



Ramachandi : The Fort Goddess of Gadamanatir

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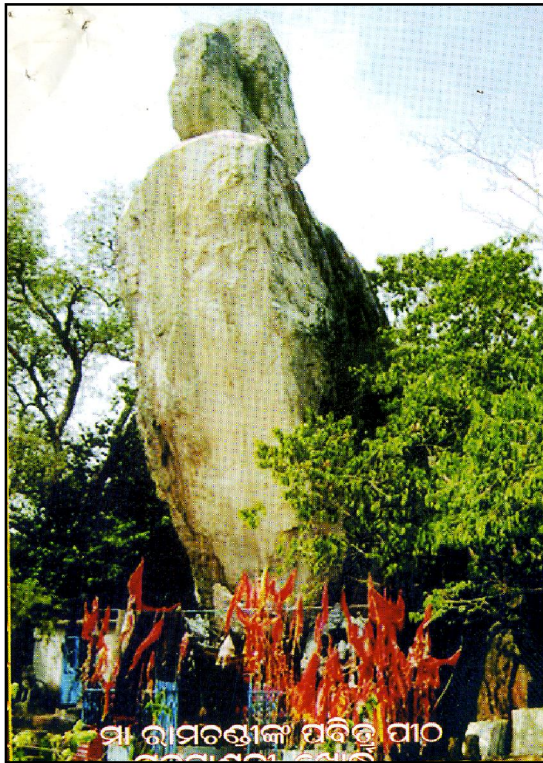
Gadamanatir, once a historically famous place of Orissa for its valiant Paiks and now well connected with its sub-divisional headquarters as well as district headquarters is well known as the abode of Goddess Ramachandi. The Abode of Goddess Ramachandi is also well connected by a fair weather metal road and is about 46 kilometers from Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Orissa.

G o d d e s s Ramachandi stands majestically and manifests herself on the top of the Ramachandi hill. The adjoining hill is popularly known as "Gobardhan Thali". There are about eighty (80) *pabachhas* (steps) which connects the ground with the hill top. The picturesque scenery, serene atmosphere, green trees and creepers, the beautiful caves, surrounded by mango groves and encircled with corn fields enhance the beauty of Ramachandi hill.

Being attracted by the natural sceneries, and the calmness of the place; visitors, tourists, artists, writers, poets and last but not the least, the devotees come here in large numbers from all the corners of the state. At the time of *Raja* and *Panchadola Yatra* (which are held at the foot of Ramachandi hill in the month of *Jyestha* and *Phalguna* respectively) more and more people gather to enjoy the beauty of the hill and to pay homage to Goddess Ramachandi.

Goddess Ramachandi is not installed inside a temple and has emerged from the earth in the form of a straight, solid and black granite stone with enormous height. At both

sides of the entrance gate of the hill top two fierce looking lion statues made of stone adorn the scene. Goddess Ramachandi with her elegant vastness would be more than one hundred feet in



Ramachandi, Garhmanitri



height. The *chalanti* deity (Representative of the original one) of Goddess is being installed inside a small temple at Gadamanatir. A family of *Adivasi* priests popularly known as *Janis* have the hereditary right of worshipping the Goddess. The *Jani* observes all the rites and rituals of Ramachandi throughout the year. The daily rites and rituals include bathing of the deity; the performance of *Majana*, the offering of *Bhog*, chanting of some *mantras*, dressing of the deity with *Kala Kachheni* (black robes) applying *Sindur* (vermilion), *Haladi* (Turmeric Paste) and *Chua* (black fragrant liquid) on her forehead. For the daily maintenance of the deity some "Jagir Land" (Rent free land) was granted by the Gajapati king of Puri.

In course of time some beautiful and interesting folklores and legends have come up in order to depict the *Mahima* (divine greatness) of Goddess Ramachandi. I would like to cite two common legends which are as follows.

"In the initial period when Goddess Ramachandi was emerging and manifesting Herself firm inside the earth, a nearby tamarind tree began to compete with the Goddess in growing fast and increased its height more than the Goddess. Seeing the height of the tamarind tree the Goddess grew more rapidly and crossed the height of the tamarind tree. There was dense forest and the *Adivasi* Priest (*Jani*) was the only person who was making the *Seva Puja* (worship). While the next day, the *Jani* came to the spot he found to his utmost amazement that the Goddess had become enormous in size and height. The poor *Jani* now became puzzled and disgusted as his hand could not reach the top of the Goddess and it was difficult to apply *Sindur* (Vermillion), *Haladi* (Turmeric Paste) and *Chua* (black fragrant liquid). And in a feat of rage the *Jani* gave a heavy slap to Goddess Ramachandi

and warned that if she would not cease increasing her height she would not be worshipped by him. Astonishingly the Goddess responded to the warning of the *Adivasi* priest and remained equal with the height of the tamarind tree standing near the Goddess equal to her height."

The second legend goes as follows:-

"Goddess Ramachandi had a pet tiger which was residing in a nearby cave of Ramachandi hill. Once the same tiger attacked and killed the bullock of the *Adivasi* Priest. When this incident came to the knowledge of *Jani* (*Adivasi* Priest) he immediately stopped the *seva puja* (worshipping) of the Goddess. In the night Goddess Ramachandi appeared before him in a dream and assured that he must not be worried due to the killing of his bullock. She directed the *Jani* that the next morning her tiger would wait for him in his agriculture field for ploughing the land. The *Jani* woke up and proceeded to his land with one of his remaining bullocks and found to his astonishment that the tiger of Ramachandi had stood like a pet bullock in a calm posture. The *Jani* tied the bullock in one side and the tiger in other side of the plough and finished the tilling of his agricultural land".

During the month of *Aswina* (October-November) at the time of "Durga Puja" people of far and near villages flock together in order to see and attend the famous "Maha Saptami Puja" of Goddess Ramachandi.

On the holy night of "Maha Saptami" large number of animals like sheeps, goats, buffaloes and fowls are sacrificed in front of the temple of *chalanti* deity of Goddess Ramachandi. A person of *Adivasi* community becomes the *Kalasi* (who acts as the living medium of the Goddess) who takes *Sura* (wine) and then the local drummers beat the drums surrounding him.



Due to the loud sound of the drums and being intoxicated and heavily drunk the *Kalasi* makes a fearful sound (*Kil Kila Radi*) and dances vigorously with a large sword to the tune of drums. The *Kalasi* is dressed with *Kala Kachheni* (black robes) with a big vermilion mark on his forehead and the garland of *Mandar* (Red China roses) and lily flowers adorns his neck. The *Kalasi* visits the whole village on foot and goes from door to door accepting the offering of *Bhog* the burning wicks and the eggs. The *Kalasi* never goes alone. He is always followed by a group of associates. These associates include one *Masaladhari* (one who holds a burning light), the *Jani* (Adivasi Priest), the *Dholkias* (local drummers), the *Ghatak* (the persons who kill the animals), one *Chhatradhari* (who holds an umbrella like thing decorated with red lilies) and two persons carrying the mobile deity of Goddess Ramachandi.

The *Kalasi* after finishing the *Bhog Khia* (Acceptance of Bhog offering) of the village, takes the *Bhog* of *Raj Kachery* (Bhog offered on behalf of the king of Puri) and then proceeds towards the temple. On the way back of *Kalasi*, devotees surrender themselves and fall at his feet seeking divine mercy which is always bestowed to them without any hesitation. Then after reaching and standing in front of Ramachandi temple the *Kalasi* foretells the future of corn harvest, the evils which would be faced by the country and its remedies

and lastly grants the desired boons to the people. Then by the order of the *Kalasi* the *Bali* (Sacrifice) of animals takes place. The *Ghatak* (killer) sacrifices sheeps, goats and fowls in large number. In the past about 75 years back during the British rule *Jhaleri* (Buffalo Sacrifice) was also offered to the Goddess. The *Kalasi* sucks the blood of the sacrificed animals and dances with a long sword showing different feats. The sacrificing of animal, the dance of *Kalasi* and the blood stained *Katari* of *Ghatak* (killer) create a dreadful atmosphere.

In the holy day of *Maha Astami* again an animal (either sheep or goat) is sacrificed before Goddess Ramachandi and the meat of the sacrificed animal is distributed among the *Paik Sardars*. On the day of Dasahara people belonging to *Paik* or *Khandayat* community observe *Khanda Puja* (sword worship) and in the evening practice different tricks of sword fighting, archery, wrestling and club fighting in front of the Ramachandi temple situated inside the village Gadamanatir.

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