



Beshas of Deities

Sabita Barik
&
Sobha Barik

In Oriya and Sanskrit, the word *Besha* means dress or adornment. It is a very common feature observed in all the temples that the deities are dressed and decorated in suitable manner. Similarly, every day from the Mangala Alati to Ratri Pahuda, the deities on the Ratnavedi of Shri Jagannath Temple, Puri wear and enjoy different types of dresses, which include *Suta bastra* (cotton) and *Pata bastra* (silken clothes) namely *Tadapa*, *Uttariya*, *Paharana*, *Phuta*, *Srikapada/Sirkapada*, *Baralagi-pata*(set), *Srimukhabala*, *Chandanaguda*, *Chadara* and gold ornaments studded with precious stones, flower ornaments, *Tulasi* leaves, *Chandana*, camphor and musk etc. Flower ornaments namely *Kara pallaba*, *Kundala*, *Tadagi*, *Chandrika*, *Gava*, *Alaka*, *Tilaka*, *Jhumpa*, *Nakuasi*, *Dayana*, *Adharamala*, *Makara kundala*, *Sripayara mala*, *Hrudaya pallaba*, *Kali padaka*, *Kaustubha padaka*, *Chausara Mala* and *Guna* etc. are made out of different types of flowers, leaves of *tulasi*, banana, *panasa* etc. In this article, a few important *beshas* of the deities are briefly discussed below:

1. **Abakasa or Tadapa Uttari Besha:** Abakasa means the brushing of teeth and bathing rituals of the deities. The clothes, which are worn for this purpose, are known as tadapa

and *uttariya*. This *besha* is done everyday after Mangala *Alati* for the abakasa rituals.

2. **Badasrungorara Badasinghara Besha :** This *besha* is usually made of different types and colours of flowers. Deities are decorated with flower ornaments like *Adhara*, *Jhumpa*, *Gava*, *Chandrika*, *Tilaka*, *Alaka*, *Guna*, *Hrudapallava*, *Karapallava*, *Tadaki* and a number of flower garlands. Most of these are prepared with leaves of *tulasi*. Deities wear *Pata bastra* (silk clothes) known as *Khandua*. Extract from the famous Sanskrit work the *Gitagovinda* of the most celebrated poet Jayadeva is found woven in the texture of this *Khandua*. This is the last *besha* of the deities done everyday before the night *Pahuda* i.e. closing of the doors when the deities retire to beds. It is worth mentioning that on the following early morning Mangala *Alati* is offered to the deities when they are in this *besha*.

3. **Chandana Besha:** The word *chandana* means sandalwood. The sweet scented paste of this wood is applied to the body of the deities in the month of Baisakha and Jyeshtha. This *besha* is done for 42 days during *Chandana yatra* beginning from *Akshya Trutiya tithi*. (third day of bright fortnight of Baisakha).



4. **Rukmini Harana Besha:** On Jyeshtha Sukla Ekadasi tithi (the 11th day of bright Jyeshtha), Krishna had married Rukmini. Therefore, on this day Jagannath wears a suitable dress to look like a bridegroom.

5. **Ganapati or Hati Besha :** On Snana Purnima tithi (the full moon day in Jyeshtha), the bathing ceremony of the deities is observed on the Snanavedi. Thereafter, the deities are dressed like Ganesa who bears the head of an elephant (Hati). Lord Jagannath and Balabhadra appear like Ganesa or black and white elephants respectively.

6. **Naba Jaubana Besha :** Immediately after the day of Snana Purnima, the deities remain secluded for 15 days. On the eve of the Ratha Yatra they are gorgeously dressed and decorated and give *darsan* to the visitors. They put on very charming robes and look like persons at the commencement of their youth (Nava Jauvana).

7. **Suna Besha :** Suna besha takes place on Asadha Sukla Ekadasi tithi (the 11th day of the bright fortnight in Asadha, when the deities are brought back from Sri Gundicha temple to the Singha dwara of the Shri Jagannath Temple. Deities are dressed in this besha when they are still in their respective Rathas (chariots). They are decorated with different types of gold ornaments like gold diadems, hands and feet made of gold and the like. Jagannath holds a gold Chakra (Disc) in his right hand and a silver Sankha (conch) in his left hand. Balabhadra holds a gold Hala (plough) in his left hand and a gold Gada (mace) in his right hand. This besha is also known as Bada Tadhau Besha and Raja Besha. This besha is also done on the days like Dasahara, Kartika Purnima and Pousa Purnima (Pushyabhiseka Besha).

8. **Chitalagi Besha :** The word Chita means decoration of forehead with special materials like chandana, musk and gorachana etc. But in Sri Jagannath Temple, Puri three magnificent Chitas (ornaments of the foreheads) made of gold, diamond, sapphire and emerald are put on the three principal deities on Sravana Amabasya. Connected with this is the decoration of Rahu Rekha. It is also an ornament of the head. This is removed from the head of the deities on the day of Snana Purnima and is again put on in the month of Sravana.



9. **Banabhoji Besha:** It is done on Bhadraba Krishna Dasami (the 10th day of the dark fortnight in Bhadraba). The deities are dressed like cowherd boys, as if they are going to attend a picnic.

10. **Kaliyadalana Besha:** On Bhadraba Krishna Ekadasi tithi (the 11th day of the dark fortnight in Bhadraba), Jagannath is dressed like Krishna killing the Kaliya serpent. As per the Puranic lore, Kaliya was the venomous serpent/vipor living in Jamuna river. It was a source of great danger to the people and Krishna had killed it. This besha takes place to remind this Puranic incident. The actual scene of killing Kaliya is usually dramatized in the sacred tank of Markanda in the Puri town.



11. **Pralambasurabadha Besha:** It is done on Bhadraba Krushna Dwadasi tithi (the 12th day of the dark fortnight in Bhadraba), when Balabhadra is dressed as if killing the demon Pralambasura. According to the Puranic story, Pralamba was a demon who was killed by Balarama. So, Balabhadra wears this besha.

12. **Krushna - Balarama Besha:** This besha is done on Bhadraba Krushna Trayodasi tithi (the 13th day of the dark fortnight in Bhadraba). Jagannath is dressed like Krushna and Balabhadra is dressed like Balarama. This besha attests the deep impact of Krushna cult in the Shri Jagannath Temple, Puri. This is also known as Giri Gobardhana besha, which reminds us the lifting up of the mountain Govardhana by Krushna.

13. **Bali-Bamana Besha :** On Bhadraba Sukla Dwadasi tithi (the 12th day of the bright fortnight in Bhadraba), Jagannath is dressed like Bamana (dwarf). Notably, Bamana is the fifth incarnation of Bishnu. According to the Puranic story, Bishnu had appeared in the form of a Bamana (dwarf) and through his ingenuity, outwitted the demon king Bali and pushed him down to the *Patala* (inferno or nether world) with his foot.

14. **Radha-Damodara Besha :** This besha takes place from Aswina Sukla Ekadasi tithi (the 11th day of the bright fortnight in Aswina) to Kartika Sukla Dasami tithi (the 10th day of the bright fortnight in Kartika). Radha is the female counter-part of Krushna who is otherwise also known as Damodara.

15. **Hari-Hara Besha :** When the Radha-Damodara besha of Jagannath continues, we have the Hari-Hara besha of Balabhadra. In this besha, half of the body of Balabhadra looks blackish while the other half looks whitish. This

connotes that half of his body is Bishnu and the other half is Siva.

16. **Thiakia Besha or Lakshmi-Narayana Besha :** This besha is done on Kartika Sukla Ekadasi tithi (the 11th day of the bright fortnight in Kartika). It is said that the worship of Lakshmi and Narayana has gained popularity in this Temple since the visit of Ramanuja to Puri.

17. **Bankachula Besha :** This besha is done on Kartika Sukla Dwadasi tithi (the 12th day of the bright fortnight in Kartika). This is similar to that of Lakshmi-Narayana besha with addition of golden headgear.



18. **Adakia Besha or Tribikram Besha:** This besha is done on Kartika Sukla Trayodasi (the 13th day of the bright fortnight in Kartika). This is also called Tribikram besha.

19. **Dalikia Besha or Lakshmi-Nrusingha Besha:** This besha is done on Kartika Sukla Chaturdasi tithi (the 14th day of the bright fortnight of Kartika). This is also known as Lakshmi-Nrusingha besha. This besha unfolds the truth that the powerful Nrusingha cult is given due recognition and importance in this Temple.

20. **Nagarjuna or Parasurama Besha :** This besha is occasionally done in the month of Kartika, when there are six days of



Panchaka. Deities are dressed like warriors on the extra day. In the recent past, this besha was last done on 16-11-1994. The previous four dates were 26-11-1993, 03-11-1968, 16-11-1967 and 26-11-1966.

21. **Ghodalagi Besha:** During the period from Margasira Sukla Sasthi tithi (the 6th day of the bright fortnight in Margasira) to Magha Sukla Panchami tithi (the 5th day of the bright fortnight in Magha i.e. Basanta Panchami), deities wear winter clothes.

22. **Sraddha Besha:** Jagannath puts on this besha in the month of Margasira for three days. Sraddha means the offerings made out of love. Such rites observed for the departed souls (parents and forefathers) are called *Sraddha*. In the month of Margasira, Jagannath performs the *Sraddha* in favour of Nanda, Basudeva and Dasaratha. In Tretaya yuga, Bishnu was born as the eldest son of Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya and was named Ramachandra. Again in the Dwapara yuga, his birth took place as the son of Basudeva in a prison in Mathura, wherefrom he was mysteriously taken out and delivered to Nanda, the king of Braja, who nourished him like his own son and came to be known as the second father of Krushna.

23. **Chacheri Besha:** In the month of Phalgun, Chacheri besha takes place. According to the age-old tradition prevailing all over India, people play with phagu i.e. coloured powder and throw this powder over the friends and relatives. Jagannath is the best representative of the people and he is also shown as sharing the experiences of the people by playing with red powder.

24. **Padma Besha:** Padma means lotus and the dress materials for this besha are made of lotus flowers, which are traditionally supplied

by the Badachhata Matha. This flower appear on earth from this month onwards. It is believed that the deities are dressed with this besha in order to perpetuate the memory of a devotee who had brought the lotus flowers from a long distance to decorate the deities. Pudding is offered to the deities when they are in this besha. It is done on any Saturday or Wednesday between the new moon day of Magha and Basanta Panchami.

25. **Gaja Uddharana Besha:** This besha is done on Magha Purnami tithi (the full moon day of Magha). This besha depicts a story in the Puranas as to how Bishnu saved a helpless elephant from the clutches of a crocodile. At one time in the past, a crocodile attacked an elephant. Finding no other way out to save his life, the helpless creature implored the mercy of Bishnu. His prayer moved Bishnu to compassion and the latter hurled his chakra to cut the attacking alligator into pieces. Jagannath who is identified with Bishnu wears this besha.

26. **Jamalagi Besha:** From Basanta Panchami (5th day of the bright fortnight in Magha) to Dola Purnami, (full moon day of Phalgun) deities wear modified *Ghoda* (winter dress).

Sevakas who are specially engaged for this purpose traditionally are called Pushpalaka or *Singharis*. They know the traditional ways of dress and decorations.

Sabita Barik and Shobha Barik lives at 151, Vijaya Vihar, Nuagaon Road, Sisupalgarh, Bhubaneswar.