

The Kandhas Festival and Puja of Odisha

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Abstract

Odisha has sixty two recorded tribal groups. Out of them, a few are important tribes. Among them, the Kandha tribe stands in a large number who are found all over the district of Odisha. However, the present paper seeks the Kandhas festival and Puja. The kandha people are animists. For the good crop they observe Merriah festival once in between three to four year while to suppress the cholera chickenpox disease from the village they observe the Rakshi Bahalani in this way they observe Kandula Parab, Hire Paraba, Bali Parab, Ghanta Parab, Puni padi and also other festivals in the whole year. They conceive of a large pantheon of a supernatural being who controls their whole life. They considered that everywhere there is animated by spiritual energy. In order to protect themselves, they would try to establish a friendly relationship with spirits through the appropriate rites and rituals. Most of their festivals are related to their agriculture and belief systems. There is a difference between the festival and the puja that's how while the festivals are observed by the villager the Puja is observed by only one person.

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Introduction

The Kandha tribe is one out of sixty-two types of tribals of Odisha. According to Mc. Pherson the word "Kandha" is derived from Telugu word "Konda" which means "Hill" or "Mountain". Those who live on the mountain are known as "Kandha". But the Kandha people identify themselves as "Kui" or "Kui loku". They speak the "Kui" or "Kuvi" language. Which is included in the Dravidian linguistic group. The Kandha people spread all over Odisha. But their most concentration is found in the district of Kandhamal, Koraput, and Rayagada of Odisha. Basically, the Kandha have been divided into three types like Dangaria, Desia, and Malua Kandha. There are as many as eighty-four types of god and goddess of the Kandha people. To satisfy them the Kandha people observe different types of festivals and Puja in a year. Their detail discussed below.

God and goddess

The Kandha people are animists. They believe that their god and goddess are omnipresent for which they worship the Sun, Moon, Tree, Forest, etc. Except these, they have their supreme deities' which are have been discussed below:-

Jakeri Penu

The Jakeri is the holy place. Every Kandha village the Jakeri situated at the middle position. It is the place of the mother goddess Alalmati and Phulamati. Inside it, we found two poles one is Kambi Munda and Liwi Munda which have made by the Mahua tree and the Sall tree. And we found that the supreme goddess in two cone style in the form of stone and another is plate stones which are being worshiped by the people as the supreme deity Alalmati and Phulamati.

Katiawali

Katiawali is the Father deity. The Katiawali situated in the middle of every village.

The Katiawali contains some small and big size stones. The Katiawali is being worshiped by the people during the time of festivals like Kandula Parab, Merriah Parab, and also other festivals. It protects the village from an evil attack.

Jatrakudi

The Jatrakudi is found at the entrance of every village. It is a mother deity. Without its permission for this deity, no evil can enter the village. It would be worship in every Puja, Festival, and Bahalani. For the Jatrakudi the people make an altar with the Bel and blackberry branches. Inside the altar, the stone is worshiped.

Mudra wali

The Mudrawali is another god who protects the village from the outside. The word mudra means “Knot” or “Tie”. It also ties the village in one rope. The Mudrawali are installed around the village such as in East, West, South, and North.

The Kandha people have a strong belief in the above-mentioned god and goddess for which whatever instruction they will get from the deity through the Shaman they observe compulsorily.

The Festivals and Pujas

As the Kandha people are animists. They worship different gods and goddesses. To satisfy them they observe different types of festivals in a whole year. Their important festivals are Kanga Parbu, Hire Parbu, Ghanta Parbu and Kadru Parbu except this there are other small Pujas or Bahalani's the details of festivals are written below:-

Invite for the festival

No one Kandha people would observe the festival alone. They have to invite their kin and kith peoples to participate in the festival.

Preparation for the festival

Firstly, the head of the village will conduct a meeting consisting of the Jani, Saunta, Nayaka, and Bishmajhi. After that, the villager will go to the Dishari and ask about the festival. According to his decision, Barika announces the information provided by the Dishari the “ it has been decided by the Dishari on Wednesday the festival would be observed”. Accordingly, all the villagers will go to the nearest weekly market and brought essential materials for the observation of the festival like Hen, Goat, Sheep, etc.

Kandula Festival

The Kandula festival is one of the festivals observed by the Kandha people. It is observed once in the month of January and February. Its importance is to fry the Kandula at the Jakeri and offered first to the goddess then the Jani will distribute it to the village. From that day the people would start to eat the Kandula.

Observation Day

At the morning the Jani took “ Bana Handi” to the “Jakeri” and started to cook the Bhoga (sacred food for god) for the goddess, nothing is being mixed here except the salt.

At about 7 am to 8 am as per the instruction of the Dishari, Gurumeni the shaman (Bejuni) and some other people first went to the Jatrakudi they worship there and sacrifice a Hen and they would pray that we are going to observe the Kandula festival for three days during these days no quarrel no evil attack would have happened in the village. After that, they will come back straight to the Katia wali.

In the Katiawali the Shaman (Bejuni) will draw a rectangular square with the Guel or unboiled rice powder. Which is known as Pagidi Gira. Then he will start the chant like:

“Ayyo dharti rani, paturani,
Telegada, Talepuru,

Nebaraji, Giriraji, Alamati,
Phulamati,
Rana muyan, Sala muyan,
Rana Dhapu, Rana baja etc.

Then if the god will visualize him then he turned into a trance. Then with the rhythm of Nishan, he will dance. During puja of the Katia wali, every villager will bring the uncooked rice as the “Podi”. And they will give it to the god through the Shaman. At the Katia wali they will sacrifice a goat, sheep and a hen from there the shaman moves straight to the Jakeri. In the Jakeri he worships the god and goddess and at the ending of the worship at Jakeri. The Jani offered the Bhoga to the god and goddess in Saal leaves after that everybody will eat that as the Bhoga or Prasad.

On that day some individual worship done by the village. Every household to satisfy their household god and goddess will sacrifice the hen. And those who have the Satra Penu they will worship the Satra Penu for three days from the starting of the first day of the festival and those who have the “Ladan penu” they will go to the Mango tree and make an altar with the Bel branches and they will worship there. The Ladan penu is worshiped in the form of stone at the foot of the Mango tree. In the evening everybody in the village will engage themselves in entertainment by singing and dancing. In this way, their festival will come to an end.

Ghanta Parab:

It is observed communally in the month of Baisakh for three days. Ghanta means earthen pot, and each such pot with four cake is offered to Thakurani penu along with a sacrificial animal by the vow taker who suffers from smallpox and cholera. Accordingly, various ancestor spirits, like Hira Penu and Sita Penu are worshiped individually and Thakurani penu and Jatrakudi penu are worshiped communally.

On the first day, the young boys and girls of the village prepare a temporary structure at the front yard of the village with wooden posts and leaves of Tamberi (Local name of a tree) and under this a clay altar Duki of 4 feet in length and 3 feet in width is made. Over that altar, a small branch of the Bel tree is posted which represents the Thakurani penu. On both sides of these two other small altars are constructed which represent Hira Penu and Sita Penu. All these altars are nicely decorated with banana plants mango leaves and twigs.

The Ichan Jani, Bejuni, and vow takers assemble there with Puja accessories. The Pt Bejuni and other Bejunis sit in a row, each with a winnowing fan for divination. The Pat Bejuni draws three squares representing three Penu's with sun-dried rice powder and piles up a heap of rice ball in each of the three squares. Thereafter all the Bejunis start singing in chorus any invoke three Penu's while offering rice to them. It is believed, immediately when any of the Penu's is visualized, the Pat Bejuni gets into a trance. Until that, the Bejunis continue to dance chanting incantations in the chorus.

After all the Penu's are visualized, the Bejunis along with drum beaters go round the village and its outskirts seven times waving a bunch of peacock feathers over their heads to ward off the evil spirits. This event takes place on the second day. While going in the procession, the Pat Bejuni throws water with a mango twig from the earthen pot (Ghanta) over her head to purify the house from pollution and in return collects sun-dried rice presented to her by each housewife.

On the third day, as per prescription, the vow takers assemble each with anew decorated earthen pot (Ghanta) full of rice flour cakes along with their respective sacrificial animals. The Domb prepares another altar before the deities where these Ghantas are placed. Bejunis perform rituals like the ones that are observed on the first day. The Pat-Bejuni frantically dances over a lamb bought from

communal funds and gets into a trance. It is believed that she is possessed by the Thakurani Penu and thereafter she behaves like the Thakurani. When she regains her senses the lamb is sacrificed by the Ichan Jani and blood is sprinkled over the piles of rice for three Penu's.

Thereafter vow takers sacrifice votive animals on that altar one after the other and sprinkle blood over the cakes in the Ghanta. The Bejuni's simply touching those Ghanta's in order to purify that.

When all the sacrifices are over the Pat Bejuni along with her team of Bejuni's and the drum beaters go in a procession to the western outskirt of the village. While the procession goes on the villagers, irrespective of age and sex roll on the ground to get a touch of the feet of the Pat-Bejuni who is supposed to be the Thakurani incarnate. This gesture, it is believed will save them from an attack of smallpox and cholera in the future. After the arrival of the procession at the outskirt of the village, the Pat Bejuni performs a ritual at the Jatrakudi in a manner similar to earlier ones and sacrifices a pigeon by piercing a sharp bamboo shaft through its rectum.

After this, the ritual comes to an end. The vow takers take away their respective ritualistic food and offer only the head of the animals already sacrificed to the Bejuni's. The Pat Bejuni alone receives the lamb. All the Bejuni distribute rice and head of the animals equally. It is believed that after this ritual the people may not suffer from smallpox and cholera in the future.

Nuakhia:

This festival is a new addition to the annual festival calendar of the Kandha which was not traditionally observed as paddy was not the main food item of the people. It is perhaps an adoption from the Hindu neighbours, particularly from the Domb. The well to do families still utilizes a patch of their agricultural plot in cultivating paddy with which this ceremony is associated. Therefore, along

with the paddy other new roots, fruits, green leaves, and vegetables, etc, obtained from the forest are also eaten ceremoniously for the first time. This festival is observed under a mango (Mahana) tree for which it is called as Mahaan tidma.

Jani and Ichan Jani collect a handful of new uncooked rice and other roots etc, from each house and pile them up in a large square drawn around a mango tree at the eastern outskirt of the village. No penu is worshiped on that occasion. But, it is believed that malevolent spirits who reside in a big mango tree must be appeased. Therefore, under a big mango tree, this ritual takes place. Usually, the Jani recites invocations by throwing burning incense and pouring liquor over the pile of rice inside the square. A pig and a pigeon are sacrificed to appease the spirits. After the rituals, the young men participate in the communal cooking and the entire villagers share that food. The same festival takes place in the month of Chaitra (March- April) before mango is eaten for the first time. After this festival only communal hunting takes place.

Punapadi:

Millet crops, like Kosla, Arka, Jana, Ganthia, etc. are eaten ceremoniously for the first time after harvest, and for that this festival is observed. Before eating, these crops are ceremoniously offered to Jatrakudi penu and to their ancestors. This is observed for a day in the month of Kartika (Dewidi lenju). The Bejunis propitiate the Jatrakudi penu on this occasion.

A day before the observance of the ritual, the temporary thatch of Jatrakudi penu is repaired and new bamboo splits are replaced by the Dhangdas (youths) of the village. Three of the Dhangdis (Maiden) go from door to door for collection of new crops and pile them up in front of the penu and watch them for the whole night.

The next morning, after the arrival of the Pat Bejuni along with three other Bejunis, three Dhangdis carry three new pitchers full of water from the stream and place them separately on the pile of various crops. The Bejunis start their chorus and the Pat-Bejuni gets into trance alternately. She gets into trance three times, and each time she regains consciousness, she pours unboiled rice from her winnowing fan into the water pitchers. It is believed that three dreadful disciples of Jatrakudi penu are satisfied by that. Ultimately the Pat Bejuni is spirit possessed for the fourth time indicating the presence of Jatrakudi penu. Other Bejunis then start reciting invocations forcefully and throw burning incense on the pile of crops. The pat Bejuni after regaining her senses sacrifices a pigeon and two fowls one after the other in the name of Dharani penu, Jatrakudi penu, and for her disciples respectively. The relatives, who are present on the spot, also give animals called, Bolani to be sacrificed.

Ultimately a buffalo brought for sacrifice is tied at a tree by the Barika. The Pat Bejuni stands over it and starts dancing. In the meanwhile, three other Bejunis throw crops from the pile at the buffalo. While dancing the pat Bejuni is again spirit possessed, which is indicative of the fact that the Jatrakudi penu is asking for food. Immediately after she gains back her senses, the buffalo is cut by the Barika, and blood is sprinkled over the pile of crops.

Dongar Puja:

Before crops harvested Dongar puja which is otherwise known as Lahi penu puja is observed for a day in the month of November in a procession with drum beaters from house to house to ward off the evil spirits by means of peacock feathers. From there they observe certain rituals. They draw two squares representing the Lahi penu and Indra penu (God of rain) and place sheaves of each crop on the drawn squares. Rituals are observed in the same manner as specified earlier and pigeon and a fowl are sacrificed respectively on two lumps of rice to satisfy the

Penus. After this ritual is observed, crops are harvested.

Meria Festival:

It is the biggest festival observed communally in any one of the villages of a Mutha for 8 days in the month of Magha (January-February) where all people of a Mutha and people of other Muthas too, participate. If there is no bumper crop, the festival may be postponed to the next year as it involves a lot of expenditure. Its importance is to appease the Supreme Goddess, Dharani Penu, and Her disciples. At the same time steps are also taken to appease all other deities and spirits of various clans present in the Mutha.

To observe this festival, a decision is taken by the elders of all villages under the leadership of the Mandal. Decisions are also taken concerning the date and place for observance, contribution to be given by each household, selection of volunteers, and collection of necessary articles. Bejunis are invited, services of the Dishari and Janis are requisitioned and a list of invitees from other Muthas is also prepared and specific responsibilities are assigned.

Observances:

Dishari usually takes the lead in organizing the ritual, which propitiates Dharani penu on this occasion. He is assisted by Janis, Ichan Janis, and Pujaris. Friday of the week is selected as an auspicious day for the festival.

On the first day Mandal and other religious functionaries accompany the Dishari with the drum beaters and musicians the two iron-chains and a thick iron-plate are taken out to be used in the present festival. These accessories probably used from the time when the Kandha people were giving human sacrifice to god. And they will take it to the puja plac..

On the second day morning, when the Bejuni gets into trance the Dishari notes the presence of the spirit. A fowl, pigeon, and goat are sacrificed and blood is sprinkled over all the piles.

In the dead of night, three young girls (who have just attained maturity and have not been captured) are sent to bring three brassware (Meria accessories) from the Pujari's house. After coming back, three of them go straight to the stream to bring three pitchersful of water without looking back. It is believed, they may be bewitched by the spirits, who are supposed to be inside the pitchers if they look back. The Pujari too, accompanies them brandishing a bunch of feathers to ward off the evil spirits. And they will bath it the buffalo Meria animal. This Meria animal is tied to a big wooden post and is considered to be purified after the bath. Then, they come to the Dishari to ask for "Podo-Kandi" (Iron-chain and plate)..

The villagers, invitees, and all others reach the Jhankad and get ready with their axe and knives to strike at the animal. While invoking both the Dishari and the Dishari and the Bejuni get into a trance with the beating of drums. The time following this is considered appropriate to satisfy Dharani-Penu. Immediately after regaining senses, they make arrangements for the sacrifice of the animal.

A big procession consisting of all males, irrespective of young, old and children, the religious functionaries, batches of Bejunis, drum beaters, and the vow takers with various sacrificial animals start tot eh eastern outskirts of the village. The Dishari, the Pat Bejuni, and the Ichan Jani carry these brasswares with water. The Pujari dangles the umbrella before the procession to ward off the evil-eyes of the spirits. The Bejunis rejuvenate their energy and dance rhythmically with the beating of drums. The young boys howl and ululate in chorus. The stalwarts both from the Dongaria Kandha and the Domb community catch hold of the ropes tied at the Meria animal. The Dishari and the Janis lead the

procession and reach at the outskirt little before the dawn. The Meria animal is tied to a big wooden-pole. Other bow takers too, tie their animals.

Just at the break of dawn, the animal is sacrificed and the first blow is given by the Pujari. Other blows fall one after the other on various parts of the animals and thus the animals are hacked to death. Even when blows are being showered, the entire belly of the buffalo is torn apart and its intestine, etc. are pulled out nibbled and rubbed over the body out of joy and revelry by the participants. It is believed; more the animal is tortured more the Penu is satisfied. Simultaneously, the vow-takers kill their animal's one after the other on the Meria spot to please Dharani Penu. With the sacrifice of a large number of animals, the entire field is flooded with blood.

Reaching the Jhankad, the Dishari draws a big square diagram on which the head is placed. The Dishari offers it as ritualistic food to Dharaani penu by putting on vermilion over it and pouring five gourdsful of wine over it. With this, the ritual part of the observance comes to an end. A portion of the Meria animal after having been skinned is given to the Dishari as a major share for conducting the ceremony, a portion of it is cooked with rice and shared by all the member present on the spot, and the rest portion is parcelled into small pieces and sent with he relatives and invitees to their villages as a token of publicity as well as to ensure better crops in their area too.

On the 8th day, Dishari himself kills a goat, cooks and offers it to Dhariani penu and her disciples as ritualistic food. This food is distributed among all the households of the Mutha Dishari Bogu (Ritualistic food of Dishari). The Dishari too, as n outsider obliges the hosts in this way.

In the evening the young boys and girls exchange rice as a token of apology for offending each other by way of jokes. The young boy touches

the hands of the parents of the young girls and beg excuse and offer a bottle of liquor to satisfy the late. Thus, the festival is observed to ensure good harvest and prosperity for the Mutha.

Bali Jatra:-

This festival takes its name from the ceremonial planting of various grains in wet sand brought from a nearby stream and placed in a structure of Bali Ghara or Sand house. The festival begins before the Bhadrapada (October) full moon and comes to an end nine days after it. In the Bali Ghara, seven baskets of sand are placed and sown with bean seed and regularly watered. On the seventh day, a platform is constructed near the Bali Ghara. On the eighth-day miniature ploughs and axes are fashioned out of Simuli wood by each cultivator. The seven baskets in which the bean seeds had germinated are placed on the platform on a ninth day. The Jani scarifies the ploughs and axes. Each cultivator takes a plough an axe and some germinated seeds. Some seeds are scattered around the village and the rest in the paddy fields. On this occasion, Kandha prepares cakes of rice, flour, and other delicious foods. Throughout the night they drink liquor and dance near the Bali Ghara.

Bihan Puja:

It is the last festival of the year, observed communally and individually for two days in the month of Chaitra (March-April) before the showing of crops.

On the first day, Jani and Ichan-Jani move from door to door to collect all varieties of seeds from the households. After collection, they take a bath in the evening and assemble with drum-beaters at eh Jhankad. Twelve square diagrams are drawn there and the seeds are piled up in each diagram. Rituals are performed by offering wine, burning incense, and by chanting invocations. A pigeon and a fowl

are sacrificed separately to appease the deity. The crops are kept in a basket that is hung above the head of Dharani- Penu.

When Jani remains busy in propitiating the Dharani Penu, the Pat Bejuni along with her part goes to individual Dangar to appease Haru-penu and Sita-Penu. Their similar rituals as mentioned above are performed with the crops and blood of the chicken sacrificed is sprinkled over the crops to satisfy the Penus. These ritually treated grains are kept in an earthen pot by the individual house owner.

On the second day, the villagers along with Jani and other religious functionaries proceed to the forest for communal hunting with bows and arrows. After five days, they come back with the game, which is cooked and shared by all villagers except the females. Any sort of animal killed beyond the village boundary is tabooed to be eaten by the female. It is believed that they become aggressive.

On the sixth day, the villagers assemble near the Kuddi. The Jani counts eight numbers of seeds from each variety of crops and hands it over to a young man who enters them in the ground in front of the Kuddi. Afterward, each householder is offered a handful of seeds. These seeds are mixed with other seeds and kept by each house owner in an earthen pot in his house. These are sown first ceremoniously and then other seeds are sown.

Thus it is evident from the above descriptions that most of the rituals of the Kandha are associated with their annual agricultural cycle. The rituals are either performed to mark the beginning of the important agricultural activities or harvest of crops or intended to restore the lost fertility of the soil.

Excepting the Kuddi, where Dharani-Penu is enshrined, the Kandha have evolved no temples or shrines or special shelter to install their gods and goddesses. It has already been described, the Earth-

Goddess resides on the earth, Kotebali resides in the forest and on hills.

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