

DHANUYATRA AT BARGARH

- Dr. Madhab Sahoo

“Dhanuyatra” happens to be a great mass festival of Odisha which is based on the exploits of Lord Krishna. Whenever the virtuous and the righteousness are demoralized and the sinners are at the top of the Supreme. Being, the Almighty God, manifests himself on Earth to protect the saints and innocents as well as to destroy the wicked. In fact, in all the ages and in every religion God has been manifesting himself with a purpose. In Dwapara Age, Lord Krishna, the very incarnation of God, appeared in Aryabarta with a view to destroying Kansa, the cruel king and the unjust Kauravas. The great exploits of Lord Krishna has been instrumental in the creation of folk tales, music, art, literature and mythology. Thus, Lord Krishna has become an integral part of our life, our culture and our civilization. He is conveniently used as the central point of reference of values, philosophy and religion in India.

Bargarh is one of the thirty districts in Odisha and it is situated in its Western border in between 20°20'0" (North) latitude and 83°37'15" (East) longitude. This district is located towards the south of the river Mahanadi and the district headquarters is 330 KMs from Bhubaneswar by road. The district has 5834 sq.km. in area and 13,45,601 in population as per 2001 census. This district is famous in the World for the holy place of Nrusinghnath in Gandhamardan Hills, the Papanga Hills, the Barapahad Range which was well known as the battle ground for the great freedom fighter Veer Surendra Sai against the Britishers, the Sambalpuri Bastralaya and the World famous Dhanu Yatra. Presently, the story from the point of the marriage between Devaki and Vasudeva until the death of Kansa forms the subject of many Dhanuyatras in Western Odisha. However, the Dhanuyatra at Bargarh is the oldest and the most famous one. Every year in the month of Sagittarius (Dhanu or Pausa) it is celebrated for eleven days of the month from the 5th day of the bright fortnight till the full moon day. For this occasion the town of Bargarh becomes the city of Mathura, the river Jeera becomes the river Yamuna and Ambapali situated on the other side of Jeera becomes Gopapura. For eleven days the whole of Bargarh town is transformed into a very big stage even though the story of Kansa, his death and the exploits of Sri Krishna are enacted in 14 main places at Mathura and 4 main places in Gopa. This mass festival, which came into existence in 1948 with the inertia of festive mood due to celebration of Indian Independence and victory over unjust British rule, symbolically shows the victory of Lord

Krishna, the embodiment of truth, justice and righteousness over Kansa who personifies arrogance and wickedness. This festival has earned its fame in the World as much due to the separate stage along with movable stage used to show the mythological story as also due to the special involvement of the entire populace in the process. Therefore, this festival is rightly called the greatest play in the world enacted in the biggest open air theatre.

The word "Jatra" refers to a tradition in India associated with spiritual or religious celebration along with artistic show and purposefully going to places. Different "Jatras" (Festivals) are organized in different religions in India. In Odisha the Car Festival is celebrated for nine days in Puri and "Shital Shasthi" for three days in Sambalpur. In these festivals the wooden idol of Lord Jagannath and the symbolic idol of Lord Shiva and Deity Parvati were used. But the specialty of Dhanuyatra is the enactment of the story of Lord Krishna in the form of drama by real actors and actress. As per as practicable, sincere efforts are made to enact all the incidents as beautifully as possible. Kansa does not remain confined to a character of arrogance and oppression only. On the other hand he stands for the glory, fame and power of Mathura as he moves around the city on elephant from afternoon till evening. In the evening he holds the Court and the entertainment. The king Kansa tries to mitigate the suffering of the populace while moving around the city. But once he comes to the court he remains occupied with discussions with ministers to find ways to avert his prophesied death. He makes all kinds of plans to kill Krishna. He dispatches various demons to Gopapura to eliminate Krishna. As all the demons were killed by Krishna in Gopapura . Kansa organizes "Dhanuyatra" in Mathura and Akrura was sent to Gopapura to bring Krishna to Mathura.

Finally Krishan comes to Mathura, kills all the wrestlers and the empower Kansa. Ugrasena regains power and becomes the king of Mathura. With a practical change in Mathura, the activities of the incarnation of Krishan, that is Gopa Leela comes to an end.