr. Alwar's review of Shri Jagannatha Sevayat Sammillani's writeup (Annex. 1) regarding the dates for Gundica yatra mentioned in the Skanda Purana:
  - a. Verses II.29.31, 32 recommends 3 dates for conducting the Ratha-yatra festival. Absence of prohibition or nishedhaabhaava is an 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 Gundica yatra described in chapters 33 to 43, and “Chapter 44 - Description of the Jyeṣṭhapañcaka Vrata,” are all very specific to the place of Jagannatha Puri ksetra. Such detailed rites of festivities are not mandated worldwide wherein Jagannatha, Baladeva, and Shubadra Deities are installed.
  - c. Skanda Purana is not necessarily compulsory for all sampradayas to adopt “as they are.” Not everything mentioned in Skanda Purana is actually being adopted and followed as it is by any sampradaya.
  - d. M.A Alwar agreed that all the details mentioned in Skanda-purna are limited to Puri Ksetra as per adhyAya sangati mimAmsaka principle.
3. Regarding Chaturdha Daru Vighras of JBS as Mūla-vighra (A 2,3,4):
    - a. According to the Vaikhanasa Agama sastras, a Mūla-vighra is rooted to the ground via Aṣṭabandanadravyam paste and cannot be moved. (Ref: <https://tirumalatirupatiyatra.in/tirumala/utsavams/astabandana-balalaya-mahasamprokshanam/> )
    - b. In case of repair work the worker comes inside the grabha-graha to perform the necessary work.
    - c. When Sri Rangam temple was attacked by the moguls, the Mūla-vighra was surrounded by a brick chamber.
    - d. Mūla-vighra and chalanti vighra are both presiding deities.
  4. Alwar says: the scriptural evidence (A5) fails “grain of rice” test:
    - a. Use of BG 16.24 as an injunction to follow the sastras “as it is” would be mean that the Puri temple should be strictly following the varnasrama dharma as mentioned in Manu and other dharma sastras. Even within Puri no one observes all the rules mentioned of VAD not to mention that trying to follow some of the VAD-regulations, can lead to conviction under the IPC and deemed guilty until proven innocent.
    - b. Use of Brahma-sutra (“Sastra yonitvat”) is out of context because, that sutra clearly is used in context to establish that the knowledge of Supreme Lord is not based on inference but is based on sastras.
  5. On the question of whether an Acharya can adjust the observances of festivals in accordance with desa-kala-sthitha considerations, for ex. Srila Prabhupada conducting the Ratha-yatra 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. Srila Prabhupada, as a great devotee, a great messenger of Sanatana Dharma, and Acharya, travelled worldwide to establish the Hari Nama sankirtana so that people regardless of status and lack of knowledge of Lord Jagannatha can become dedicated Vaishnavas worshipping variety of Krishna’s forms.
    - b. The following statements from SB 8.23.16 is applicable to ISKCON performing Ratha-yatra on alternative dates owing to the fact that the

chanting of Holy Name by devotees and onlookers alike is sufficient to nullify all deficiencies:

- i. mantratas tantrataś chidraṁ | deśa-kālārha-vastutaḥ || sarvaṁ karoti niśchidraṁ | anusaṅkīrtanaṁ tava || [SB 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 sastric violations in regards to allowing the arca vigraha and Mula vigraha to be touched during Ratha-yatra festival, conducting Ratha yatra festival on alternate dates is certainly not a serious violation.

## Purushottama Goswami, Vallabha Sampradaya

In his grantha Sri Purushottama-granthavali (vol 5), section: utsava-prathanaH, chapter: JyesthamAsotsava, sub-heading: JyesthabhishekotsavaH, on pages 185-186 of the printed edition (2012 AD), Purushottama Goswami analyzes the statements of Brahma Purana and Skanda Purana to establish that the details presented in these puranas, including the days of observances for Ratha-yatra and Snana-yatra, are very specific and mandatory to be observed only in Purushottama ksetra (Jagannatha Puri) and is not mandated for observances outside of Puri Ksetra.

In page 185 of Sri Purushottama-granthavali (vol 5), section: utsava-prathanaH, chapter: JyesthamAsotsava, sub-heading: JyesthabhishekotsavaH, Purushottama Goswami quotes from both the Brahma-purana and Skanda-purana to explain the best prescribed dates for snana-purnima festival:

*jyeṣṭhābhiṣekotsavaḥ*

*jyeṣṭhaśuklapūrṇimāyām tatsamīpe vā jyeṣṭhāyām jyeṣṭhābhiṣekotsavaḥ / taduktam brāhme*

*"jyeṣṭhe māsi ca samprāpte nakṣatre caindradevate,*

*paurṇamāsyām tadā snānam sarvakālam hareḥ dvijāḥ /" iti /*

Jyeshtha Month Festival:

The Jyeshtha Abhisheka Utsava is celebrated on the Jyeshtha Shukla Purnima (full moon day) or when the Jyeshtha Nakshatra is present nearby. This is mentioned in the Brahma Purana:

"When the month of Jyeshtha arrives, along with the Jyeshtha Nakshatra governed by the Moon, On the full moon day, O Brahmins, bathing Lord Hari is always auspicious."

*tathā*

*svaṛṇadharmānuvākena snāpayet puruṣottamam" iti /*

*"paurṇamāsyām sūktatantraīḥ snāpayed vidhivad vibhum" iti ca /*

It is also mentioned:

"One should bathe Lord Purushottama with the recitation of the Swarnadharmanuvaka."  
"On the full moon day, one should ritually bathe the Supreme Lord using sacred hymns as prescribed in the scriptures."

*atra ca paurṇamāsyām iti sāmīpyasaptamī tena dolotsavavadeva etadvyavasthā*

*jñeyā. tithinakṣatrayogaḥ cet praśastataratvam jñeyam*

Here, the phrase "Purnimayam" (on the full moon) refers to the general significance of the Saptami (seventh day), and thus, a similar arrangement as the Dolotsava festival should be made. If both the lunar date (tithi) and constellation (nakshatra) coincide, it is considered highly auspicious.

*"jyaiṣṭhyām jyeṣṭharkṣayuktāyām yaḥ paśyet puruṣottamam, kulaikaviṁśam uddhṛtya viṣṇulokam sa gacchati." iti brāhmāt.*

The Brahma Purana further states:

"One who beholds Lord Purushottama on the Jyeshtha full moon day, when the Jyeshtha Nakshatra is aligned, uplifts twenty-one generations of their lineage and attains Vishnu-loka (the divine abode of Lord Vishnu)."

*yattu, skānde indradyumnam prati bhagavadvākyam "jyaiṣṭhyām aham cāvatīrṇaḥ tatpunyam janmavāsaram, tasyām me snapanam kāryam mahāsnānavidhānataḥ, pratyarcāyām mahārāja sādhibāsam samṛddhimat"*

Additionally, in the Skanda Purana, Lord Vishnu's words to King Indradyumna are mentioned: "In the Jyeshtha month, I incarnate. Therefore, this is My sacred birth

anniversary. On this day, My consecration (Mahasnana) must be performed according to proper rituals. O great King! The worship (pratyaarchana) must be conducted, and a grand stay (adhivasa) should be arranged with great devotion and prosperity."

In page 186 of Sri Purushottama-granthavali (vol 5) Purushottama Goswami explains that the water for the snana-purnima utsava must be drawn from a specific well situated under a specific tree, as cited below:

*iti, tattu tatkṣetrasthasvasvarūpaparameva iti pratibhāti.*

Thus, it is evident that this ritual is directly related to the divine presence in that sacred place.

*"nyagrodhāt uttare kupāḥ sarvatīrthamayo'sti vai, snānāya pūrvam nirmāya kiñcidācchādito bhuvā, avatīrṇastvahaṁ paścāt taṁ vivicya prakāśaya, saṁkārya: sa caturdaśyām baliṁ datvā vidhānata: " iti kūpavivecanalingāt etenaiva*

"To the north of the Banyan tree, there is a well that embodies all sacred pilgrimage sites. It was originally created for the purpose of ritual bathing, though it remained concealed. Later, I descended and revealed it with due deliberation. On the fourteenth day, one must offer oblations before performing the rituals." This is indicated by the well-related scripture. Likewise, it is stated:

*"ṛkṣābhāve pūrṇamāsyām yo vidhi: sa tathaiva ca, kārya: prasādanārtham hi devasya puruṣottame." iti brāhmam.*

"If the Jyeshtha Nakshatra is absent, the ritual should still be performed on the full moon day, as it is meant for the pleasure of Lord Purushottama." Thus, it is mentioned in the Brahma Purana.

*"paurṇamāsyām prakurvīta snānam śrīpuruṣottame, yadā ṛkṣam na labhyeta tadā grāhyā tu pūrṇimā"*

"On the full moon day, one should perform the ritual bath of Lord Purushottama. If the Nakshatra is not present, then only the full moon day should be considered."

*iti skādam ca vyākhyātam jñeyam, kṣetranirdeśād iti yadi ca na idam abhyupeyate tadā nakṣatram tithiśca ubhayamapi kālo astu vyavasthā tu śiṣṭācārānusārāt, kalau tasya balīyastvāt, tadupapāditaṁ prāk.*

This is also explained in the Skanda Purana and is to be understood as per the regional context. If this is not accepted, then the alignment of both the Nakshatra and the lunar date should be taken into consideration. However, in Kali Yuga, adherence to traditions (Shishtaachara) holds greater significance, and this has been established in earlier scriptures.

...

*iti jyeṣṭhotsavāḥ.*

This concludes the description of the Jyeshtha Utsava (Jyeshtha Abhisheka Festival).

Therefore in the above cited pages of Sri Purushottama-granthavali (vol 5) Purushottama Goswami clearly establishes that whatever mentioned in Brahma Purana and Skanda Purana have to be understood as per the time, place, and circumstances specific to the Puri ksetra region and its associated context. This is clearly evident by the use of the words "*iti skādam ca vyākhyātam jñeyam, kṣetranirdeśād:*" and "*tatkṣetrasthasvasvarūpaparameva iti pratibhāti:*" meaning every details mentioned in regards to snana Purnima including the mention of banyan tree and well to draw water from, along with the recommended days for Gundica yatra etc. are only applicable to the ksetra being discussed under that particular khanda of the Skanda Purana. Similarly on page 187 in regards to Ratha-yatra, Purushottama Goswami states:

rathotsavaḥ

atha āṣāḍhe rathotsavaḥ. taduktaṁ skānde, “guṇḍicākhyām mahāyātrām prakurvīthāḥ kṣitīśvara, yasyāḥ saṁkīrttanādeva naraḥ pāpād vimucyate, māghamāsasya pañcamyām aṣṭamyām caitraśuklake, ete kālāḥ praśastā hi guṇḍicākhyamahotsave, viśeṣān mokṣadā” śāḍhadvitīyā puṣyasamyutā, ṛkṣābhāve tithau kāryā sadā sā prītaye mama, āṣāḍhasya site pakṣe dvitīyā puṣyasamyutā, tasyām rathe samāropya rāmaṁ mām bhadrayā saha, mahotsavaṁ pravartyātha prīṇayeta dvijān bahūn, guṇḍāmaṇḍapaṁ nāma yatrā’hamajānaṁ purā ”

ityādinā ca maṇḍapapraśamsām uktvā ” dināni nava yāsyāmi yathā tasmād ihā”gataḥ” ityādinā. tena rathārohaṇaṁ guṇḍicāmaṇḍapagamanārthaṁ tadyātrāṅgabhūtaṁ ca. śiṣṭāstu kevalamapi prādhānyena kurvanti tatra bahūnām kālānām uktatvād nakṣatraprādhānyasya upapāditatvācca jyeṣṭhābhiṣekavadeva nirṇayaḥ iti alaṁ vistareṇa.

In the month of Āṣāḍha, the Rathotsava (chariot festival) takes place. It is mentioned in the Skānda Purāṇa: “Guṇḍicākhyām” and other words.

“O King! The great journey known as my ‘Guṇḍicā’ should be performed, by whose chanting a person is freed from sins. The fifth day of Māgha and the eighth day of Caitra Śukla are the best times for this ‘Guṇḍicā’ Mahotsava. The second day of Āṣāḍha in the bright fortnight, when it coincides with the Puṣya Nakṣatra, is especially capable of granting liberation. If the Puṣya Nakṣatra is not available, then the festival may be performed on the second day alone, for my satisfaction. On the second day of Āṣāḍha in the bright fortnight, when it coincides with the Puṣya Nakṣatra, place me in the chariot along with Subhadrā (Mahālakṣmī) and Baladeva, and begin the festival, making many Brahmins content.”

After this, the praise of the **Guṇḍicā Maṇḍapa** is mentioned with the words:

“Guṇḍicāmaṇḍape nāma yatrāhamajānaṁ purā” and so on. And with the words “Dināni nava yāsyāmi” it indicates the journey to the **Guṇḍicā Maṇḍapa** for nine days and its connection to the journey. The learned people, without taking God to the **Guṇḍicā Maṇḍapa**, only make the chariot ride happen. For this **Guṇḍicā Mahotsava**, times like the fifth day and others are prescribed there, and the importance of the Nakṣatra has already been supported, so it is also concluded that, just like the great ablution ceremony (jyeṣṭhābhiṣekavadeva nirṇayaḥ), it is appropriate to perform the festival in the Puṣya Nakṣatra. It is not necessary to go into further detail.

## Author: Sridhara Srinivasa Dasa

About the author:

Śrīdhara Śrīnivāsa dāsa was born in a traditional Tamil Nadu Iyeṅgār family of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava lineage, practicing Vaiṣṇava culture, and duly received *upanayana saṁskāra* at the age of nine. The author holds a bachelor’s degree in engineering, a Master’s degree in business administration from a reputed university in Seattle, USA and has worked in the position of General Manager in several software firms in Japan, USA, and India. The author was initiated in September, 2006 into the *Gauḍiyya-vaiṣṇava sampradāya* by His Holiness Bhakti Vikāsa Swamī, a *sannyāsi* disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīdhara Śrīnivāsa dāsa is the author of the books: 1) *A Divine Prophecy, a Śrī Vaiṣṇava prophecy on Lord Caitanya*, released in English and Tamil. 2) *Female Dīkṣā-gurus, Do We Need Them?* (English, Russian, and Hindi). He has also authored several articles featured in the Tamil edition of “back to godhead” magazine.

The following are the author’s specific points.

1. The Bhagavata perspective of the word the saṁkīrtanā means congregational chanting of the Holy Name. Lord Sri Caitanaya Mahaprabhu exemplified this principle of chanting the Holy Name of the Lord during the whole of Gundica yatra. On this basis, it can be stated that the focus of Ratha-yatra is Hari-nama-sankirtana.



When we study closely the verses of Skanda Purana (II.29.30 to 34) we find that the word saṁkīrtanā appears in verse 29.30. From the Gaudiya acaryas explanation of the word saṁkīrtanā and Lord Caitanya’s personal example, the word saṁkīrtanā in verse 29.30 can refer to both the glorification of the Ratha-yatra and the congregational chanting of the Holy Names of the Lord both of which yields one the most cherished goal of human life.

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

Therefore, the statement of SB 8.23.16 and the acaryas commentaries to that verse that while following pancaratrika vidhi, especially during festivals, any discrepancy due to time, place, and circumstances, the chanting of Hari-nama or Holy name nullifies all such faults.

2. In SB 1.4.25, it is stated that women, sudras, and dvijabandhus are not allowed to hear the Vedas, but are allowed to hear the Mahabharata which includes Vishnusahasranama and Bhagavad-gita. Some still contest that SB 1.4.25 allows the women, sudras, and relatives of the twice born to only hear Mahabharata and Vishnusahasranama but not actually recite them. Yet, the great authority of recent times among the Advaitins, Kanchi Chandrashekara Sankaracarya allowed his female disciple M.S. Subbalakshmi and other women to recite Vishnusahasranama for the sake of spreading of Vishnusahasranama chanting on a very large scale. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandrashekharendra\\_Saraswati\\_VIII](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandrashekharendra_Saraswati_VIII) , <https://www.indiadinivine.org/content/topic/1535146-can-ladies-recite-sri-vishnu-sahasranamam/> )
  - a. If SB 8.23.16 is not the basis then what is the sastric basis for introducing this change?
  - b. If not the fact that acharyas like Srila Prabhupada can introduce or adjust the sastric principles in terms of their application which is not against sastric injunctions, what is the basis for Kanchi Chandrashekara Sankaracarya to introduce such changes?
3. M.A. Alwar’s opinion (2.b above) regarding the rules and regulations of Rathayatra festival being very specific to Puri Ksetra is also supported by Prushottam Goswami, descendant of Vallabacarya, Vallabha Sampradaya, in his grantha Sri Purushottama-granthavali (vol 5), utsava-prathanaH, JyesthamAsotsava, JyesthabhishekotsavaH 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 Ashada Dvitiya for Ratha-yatra mentioned in Section II of the Skanda Purana is specific to Purushottama-ksetra.

# Perspectives of Madhva and Ramanuja Scholars on the Uniformity of Rathayatra Dates

By Chaitanya Jivana Dasa

## 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 *Rathayatra* 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 Acharya**, 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 *Vishishtadvaita Vedanta*, *Nyaya*, and *Mimamsa*, he has authored and published 23 books, including two international publications. He currently serves as a senior professor of *Vishishtadvaita 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 Madhvacharya. He has authored several articles on *shastric* topics and has written a few books.

**Shri Hari Acharya**, 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 Madhvacharya's Sarva Moola Granthas.

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## Discussion on Rathayatra 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 Madhvacharya, Ramanujacharya, and in *Divya Deshams*.

Shri Hari Acharya (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 Rathayatra Dates**

When asked whether the dates of *Ratha Yatra* should be uniform across all temples where Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadrā 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 Sampradaya, 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 sampradaya and has the freedom to celebrate Ratha Yatra based on its acharyas' 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 sampradaya's practices contradicts the principle of sampradaya autonomy."

He also emphasized, "ISKCON and the Puri tradition belong to different sampradayas, 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 *acharyas* of each *sampradaya*. As a distinct *sampradaya*, ISKCON has full autonomy to establish its own dates and methods of celebration, guided by scriptural interpretation and the instructions of its *acharyas*."

### **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 Acharya** stated:

All **Madhva temples** are expected to follow the rituals outlined in the *Tantra Sārah*, 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 Sārah*.

### **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 Acharya 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 ISKCON Ratha-yātrā

by  
Arjuna-sakhā dāsa

Member of ISKCON India Scholar's Board

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[1]

The Skanda Purāṇa and Brahma Purāṇa prescribes the rules for celebrating Rathayātrā on the following tithis other than Āṣāḍha Śukla-dvitiyā:

- 1) fifth day of the month of Māgha
- 2) eighth day of the bright half of Caitra
- 3) second day in the lunar month of Āṣāḍha
- 4) Uthāna Ekādaśī
- 5) Phālguna Pūrṇimā
- 6) during the equinox (jala viṣuva, dhānya viṣuva)

**Skanda Purāṇa 2.2.2.30–33:**

गुंडिचाख्यां महायात्रां प्रकुर्वीयाः क्षितीश्वर ।  
यस्याः संकीर्तनादेव नरः पापाद्विमुच्यते ॥ ३० ॥  
माघमासस्य पंचम्यामष्टम्यां चैत्रशुक्लके ।  
एते कालाः प्रशस्ता हि गुण्डिचाख्यमहोत्सवे ॥ ३१ ॥  
विशेषान्मोक्षदाषाढद्वितीया पुष्यसंयुता ।  
ऋक्षाभावे तिथौ कार्या सदा सा प्रीतये मम ॥ ३२ ॥  
आषाढस्य सिते पक्षे द्वितीया पुष्यसंयुता ।  
तस्यां रथे समारोप्य रामं मां भद्रया सह ॥ ३३ ॥

O Lord of the Earth, you should organize the grand festival known as Guṇḍicā. By merely chanting its name, a person is freed from sins (30). The fifth day of the month of Māgha and the eighth day of the bright half of Caitra—these are the best days for the great festival named Guṇḍicā (31). Particularly the second day in the lunar month of Āṣāḍha in conjunction with the Puṣya constellation is conducive to liberation. The festival shall be celebrated on the specified lunar day even if the constellation does not coincide. It is pleasing to me (32). On the second day, in the bright half of the lunar month of Āṣāḍha, in conjunction with the Puṣya constellation, the devotees should place Rāma and Me along with Bhadrā on the chariot (33).

## Brahma Purāṇa 67.3-4:

गुडिवायां तथोत्थाने फाल्गुन्यां विषुवे तथा ।  
यात्रां कृत्वा विधानेन दृष्ट्वा कृष्णं प्रणम्य च ॥ ३ ॥  
सङ्कर्षणं सुभद्रां च लभेत्सर्वत्र वै फलम् ।  
नरो गच्छेद्विष्णुलोके यावदिन्द्राश्चतुर्दश ॥ ४ ॥

[Brahmā says:] I will tell the fruits of each of the yatras that humans undertake to that region with a controlled and peaceful attitude. Listen. On the day of Uthāna Ekādaśī, Phālguna Pūrṇimā, and during the equinox (the time when the day and night are of equal duration), a person should journey, and according to proper procedures, have darśana of and offer praṇāma to Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and Subhadrā. By this journey to Guṇḍicā, humans attain all fruits. They reside in Viṣṇuloka for the duration of the reigns of fourteen Indras.

If you say that these tithis are not for Rathayātrā, they are for various parts of the Guṇḍicā Mahotsava, like bringing wood for the chariot, building the chariot, etc., that is not right because:

Vācaspati Miśra in Tīrtha-cintāmaṇi (page 160) accepts that these three tithis are for the celebration of Rathayātrā.<sup>1</sup> Vācaspati Miśra has said that by performing Rathayātrā on these three tithis and taking Śrī Jagannātha, Balarāma and Subhadrā to Guṇḍicā and having darśana of the Lord there, one attains Viṣṇuloka.

तत्रैव ब्रह्मपुराणे --  
ब्रह्मोवाच ।  
गुण्डिका (वा) यां समुत्थानेऽ फाल्गुन्यां विषुवे तथा ।  
यात्रां कृत्वा विधानेन दृष्ट्वा कृष्णं प्रणम्य च ॥  
सङ्कर्षणं सुभद्राच्च लभेत् सर्वत्र वै फलम् ।  
नरो गच्छेत् विष्णुलोके यावदिन्द्राश्चतुर्दश ॥

Therefore, in Guṇḍikā, whenever there is Uthāna Dvādaśī, Phālgunī, jala viṣuva, dhānya viṣuva, If one performs Kṛṣṇa darśana and praṇāma, Saṅkarṣaṇa darśana and praṇāma, and Subhadrā darśana and praṇāma, the fruit of residing in Viṣṇuloka up to fourteen Indras is attained in each, this is the meaning.

Therefore, it has been instructed to organize Ratha-yātrā separately on those three tithis; the three tithis are not various parts of the Guṇḍicā festival.

According to Odiya tradition, the making of the chariot begins from Akṣaya Tṛtīyā. That ritual is known as Rathanukūla and it does not begin on Caitra Aṣṭamī.

The Vāmadeva Saṃhitā and Nīlādri Mahodaya state that the construction of the chariots begins on Akṣaya Tṛtīyā in the month of Vaiśākha. Therefore, the aforementioned seven tithis are indicated separately for Ratha-yātrā; they are not a part of the Guṇḍicā Mahotsava.

<sup>1</sup> Tīrtha-cintāmaṇi of Vācaspati Miśra, edited by Kamalakrishna Smrititirtha, published in Calcutta in 1912.

1) Nīlādri-mahodaya 36.1, 6, 47-50 states that the construction of the chariots begins on Akṣaya Tṛtīyā in the month of Vaiśākha when Lord Brahmā describes the festivals and observances of the month of Vaiśākha in detail to King Indradyumna:

वैशाखे मासि यन्नीतिर्नीलाचलपतेर्हरे ।  
तं वदामि नृपश्रेष्ठ ! सर्वकामफलप्रदम् ॥ १ ॥

O best of kings, I will tell you the rituals that is followed in the service of Nīlācalapati Hari in the month of Vaiśākha, which gives all desired results.

अथो वैशाखमासस्य शुक्लपक्षे शुभोदये ॥ ६ ॥  
तृतीयायां तिथौ सायं पूजानन्तरतो नृप ! ।

Thereafter, in the bright fortnight (śukla pakṣa) of the month of Vaiśākha, at the time of the auspicious sunrise, O King, on the Tṛtīyā tithi, in the evening after the pūjā one should pray to the Lord in this way

बलभद्र नमस्तुभ्यं नमस्ते लाङ्गलायुध ।  
आज्ञापय प्रलम्बारे ! रथनिर्माणहेतवे ॥ ४७ ॥  
नन्दीघोषरथारूढ चक्रायुध ! नमोऽस्तु ते ।  
नीलाचलपते ! देव ! नित्यं तुभ्यं नमो नमः ॥ ४८ ॥  
आज्ञापय जगन्नाथ ! जगदानन्दवर्द्धन ।  
रथस्य निर्मिति कर्तुं जगत्यावनहेतवे ॥ ४९ ॥  
भद्रे ! देवि ! जगद्धात्रि सृष्टिस्थितिलयांश्रये ! ।  
आज्ञापय सुरेशानि ! निर्माणार्थं रथस्य वै ॥ ५० ॥

O Balabhadra, obeisances to you, O holder of the plow weapon, obeisances to you. O Pralambāre, please give orders for the construction of the chariot! O Jagannātha, O one who rides upon the chariot named Nandīghosa, holder of the disc weapon, obeisances to you! O Lord of the Nīlācala mountain, O deity! I offer my eternal salutations to you, O Jagadānandavardhana! Please give orders, so that the construction of the chariot may be done for the purpose of purifying the world! O Devi, O Bhadrā, O Jagaddhātrī, you are the refuge of creation, maintenance, and dissolution! O Sureśāni, please give orders for the construction of the chariot!

2) The Vāmadeva Saṃhitā 22.38, 53 and 56 state that on the second tithi of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaiśākha, one should grind sandalwood paste, and on the next day, i.e., on Akṣaya Tṛtīyā, after midday worship, one should pray to [the Lord] to engage in jala-krīḍā and start the construction of the chariot by taking the command of Jagannātha and Baladeva. Therefore, the Guṇḍicā festival or the chariot construction work starts from Akṣaya Tṛtīyā.

वैशाखशुक्लपक्षे च द्वितीयायां तिथौ प्रिये ।  
सायंपूजां समाप्याथ प्रासादपूर्वदेशके ॥ ३८ ॥

On the second tithi of the bright fortnight (śukla pakṣa) of the month of Vaiśākha, O dear, having completed the evening pūjā, then to the east direction of the palace. (38)



ततो मध्याह्नयजनं कृत्वा वन्दापयेत् क्रमात् ॥ ५३ ॥  
प्रार्थयेत् च तान् देवान् जलक्रीडार्थमादरात् ॥ ५४ ॥

Then, having performed the midday yajña, one should pay obeisances in order (53). And one should respectfully pray to those deities for jalakrīḍā (water sports) (54).

आज्ञापयन्तु हे देवा ! रथानां घटनेषु च ॥ ५६ ॥  
वनयागं करिष्यामि गुण्डिचोत्सवकर्मणि ।

O gods! Please give orders for the arrangement of the chariots. (56). I will perform Vanayāga on the occasion of the Guṇḍicā festival.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, the aforementioned tithis are not for celebrating various parts of the Guṇḍicā Mahotsava. Rather, it has been said that the Ratha-yātrā Mahotsava can be celebrated on those aforementioned tithis.

[2]

**In Pañcarātra śāstra, there is a rule for Ratha-yātrā on the ninth day of the annual Mahotsava of deity installation.**

In the Pañcarātra śāstra *Praśna Samhitā* 30.4-5, 10-11 and 36.85-87, in the context of a Mahotsava, the following rules for the Ratha-yātrā of the deity are described.

श्रीः उवाच—

कथं महोत्सवो नाम तत्प्रकारश्च कीदृशः ॥4 ॥  
कस्मिन् काले च कर्तव्यो दिनसङ्ख्या च कीदृशी ।  
तत्सर्वं विस्तरेणाद्य साधुसेव्य वदस्व मे ॥5 ॥

Śrīdevī said: "O Sādhu-sevya, how does this (mahotsava) festival happen, what kind is it? (4) At what time should it be done and what should be the number of days? Tell me all that in detail today." (5)

बिम्बाविर्भावक्रक्षे वा प्रतिष्ठातारकेऽपि वा ।  
तत्तिथौ वा तीर्तयात्रां निश्चित्याङ्कुरपूर्वकम् ॥ 10 ॥  
ध्वजमारोप्यते यस्मिन् स तु नित्यो महोत्सवः ।

That which is [celebrated] on the nakṣatra of the appearance of the deity, or in the nakṣatra of the installation of the deity, on that date, beginning with aṅkurārpaṇa, in which the flag is raised, that is certainly the nitya mahotsava.

भगवान् उवाच—

नवमे दिवसे देवि प्रातर्बल्यन्तमर्चयेत् ॥85 ॥  
देशिकेन्द्रोयथाशास्त्रं कृत्वा रथवरोत्सवम् ।  
कुर्यात् ते तत्प्रकारं तु वदामि कमलेक्षणे ॥86 ॥  
लोहजं दारुजं वापि सर्वलक्षणसंयुतम् ।

Bhagavān said: "O Devi, on the ninth day of the Mahotsava, one should worship in the morning after offering bali (arghya pradānādi) etc. Thereafter, the deśikendra (ācārya) should perform the Rathotsava according to the śāstra. O Kamala-nayani, I will tell you that method, listen. One should construct a grand chariot, be it of iron or wood, endowed with all characteristics, and decorate it with golden bells etc."

Therefore, any ISKCON temple where the deities of Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadrā are being served can perform Ratha-yātrā on the ninth day of the celebration of a Mahotsava.

[3]

**Jagannātha is Himself Viṣṇu; no other deity is equal to Him — Prabhupāda's conclusion is in accordance with the Skanda Purāṇa.**

Skanda Purāṇa 2.7.19.21-25 says that Lord Viṣṇu should never be equated with any other deity:

इन्द्राच्च गिरिजा देवी देव्याः शंभुर्जगद्गुरुः ।  
शंभोर्बुद्धिर्महादेवी बुद्धेः प्राणो बलाधिकः ॥ २१

Goddess Girijā is superior to Indra. Śaṃbhu, the sire of the universe, is superior to that goddess. The great goddess Buddhi (Bhārati) is superior to Śaṃbhu. Prāṇa (Vāyu) is superior in strength to Buddhi. (21)

न प्राणात्परमं किञ्चित्प्राणे सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितम् ।  
प्राणाज्जातमिदं विश्वं प्राणात्मकमिदं जगत् ॥ २२

There is nothing greater than Prāṇa. Everything is established in Prāṇa. This universe is evolved out of Prāṇa. This universe has Prāṇa for its soul. (22)

प्राणे प्रोतमिदं सर्वं प्राणादेव हि चेष्टते ।  
सर्वाधारमिमं प्राहुः सूत्रं नीलांबुदप्रभम् ॥ २३

All this (visible world) is as if sewed to Prāṇa. It is active only through Prāṇa. They say that it is the support of everything and has the lustre of the blue cloud. It is the Sūtra (that which makes everything function). (23)

लक्ष्मीकटाक्षमालेण प्राणस्यास्य स्थितिर्भवेत् ।  
सा लक्ष्मीर्देवदेवस्य कृपालेशैकभाजिनी ॥ २४

This Prāṇa is sustained merely by the side-glance of Lakṣmī. That Lakṣmī gets a portion of the mercy of the Lord of devas.(24)

न विष्णोः परमं किञ्चिन्न समो वा कथंचन ॥

There is nothing greater than Viṣṇu nor even on a par with him in any respect. (25)

[4]

**Vaiṣṇava initiates, regardless of their birth, are entitled to perform rituals like a brāhmaṇa initiated into a sacrifice. Therefore, they should have the right to enter the Jagannātha temple.**

Devotees all around the world come to Purī during Ratha-yātrā to get the darśana of the Lord as they are not allowed to enter the temple.

It is said in the Skanda Purāṇa that even a caṇḍāla, by the means of Vaiṣṇava-dīkṣā, wearing the ūrdhva-puṇḍra tilaka and bearing the śaṅkha and cakra, etc., would become adorned like a Brahmin initiated into a sacrifice. This is clear from its Kāśī-khaṇḍa where there is a narration about a paramount Vaiṣṇava king named Amitrajit in the kingdom of Mayūradhvaja in ancient times. In his kingdom, even the Antyajaja, having received Vaiṣṇava dīkṣā, would bear the mark of the śaṅkha and cakra and become adorned like a sacrificer:

अंत्यजा अपि तद्राष्ट्रे शंखचक्रांकधारिणः ॥  
संप्राप्य वैष्णवीं दीक्षां दीक्षिता इव संबभुः ॥ ३१ ॥

In his kingdom even Antyajajas were stamped with the marks of conch and discus after initiation into Vaisnava cult. They shone like those initiated in Yajñas etc. (Skanda Purāṇa 4.82.31)

Therefore, following the Skanda Purāṇa, all Vaiṣṇava-dīkṣitas should be allowed to enter the Purī Jagannātha temple.

## Contents of the Niladri Mahodaya summarized

By: Rama Aprameya dasa

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The mode of worship of Sri Jagannath is unique and different from that of the other Vishnu temples, situated in north and south India. Worship of Lord in different temples in India are based on two important types of shastras:

1. Nigama (Vedas)
2. Aagama (Tantras)

Aagamas or tantras are many and are classified as Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava. Vaishnava aagamas are two, namely Vaikhanasa and Pancharatra. Tantras primarily deal with yantras and mantras. Yantras are presented as mandalas for worship. They have mantras associated with them. In this way the deities are invoked and worshipped. The deities of Jagannatha, Baladeva and Subhadra in Puri are established on different yantras, Sri Balabhadra on Tara Yantra, Sri Subhadra on Bhubaneswari Yantra and Sri Jagannatha on Kali Yantra.

Narada Purana mentions that the Puja of Sri Purusottama was being undertaken according to the tenets of Pancaratra system during the time of king Indradyumna. The same system with some additions and alterations continues even at present. Among the different disciplines of Vaishnava worship the system of Pancaratram holds a very prominent position. Gajapati Purusottama Dev (1466-1497 A.D), the famous Gajapati king of Ganga dynasty, compiled 'Gopalarchanavidhi' on the rites and rituals of Sri Jagannatha and 'Muktichintamani' on the sanctity of Purusottama Puri. Gopalarchanavidhi otherwise known as 'Niladrinatha Pujavidhi' and 'Niladrimahodayarcanavidhi' have been compiled on the Vaishnava Skandha of Agamakalpataru. Niladri Mahodaya is a very popular work. It states the origin, rites and rituals of Sri Jagannath. But the period of its compilation and about its actual author are not yet definite. Some say that it was compiled at the time of Ganga king Bhanudev IV (1414-1435 AD), but this book as a reference is not found to have been quoted by any author of Orissa till 18th century. So it comes to one's mind that it is a later compilation. Niladri Mahodaya contains 91 chapters, dealing in detail with all the rites and rituals and day-to-day functions in Jagannath temple. It is a compilation based on all Dharmasastras, Puranas and Tantras etc., hence it is called as 'Sthala Purana' in Orissa. However, the latest compilation of Niladri Mahodaya along with its Oriya translation has been edited by Dr B.K Swain and published by Sadgrantha Niketan, Puri recently in two volumes and available in the market.

Niladri mahodaya contains discussion between Suta Goswami and Shaunaka and other rsis.

First chapter (1.11) says:

क्षेत्राणां च फलं तावत् सुत नः कथय प्रभो

तेषां मध्ये वरः को वा क्षेत्राणां च मुनीश्वर

“Oh greatest of the sages, you have described so many holy places. Which is the best among them? “

Verse 1.14

शृणुध्वं मुनयः सर्वे सम्यतात्मन एव ही

तीर्थानां क्षेत्राशीनां मध्ये श्री पुरुषोत्तमः

“Oh great good souls, oh sages, the greatest of the holy places of pilgrimage is Sri Purushottama (Puri)”.

Shaunaka Rsi asks which is the best kshetra on earth? Suta Goswami describes about Purushottama Kshetra, its glories and the glories of one who leaves his body there. The book further describes about Nila Madhava and how Jagannatha appeared. Nila Madhava is manifest in the first parardha (50 years) of Bramha. In the second parardha, Lord Jagannatha is manifest. This is the first day of the second parardha of Bramha and so the lila of transition from Lord Nila Madhava to Lord Jagannatha has happened. Post appearance, various demigods including Lord Bramha appear there to pay respects to Lord Jagannatha. Post that, Lord Bramha instructs about Jagannath, His worship, festivals etc including Ratha yatra. So Niladri Mahodaya deals with the discussion about Sri Kshetra, its glories, deity of Jagannatha there and festivals and worship associated with Him.

Following are the topics that are covered in the Niladri Mahodaya

- Lord Bramha in the 6th chapter glorifies Jagannatha with shruti vaakhyaas.
- This is followed by the procedure of worship of Jagannatha in 7th chapter.
- Chapter 8 speaks of the afternoon worship.
- Chapter 9 speaks about the qualities of the acharya, the worshipper and the servants who serve Jagannatha.
- Chapter 10 deals with the paraphernalia used in worship.
- Chapter 11 deals with offerings of food stuffs and jewels to the Lord.
- Next couple of chapters deal with the purifications needed in the temple if a yavana enters it.
- Chapter 14 deals with Snana yatra. Chapter 15 deals with the procedures when Jagannatha is sick and doesn't appear for darshana.
- Chapter 16 deals with the procedures of ratha yatra (also called Ghosha Yatra).
- Chapters 17 to 38 focus on the different festivals associated with Jagannatha that happen throughout the year and the method of worship during the festivals.
- Chapter 39 deals with the process of Vaishnava tarpana.
- Chapters 40 to 42 deal with bathing the Lord and performing yajnas in the kitchen of Jagannath.
- Chapter 43 deals with the procedure to worship the Sun God in the kitchen.
- Chapters 44 and 45 deal with the worship of the gatekeepers of the Lord and preparations for the worship of Jagannatha like aasana shuddhi, matrika nyasa etc followed by the panchopachara puja (offering 5 items to Jagannatha).
- Chapters 46 to 82 deal in detail about
  - Worship of Guru and Ganesha.
  - The mantras necessary to begin worship of Jagannatha
  - The nyasas to be done prior to the chanting of the mantras
  - The invocation (aahvaana) of the Lord in the deity followed by the shodashopachara puja (16 offerings)
  - Performing yajna and offering the same prasada to the yajna

- Baliharana (offering the food as bali outside the temple)
- Maha mangalarati after naivedya.
- Once the naivedya is done, the same is offered to other associates.
- Chapter 83 deals with the tarpana to be offered.
- Chapters 84 to 90 deal with the worship of Baladeva
- Chapter 91 deals with the results of honouring Vishnu prasada and also the results obtained by offering the same to ancestors. It also deals with the remedies needed if there are any issues in worship or associated with the deities (like deity fall down etc).

All these procedures including the tithis for snana yatra and ratha yatra are specific to Jagannatha Puri as is clear in the introduction. The introduction begins with questions regarding the best Tirtha and Suta Goswami begins by answering about Jagannatha Puri. Niladri Mahodaya provides no reference that the same procedures have to be repeated elsewhere as it is.

### Tithi for Snana Yatra

Chapter 14 deals with the snana yatra procedures. A detailed description of the method of worship of the Lord, mantras to be chanted, paraphernalia to be offered is given. Snana Yatra is performed in the Sri Kshetra Puri on Jyeshtha masa Shukla paksha Chaturdashi.

Chapter 14

ज्येष्ठे मासि सिते पक्षे चतुर्दश्यां नृपोत्तम

मध्याह्न समयं प्राप्य त्रिकालार्चा समापयन्।

In the jyeshtha maasa Shukla paksha chaturdashi tithi afternoon trikaalaarchanam (worship) has to be done. (14.9)

That is when snana yatra begins. Once the snana yatra is performed, Lord Hari (Jagannatha) is given rest. It further emphasizes that there are no hard and fast rules nor is there any stipulated time for the snana yatra.

After snana, verse 14.10 says

ततश्चतुर्थं पूजान्ते शयनं रचयेत् हरेः

उत्सवेषु च सर्वेषु न काल नियमो भवेत्।।

After the fourth worship, Lord Hari is given rest. For all these procedures of worship, there are no rules nor is there any stipulated time to perform them.

14.11 says

काल व्यतिक्रमो दोषो नास्त्यत्र नृपसत्तम

मार्कण्डेयं प्रति श्रीमान् भगवान् भूतभावनः।

Oh King, the fault of passage of stipulated time is not there in this ceremony. This is narrated to Markandeya by Bhagavaan Bhootabhaavanaah (Narayana)

The above verses clearly indicate that strictness related to muhurta is not to be considered while performing utsava related to Jagannatha.

दश पञ्च दिनान्येवं वांशावरण वेष्टितं

कर्तव्यं तत्र किं कर्म वक्तव्यं कमलासन

“What activities are performed in the next fifteen days when Jagannatha is in a closed room? “

This indicates that for the next fifteen days Jagannatha is given rest in a closed room and is not available for darshana. Ratha yatra is performed on the Aashaadha Shukla paksha dvitiya tithi in Jagannatha Puri.

15.4-5

आषाढस्य च मासस्य सिते पक्षे अतिपावने

द्वितीयायां तिथौ तावत् घोषयात्रा विधीयते

“Shukla paksha of aashaadha, dvitiya tithi is the auspicious day for the Ghosha (Ratha) yatra”

However, the word "auspicious" is also predicted for the chosen dates indicating that the festivals can't be on any random date but care to be taken to select the auspicious dates.

### **Puja at the wrong time**

अकाले जायते पूजा निष्फला जायते द्विजाः ।

व्यतिक्रमे महान् दोषः हरेस्तुष्टिर्न जायते ॥

Therefore, all the rituals should be conducted only during the prescribed times. Any violation of the time prescribed will amount to commission of great offense and the Supreme Lord is not satisfied. (37.130)

कर्तव्याश्चेत् तदा तांस्तु नगृह्णाति स्वयम् ।

तत्सर्वं राक्षसैर्ग्राह्यम् सत्यमेतन्न संशयः ॥

The Lord doesn't accept the pūja when done at the wrong time. Those offerings are accepted by the demons, of this there is no doubt. (37.135)

We agree to this. But how to understand that the Lord in the ratha is not given shayana, people offering akaala aarati in the night and hug and massage the Lord? Some people who come there may be contaminated also and so may not be eligible to touch the Lord.

The ratha Yatras in ISKCON ensure that only pujaris handle the Lord, Lord is given shayana in the night and no akaala puja is done. The ārati timings are fixed and don't change.

If akaala just means different dates, it will result in avyaapti dosha. Akāla here should mean wrong timings. Organizing rathotsava doesn't make it akāla.

### Yavanas and Mlechchaas

The book deals with a lot of praayaschittas when a mlechcha or a yavana enters the temple or the kitchen. These terms are normally assumed based on one's birth. Qualification among those born in the vedic families is not considered today. Without the necessary samskaras, one doesn't elevate himself to the status of a brahmana. This is clearly the verdict of the scriptures.

जन्मना जायते शूद्रः संस्काराद्भवेत् द्विजः

वेद पाठात्भवेद्विप्रो ब्रम्ह जानातीति ब्रम्हणः

By birth everyone is a sudra, but by undergoing the purificatory ceremonies under the direction of a bona fide spiritual master, one may become a vipra, and when one knows the Supreme Spirit, he actually becomes a truly learned brāhmaṇa.

Scriptures also mentioned that those born in low families are also elevated by the process of chanting the holy names of Lord Vishnu.

किरात हूणान्ध पुलिन्द पुलकषा

आभीरषुम्भा यवनाः खसादयः |

येन्ये च पापा यदपाश्रयाश्रयाः

शुध्यन्ति तस्मै प्रभविष्णवे नमः ॥

Kirātas, Hūṇas, Āndhras, Pulindas, Pulkaśas, Ābhīras, Śumbhas, Yavanas, members of the Khasa races and even others addicted to sinful acts can be purified by taking shelter of the devotees of the Lord, due to His being the supreme power. I beg to offer my respectful obeisances unto Him.

Hence the words like mlechhas and yavans must be considered according to shastras and must not be accepted just based on birth right. These terms must be redefined in order to better address the issues at hand.



## Conclusion

Niladri Mahodaya is the sthala purana related to the worship of Jagannatha. It is a collection of shlokas about Jagannatha. The book is very helpful in order to learn the process of worship of the deity, tantras and mandalas, nyasas and mantras that are necessary for the worship of the Lord, the process of yajnas etc. The details are specific to Purushottama Kshetra and can't be accepted in toto at other places. It clearly delineates the non-rigidity of the following of tithis for the Ratha yatra. Different sampradayas have their shastras and their aagamas that decide their mode of worship. These procedures are directed based on the instructions of their acharyas. ISKCON in particular is bound to follow the instructions of Srila Prabhupada who has laid down the rules and procedures. It would make no sense that this be disturbed.

The Krishna consciousness movement has good experience of preaching and recruitment of youngsters all over the world. This is in continuation of the Bhakti culture that was inaugurated by Sri Ramanujacharya, Sri Madhwacharya, Sri Chaitanya mahaprabhu etc. The rigidity of vedic society was failing in this regard and people were leaving the path of dharma. The Krishna consciousness movement by the mercy of its predecessors knows how dharma has to be established based on Pancharatra. This will be disturbed if different sampradayas would be imposed on it.

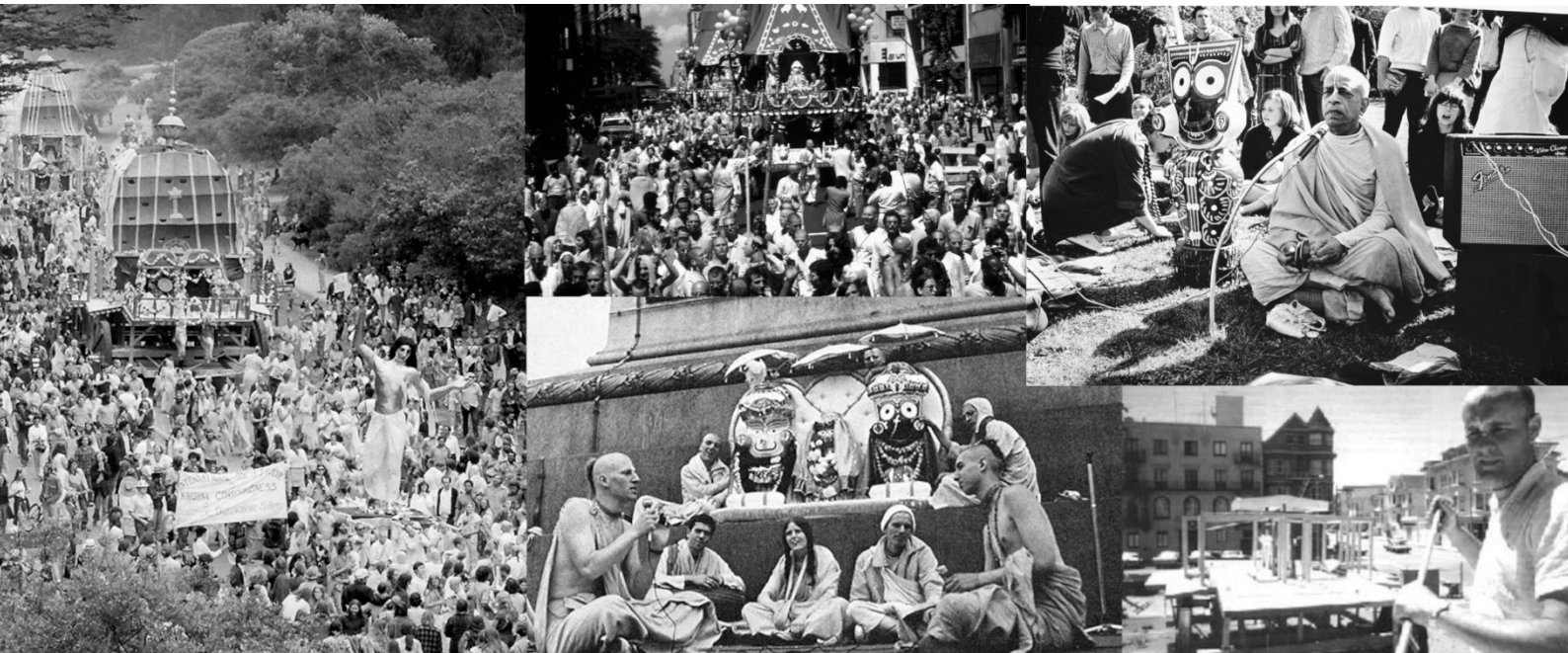
Words like yavanas and mlechcha have to be redefined according to shastras so that those in high class families who have not utilized their higher birth are to be rejected and those who perfect their lives although from not so high birth must be accepted for the worship of Lord Jagannatha. The caste system by birth without any qualification is not advocated in the shastras.

**Jaya Jagannātha, Jaya Baladeva, Jaya Subhadrā**

ISKCON Founder-Ācārya His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda

# ISKCON's tradition of Rathayātrā

*Settling doubts about its concurrence with śāstra*



ISKCON India Scholars Board  
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## Executive Summary

1. The example ISKCON's Founder-Ācārya His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda set for selecting dates for the Rathayātrā mahotsava has been that he tried to follow the traditional religious calendar but made concessions for other dates when following the calendar was unfeasible.
2. The *Dharma-śāstras* and *Purāṇas* give evidence that a *śāstra-vidhi* should not be followed if the people in general are opposed to it.
3. The *śāstras* also allow for *vidhis* to not be followed in order to give others who may not be able to follow them a chance to first fix their minds on Kṛṣṇa. After that is done, all other *śāstra-vidhis* may be introduced.
4. *Skanda Purāṇa* gives three *tithis* for holding the Rathayātrā.
5. The recommendation of the Āśāḍha-śukla-dvītiyā is a recommendation, not an injunction that permanently suppress the other two dates.
6. However recent they may be, ISKCON itself has its own traditions for worshipping Jagannātha that must be honored (e.g. Jayānanda Prabhu's photo must be placed on the front of Jagannātha's cart at every ISKCON Rathayātrā).
7. While the Puri temple traditions may be respected, ISKCON has a duty to follow its own traditions before any others.
8. Texts such as *Nīlādri Mahodaya* and records such as *Māḍāl Pañji* are explicitly concerned with the rituals and festivities in Puruṣottama-kṣetra but have never been mentioned or discussed by Prabhupāda. Nor does it appear that they have been mentioned in the main works of ISKCON's *pūrvācāryas*. This is not a criticism, this is just how things are.
9. Order of the strength of *pramāṇas* in descending order: *śrutis*, *smṛtis* (*purāṇas*, *itihāsas*, *dharma-śāstras*, *pañcarātra āgamas*), *sad-ācāra*, the preference of a *sādhu*, and vow by a *sādhu* to do something virtuous (*saṅkalpa*). All of these evidences have Vedic authority.
10. If there is a conflict between two or more of these authorities, the rule is that the stronger authority is to be understood in its most direct form, and the weaker authority takes an indirect meaning that is compatible with the stronger authority.
11. The Puri temple's traditions are at the level of *sad-ācāra*, which means they cannot rule out the alternative dates given in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, whose authority is *smṛti* and therefore has stronger authority than the Puri temple's traditions.
12. The authority of the Puri temple's traditions, such as their dates, are therefore compulsory only for members of their tradition. They are not compulsory for everyone everywhere.
13. ISKCON strives to follow the *śāstras* in all its endeavors, but in cases where it is not possible then some concession as provided for by *śāstra* needs to be made. This sometimes includes observing the Rathayātrā and Snānayātrā on dates other than those recommended in the *śāstras*.

## ISKCON's understanding of when to observe the Rathayātrā

ISKCON Founder-Ācārya His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda introduced Vedic culture around the world to those not born into it. All over the world, he initiated people from fallen communities and nations into the Gauḍīya line of Vaiṣṇavism, in the line of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, etc. Considering the newness of Vedic culture to his foreign disciples, Prabhupāda was their only source of knowledge of the rules, regulations and customs of Vaiṣṇava practice. And even in light of other sources, Prabhupāda was and continues to be ISKCON's members' most authoritative source of knowledge of Vaiṣṇavism, Vedic culture, dharma, etc.

As to how to properly observe the Jagannātha Rathayātrā and other festivals associated with it, such as the Snānayātrā, ISKCON's members have always looked to Prabhupāda's example—what he said and what he did. What ISKCON's members have learned from this is that Prabhupāda preferred to follow the dates given for festivals in traditional calendars such as the Bengali Pañjikā, but sometimes he allowed the Rathayātrā to be observed at other times.

In ISKCON's world wide mission, there are places that cannot hold the Rathayātrā strictly on the same prescribed dates as the Puri Mandir – even within a range of dates approved by their administration. Some examples include:

- Australia: Prabhupāda was scheduled to attend the Rathayātrā in Melbourne in January of 1977. He had also approved that date. It should also be noted that in the Southern Hemisphere, the seasons are opposite of those in the Northern. In Australia, June-July is the middle of winter, as is the case in most of Africa and South America, and mid-Summer is December-January.
- Washington D.C. Rathayātrā: This must be held on the 4th of July every year, because it is in the capital of the United States of America. On account of the 4th of July national holiday Washington D.C. there is the Independence Day Parade. It is not possible to organize any other Rathayātrā so close to the July 4th date, on account of security, attendance, etc. In this case, Jagannātha's ratha is one of many floats in the Independence Day Parade, which get reviewed by the President of the United States of America himself and is on national television. If some other date is chosen, then the president does not see Jagannatha, and Jagannātha does not come on television.
- Switzerland: Devotees there are also trying to do as per tithi but they can only do it on Sundays and sometimes there are other functions and they have to wait till next Sunday.
- Russia: The regional climate, the government and the local culture are often not favorable to the observance of Rathayātrā on dates prescribed in *śāstra*.

These are but a few examples of places in the world on which the Rathayātrā cannot be held on the prescribed *tithis*.

Sometimes it is the case that the people in general are unfavorable to some recommendation in the *śāstras*. In such cases, the *Dharma-śāstras* and *Purāṇas* recommend not following some practice even if permitted or recommended by *śāstra*.

*parityajed-ārtha-kāmau yau syātām dharma-varjitau  
dharmam cāpy-asukhodarkam loka-saṅkruṣṭam-eva ca*

“He shall, avoid such wealth and pleasures as are opposed to righteousness, as also righteousness if it be conducive to unhappiness, or disapproved by the people.”<sup>1</sup>

*karmanā manasā vācā yatnād-dharmam samācaret  
asvargyam loka-vidviṣṭam dharmyam-anyācareṇna tu*

“By deeds, mind, and speech, one should diligently practice righteousness. One should not practice even a righteous act if it is not conducive to heaven or is detested by the people.”<sup>2</sup>

*parityajed-ārtha-kāmau yau syātām dharma-varjitau  
sarva-loka-viruddham ca dharmam apy-ācareṇna tu*

“Without dharma, the so-called life goals of artha and kāma should be given up. In addition, whatever is dharma that the people in general are opposed to should not be practiced.”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, ISKCON has typically observed the Rathayātrā on dates near the same time as the one in Puri but also considers the opportunity for as many people to attend the Rathayātrā as possible, which sometimes is better on other days than on the dates recommended in *śāstra*.

## Spiritual reasoning in ISKCON’s paramparā

The questions we are concerned with are dates on which the Rathayātrā and Snānayātrā are held: Is it better to hold the Rathayātrā or Snānayātrā on the dates prescribed in *śāstra* or (more recently) as insisted on by the Puri Mandir but to minimal effect in preaching or not observing the festival at all? Or, is it better to make some adjustment in the dates so that as many people as possible can attend the festival? Often times this would mean not doing the festival at all, because hardly anyone would come for it. It is a huge expense, and temples which have little money can hardly afford to spend it on endeavors that do not help them preach and spread the cult of devotion to Lord Jagannātha.

These two śloka are fundamental to ISKCON’s members’ reasoning:

*tasmāt kenāpy upāyena  
manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet*

“Somehow or other, one must fix the mind on the form of Kṛṣṇa very seriously.”<sup>4</sup>

This was Nārada Muni’s conclusion when speaking to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira as to why Śiśupāla got *mukti* despite blaspheming Kṛṣṇa. Even he was inimical, he was still thinking of the form of Kṛṣṇa and therefore obtained *mukti*. Śrī Nārada also mentions the contrasting example of Mahārāja Vena, who could not think of the form of Viṣṇu either out of affection, fear or envy or any other way. And hence he went to hell.

The ultimate purpose of all the Vedic rules and regulations is to help someone remember Kṛṣṇa and never forget Him. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in Bhagavad-gītā 15.15, *vedaiśca sarvair aham eva vedyah*, “By all the Vedas, I am to be known.” And more emphatically in the Padma Purāṇa it is said,

<sup>1</sup> Manu-saṁhitā 4.176, trans. Ganganatha Jha.

<sup>2</sup> Yājñvalkya-smṛti 1.156.

<sup>3</sup> Kūrma Purāṇa 2.51.

<sup>4</sup> Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.1.32.

*smartavyaḥ satataṁ viṣṇur vismartavyo na jātucit  
sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syur etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*

“Viṣṇu should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the *śāstras* should be the servants of these two principles.”

Thus the fundamental *scriptural* principle followed by ISKCON’s members is that the rules and regulations of dharma and *bhakti* may sometimes be relaxed in order to give others a chance to remember Kṛṣṇa. And by getting this chance, the rules and regulations from the *śāstras* that should be followed will gradually be accepted.

The main consideration is how to make persons who, out of inability or even enmity, are unfit to practice bhakti-yoga strictly according to *śāstra-vidhis* into devotees, who are capable and willing to follow *śāstra*. Outside of India, such adjustments to the prescribed *vidhis* are necessary so that the people in general can derive the highest benefit.

## Śāstra

The *Skanda Purāṇa*, 2.2.2.30 – 33 offers three *tithis* (dates) on which the Rathayātrā may be performed. Of these days, the one most preferred by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the second day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Āṣāḍha. This is the day that the Jagannātha temple in Puri observes the festival.

*guṇḍicākhyāṁ mahāyātrāṁ prakurvīyāḥ kṣitīśvara |  
yasyāḥ samkīrtanādeva naraḥ pāpādvimucyate || 30 ||*

*māghamāsasya pañcamyāmaṣṭamyāṁ caitraśuklake |  
ete kālāḥ praśastā hi guṇḍicākhyamahotsave || 31 ||*

*viśeṣānmokṣadāśāḍhadvitīyā puṣyasamṣrutā |  
ṛkṣābhāve tithau kāryā sadā sā prītaye mama || 32 ||*

*āśāḍhasya site pakṣe dvitīyā puṣyasamṣrutā |  
tasyāṁ rathe samāropya rāmaṁ mām bhadrāya saha || 33 ||*

O Lord of the Earth, you should organize the grand festival known as Guṇḍicā. By merely chanting its name, a person is freed from sins (30). The fifth day of the month of Māgha and the eighth day of the bright half of Caitra—these are the best days for the great festival named Guṇḍicā (31). Particularly the second day in the lunar month of Āṣāḍha in conjunction with the Puṣya constellation is conducive to liberation. The festival shall be celebrated on the specified lunar day even if the constellation does not coincide. It is pleasing to Me always (32). On the second day, in the bright half of the lunar month of Āṣāḍha, in conjunction with the Puṣya constellation, the devotees should place Rāma and Me along with Bhadrā on the chariot (33).

The fact that the *Skanda Purāṇa* gives three different dates on which the Rathayātrā festival may be held makes this different from other *tithis* like Janmāṣṭami, which is to be observed on a single day and no other. Lord Kṛṣṇa sometimes went to visit His relatives and devotees in Hastinapura and Mathura-Vṛndavana as per *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.11.9. According to Śrīla Prabhupāda, the Rathayātrā festival observed by Lord Caitanya is “the emotional process of taking Kṛṣṇa back to Vṛndavana.”<sup>5</sup> And at different times, more than once, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself went back to visit

<sup>5</sup> Prabhupāda, *Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*, chapter 82.

Vṛndāvana. Because the *Skanda Purāṇa* gives three different *tithis* on which the Rathayātrā festival may be observed, other *śākhās* of *sanātana-dharma* that wish to observe this festival may choose from any of these.

If *śāstra* permits the Rathayātrā festival to be held on different *tithis*, then why does the Jagannātha temple in Puri insist that everyone else around the world must also observe it on that day—or at least within the 14-day period they have allowed for around Āṣāḍha Śukla Dvīṭīyā? On many matters, *śāstra* offers options (*vikalpa*), and a *ṛṣi*, an *ācārya*, or simply *sad-ācāra* without any known person starting it (*aitihya*) may have selected one of the options on behalf of the tradition's followers. When the option is thus chosen, the followers are obligated to honor their *ācārya's* choice and follow no other option.

For example, in the Varāha Upaniṣad 1.17, it is said that

*ye ṣaṅṅavati-tattva-jñā yatra kutra-āśrame ratāḥ  
jaṭī muṅḍī śikhī vāpi mucyate nātra saṁśayaḥ*

“Those that know these ninety-six *tattvas* will attain salvation in whatever order of life they may be, whether they have matted hair or are of shaven head or have (only) their tuft of hair on their head. There is no doubt about this.”

However, it is well-known that Prabhupāda insisted that male *āśrama* residents keep only shaved head and *śikhā*, and he always discouraged matted locks. ISKCON's members are therefore obligated to follow the option that their Founder-Ācārya has chosen.

Similarly, it is understood that in the *paramparā* of the Puri temple, the *tithi* on which the Rathayātrā festival is to be observed has been decided long ago by a *ṛṣi* or *ācārya* in their *paramparā*. At the same time, this does not invalidate any other *sampradāya's* choice of *tithi*, just as Prabhupāda's choice of shaved heads does not invalidate the choice of wearing matted locks made by *ācāryas* of other *sampradāyas*.

*Sanātana-dharma* therefore has both deep unity and great diversity. This simultaneous unity and diversity makes it cohesive and also highly adaptable across different times, places, communities and circumstances. Thus even in the customs and rituals of the worship of Lord Jagannatha within India, there is great diversity.

## Aitihya (historical evidence)

Aitihya is historical evidence.

As per *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.19.17, *aitihya* is considered synonymous with *sad-ācāra*, the customs of saintly people.<sup>6</sup> On the same *śloka*, *Bhavārtha-dīpika* commentary by Śrīdhara Svāmī, says *aitihyam mahājana-prasiddhiḥ*, “*Aitihya* means the established conventions of great souls.” In *Krama-sandarbha*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī slightly elaborates: *aitihyam—tat-tac-cāstra-pravartaka-mahājana-sampradāya-prasiddhiḥ* “*Aitihya* means the established tradition from great souls who promulgated the various scriptures.” Śrīla Virarāghavācārya puts it as simply as possible: *aitihya-sabdaḥ*, “*Aitihya* is sabda.” Śrīla Visvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura repeats Śrīdhara Svāmī and adds the illustrative example mentioned in the *śloka*: *aitihyam mahājana-prasiddhiḥ; na kadācid anidṛsam jagad ityādikam vadatam tu na mahājanatvam jñeyam*, “The evidence presented by historical or

<sup>6</sup> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.19.17: *śrutih pratyakṣam aitihyam anumānam catuṣṭayam*, “Vedic knowledge, direct experience, traditional wisdom and logical induction.”



traditional wisdom is that those who declare that this material world is false did not exist previously, and thus are unauthorized and ignorant.” Hence, *aitihya* is not only synonymous with *sad-ācārā* but signifies the virtuous traditions handed down by the great souls (*mahājanas*), who are self-realized.

As per *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.28.18, *aitihya* is among the sources of knowledge by which *jñānam*, true knowledge, is cultivated.

*jñānam viveko nigamas tapas ca  
pratyakṣam aitihiyam athānumānam*

Real spiritual knowledge is based on the discrimination of spirit from matter, and it is cultivated by scriptural evidence, austerity, direct perception, reception of the historical narrations from the Purāṇas, Itihāsas, etc., and logical inference.

Śrīdhara Svāmī and Virarāghavācārya in their commentaries put it most simply: *aitihyam upadeśaḥ* “*Aitihya* means instruction.” Śrīla Vijayadhvajā Tīrtha writes: *ācārya-sampradāya-siddhatvād aitihiyam* “*Aitihya* is established through tradition and *ācāryas*,” or, alternatively: “*Aitihya* is established through tradition consisting of *ācāryas*.” Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura repeats Śrīdhara Svāmī verbatim, in full.

As explained by ISKCON’s Founder-Ācārya Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, *aitihya* is not just historical evidence, but historical evidence from authority and, hence, is *śabda-pramāṇa*.

There are three kinds of evidences: *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna* and *aitihya*. *Pratyakṣa* means that you can directly perceive. That is called *pratyakṣa*. And *anumāna*, *anumāna* means you can conjecture, make an..., “It may be like this. It may be like this. Perhaps it is like this.” This is called *anumāna*. And the other evidence is *aitihya*. *Aitihya* means to take evidences from the authority.

So according... Out of these three evidences, this *aitihya* evidence, just like we are taking instruction of Bhagavad-gītā, sound, sound vibrated by the greatest personality, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. That sort of *pramāṇa* is acceptable. That is the best. This is the best way of acquiring knowledge. Because so far direct evidence is concerned, it is impossible. Because our senses are so imperfect, we cannot have anything. We can..., we can have some direct experience of certain things, but not for all, especially for these spiritual things, which is beyond our experience.<sup>7</sup>

*Aitihya* is typically a tradition started from someone unknown or no longer remembered. Jīva Gosvāmī gives this definition: *ajñāta-vaktra-kṛtāgata-pāramparya-prasiddham aitihiyam*: “*Aitihya* is common knowledge received from a tradition started by an unknown speaker.”<sup>8</sup>

So, the evidence from *aitihya*, or tradition, is a category of *śabda-pramāṇa*. When it is in line with *śāstra*, then it is a valid means of understanding that which is beyond one’s ability of direct perception or inference, and a valid source of knowledge of dharma.

## Śāstra and the traditions of ISKCON and the Puri Temple

ISKCON has its own *paramparā* and traditions established by its *pūrvācāryas*. Its *guru-paramparā* includes many illustrious *ācāryas*, beginning with ISKCON’s Founder-Ācārya Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, his own guru Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Śrīla Gaurakīśora Dāsa

<sup>7</sup> Lecture by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda on 11 March 1966.

<sup>8</sup> Tattva-sandarbhā Sarva-saṁvādinī 9.

Bābājī, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Śrīla Jagannātha Dāsa Bābājī, Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, Śrīla Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī and his older brother Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, who were disciples of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself. Madhvācārya and many of his descendents like Padmanābha, Jayatīrtha, and the great Mādhavendrapuri are also included. And the very head of ISKCON's guru paramparā includes Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the cause of all causes, Lord Brahmā, who emerged from the lotus grown from the navel of Garbhodhakaśāyī Viṣṇu and is creator of the universe; Brahmā's *mānasaputra* Devarṣi Nārada Muni; and Nārada's illustrious disciple Śrīla Vedavyāsa, the compiler of the Vedas.

Although our right to claim this lineage has sometimes been contested, it is this understanding of our *guru-paramparā* that we have received from Prabhupāda, who himself received it from his own *gurudeva* (his name is given in the above list). While we respect the insights, traditions and customs of other authentic *sanātana-dharma paramparās*, our allegiance is first to following and maintaining the traditions and customs handed down to us from the *ācāryas* within our own *paramparā*. In this respect, we are no different from any other *sanātana-dharma paramparā*. *Evaṁ paramparā prāptam imaṁ rājarṣayo viduḥ (Bhagavad-gītā 4.2)*.

Sometimes a doubt may arise as to whether some custom followed by a paramparā is authentic, or whether a particular action at a specific time and place by certain members of the paramparā is authentic. In order to ascertain what is authentic, our *pūrvācārya* Śrīla Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura has said that an authentic understanding of any topic comes from a unified understanding of if from *śāstra, sādhu and guru: sādhu-śāstra-guru-vākya, cittete kariyā aikya*, "Make the words of one's guru, of the saintly person, and the *śāstra* one within one's mind." That is to say that a topic should be understood in a harmonious way from these three sources; an unharmonious understanding, where one source is understood in a way opposed to the others is unharmonious, and such an understanding is considered improper or faulty.

Doubts about some topic arising from apparent incompatibility between *śāstra, sādhu and guru* is resolved according to certain rules governing the relative authority of these *pramāṇas*. The topmost authority is *śāstra*, because the authority of guru and sādhu is derived from *śāstra*. This hierarchy of *pramāṇas* from Yājñavalkya-*smṛti* 1.1.7 is to be observed in resolving doubts among them.

*śruti-smṛti-sadācāraḥ svasya ca priyam ātmanaḥ  
samyak saṅkalpajaḥ kāmo dharmamūlam idaṁ smṛtam*

"The Vedas, *Smṛti* texts, good conduct, and what is dear to oneself, along with a vow to do something virtuous arising from a virtuous desire – this is considered the root of Dharma."<sup>9</sup>

It is furthermore the understanding that the authority of each of these sources is less than the authority of the previously listed item.<sup>10</sup>

In *Tattva-sandarbha*, Jīva Gosvāmī gives an example of a stronger source and weaker source: *śruti-smṛti-virodhe tu śrutir eva balīyasī*, "In a conflict between *śruti* and *smṛti*, the *śruti* is stronger."<sup>11</sup> After having ascertained which source is stronger, then the weaker statement should be understood in

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Śrīla Prabhupāda's commentary to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.11.7

<sup>10</sup> This order of the authority of *pramāṇas* is given in Vijñāneśvara's *Mitākṣarā* commentary to *Yājñavalkya-smṛti*. It is also the opinion of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his work *Tattva-sandarbha* that among all *śāstras*, including the Vedas, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is considered to have superlative authority. Therefore in Jīva Gosvāmī's own *Samvādinī* commentary to the first four of the *Ṣaṭ-sandarbhās*, in his commentary to each *anuccheda* there is text from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as its *viśaya-vākya*.

<sup>11</sup> *Jābāla-śruti*, quoted in *Tattva-sandarbha* 11, *Saṁvādinī* commentary.

light of the stronger statement: *balavad-vākyānugato 'rthas cintanīyah*, “The meaning should be contemplated according to the stronger statement.”<sup>12</sup> That is also to say that the stronger statement should be understood in its most direct, sensible meaning, and the weaker statement should take an indirect meaning that is compatible with the stronger statement.

According to this hierarchy of *pramāṇas*, *aitihya* which is synonymous with *sad-ācāra*, is weaker than either *śruti* or *smṛti*. Therefore if the head of some *paramparā* that is apart from the Puri Mandir decides to perform the Rathayātrā on some other date consistent with the two other optional dates in *Skanda Purāṇa*, that should not be objectionable or considered wrong. The *sad-ācāra* does not absolutely override *smṛti*. The choice made for a particular *paramparā* is valid for that *paramparā*; it is not universal.

## Prabhupāda’s disciple Jayānanda and an ISKCON tradition

One example of a tradition that ISKCON must observe is that a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciple Jayānanda Prabhu must be placed prominently at the front of Lord Jagannātha’s cart at every ISKCON Rathayātrā. This was ordered by Prabhupāda.

Jayānanda Prabhu was especially dedicated to the service of Lord Jagannātha. He encouraged, organized and oversaw the building of Jagannātha’s ratha for the Rathayātrās held all over ISKCON. Even in his last days as an invalid confined to a wheelchair, he had to be present during the building of the ratha to encourage others and assist in any way he possibly could. Indeed, just his mere presence enthused others to build Jagannātha’s cart.

Jayānanda Prabhu passed away during the manifest presence of Śrīla Prabhupāda. On the occasion of Jayānanda’s departure, Śrīla Prabhupāda himself had been so pleased with his service and exemplary life, he wrote the following letter to Jayānanda, had it circulated to all his disciples and published in his periodical magazine *Back to Godhead*.

Bombay, 5 May, 1977

My Dear Jayananda,

Please accept my blessings.

I am feeling very intensely your separation. In 1967 you joined me in San Francisco. You were driving my car and chanting Hare Krsna. You were the first man to give me some contribution (\$5000) for printing my Bhagavad-gita. After that, you have rendered very favorable service to Krsna in different ways. I so hope at the time of your death you were remembering Krsna and as such, you have been promoted to the eternal association of Krsna. If not, if you had any tinge of material desire, you have gone to the celestial kingdom to live with the demigods for many thousands of years and enjoy the most opulent life of material existence. From there you can promote yourself to the spiritual world. But even if one fails to promote himself to the spiritual world, at that time he comes down again on the surface of this globe and takes birth in a big family like a yogis' or a brahmanas' or an aristocratic family, where there is again chance of reviving Krsna Consciousness. But as you were hearing Krsna-kirtana, I am sure that you were directly promoted to Krsna-loka.

*janma karma ca me divyam evam yo vetti tattvatah  
tyaktva deham punar janma naiti man eti so' rjuna*

Krsna has done a great favor to you, not to continue your diseased body, and has given you a suitable place for your service. Thank you very much.

Your ever well-wisher,

<sup>12</sup> *Tattva-sandarbha* 11, *Saṁvādinī* commentary.

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami  
ACBS/tkg

Later, from New Delhi, in a letter dated 11 May 1977 to Rāmeśvara Swami, Prabhupāda wrote,

Jayananda's death is glorious. It is very good that he had stated, what is the use of such a useless body, better to give it up. He has left his body very wonderfully, and he has been transferred to Vaikuntha. I have already sent a condolence letter for publication in Back To Godhead. Everyone should follow the example of Jayananda. I am very proud that I had such a nice disciple. If possible Jayananda's picture should be hung in the ratha of Lord Jagannatha, and in all of our temples a day may be set aside for holding a festival in his honor, just as we do on the disappearance day of the other great Vaisnavas.

From that time onwards, in every Rathayātrā observed by ISKCON all over the world, a picture of Jayānanda Prabhu is placed in the front of Lord Jagannātha's Ratha. And a festival on his disappearance is also held yearly in his honor. After Prabhupāda, Jayānanda is ISKCON's first saint.

## Rathayātrā around the world

There is another principle to consider in this regard—*phalena paricīyate*: "A tree is known by its fruits". In other words, the results will prove if one is following *śāstra* correctly or not.

From *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, it is clear that development of a sinless nature, *sāttvika* life and pure devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa are the natural results of following the Vedic scriptures properly. There are four primary sins: meat eating, intoxication, illicit sex and gambling.<sup>13</sup> *Sāttvika* life refers to a life dedicated to the growth of brahminical qualities such as control of the mind and senses through the routine performance of brahminical duties involving study of Vedic scriptures, worship of the Supreme Lord and so on for the moral and spiritual benefit of everyone.<sup>14</sup> Pure devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa refers to selfless engagement in hearing about Him, glorifying Him and so on.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, if one does not follow the scriptures properly, it will lead to constant difficulty in this regard. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī quotes the *Brahma-yāmala* in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.101:

*śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-pañcarātra-vidhiṃ vinā  
aikāntikī harer bhaktir utpātāyaiva kalpate*

"If one wants to demonstrate his great devotion to the Supreme Lord but his process of devotional service violates the standard rules of revealed scriptures such as *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, *Purāṇas*, *Pañcarātra* and so on, then his devotion will simply disturb society by misleading people from the auspicious path of spiritual advancement."

So, this criteria can also be used to verify if ISKCON -- one of whose core activities is the performance of Śrī Jagannātha Ratha-yātrā in almost all parts of the world and which mostly take place on days other than the three *tithis* mentioned in *Skanda Purāṇa* for the Ratha-yātrā at Puruṣottama-kṣetra— is following the Vedic scriptures correctly or not. If one were to examine the sincere practitioners of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in ISKCON, one will find that they indeed avoid the above-mentioned four

<sup>13</sup> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.17.38: *dyūtaṃ pānaṃ striyaḥ sūnā yatrādharmaś catur-vidhaḥ.*

<sup>14</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.42: *śamo damaś tapaḥ śaucaṃ kṣāntir ārjavam eva ca / jñānaṃ vijñānam āstikyaṃ brahma-karma svabhāva-jam. Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.11.13: *ijyādhyayana-dānāni vihitāni dvijanmanām.*

<sup>15</sup> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.5.23: *śravaṇaṃ kīrtanaṃ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇaṃ pāda-sevanam / arcanaṃ vandanaṃ dāsyam sakhyam ātma-nivedanam.*

primary sinful activities, that they have embraced a *sāttvika* life as mentioned above and that they are cultivating a life of purity in devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa as mentioned in *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

## The superexcellence of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti

Unlike *karma-kaṇḍa* rituals, which must be performed precisely to obtain the desired result, in *bhakti* even if there is a fault or many faults, Kṛṣṇa still pleased with His *bhakta* and accepts the service rendered.

In the *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja briefly describes the pastime of Jagannātha and Baladeva chastising Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi for becoming envious of a *pūjārī*.<sup>16</sup>

*ei-mata saba vaiṣṇava gauḍe calilā  
vidyānidhi se vatsara nīlādri rahilā ||77||*

*varūpa-sahita tānra haya sakhya-prīti  
dui-janāya kṛṣṇa-kathāya ekatra-i sthiti ||78||*

*gadādhara-pañḍite teṅho punaḥ mantra dila  
oḍana-ṣaṣṭhīra dine yātrā ye dekhila ||79||*

*jagannātha parena tathā 'māḍuyā' vasana  
dekhīyā saghrṇa haila vidyānidhira mana ||80||*

*sei rātrye jagannātha-balāi āsiyā  
dui-bhāi caḍā'na tānre hāsiyā hāsiyā ||81||*

*gāla phulila, ācārya antare ullāsa  
vistāri' varṇiyāchena vṛndāvana-dāsa ||82||*

“Finally all the Vaiṣṇavas returned to Bengal, but that year Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi remained at Jagannātha Purī (77). Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī and Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi had a friendly, intimate relationship, and as far as discussing topics about Kṛṣṇa, they were situated on the same platform (78). Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi initiated Gadādhara Paṇḍita for the second time, and on the day of Oḍana-ṣaṣṭhī Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi saw the festival (79). When Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi saw that Lord Jagannātha was given a starched garment, he became a little hateful. In this way his mind was polluted (80). That night the brothers Lord Jagannātha and Balarāma came to Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi and, smiling, began to slap him (81). Although his cheeks were swollen from the slapping, Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi was very happy within. This incident has been elaborately described by Ṭhākura Vṛndāvana dāsa (82).”

On another occasion, after Lord Vāmanadeva punished Bali Mahārāja and bestowed His favor on him, the Lord then asked Śukrācārya what was the fault in Bali Mahārāja's *yajña* for which Śukrācārya rejected Bali Mahārāja as his disciple. Śukrācārya replied there was no fault, because when the Lord's Holy name is uttered, everything becomes faultless.<sup>17</sup>

*athāhośanasam rājan harir nārāyaṇo 'ntike  
āsīnam ṛtvijām madhye sadasi brahma-vādinām ||13||*

<sup>16</sup> *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā*, Chapter 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Canto 8, Chapter 23.

*brahman santanu śiṣyasya karma-cchidraṁ vitanvataḥ  
yat tat karmasu vaiṣamyam brahma-dṛṣṭam samam bhavet ||14||*

*śrī-śukra uvāca  
kutas tat-karma-vaiṣamyam yasya karmeśvaro bhavān  
yajñeśo yajña-puruṣaḥ sarva-bhāvena pūjitaḥ ||15||*

*mantratas tantrataś chidraṁ deśa-kālārha-vastutaḥ  
sarvam karoti niśchidram anusankīrtanam tava ||16||*

*tathāpi vadato bhūman kariṣyāmy anuśāsanam  
etac chreyaḥ param puṁsām yat tavājñānupālanam ||17||*

*śrī-śuka uvāca  
pratinandya harer ājñām uśanā bhagavān iti  
yajña-cchidraṁ samādhatta baler viprasibhiḥ saha ||18||*

“Hari, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Nārāyaṇa, thereafter addressed Śukrācārya, who was sitting nearby in the midst of the assembly with the priests [*brahma, hotā, udgātā* and *adhvaryu*]. O Mahārāja Parīkṣit, these priests were all *brahma-vādīs*, followers of the Vedic principles for performing sacrifices (13). O best of the *brāhmaṇas*, Śukrācārya, please describe the fault or discrepancy in your disciple Bali Mahārāja, who engaged in performing sacrifices. This fault will be nullified when judged in the presence of qualified *brāhmaṇas* (14). Śukrācārya said: My Lord, You are the enjoyer and lawgiver in all performances of sacrifice, and You are the *yajña-puruṣa*, the person to whom all sacrifices are offered. If one has fully satisfied You, where is the chance of discrepancies or faults in his performances of sacrifice? (15) 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 (16). Lord Viṣṇu, I must nonetheless act in obedience to Your order because obeying Your order is most auspicious and is the first duty of everyone (17). Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: In this way, the most powerful Śukrācārya accepted the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead with full respect. Along with the best *brāhmaṇas*, he began to compensate for the discrepancies in the sacrifices performed by Bali Mahārāja (18).”

Similarly, though several faults may be apparent in ISKCON's sincere endeavors to serve Lord Jagannātha, we are confident that these are rectified. After all, all the Rathayātrās are accompanied, from the beginning to the end, by the chanting of the Lord's holy names performed by devotees who also chant in japa 25,000 holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa and avoid the above-mentioned four primary sinful activities.

## Conclusion

The Rathayātrā mahotsava observed by the Puri temple is unsurpassed. Yet the *Skanda Purāṇa* gives three dates on which the festival may be held. This means that the practices of the Puri temple, such as observing it *only* on the Āṣāḍha-śukla-dvītiyā, and other utsavas like the Snānayātrā based on that date that has been chosen for their tradition, have the authority of *sad-ācāra*. They are therefore applicable to their locality but not necessarily to other localities. Other sanghas around the world may choose to follow the Puri temple’s customs and dates, but that is a choice they are free to make. Other sanghas may choose to observe the Rathayātrā on the other dates prescribed in the *Skanda*

*Purāṇa*, and their observances of other utsavas will then need to be adjusted accordingly. This would be valid both for India and the rest of the world. The Puri temple has its own traditions, but so does ISKCON.

Texts like the *Nīlādri Mahodaya* and the *Māḍalāpañji* are followed closely by the Puri temple, but they are not a part of ISKCON's canon of *śāstras*. That is not a criticism, that is just a fact. Prabhupāda never discussed these texts or taught them to his disciples. ISKCON follows the *Nārada Pañcarātra āgamas* in the matter of *arcana-vidhi*, and, of course, the *śrutis*, *smṛtis*, and *purāṇas* also. However recent ISKCON's traditions may be, ISKCON's members are obliged to honor them because Prabhupāda either asked his disciples to follow them or he set the standard by his own personal example.

*yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janaḥ  
sa yat pramāṇam kurute lokas tad anuvartate*

Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues." (*Bhagavad-gītā* 3.21)

Śrīla Prabhupāda was undoubtedly a great *sādhu*. So, the standards he set are to be considered traditions and as valid as any other traditions, however ancient they may be.

ISKCON is a global mission for the propagation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And the Rathayātrā has been observed in ISKCON from its very beginning. ISKCON has celebrated the Rathayātrā mahotsava under greatly varying conditions throughout the world. This has sometimes required the adjustment or relaxation of some rules so that the Rathayātrā festival may be established where none was before, and and festivals like Rathayātrā may be observed at all.

It is declared in the Padma Purāṇa that all the regulative principles given in the *śāstras* are servants of two principles: always remember Kṛṣṇa and never forget Him. At the beginning of this paper, and it was shown it is not always possible to observe the Rathayatra on the prescribed dates. Thus these two question were posed:

- Is it better to hold the Rathayātrā or Snānayātrā on the dates prescribed in *śāstra*, as insisted on by the Puri Mandir but to minimal effect in preaching, or instead not observing the festival at all?
- Or, is it better to make some adjustment in the dates so that as many people as possible can attend the festival?

ISKCON's answer from the very beginning has been to affirm the second question and follow that. It has been ISKCON's practice that the Rathayātrā should be observed even if it means observing it on some date not recommended in the *śāstras*. This is not to be taken as a license for ISKCON's members to flaunt the rules and regulations of the *śāstras* and observe the festival according to their imagination, in defiance of *śāstra* and sad-ācāra. Yet adjustment according to *deśa-kāla-pātra-vicāra* will sometimes be necessary. This adjustment is also provided for in the *śāstras*.