



Durga Puja in the Prominent Sakti Pithas of Odisha

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Abstract

It is persistently presumed that there are about 33 crores of Gods and Goddesses in Hinduism. These Gods and Goddesses are broadly divided into three. They are Vaishnava, Saiva and Shakta. Among them Goddess Durga, belongs to the Shakta category. The Shakta cult got immense popularity during the ancient age commencing from the 6th Century B.C till the end of the 6th century A.D.

So far as Odisha is concerned, worship of Goddess Durga is observed in all the undivided 13 districts. Here is given an account in detail about the worship of Goddess Durga in Odisha.

1. Durga Puja in the undivided Balasore District

Durga Puja is one of the most popular festivals of the district. It is celebrated in the bright fortnight in the month of Aswin (September-October). This colourful festival begins from Saptami (7th day) and ends on Dasami (10th days).

Clay Image of Goddess Durga is worshipped at many places in the district with great pomp and splendor of which mention may be made of the celebrations held at *Baleswar, Bhadrak, Nilagiri, Soro, Jaleswar and*

Chandabali. The 10th day of the festival is called Dussehra. On this day the images are taken out in procession for immersion in tanks or rivers. In some other places the images are immersed on the 11th day. Durga Puja is also celebrated at many Sakta Shrines in the district.

2. Durga Puja in the undivided Bolangir District

The village of Jarasingha situated 5 miles from Tusra and two miles from Deogan is famous for the Patkhanda Jatra which takes place in the month of Aswina from 8th to 10th day of the bright fortnight. A man locally called 'Barua' becomes possessed by the spirit of Goddess "Patkhanda" and under that condition he is believed to bestow miraculous boons on devotees. People suffering from mental diseases are brought here for blessings and barren women also come here in large number in the hope of getting children by the blessing of Goddess Patkhanda.

3. Durga Puja in the undivided Boudh, Kandhamal District

The images of Goddess Durga are worshipped in a few places in the district of which celebrations held at Boudh deserve special mention. Durga Puja also celebrated at several Sakta shrines in the district of which the worship



of Goddess Bararaul at Bataskumpa in Khajuripada police station is important. The devotees offer rice, milk and sweetmeat to the Goddess. According to custom the tribal people of the district offer bhetis (presentations) to their hill-chiefs and Muth-heads as a token of respect during Dussehra.

Dussehra or Dasahara has a special significance to the warrior community. They worship their old weapons of war and exhibit martial art on the occasion. Their heroic forebears used to start on fresh military Expeditions during this season of the year.

4. Durga Puja festival in the undivided Cuttack District

Sarbajanina Durga Puja is celebrated during the bright fortnight in the month of Aswina (September-October). Generally it continues for five days from Sasthi to Dasami. The celebration reaches the peak on Dasami which is called Vijaya Dasami. Clay idols of Goddess Durga and God (Lord) Mahadev are made and worshipped in many places in the district. Celebrations held at Cuttack city deserve special mention. Over 100 Durga and 60 Mahadev Medhas are there in Cuttack city. Durga Puja here is celebrated with great pomp and grandeur, lakhs of people visit the Medha's to have a darshan of the deities and enjoy the operas and melody nights held in front of the important Medhas in central places during these days. A big fair is held on the bank of the river on the day at Puri Ghat. This year the Durga puja of Cuttack will be celebrated with COVID-19 guidelines.

Durga Puja is also celebrated with pomp and ceremony at several Shakti Pithas in the district of which Sarala at Jhankada (Kanakpur), Cuttack Chandi at Cuttack, Gada Chandi at



Barabati Fort, Charchika at Banki, Mahuli Thakurani at Parsurampur in Athagarh, Prabala Thakurani at Jeypure in Narasinghapur, Rama Chandi Thakurani at Rangadipada in Badamba, Maa Bhatarika at Badamba and Biraja Thakurani at Jajpur are important.

5. Durga Puja in the undivided Ganjam District.

Dasahara is celebrated throughout the district during the bright fortnight in the month of Aswina (September-October). Generally Durga Puja continues for four days from Saptami upto Dasami. The celebrations reach climax on Dasami which is called Vijaya Dasami. Clay idols of Goddess Durga are made and worshipped in many places in the district of which celebrations held at Brahmapur, Parlakhemundi, Hinjili and Rambha deserve special mention. Worshipping of the clay idol of Durga during Dasahara was first introduced by the Bengalee settlers in Brahmapur town of the district in the early part of forties of the 20th century.



Durga Puja is also celebrated at several Shakti Pithas in the district of which Goddess Narayani near Khallikote, Ramachandi of Chikiti, Mahisamardini of Rambha, Tara Tarini near Purusottampur, Thakurani Pitha of Purunapatna near Paralakhemundi, Byaghra Devi of Kulada and Bhairabi Pitha of Mantridi near Brahmapur are important.

6. Durga Puja in the undivided Kalahandi District

Goddess Manikeswari is the prominent deity of Kalahandi district. The temple of the Goddess is situated in the premises of the Ex-Maharaja's palace at Bhawanipatna. The Ex-Rulers of Kalahandi used to observe the Saradiya Puja of the Goddess known as Chhatra Yatra. The festival reaches its peak on the Mahastami day.

Besides Bhawanipatna, Dasahara also forms an important festival at Khariar Road, Khariar, Sinapali, Komna, Charabeda and Salia under Jonk police station, Jayapatna and Behera in Koksara police station and Dharamgarh.

The Khandabasa festival is observed during Dasahara in the temple of Goddess Lankeswari at Junagarh, the old capital of Kalahandi Ex.-State. The ruler of Kalahandi used to come to Junagarh on the Mahastami day to perform the Puja. The ruler observes fasting on the day and places a sword before the Goddess on an auspicious moment fixed by the astrologer. There is a widespread belief among the local people that if the sword placed by the ruler before the Goddess remains straight, villagers will not face any natural calamities like drought, epidemics etc. If the sword tilts, right or left then it indicates bad omen for the State.

The festival is observed for a day and a fair is held at the place on the occasion. The congregation actually lasts for about three days.

Folk performances like Ghumura dance and Ramalila are usually organized at night-for the entertainment of the people.

7. Durga Puja in the undivided Keonjhar District

People worship their vocational implements on these days. Images of Goddess Durga are worshipped in many places of the district of which the celebrations held at Keonjhar, Jhumpura, Joda, Barbil, Champua and Anandapur attract more people. Durga Puja is also celebrated at the Sakta Shrines at Siddhamata near Keonjhar and Tarini at Ghatagaon.

8. Durga Puja in the undivided Koraput District

The greatest festival of the district is Dasahara observed at Jeypore. This festival is held in honour of Kanaka Durga (Golden Durga) whose temple is situated within the palace. This festival lasts for sixteen days and a series of ceremonies are held throughout the period.

9. Durga Puja festival in the undivided Mayurbhanj District

Dasahara is the festival in which the Hindus, the Schedule Tribe and the Schedule Caste people are equally interested. It is observed with great pomp and splendor at Baripada, Betnati and Kaptipada. It begins on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Aswin and continues for three days.

10. Durga Puja festival in the undivided Puri District

The Durga Puja continues for four days from Saptami up to Dasami. People also worship their vocational implements on these days and stop work in the workshop. Clay images of



Goddess Durga are worshipped at many places in the district of which mention may be made of the celebrations held at Puri, Bhubaneswar, Jatni, Khurda and Nayagarh. At Puri this festival is called gosani jata. The Gosani or Durga images constructed at Puri are of colossal size with distinctive iconographic features.

Durga Puja is also ceremoniously observed with due ceremony at several Sakta shrines in the district of which the worship of Mangala at Kakatpur, Bhagabati at Banpur and Bimala at Puri deserves special mention.

11. Durga Puja festival in the undivided Sundargarh District

The district with its alluring legend and history contains many temples and shrines where people of different faiths congregate on many religious and festive occasions.

Vedavyasa, a beauty spot near Rourkela, located at the confluence of the rivers Sankha and Koel, is a famous place of pilgrimage for the Hindus. Its sanctity is due to the location of the temple of Lord Siva. According to local tradition sage Vyasa, the celebrated author of "The Mahabharata" is said to have been born here.

The fairs and melas are common in the district and are held throughout the year. Some of these fairs have a religious or economic origin. On such festive occasions the people get scope to rejoice and also avail the opportunity of purchasing many articles from outside traders who come with their merchandise from distant places. Tribal dance, chhau dance, opera and magic shows, etc., are some of the usual features of these melas.

Most of the tribal festivals synchronise with their agricultural operations. They have also

adopted many Hindu festivals due to years of close cultural contact with their Hindu neighbours. Rourkela in the district is the main place for Durga Medhas.

12. Durga Puja festival in the undivided Dhenkanal District

The vital places of Durga Puja in the District are Dhenkanal, Angul, Kaniha, Talcher, Chhendipada, Kamakshanagar, Kapilas, Athamallik etc.

13. Durga Puja in the undivided Sambalpur District

The undivided Sambalpur district is the heart of cultural heritage of Western Odisha. The Durga Puja and Dasahara is celebrated in the Devi Pithas of Samaleswari and Ghanteswari.

It commences on the 1st day of the bright fortnight of the month of Aswin (September-October) and ends on the 10th day of the bright fortnight of the month of Aswin. Hence Durga Puja continues for 10 days in all the Devi Pithas of the district. It is the 2nd grand celebration in the district followed by "Nuakhai".

In Sambalpur Goddess Durga is considered as the "Samaleswari Durga". She is originally the Goddess of the "Aborigin Sauras" (Adivasi Saura Community). Initially the aborigin people were appointed in the service of the Goddess. Goddess Samalai (Samaleswari) is considered as the Goddess of antiquity or Adimapantee Devee.

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