

UNTIMELY RATHA-YATRA: A BRIEF NOTE

According to sacred scriptures and ancient well-established tradition, the sacred Ratha-yatra of Shree Shree Jagannatha Mahaprabhu is a nine-day festival (*navadinatmaka-yatra*) commencing every year **only** on Asadha Shukla-paksha Dvitiya Tithi. Since several decades, however, ISKCON Temples in India and abroad have been performing Shree Jagannatha Ratha-yatra on various dates throughout the year. In this connection, after several years of interaction and dialogue between Shree Jagannatha Temple Administration (Puri) and ISKCON Headquarters (Governing Body Commission) at Mayapur (West Bengal), the ISKCON Headquarters by the letter of its Chairman dated 19th October 2025 finally decided as follows: (a) It will conduct Shree Jagannatha Ratha-yatra in India within the aforesaid nine-day period, but (b) with regard to Shree Jagannatha Ratha-yatra performed by ISKCON outside India, it will continue with its practice of holding the yatra on various dates throughout the year.

The aforesaid decision of ISKCON to hold Ratha-yatra in countries outside India on days other than the auspicious nine-day period above-mentioned is not acceptable at all for the following reasons:

- 1) The most sacred festivals of Sanatana Vaidika Dharma, such as, Shree Krishna-janmashtami, Shree Rama-navami, Shree Mahashivaratri, Shree Ganesh-chaturthi, Holi, Diwali, Durga Pooja (Navaratri), Dussehra, Vasant Panchami, Makara-sankranti, Guru Poornima etc are celebrated all over the world on tithis sanctioned by sacred scriptures. Even in other world religions, holy festivals are celebrated around the world according to lunar calendar/dates sanctioned by sacred scriptures and/or tradition, whether it be Christmas or Eid-al Fitr, Wesak (Buddha Day) or Paryushan Mahaparva (Jainism), Yom Kippur celebrated by the Jews or Vaisakhi celebrated by our Sikh community. Any deviation in the date of the above festivals will not be tolerated by the followers of the concerned religion anywhere in the world. There can therefore be no valid justification for celebrating Ratha-yatra -- the greatest and most sacred festival of the Supreme Lord, Shree Purushottama-Jagannatha -- on just about any day of the year contrary to the prescription of scriptures and tradition.
- 2) In the words of Maharshi Vedavyasa as stated in Skanda Purana (Purushottama-kshetra Mahatmyam, Adhyaya 29, Shlokas 32-41, 44 &45), Shree Jagannatha Mahaprabhu has Himself proclaimed that His Ratha-yatra will be a nine-day festival commencing on Asadha Shukla-

paksha Dvitiya Tithi. Performing Ratha-yatra on any other day of the year is a blatant transgression of the Divine Command of the Supreme Lord. The aforesaid nine-day period for holding Ratha-yatra has also been mentioned by Maharshi Vedavyasa in Brahma Purana and Padma Purana and has been reiterated in several other scriptures.

- 3) The sacred scriptures written by Maharshi Vedavyasa from the Vedas to the Puranas constitute the very foundation of Sanatana Vaidika Dharma. Contravention of important prescriptions contained in these scriptures, such as the tithis proclaimed for performing Shree Jagannatha Ratha-yatra, amounts to a blatant disregard and violation of the fundamental scriptures of Sanatana Vaidika Dharma. It defies all logic and reasoning when ISKCON faithfully abides by the Divine Proclamations of Shree Krishna narrated by Maharshi Vedavyasa in Shreemad Bhagavata Purana and Shreemad Bhagavad Geeta but refuses to abide by the Divine Proclamations of Shree Jagannatha Mahaprabhu narrated by Maharshi Vedavyasa in Skanda Purana and Brahma Purana.
- 4) It is a well-established tradition and rule of Sanatana Vaidika Dharma which has been laid down in several scriptures, such as, Naradiya Samhita and Atri Samhita that, after consecration and installation (*Pratistha*) of the Presiding Deities in the Temple, they are not removed from Their Throne. During various festive occasions, the Utsava-vigrahas (as Representatives of the Presiding Deities) are taken out of the Temple in festive processions; but the Presiding Deities never leave Their Throne in the sanctum-sanctorum of the Temple. Mahaprabhu Shree Jagannatha, Shree Baladeva, Devi Subhadra and Chakraraj Sudarsana (*Shree Chaturdha Daru Vighrahas*) are Presiding Deities and not Utsava Vighrahas. According to ancient tradition well-established in Shree Jagannatha Temple in Puri (Moola-peetha of Mahaprabhu Jagannatha), it is the Utsava Vighrahas of *Shree Chaturdha Daru Vighrahas* (the Presiding Deities), such as, Shree Madanamohana, Shree Narayana, Shree Dolagovinda, Shree Balarama, Shreedevi, Shree Krishna and Shree Nrusingha, who are taken out of the Temple in procession on various festive occasions during the year. On the other hand, the Presiding Deities (*Shree Chaturdha Daru Vighrahas*) are themselves taken out of the Temple only on two most holy festivals, namely, Snana-yatra and Ratha-yatra, in obedience to the Divine Command of Shree Jagannatha Mahaprabhu as narrated in sacred scriptures. There is no sanction or any indication at all either in the scriptures or tradition for taking the Presiding Deities (*Shree Chaturdha*

Daru Vighras) out of Their Temple on any other day/occasion. Doing so amounts to a breach of the proclamations of Shree Jagannatha Mahaprabhu, prescription of our scriptures and well-established tradition of Sanatana Vaidika Dharma.

- 5) Several sacred scriptures such as, Kaalamaadhavah, Veeramitrodayah, and Neeladri Mahodaya, categorically state that the tithi prescribed in the scriptures for performance of festivals cannot be altered under any circumstance whatsoever. On the basis of 'desha-kala-patra nyaya' (that is, adaptations/changes in performance of rituals and festivals which are permissible on the basis of differences in place, time and circumstances) it is permissible to suitably adapt and modify the manner of conduct of Shree Jagannatha Ratha-yatra; but under no circumstance, whether within India or abroad, is it permissible to alter/change the tithi for performing the yatra. It may be stated here that a relevant factor for conducting Ratha-yatra in countries outside India is that the yatra can be practically held only on a week-end due to non-availability of public street during the week-days and/or convenience of the devotees. This issue is however overcome because Shree Jagannatha Ratha-yatra is a nine-day festival (*navadinatmaka-yatra*). Therefore, one or sometimes even two week-ends will fall within the prescribed nine-day period for celebrating Ratha-yatra.
- 6) Abiding by the prescription of sacred scriptures mentioned above, Shree Jagannatha Ratha-yatra has been performed since time immemorial in the Moola-peetha of Mahaprabhu Jagannatha (Shree Jagannatha Temple at Puri) within the sacred nine-day period commencing on Asadha Shukla-paksha Dvitiya Tithi; and this ancient well-established tradition has been followed in countless Shree Jagannatha Temples in India since many centuries.

The above are some of the major reasons, very briefly stated, which clearly establish that performing Shree Jagannatha Ratha-yatra anywhere in the world on a day other than the sacred nine-day period prescribed in scriptures and tradition is a blatant violation of the Divine Command of Shree Shree Jagannatha Mahaprabhu, the proclamations in sacred scriptures and well-established tradition. For a comprehensive exposition of the subject, please read the Final Opinion of the Scholars dated 2nd September 2025 and related documents attached below.

Jaya Jagannatha

