

Religious Belief and Practices of the People of Gond Tribe of Nuapada District of Odisha in Eastern India

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Abstract

The religious tradition of the Gond people of Nuapada district is an important aspect of the tribal culture of Odisha in Eastern India. The Gond people of Nuapada district of Odisha are polytheist and their religious belief and practices begin with primitive notions of animism and reaches up through the worship of nature deities. The group of the Gods and deities of high order revered by the Gonds of Nuapada are numerous. Most of the gods belong to the Hindu pantheon and are worshipped by the neighbouring Hindu people of that region. The most distinctive features of the Gond tribal religion in the cult of the supreme God Bara Deo and Goddess Dharti Mata who are considered as the clan deities like many other tribes of Nuapada district, Gonds worship a village spirit God known as Bara Deo, Bhagavan, and Maha Deo known sometimes, rather confusing as Bara Deo they are worshipped by the Gonds. The Gond god and goddess are generally referred as *Deve*, *Devta*, *Deo* and *Devi*. They are supposed to be the inhabitant of heaven as conceived by the Gonds. Many of them are nature God's worshipped in different names by the aboriginal communities. Odisha has been considered as a state of different tribes and it occupies a unique place in the history of tribal India. Out of the total 705 tribes of India, as many as 62 tribes are noticed in the state of Odisha. Gond is an important tribe of the Nuapada district of Odisha. Really, the people of Gond tribe are the majority among all the total thirteen tribal communities of the Nuapada district. The religious life of the Gonds of Nuapada district is associated with several traditional ceremonies. The traditional religious belief and practices of the Gonds of Nuapada district are very curious and interesting for study of tribal culture of Odisha. Hence, the present scholars have undertaken this topic for scholarly discussion. The aim of this article is to focus on the religious belief, rituals and festivals practised by the Gond people of Nuapada district of Odisha. Here, the primary as well as secondary sources have been used by the authors for the writing of this article.

Key words: Religious, belief, practices, Gonds, tribe, Nuapada District, Odisha, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Gond is one of the important tribal communities of the Nuapada district of Odisha in Eastern India. The religious belief and practices of the Gond people of Nuapada district are the main aspect of the tribal culture of Odisha. The most distinctive features of the Gond tribal religion are the cult of the supreme God Bara Deo and Goddess Dharti Mata or the clan deities like many other tribes of Nuapada district of Odisha. Gonds worship a village spirit God known as Bara Deo, Bhagavan, and Maha Deo known sometimes, rather confusing as Bara Deo are worshipped by the Gonds. The Gond people of Nuapada district are polytheist. The religious belief and practices begin with primitive notions of animism and reaches up through the worship of nature deities. Historically, religious emotion and resulting ritual action, as spontaneous or instinctive reactions to environment, would appear to have originated much earlier than organised beliefs and a definite pantheon. Yet, as an account of the Gonds present organised religious rites and ceremonies would necessarily involve a reference to their religious beliefs and pantheon. The group of the Gods and deities of high order revered by the Gonds are numerous. Most of the gods belong to the Hindu pantheon and are worshipped by the neighbouring Hindu people of that region.¹ The Gond god and goddess are generally referred as

Deve, Devta, Deo and *Devi*. They are supposed to be the inhabitant of heaven as conceived by the Gonds. Many of them are nature God's worshipped in different names by the aboriginal communities.² The Hindu religion attaches highest significance upon a supreme God namely-Visnu, Bhagawan and Narayan who is said to have thousand of names for address. He is the creator, survivor and destroyer of everything called the universe. The Gonds worship god and goddess in an obscure fashion. But following the animistic, monotheistic traditions, the Gond people traditionally recognize a nature God. The sun god is addressed by Gonds as *Dharmaraj* or *Dharam Devta*, as their supreme deity.³ The traditional religious belief and practices of the Gond people of Nuapada district are very interesting to know the tribal culture of Odisha. Hence, the present scholars have taken a modest attempt to highlight the religious belief and practices of the Gonds of Nuapada district of Odisha in India.

II. METHODOLOGY

Both the primary and secondary sources have been used in the writing of the present article on Religious Belief and Practices of the People of Gond tribe of Nuapada District of Odisha. The secondary sources have been mostly used in the writing of the present article. The primary data of the topic have been collected from *Gazetteers*, literatures, reports, hearsay accounts of respondents through the interview methods, etc. The secondary data used in the article are such as Books, Magazines, Reviews, Journals, Periodicals, Proceedings, and Records. The data collected from both the primary and secondary sources are methodologically analyzed and utilized in this article.

III. RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3. Religious Belief and Practices of Gonds of Nuapada District

3.1 Animistic Belief

The religious thinking of the Gonds is saturated with animistic ideas. The Gonds considers the animate objects such as, trees, plants, animals as well as human beings as the abode of spirits. For them the mystery of natural phenomena can be explained with reference to the spirit of world. The day to day happening of the human life are attributed to the spiritual forces.⁴ The Gonds of Nuapada believe that the spirits live in tree. Hence, cutting down trees is against ritual norms. On the other hand, planting of trees is meritorious acts which often bring good luck like getting off springs or increase of wealthy. The spiritual significance of the trees and plants are found in their use in domestic and communal rituals practice of magic cure of diseases.⁵

The Gonds honour a Number of trees. Most important among them are *Bara* or banyan (*finisbengalensis*), *Pipil* (*finis religious*) *Am* or mango (*magnifiers Indica*), *Bel* (*Angle marmelos*), *Neem* (*melia indica*), *Panas* or Jackfruit (*Artocarpus integreiolia*), *Amla* (*phyllanthus embilica*), *Bahada* (*taerminalia belerica*), *Barkoli* (*Zizyphua jujuba*), *champa* (*Michelia champaca*), *kuchila* (*Strycnos nux-vomica*), *Mohua* or *mahu* (*Bassia latifolia*), *sal* (*Shorea robusta*), *Tentuli* or tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), *Dimuri* (*fiens glomerata*), *Kendu* (*Disospyros melanocyclin*), *Harida* or *Harra* (*terminalia chebula*), *Baula* or *Molsuri* (*Mimusops elengi*), *Asok* (*polylthia longifolia*) and *karma* (*Adina crdifolia*). The *Bara*(*Bayan*) and *papal* (*Aswasth*) are found in the Gond Community.⁶ These trees are most widely venerated since they have been believing to be the resorts of spirits, and god of the Hindu pantheon. They are also connected with the cult of the dead and fertility rites. Every leaf of these trees are said to be the seat of a god. Plantation of

banayan and *Pipal* trees brings good luck and prosperity.⁷ A *Pujastali* (fig. no.30) of Pradeshen worship of Gonds is noticed at Jambahali village of the Komna block in Nuapada district of Odisha.

In the religious concept of the Gond, the *Bel* leaves a favorite of Lord Shiva. The leaves, fruits and rood of the *Bel* tree are used in various rituals like marriage birth, death, in worshipping several of the deities; in magic and for medicinal purposes. The sterilize flowers of the *Boula* are worshipped and used in worshipping the Gods. The leaves and twig of the *Asok* tree are used for festooning the shrines during festive occasions. Like the above trees the flower of *Champa* is also sacred as it is a favourite of Lord Shiva and other gods of the Gond pantheon. Because of their religious significance, these trees are always planted in the precinct of temples and shrines. Various parts of the mango, *Karkali*, *Harida*, *Bahada*, *Amla*, Jackfruit trees have entered into the Magic- religious and the medicinal usage of the Gonds. The lion is regarded as the "Vehicle" of *Durga*, the mother Goddess who is therefore called *Shimhabahini*. But tiger appears more predominantly in their folk beliefs. It often replaces the lion as the vehicle of the mother Goddess.⁸ Tiger is also regarded as a totemic animal of the Gonds, persons belonging to the *Barga* named *Bagha* (the tiger). The parts of tiger's body have various usages. Its fat cures rheumatism and its heart and flesh are used as tonics, stimulants, aphrodisiacs and communicated its physical strength and courage to those who use them. Its flesh is burned in the cattle shed to dispel cattle disease and in the field to ward off disease. The animal's gall begs, clavicle, lever, fat milk, urine, hair, moustache, teeth, paws and akin are highly valued. The tongue and powdered tooth are administered as a tonic to strengthen weak children. The whiskers and pairings of the tiger's claws with other components of magical charms are hung as lockets on the necks of children of tied around their upper arms as armlets in order to word off worship *Baghia Davta*, the "Tiger God", who can cause storm and cyclone by making the winds to blow faster. He guards the household properties, crops and cattle it duly appeased which rituals, offerings and animal sacrifices.⁹

3.2. Dharam Dev- the Supreme Deity

Like the Juanga, Bhuiyan, and other Mundari speaking tribes, the Gonds regard *Dharm Devta* (the son God) as their Supreme deity. He is venerated with distinction as the most divine and benevolent God of the *Dharam* (righteousness and virtues). He controls the human as well as the supernatural world. He sees and knows all that goes on upon the earth, hell and heaven. He punishes the misconduct against customary morality. He is the Supreme Being residing in and shining through the luminaries. He reigns supreme over the earth in removing darkness, purging sin, subduing all evils and showering his kindly blessings on the earth and its inhabitants. There is not fixed routine for worshipping him. Nor, his images or idols are found to be worshipped. However, in all domestic and communal rituals, the God receives the first prayers.¹⁰

3.3. The Supreme Triangle

The mentioned earlier the Gonds believe in the supreme God, the Vishu or Parameswar of the Hindu religion. Lord Parameswar manifests Himself in the form of triangle of three acting Supreme Gods namely, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar in order to discharge the three prime functions as the Creator, the Survivor and the Destroyer of the Universe respectively. Lord Vishnu is worshipped by various names and by his various incarnations named Ramachandra, Nrushimha, Sri Krishna, Jagannath, etc.¹¹

Lord Shiva or *Mahadev*, the third god of the 'supreme Trio' of Hindu pantheon is highly honored as *Jati deve* or the patron deity of the Gond community. He is most accessible and benevolent to them. His phallic image is worshipped in temples in the most of the village. He is the god who grants offsprings forgives and purifies the sinners and the polluted ones and is the scarcer of all evils and devils. The Monday in every week is traditionally observed by the Gonds as a holiday meant for the worship of Lord Shiva.¹²

3.4. *Basu Maata* or *Dharti mata*(village God)

The *Basu maata* or *Dharti mata* (the mother earth), is a nature goddess ranked next to the supreme God *Dharam Devta*. Gond's faith in the mother earth very much is (common with those of the neighbouring tribal communities). The Juanga and the Bhuiyan highly regard the couple, the *Dharam Devta* (the sun God) and the *Basuki mata*, as their supreme deities who receive prayers, sacrifices, and offerings on all rituals. However, the *Basuki mata*, is of lesser significance than the *Dharma Devta* to the Gond.¹³ The use of earth or soil in the name of *Basu Mata* in most of the rituals and agricultural festivals is common in the Gond society. The *Dharti mata* is addressed as mother and she is the substance of all earth things. She is considered to be the upholder of the human, plants and animals existing on her surface. A Gond priest is worshipping / *Mati devota* noticed at the place Sunapur village of the Nuapada district. The Gond peasants worship *Dhartimata* and *Mahalaxmi*, (the goddess of wealth), on the festival of *Akshaya Tritiya* in the month of *Vaisakha*. He offers cooked to the deities in the field saying.

3.5. Village deities

These Village deities are worshipped by the whole villagers with pomp and ceremony on the seasonal festive occasions of *Nuakhai*, *Puspune*, *Dhanmaden* and *Dussara*. They receive special communal worship during the period of grave crisis like flood, fire draught, epidemics, and watch. Individual families of the village also propitiate the deities on the occasions of marriage ceremony, birth death and other important ritual celebrations in the family.¹⁴In most of these occasions animal sacrifices, fruits and cooked food are offered to the deities to appease them. It is one type special cake offered at the Nuakhai. Nuakhai Festival was noticed to the scholar at Sunapur village of the Nuapada District in Western Odisha. A scene of Mohali Puja is noticed at the Baruka hill nearby the Kendupati Village, Sinapali block, Nuapada. In this Puja Jarwa , Devi is found worshipped by the Gonds

As per the longstanding local tradition these guardian village deities are not served by the Brahman priests. In most of the villages, a priest called *Pujari* or *Jhakar*, who may be a tribal or an upper caste or a lower caste like Gond, is kept in charge of routine attendance of this deities.¹⁵ In some places the traditional village chief *Gauntia* discharges the priestly functions for the mother deity of the village. For example, in the village Barangpali the female deity named *Balipatiani* is served by the *Gauntia* who is a *Kulta* (cultivator caste) and the male deity is the *Grampati* is served by the *Jhakar* who belongs to Raj Gond tribe. This service is hereditary; in lieu of which the functionaries were formerly remunerated with rent free *Jagiri* (village service) lands as long as they continued to serve. After independence, these lands have been settled with the former office-bearers with occupancy rights, but on payment of equitable rent basis. The *non-brahmanic* tradition of worshipping the village deities indicates that, this is an ancient institution started by the aboriginal settlers who had set up human habitations with their Gods and deities amidst jungle clearings in the remote past. The priest of village Pharasara, took to the present scholar and showed a stone image worshipped as Dharua, the Gond God. A sacred place

for Buda Deo is noticed at Farsara village of the Boden block of Nuapada district. The Bali hill from Pharasara is identified with Buda Deo who is male God worshipped with Goddess Sunadei, his queen. In village of Pharasara, the Dharua Gond is the clan God of Markam Gond.¹⁶

3.6. God and Goddess

According to the Gonds of Nuapada, the goddess Bhagavati is their ancestral goddess Buda Deo and primitive mother. As per the Gond Genealogy, the distribution of the gods and goddesses can be seen in the Gond society. They are mentioned as follows.

Table No.1 Gond Clan Gods and Goddesses

Gond Clan	Gods and Goddesses
Markam	Bastaren, Malchama, Pardesen,
Netam	Tejraja, Bhuja Raj, Mund Raj
Jagat	Lankeswari, dhuar Sani, Kateswari
Oti	Rahu, Kanavara,
Porti	Bira, Shira, Bhim, Gangadi
Sori	Dharua Buda, Gangadi, Mirchuk

3.7. Sixteen Sisters /Devis of *Gangadi*

The Gond people worship sixteen goddesses in chronological number, they are 1-Budima, 2- Nanima, 3-Sundharima, 4-Gondima, 5-Endradi, 6-Sidhradi, 7-Kamaladi, 8-Bimbaladi, 9-Tekenani, 10-Bhagabati, 11-Pradeshiani, 12-Sheyagaren, 13-Bhandharagaren, 14-Podhamata, 15-Khoragundi, 16-Podama, It is worth noting that among the sixteen goddesses, the goddesses of *Budima, Gundimi, Syarachi, Ghodamata, Podama, Paya Gharen*, etc. are very important. The Gonds who can be cured by the miraculous means of worshiping various biodegradable diseases, here the present scholar understands that she is the goddess of spring. Gundima is believed to be present when the body shows signs of spring rot (milimila, Hadfuti). The whole body of Gundima is red.¹⁷ The long bond includes 12 brothers *Baburai* and *Sohan* sister *Raghadik Barnabi*. Among the *Sohan* sisters, *Garghadi* is known as the *Bhadradi* and *Sidradi* rivers. *Kamaladi* and *Bipaladi Durga*. Famous village goddesses such as the goddess of the treasury of the provincial treasury, are known as the goddesses of one region. The goddess of treasure is the whole worshipped by Gond worshippers in Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Balangir and Nuapada areas.¹⁸

3.8. Household Deities and Spirits

The Gond home is not just inhabited by humans; there are certain personified deities and spirits who are thought to reside inside the Gond family. *Pitar ghar* or *Devta ghar* is the name given to one of the rooms used as the deity chamber in the Gondhouse, preferably the storage room in multi-roomed households or the only living room in single-roomed dwellings. The Gond households strictly observe the purity and sanctity of this room by following a customary code of conduct.¹⁹ They never allow strangers and persons bearing various kinds of ritual pollutions to enter into this room. Even the women of the household under menstrual and child birth pollutions are prohibited to enter into this room. Taking food in this room is also restricted because the leftover food causes pollution failure to comply these rules results in pollution of the room and the fellow supernatural inhabitants are sip leased. This room receives special attention in respect of cleaning and purification. *Tulashi Chuhara* personal home worship place of Gond family is noticed at Sunapur Village of the Boden Block of Nuapada District.

3.9. Shakta Deities of Gonds

The worship of mother goddess, in her many forms is also popular among the Gonds of Nuapada district. Goddess *Durga*, the consort of Lord Shiva is known to the Gonds in many of her name such as, *Mahisamardini*, *Bhabani*, *Uma*, *parbati*, *Shimhabahini*, *Gouri*, etc. She is worshipped with pomp and ceremony in the festival of *Dussara* or *Durga puja* in the month of *Ashwin* (September-October). *Sital Sasthi* in the month of June and *Diwali* or *Kalipuja* in the month of *Kartik* (October-November), She is also revered as the *Adya Shakti Mahalaxmi*, the consort of Lord Vishnu and the goddess who grants wealth, fortune and material prosperity, receives special reverence from the Gonds. Her influence upon a person's destiny is so great, as the Gond believes that, without her blessings a person is doomed to lead a miserable life of poverty and squalor.²⁰ The persons who are successful in their life are said to be born with the blessings of the goddess. The Thursday is regarded as the day of *Mahalaxmi*. All the four Thursday in the month of *Margasira* (November-December) are specifically meant to be observed as *Mahalaxmi puja*. Only married women of the Gond households conduct this ritual. The Gonds believe in a number of other deities of higher religion, who are of lesser significance than those hitherto described. Like Sun God, moon also receives reverence of the Gonds.²¹

3.10. The Festivals of the Gond tribe

In the Gond community of the Nuapada district, some of the festivals are found to be observed by their people. They are viz. 1. Chaitra Parba, 2. Bihan China, 3. Akshiya Tritiya, 4. Asadha Khana, 5. Huruali uansha, 6. Danshara, 7. Nuankhai, 8. Dashahra, 9. Chaul dhua, and 10. Charu Puja. Several religious festivals of the Gonds are associated with their agriculture. The bull celebration *Pola* and the snake festival *Nagpanchami* are both quite popular. *Dasahara* is a significant Gond holiday. Stick dance is a Gond ritual practiced by young people. Bands of young people dance and sing as they move from village to hamlet. Dancing is a religious obligation. It is also a good time to have some fun. *Akhari*, *Jiwati*, *Pola*, *Diwali*, *Dashahara*, *Nuakhai*, *Puspuni*, *Janijatrya*, *Kartika Purnima*, *Baishakha*, and *Phaga* or *Shimga* celebrations were among them. Many of them have anything to do with the agricultural season. The Gond celebrations were mass ceremonies.²²

3.10.1. Chait Yatra or Mahul Yatra

The Chait pilgrimage is usually celebrated by the Gonds in the month of Chaitra. The pilgrimage of the Kandha's Barat Parva and the Gonds Chait Yatra is different. Gaud in the community, the Jatra is celebrated only one day. The character drinks on the first Tuesday of the lunar month of Chaitra. During this Jatra, the village goddess Gangadi is worshiped outside the village. This is because outside the village there are the shrines of the Gangadi goddess. The village's headman walk a little farther out of the village holding rice, incense, lamps, vermilion, pools, chickens and wine in a new twist. Other people also go with him of the village outside, a tree worships.²³

3.10.2. Bihana Chhina

The trip is an agricultural festival of the villages. The pilgrimage is celebrated on any day of the lunar month of *Baishakh*. During this journey, the goddess of the earth, the goddess of the rock, is worshipped.²⁴ The village headman, and others work together to set a date and date for the pilgrimage. Usually the goddess of the hill treasure is in the hills near the village. One a certain day, everyone goes up the hill with the village *Jhankar*. The head of the village and *Jhankar* carry rice, incense, lamps, vermilion and everything for them. There, the goddess *Dhar* and the goddess of the rock store are worshipped by burning incense, lamps, and vermilion.

Elsewhere in the village, rice, chicken, oil, turmeric and salt are taken. The rice is stored in to pay people. In this ritual chickens, sorghum, mercury and sheep are sacrificed. Chicken, mercury, sesame seeds, and manta are not offered to the goddess: no sacrifices are made.²⁵

3.10.3. *Akshay Tritiya*

Akshay Tritiya is a agricultural festival of the Gonds of Nuapada. During the sowing journey, everyone brings seeds and mixes them with their own seeds. On the third day of *Akshaya Tritiya*, everyone bathed in the morning and returned to their land in a new basket with seeds and cow's milk pouring on the ground. They plant rice on the ground in memory of their ancestors. It is believed that sowing rice on this day yields good money in the land.²⁶

3.10.4. *Ashada Khena*

The festival of *Ashada Khena* is celebrated in the month of *Asadha* or *Gulichha (Gundicha)*. It is celebrated on the auspicious occasion of the month of *Ashar*. On the third day of *Ashada*, everyone sows wealth in their own land. The rice grows all over, and the grass grows on the ground. The goddess *Gangadi* is worshiped during this festival. On certain days, the villagers like *Jhankar* and other persons go to the *Gangadi* in the village. They take chickens, goats, sheep, mercury, and coconuts to sacrifice to the goddess. The *Gangadi* goddess is invoked by the Gonds of Nuapada.²⁷

3.10.5. *Haruali Uans*

This festival is observed on the Shraavan month new moon day. The patron God of the mounted is worshipped during this festival. Worship the gods in whose house no female child is born. The family head is also buried in his home. On this day everyone is their own in the land of *Suniri Dal*, *Devatun Taj*, *Venlua Da*, and milk. On this day, the house is home to gets. This allows any demons, ghosts, snakes, scorpions, to enter the house. It is celebrated once a year.²⁸

3.10.6. *Dashahra*

The lunar eclipse of the month of *Ashwin* is celebrated from the eighth to the tenth on this Jatra, the goddess Durga is worshipped by the people of Gond community. Devotion to the gods is diminished. On the evening of the eighth day, in the village of Dhaka, *Jhakar* goes to the shrine of the goddess and worships and draws out all the swords, sticks, and weapons of the goddess. The Dhaka village belongs to the Gond community of the Sinapali Block of Nuapada district.²⁹ The worshippers of their goddess are usually Bati and are known to be from the Gond community in many villages of Kalahandi and Nuapada district. The *Jhakar* worships a plate and sacrifices it in a pan. He then returns home at 9:10 p.m. After this weapon is given, a chicken, goat or ship is given there is from this day to the tenth day, the lamps are lit on the goddess's sword, stick, and weapon. It simply came to our notice then. On the morning of the tenth day, comes to bathe and worships *Khanda* with sticks and the goddess's weapons, and puts them on sticks. They wear shadows on the roof and wear scarlet on all their weapons. At 11:12 a.m., the goddess's sword, sword, armor and umbrella were removed from the house and brought to another house.³⁰ As soon as the roof comes out, everyone nearby comes and shaves their heads. Then in one place, with the umbrella, and with the other weapons, "Keep it all." Armed with the umbrella of the tax goddess, *Bela patra* is worshipped with indigo flowers and *Jhuna*, incense, lamps. Branches incense, and lamps come from the homes of all members of the community from the village for worship near this roof. Coconuts are served in the oven. In addition to those who refuse to sacrifice any living things near the roof, there are sacrificed chickens, goats, or mercury.³¹

3.10.7. *Chaula Dhua Jatra*

The trip is celebrated on the day of the Dalai Lama. Everyone at home is new to rice harvesting. But everyone cooks and eats rice calling all the people in the village to fix the day for the rice. In this magic the village-goddess- *Gangadi* and others are worshipped.³² At home, former men worship *Gangadi*. On a particular day, Dhaka goes to the village goddesses carrying rice, incense, lamps, vermilion, rice lime, and drink. There the rice is lime-fried. The rice is washed in a new pot and cooked, then cakes are made. After that the goddess is worshiped with rice, incense, lamps, vermilion, and all the cooked food is morning. On this day, chicken, gays, and mercury are also sacrificed. Then everyone returns home. The goddess of their own house, *Duma*, worships *Jhoti* with a *Jhoti* and enjoys rice, *Khuri*, cakes. From this day, everyone throws away their old cooking pot and cooks rice in the new pot. It is believed that the goddess creeps on the person who washes and cooks the rice before the cake is finished. So first the rice was washed before the goddess and then everyone else washed and cooked the rice. One in the Gond community violates the policy; no reward is given to him. The one who does it rewards himself.³³

3.10.8. *Charu Puja or Matipuja (Soil worship)*

The festival of *Matipuja* is celebrated in the month of *Poush*. It is a festival to create the clay deities of their respective lands. At this time, white deer, goat, chicken, sheep and *Mahuli* are offered to the earth goddess. On the night of the trampling, everyone cooks and eats on the own land. In the concept Gond people, the disease is not brought home due to the observance of *Matipuja*. They call their friends and eat on the land their faith. *Charu Puja* pleases the earth god and gives flowers for a good harvest.³⁴

3.10.9. Cultural Practices

Without much connection with the other culture, the Gonds had formed their own cultural traditions as a result of their social information. Their cultural customs were modest and had been passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition.

3.11. Fairs and Festivals and Ceremonial Practices

The district's Hindus celebrate a variety of festivals throughout the year. Domestic festivals, observed in each family, and public festivals and fairs, when people assemble in great numbers on auspicious days, are the two primary divisions of these festivities. Domestic holidays are limited to the worship of family deities, the practice of *Ekadashi*, and numerous other events. Public festivals are often religious celebrations attended by vast crowds of men, women, and children seeking both worship and amusement. The following is a list of some of the most prominent festivals in the area.³⁵

3.11.1. *Buel Jatra*

The Gonds are believers of *Sakti* and deity. They worship the tutelary deities of their villages with pomp, gaiety and splendour, associating it to different farming seasons. Such a festival is *Buel Jatra*. Though the *Yatra* is celebrated on *Vijaya Dasami*, the rituals begin from *Mahastami* the village *Jhankar* (Priest), *Pota* (*Pota Majhi*) and *Makadam* keep fasting since the morning.³⁶ In the evening all the villagers assemble near the temple of *Budha Deo*, within the premises of *Pata Majhi* of the village, to join in the procession of *Khandadhua*. This is cleaning weapons of deities in holy water. The procession is accompanied by *Domba Baja* or music played by the people belonging the *Domba* caste. The musical instruments include Drums like *Dhol*, *Tasha*, *Dhap* and *Nishan*, and the rhythm controller *Muhuria* plays the pipe organ. In the

procession the *Chhatar* or Umbrella of *Budha Deo*, *leth*, *Pattakhanda*, other swords and weapons of the deities of the village are taken to the nearby river, *Udanti*. After washing the weapons in milk, they are refurbishing to glaze and polished to sharpen like stainless steel.³⁷

3.11.2. *Chhatar Jatra*

In the *Chhatar Jatra* festival, the Gonds of Nuapada worship their familygods and goddesses like *Ma Samaleswari*, *Ma Raktambari*, *Ma Duarsani*, *Ma Bastaren*, *Ma Perragodian*, *Ma Kata Jholian*, *Kanabhainra*, *Ma Suna Dei*, *Ma Indradei*, *Budha Deo*. Being presiding deities of certain areas of the indigenous people, the deities have absolute spiritual control over the collective life of the people, and the rituals associate with the deities are participatory and egalitarian.³⁸

3.11.3. *Laxmi Puja*

The *Laxmipuja* is basically a Hindu festival observed in almost all the Hindu families in the month of *Margasira* (November-December) particularly on Thursday. Especially Hindu families have an early preparation on Wednesday. They decorate the surroundings of their houses with *Alpana* or *Jhoti*.³⁹ As goddess *Laxmi* is known for wealth and prosperity; she is worshipped with all religious fervor. Hindu women get up quite early in the morning and, after taking a bath, recite *Laxmi Purana*. Like the Hindu women, the Gond women of Nuapada also observed *Laxmipuja* in their families.

3.11.4. *Makarmela*

The *Makara* is observed by Gonds of Nuapada on 14th of January every year in the district of Nuapada. In this district, *Makara Sankranti* is observed in many temples namely, *Dadhibamana* temple, *Khariar*, *Jagannath Mandir Tukla*, and *Patalganga* and many other temples particularly *Jagannath* temples and *Patalganga* and many other temples particularly *Jagannath* temples and sweets and many other things on the occasion of *Makarmela*.

3.11.5. *Nuakhai Festival*

The *Nuakhai* is an agrarian festival of Western Odisha. This is basically a *Duma Puja*. In fact, the indigenous community (*Adivasi* and *Dalit*) are highly obliged to their deity for the reason they have identified the food material in the primitive era and made them familiar as consumable materials since the first food material.⁴⁰ Therefore, whatever crop is being produced either in the field or in the forest has to be offered first to the deity and thereafter the community use to consume paddy, mango, *Chanar*, pumpkin, etc. as *Nuakhai*. Since rice is a staple food therefore usually the paddy has become popular as *Nuakhai*. It is a harvesting festival, and constitutes the cultural marker of the collective identity of the Nuapada region as well as western Odisha. It is the most important festivity of the area, and the celebration thereof cuts across castes and religions. People observe *Nuakhai* in the beginning of harvesting season. After the hard work during agriculture season farmer await their new crops. They follow the tradition of offering the first rice of the season in honour of the presiding deity of the locality. Much before this day begins the preparation. People do up their houses, wash walls with red earth and draw patterns in white on walls and floor. In fact, with the changing time and due to the process of modernization, houses are being colours-washed. However, in villages the time-tested traditions still persist. On the day of *Nuakhai* people procure the first crop from the field and make fattened rice which is first offered to the deity. Thereafter, all the clan members take it together as *Prasad* (consecrated food). It is followed by visiting all houses of the villages and paying respect to the elders.⁴¹

3.11.6. *Pousa Purnima*

The *Pousa Purnima* or popularly known as *Pushpuni* in the local language is observed throughout the Nuapada district. In rural areas of Nuapada district young people of villages observe this day as *Chherchhera* by obstructing movement of passers-by, who give some money to the youths for merry making.⁴² It is looked upon by people as something of fun. This day is taken as starting day of contractual agreement between *Mahajan* and *Halia* (landlord and farm servant) in Nuapada district. The wage of *Halia* is fixed on this particular day. In the very next day *Puspuni Basi* is observed throughout the district, and rural folk drink liquor, relish non-vegetarian food items and *Puspuni mada* (local cake).

3.11.7. **Rites of the Passage of Gonds tribe**

Gonds guard pregnant women against spells and evil influences, and they execute a number of rites once the child is delivered. A baby boy is usually named after the mother's brother, while a girl is named after the father's sister. Children grow up as members of a family, clan, or portray (one of Gond society's four major divisions) and progressively learn the customs of their people.⁴³ Boys and girls work together to protect the family's crops from birds and monkeys. As a symbol of adulthood, males shave their beard, moustache, and brows.⁴⁴ When a girl's first menstruation occurs, she is considered fully mature. Death rites are performed by Gonds to assist the spirit's transition into the other world and to smooth its acceptance by other clan spirits. This ceremony, known as *Askarun*, is required to fulfill a duty to the departed. Memorial pillars pay tribute to the departed. The Gonds believe ancestral spirit watch over the living, punish violators, and protect the Gond community.⁴⁵ The Gond people of Nuapada district observe different types of fairs and festivals throughout the year as mentioned by scholars.

IV. CONCLUSION

We come to know from the above discussion that Gonds of Nuapada district worship their ancestral gods and goddesses along with some Hindu deities of adjacent areas of Hindu community. The religious thoughts of the Gonds of Nuapada district are drenched with animistic ideas. The Gond people of Nuapada consider the animate objects such as, trees, plants, animals as well as human beings as the abode of spirits. For them the mystery of natural phenomena can be explained with reference to the spirit of world. Like the people of other tribes, the Gonds regard *Dharm Devta* (the son God) as their Supreme deity. He is venerated with distinction as the most divine and benevolent God of the *Dharam* (righteousness and virtues) who controls the human as well as the supernatural world. The *Basu maata* or *Dharti mata* (the mother earth), is a nature goddess ranked next to the supreme God *Dharam Devta*. Gonds of Nuapada consider that the goddess Bhagavati is their ancestral goddess Buda Deo and primitive mother. Among the sixteen goddesses of Gond society, five goddesses like *Budima*, *Gundimi*, *Syarachi*, *Ghodamata*, *Podama*, *Paya Gharen*, are considered as very important from the religious point of view. The worship of mother goddess, in her many forms is also popular among the Gond society of Nuapada district. Goddess Durga is revered as the *Adya Shakti Mahalaxmi*, the consort of Lord Vishnu and the goddess who grants wealth, fortune and material prosperity, receives special reverence from the Gonds of Nuapada. In the Gond community of the Nuapada district, some of the festivals like Chaitra Parba, Bihan China, Akshiya Tritiya, Asadha Khana, Huruali uansha, Nuankhai, Dashahra, Chaul dhua, Charu Puja.etc are found to be observed by their people. It is known from the observation that several religious festivals of the Gonds are associated with

their agriculture. Domestic festivals, observed in each family, and public festivals and fairs, when people assemble in great numbers on auspicious days, are the two primary divisions of these festivities. Gonds guard pregnant women against spells and evil influences, and they execute a number of rites once the child is delivered. A baby boy is usually named after the mother's brother, while a girl is named after the father's sister. The common rituals and festivals are performed by *Jhakar*, the local priest of Gond community of Nuapada. The religious belief and practices of Gonds of Nuapada are prayers, rites, festivals, sacrifices and spiritual dances. The specific order of temples for the worship of Gond gods and goddesses are not found in the Nuapada district of Odisha. The Gond people worship their gods and goddesses in their sacred places, which are locally called *Devata Gudi*, *Devata Ghara* and *Duma Kurea*. The Gonds are very ritualistic people and they consider their spirits as their Lords and protectors. Different type of traditional rituals and festivals are found to be observed by the Gond people as clearly discussed in the fact. Some of the festivals are found to be connected with agricultural operation and a few festivals are observed by Gonds for other purposes. In *Gadi Yatra* or *Khala Yatra*, people of each clan of Gond tribe worship their ancestors in a sacred place called *Gadi* for wellbeing of their community. It is observed once in a year in some places and a few places in five years of interval period. On the whole, religious belief, the rituals and festivals observed by the Gonds of Nuapada district are very interesting and curious for study to know the tribal culture of Odisha in Eastern India.

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