

Baliyatra: Celebrating Odisha's ancient links with Indonesia and Southeast Asia

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Paper - I
(Art & Culture)

- ❖ During the G20 Summit, PM Modi mentioned Baliyatra, literally 'voyage to Bali', one of the country's largest open-air fairs that commemorates the 2,000-year-old maritime and cultural links between ancient Kalinga and Southeast Asia.

In his address to the Indian diaspora in Bali on the sidelines of the G20 summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned the annual Baliyatra on the banks of the Mahanadi in Cuttack, which celebrates the ancient trade relations between India and Indonesia.

This year's Baliyatra, which concluded on Thursday, also found a place in the Guinness World Records for achieving an impressive feat of origami, the creation of beautiful paper sculptures.



Historical significance

Baliyatra, literally 'voyage to Bali', is one of the country's largest open-air fairs, which is organised every year to commemorate the 2,000-year-old maritime and cultural links between ancient Kalinga (today's Odisha) and Bali and other South and Southeast Asian regions like Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Burma (Myanmar) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

The origins of the festival, which begins on Kartik Purnima (full moon night in the month of Kartik) can be traced back more than 1,000 years. The Bay of Bengal region had several ports, and sadhavas (traders) traditionally began their voyage across the sea on this auspicious day, when the winds were favourable for the boats, known as boita, to sail.

According to historians, popular items of trade between Kalinga and Southeast Asia included pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, silk, camphor, gold, and jewellery.

Even today, thousands of people across Odisha sail decorative miniature boats made of banana stems, paper, or thermocol to celebrate boita bandana, or the worshipping of the boats.

Business of festivities

The festival is organised by the Cuttack district administration and Cuttack Municipal Corporation in association with several other government agencies. Lakhs of people from Cuttack and neighbouring districts throng the fair site by the Mahanadi through the nine-day festival.

Besides the cultural and historical aspects, Baliyatra has an important commercial dimension. It is a time when people purchase everything from automobiles and electronic devices to local artisanal products at prices that are comparatively low. The district administration allots more than 1,500 stalls to traders through an auction, and the fair is estimated to see business worth more than Rs 100 crore over its nine days.

In October, a delegation of ambassadors and heads of missions in India of ASEAN countries visited Odisha to explore business opportunities. During a business summit, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik spoke of Odisha being a “gateway to the ASEAN region”.

Bigger after pandemic

Massive arrangements were made for this year's Baliyatra after the Covid-induced disruptions in 2020 and 2021. The festival, which is usually held in a 35-acre area, sprawled over 85 acres this year. People come to relish a range of foods and

BALIYATRA

- ➔ Bali Yatra, a festival commemorating Odisha's rich maritime history, is celebrated across the state. In the historic city of Cuttack, a week-long event is held starting from the day of Kartik Purnima (full moon of the month of Kartik, i.e. October-November).
- ➔ The Kalinga Kingdom (present day Odisha) is known for its illustrious maritime history. Due to the geographical location of Kalinga, ports began to be built in the region as early as the 4th and 5th centuries BCE. India could connect with other countries by sea through some famous ports like Tamralipti, Manikpatna, Chelitalo, Palur, and Pithund. Soon, the Kalingas established trade relations with Sri Lanka, Java, Borneo, Sumatra, Bali and Burma. Bali was part of four islands collectively known as Suvarnadweep, which is today known as Indonesia.
- ➔ The Kalingas built large boats called 'Boita' and with the help of these they traded with the Indonesian islands. The frames of these ships were made of copper and seven hundred men and animals could be carried in them at a time. Interestingly, the Bay of Bengal was once known as Kalinga Sagar because it was filled with these ships from Kalinga. The dominance of the Kalingas on the sea routes can be understood from the fact that Kalidasa has called the king of Kalinga as the 'god of the sea' in his work 'Raghuvamsha'.
- ➔ The Kalingas often traded with the island of Bali. Along with trade goods, ideas and beliefs were also exchanged. Odia traders formed settlements in Bali and influenced the culture and ethics here. This led to the growth of Hinduism in the region. Hinduism blended well with the concepts of the island of Bali, and even today, the majority of the population practice 'Bali Hinduism'. They worship various Hindu deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha and Brahma. Lord Shiva is considered the presiding deity and the elder brother of Buddha.
- ➔ The people of Bali also celebrate Hindu festivals like Shivratri, Durga Puja and Saraswati Puja. Interestingly, the 'Masakapan ke Tukad' festival celebrated in Bali is similar to the Bali Yatra festival in Odisha. Both the festivals are celebrated in the memory of their respective maritime ancestors.

cultural evenings see performances from folk dancers as well as classical artists and celebrities, even as swings, Ram Dolis, and the sounds of toy trumpets lend the fair a rustic charm.

At a special event organised at the Barabati Stadium this year, over 2,100 students made over 22,000 paper boats at a single venue in 35 minutes, an achievement that was recognised by Guinness, and achieved the objective of getting global attention for the festival.

Expected Question

Que. Recently, the 'Bali Yatra' was discussed by the Indian Prime Minister in the G-20 summit. Which of the following is it related to? Recently, the 'Bali Yatra' was discussed by the Prime Minister in the G-20 summit. Which of the following is it related to?

- (a) It is from the Onam festival of Kerala which is celebrated in honor of the munificent king Bali.
- (b) In South India, on the second day of Kartik Shukla Pratipada i.e. Diwali, first Margpali Puja is performed and then it is associated with the tradition of worshipping King Bali in the evening.
- (c) This journey is related to Gandhiji's Dandi March.
- (d) The Bali Yatra Festival marks the day of Kartik Purnima when the Kalingavashi sea traders left for the Indonesian islands.

Answer : D

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: 'Bali Yatra' was recently mentioned by the Indian Prime Minister during the G20 summit. What do you understand by Bali Yatra? Explaining its historical importance, tell its relevance at present?

Answer Format :

❖ **Introduction (30-40 words)**

Write about the Bali Yatra which was mentioned by the Prime Minister in the G-20 Summit.

❖ **Main Body (140-160 words)**

Explain the historical, commercial and religious importance of Bali Yatra.

❖ **Conclusion (40-50 words)**

Explain the relevance of Bali Yatra in present times.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.