

## Sacred Performances at Khirachora Gopinath Temple of Remuna in the Balasore District of Odisha

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### Abstract

The sacred performances in a sacred complex include offerings to deities, fire rituals, prayers, recitations of sacred texts, observance of sacraments and festivals, sacred bathing, water offerings, as well as artistic and dramatic performances associated with religious devotion. The present research paper highlights the important rituals and festivals as sacred performances at the Khirachora Gopinath temple located at Remuna in the district of Balasore, Odisha. The primary data were collected through observation and interview methods. The major findings of the study reveals that the Giri Govardhan Puja, Akasha Deepa, Gosthashtami, Rahasa Jatra, Prathamashtami, Byanjana Dwadashi, Dhanu Sankranti, Makara Sankranti, Rasikananda Mahaprabhu Mahotsav, and Dola Parba are not merely ritual and festival observances but living expressions of devotion that reinforce the temple's spiritual significance. Each festival reflects different dimensions of Vaishnavite philosophy, mythology, and ritual practice, while preserving centuries-old customs that continue to attract devotees from Odisha and beyond.

**Keywords:** Sacred performances, Khirachora Gopinath, Balasore district, Sacred complex.

### Introduction

The concept of “sacred performances” has its intellectual roots in the idea of “cultural performances” developed by Milton Singer (1955). Singer identified various ritualistic and expressive activities as important “units of observation” for understanding culture. According to him, practices such as prayers, rituals, readings, recitations, rites, and ceremonies function as “cultural performances” through which the values, beliefs, and traditions of a society are communicated and preserved. Building upon Singer’s framework, L. P. Vidyarthi introduced a more religion-oriented perspective by replacing the term “cultural” with “sacred.” In his work, he developed important concepts such as “sacred geography,” “sacred performances,” and “sacred specialists” (1961: xviii), thereby emphasizing the spiritual and religious dimensions of social life.

Vidyarthi explained that sacred centres are spaces where a wide range of ritualistic and devotional activities are regularly performed. These activities include offerings to deities, fire

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rituals, prayers, recitations of sacred texts, observance of sacraments and festivals, sacred bathing, water offerings, as well as artistic and dramatic performances associated with religious devotion (Vidyarthi, 1961: 30). Such performances not only express religious faith but also reinforce collective identity, social solidarity, and the continuity of sacred traditions across generations. Through these sacred performances, religious centres become vibrant cultural spaces where spirituality, ritual practice, and community life are deeply interconnected. Vidyarthi's work motivated other scholars such as Jha (1971), Saraswati (1978), Narayan (1972), Upadhaya (1974), Mohapatra (1974), Chakravarti (1974), Humble and Vetschera (1976), Sinha (1974) and N. Patnaik (2000) who have contributed significantly on different aspects of sacred complex from different parts of India. P. K. Acharya on the Sacred Complex of Budhi Satani: An Anthropological Approach to Study Hindu Civilization (2003) classified the sacred performances in two categories; such as sacred performances "at the temple of Budhi Satani and those performed during the Thakurani Yatra". Vidyarthi, Jha and Saraswati on the Sacred Complex of Kashi highlighted different types of sacred performances such as "sacred actions, fairs, festivals, types of arati" and procedures of everyday worships are integral part of the sacred complex (1979).

Rituals and festivals constitute the living core of temple-centre's religious life in India, functioning not merely as acts of worship but as dynamic social performances through which sacred meanings are enacted, negotiated, and renewed. The abundance of festivals surrounding Lord Krishna reflects the deeply affective nature of Krishna-bhakti, where devotion is expressed through joy, celebration, and sensory engagement. Across the Vaishnava traditions of India—and particularly in the eastern regions of Odisha and Bengal—Krishna devotion is articulated through an elaborate ritual calendar marked by numerous festivals that commemorate episodes from his life and *lila*. Dedicated to Lord Gopinath, a form of Krishna revered within Odisha's Vaishnava tradition, the Khirachora Gopinath Temple is widely known for its association with the legend of *Khirachora*—the divine theft of sweetened milk for the devotee Madhavendra Puri. This narrative, central to the temple's sacred identity, continues to shape ritual symbolism, food offerings, and devotional imagination. The present paper highlights the major rituals and festivals as sacred performances at Khirachora Gopinath temple.

### **Methodology**

This study is a part of doctoral research conducted at the Khirachora Gopinath Temple located at Remuna in the Balasore district of Odisha. The research examines temple rituals and festivals as lived religious practices, focusing on their performance, organization, and modes of participation within a Vaishnava sacred setting. Fieldwork was carried out through repeated visits covering both daily rituals and major festival occasions. Both participant and non-observation constituted the primary method of data collection. The researcher spent extended periods within the temple complex observing daily rituals, special ceremonial sequences, and festival performances. The study incorporated semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with priests, temple staff, regular devotees, pilgrims, and local residents. Data were recorded through detailed field notes, descriptive accounts of ritual sequences, and the documentation of oral narratives related to the deity, temple history, and festival traditions.

Temple calendars, pamphlets, and locally available texts were consulted to corroborate ritual schedules and festival practices. The research was conducted with sensitivity to temple norms and religious practices.

### **The Khirachora Gopinath Temple**

The Khirachora Gopinath Temple of Remuna, located in the Balasore district of Odisha, is an important centre of Vaishnava worship in eastern India. The temple is dedicated to Lord Krishna as Gopinath and is widely known for the legend of Khirachora Gopinath, which highlights the close and personal relationship between the deity and his devotees. Over time, the temple has become not only a place of daily worship but also a major site for festival celebrations that draw large numbers of devotees from surrounding regions.

The festivals celebrated at the Gopinath Temple are central to the religious life of Remuna. These occasions go beyond formal rituals and involve collective singing, chanting, movement, and emotional participation, through which devotees express their devotion to Krishna. Rooted in the Vaishnava tradition, the festivals combine scriptural temple rituals with popular devotional practices, creating a shared religious experience. This paper focuses on the rituals and festivals celebrated in the temple from the months of Kartika through Phalgun and examines how festival celebrations at the Gopinath Temple transform ritual acts into lived devotional experiences, highlighting the importance of performance, participation, and emotion in Vaishnava worship.

### **GIRI GOVARDHAN PUJA**

*Giri Govardhan* puja is celebrated in the *shukla paksha pratipada tithi* of the month of *Kartika*. Rasikananda Mahaprabhu was born on that day. *Giri Govardhan* Mountain is erected using cow dung and earth for seven days on the Tulsi *chaura* in front of the temple. *Giri Govardhan* is also called *Annakuta* (mountain of food). Two ponds, *Shyama Kund* and *Radha Kund*, are dug in it. Turmeric water, *Panchamrit* water, Kheer, ghee, milk and good water is offered in that Kund (shallow/reservoir). Branch of the mango tree, branch of the *aakhu* (sugarcane) tree, coconut, fruits like apple, ripe bananas are kept on top of that mountain. A crown is put on the head of the cow and a towel containing colour, turmeric, *sindoor* and rice is tied around its neck. It is also bathed with turmeric water. After that when the final bhoga arrives after being offered to the deity inside the temple, the cow walks around the mountain seven times and then the mountain is broken by the same cow by making the cow climb on it. *Annakuta Bhog* is prepared inside the temple. In *Annakuta Bhog*, the pujari makes a mountain out of pulses, vegetables, puri, *malpua*, *kheer*, *panchamrit*, etc. The face of the deity is made using the same *Annakuta Bhog*. And this puja is celebrated from 12 noon to 2 pm.

### **History**

The inhabitants of Vrindavan, following Krishna's guidance, chose to discontinue the worship of Indra, the Vedic deity associated with rain, and instead redirected their devotion toward Govardhan Hill, which sustained their agrarian and pastoral life. Angered by this perceived challenge to his authority, Indra unleashed incessant and destructive rainfall upon Vrindavan. In response, Krishna manifested his divine power by lifting Govardhan Hill with his little

finger, using it as a protective shelter for the people and their cattle. For seven days and nights, the inhabitants of Vrindavan remained under the hill, safeguarded from the deluge. Realizing his error and acknowledging Krishna's supremacy, Indra sought forgiveness and performed a ritual act of reverence by bathing Krishna with the milk of *Surabhi*, the celestial cow, thereby giving rise to a sacred water body known as *Govinda Kund*.

### **Significance**

The story symbolizes Krishna's victory over the material desires of the people of Vrindavan, who were previously focused on Indra's material gifts. It highlights the importance of devotion to Krishna and surrenders to his divine will, rather than relying on external deities. The event establishes Krishna's supreme authority and power, demonstrating his ability to control even the forces of nature. The story elevates the Govardhan Hill to a sacred site, making it a place of worship and pilgrimage.

### **AKASH DEEPA**

Akash Deepa is lit every morning and evening from *Ekadashi* to *Purnima*. This ritual takes place before the evening Aarti and is celebrated around 5 pm in the evening. On this day the Lord is remembered by lighting a lamp inside a *handi* (pot) made of bronze hung with the help of a bamboo rope near the Tulasi square and then it is offered.

### **History**

The practice of *Akash Kandil* has its roots in ancient times, when lanterns were used to light homes and temples during festivals. Traditionally, Hindus released these lanterns into the sky as a symbolic way of inviting the spirits of their ancestors to return and join the celebrations. This act expressed respect for ancestors and maintained a sense of connection between the living and the dead. The lantern represents light, knowledge, and positivity, symbolizing the removal of darkness and negative forces. Through this practice, the festive space becomes spiritually meaningful and socially shared.

### **Significance**

The lighting of *Akash Deepa* is believed to invite the blessings of deities, especially Lord Vishnu, and other positive cosmic forces. The lamps are thought to create an auspicious atmosphere that brings good fortune and prosperity. Akash Deepa also symbolizes the human desire for enlightenment and freedom from negativity, representing the illumination of the mind and the pursuit of knowledge. Deeply rooted in Indian culture, this tradition helps people connect with the past, honor their ancestors, and create a joyful and festive environment during occasions such as Diwali and other celebrations.

### **GOSTHASHTAMI**

Gosthashtami is also called as Gopashtami. Gosthashtami is celebrated in the month of Kartik on the astami tithi of shukla paksha. Cows are worshipped on this day. It is said that on this day Krishna went to feed the cows for the first time. All the cows living inside the temple goshala are freed for the day to roam inside the temple premises and worshipped. Worship is done from 10:30 in the morning till 11 o'clock. On some occasions the puja might start after 1.30 pm after

the regular deity puja is complete. On this day chuda (flattened rice), peda (an Indian sweet), kadali (banana) Bhog is offered. Circumambulation (Parikrama) of the temple is done with the cow. The cow is given the Bhog in the form of food and is given new food to eat. A person from the gouda caste comes to feed the cow. Devotees also perform cow worship (*go-puja*), seeking blessings for prosperity, protection, and well-being. Acts of charity, such as feeding cows, donating fodder, or helping cow shelters (*gaushalas*), are considered especially meritorious on this day.

### History

Gopashtami is believed to be the day Nanda Maharaj, Krishna's foster father, entrusted him with herding the cows for the first time. Krishna, now a skilled cowherd, along with his brother Balarama, began herding the cattle. Krishna encouraged the people of Braj to worship Govardhan Hill instead of Indra, the rain god. Indra, angered, unleashed fierce storms and floods. To protect the villagers and their cattle, Krishna lifted Govardhan Hill, sheltering them for seven days and nights. Humbled by Krishna's divine power, Indra accepted defeat and sought Krishna's forgiveness on the day of Gopashtami. This day is celebrated as a reminder of Krishna's protection and his love for the natural world, especially animals.

### Significance

Gosthashtami is celebrated with cow worship (*Go-Puja*), where cows are bathed, decorated, and offered special foods. It's a time to remember Krishna's compassionate nature and the importance of caring for all living beings.

### RAHASA JATRA

Rahasa Purnima is celebrated for seven days. In these seven days, Radha Rani Raas Bihari is brought to the Raas Mandap only on Chaturdashi and Pancha tithi. For the remaining five days Radha Rani is brought back to the temple. Chandan lepa is done for the deities for the first five days. On this day *Homa* is performed and *Kirtan* is done. *Amaniya Bhog* (raw or uncooked food) is distributed to the devotees in Rahasa Jatra. Khua peda, laddu, coconut, chura are served in *Amaniya Bhog*. *Anna bhoga* is prepared for devotees on contract basis. The bhoga prepared by the temple cook is offered to the deities and then served to the temple staff only. *Boita bandana* takes place in the Chandan pokhari and saptasara river. Also a yajna is organised outside the temple premises for nine days by the nearby village people.

### History

Raas, also known as *Rahasa Yatra*, is an important Vaishnavite festival that celebrates the divine love and playful interactions (*Raas Leela*) of Lord Krishna with his devotees, especially the Gopis. Observed on the full moon night of the Sharad (autumn) season, the festival commemorates the celestial dance in which Krishna participates with the Gopis, symbolizing the eternal relationship between the individual soul and the Supreme. Central to Raas Yatra is the enactment of the *Maha-Raas*, the grand dance that embodies devotion, love, and spiritual union. Deeply rooted in Vaishnavite tradition, the festival has regional variations and historical associations. In Cooch Behar, the Raas Mela is believed to have originated during the reign of

Maharaja Harendra Narayan, while in Nabadwip it is closely linked to the devotional movement of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

### **Significance**

The festival is a time for reflection and devotion, encouraging devotees to contemplate the selfless love of the Gopis for Krishna and to strive for their own union with the divine. Raas Yatra is a vibrant cultural event, attracting people from different backgrounds and religions to participate in the festivities and partake in the joy of the celebration.

### **PRATHAMASHTAMI**

Prathamastami is celebrated on the last day of Krishna Paksha of Margashirsha month. On this day the Lord is made to wear new clothes. Kheer made from new grains is offered to the Lord in the Bhoga and Laddu (spherical sweet is also offered in the form of Bhoga. It is celebrated in the same manner as every day. A grand bath (*abhishek*) is taken at night.

### **History**

According to popular folklore, the celebration of *Prathamastami* is linked to the legend surrounding the birth of Lord Krishna. It is believed that the demon king Kansa was foretold that Devaki's eighth child would bring about his death. While Kansa spared Devaki, he killed her earlier children in an attempt to prevent the prophecy. *Prathamastami*, mainly observed in Odisha, is a festival dedicated to the firstborn child, who is traditionally regarded as the carrier of family lineage and responsibility. Celebrated on the eighth day of the waning moon in the month of *Margasira*, the festival involves prayers for the health and prosperity of the firstborn, with maternal uncles presenting new clothes and sweets. The occasion also coincides with agrarian celebrations, during which farmers express gratitude for a good harvest and offer worship to the goddess *Soubhagini Devi*.

### **Significance**

*Prathamastami* is dedicated to the eldest child, praying for their well-being, longevity, and prosperity. The firstborn is seen as the custodian of family traditions and the future bearer of responsibilities. The firstborn is considered a symbol of the family's continuity and legacy. They are expected to support their parents and carry on family traditions. Rituals include an "Aarti" (worship) for the firstborn, performed by the mother and relatives, and the gifting of new clothes, sweets, and other items by the maternal uncle. A special dish called "*Enduri Pitha*" (made with *chhena*, jaggery, and grated coconut, and steamed in turmeric leaves) is a main part of the celebration.

### **BYANJANA DWADASHI**

*Byanjana Dwadashi* is celebrated on the *Dwadasha tithi* of *Shukla Paksha* of *Margashirsha* month (mid-December to mid-January). It is said that on this day Maa Yashoda cooks many types of food and feeds it to Lord Krishna. On the day of *Byanjana Dwadashi*, 32 different types of food are cooked and offered to Lord Gopinath in the form of a Bhoga.

## History

The festival's roots lie in the Mahabharata, where Yashoda, Krishna's mother, observes that her son is weak and pale due to his constant battles with demons. Realizing that Krishna needs proper nutrition, Yashoda prepares a feast of various dishes and feeds him. Byanjana Dwadashi is a Vaishnava festival that commemorates this event, highlighting the importance of a balanced diet and community food sharing.

## Significance

The festival emphasizes the importance of both physical and spiritual sustenance, with the preparation of various dishes representing a balanced diet. Byanjana Dwadashi promotes the idea of community food security, where diverse delicacies are prepared and shared, fostering a sense of togetherness. The festival is a beautiful example of devotees' heartfelt offerings to their beloved Lord, symbolizing their devotion and love.

## DHANU SANKRANTI

Dhanu Sankranti is celebrated on the full moon day of Shukla Paksha in the month of Margashirsha. There is a laddu named Dhanu Muha which is made of *Khai* and that laddu is offered to God daily for a month till Makar Sankranti. Sun god is also worshipped on Dhanu Sankranti.

## History

Dhanu Sankranti, or Dhanu Sankraman, is a Hindu festival celebrated when the Sun enters the Sagittarius zodiac sign, marking the beginning of a new phase in the Hindu calendar. It's associated with various legends, including one where Lord Vishnu entered the Dhanu Rashi (zodiac sign) to destroy a demon and protect the universe. The festival also involves rituals like worshipping Lord Surya (the Sun God) and Lord Vishnu, and is believed to bring prosperity and good fortune.

## Significance

In Odisha, the festival culminates with *Pahili Bhoga*, a special meal offered to Lord Jagannath. In some regions, the festival is linked to the story of Krishna and Kansa, where Krishna, disguised as a bow, was invited to Mathura by Kansa with the intention of killing him, but Krishna ultimately killed Kansa.

## MAKARA SANKRANTI

Makar Parba or festival is celebrated during the Sankranti of *Pausa* (Dec-Jan) month. Makar rice is offered from that day onwards for a whole month. Apart from that, various types of fruits are also offered. Makar Parba is also called the festival of those who do farming. New grains are offered to the lord on this day.

## History

Religiously, Makar Sankranti draws inspiration from Hindu mythology. It is believed that on this day, Lord Vishnu defeated the demon Sankarasura, symbolizing the victory of good over

evil. Devotees observe this triumph through prayers, rituals, and visits to holy rivers for spiritual cleansing. In North India, Makar Sankranti is also associated with Bhishma Pitamah, a character from the Mahabharata, who chose to leave his mortal body during Uttarayana (the period of the sun's northward journey), believing it to be an auspicious time. In South India, Makar Sankranti is celebrated as Pongal, a harvest festival that thanks the Sun God for a bountiful harvest.

### **Significance**

This festival is celebrated primarily to thank the sun god for life and to welcome the start of longer days and the northward movement of the sun. It signifies the end of the winter season and the beginning of a new agricultural cycle, making it a time of joy, gratitude, and renewal.

The festival is also celebrated with various regional customs and traditions, reflecting India's diverse cultural landscape.

### **RASIKANANDA MAHAPRABHU MAHOTSAV**

Lord Gopinath had a great devotee whose name was Rasikananda Deva Goswami. He had become absorbed into the deity of Gopinath. That is why a thirteen-day festival is celebrated. The festival starts from the day after Shivaratri i.e. from the Amavasya day. The death anniversary of Rasikananda Mahaprabhu is celebrated which falls on a day in those thirteen days.

**Day 1:** On this day devotees from outside come, most of the devotees were from Bengal. Many of the people came from Midnapore (Gopiballavpore) West Bengal. These are the people who came for darshan (sight/vision). On this day Shyamananda Dev Goswami also arrive at the temple at night. Shyamananda Dev Goswami refers to the current living descendants and hereditary leaders (Mahantas) of the lineage founded by Rasikananda Mahaprabhu.

**Day 2:** On the second day of the Mahotsav, the photo of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is made to sit inside a *biman* (chariot). A mango pod or leaf is placed on the photo. A Tulsi plant is placed on the side. A circle of cloth of pink, red, yellow colours is made around the chariot and it is decorated with plastic flowers. A branch of banana leaves is tied at the four corners of the circle that is made. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is made to wear a flower garland. Four people (temporary kirtan staff) playing musical instruments sit in the Mandap and performed bhajan kirtan (a devotional song or hymn). Among the musical instruments, cymbals, mridangam and harmonium are played. Kirtankar sings "Hare Krishna, Hare Ram, Shri Radhe Govinda". Devotees come and offer dakshina (fees) to Kirtankar and after circumambulating the chariot, they pay obeisance to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. For the thirteen-day festival, a four-person group of temporary Kirtan staff is called all of whom are non-Brahmins.

In the morning, Khichdi Bhog is distributed to all the devotees by the temple. Along with it, Khua Bhog is also distributed to everyone. The temple gate is closed at 11:00 in the morning. After some time, all the devotees sing and dance while doing Bhajan Kirtan and also give their support. Two persons in the front of the group play drums and some others play Mridanga. In this group, along with local devotees, many devotees from outside also come of which most are from Bengal.

The present Shyamananda Mahanta also performs circumambulation (Parikrama) along with all the devotees and after doing Parikrama around the temple four to five times, everyone gathers behind the temple where there is a big tree named *Champa Nageshwar* and finishes the Parikrama and pays obeisance to the tree. After that, Kirtankar and all the devotees sit near the Champa Nageshwar tree and perform bhajan kirtan. Then at 1:30 in the afternoon, the door of the temple opens and offerings (*chausatha bhoga*) for the sixty-four Mahantas are kept in front of the Lord on sixty-four banana leaves. It is a practice to organise a grand feast (*bhoji*) in honour of the 64 mahantas which is hosted by the shyamananda family. This bhoga is then served to all the staff and devotees. After opening the door of the temple, first the face of the deity is cleaned, then after asking, the deity is offered bhoga, and afterwards aarti is performed and then the deity's face is washed again and cleaned. In the afternoon arrangement for food and drink is made for the devotees. Rice, dal (pulses), papad, tomato chutney and kheer are served for lunch. After that all the rules and regulations are followed as held in the temple regularly.

Nothing special is celebrated for the next two days. The daily rules and regulations are followed as usual and along with it the Bhajan Kirtan continues. Kirtan is performed continuously for thirteen days daily in the Jhulana Mandap.

### **Day 3: (MANIKA KHANDA)**

Just like Rasikananda who was a great devotee of Lord Gopinath, similarly there was a woman named Manika Gauduni who also received curd from Lord Jagannath.

Manika Gauduni was a devotional figure from Odisha whose story occupies an important place in Jagannath religious tradition. Believed to have lived in the fifteenth century, she belonged to the cowherd (*gopala*) community, from which she derived the name *Gauduni*, meaning milkmaid. According to traditional accounts, she earned her livelihood by selling milk and yoghurt. During the period associated with the Kanchi expedition of the Gajapati king of Kalinga, Lord Jagannath and his brother Balabhadra are said to have appeared in disguise and consumed yoghurt at her stall. When Manika Gauduni asked for payment, the deities gave her a gem-studded ring (*ratnamudrika*) and instructed her to present it to the king. Upon recognizing the ring as divine, the king rewarded her generously and granted her a village, which later came to be known as Manikpatna.

Now, since thirteen-day death anniversary is being observed and Manika Gauduni is a great devotee of Lord Gopinath, so on the day of Manika Khanda, her death anniversary is also celebrated in these thirteen days.

On the day of Manika Khanda, the bhoga that is prepared for the Lord is cooked secretly from everyone. The reason for this is the belief that the Lord will come to the temple first and then he will be offered the bhoga and Aarti will be performed and it is not shown to anyone until it is offered to the Lord. After that, it is offered only to Vaishnava people, which are called Vaishnava Pongo Dal on the day of Vaishnava. While offering the Prasad to the deity, it is covered with a yellow towel and at that time no one is allowed to see the offering of the Prasad; only the priest of the temple is present.

Then after 10-15 minutes, Puja and Aarti are performed and outside the temple, Aarti is also performed where the offerings have been made. Aarti is performed at both the places simultaneously at that time. On that day, the *Vaishnava Pangata* group is invited for dinner. People from 78 villages who follow the Vaishnava religion are also invited. All the people living in the nearby areas of Remuna are also invited. Outside the temple, where the offerings are made, three keys are kept in the name of Raas Bihari, Manika Gauduni and Rasikananda. And inside the temple, 6 plates, glasses and a Peedha-Patta (traditional Indian wooden stool) are kept near the Lord.

First, the food is offered to Gopinath, and then it is offered to Lord Madan Mohan, Lord Govind, Lord Gageshwar, Lord Mahadev and Goddess Ramchandi and after that Kheer is also offered to everyone. Manika Gauduni is offered the bhog (sacred food) which was offered to Lord Gopinath ji because she was a great devotee of Gopinath. Prasad is also offered to Raas Bihari and Rasikananda near the temple. Only after Gopinath and Manika Gauduni have eaten, it is offered to Rasikananda and Raas Bihari. All the rules and regulations that happen on this day start after Sandhya (evening) Aarti and end with Sayana (night) Aarti.

**Day 4:** On this day, food is prepared by the temple for the devotees and that food is also offered to the Lord in the form of a bhoga. And all the rules and regulations are followed. Bhajan kirtan goes on throughout the day.

**Day 5 to Day 10:** For the next 6 days, continuous kirtan is held in the temple, where the permanent kirtan staff of the temple sits in the Jhulana Mandap. Along with kirtan, these six days also have a drama programme.

**Day 11:** All the daily rituals followed during the day are followed in the same manner and along with that, kirtan keeps going on in the Jhulana Mandap throughout the day. In the evening, farmers who are sharecropping on the agricultural lands under the temple administration are invited to the temple. They come to the temple and pay their taxes and donate funds as offerings and after the aarti, prasad is also distributed by the temple to the farmers. This prasad (sacred food) is made only for the farmers and not for anyone else.

**Day 12:** The rituals of the day are the same as daily but in the evening, the Dahi Handi (Curd Pot) is brought out from inside the temple before the evening prayer. After that, the devotees break the Dahi Handi and then do the circumambulation (parikrama) of the temple and at last the evening prayer is held.

**Day 13: (MENDHA GUHALA PODA)**

Mendha Guhala Poda is also known as Holika Dahan. The local people here celebrate this festival by the name of Mendha Guhala Poda. This is the last day of the 13-day festival. On this day Mendha Guhala Poda is celebrated in the temple. After the evening Aarti, everyone gathers in front of the temple. The idol of Shri Krishna is placed in the *biman* and devotees are also there. Priest puts a red colored cloth over the biman and the idol is adorned with a garland of flowers made in the temple and then after performing the puja, everyone bows their heads before the idol. After that four priests together lift the lamp and chanting “Hari Bol, Hari Bol”, they proceed out of the temple. A priest walks in front carrying a mass of people behind him.

All the devotees also follow them to the nearby girls' school. Then after reaching the girls' school area, the lamp is placed on a space near the roadside which is prepared prior to the ritual for this occasion. A peeled cloth is tied behind the lamp.

Three priests sit in front of the deity, one of them does the puja, another one serves and the third one stays to help. The remaining four are permanent staff. Three of them play the Jhanjh (cymbals) and one plays the *Mrudang* (a drum). First the Priest places the Kalsi (brass pot) on the Sal leaf and after that he sprinkles water and performs the Puja while ringing the bell. After that, other priests decorate the plate with Abir (colored powder) of different types of colors (red, pink, yellow, green). Then, one priest performs *raja agni homa* and the other priest worships the idol of Shri Krishna. After the Puja is over, a white towel is used as a curtain before the idol and then the holy fire is lit over the puja thali using dry wood. After that bhoga is offered to Lord Krishna. It is believed that no one should see the bhoga being offered to the deity. So, on one side of the curtain, the bhoga is placed and on the other side the devotees wait for the rituals to be completed.

After the bhoga is placed, the curtain is removed. Everyone stands up and aarti is performed. During aarti, some devotees blow conch shells, some offer water and there is also bhajan kirtan. After that all the people take the blessings from the aarti. Then the priest performs the puja by waving a yellow cloth in front of the idol and offers abir, flowers and yellow cloth to the lord. Then after that everyone bows down and applies colours to each other. After all the puja rituals are over, some priests lift the lamp together and circumambulate around the hut three times and along with it the Kirtan people also stay behind the lamp and do *parikrama* three times while doing Kirtan and the priest burns that hut. This is how Mendha Guhala Poda is celebrated at Khirachora Gopinath Temple.

## **DOLA PARBA**

There are as many temples around Remuna, the idols of Radha Krishna (jugala murti) from all those temples gather near Khirachora Gopinath temple in a *bimana* (chariot). Idols of Radha Krishna come there from as many temples and local temples and houses. The idols of Radha Krishna inside the *garbhagriha* (inner shrine chamber) is also brought for the dola (holi) festival as a representative of the temple deities. Near the temple in the *rahasa mandapa* everyone applies colour to each other, and are given bhoga and then bid farewell. On this day *Amaniya Bhoga* (Peda, many types of Laddus, chopped coconut core, chuda, etc) is given to all the devotees. Whoever brings the idols, they are given food and offerings. Except Gopinath, everyone else is given special food. Prasad (*anna bhoga*) is also arranged for the devotees. The devotees lifting the chariots might belong to local gouda, khandayat and Behera castes.

Dola parba (one day before Holi) is celebrated, it is observed for a single day. From 9 o'clock in the morning, people start coming to the temple. The procession starts from Madhavendra Puri Gaudiya Matha to Khirachora temple. In that procession, people come dressed as elephant, bear, deer, lion etc. Kirtan takes place, everyone is given sharbat (juices) and this procession goes on from 9 o'clock in the morning till 12 o'clock, then from 12 o'clock to 1 o'clock bhoga is organized inside. After that all return to their original place. After Lord Gopinath returns to

the temple, he is given a bath and after that he is worshipped again which is called *prana Pratishtha*(consecration).

### **History**

Dola Parba, or Dola Purnima, is a significant festival in Odisha, celebrated to commemorate the divine love of Radha and Krishna and the arrival of spring. It's deeply rooted in the Bhakti movement and signifies the victory of good over evil. The festival begins five days before the full moon in Phalgun, culminating on Dola Purnima, which is also known as Holi in other parts of India. The festival is also tied to the legend of Prahlad and Holika, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. Holika, the sister of the demon king Hiranyakashipu, attempted to burn Prahlad, a devotee of Lord Vishnu, but failed, and Holika perished in the flames.

### **Significance**

The festival marks the beginning of spring, bringing a sense of renewal and joy. Dola Purnima brings people together through vibrant celebrations and devotional practices, strengthening community bonds. The festival holds deep religious and cultural significance in Odisha, with unique traditions and rituals that distinguish it from other celebrations of Holi. The festival symbolizes love, devotion, and the eternal bond of love between Krishna and Radha.

### **Conclusion**

The Khirachora Gopinath Temple at Remuna represents a vibrant sacred complex where religious traditions, cultural heritage, and community life converge through an annual cycle of festivals and rituals. Celebrations such as Giri Govardhan Puja, Akasha Deepa, Gosthashtami, Rahasa Jatra, Prathamastami, Byanjana Dwadashi, Dhanu Sankranti, Makara Sankranti, Rasikananda Mahaprabhu Mahotsav, and Dola Parba are not merely ritual observances but living expressions of devotion that reinforce the temple's spiritual significance. Each festival reflects different dimensions of Vaishnavite philosophy, mythology, and ritual practice, while preserving centuries-old customs that continue to attract devotees from Odisha and beyond.

The large congregation of pilgrims during these occasions transforms the temple precinct into a dynamic sacred landscape, where worship, cultural performances, traditional music, devotional singing, and communal participation create an atmosphere of profound religious experience. These festivals strengthen social cohesion by bringing together diverse communities in collective acts of faith, service, and celebration. They also contribute significantly to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage by transmitting traditional rituals, oral traditions, and customary practices across generations.

As a sacred complex, the Khirachora Gopinath Temple extends beyond its architectural and historical value to embody an enduring spiritual ecosystem sustained by ritual continuity and popular devotion. The uninterrupted observance of its festival calendar reinforces the temple's identity as a major centre of pilgrimage and Vaishnavite worship. Therefore, conserving both the tangible heritage of the temple and the intangible traditions associated with its festivals is essential for safeguarding its cultural authenticity, religious sanctity, and historical legacy for future generations.

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