

## The Procedure of Preserving the Chariot in the *Skanda Purana*: A Study of Rituals and Spiritual Significance in the *Jagannath Yatra*

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### Abstract:

The *Skanda Purana*, one of the most revered texts of Hinduism, encapsulates numerous rituals and practices associated with the worship of Lord Vishnu, particularly through the *Jagannath Yatra*. Chapter 35 of the *Skanda Purana* specifically delves into the procedures for preserving the chariot during the annual festival, offering both detailed instructions on the protection of the chariot and profound insights into the spiritual significance of the procession. This paper explores the Sanskrit verses from the *Skanda Purana* concerning the preservation of the chariot and the rituals associated with it. The paper analyses these instructions, their mythological context, and their significance in the broader scope of Indian religious traditions, linking the physical preservation of the chariot to the ultimate goal of liberation (moksha).

### Keywords:

*Skanda Purana*, Jagannath Yatra, Chariot Preservation, Hindu Rituals, Lord Vishnu, Liberation, Sanskrit Verses

### Introduction:

The *Jagannath Yatra*, one of the most significant Hindu festivals, involves a grand procession where Lord Jagannath, accompanied by his siblings Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra, is taken from the main temple to the Gundicha Temple in Puri. This procession is meticulously described in various ancient scriptures, including the *Skanda Purana*. Chapter 35 of the *Skanda Purana* outlines the rituals and procedures for preserving the chariot, which are integral to maintaining the sanctity of the festival and ensuring its spiritual efficacy. Through these rituals, the mundane act of preserving the chariot transforms into a deeply spiritual experience, symbolizing the divine protection granted to the devotees and the deities alike. This paper examines these rituals, focusing on the Sanskrit verses that provide instructions for the preservation of the chariot, and explores the wider implications of these practices.

### 1. The Rituals of Protecting the Chariot

The initial verses of Chapter 35 describe the procedures for safeguarding the chariot from harmful supernatural beings such as goblins and ghosts. These rituals emphasize the importance of devotion and protection in the process of preparing the chariot for the *Yatra*.

*ataḥ paraṃ pravakṣyāmi ratharakṣākaraṃ vidhim /*  
*bhūtapretādayo ghorā dāruṇānyadbhutāni ca ||*<sup>1</sup>

In this verse, Jaimini, the sage, begins by describing the procedures for the protection of the chariot. He outlines the importance of warding off malevolent forces, ensuring that the chariot remains undisturbed by supernatural beings.

## 2. The Daily Worship of the Deities on the Chariot

The second set of verses focuses on the importance of daily worship and offerings to the deities represented on the chariot. This worship, involving flowers, incense, and dances, is essential in maintaining the chariot's sanctity.

*na bādhaṃte rathānyena munayo vaśca yanmatam |  
pratyahaṃ pūjayeddevānkr̥ṣṇādīndhvajasamsthitān ||<sup>2</sup>  
gamdhapuṣpākṣatairmālyairupahārairanuttamaiḥ |  
gītānṛttādikaiścaiva dhūpadīpanivedanaiḥ ||<sup>3</sup>*

The daily worship is described as a combination of physical and sensory offerings, such as flowers, incense, and songs, ensuring that the deities are honored and protected. This reflects the profound connection between the deity, the chariot, and the devotees.

## 3. Protection from Inauspicious Beings

The verse stresses the importance of offering oblations to protect the chariot from negative forces and ensuring that no inauspicious being can disturb the sacred space of the chariot.

*dīkpālebhyo baliṃ dadyātpāyasānnena cānvaham |  
bhūtapretapiśācebhyo dadyācca balimuttamam ||<sup>4</sup>*

This verse introduces the concept of offering *bali* (ritual offerings) to the Guardians of the Quarters and supernatural beings, including ghosts and evil spirits, highlighting the significance of ritual purity and protection in the *Yatra*.

## 4. The Adornment of the Chariot and the Rituals of the Eighth and Ninth Days

In the verses that follow, the focus shifts to the specific rituals performed on the eighth and ninth days of the festival, such as adorning the chariot and installing the deities.

*aṣṭame'hni punaḥ kṛtvā dakṣiṇābhīmukhānrathān |  
vibhūṣayedvastramālyapatākaiścāmarādibhiḥ ||<sup>5</sup>  
navamyāṃ vāsayeddevāṃsteṣu prātaḥ samṛddhimat ||<sup>6</sup>*

On the eighth day, the chariots are adorned with cloths, wreaths, flags, and other ceremonial items, while the deities are installed in them on the ninth day. These actions symbolize the physical and spiritual preparation for the procession, indicating the importance of ritualistic detail and devotion.

## 5. Spiritual Significance of the *Yatra*

The final verses describe the spiritual benefits of witnessing the *Yatra* and participating in the rituals. The sight of the Lord and the associated rituals are believed to grant liberation and eternal bliss.

*guṇḍicāmaṇḍapātkṛṣṇamāyāṃtaṃ dakṣiṇāmukham |  
rathasthaṃ balinaṃ bhadraṃ paśyaṃto muktibhāginah ||<sup>7</sup>*

*stuvantaḥ praṇamaṃtaśca śraddadhānāśca ye narāḥ |  
na te punarihāyāṃti brahmalokasthitā dhruvam ||<sup>8</sup>*

The final verses extol the benefits of observing the procession, with the promise of liberation for those who witness the chariot's journey. The ritual is not just an act of physical observation but a profound

spiritual experience that elevates the devotee.

### Conclusion:

The preservation of the chariot, as detailed in Chapter 35 of the *Skanda Purana*, is much more than a ritualistic task. It symbolizes a deeper spiritual journey that connects the devotee with the divine. Through these rituals, the mundane act of maintaining the chariot is transformed into an act of devotion, ensuring that both the chariot and its passengers Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Goddess Subhadra are safeguarded from inauspicious forces. The spiritual significance of the *Yatra*, as outlined in the verses, highlights the connection between ritual practices and the ultimate goal of liberation. By participating in these rituals with devotion, the devotee not only protects the physical chariot but also attains the highest spiritual benefit liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

### References:

1. *Skanda Purana*, 35.1
2. *Ibid*, 35.2
3. *Ibid*, 35.3
4. *Ibid*, 35.4
5. *Ibid*, 35.6
6. *Ibid*, 35.7
7. *Ibid*, 35.12
8. *Ibid*, 35.20

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