



Fairs and festivals of Mayurbhanj: an Overview

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I. Introduction:

The Hindu festivals are the complex combination of religious ceremonies including worship, prayer processing, songs, dances, eating, drinking, fasting and feeding the poor and other activities of traditional characters. Thus, although the festivals are deeply associated with religion, the main purpose seems to be social and recreational. So the festivals are regarded as the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of friendship and cooperation. Festivals also take away human beings from the routine monotonous life to amusement. The festivals also give relaxation to the people, who are tired after hard work. Thus, they promote a common cause, develop social solidarity, fellow feeling and mutual cooperation, enjoyment and recreation. The performance of the festival is a binding force to tie the community into a socio-cultural fabric.

Odisha is a land of festivals. There is a saying in Odisha, which says, "Bara MasareTeraParva" meaning in twelve months there are thirteen festivals to be observed by the people. Hindu religious festivals are numerous ranging from the tribal and semi-tribal communities to the people of the sophisticated society. Festivals are significant and essential to community living and understanding. A festival moves from being a mere occasion to the observance of deep-rooted traditions and customs of community living. Festivals in Mayurbhanj are celebrated with great pomp and grandeur. The vibrancy and richness of the cultural heritage of this district, undoubtedly, makes Mayurbhanj one of the most noteworthy places in Odisha. There are a number of festivals which are celebrated in Mayurbhanj such as, AkshyayaTrutiya, Gamha Purnima, Makar Sankranti, Nuakhai, HingulaYatra, Udarparba, ChhauBasuli Puja, Karam Festival, Jantal Festival, Tusu Festivals, Bandana festivals etc.

Below are the most observed festivals in Mayurbhanj in a nutshell.

Makar Sankranti:

Makar Sankranti is a festival in the Hindu calendar dedicated to the Sun god. The 'Kudumi' tribal people of Mayurbhanj district, however, celebrate this festival in a unique way. For them, it is their biggest festival of the year known as 'TusuParab'. TusuParab is part of the traditional 'Makara Parab' which the tribals celebrate according to their unique custom and tradition. People of the Kudumi community worship 'Tusu Devi' in the festival instead of Sun god. While there are no well-documented historical records to trace the origin of this festival, legend has it that the tribals celebrate this festival to honor the sacrifices of 'Tusu' who was the only daughter of a rich Kudumi landlord during Mughal rule several centuries ago. A Mughal ruler, enamored by Tusu's beauty, wanted to marry her. However, the proposal was rejected by her father who fixed her marriage with another groom. Angered by the defiance of the landlord, the Mughal ruler killed her fiancée and tortured her family members. To save her honour, Tusu committed suicide by jumping into the river on Makar Sankranti. The festival traces its roots to the followers of the landlord who celebrated Makar Sankranti as TusuParab in honor of the woman. According to Kudumi customs, a day before Makar Sankranti is known as 'Makar Baundi'. [1] Unmarried girls dress up, sing songs in groups of four, and worship 'goddess Tusu'. Later the idols of goddess Tusu are taken to their homes and worshiped at night with traditional fervor. Both the ladies and gents spend the night singing and dancing. Makar Parab, also known as 'Makar Chaundi' is celebrated early in the morning on Sankranti. The idols of goddess Tusu are immersed in water bodies nearby on this day.

The day after "Makar Chaundi" is known as 'Makar Dhaundi'. Tribals spend several days after Sankranti in celebration. Makar Mela, cultural shows, sports competitions and cockfights are organized to mark the occasion.



Car Festival of Baripada:

Apart from Puri, Lord Jagannath is worshiped as Shri ShriHaribaldevMahaprabhu at Baripada. There goes a saying that Maharaja BaidyanathBhanj had been to Puri to have a Darshan of Lord Jagannath. Failing to offer the demanded gold coins the king was denied a 'Darsan'. Another version of the legend goes like this. When the Maharaja went to Puri in royal splendor with the accompaniment of 'CHHATRO' and 'CHAMORO' the Gajapati of Puri refused permission as it was a display of higher status que over the 'Thakur Raja of Puri'. The prevailing custom then was that the devotees to Puri will come as common man without showing any supremacy over the Gajapati 'who is Chalanti Vishnu Designate'. The Maharaja went in penance near the Atharnala, outskirts of Puri. In a dream he was ordered by Lord Jagannath to construct a temple in Baripada so that he would come down to assuage his devotee. Showing deference to wishes of Lord Jagannath he constructed the majestic temple at Baripada. Like Puri, all the rituals for Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Suvadra are performed here at Baripada. The Bhanja Rulers, whose royal patronage in the field of architecture was at par excellence, would be remembered for their magnificent offering to Lord Jgannath in getting built the Jagannath temple prototype of Puri.[2]

The District of Mayurbhanj preserves many temples built in different styles of Orissan architecture, such as Rekha, Bhadra and Gauriya. Among the Rekha temples, the most important are the temples of KakharuaBaidyanath at Manatri of this District and that of Lord Jagannath at Baripada. The temple of Lord Jagannath at Baripada is universally known as Haribaldev temple. It was built by Shri BaidyanathBhanj in 1575 A.D. on the same architectural principles of KakharuaBaidyanath temple. The temple stands as a symbol of the religious favor of the Bhanja Rulers of Mayurbhanj and is regarded as the Queen Monad among the princely states during the pre-merger days. It is made of laterite stone with exquisite designs engraved in the walls. It has a height of 84'-6". A big boundary wall encircles the temple which is a replica of that of Lord Jagannath at Puri. An inscription on the temple wall states that in the year 1497 of the Saka Era this temple was built by BaidyanathBhanj. This temple, like the KakharuaBaidyanath of Manatri is provided with Vimana, Jagamohan and Nata Mandira and is in a better preserved condition than the latter.

Besides the presiding deities, there are as many as seventeen Bedha deities consecrated in the temple. There are various other pillars, images and structures both in front of the presiding deity and on the body of the temple. This temple is provided with Nata Mandira and is beautifully painted inside as well as outside. Every year Car festival is celebrated on the day after the day on which Car festival is celebrated at Puri. The three deities come to the Radhamohan Temple (MausimaaMandir) during the car festival which lasts for two days. The speciality of the Baripada Car festival is that only ladies can pull the chariot of Maa Subhadra.[3]

In Baripada the car festival is also observed in BantiaJagannathMandir. All the rituals are observed in this temple also. The unique RathJatra of this temple is there is only one Ratha or chariot built for Balabhadra, Jagannath and Subhadra idols and that Ratha is pulled by the students and kids. During the Ratha pulling special GudMithai are distributed by the deities above the chariot.

UdaParab:

In some areas especially in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar, a flying festival popularly known as UdaParab is observed. The participating devotees of this festival are called Bhokta or Bhakta. In a village field, a long staff is fixed horizontally on a perpendicular pole. The Bhoktas after having the ceremonial bath and other rituals in a nearby river move dancing in a procession to this place accompanied by a cheering crowd and loud beating of drums. There a huge congregation enthusiastically awaits their arrival. Then, one by one, they are tied to the horizontal staff with a long cloth at the shoulders. Anklo – bells are fitted on their feet. Some devotees are not tied. They simply hold on the staff with one hand and move hanging. With the help of a rope fixed to the perpendicular staff they are moved round and round by a person below profusely garlanded, the Bhokta flying at a height throws flowers from his garland and green mangoes to the audience. After this ceremony, the Bhoktas go to the nearby temple and offer offerings to Lord Shiva, Hingula, Mangala. Chhau the popular dance is also performed in the month of Chaitra. The presiding deity of Mayurbhanj 'Chhau' is Lord Bhairab. Elements of folk, tribal, martial, traditional classical and have been woven into the grand mosaic of MayurbhanjChhau.[4]

Karam Festival:

The Karam festival is widely prevalent among the tribal people of Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur, Bolangir, Keonjhar. This festival is also



observed by the aboriginal people of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The tribes in Odisha celebrate this festival with great devotion are Ho, Kishan, Kol, Bhumij, Oraon, Bhuyan, and Binjhals. The Karam festival is celebrated on BhadravaEkadasi, i.e on the eleventh day of the bright full moon of the month of Bhado (August – September). The Karam tree, scientifically called *NaucleaParvifolia* is the center of proceedings at the festival. Though it is a festival of paying respect to the Karam tree it has deep religious significance as well as the tribe worship to nature also. The presiding deity of this festival is either a god called “Karam” or a Goddess called “Karamasani ” who is represented by a branch of the Karam tree. In the ritual, people go into the jungle accompanied by a group of drummers and cut one or more branches of the Karam tree. The branches are usually carried by unmarried young girls who sing in praise of the deity. Then the branches are brought to the village and planted in the center of the ground which is plastered with cow-dung and decorated with flowers. A tribal priest offers germinated grains and liquor in propitiation to the deity who grants wealth and children. A fowl is also sacrificed and blood is offered to the branch. Then the tribal priest then narrates the legend to the villagers about the efficacy of the Karam Puja.[5]

Philosophy: ‘Karam’ is a festival of sisterhood friendship and cultural unity. The festival Karam also has a close link with nature. Tribes worship trees during this festival and pray to Mother Nature to keep their farmlands green and ensure a good harvest. It is believed that the worship for good germination increases the fertility of grain crops. The devotees keep a day-long fast and worship the branches Karam / Kadam and Sal. Girls celebrate the festival for welfare, friendship and brotherhood by exchanging a Jawa flower.

The legend varies from tribe to tribe. Among the Bumij, Ho and Oran, the legend is that there were seven brothers living together. All the six brothers worked in the field and the youngest one stayed at home. He indulged in dance and songs around a Karam tree in the courtyard with his six sisters-in-laws. One day they were engaged in dancing and singing and forgot to take lunch for their husbands to the field. When they arrived home, they became agitated and threw the Karam tree into the river. The youngest brother left home in anger and their bad days started. Their house was damaged, their crops failed and they virtually starved. While wandering, the youngest brother found the Karam tree floating in the river.

Then he again propitiated the God who restored everything. Thereafter he came home and told everything to his brothers about the curse of the KaramDevata. Since then the KaramDevata has been worshiped. Another legend prevalent among the PauriBhuiyans is that a merchant returned home after a very prosperous voyage. His vessel was loaded with precious goods which he had brought from distant lands. He waited in the vessel to be ceremoniously received by his wife and relatives, as was the custom. As it was the day of the Karam festival, all the women and men were engaged in dancing and playing the drums, no one there to receive him. The merchant became furious with them and he uprooted and threw the Karam tree. Then the wrath of KaramDevata fell on him. His vessel sank into the sea. He consulted with an astrologer who advised him to propitiate the KaramDevata. He set out another voyage in search of the deity and found him floating in the sea. He propitiated him with great devotion and was restored with all wealth. From that day the annual festival of Karam Puja is being held. After spending the whole night with dance and songs, the people uproot the branches and carry them to nearby rivers or rivulets for immersion. In some places instead of immersion, the branches are planted in the field where it is cultivated so that their crops may be protected by the KaramDevata from insects and animals. The festival is observed in two ways. Firstly it is commonly held by the villagers on the village street and the expenses on liquor etc. are commonly borne. Alternatively, it is celebrated by a man in his courtyard under his patronage to which he invites all. Even people who come uninvited listening to the sound of drums are also entertained with liquor.[6]

It is also mentioned that this puja is celebrated over a period of three to five days in August or September as decided by the priest. The devotees go to rivers, creeks or ponds by wearing new clothes. After performing certain rituals, they collect sand in a bamboo basket and return to the village. The sand is kept at a designated place. Seven varieties of grains – black gram, green gram, wheat, paddy, mustard, horse gram and flax seeds– are mixed in the sand. As per tradition, water is sprinkled on it. And the seeds germinate. People believe that they are blessed by the deity. Next, they collect branches of the Karam tree. They sing and dance while performing this ritual. All the rituals are conducted under the supervision of a village priest. After the separation from the tree, the branches are accorded the status of god and the priest plants the branches at the center of an open yard. Devotees



dance to the beats of drums. [7] It is believed that Karam puja is linked to Lord Bishnu, who loved to wear yellow clothes. The flower of the Karam tree is yellow. Karam tree is worshiped to propitiate the Lord Bishnu. The festival is celebrated to remind the role of the Karam tree in the creation of the world.

JantalaBonga (Jantal Festival):

This festival is celebrated when the ear of Paddy hangs downward exclusively in the year when the crop is destroyed due to scanty rainfall. The hill treated as God is offered a male goat as a sacrifice with a belief that propitiation of hill God will bring about bumper crops. The male goat killed is distributed among the villagers. In some packets, this festival is celebrated as 'Ashadhi' on 'Bihuda' Parva where the Buyans invite Rain God with religious sanctity for good shower so also the Lodhas for bumper production of 'Tusaro'. [8]

This festival is celebrated among Santal community quite differently as they believe Jantal word combines two words: Jang+Tol . Jang means 'Seed' and Tol for 'sow', thus 'sowing of seed'. The paddy plants grow to give out panicles during the month of 'September'. The roots of paddy plants suck or extract water from the soil to live and grow its seeds so It requires adequate water during this time . To overcome the water shortage, rain is needed during this month. If the required amount of rain fails to fall the growth of seeds are badly affected which results in low harvest. The healthy growth of the seeds depends upon the good rain only. This is why Santal people observe 'Jantal festival' to pray and to beg for good rain and healthy crops.

Unlike other festivals 'Jantal' is observed in quite a different way which is rather more of praying or begging than celebrating like the rest of the festivals. Santal believes 'Marangburu' to be responsible to cause rain. So all the rituals during this are begged and prayed in name of 'Marangburu'. 'Dihiri' the custodian of the hill decides the date with consultation of villagers and further the following day, people gather to perform this, they bring rams, goats, raw rice and other required things that are to be handed over to the Dihiri so that he could perform his rituals. Dihiri puts sindur on the forehead of the animals and make them eat raw rice which is placed inside the 'Khond'. Later the animals are sacrificed and their meat is cooked with rice and is served between all villagers.

BandnaParaba (Sohorai):

The Bandna Festival is mostly celebrated among the agriculturist community i.e. the Kudmi. It is celebrated on the day Amavasya (new moon) of Kartik (October – November) to give thanks to their domestic cattle as well as agricultural implements for their constant help in harvesting good paddy crops. On the BandnaParab they clean their houses, wash cattle's and agricultural implements and decorate them with Gudi solution, oil, vermilion, Monwair etc. worship in their traditional way and finally dance with them. [9]

The second day of BandnaParab popularly known as Gohal Puja; the female members of the house purify the floors, TulsiChaura and Aangan with cow dung in the morning. The Bagals and the male members of the family carry the haal, juyant, karha and mair etc to wash and keep it in the house in a systematic manner facing east. Then the Bagals washed the cattle properly. The head of the family goes to take bath with hansua. After taking bath he cuts a bundle of paddy straw from his field and returns home. While returning he does not make conversation with any one. At home, he keeps the paddy bundle on a charpai and begins to knit merwair (a kind of knitting with paddy straw). After smearing oil and sindoor on the cattle's the menwair are hanging around their necks and forehead. The merwain is also tried to the Dharna (Central pole) of each house. The merwair hanged in Dharna becomes of immense importance because of its requirements in the marital ceremony. The rice solution is put on either side of the door frame and SindoorTika is given on it. The lady of the house keeps fasting and made alpana (from rice flour) from the entrance. [10] The design may vary from one clan to another. At the entrance lie a few branches of Sargunj / Genda flower, Chitchiti or Apang, a chunk of cowdung and a stone. The cow dung symbolises purification, the stone gives a representation of Lord Nirakar Siva, The Sargunj / Genda flower welcome the cattle's whereas the Chitchiti prevents the entry of the evil forces. The chawk, prepared is generally criss crossed squares connected with another and a triangle attached to the side arms

of the square. The apex of the triangle again joined with the curved lines. All these squares, triangles and the curved lines are drawn with the four fingers of the right hand. Vermillion dots put on each joint which gives an attractive look. But mythologically it symbolizes breeding. [11]



The Goth Puja is performed outside the village, on the way through which the cattle are generally drawn in. The Mahato / Majhi / Pahan performs this Goth Puja by giving a chicken sacrifice or breaking of an egg. Again he sprinkles the Gudi solution on the cattle and they are made to cross it. On the completion of the Chawk Puja, all the cattle are made to pass over it. The lady of the family is ready to prepare GaraiyaPitha i.e. a special kind of sweet cake made of rice in a newly built chullah in order to maintain the purity of the cake. The house owner arranges all the Puja materials for Gohal Puja i.e. ArwaChaula, Sindoor, Gudi, Surgunja flower GaraiyaPitha on a separate Dona, Handia, Milk, Diwa, Dhupchi are arranged in a new, winnowing fan. An assistant keeps the chicken ready and both come to the Gohal for Puja. The Puja is performed to the Garaiya deity, made of mud having cylindrical shape kept in the eastern side of the Gohal¹⁰. Some clan members even use Mohua wood for making Garaiya. The offering is made to Garaiya deity praying for the better health of cattle and the increment in the number of cattle. Further, the GaraiyaPithas offered for three times followed by pouring milk and handia. Then they sacrifice the chicken (mainly black color) and they also offer puja for their ancestors for the welfare of their family. All the equipment related to agriculture are placed at the courtyard facing east and the fastest lady worships this agriculture equipment by sprinkling Arwachawal, putting Sindoor tikka and Dhubghansh over it. It is interesting to note the women folk are not allowed to touch or jump this equipment except on this day. At the end of the day lies the NimchaNimchi ceremony. This act of performance signifies the drawing out and crushing of the evil spirits if at all residing on the cattle. At the end all the family members, relatives, friends and clan members enjoyed with sacrificed chicken, handia etc. and dance.[12]

AkhiTrutiya :

With the farmers performing traditional 'AkhiMuthiAnukula', the ritual of sowing seeds in their paddy fields after plowing their lands, agrarian festival 'Akshay Tritiya' is being celebrated across Odisha. As per rituals, farmers observe the festival as 'Siddhi and SuddhiDibasa'. They wear new clothes, carry a basket of seeds and sow those in their fields. These seeds are known as offerings to Goddess Lakshmi which is believed to bring rich harvest.[13]

The word akshay means something that never diminishes and that is why it is believed that

things started on the day of Akshay Tritiya continue to grow and prosper. From this day, construction of the chariots for the famous JagannathRathYatra begins in Mayurbhanj. Carpenters start making chariots for Lord Jagannath, Balabadra and Subhadra, for the procession to be carried out on the day of world famous RathYatra.

Akshay Tritiya also marks the beginning of the ChandanYatra of the Holy Trinity of HariBaladevJew Temple Baripada. The day of 'Akshay Tritiya' is considered to be auspicious for new beginnings like weddings, buying property, making investments, etc. Akshay Tritiya is also considered to be the day of the birth of Lord Parsurama, the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. It is also considered to be the day when Ved Vyasa and Lord Ganesha started writing the Mahabharata.[14]

With the above mentioned festivals the people of Mayurbhanj also celebrate many Pujas some of which are widely celebrated in Odisha but some of the Pujas are only famous in Mayurbhanj district and observed since ages. Below is the list of Pujas celebrated by the people of Mayurbhanj.

Hingula Puja:

The Hingula puja is observed at Kaudikhani near Suhagpur village in Badasahi block and belongs to GoddessHingula. This Puja is observed either on a Tuesday or Saturday just after the Magha Purnima. The rituals are distinct in a way where devotees put bhog in the 'havankund' (fire-altar) and do not look at it after the fire is lit. Locals also put pieces of bamboo or paddy straw from roofs of their huts in the havankund, with the belief that the Goddess will protect their houses from fire and other mishaps.

The visitors included people from Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Keonjhar and Bhadrak districts besides bordering states of West Bengal and Jharkhand. According to the trustee of Hingula Puja committee, Devotees from outside the district and State came to offer bhog to Goddess Hingula. The rituals in the temple are unique. Here, bhog is offered to the deity in the havankund and not meant to be consumed. [15]

Gobardhan Puja:

This Puja is observed during Diwali/Dipabali festival and widely observed among the Kudumi and Santal people of Mayurbhanj as both of these community people widely depend on agriculture for their livelihood. As per the name this puja is dedicated to Cow or "GOMATA". It is an agro-based festival for the communities who



celebrate it as 'Gobandana' or 'Gobardhan Puja'. This puja is celebrated for three days from the day of Kali Puja, the first day is known as Gotha or *Gothani* Puja, the second day is *Guhala Puja* and the last day *Budhi Bandana* ritual is performed. [16]

Diwali is known as 'HatiLekhenParab' in Kurmali language and 'HatiLekhenParab' means biggest festival like elephants. The villagers start preparations one month before for the festival. Relatives come from other villages for the celebration. On the afternoon of Diwali, people gather their cows at one place in the village and the village head performs a special puja at the spot. The uniqueness of the puja is that they perform all rituals in front of one egg each. Every family present at the spot brings one hen and puja is performed for hens also.

The main aim of these rituals are prayer for the safety of these domestic animals. As cows and bullocks help in farming. Kudumi community and Santhala tribe people think of them as their family members. After puja, all cows and bullocks are allowed to walk together. The bullock, who will touch the egg first, the owner of that bullock used to be called the luckiest man of that year. [17]

In the evening, the villagers with the village head used to go to that luckiest man's house with a procession. He also treats them as guests and gives treats of chicken and mutton. The specialty of this Gotha Puja is Prasad of sweet cake with mutton.

Bahtauli Parab:

This festival is also connected with the activities, which falls during the Baharechandu or Sarvana (July-August). In this festival Dehuri, worships the DessauliBonga at Jahera for protecting their paddy fields from the insects and pests as well as for yielding bumper crops. There is no particular date for this festival. Before its celebration the Dehuri worships the DessauliBonga at Jahera and fixes a date, which is accepted by all the villagers. On the day of festival the Ho community people offer a tirilsakam (Kendu leaf) and sacrifice a sim at Jahera. On the preceding day each family erect a twig of tiril tree in their own paddy fields. [18]

Jamnawa Parab:

It is a harvesting festival. During this festival, the tribal community offers the newly harvested paddy to their Bongas. On this day the people consume their new rice first, even if they have harvested it much before. This festival is equivalent to the NuaKhai or NuaKhiaparab of the Oriyas, which is celebrated in the month of Aswina (September-October) of each year. Like some of the

other festivals it also has no fixed date. The Dehuri, the Munda and other headmen of the village as per their convenience fix the date. Even sometimes it is also evident that the people from the same village celebrate it on different days.

On the fixed day the Dehuri worships the DessauliBonga along with some other Bongas and sacrifices sim for them. Sometimes, some other headmen of the village can also perform this worship. The villagers worship their ancestral Bongas at their aading and offer them flattened rice prepared from new paddy crops along with illi. The rest of the festival is spent through eating, drinking, singing and dancing, which continue till the late night. [19]

II. Conclusion:

Festival celebration helps in spreading happiness, joy and helps build bonds between people. Festivals are an expressive way to celebrate glorious heritage, culture and traditions. They are meant to rejoice special moments and emotions in our lives with our loved ones. They play an important role to add structure to our social lives, and connect us with our families and backgrounds. Every festival brings happiness and harmony between our traditions and rituals.

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