

The Essence of Seli Besha

While many *Beshas* (costumes) of Lord Jagannath focus on opulence and power, Selibesan is centered on **comfort and cooling**. It is intrinsically linked to the 42-day **Chandana Yatra** festival. As the sun reaches its zenith in the month of Baisakha, the servitors perform this ritual to offer physical relief to the deities. The term "Seli" refers to a specific style of floral decoration and sandalwood application that transforms the sanctum into a fragrant, cool sanctuary.

Ritualistic Procedure and Adornment

The ritual is a meticulous process managed by specialized *Sevayats* (servitors). The core of the Besha is the application of fresh **Malayagiri Sandalwood paste**.

- **Sandalwood Application:** The paste is applied in beautiful, intricate patterns across the foreheads, chests, and arms of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Devi Subhadra.
- **Floral Ornaments:** The deities are adorned with *Chula* (floral crowns), *Alaka* (forehead ornaments), and garlands made of seasonal, fragrant flowers like Jasmine (*Malli*), Gardenia (*Sugandharaj*), and Marigold.
- **Sacred Attire:** They are dressed in light, breathable cotton fabrics (often white or light yellow) that align with the summer season, contrasting beautifully with the golden-hued sandalwood.

The Daily Rhythm (Nitis)

Selibesan does not happen in isolation; it is woven into the complex daily *Nitis* (services) of the temple. After the **Abakash** (purification bath) and **Mailam**, the deities are prepared for the day. The Besha is typically completed before the **Sakala Dhupa** (morning food offering). This ensures that when the deities "consume" their meal, they are in their most refreshed and serene state.

Seasonal Bhoga (Offerings)

To complement the physical cooling of the Besha, the *Bhog* (food offerings) during this period are specifically curated to be light and hydrating. Traditional summer delicacies such as **Pana** (a sweet herbal drink), curd-based rice, and fresh seasonal fruits like mangoes and melons are offered. These items follow the *Shodasha Upachara* (16-fold worship) protocol, ensuring every sensory experience—sight, smell, and taste—is dedicated to mitigating the summer heat.

Spiritual Significance

Spiritually, Selibesan reminds devotees of the intimate relationship between the Creator and the created. It teaches that devotion is not just about grandiosity, but about **empathy and service**. By cooling the Lord, the devotee symbolically cools the "fire" of their own worldly anxieties and ego.

Witnessing the deities in Selibesan, covered in cooling sandalwood and fragrant flowers, provides a sense of immense peace (*Shanti*) to the thousands of pilgrims who flock to Puri, making it a cornerstone of Odisha's living cultural heritage.