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MANDA PUJA: A SACRED AMALGAMATION OF RITUALS AND BELIEFS IN JHARKHAND, INDIA

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ABSTRACT: Manda Puja is an age-old annual festival which is celebrated with great devotion in and around 100 km of Ranchi city in Jharkhand, India. It is celebrated in the honor of Lord Shiva And Goddess Parvati every year during the month of April-May. This Puja is considered as one of the most important tribal festival in Jharkhand as large number of devotees belong to Oraon and Munda tribe along with members of Mahto, Lohad and other non-tribal communities. This is a festival which lasts for 7-9 days in which devotees fasts strictly. Both male and female devotees of Lord Shiva participate in this festival fervently. Male devotees are called as “Bhoktas” and female devotees are called as “Sahayikas”. Basically female devotees show their support to Bhoktas by doing the ritual of “Lota Sevan” in which they carry lota (brass pot) full of water over their head for long duration in the name of a particular Bhokta, who could be brother, husband or potential partner of that female devotee. Along with this ritual, several rituals are followed by devotees which include “Betjori”, “Dhuwasi”, “Charka Daag Machan” “Barmangi”, and “Phulkunda”. All these rituals of Manda Puja involve extremely strenuous ordeals which devotees perform to express their devotion to Shiva. Like in Betjori ritual Bhoktas roll on muddy ground bared body with stick, in Dhuwasi ritual bhoktas are hung upside down on a bamboo set-up under which fire is lit. In Charka Daag Machan ritual, Bhoktas body are hooked with iron-hooks, and then they are suspended by these hooks from approx. 60-feet high bamboo poles. In Phulkunda ritual true devotees are supposed to walk bare-footed on the bed of coal embers. All these rituals are followed with a strong belief that Shiva is there to look after them hence true and pure devotees won’t get injured. Undoubtedly, this amalgamation of rituals and strong belief in divinity highly enriches the overall diverse culture of Jharkhand and also provides platform for the members of various communities to come together and witness this unique festival which is an absolute test of one’s devotion.

Keywords- Manda Puja, Sacred, Amalgamation, Rituals, Beliefs

I. INTRODUCTION

Manda Puja is an age old ritual which is celebrated only in and around 100 km of Ranchi city in Jharkhand. It is celebrated in the honor of Lord Shiva And Goddess Parvati every year during the month of April-May. This Puja is considered as one of the most important tribal festival in Jharkhand as large number of devotees belong to Oraon and Munda tribe along with members of Mahto, Lohad and other non-tribal communities. This puja is only confined to Ranchi and nearby villages spread in radius of 70-100km of Ranchi. No other city of Jharkhand observes this festival. It is believed that by doing this puja Shiva will get happy and bring good rainfall which will lead to good harvest in village and also fulfill ones’ wishes. This is a festival which lasts for 7-9 days in which devotees fasts strictly. Both male and female devotees of Lord Shiva participate in this festival fervently. Male devotees are called as “Bhoktas”. Female devotees are called as “Sahayikas”. Basically, female devotees show their support to Bhoktas by doing the ritual of “Lota Sevan”. The Priest who helps devotees in performing rituals is called as “Gossaein”. Along with this ritual, several rituals are followed by devotees which include “Barmangi”, “Betjori”, “langdi”, “Samdhived”, “Dhuwasi”, “Phulkunda” and “Charka Daag Machan” OR “Jhulan”. All these rituals of Manda Puja involve extremely strenuous ordeals which devotees perform to express their devotion to Shiva. Like in Betjori ritual Bhoktas roll on muddy ground bared body with stick, In Dhuwasi ritual bhoktas are hung upside down on a bamboo set-up under which fire is lit. In Charka Daag Machan Or Jhulan ritual, Bhoktas body are hooked with iron-hooks, and then they are suspended by these hooks from approx 60-feet high bamboo poles. In Phulkunda ritual true devotees are supposed to walk bare-footed on the bed of embers. All these rituals are followed with a strong belief that Shiva is there to look after them hence true and pure devotees won’t get injured. This festival is in a way test of One’s devotion. All the rituals that involves physically tough ordeals are followed with strong belief in divinity and hence each and every aspect of this puja is considered as sacred by devotees.

II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To Know about whole process of Manda Parv or Manda Puja and how it is celebrated fervently in the city of Ranchi.
- To bring in light the impact of acculturation.
- To know about the significance of each ritual which is performed.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For data enquiry about Manda Puja fieldwork in Boreya and Sukurhutu village of Kanke, Ranchi has been done at the times of this festival. During fieldwork techniques of Observation, Schedule and Interview for data collection has been incorporated. Non- Probability sampling has been done and data from 46 informants in and around Ranchi has been collected for this micro study to come up at the conclusion.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1.1 The Beginning:

Manda Puja begins with Bhoktas Observing strict fasting and taking dip in nearby river in morning. Offerings are made to God Shiva and Goddess Parvati in the temple accompanied by prayers and chanting of mantras. Then, idol of Goddess Parvati is taken by Bhoktas and moved house to house in whole village starting from the house of Mukhiya. And for whole 9 days this process is repeated. This is Called as “Patha” locally. The idol is kept in the house of Lohda till the last day of Puja and at last day with mandar and dhol’s beat it is returned back to temple at night. From the house of Mukhiya, Bhoktas receives water with Gur (Jaggery) & Chana. Bhoktas fast for 7-9 days till the last ritual of Phulkunda is performed. Age group of Bhoktas varies from 7 yrs. to 70 yrs. Whoever is capable is ready to show his devotion. During this fast they are not allowed to eat anything but fruits, chana, roti, semolina, pudding of arva rice, and drink water mixed with jaggery. Eating salt, grain and fried food is strictly forbidden, their consumption is considered impure. They consume fruits or chana or gur paani around 1-2 pm in afternoon.

1.2 Lotan Seva:

In Manda Puja both male and female devotees participate fervently. Female devotees start their fast from the third day. Basically female devotees or Sahayika or Bhoktain show their support to Bhoktas by doing the ritual of “Lota Sevan” in which they carry lota (brass pot) full of water over their head for long duration in the name of a particular Bhokta, who could be brother, nephew, cousin or potential partner of that female devotee. In this festival female devotees are considered as Goddess Parvati and Bhoktas as Shiva. Sahayikas too observe fasting strictly. In some villages when bhoktain are eating fruits and other sweet edibles and if she hears any voice from outside, be it the voice of dog or cat or bangles, she stops eating. Nowadays this is not followed everywhere. They also take dip in river and wear either cotton clothes or laal paar saree for 9 days. They don’t comb their hair for the whole period of fasting or apply any makeup. They only use wooden sticks of mango tree for brushing their teeth .For each Bhokta one Sahayika will be there who will do the lota sevan for that Bhokta.

1.3 Betjori:

This is a ritual which is performed by mainly Bhoktas in Manda Puja. In this ritual canes or bamboo sticks are carried by Bhoktas in alignment so that they are connected together, hence the name “Betjori” is given. Also, in this ritual bhoktas roll on the ground bare bodied with a bamboo or wooden stick in front of temple. In several villages along with rolling, bhoktas also perform several acrobatics.

This is done in order to appease the God. Sahayikas stand by side with lota or brass pot over their head and sprinkle water over bhoktas by mango leaf from that brass pot.

1.4 Langdi :

In this ritual Bhoktas stand on one leg by holding shoulder of other Bhokta and then he hops around the temple of Shiva on one leg.

1.5 Samdhived:

In this ritual bhoktas hug each other 3 times. Gossaein (the priest) take dips in river 7 times. Then Bhoktas stand parallel to each other in two rows and then by keeping both hands on both shoulders of each other they make a pathway for Gossaein. Gossaein crosses this pathway and walks on this till he reaches the temple, hence from river to temple he walks over the shoulders of Bhoktas. After taking bath in river once he reaches the temple he offers prayer to God by Chanting mantras and offering prayers and other things. After this, Ritual of Barmangi is followed.

1.6 Barmangi:

This ritual is done by unmarried girls who are sahayikas in Manda Puja. This is a simple ritual in which unmarried girls pray to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati for a good husband. Offerings like sindoor, incense sticks, earthen pot, red clothes, arva rice, bangles etc are made to Goddess Parvati.

1.7 Dhuwasi:

Dhuwasi is a ritual in Manda Puja in which all bhoktas are hung upside down on a bamboo set-up one by one. Below this set-up fire is lit consisting of “dhoop” and wood of mango tree, and bhoktas are supposed to swing over this fire upside down. This is done because smoke or “dhuwa” which come out from the burning wood and dhoop is considered as pure and sacred and hence bhoktas hung their body over this smoke in order to purify themselves. They swing their body 3 times over the lit fire.

1.8 Phulkunda:

Phulkunda in local terms means to “leap or walk over flowers”. Here the burning embers of wood are considered as flower, hence the name Phulkundi. This is the most astonishing ritual of Manda Puja which is the utmost test of ones’ devotion. This ritual is followed on the day of full moon or Purnima. In these ritual devotees are supposed to walk over the bed of embers. Devotees of Shiva have strong belief that if they have done the fasting properly then nothing will happen to them. They won’t get burnt and those who get burnt are supposed to not have done or maintained the fasting with purity. This is one of the most sacred ritual of Manda Puja. Female Devotees too walk over ember bed but after bhoktas. Embers are prepared by burning raw wood. That raw wood is usually of mango tree and is collected by Lohda from door to door. From each house of

village woods are given and then bed of wood is prepared which is further burnt. A blaze is made by fanning the embers with a winnowing fan or “soup”. As long as blaze is prepared till then mandar and dholak are played by folk artists. This ritual is done on the last day i.e., 7th or 9th day at night. In some villages this ritual is practiced at midnight. On the last day bhoktain usually get ready traditionally by wearing laal paar saree and doing all the shringar (makeup) which was forbidden during fast. They apply alta, mehendi or other things. On the last day of the puja it is believed that devotees who follow all the rituals loyally are sometimes possessed by Shiva himself. Possessed devotees often go in trance state and are not aware of what they are doing. Sometimes they dance, they move their head and hair wildly, female possessed devotees break their bangles etc.

1.9 Jhulan:

This is one of the most strenuous ritual of Manda Puja. It is also called as Charka Dag Machan. It involves hooking bhokta’s body with iron hooks. Then bhoktas are one by one hung over a 50-60 feet apparatus which is rotated by another devotee. While being rotated, bhoktas hanging on the bamboo throws flowers over huge number of devotees standing below them. Flowers thrown by them is considered as sacred and blessing of God. Gulaichi flowers are considered sacred and they are used widely in this puja. Hence devotees try to catch flower fervently and often they keep it in their books and in other sacred places.

2.0 Shiv Manda Mela (Fair):

Every year Manda Mela is Organized in which usually Jhulan ritual is performed by Bhoktas. Tribal and Non-Tribal communities participates in this mela equally. This mela prove as an integrating factor and provides opportunity to interact to everyone around.

CONCLUSION

Manda Puja is undoubtedly a sacred amalgamation of rituals and strong belief in divinity, which here is Lord Shiva.

This festival highly enriches the overall diverse culture of Jharkhand and also provides platform for the members of various communities to come together and witness this unique festival which is an absolute test of one’s devotion.

Manda Puja is also a clear proof of acculturation as Tribes like Oraon and Munda are originally animist but due to contact and interaction with Hindus living nearby and observance of Hindu Culture closely has led to their transformation of beliefs and hence they too also believe in Lord Shiva and prays in temples before idols of God. The ritual which stuns everybody is the ritual of walking over bed of embers or in simple terms walking on fire. Devotees who perform this ritual has a strong belief that they are able to do so because the follow all the rules and fasts loyally hence they are pure and which is why their feet won’t get burnt while walking over fire. But this too has a scientific reasoning, first of all the wood used for making bed of embers is raw wood which usually is not a good conductor of heat, Second, the time of contact between the sole of foot and ember is not long enough to burn the skin, beside the skin of sole of feet is hard in comparison to skin of foot overall. Gradual steps are taken, one doesn’t run over the ember bed as if it happens then due to bodyweight his/her feet will go deep inside the bed of ember which would cause skin to burn. Embers have low thermal capacity. They don’t transfer heat as quickly as they look while blazing. But beside this reasoning other rituals of this Puja actually requires physically strenuous tasks; which devotees perform to express their devotion.

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