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**Major Festivals of Mayurbhanj**

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Mayurbhanj was one among the 26 feudatory state of Odisha, is at present one of the thirty districts of Odisha. It is the largest district having 10418 sq km. In the area with 62% tribal population which belongs to 40 tribal groups 1. Like Santal, Kols, Bhumij, Bhuyan, Dharua, Kharia, Bathudi, Mankadia, Khadia and Birhor etc. Among the tribal, there are urbanities semi-tribal agriculturists and aboriginals living with a food gathering economy in a state of stark illiteracy superstition and semi-nomadic existence. Throughout the history of human culture certain day or periods of time have been set aside for ritual celebrations. Those occasions are the events of agricultural, religious on socio-cultural importance. The days or periods generally originated in religious celebrations also treated as sacred occasions are usually called festivals' in the traditional sense of the term. 2. Festivals of any country reflect the culture, tradition and the history of the people. Each festival is associated with the worship of a particular God, Goddess, nature etc. Legends have grown connecting these festivals with mythological events recorded in the Puranas and other religious literature. 3. They intended to inspire faith and virtuous life among the people. Therefore, a religious impact pervades the celebration or observance of all the festivals.

The Hindu festivals are the complex combination of religious ceremonies includes 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 being from the routine monotonous life to amusement. The festivals also give relaxations to the people, who are tired after hard work. Thus, they promote a common cause develop social solidarity, fellow feeling and mutual co-operation, enjoyment and recreation. 4. In addition to this, the performance of the festival is a binding force to tie the community into a socio-cultural fabric.5.

Odisha is a land of festivals. There is a saying in Orissa, which says, "Bara Masare Tera Parva" 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. 6

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, Akshyaya Trutiya, Gamha Purnima, Makar Sankranti, Nuakhai, Hingula Yatra, Uda Parba, Chhau Basuli Puja, Karam Festival, Jantal Festival, Tusu Festivals, Bandana festivals etc.

### **Makar Sankranti**

Makar Sankranti is an agricultural based festival and falls on the first day of the month of Magha. According to the Christian calendar, it falls on 13th or 14th of January. It is the day on which the Sun enters the sign of Makar (Capricorn). It is also regarded as the Uttaraavana on the Sun's northern course. Although Makar Sankranti is celebrated in all parts of Odisha the people of Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Keonjhar celebrate this festival with much joy and merriment. 'Makar Chaula' a special kind of Bhog is prepared with raw rice, molasses, coconut, til, chenna (paneer), honey, milk. First it is offered to the Sun God and later taken by everyone. According to Sun's movement, the days from this day onwards become lengthy and warmer. So the Sun is worshipped as a great benefactor. In Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh where the tribal population is more, the festival is celebrated with great joy. Though this is not a tribal festival because of the acculturation with the Hindus for centuries they have been celebrating this festival with great pomp and show. And most important is this is an agricultural festival which falls after the harvest. People start preparation for the festival much earlier. All houses are cleaned and coloured with white, red and black. People wear new clothes, eat sweets and cakes on "Aarisha" i.e. a cake made of jaggery and rice flour, and a meal with meat-curry is a must in every household. Liquor is freely consumed by men and women. They sing, dance and enjoy their life about a week. It is a three-day festival. People take their purification bath in the river early in the morning and wear new dresses. In some villages sports, competition like ram fighting, cock-fighting, archery is also organized. Tusu, a female deity of tribal culture is also worshipped and immersed in the river, tank singing songs of special variety.

### **Uda Parab**

In some areas especially in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar, a flying festival popularly known as Uda Parab 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 is 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 Mayurbhanj Chhau.

### **Karam Festival**

The Karam festival is widely prevalent among the tribal people of Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur, Bolangir, Keonjhar. It is also observed by the low-caste Hindus of the areas. 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 Bhadrava Ekadasi, i.e on the eleventh day of the bright full moon of the month of Bhado (August – September). The Karam tree, scientifically called *Nauclea Parvifolia* is the center of proceedings at the festival. <sup>7</sup> 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 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 centre 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.

**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.<sup>8</sup>

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 round a Karam tree in the courtyard with his six sisters-in-laws. One day they were engaged in dancing and song 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 Karam Devata. Since then the Karam Devata has been worshipped.

Another legend prevalent among the Pauri Bhuiyans 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 customs. As it was the day 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 Karam Devata fell on him. His vessel sank into the sea. He consulted with an astrologer who advises him to propitiate the Karam Devata. 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. 9. In some place instead of immersion, the branches are planted in the field where it is cultivated so that their crops may be protected by the Karam Devata 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.

### **Jantala Bonga (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 so 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'.

### **Bandna Paraba ( 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's as well as agricultural implements for their constant help in harvesting good paddy crops. On the Bandna Parab 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.

The second day of Bandna Parab popularly known as Gohal Puja; the female members of the house purify the floors, Tulsimnch 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 Sindoor Tika is given on it. The lady of the house keeps fasting and made alpana (from rice flour) from the entrance. 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. The Goth Puja is performed outside the village, on the way through which the cattle are generally drawn in out. 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's are made to pass over it. The lady of the family is ready to prepare Garaiya Pitha 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. Arwa Chaula, Sindoor, Gudi, Surgunja flower,

Garaiya Pitha 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 Gohal<sup>10</sup>. Some clan members even use Mohua wood for making Garaiya. The offering is made to Garaiya deity praying for the better health of cattle's and the increment in the number of cattle. Further, the Garaiya Pithas offered for three times followed by pouring milk and handia. Then they sacrifice the chicken (mainly black colour) and they also offered 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 fasted lady worship this agriculture equipment by sprinkling Arwa chawal, putting Sindoor tikka and Dhub ghash over it. It is interesting to note the women folk are not allowed to touch or jump this equipment except this day. At the end of the day lies the Nimcha Nimchi 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.

### **Budhi Bandna**

The day after Barad Bhikad is observed as Budhi Bandna. This is of less importance as no formal rituals are performed. The Bagals mainly erect a single Khunta at Gochar outside the village. The Bagals, force the cattle to play with their song and teasing nature. Moreover, the barren cows which do not conceive are made to play by the Bagals by tying to a special Khunta of Andri tree.

### **Car Festival / Ratha Yatra**

Car festival or the Ratha Yatra falls on Asadh Sukla Pakshya Dwitiya Tithi (the second day of the bright fortnight in the month of Asadha ). It is celebrated all over the state but in Puri and Mayurbhanj it is celebrated with much pomp and show. Puri is regarded as one of the 'dham' among the four dhams Srikhetra, the abode of Lord Vishnu. Similarly, Mayurbhanj is regarded as the Dwitiya Srikhetra (Second Srikhetra), Baripada the district headquarter of Mayurbhanj hosts the second most popular Rath Yatra of Odisha. The specialty of Baripada Car Festival is that the chariot of ' Maa Subhadra' is drawn by the women folk only. It symbolizes the empowerment of women. In the year 1975 is regarded as the international women's year, from this year the women pull the chariot of goddess Subhadra till to the date. It is a nine-day festival of Lord Jagannath, Balaram and Devi Subhadra to their aunt's house. For these nine days, the three deities eat delicious sweets and the devotees got their sights in various forms known as "Bhesha". It is believed that seeing Lord Jagannath on the chariot and touching the rope of Ratha would mitigate the pain of rebirth and immortal soul would mingle with the great soul of this universe. Whatever may be the truth behind, the Ratha Yatra of the three deities is performed with

religious thoughts and enthusiasm. The construction of the chariot begins on Akshya Tritiya (Shukla Tritiya of Baisakha). The three chariots named as Taldhwaja 14 wheel for Lord Balaram, Devidalan 12 wheel for Devi Subhadra, Nandigghosh 16 wheel for Lord Jagannath. After staying for a nine-day festival at Mausima the three deities returned to the Badadeula known as "Bahuda Yatra". Another important thing is that in Baripada two car festivals are observed one is Bada Deula Hari Baladeva Jew Car Festival another is Banthia Jagannath temple Car Festival. The same schedule is observed in the same way at Banthia Jagannath Temple. But there exists a single chariot of comparatively smaller in size of the chariots of Haribaldev jew. But this single chariot holds a speciality that it is being pulled only by the children.

### Conclusion

Taking a note of the above celebration we come to the conclusion that festivals are closely associated with our culture and tradition. To get a relaxation from a monotonous life we celebrate various types of festivals such as institutional festivals, Agricultural Festivals, Seasonal Festivals, Social Festivals etc. the feasts and festivals are the means of promoting our cultural values and celebrating the lives with the supernatural divinities that are associated with our life and work.

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