



Chhatra Yatra of Manikeswari

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Kalahandi merged with the state of Orissa on the 1st January 1948. The sixth Raja of Kalahandi was Harichandra Deo. His son Ram Chandra Deo was crowned as seventh king of Kalahandi at Jugsaipatna by a Kondh who is called Pat Majhi. The mother of Ram Chandra Deo (Ranee Maa) along with Goddess Manikeswari came to Kalahandi, which is now the family goddess of the Naga family.

Goddess Manikeswari is the prominent presiding deity of Kalahandi district. The temple of the goddess is situated in the premises of the ex-Rulers of Kalahandi used to observe the *Saradiya Puja* of the goddess known as *chhatra yatra* (vijaya utsav) with much pomp and gaiety. Jugsaipatna, Thuamul Rampur and Bhawanipatna are also famous for Manikeswari Temples. Animal sacrifice is prevalent in the Shakti shrines of the district. These are done generally, on the Mahastami day of the Durga Puja festival. Every human being has a Shakti, although women have more than men. The name Shakti is used for the supreme goddess herself. Thus shrine of Maa Manikeswari is a major shakti pitha.

The Khond ritual practice of renewal of post-worship (Nabakalevara) has been also practiced in Manikeswari worship in a modified manner. Manikeswari has been believed to be "Chhinamastha" a goddess of Dasamahavidya Group. Kalahandi being the store house of ruby

stone (*Manikya*) the name of the deity Manikeswari or Goddess of Ruby is justified.

Maa Manikeswari comes out from the Garbhagriha on *Mahastmi* mid-night to *Jenakhal*, which is 3 kilometers away from the alma mater. On Maha Navami auspicious morning *Chhatra Yatra* starts with *Nagarparibhramana*. The effigy of Manikeswari is installed on a bamboo and covered with black spotted cloth. At the top on silver plate *Dasamahavidya Yantra* is installed as a deity of Tantric Hinduism. One can witness unique and beautiful tribal dance with ethnic terracotta instrument *Ghumura Veer Badya*. The dancers tie the *Ghumura* on their shoulders and hang them tight on their chest. On the way devotees of bounteous Mother Goddess Manikeswari, with their folded hands and delighted hearts offer prayers with offerings of Goats, sheep, fowls, flowers, rice, and coconut. Words are inadequate to express the divine flavours until or unless someone see on her eyes directly and the disciplined mammoth gathering of the most revered and ancient deity of this virgin land Kalahandi.

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