



Festivals, Rituals and Vesas of Goddess Samalesvari of Sambalpur

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Goddess Samalesvari is worshipped as the presiding deity in most of the Sakta shrines of Western Odisha. She is worshipped in various forms and figures such as in the case of Samalaesvari temple of Barpali and Sambalpur, She is worshipped as a large block of stone in the middle of which is a projection resembling the mouth of a cow; the extremity of this projection has a groove of a thread breath which is called the mouth. As discussed by N. Senapati and B. Mohanty¹, at both sides of the projection, there are depressions over which between gold leave is placed as a substitute for eye. According to some scholars², it is also described as a massive triangular rock with something like a penis protruding at the bottom, a unique image in the whole country, a rare relic of the *linga-yoni* worship. She does not correspond to any other deities of Hindu religion. However, in certain Samalesvari temples of Western Odisha, especially in the rural areas She is worshipped in the anthropomorphic form of

Goddess Durga under the *Semel* trees. For example at Bhatigaon under Barpali block of Bargarh district, icon of Mahisamarddini Durga is worshipped as Goddess Samalesvari. Also in case of Budhi Samalei of Suvarnapur, the presiding deity is a four-armed Durga. Thus Goddess Samalesvari is a popular deity in the length and breadth of Western Odisha.



Rituals

When the Chauhan kings of Patna State came to rule over Western Odisha, they tried to appease the local tribes by accepting their deity Samalei as their *Istadevi* (tutelary deity) and thereby manipulating their support for good governance. According to noted scholar F. Deo³, the Chauhan king Balaram Dev (1542 to 1556 A.D.) exulted the local tribal deity Samalei to state deity by accepting the foot prints of his ancestor, Ramai Dev, the first Chauhan king, adorned her with great veneration and respect. Therefore the Chauhan



kings made it as their state policy by accepting the local faiths and beliefs for the expansion of their territory. Since then Goddess Samalesvari occupies a very pivotal position in the religious and cultural life of the people of Western Odisha. Number of Samalesvari temples are dotted throughout the length and breadth of Western Odisha. In each and every temple dedicated to Goddess Samalesvari, festivals are observed in specific months of the year i.e., September and October are very common. In this discussion, specific study has been made with regard to festivals, rituals and *vesas* associated with the Goddess Samalesvari of Sambalpur. Since the time of Balaram Dev, the illustrious Chauhan king, Goddess Samalesvari became the tutelary deity of the king and the people of his kingdom. As described in Kosalananda Mahakavyam, Sambalpur grew luxuriously to a metropolis full of riches and free from fear and abounding in nature which came without efforts due to the blessings of Goddess Samalesvari. Sambalpur became the capital city of Chauhan kingdom as a landmark in the history and culture of Western Odishan people. The regular Puja and Seva to Goddess started which was gradually Sanskritized and Aryanised. As in the case of other Sakta temples of Western Odisha, tribal priests normally worship, but in Samalesvari temple of Sambalpur, Kshatriya priests are engaged for worship since the time of Balaram Dev.

Sambalpur was also popular as a seat of Tantric Buddhism from the early times. Even when Buddhism was about to decline in different parts of India, the new order Tantric Buddhism began to flourish under the princess Laxmikara, the sister of king Indrabhuti of Sambal in 8th century A.D. Perhaps the present *pitha* of Goddess Samaleswari owes its origin to this period. According to scholar S.S. Panda⁴, inside the sanctum of Samalei temple a pair of human foot

prints with two eight-petalled lotus rosette motifs on both the sides are carved on a stone panel, which is worshipped as Sital Mata. Such type of foot prints were worshipped by Siddhacharyas, which was common in the Buddhist Tantric School. Thus in the worship of Goddess Samalesvari there was very much influence of Tantricism.

According to Late Durga Prasad Ray⁵, the chief priest of Samalesvari temple of Sambalpur, Goddess Samalesvari is worshipped in Vaishnavi *mantra* i.e., *om hring shring Somalesvarje aing sring namah*. Vija Mantra: *Sring*. Gayatri Mantra: *Narayanai Bidmahe Somolesvarjei dhimahim tamodevi prochodayat*.

Dhyana: *Sindura Ranakanti hemavandana soundharya varan nidhi, ratnakalpa bibhusitam kucharatam saleikarimanjarim, hasthe sulagadam sikhecha mukutam soudanmini sannibham, dhayardugabare virajitatare sri Somaladhisvarim*.

*Prarthana: Sidhi bhavatume Devi Tatprasadat krupamayee, lokamata Gopi rupa trahimam saranagata*⁶

Goddess Samalei is offered with both vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods. Thus the tribal deity worshipped by the aboriginals has become an idol of the Hindus in course of time. According to Pandit Gopinath Panigrahi,⁷ Samalei is no other than Goddess Asapuri of the Garhsambhar Chauhans. He has tried to prove the lunar origin of the Chauhans through the etymological significance of the word Samalai (*Soma*-crescent moon). A close look however reveals that Samalei is not a Hindu icon, no armed Durga. On the other hand as pointed out by noted scholar Prof. P.M. Nayak⁸ She has the form of a



caste vagina interpenetrated with the penis, which presupposes that the name is perhaps derived from the word Sambhalai suggestive of the ability to bear. This *linga-yoni* image reminds us to several centuries back to the Greeco-Roman days of phallic worship. This phallic image of Samalai is hardly concreted by our efforts to Aryanize and modernize and Hinduise this very primitive deity through improvization and visualization of an oval face with a protruding tongue with all her superimposed ornaments and garlands Goddess Samalai stands on a huge block of stone in the unmistakable shape of a vagina penetrated by a penis. Like Goddess Charchika of Banki, Biraja of Jajpur, Sarala of Jhankada, Chandi of Cuttack, Samlei of Sambalpur has made Sambalpur as an important Sakta Pitha of Odisha.

Festivals

Festivals are the occasions that reinforce the presence of Gods and Goddesses in the life of the individuals and community. Those are also moments for the people and to be a part of as old, yet still vibrant and living traditions⁹. Festivals are also full of enjoyment, when they coincide with agricultural events such as harvest like Nuakhai or Navarna celebrated in West Odisha during *Bhadra Sukla Paksha* every year. Webster's Dictionary defines the term festival as a day or time of religious or other celebration marked by feasting, ceremonies or their observances. Festival is celebrated by one religious or sub group, group, a tribe or a community with exceptions to few individuals. Rituals performed during festivals are common to one social group, a religious sect or a community. Food, sweets, fruits, nuts etc. prepared during the festivals are common to one social group, religious sect or a community. The celebration of such festivals and rituals associated with Sakta shrines of western Odisha are religious

in nature which reflects the culture of the people of the particular area or locality. Here discussion has been made with regard to some important Sakta festivals associated with Samalesvari temple of Sambalpur.

The major festivals associated with Samalesvari temple are Nuakhai, Mahalaya and Saradiya Vasantika Durga Puja. Every year with much pomp and luxury, Nuakhai *Bhetghat* is organized on Bhadrava Sukla Paksha inside the temple premises. People of Sambalpur region eat *Navarna* (new rice) only after it is offered to Goddess Samalesvari. Nua Khai is such a popular festival in western Odisha that on this occasion people exhibit their gratitude and thankfulness to the creator and Mother Goddess earth. This festival normally observed on the 5th day of Bhadrava Sukla Paksha when newly harvested rice is first offered to the presiding deity Samalesvari and other gods and goddesses and then they eat the new rice sitting together. Everybody wears new clothes, people clean their houses. Younger members of the family touch the feet of the elders in the neighbourhood and visit Samalesvari temple to pay homage to the deity. On this occasion various types of cultural events like music and dance, meeting, *akhada* are organized at the premises of the Samalesvari temple. Another important celebration associated with Goddess Samalesvari is Gundikhai on the day of full moon of *Phalguna*, the first crop of mangoes with char (a type of miniature sweet black berries) and new *Mahul* flower are first offered to Goddess Samalesvari and then members of the locality take those offerings. In the month of April on the occasion of Mahavisuva Samkranti, Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated inside the temple precinct. By worshipping Devi Durga, Sati Savitri got back her husband, Satyavan. To commemorate this event, Savitri Vrata is



celebrated in the month of May. In the month of June Samalesvari is worshipped as the protector against all dangers and in Her honour Vrata and Hera Panchami are observed. In the month of July, Chitau Amavasya and Sravanaviseka are performed in the temple. The other festivals are such¹⁰ as Sravanabhiseka, Ganesh Chaturthi

(August-September), Puajuntia Osha, Dipavali, Syama Puja, Maha Sarasvati Puja etc. are observed.

The following festivals are celebrated throughout the year in the Hindu calendar month which are as follows:

Jyestha Purnima	Jalasayi Utsav of Bhairava Baba
Sravana Purnima	Sravanabhiseka of Goddess Samalesvari
Bhadra Babha Krushnapaksha Astami	Ambika Puja
Bhadra Babha Suklapaksha Panchami	Nuakhai
Asvina Krushnapaksha Asthami	Beginning of Sohala Puja
Asvina Krushna Paksha Amavasya	Mahalaya, Dhavalamukhi Vesa or Ganga Darshana Vesa
Asvina Suklapaksha Pratipada	Saradiya Navaratri Puja and lighting of Jagara Dipa
Asvina Suklapaksha Saptami	Beginning of Triratri Manasika Jagara Dipa
Asvina Suklapaksha Astami	Mahastami, Sandhi Puja, Akhada in the temple compound, Khandadhua Sobhajatra
Asvina Suklapaksha Navami	Mahanavami, Akhada Parikrama
Asvina Suklapaksha Dasami	Vijaya Dasami, Ranajita Sobhayatra
Asvina Purnima	Flag ceremony
Kartika Krushnapaksha Amavasya	Syama Puja
Every Thursday of Margasira	Mahalaxmi Puja
Pausa Purnima	Pausyabhiseka
Magha Sukla Paksha Panchami	Mahasarasvati Puja
Magha Purnima	Purnahuti of Chabis Prahari Nama Jagna
Makara Samkranti	Purnahuti of three-day long Dipa Mahajagna
Phalgun Purnima	Dola Purnima, Gundi Khai
Chaitra Sukla Paksha Pratipada to Navami	Basantika Navaratri Puja and Lighting of Jagara Dipa
Pana Samkranti	Special Puja of Sitala Thakurani
Akshaya Tritiya	Sri Sri Samalesvari Bhajan Samaroha
Every Tuesday	Special Puja at Akhada Hanuman Temple.



Time Table in the Temple

Mangala arati at 5 A.M.

Bhoga and Pahada at 12 noon to 12.30 P.M.

Alati at 8 P.M.

Bhoga at 9 P.M.

Closing of the temple at 10 P.M.

(Some variations may be observed on Tuesdays and on specific festivals)

Vesas of Samalesvari

Vesa means costume, attire or dress. Another important aspect associated with Goddess Samalesvari is Her different *Vesas* on festive occasions of the year. Those *Vesas* can be discussed as follows:

Dhavalamukhi (Ganga Darshan) Vesa

On the day of Asvina Amavasya Mahalaya, Goddess Samalesvari is decorated with white colour instead of red. It is a popular belief that *Darshan* to Goddess during this *vesa* is as good as *darshan* to Goddess Ganga. According to legend of the *Mahabharata*, when Lord Krishna offered blessings to Bhishma, who was sleeping on the bed of arrows, told that Mahalaya *Sradha darshan* of Goddess Ganga leads to the *Mukti* or salvation of the departed soul. It is not possible for everyone to have Ganga *Darshan* on this auspicious day, therefore Goddess Samalesvari gave *darshan* to Her devotees and cure sins and sufferings. Since the time of Raja Balaram Dev (16th century A.D.) this *Vesa* is in practice till today. These *Vesas* are continued for two and half days.

Nava Durga Vesa

On the occasion of Durga Puja, in the month of October from the *Asvina Sukla Paksha Pratipada* till *Navami* (9th day) Goddess

Samalesvari dressed with Navadurga *Vesa* in every afternoon and She is offered with *Puja* by the devotees.

Sailaputri Vesa (Pratipada)

Sailaputri Vesa is narrated in the following *sloka*:

*Vande bacnhhita lavaya Chandra dhakruta sekharam
Vrusrudhham Suladharam sailaputri jasasvini*

Goddess Samalesvari is worshipped as Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya and known as Saila Putri. In this *Vesa* the Goddess holds trident and lotus in Her right and left hands respectively. Her head looks like crescent moon. Goddess offers blessings and fulfills the desire of the devotees.

Brahmacharini Vesa (Dvitiya)

This *vesa* is narrated in the following *sloka* :

*Dadhana varapadmavhya
Akshamala kamandalu
Devi prasidatu mayee
brahmacharini annuttama*

In the second day of the Navaratra (*Dvitiya Tithi*) Goddess Samalesvari is worshipped in Brahmacharini *Vesa*. As per the shapeless Brahma the second name of the deity is Brahmacharini i.e., Tapacharini and She holds rosary and *kamandalu* in Her right and left hands respectively.

Chandraghanta Vesa (Dvitiya)

This *vesa* is narrated in the following verse:

*Pindaka pravaraudha
chandakopaastrakairjuta
Prasadam tanute mahyam
chandraghantetivisruta*

Goddess Samalesvari is worshipped in the form of Chandraghanta on the second *tithi* of Navaratra. She is golden in colour and ten-armed with Her conventional weapons. She is seated



on Her mount lion and prepared for war. She removes all sins and sufferings of the devotees.

Kusmanda Vesa

This *vesa* is well narrated in the following verse:

*Sura sampurna kalanam
Rudhiraplutameba cha*

*Dadhana hastha padmavyam
kusmanda subhadasthu me*

The meaning of *kusmanda* is having multi meanings such as *ku* meaning ugly or bad, *usma* meaning multifarious world and *a* meaning originated from the womb. As Goddess Samalesvari holds three-fold living beings in Her womb and hence Her fourth nomenclature is Kusmanda. As She resides in the solar world Her glaze is just like the rays of the Sun. She is eight-armed and mounts on a lion. She holds *kamandalu*, bow, *bana*, lotus, full pot, a pot filled with nectar, wheel and goad and in Her eighth hand She holds a rosary. This *vesa* is worshipped on the fourth day of Navaratra.

Skandamata Vesa

This *vesa* is well narrated in the following verse:

*Simhasanagata nityam
padmasritakara dvaya*

*Subhadastu sada devi
skandamatab jasasvini*

The other name of Karttikeya is Skanda and he is the Commander-in-Chief of the Gods and Goddesses. Being the mother of Skanda the fifth name of Samalesvari is Skandamata. She is worshipped on the fifth day of Navaratra. In the image of Skandamata Lord Skanda sits on Her lap.

Katyayani Vesa

This *vesa* is well narrated in the following verse:

*Chandrahasktyalakara
sardula vara vahana*

*Katyayani subham dadyat
devi danava ghatini*

For fulfilling the needs of the Gods and Goddesses Mother Durga originated in the Ashram of Maharsi Katyayana. As the sage Katyayana adopted Devi Durga as his daughter Her sixth name is Katyayani. On the sixth day of the Navaratra, Goddess Samalesvari is worshipped in this *Vesa*. In this attire the glaze is comparable to gold. She is four-armed and holds swords, full-blown lotus, *Varada* and *Abhaya*.

Kalaratri Vesa (Saptami)

This *vesa* is well narrated in the following verse:

*Ekaveni japakarna
puranagna kharasthita*

*Lobmosthi kanaka varni
tailabhyakta saririni*

*Vama padollusalloha
lata kantaka bhusana*

*Vardhana mudhardhwaja krushna
kalaratrirbhayankari*

As the destroyer of the Universe, Goddess Samalesvari holds Kalaratri *vesa* on the seventh day of Navaratra. She is black in colour, Her hairs are open, necklace on the neck, her three eyes are just like the globe, flame is emanated from Her nose. Her mount is Ass. She is four armed and holds iron nail, sword, *varada* and *abhaya*. Despite her ferocious appearance She is considered as the bestower of boon. Hence Her other name is Subhankari.



Mahagouri Vesa (Astami)

This *vesa* is well narrated in the following verse:

*Svete vruse samarudga
svetambara dhara suchih
Mahagouri subham dadyan
mahadeva pramodada*

To kill the demons Sumbha and Nisumbha the white complexioned *Devi* Parvati changed Her colour to black and assumed the name Kali. Once again She assumed white complexion and hence Her other name is Mahagouri. In this *vesa* wears white cloth and attires. She is four armed and mounts on a Bull. She holds in Her four arms *dambaru*, *varada*, trident and *abhaya*. This is the calm posture of the Goddess.

Siddhidatri Vesa (Navami)

This *vesa* is well narrated in the following verse:

*Siddhagandharva jakhya dyo
asurairamareirapi
Sevyamana sada bhuyat
sidhita sidhidayini*

To fulfil all the desires of the devotees Her other name is Siddhidatri. The Goddess is worshipped in this *vesa* during Navaratri. Her four arms are adorned with lotus, conch, wheel and goad.

Rajarajesvari Vesa (Asvina Purnima)

The greatest *vesa* of the Goddess is Rajarajesvari *vesa*. The other names of this *vesa* are Rajarajesvari, Srividya, Mahatripura Sundari and Balapanchadasi. In Dasamavidya, Rajarajesvari *vesa* is placed in the fourth position. She is considered as the *Sakti* of Siva. She is five-faced and ten armed. She has four rupas like *sthula*, *sukhma*, *para* and *turiya*. She sits on

the lotus originated from the naval of Siva. Adi Sankaracharya used to worship Her in *Srividya* form. A new flag is unfurled on that day. Flowers like *ketaki*, *mandar* and *dahana* leaves are favourites of the Goddess. The Chauhan king Balaram Dev worshipped Her in pomp and grandeur after the establishment of the new capital at Sambalpur. Since that time these traditions are practised.

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