



# Bandhna Parab- A Celebration of Indigeneous Culture of the Tribalsof Parts Of South Bengal

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## ABSTRACT

The paper is going to understand how one of the indigenous festivals of tribal communities called BandnaParab is celebrated by particularly Kurmali and Santhali tribes of southern districts of Bengal particularlyPurulia and West Midnapore. It will closely look into the myths, rituals and the man-nature harmony celebrated through this festival. The paper will also discuss on the regional arts, music and food cultures associated with the festival. The paper tries to bring forth the lesser known cultures associated with these tribes and how they practice sustainable living by maintaining harmony with nature. It will also shed light on their livelihood and how their festivities and entertainment is intricately related with agriculture.

**KEYWORD:** Purulia, indigenous, man-nature harmony, rituals, festivals.

## I. INTRODUCTION

“In India, it is believed that all creatures have a purpose.”- Mel Gibson

This is precise when we closely find the association of animal worship especially cattle in our Indian festivals. One such lesser known festival of Purulia and West Midnapore district from West Bengal, India known as BandnaParab is about celebrating the bond between man and animals. This is celebrated during the onset of the winters around October-November which is also known as the month of Kartik according to Hindu calendar. When the country celebrates Diwali or Kali Puja the Santhali, Kurmali, Mahato, Bagal, Bhumij tribes of the region devotedly celebrates Bandna or Sarhay. (Sheikh) It is a three-day celebration and each and every day is filled with celebration of the cultures of food, mythology, nature and art belonging to this particular region of Bengal.

These Kurmali, Santhali, Bhumijetc tribes are agriculture based communities so the cattle and the agricultural tools are having immense importance in their lives. To show their deep

gratitude towards the cattle for supporting them to earn their livelihood the tribes worships them. There is a mythological belief that has been associated with the BandnaParab. It is believed that Lord Nirakar Shiva after creating humans had to take care of them by providing food for survival. But with the passage of time the population increased and the Lord could not manage to feed so many mouths. So he decided to teach humans to grow their own crops for survival. However men were facing great difficulty in cultivating crops without proper agricultural tools for doing heavy works like tilling the soil and carrying loads. The lord solved this problem by blessing them with cattle as agricultural help. Initially the bond between man and cattle were friendly but gradually men started exploiting the animals. The animals were battered to death with heavy works for longer hours. They decided to complain the Lord and asked for his intervention to save them from the injustice. Shiva promised the cattle to inspect the matter by visiting the villages personally on the day of Amabasya (new moon day) of Kartik month. The men being more clever in order to save themselves from the wrath of the lord on that particular day cleaned the houses and the cowsheds (gohals) , oiled and bathed the cattle, decorated them with vermilion and lit up the entrance of the cowshed with earthen lamps.(Mohanta and Mahato 75) Seeing this Shiva was contented and blessed the men for a year full of good harvest.

## II. PLANNING OF BANDNA PARAB:

Long before the Bandna celebration starts there is a sense of joy and positivity among the community during its preparations. The villagers are busy shopping new dhotis,sarees, oil, ghee, flour, sindoor, earthen lamps, bamboo baskets for the rituals. They are also involved in cleaning and purifying the homes with cow dung and using clays like lalmati, dudhimati, charcoal, plant extracted colours for decorating their homes. (Mohanta and



Mahato 78) The women are also generally found decorating the walls of the homes with various natural colours and they do not follow any particular pattern of designs. They are found to paint designs on the wall that each of them have inherited from their elders or they use their creativity. These wall designs are generally influenced by shapes of grass blades, leaves, flowers, animals or simple running lines. The colours are made of freshly crushed rice powders mixed with gums from trees like gamahar. They also use charcoal for creating a combination of black and white colours. During this part of the year such neat patterns can be found on the walls of almost all the villages of these communities. With the increase in availability of colours and paints nowadays it is often found various colour combinations are used for making elaborate and detailed patterns on the walls of mud houses. This cleaning and decoration is exclusively associated with the festival but it has a practical reason too. During the monsoons most of the houses of this rural region are damaged as they are mostly made of clay, bamboo and woods. So before the teeth chattering winters sets in the rocky and hilly interiors of Purulia, people repair their houses and welcome the deity of harvest and worship the Go-Mata (Mother Cow) with new hope and warmth before reaping the crops. It is a celebration just before the harvest when the stock of grains over the year has been already reduced. The farmer community celebrates this as a symbol of hope of good harvest to have surplus of grains throughout the year. So before stocking up the houses with new harvest they do bandana i.e worship of the deities like Maa Lakshmi, GoMata and Shiva through artworks, rituals, songs and music and food.

### III. THREE-DAY CELEBRATIONS & RITUALS

The festival is a three-day celebration, the main rituals starts from the day of Kali puja on amabasya. The first day coincides with the day of Kali Puja. On the morning of this day the cattle are taken to the nearby ponds and bathed. Then the women of the house clean the courtyard, cowsheds and the TulsiManch (holy basil temple) using cow dung, clay and water. After the cattle are brought back from the ponds they are oiled with ghee and are smeared with sindoor or vermilion. The cattle are given freshly cut grass as offerings for the puja. In the evening another set of rituals are practiced which is known as Jagran meaning awakening. On the evening of the darkest night of amabasya the earthen lamps are lit at the main entrances of the homes, tulsimanch, cow sheds and the corners of the

homes to ward off darkness. This particular lamp lighting ritual is known as Injor –pinjor which in Kurmali means light kills darkness. (Sheikh) After the lighting up of lamps, mouthwatering fried pithas (rice cakes) are cooked and the entire night is spent by singing songs and playing musical instruments like dhamsa-madol. The ahire folk songs are sung by the people throughout the night to keep everyone awake. e why it is called Jagran and its motto is to prevent the evil from entering their houses. The men from Dheguwan community roam around the village playing instruments, singing songs and lighting bonfires across the village. Bonfires were lighted up to keep away wild animals too when the forest covers were dense. But now this has become a ritual on the day of Jagran.

On the second day the Goreya or GohalPujo is celebrated, gohal meaning cowsheds. In the early morning the head married woman of the family takes bath and wears new saree. Then she takes rice in the new kulo (bamboo basket) and pounds it in dhenki for offering to GohalGosai the God who is believed as the protector of the cowshed and the cows. The master of the house also has preparations as he performs the Goreya ritual, it is important to mention here that there is no particular need of Brahmans or knowledge of holy chants for this ritual. The head man of the family goes to the forest cuts a young shoot of sal tree and divides it into three pieces, then he comes back to home and cleans the agricultural tools like plough, sickle, etc and keeps everything inside the cowshed for worship. Before moving into the gohal the man makes a small puja offering of three small pieces of the sal shoot to the Tulsimanch (holy basil temple). After this he moves inside the gohal for performing the rest of the ritual. The master makes a pedestal on the western side with haystack which is known as the gorai and does the bandana or worship. The Kulbadhu or the married headwoman of the family makes a structure with three pieces of stones on the northern side of the cowshed. Then she offers fried Pithas (rice cakes) as prasad or bhog freshly made in a new utensil bought for particularly this purpose. There is another important offering made by the lady it is a pound of mud and bud of shaluk flower plucked before midnight by a virgin girl. The girls come to each homes in the early morning of the second day to deliver a pound of mud and shaluk buds in exchange of pithes. On the goreya there is an interesting alpana or floor art known as Chaityapura is done by the lady of the house during the evening aarti all around the tulsimanch. They mix rice flour and with use of five finger tips draw continuous patterns of Bayna climber tree all over the floors of



their homes and at the end of Chaityapura the calf is made to put across its feet on the alpana marking the completion. After this the last part of second day celebration is done. It is known as Bhagvati boron meaning welcoming the holy goddess of cow. In this the cow and the bull both are decorated with oil and vermilion and the cow is given a head gear made of white blades of rice plants. This marks the end of the second day.

On the third day there are two main rituals, the first is Bandna-jamai and the second is Gorukhutan. Bandna-jamai is quite similar to the Bengalee ritual of Jamai-shoshti where the son-in-law is invited by the mother-in-law for indulging in a sumptuous lunch and hospitality. In Bandna-jamai the newlywed daughter comes to her paternal home with her husband for the first time. The son-in-law is treated with variety of delicacies as per the economic stability of the wife's father. There is a famous dialogue exchange between the grandfather of the newlywed woman and her husband associated with Bandna -jamai ritual. In the dialogue the grandfather teases his granddaughter's husband by addressing as shy young man who is afraid to come out of home. The teasing adds fun and charm to the family gathering along with the festivities of Bandna.

The next part of the ritual is Gorukhutan. In the late afternoon, a wooden pole known as khuta is fixed in an open ground and the cow is tied to the pole. Mostly the men of the village gather in the ground and a dried animal skin of dead bull or animal is brought close to the cow. As soon as the cow smells the dry skin it jumps out of fear and tries to free itself and run away. It is done repeatedly to tease the cow and have fun seeing its reactions. Sometimes the cow is freed from the pole or khutan and is allowed to run around the ground. It is fun to watch the cow running away in fear scares the ground full of people more by moving around aimlessly. This ritual also has logic behind it. It is said that the smell of the skin of a dead animal is for training the cow how to protect itself from the poisonous snakes by identifying their smell. But sometimes the ritual backfires and causes minor accidents. With this the BandnaParab reaches to its completion.

The festival is very popular in the jangalmahal area of Purulia, West Midnapore and borders of Jharkhand. It is particularly the festival of the forest dwellers who are completely dependent on lands and cattle for their survival. The people from

these regions are so much attached to this festival that they feel disheartened as the three days passes swiftly. The rest from working in the fields, decorated houses, singing songs and eating sumptuous foods makes it as pompous and elaborate as Durga Puja for them.

#### **BANDNA FROM THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

Larry Neal proposed to emphasize folk cultures and traditions of black people as part of black cultural heritage.(Nayar 225) Similarly the exploration of community shared, indigenous traditions of marginal communities from Jangalmahal areas of India too is much needed for keeping alive the traditions that celebrates the communal joy and helps to continue the legacies of rare art, language and music. There is a dire need to protect these indigenous cultures as they are contested against urban societies where the marginalized are often stereotyped as backward. The more and more discussions of the folk cultures will intrigue to cherish and know them.

Bandna is not only important for knowing about traditions but it is a constant reminder of man-nature harmony and coexistence. Anthony Giddens has said it is important for man to check his irrational actions that is harming the wilderness and he suggests for an amiable relation between man and nature rather than an exploitative one. (Nayar 246) The Marxist Environmentalism clearly stated about using nature as a commodity of exploitation and for accumulating wealth. (Nayar 247) A similar hint of irrational use of nature for one's own profit is seen in the mythological reason of Bandna celebration. Bandna is symbolic of the trial to alert and control man's uncontrollable desire of gain that harms wildlife. Bandna is not only a festival of community but it brings out macrocosmic ideology of deep ecology (Nayar 246) where the interconnectedness of people and nature is entrenched. These literary theories are unknown to these communities but their way of life and celebration is the praxis on which the theories rest upon. Therefore knowledge of festivals, cultures and practices of the subalterns can be important learning experience.

#### **IV. PICTORIAL CELEBRATION OF BANDNA:**

Some of the pictures of Bandna celebration have been collected from various online sources. A peek into the three day celebration will be a lively way of understanding and enjoying the festival closely.





Fig 1.



Fig 2. Bright hues of wall arts are found just before Bandna celebration. (Samaj)



Fig.3 Jagran is celebrated with songs and music.





Fig.4 Feeding the cattle is one of the important rituals in BandnaParab.



Fig.5 Sal leaves, shoots and rice powder mixture are used during the worship.





Fig.6 The cattle are oiled and smeared with vermilion as a mark of respect and gratitude.





Fig. 7 Chaityapura is a peculiar floor décor associated with Bandna.



Fig 8. On the day of Gohal puja cows are decorated with rice plant made head gears.





Fig.9 Gorukhutan marks the end of the festival. It is a village sport celebrated as the closing ceremony of Bandna.

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