

A DREAM FESTIVAL

Orissa, on the eastern seaboard of India, is not only a land of magnificent monuments and natural beauties but also a land of colourful fairs and festivals. Every season has a verity of festivities to offer as a part of our rich cultural heritage. According to a local proverb, there are 13 festivals in a year but in fact they are as numerous as the days in the year, each with a difference.

In this plethora of festivals, there is a one and only festival which is remarkably distinguishable from the rest in sense and style grace and grandeur.

Observed for 11 days preceding Pausha Poornima – the full moon day of Pausha in December- January, this is the spectacular Dhanuyatra of Bargarh in the western part of Orissa, about 59 kms from Sambalpur on the National Highway No.6. Dhanuyatra is the theatrical presentation of Krishna Leela enacted to bring the old myth alive on locations from the marriage of Devaki with Vasudev till the death of Kansa as described in the scriptures. The entire episode is reenacted, blow by blow.

Incidentally, the geography of Bargarh region totally conforms to the locales of the puranic descriptions and the scenes are enacted at different places instead of at one place. The city of Bargarh is treated as Mathura. On the outskirts of Bargarh is the river Jeera, to serve as river Yamuna; on the other bank of which is a small village Ambapali to become Gopapura. Even there is a mango grove there to serve as Vrindaban and a pond as lake Kalindi. A gorgeously decorated high rise stage in the heart of Bargarh is erected to serve as the durbar of Kansa. A live elephant is engaged for the royal transport.

The entire topography of Bargarh within a radius of five kilometers turns into the zone of play, making in the largest open air theatre where the scenes are enacted as their appropriate locations, simultaneously on the appointed days which gives the festival a lively and natural look. Perhaps now here a play has been made to achieve such a vast magnitude with such naturality.

What is also unique to Dhanuyatra is the largest cast and the people participations. While the lead characters are selected from among the artists of the region, all the local inhabitants as well as the visitors who happen to be there then are taken as characters (as the subjects of Mathura & Gopa).

Virtually every one has a role to play, physically involved, emotionally overwhelmed. They all join without any persuasion without any invitation. The festival is of the people, by the people and for the people. Who seem to have been transported to mythical as in body and spirit during the festival period. The performances are so lively that even the district administrator plays a passive role at the back stage, living the role of king kansa to prevail. And the people enjoy his dictates as if he is the defacto administrator.

There is no specific dialogue for any scene, Keeping in view the scene of the episode, the characters speak the dialogue extempore in there own way.

The festival also provides an opportunity to the local performing artist to exhibit there talent. The local people might be watching this for years, but they are not tried to see it again. What is remarkable for the visitor who come for the first time is to watch them; how they became part of the festival without any obligation, without any compulsion.

The scenes are enacted in the afternoon and evening hours everyday. However, cultural programmes continue till the wee hours foe entertainment of the visitors. There is no rule, no restriction but it is so disciplined that there is no dislocation. The festival does in anyway interfere with the normal routine of the city, everything goes on as usual.

Evidently, Yatra happens to be the extra equivalent of theatre that directly reates to the sphere of enactment of the histrionic arts. Depending on the worldly limitations. Yatra has four form with one side, two side, three side & four all side spectators, the last being the oldest. For many reasons, Yatra has remained open air through there used to be permanent Yatra halls. Dhanuyatra of Bargarh appears to the largest open air theatre with oldest from. While elsewhere a limited, a vast field, open a long street, an extended open space etc. are improvised, here in Bargarh a whole with a village including a river is turned into the acting arena. It has also an element of modern technique which calls for the spectators participation. There is hardly any play where one and all of the spectators are involved in the participation as they are in the Dhanuyatra.

Orissa has a great and ancient tradition of Yatra in many splendoured verities and forms. Massiva and spectacular theatrical presentation are the specialties of Yatras of Orissa. Dhanuyatra tops them all in its imaginative grandeur. When and how the Dhanuyatra began at Bargarh is not exactly known but it is being organized since 1948

almost regularly every year. The festival might have undergone some changes over the years in pomp and ceremony but the message, victory of good over evil, triumph of truth over tyranny" remains.

Dhanuyatra is a dream festival. To be in Bargarh during Dhanuyatra means to be apart of the festival which is a life time experience, rare occasion to peep into the local culture in all its entirety.

Referred: Bargarh Dhanuyatra Mahotsav Souvenir – 1999-2000