



Veshas of Goddess Samaleswari

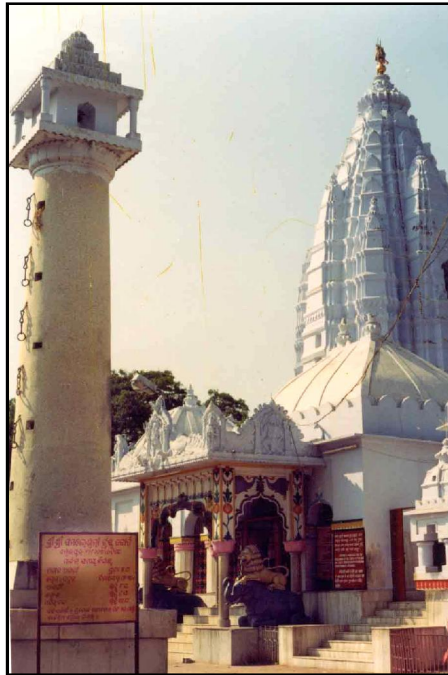
Ratan Kumar Pani

Dussehra celebration at Samaleswari temple, here is an entirely different affair. Unlike other places and like Lord Jagannath of Puri, Goddess Samaleswari adorns different 'Beshas' (incarnation) throughout Dussehra celebrations.

Legend has it that Devi Samaleswari, the presiding deity of Sambalpur is regarded as an Ansh (a part) of Durga or Parvati, along with six other 'Shakti Ansh' of Orissa and Chattishgarh. According to temple authorities, the festivities start with Sohala Puja followed by Mahalaya. On the day of Mahalaya, the Goddess adorns 'Dhabalamukhi' Beshha, also referred to as 'Ganga Darshan' after which the Navaratri Puja begins and goes on for nine days with Devi Samaleswari dressed in several incarnation of Durga. On the first, the Devi adorns the 'Shailaputri Beshha', next day she transforms into 'Brahmacharini'.

On the following days, the Devi assumes the incarnations of 'Chandraghanta',

'Kusumanda', 'Skandhamata', 'Katyayani', 'Kalaratri', 'Mahagouri' and finally she is adorned as 'Raja Rajeswari'.



Several religious functions are performed during the Navaratri. On the day when Devi is adorned as 'Katyayani', a three-day 'Jagar Deepa' (earthen lamp) is lit, which is immersed on Vijaya Dasami.

During the 'Kalaratri Beshha', all the arms and ammunition are cleaned and the temple 'Akhara' traverses the city in a procession demonstrating skills. After the 'Raja Rajeswari Beshha', the temple's 'Dhwaja' (costomary flag) is replaced marking resumption of normal practice and worship.

Courtesy : Devi, Spl. Issue of New Indian Express, October 2007.