

A Study on Folk Festivals Among the Gond Tribes of Nuapada, Odisha

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Abstract:

Gonds, one of the historically significant and numerous tribes among the 62 tribes in Odisha, have a wide distribution over every district of Odisha. The Gonds make up a major tribal community in Nuapada. The Gonds of Nuapada speak Kosali or Sambarpuri instead of Gondi. The Gond community in Nuapada organises and performs a variety of folk festivals. Each festival has its own socio-religious importance for the sustainability of people's unity, integrity, and rational sense of community and is held on a certain day of the lunar fortnight. It assumes that the festivities promoted peaceful cooperation among the people of Gond tribe and served a structural and functional purpose in society. There are scanty and inadequate materials regarding folk festivals. Therefore, to maintain traditions, protect cultural identity and sustainability of Gond tribes' folk festivals are given particular attention in the current study, with special reference to the Nuapada area. The current study has adopted descriptive research approaches to acquire responses from participants through interviews, personal observation, and schedule, while secondary data have been obtained by using a variety of platforms. The present study analysed and document what their folk festivals are and how they are observed.

Keywords: Folk festival, Gond, Nuapada, Odisha

Introduction:

Gonds are constitutionally recognised as one of the significant and numerous Scheduled Tribes among the 62 tribes in Odisha. Gonds are widely distributed in almost every district of Odisha and make up a major tribal community compared to other tribal groups in Nuapada. Gonds of Nuapada generally communicate in Kosali or Sambalpur instead of Gondi. As per census 2011, Gonds constitute 9.26 percent (8,88,581) of the total Scheduled tribe population in Odisha (95,90,756) and 64.88 percent (1,33,859) of the total Scheduled tribe population in Nuapada district (2,06,327) ([Ota et al., 2008](#)).

Celebrations of festivals in India form a wondrous and joyful series of events, marking the rights of passage between birth, death, and renewal. Festivals are moments of remembrance and commemoration of the birth days and great deeds of gods, goddesses, and deities. Every festival celebrated has its own uniqueness, which is expressed by people by preparing specific sweets appropriate to the season and crops. These moments are determined not by pre-set dates in a linear calendar but by the changing luminosity of the sun as it enters new seasons and in cycles spun out by the waxing and waning of the moon. There are times when people gather

together, linked by ties of shared socio-cultural beliefs and practises. A festival is an occasion that reinforces the presence of God in the lives of individuals and families and binds them to the community. According to Webster's dictionary, the term festival means "a day or time of religious or other celebration, marked by feasting, ceremonies, or their observances". There is the joy of congregational 'darshan', or view of the deity; the sharing of amrit, prasad (consecrated food), or especially blessed food.

Festivals for tribal people are one of the sacred performances that give them their ritual calendar. Festivals make them jubilant and enthusiastic. People engage themselves in drinking, dancing, and feasting. Festivals usually last for more than one day and are celebrated annually. Deities are worshipped with suitable rituals, and offerings are made on all the festive days. Tribal people seek safety and prosperity for their community as a whole at each new stage in the annual cycle of their simple economic pursuits and feasting, rejoining, and reunion that make their successful termination. A greater interaction with nature on the one hand and spirit on the other can be observed in the celebration of tribal festivals ([Tribhuwan, 2003](#)).

Folk festivals are a part of folk tradition; they are basically the practises that signify the unique culture of a particular indigenous people, which makes them different from the common cultures or traditions. It is one of the entities through which we can differentiate the lifestyle of a particular tribal society ([Baby Debbarma, 2022](#)).

The Gond community in Nuapada organises and performs at a variety of folk festivals. Each festival has its own socio-religious importance for the sustainability of people's unity, integrity, and rational sense of community and is held on a certain day of the lunar fortnight. It assumes that the festivities promoted peaceful cooperation among the people of the Gond tribe and served a structural and functional purpose in society. All the activities and practices associated with the festival are carried out according to their traditional and uncoded customary law.

[Vinod Sing & Sivanarayana](#) (2015) have analysed a paper on festivals and proverbs used in farming by the Scheduled Tribes, viz. Gond, Baiga, and Kolh, in Madhya Pradesh. The study was conducted to explore and document some festivals celebrated and different farming proverbs among Scheduled tribes from six villages in Kusmi and Majhauhi blocks of Sidhi district, Madhya Pradesh, India. They collected twelve proverbs, out of which two are on field operations, five on rain fall, one on crop protection, and four on sowing and transplanting.

[Seth & Jhankar](#) (2018), in his paper "Fair and Festival of Gonds Tribe in Western Odisha: with Special Reference to Jangadeo Festival of Loisingha Block, Balangir District, Odisha," has mentioned the Gonds are widely distributed in different areas of Western Odisha, viz. Balangir, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Sonepur, and Nuapada. The Gonds organise and celebrate various kinds of fairs and festivals; basically, they are identified as nature worshippers. According to him, the study of fairs and festivals helps to understand any tribal group and reconstruct their own history. However, he has made a study among the Gonds of Loisingha block of Balangir district and highlighted the organisation and celebration of a festival called Jangadeo or Badadeo festival by the Gonds people of Loisingha block from the seventeenth to the twenty first century.

[Kumar and Baudh](#) (2021), in their paper "A Study of the Traditional Festivals Among the Gond Tribe," have explored the socio-religious significance of prevailing festivals, traditionally celebrated by the Gond tribe of Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve. Festivals like Bidri, Devli, Hareli, Haritalika Tija, Navakhani, etc. are significant among the Gond community. This study has attempted to trace the link between tradition, contemporary ritual, and the coexistence of peace within the clan, which is the most reflective part of Central Indian culture. It was content that these celebrations of festivals evolved through time into "life cycle rituals" played a structural and functional role in society, and drew peaceful coexistence from the Gond tribe. The findings of the study show that these socio-cultural festivals have achieved some degree of sustainability in the natural environment through organised messages for the pre-development of community, peace, and sociability.

Overall, analysis of literatures there are many studies and have covered celebration of various festivals among the Gonds of different places. But they have given only importance to well-known festivals and have skipped many festivals those used to perform within the smaller unit of society called family.

Therefore, it is prior to protect cultural identity and heritage maintenance of the folk custom and traditions. The Gond tribes' folk festivals are therefore given particular attention in the current study, with special reference to the Nuapada area.

Objective of the Study:

To study and document of folk festivals observe among Gond tribes of Nuapada district

Study Area:

Komana is a block and Tehsil head quarter itself in Nuapada district of Odisha state, India. Komana block is located 44 km far towards South from its District main city Nuapada. Komana block is selected as area of the study, because numerous Gond people resided in different villages of Komana block, Nuapada.

Methodology:

For a better understanding of the present study, descriptive methodology has been applied using both primary and secondary data obtained through a variety of platforms. The primary information is collected through primary investigation, which involves informal interviews, personal observation, case studies, and a schedule. Further, secondary information is taken from sources such as documents, journals, and books.

Folk Festivals of Gond Tribe in Nuapada, Odisha

The folk festivals are celebrated with great enthusiasm and excitement by the people belonging to the Gond tribe. The Gonds folk festivals are referred to as '*Jani Jatra*' or '*Jatraa*' or '*Tihar*'. Also, Gods and Goddesses of the Gond faith are generally referred to as '*Devi*' and '*Devta*'. The Gonds do not have specific temples for worshipping their gods and goddesses. Instead, they worship them in sacred places known as '*Devata Gudi*', '*Devata Ghara*', and '*Duma Kurea*' ([Majhi & Mohapatra, 2021](#)) In Nuapada, Odisha, the Gond community celebrates several folk festivals that are closely connected to religious beliefs, social rituals and

agricultural practices. Some of these folk festivals include, '*Asadhkhena Jatra*', '*Haryali*', '*Belsara tihar or jatra*', '*Dashra jatra*', '*Pithori jatra*', '*Charu jatra*', and '*Chaitraa tihar*'.

Asadhkhena Jatra:

The '*Asadha*' month is the third month of the Hindu calendar, falling between June and July in the English calendar ([Opepa, 2023](#)). '*Asadha*' month is known differently in different Indian languages and locations. The Gond people of Nuapada refer to the month of '*Asadha*' as '*Asadh*'. The '*Asadhkhena Jatra*' celebration takes place between the second and twelfth days of the bright lunar fortnight in the month of Asadha. '*Arua chaula*' (nonboiled sunned rice), fried rice, Bael tree leaves, soil lamp, and '*dhup*' (frankincense), milk, '*mahuli*' (juice of Mahua flowers), coconut, lemon, spine gourd leaves, and '*Dahi*' plant leaves are among the materials offered to the '*Devta*' (gods), '*Devi*' (goddesses), and clan and ancestor deities during the folk festival of '*Asadhkhena Jatra*'. Spine ground leaves and '*Dahi*' plant leaves are the most significant and mandatory commodities to offer to their Gods, goddesses, and deities on this '*Asadhkhena Jatra*'. The purpose of the celebration of the '*Asadhkhena Jatra*' is that from this day on they started to consume green leaves and vegetables of the new season. They also pray to '*Devta*', '*Devi*', and clan and ancestral deities for the health of family members on the day of this folk festival.

Haryali Tihar:

The '*Haryali Tihar*' or '*Haryali Jatra*' is a major folk festival celebrated by the Gonds and is related to their agriculture practises. This '*Haryali*' folk festival takes place in the fourth month of the Odia calendar, Sraban; Gonds refer to this 'Sraban' month as '*Saraban*', though the 'Sraban' month lies between July and August ([see Opepa, 2023](#)). The '*Haryali*' festival is celebrated on the new moon (*Amavasya*) day of the lunar month of 'Sraban'. Offering ingredients to the gods, goddesses, and Deities at the '*Haryali*' festival include '*Arua chaula*' (nonboiled sunned rice), fried rice, Bael tree leaves, soil lamps, '*dhup*' (frankincense), and hen and cock. In addition, '*chaula pitha*' (rice pie) and alcohol may be used as offerings. The goal of the '*Haryali*' event is to promote healthy cultivation and wellness among the family members.

Belsara Tihar or Jatra:

The Bhadraba is an Odia calendar month that begins between August and September of the English calendar. This month is known as '*Bhado*' among the Gonds of Nuapada. '*Belsara Tihar*', or '*Jatra*', is an agricultural folk festival held in the month of Bhadraba. This traditional festival is mostly observed by the Gond people of Nuapada, Odisha. This folk festival is celebrated during the second, third, and fourth bright lunar fortnights of Bhadraba month to welcome the season's fresh rice. At the '*Belsara*' folk festival, a range of rituals and traditions about the usage of food to worship their gods, goddesses, and deities can be seen. Such ingredients likely to be '*Arua chaula*' (nonboiled sunned rice), '*phula lia*' (fried rice), '*dhup*' (frankincense), milk, '*kure*' leaves, '*kure*' leaf lamp, coconut, new paddy, '*chaula pitha*' (rice pie), and lemon. This folk celebration has unique rituals and practises compared to other folk festivals for worshipping and serving items to their gods, goddesses, and deities. The day after Ganesh Chaturthi, in the fifth brilliant lunar fortnight of Bhadraba, both the young and old wear new clothes. They worship their gods, goddesses, and deities once again as per custom by presenting ceremonial items, particularly rice pie, fresh flattened rice of new paddy, and new

rice cooked with milk and sugar, '*Kshiri*' (Porridge). The family's oldest member then distributes the same to the other family members. Despite the fact that the event is meant to celebrate eating the fresh rice of the year, it is marked as a general festival. The celebration includes meetings of elders and relatives and greetings as '*Nuakhai Juhar*' are parts of the festival ([Gopal, 2010](#)).

Dashra Jatra:

'*Dasra Jatra*' is believed to be one of the major folk festivals among Gonds. Particularly, this folk festival is celebrated in the Dashahara month of the Odia calendar, and it falls in the months of September and October in the English calendar. The folk festival of '*Dashra*' is generally observed between the sixth bright lunar fortnight and the fourteenth bright lunar fortnight of the month of Aswina. The Gond people referred to Aswina month as '*Dashra*'. During this festival, the Gond people worship and offer prayers to their gods, goddesses, and deities for good health, wealth, prosperity, and long life. People do many rituals and activities by offering various items, including '*Arua chaula*' (nonboiled sunned rice), fried rice, Bael tree leaves, '*dhup*' (frankincense), milk, '*chaula pitha*' (rice pie), coconut, a new soil lamp, lemon, hen and cock, '*mahuli*' (Juice of boiled Mahua flower), and various flowers available in the surrounding area. This folk festival of Dashahara can be called a flower festival among the Gonds of Nuapada.

Pithori Tihar or Jatra:

The '*Pithori*' is one of the traditional celebrations associated with the consumption of newly harvested food, particularly rice. On this day, newly harvested paddy rice is washed in water and then presented to their supreme gods, goddesses, and deities along with fried rice, Bael tree leaves, '*dhup*' (frankincense), milk, coconut, lemon, and rice pie. One of the most important differences is that after harvesting and before celebrating this traditional event, no one washes or consumes the newly '*Arua chaula*' (nonboiled sunned rice). This folk festival is particularly celebrated during the first and fourteenth bright lunar fortnights of the Kartika month. '*Diel*' is a Gond word that refers to the month of Karttika. The Karttika month is between October and November.

Charu Jatra:

Margasira is the eighth month of the Odia calendar, occurring between November and December. This Margasira month was known locally as '*Poan*' by the Gond people. During the first two weeks of the month of Margasira, there is a folk celebration known as '*Charu Jatra*' or '*Mat Puja*'. This festival is related with agriculture and is celebrated between the first and fourteenth dark lunar fortnights of the month of Margasira. Prayers and religious rituals for the enhancement of the farming season and wellbeing are among the primary observances during this event. '*Arua chaula*' (nonboiled sunned rice), fried rice, Bael tree leaves, '*dhup*' (frankincense), milk, coconut, rice pie, '*mahuli*' (Juice of boiled Mahua flowers), hen and cock, and occasionally goat, sheep, and pig are used as sacrifices to gods, goddesses, and deities in the cultivating field. Likewise, they perform this festival based on their local customs and traditions. Particularly, the male members of the family only participate, and at last there is to be a big feast among them.

Chaitraa Tihar or Jatra:

Gond people of the study area celebrate ‘*Chaitraa Tihar or Jatra*’, one of the important folk festivals. In the month of Chaitra, this event is often commemorated between the first and fourteenth bright lunar fortnights. March and April are frequently the months in which the Chaitra occurs. At this folk festival, a number of customary rituals are carried out, including prayers and the offering of food to the supreme gods, goddesses, and deities. ‘*Arua chaula*’ (nonboiled sunned rice), fried rice, Bael tree leaves, ‘*dhup*’ (frankincense), milk, soil lamp, rice pie, new ‘*mahuli*’ of the new mahua flower, ‘*Char koli*’ (Buchanania Lanzan), coconut, lemon, hen, and cock are some of the components. The next morning, in their respective homes, they arrange the materials for the ritual. In the early morning of the next day, farmers in their respective homes prepare for the agricultural festival. They arrange the materials needed for the rituals and then proceed to take ablution in a river, pond, or open well. After cleaning themselves, they wear new clothes and carry seeds in new baskets. At the field, they make offerings to Lakshmi, the goddesses of wealth, and sow the seeds ceremonially while praying to the gods, goddesses and deities for rich and bumper crop. This festival is exclusively focused on agriculture, and it marks the beginning of the farmers’ sowing season, especially for paddy cultivation ([see Gopal, 2010](#)).

Conclusion:

The Gond tribe in Nuapada, holds diverse and culturally significant folk festivals. These festivals play a pivotal role in preserving their cultural identity and maintaining traditions. They offer prayers and offering to gods, goddesses, and deities, seeking prosperity, health and a successful harvest. The Gonds’ folk festivals are closely linked with the agricultural practices, signifying their strong connection with nature and spirit. The present study will contribute to a better understanding of the unique folk festivals of the Gond tribe in the Nuapada area, enabling the preservation and appreciation of their rich cultural heritage.

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