

b-582001

WORLD NEWS -- 2

The "Chariot Festival" -- one of the most sacred of Hindu rites -- swells the tiny village of Puri with more than half a million pilgrims. Elephants -- following customs of eight centuries ago -- lead the Hindus in their worship of Jagannath -- the God of the people. Dancing girls are also in the glittering procession, which includes the temple throne on which the massive image of Jagannath sits. Legend says Hindus once threw themselves before the throne to be crushed as living sacrifices.

Crowds watch the throne -- on a high tower moving on wheels -- being pulled by the pilgrims, who -- their religion says -- qualify for heaven by serving their lord at the "Chariot Festival."