

Devi Sureswari of Sonepur

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Sonepur is the second town of Orissa next to the state capital Bhubaneswar is famous for its temple culture. Sonepur is the only town of western Orissa where a large number of attractive and heart touching temples are found. It is the symbol of cultural movement and glorious past. These temples also show our greatness in the fields of art, architecture, tradition and religious faith. The historic town Sonepur, is the headquarter of Suvarnapur district. Its geographical situation is responsible for the growth of a cultural centre. This town is located in the confluence of the holy river Mahanadi and its tributary, the Tel. The importance of this place is increased due to considerable antiquarian and archaeological interest. In past Sonepur was ruled by the various royal dynasties of Orissa like the Bhanjas, the Kalachuris, the Teluguchodas, the Soma and the Ganga Vamsis. Lastly this region was captured by Madan Gopal Singh Deo the younger brother of Balaram Singh Deo the Chauhan ruler of Sambalpur. He defeated a tribal chief of Gond clan and exercised the Chauhan supremacy in this area. Gangadhar Mishra the Court poet of Baliarsingh Deo of Sambalpur has described Sonepur as the second Varanasi in his Sanskrit text "Kosalananda Kavyam". In Sonepur thirteen Chauhan rulers ruled for more than three hundred years. During their rule, number of new temples were constructed which increased cultural activities, religious spirit and improved the value

of ritual, customs, and faith. It is said by the people that there were 108 temples in Sonepur in past. Thirty temples are found in Sonepur at present.

It is also said that eight temples are dedicated to Astha Chandi. These temples are Sureswari, Khambeswari, Bhagavati, Samalei, Vimalaksi, Narayani, Rama Chandi, and Dasamati. Sonepur is an ancient Saktipitha. There found other Sakti temples like Manikeswari temple and the open air temple on the monolithic rock in the gorge of the Mahanadi river called the temple of Lankeswari. It is also said by the people that Sonepur was an ancient Tantra and Sakti pitha. Pratap Ray the Court poet of Sonepur had written a memorable text named "Sashishena" in which he has described about magic performance and wonder power of Tantra Kumari Madan Maluni. No doubt Sonepur is a great place of Sakti culture. Number of religious rituals, faiths and customs related to Sakta culture are observed by people.

Devi Sureswari is the presiding deity of Subarnapur district. People of this district show their high devotional feeling towards Devi Sureswari. Temple of Devi Sureswari is situated in Sonepur town. A six-handed standing image of Kali is worshipped as Sureswari. The main festival of Devi Sureswari is observed in the time of Dasahara. The "Balijatra" is one of the greatest fair of Devi which is celebrated from the Aswina

Amabashya to Purnima for fifteen days. Entire Sonepur town becomes crowded and sounded by the traditional musical instruments. In past it is heard that the human sacrifice was being given near the temple of Devi Sureswari. Even during the time of Biramitro Singh Deo, the ruler of Sonepur that incident. According to a popular legend Parshuram had performed a vedic sacrifice here and established Devi Sureswari by the direction of his mother Renuka. The temple side of Devi Sureswari is regarded as Renuka Pitha. The sacrificial altar of Parshuram is known as "Khaulagada". The temple of Devi Sureswari is situated in the south-west direction of the town. The main gate of the temple faces towards east but Devi Sureswari looks towards north. Seven Ponds are found by the temple side of Sureswari. According to many scholars these ponds were the fort moats of the Kalachuri rulers. Devi Sureswari was the presiding deity of the fort of Chauhan ruler Achal Singh Deo who was the builder of that historic temple. But after that Maharaja Biramitra Singh Deo constructed many images of parsvadevatas. Devi Sureswari is worshipped in Vana Durga mantra. In the parsvadevata niches, there are images of ten-handed dancing Durga, four-handed Devi sitting in lalitasana and eight-handed Ganesa all on the Visvapadma pedestals. Standing image of Bhairav and tantric Buddhist goddess named Tara are kept here and there all around the temple. There is a Khaulagada in the temple premises. During the Balijatra, Barua (the priest) smears the soils of Khaulagada in his own body. Then the God enters in the body of the Barua. In a ceremony named "Khaula Phita" in which the soil is collected from the Khaulagada, the Barua collects the soil from the Khaulagada in the midnight of month of Aswina. If the white soils come out from the Khaulagada,

it is considered as the good symbol. The red and black colour soil identify sorrow, suffering, illness. It is said by people that a large number of horrses had been sacrificed here in the past. So the soil is poisonous. The soil is smeared in the body of Barua for entering of God in his body. There is a great faith among people that Devi Sureswari fulfills the the desires of the devotees. Devi Sureswari becomes Dasavesa from the fourth day of full moon in the month of Aswina. These vesas are Kali, Tara, Sodashi, Bhubaneswari, Chinnamasta, Bagala mukhi, Bhairavi, Matangi, Kamala and Dhumabati. Devi Sureswari is well decorated with above vesas in the time of Dasahara. Devi is also offered prayer in sodasha upachara. The Dasavesa of Devi Sureswari are very attractive and heart touching. Devotees from far and wide come here to see the Dasavesa in the time of Dasahara. On the day of "Nuakhai" the mass festival of western, Arnna Bhoga is first offered to Devi Sureswari. Then the people of Subarnapur district take the Prasada. It is said by the people that in every midnight Devi Sureswari moves around Sonepur town by horse. People say Devi protects the devotees in time of needs. The temple of Devi Sureswari occupy a great position is Sakti culture. It is one of the well known ancient Sakti pitha of Orissa. Devi Sureswari was the presiding deity of Sonepur royal family. People have great faith on the divine power, love and blessings of Devi Sureswari. So they have been showing devotional respect to Devi Sureswari.

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