

The Big News

Puri Rath Yatra (1 July 2022)

Why in News?

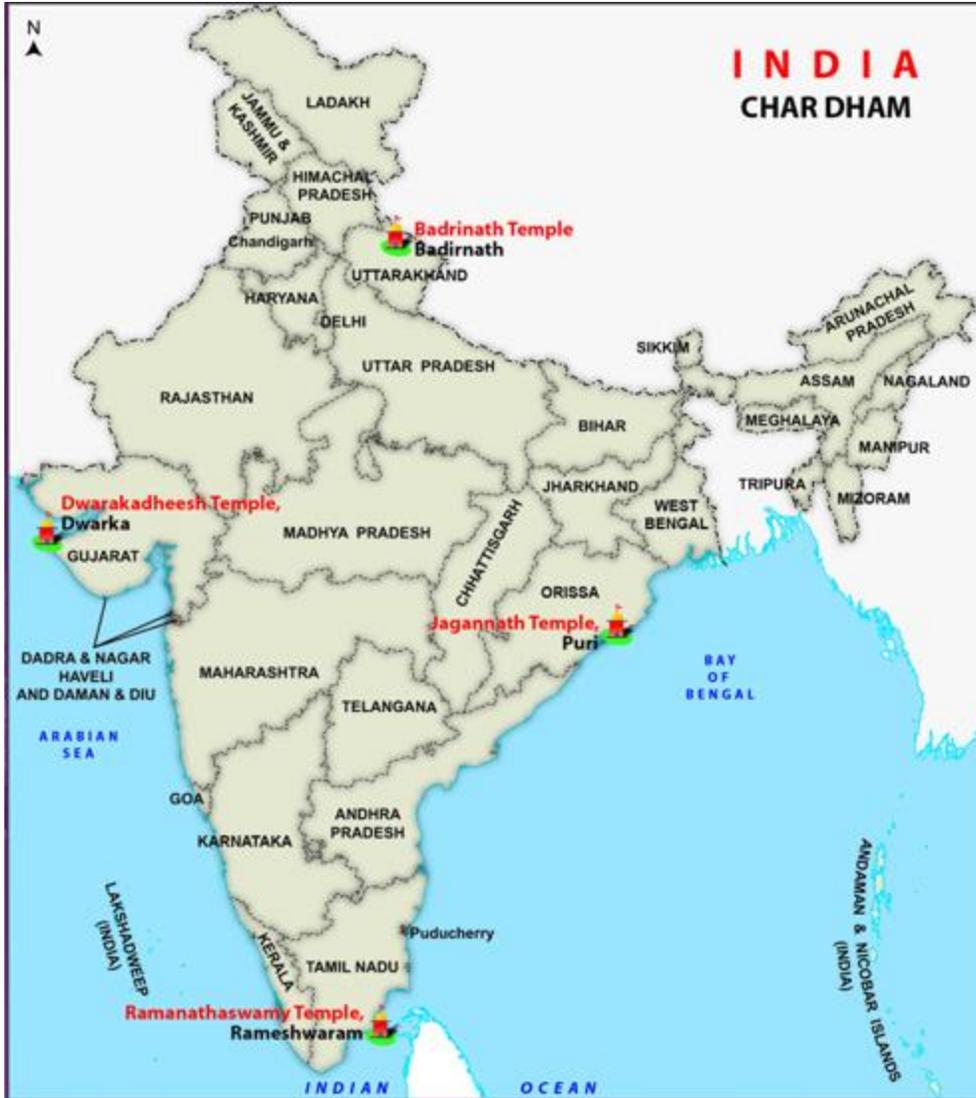


Why in News?

- One of India's biggest religious festivals, the Jagannath Puri Rath Yatra, gets under way on 1st July 2022.
- The Rath Yatra or the Chariot festival is celebrated at the Puri Jagannath Temple, associated with Lord Jagannath.
- The Rath Yatra festival of Lord Jagannath celebrated in the month of Asada (June-July) is the most well-known, attracting innumerable devotees from across the world every year.

Puri Jagannath Temple

- The Jagannath Temple at Puri is among the most revered Vaishnava sites in India.
- It is dedicated to Lord Jagannath, a form of Vishnu, and is located in Puri in the state of Odisha on the eastern coast of India.
- The temple was built by the Ganga dynasty king Anantavarman Chodaganga in the 12th century CE, as suggested by the Kendupatna copper-plate inscription of his descendant Narasimhadeva II.
- Anantavarman was originally a Shaivite, and became a Vaishnavite sometime after he conquered the Utkala region.



- Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are a trio of deities worshipped at the temple.
- The inner sanctum of the temple contains statues of these three Gods carved from sacred neem logs known as daru sitting on the bejeweled platform or ratnabedi.
- The deities are adorned with different clothing and jewels according to the season. Worship of these deities pre-dates the building of the temple and may have originated in an ancient tribal shrine.
- During the Rath Yatra, deities are taken out of the temple to travel to devotees, and it is also the largest chariot procession in the world.



Rath Yatra

- The chariot procession begins with three massive multi-wheeled chariots bearing the sibling deities making their way through massive crowds.
- These chariots, which are mini architectural marvels, are constructed over 42 days from over 4,000 pieces of wood.
- Besides the various mentions of this ratha yatra in the Puranas, the earliest literary evidence in Odisha of the ratha yatra at Puri is from a 10th-11th century CE drama written during the rule of the Somavamshi dynasty, which talks of the yatra of Lord Purusottama (Jagannatha) near the sea shore.



- The earliest iconographical evidence of this ratha yatra is from the Ganga dynasty era (13th-14th century CE), where a frieze from a temple at Dhanmandal in north Odisha depicts the three rathas, each drawn by many devotees.
- The frieze rathas show 12 wheels without spokes, with mandapas having the typical toranas, while the ratha roofs are pyramidal ending with kalasas (clearly Pidha type temples).
- The frieze also shows two chattras and two standards (trasa) that depict the royal status of the deities, which are still carried.



Ratha Yatra as Life's long journey to Moksha

- Interestingly this Ratha Yatra is also seen as the journey of life undertaken to achieve Moksha.
- In the Katha Upanishad (1:3:3:4) ratha is a symbolical representation of a body, and the yatra is the path undertaken in every birth.
- The body (shareera) undertakes the yatra (journey) in its every birth to reach the final destination (moksha); and the yatra is known as Rath Yatra.

