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BHUBANESWAR: The first Nabakalebara of the millennium was also the first for many youngsters. Thegennext did not miss the chance of being a part of the mega festival and visit various temples in the city to pull the chariots.

"We have seen many Rath Yatras over the past many years. But this year was different from the outset. The attention that everything received, right from cutting of the daru to the soul transfer, was amazing," said Sambandh Dhal, 21, a final-year engineering student at ITER, Bhubaneswar.

Even two days after Rath Yatra, social media sites continued to be flooded with pictures and messages related to the festival. Those in Puri did not miss the chance to take pictures and post them on Facebook.

The city witnessed about 20 big Rath Yatras this year, most of which are in the campuses of universities and technical institutes. Prominent among them are the chariot festivals at Utkal University, (OUAT), (RCM), and KISS at Jagamara near Siksha O Anusandhan University.

"The chariot festival at Jagannath temple on the KISS campus is a grand affair with three chariots being pulled by thousands of devotees. Since it is not possible to visit Puri due to the rush it is no lesser an experience being a part of this particular festival," said Sakshi Agrawal, a KIIT student.

Many students in Bhubaneswar are now in Puri to witness the new avatar of the Lord. "I did not go to Puri on the day of the Rath because of the crowd there. I was too young during the last Nabakalebara to understand its significance. I am going today," Abhijit Sahani, 23, who returned from Singapore recently.

"Devotion lies within. I do not think He wants us to please Him with materialistic things. While I am all for big celebrations, I think this yearly cutting of trees for chariots can be stopped," Sulovna Susant, 21, a Singapore Management University student told TOI via WhatsApp.

Many rued the chance to attend the celebrations. "I used to attend the Rath Yatra every year when I was in Bhubaneswar. I wish I could be there now. I followed the telecast on television," Shristi Roy, 21, an employee with Ernst & Young, told TOI over the telephone from Bangalore.