

# Fairs and Festivals of the People of Keonjhar During the Colonial Period

Name-Mamata Prusty  
Redg.no-Arts. /Hist./01/Ph.D./2024  
Research scholar of M.S.C.B. University, Baripada

**Abstract:-** The story of Kendujhara fairs and festivals is a story of evolution. Keonjhar is one of the 26 princely states of Odisha. It is the third largest of the princely states, having an area of 3096 square miles. Keonjhar is divided into two widely dissimilar lands, lower Keonjhar being a region of valley and lowlands, while upper Keonjhar consists of mountainous highland. According to local tradition Yoti Bhanja the earliest Bhanja king of Keonjhar, first founded his capital at a place called Yotipur named after him. During the colonial period, Keonjhar was known as *Kendujhargarh*. Traditionally, Keonjhar is famous for triple "N" which are *Baitarani*, *Maa Tarini* and *Khani* these are three jewels of Keonjhar. It is known for its vibrant seasonal fairs and festivals that reflect the rich tribal and cultural life of the region. Many of these fairs were linked to agricultural cycles, local deities, and royal traditions under the Keonjhar princely state. Important gatherings took place during festivals like Rath Yatra, Makara Sankranti, Raja, Durga Puja Kali Puja, Laxmi Puja and other village jatras, where people came together for worship, trade, music, and dance. These fairs also served as local markets where forest products, handicrafts, and agricultural goods were exchanged. During British rule, such festivals continued to play an important role in preserving the social and cultural identity of the people of Keonjhar.

**KEYWORDS :-** Keonjhar, Fair & Festivals, Tribal, Culture, Custom and Tradition.

**INTRODUCTION:-**One of the main demographics of Keonjhar State is the fair and festival. There was a long history of religious, tribal, and seasonal festivals in Keonjhar from 1803 to 1947. For the Keonjhar people, these fairs and festivals were significant aspects of their social, cultural, and economic lives. Important fairs and festivals are Ratha Yatra, Chaiti Parba, Raja, Makara Sankranti, Kalipuja, Durgapuja, Ashadi Parba, Khudurukuni Osha, and Maha shivaratri with tribal fairs and festivals also celebrated in this land.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES :-**

1. To preserve the culture and traditions of the community.
2. To promote unity and social bonding among the Keonjhar people.
3. To provide recreation and enjoyment for the people
4. To encourage local trade and economic activity during fairs.
5. To pass traditions and customs to the next generation.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY;-** This study adopts a qualitative, ethnographic approach to understand the fairs and festivals of the people of Keonjhar. Fieldwork was conducted in Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts, using participant observation, interviews with elders, women, and community leaders, and focus group discussions. Oral traditions, songs, and rituals were documented to capture cultural expressions. Secondary sources such as books, articles, and reports supported the analysis. Visual documentation through photography and video enriched the understanding of performances and rituals. This comprehensive method highlights the cultural, social, and environmental significance of Keonjhar people festivals and their role in preserving community identity and heritage.

Fair is a large market with or without amusements held periodically. Fairs or melas are one of the oldest means of recreation. It is a good mixture of culture. Some fairs are held for entertainment, some for religious purposes and some for business transactions. In a nutshell, it is a trade show. A number of fairs are held in different regions of Keonjhar District. Following are some descriptions about the fairs of Keonjhar district.

**Varuni Yatra Mela** :-It is a religious mela or gathering. On the auspicious day of Chaitra (March-April) Sukla Trayodasi a large number of people gather at a place of jhadeswar temple at the bank of river Baitarani at Anandapuru, and Kushaleswar temple at the bank of Kushavadra river. Gonashika mountain is situated near village Gonashika in Keonjhar district. There is a chuan or cave with water from where River Baitarani originates. It is the birthplace or mouth of Baitarani. During that time majority of devotees perform a holy dip in the Baitarani river to mark the auspicious Varuni Yog. A large number of saints, devotees and businessmen gather there for their respective work.

Festival is a series of public events connected with a particular activity or idea. Tribal festivals are celebrated at three horizontal level family, village and region. These are observed for specific purposes, such as for good rains, good harvest, first eating or consumption of seasonal crops, fruits, roots, flowers, leaves, tubers, Protection from dreadful calamities, epidemics and attack of wild animals, safety, security, and sound health of humans and livestock and the like for which the blessings of the supernatural beings and the ancestors are indispensable. Therefore, the Gods and Goddesses, the forefathers, and malevolent and benevolent ghosts and spirits are worshipped with equal awe and respect and kept in good honour. Every festival has two-sides- sacred and secular. It provides the tribes an occasion to break the monotony of their struggle some routine life and enjoy moments of leisure and recreation by participating in eating delicious foods, drinking, dancing, singing, marry making and socializing. Every activity of their life is internally connected with religion, faith and practices.

**Raja Parba** :- This agricultural festival is one of the best festivals that affect the rural life of Keonjhar district. The Raja Parba is the festival of the earth. The festival is held on the last day of Jyestha Masa and the 1<sup>st</sup> two days of Asadha Masa. These three days have been spent in festivity and amusement. The entire district celebrates Raja Parba with a doli song competition between the young and the old. Most of the people of Keonjhar like to eat non-veg food such as meat and fish during Raja Parba. The first day of Mithun Sankranti or the first day of the month of Asadh is called Raja Sankranti. Raja Parva is mainly celebrated for three days, but it is celebrated for five days in the villages. The first day of the first month, the day before the first Raja, is called "Pani Buha". This tradition has become a bit outdated during colonial period but now the first day has become a day only for water. The day after Sankranti is the last day and the day after that is the most important day for the women of the village because on this day they bid farewell to the Raja Thakurani.

Basically, females is in villages especially enjoy the Raja Parba. They wear new clothes, eat pithapana, dance and sing. Among the all the pitha made during the raja 'Pod Pitha' is the most famous and the Raja Parba is incomplete without Paan and Pod Pitha. The virgin girls do not perform any work on this festival. All the women of the village, from young to old, gather at a place called *Tota* and dance the Sabari dance, holding hands in the waist and putting flowers on their heads. While dancing the Sabari dance, they sing the song – “Sabari Lo, Naba Nagrilo, Benu Sabarilo...”

In some areas, this Tota, where the dance and song are performed is called the Shabar Tota. On the first day of the month, a clay female idol ‘Rajabati Maa’, is made, and the women worship this idol for three days. After three days, the fourth day is to bid farewell to this Rajabati Maa. When Raja Parba is celebrated in the village, no one ploughs the fields. Everyone believes that on this day, Dharitri Maa (The earth) becomes Rajabati. Due to this belief, even girls who have become Rajabati do not go to the Shabar Tota. The men of the village play playing card, luddo and bagudi etc. The bagudi game played by the men is called Dhara Bagudi. Which is not an exaggeration to say that it is a kabaddi game. Although festivals are celebrated throughout the district during Raja, Raja Parba is mainly celebrated with great pomp and show in places like *Sitabinjh*, *Tikira*, *Binajhiri*, *Raisuan*, *Naranpur*, *Dimb*, *Anandpur*, *Harichandanpur*, *Ghatgaon*, etc. The *Sitabinjh* and *Binajhiri* Raj Utsav or fair has gained fame across the state during the British period. Earlier, Raja Parba was celebrated especially at the Tarini Peetha Ghatgaon, but even now, this tradition is not seen.

**Ratha Yatra** :- The Baladevjew Temple is the focal point of the Keonjhar district, Odisha. The Rathayatra (chariot festival), where Lord Baladevjew (Balabhadra), Jagannath, and Subhadra are seated on a single, enormous chariot rather than riding separately as in Puri. The temple was constructed, and the festival was started in the late 17th century (about 1671 AD). After the East India Company’s conquest of Odisha in 1803, Keonjhar State continued its

religious and cultural customs, such as the Rathayatra, under British indirect control. The ruling family, temple officials, and tribal communities particularly the Bhuyan and Juang tribes, which supplied holy tools like the siali creeper ropes gather from the Gandhamardhan forest, used to pull the chariot maintained the festival as a local observance. Over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Bhanja rulers of Keonjhar actively encouraged temple rituals including Rathayatra. In times of peace and stability (under Raja Janardan Bhanja c.1794–1825, and later rulers), the festival followed customary rites.

Even before modern transportation made it possible for more people to attend, tribal and rural participation remained strong, and the festival drew crowds from all over the district. The Guinness Book of World Records has acknowledged that the chariot of Lord Baladevjew of Keonjhar, Odisha, is actually the tallest chariot in the world. This chariot has sixteen wheels and measures forty *hata* in height and twenty-eight *hata* in width. The three deities were transported in a single chariot from the temple to Gundicha Temple through the one-kilometre Badadanda road. Under royal patronage, royal ceremonial practices such as Chhera Pahanra were probably locally modified from more general Jagannath customs, but with a distinct regional flavour. Despite colonial rule, the festival served as a significant social and religious event that strengthened ties within the community across castes and tribal groups. In addition to Keonjhar, it was also celebrated in the other important areas of Keonjhar district are Anadapur, Turmunga, Rajnagar, Telkoi, Champua, and Joda.

The Rathayatra fair of Keonjhar is one of the most important fair in Keonjhar. It is celebrated every year with great devotion and joy. During this festival, Many people gather to see the procession and take part in prayers. The fair also includes small shops, food stalls, and cultural programs, making it a time of happiness and togetherness for everyone.

**Makara Sankranti** :- Makar Sankranti is an ancient Hindu harvest festival that marks the entry of the sun into the zodiac sign of Capricorn and the beginning of the sun's northward journey, Uttarayan. It also marks the end of winter and the beginning of warmer, longer days - a significant turning point in agricultural society throughout Odisha. Even in the 19th century, this astronomical and agricultural significance existed long before British rule the festival is solar, and its date in mid-January is determined by the cycle of the sun. In the 19th century, Keonjhar was a tribal agricultural state under local rulers (the Bhanja clan), which was formally integrated into the British administrative structure towards the end of the century. Therefore, Makar Sankranti, which comes after the harvest season, has deep local resonance as a religious and seasonal festival.

**Ritual Bath and Sun Worship**- During that time Fasting and holy morning bathing in a river or pond, especially the Baitarani River, were the mainstays, during colonial period it was a symbol of purification and renewal. After bathing, people would go to the local Shiva and Sun temples and offer Makar Chaula (newly harvested rice mixed with ghee, banana, milk, coconut, etc.) to the gods. As a post-harvest celebration, farmers traditionally stopped farming and celebrated the bounty of the fields - such seasonal rituals were a part of village life before written records. Both tribal and non-tribal communities participated in communal feasts, songs and dances, which were an integral part of rural festivals.

**Tribal Cultural Customs** - In the tribal areas of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj, Makar Sankranti has long been associated with the Tusu festival, a parallel folk festival celebrated by young women with songs and religious rituals. Although the most famous *Tusu* legends were recorded later for Mayurbhanj, this practice reflects how tribal groups adopted and enriched the Makar festival with their own cultural expressions. Melas (fairs) - While small fair gatherings are celebrated (at places like Barhatipira, Gadachandi, Murga Mahadev, Keshari Kunda and Ghagatagan), the small village fairs and communal gatherings associated with Makar Sankranti during British period have their historical roots in the festival calendar of agricultural societies, serving as venues for trade, news exchange and cultural performances.

Although we do not have any colonial or tribal manuscripts from the 19th century that clearly describe Makar Sankranti in Keonjhar in a positive light, the core elements of the festival in this region have remained remarkably

consistent over the centuries. By the 19th century, the festival had become established as a religious ritual and harvest festival in the Keonjhar region.

In the 19th century, Makar Sankranti in Keonjhar was deeply intertwined with the agricultural season and tribal-Hindu cultural practices that we see today, including post-harvest rituals that included purification and worship of the Sun and Shiva, offerings of newly harvested grains and food, communal feasts, songs and dances, village fairs, and shared celebrations between tribal and caste communities. Although these traditions have been adapted over time, they still reflect the region's enduring cultural heritage.

**Asadhi Parba ;-** Asadhai Parba is one of the most important annual festivals celebrated in Keonjhar district. This festival has been celebrated in almost every part of Keonjhar since ancient times. It is particularly associated with the Maa Tarini temple in Ghatgaon. It has religious and agricultural significance for the local people. The first month of the twelfth Odia month is called Asada. This Asadhi Parba is observed in honour of the presiding goddess Maa Tarini, the goddess of Keonjhar, at the Maa Tarini temple located in Ghatgaon (about 45 km from the keonjhar city). According to the belief of the people of Odisha, the significance of Asadhai Parba is that Maa herself fasts for the happiness of her devotees. On the last Thursday of the month of Asadha, Maa herself goes to the celestial goddess to free people from sorrow. She also prays to the deities that the land becomes green and the crops are bountiful. She goes to heaven during the day and returns in the evening. Therefore, Asadhi Puja is not performed in the temple of the maa during the day but at night. On that day, a buck (*Boda*) is sacrificed to the mountain and the tiger, but nowadays, this sacrifice is no longer observed. It is said that earlier, the blood of the buck was taken in a new earthen vessel to the forest, then the tiger was invited to the with a mantra, and the tiger came and eat the blood from the vessel. If the dehuri was frightened at this time, then great harm would have occurred. The buck meat is eaten by men as a feast. It ends at night. If the meat is remained, it is buried. Women are prohibited from touching this Prasad meat.

**Chaiti yatra or Chaiti Parba;-**Maa Tarini's Chaiti Parba: A major Shakti Peetha in Odisha. Maa Tarini is the main goddess of Keonjhar. Various festivals are celebrated every year at this Shakti Peetha in Ghatgaon. Each festival is unique. Its rituals and worship are unique. The major festivals celebrated at this *Peetha* are *Chaiti Parba*, *Asadhi Parba*, *Durga Puja*, *Kali Puja*, *Lakshmi Puja*, *Shivaratri* and other festivals like Dola Purnima. *Asadhai Parba* and *Chaiti Parva* are two unique traditional festivals celebrated at Maa Peetha. This festival is celebrated with greater importance and significance than other festivals in the temple. It is the biggest festival of the temple. This festival is celebrated and concluded with special arrangements. Every year, this festival begins from the last week of the month of Chaitra, April 9th, and continues till the first week of the month of Baisakh, April 15th. It is believed that seeing Mata on this day will bring invaluable benefits. As per special rituals, this festival is celebrated for seven days with the help of the local people. It is believed that seeing Mata on this day will bring merit. This royal festival has been going on for more than 300 years and is celebrated with special rice. Every day, many of people from outside the district and the state come here through the national highway to have darshan of Mata, spread the unique glory of Mata, and seek blessings by listening to hymns sung in her honour. The gathering becomes very big during Chaiti Parva. With the full cooperation of the district administration and the police force, this Chaiti Parv turns Ghatgaon into a grand festival even in the scorching heat of the month of Baisakh. Chaiti Parv is celebrated for seven days. During these seven days, the Maa wears a new besha every day, and on the seventh day, she is adorned with seven besha and full ornaments.

**Shivaratri ;-** Shivaratri is celebrated with great pomp in the entire Keonjhar district. Starting from Brahmaswar Mahadev located at Gonasika, the origin of the Baitarani River in Keonjhar district, Shiva temples have been built within a distance of about 150 to 10 km to the confluence with the sea. Therefore, Mahashivaratri is celebrated in these Shiva temples during the Chaturdashi Yatra of Krishna Pakhya in the month of Phalgun. This tradition is very old in Odisha. In various parts of India, starting from Amarnath, Vishwanath and Badrinath, this tradition of worshipping and staying awake at this place is very old. Similarly, the rituals performed in various Shaivite temples of Odisha, starting from Lingaraj Temple to Dhableswar Temple and Kapilas Temple, are observed in the same way in every major and every Shiva temple of Keonjhar district. During the princely state period Shivaratri was patronised by the Keonjhar rulers, after that making it an important public festival. On this day, devotees stay awake and offer

lamps to the Lord and after the Mahadeep is lit, they consider the fast to be over. Both men and women observe fast on this Shivaratri festival. Unmarried women believe that they will get a beautiful life partner with the blessings of Lord Shiva. It is said that those who celebrate this Shivaratri with devotion and faith get the benefits of birth and death. Lord Shiva protects them from diseases, sorrows and hardships. Apart from this, it is believed by the people that childless couples get children by worshipping Lord Shiva. The major places where Shivaratri is celebrated in Keonjhar district are Gonashika, Keonjhar city outskirts, Chandrasekhar Mahadev Bodapalasa, Champua, Murgamahadeva, Bileipada, Kusheleswar and the new Shiva temple built in Swam Patna. Apart from this, this Shivaratri is celebrated in all the Shiva temples of the district, from villages to cities.

**Dola Purnima ;**- In Keonjhar, Holi is closely linked to Dola Yatra (Dola Purnima) -the festival of Lord Krishna. During colonial times in Keonjhar, Idols of Krishna and Radha were placed on decorated swings (dola). Processions moved through towns and villages. Devotees applied coloured powders (abira). Temple-centred celebrations were prominent. The royal family often sponsored temple rituals, especially in the main town of Keonjhar. Keonjhar had large populations of Juang, Bhuyan, Ho, and other Adivasi communities. Among tribal groups-Holi was less about Krishna and more about seasonal transition (spring) and agricultural cycles. During that time Bonfires resembling Holika Dahan symbolized purification. Dancing, drumming (especially mandal and dhol), and community feasting were central. Rice beer (handia) was commonly consumed in celebrations.

Holi also reflected social hierarchy-Royal court and upper castes celebrated in temple-centred. Tribal communities celebrated in open fields and village centres. It creates interaction between groups, which increased during fairs (melas), but caste and tribal boundaries remained strong. British administrative reports from the late 19th century describe spring festivals in Odisha as lively but sometimes marked by intoxication and local disputes though Keonjhar was not considered unusually disorderly. It is a combination of tribal spring rites or Vaishnav devotionalism.

**Laxmi Puja;**- Goddess Laxmi, worshipped as the deity of wealth, prosperity, and harvest, held special importance in agrarian Odisha. In Keonjhar, the festival combined Vaishnav-Hindu traditions with local customs influenced by tribal communities (especially Juang and Bhuyan groups). The worship often emphasized grain, paddy, and household prosperity, aligning with the agricultural calendar. The Bhanja rulers supported major Hindu festivals, including Laxmi Puja. In the royal palace, elaborate rituals were conducted by court priests. Offerings included rice, newly harvested crops, sweets, and traditional items symbolizing abundance. The festival reinforced the king's image as a protector of prosperity and dharma. By the late 19th century, Laxmi Puja was observed both domestically and in community spaces. In villages, people decorated homes with jhoti or chita (rice paste designs) and lit lamps. Weekly observances during the month of Margasira (November–December) were particularly significant in Odisha. Local fairs (melas) sometimes accompanied major celebrations, encouraging trade and social gathering. Although the British did not directly interfere in religious practices, colonial administration-Influenced the economic structure (land revenue systems), affecting agrarian prosperity. Encouraged the growth of markets, indirectly expanding festival-related trade. The spread of print culture in Odisha during the late colonial period helped standardize some ritual practices and devotional literature. Laxmi Puja symbolized-Household well-being, Agricultural fertility, and social cohesion.

**Kali Puja and Diwali ;**-Every year, Kali Puja is celebrated in West Bengal, which is the main festival of the entire West Bengal. Although this Kali Puja is celebrated in large numbers in different parts of Odisha, the Kali Puja of Keonjhar is unique and incomparable. Therefore, this Kali Puja has been given the status of the main festival of the district. Kali Puja celebrated in Keonjhar city is celebrated in large numbers for 12 days. During the British period this festival, Keonjhar city looks like a newlywed bride adorned with flower. People from all over Keonjhar come to enjoy this unique Kali Puja. The high arches, colourful flower and decorations make the atmosphere of the gathering pleasant. The fun of walking around small Meena Bazaar is truly unique. The hangings in Meena Bazaar, the availability of various delicious regional food stalls and household items attract people to the fair. Apart from this, clay idol worship of Maa Kali is held in various places in the city. In the city's Kali Padia, Kashipur, Siddha Matha, Old Town, etc. At the Shakti Peetha of Maa Kali in Madhapur, Keonjhar, worship is done according to the Shakti tradition. This Kali Puja is called Deepavali. This Deepavali festival celebrates the advent of light and the disappearance of darkness with the arrival of Maa. On this day, lamps are lit in every house. Along with this, this

festival is fully enjoyed by shooting arrows at night. It is seen that people celebrate this festival happily by distributing sweets.

The Kudumi community of Kendujhar celebrates this holy Kali Puja with great enthusiasm. Along with worshipping chickens at home, Chhankal cakes are also made and eaten on this festival. During this time, 'Go Vandana' and 'Gobardhana' Pujas are the main traditions of the Kudumi community. The main purpose of this tradition is to take care of cows and bulls. They observe this tradition for three days to ensure that they return safely, even if they fall ill with a common cold, lose their way in the forest, or get lost. Therefore, the people of the Kudumi community believe that on the second day of Gobandana Puja, Lord Shiva comes to earth and understands the plight of the cows. Keeping this in mind, the people of the Kudumi community organize Gobandana Puja with great devotion. The Gobandana Puja of the Kudumi community is a unique tradition. They prepare for it with great enthusiasm long before. On the first day of the Gobandana festival, all the cows in the village are bathed in the morning. In the afternoon, they are decorated with flowers, sandalwood and vermilion and taken to the cowshed at the head of the village.

**Khudurukuni Osha ;**-Khudurukuni Osha is one of the traditional folk festivals in Keonjhar, particularly celebrated by young, single girls. It had a strong connection to the area's rural and agricultural way of life during the colonial era. mostly observed from August to September during the month of Bhadraba. It is devoted to Goddess Mangala, believed to bless girls with prosperity, for the good health of her brother, and a suitable marriage. It was observed by fasting, praying, and singing traditional songs, as is now. Girls worshipped the goddess using locally grown flowers, fruits, and handcrafted offerings, exhibiting a strong bond with nature. Khudurukuni songs were sung collectively, capturing women's feelings, goals, social values, and village life. The festival emphasised harmony, teamwork, and cultural education for young girls. Despite British dominance and minimal outside intervention, Khudurukuni Osha persisted in maintaining indigenous traditions. It supported the preservation of local communities' identities by acting as a vehicle for cultural resistance.

**Akshya Tritia ;**- To begin the first paddy sowing, individual family heads performed the Akshya Tritia ceremony on the third day of the moon in the month of Baisakha, which was attended by both tribal and non-tribal people. The man kept up his fast the day before the ceremony, and after finishing both, he husked some paddy. After arranging offerings like vermilion, turmeric powder, and husked rice, he only had one meal in the late hours of the day. The Bhuiyan adhered to several taboos surrounding the Tritia ritual. If a woman was pregnant or in her menstrual cycle, a man was not allowed to conduct a ceremony. The man kept fasting the day before the ceremony, and he husked some paddy after eating. After preparing offerings like husked rice, turmeric powder, and vermilion, he only had one meal in the late hours of the day. On the day of the ceremony, he was not allowed to walk to anyone, smoke, brush his teeth, or eat anything until the ritual was finished. Neither he nor any of his family members were allowed to visit anyone's home until the family head had completed the ritual and taken his food.

**Festivals of Tribal People;**- Tribal people, like other communities, celebrate many festivals. Besides their religious significance, most of these festivals are closely linked to the agricultural cycle. They are observed to mark different periods of economic activity and agricultural operations such as the distribution of forest land for shifting cultivation, felling of trees, ploughing, weeding, sowing, harvesting, and eating new crops. All these activities are solemnized by performing appropriate rituals and worshipping the concerned deities and ancestral spirits.

**Magha Podal ;**- It is a three-day festival celebrated in January–February after the harvest is over. The date of the festival is decided in a meeting of village elders at the Darbar, and all villages are informed a few days in advance so families can prepare for the rituals. The first day is called Khiri Katala, when the Dehuri (village priest) worships the deities and prepares gruel from *katala*, which is offered to the gods and ancestral spirits. The second day is called *Poda* (burning). A small hut made of freshly cut wood and thatched with wild grass is built near the Gaisiri. The Dehuri creates a new fire by rubbing two sticks together, and the hut is burned. The ashes are believed to bring good luck. The last day is called *Pitha Khiani* (eating of cakes). The Dehuri worships the deities, offers new grains, and sows a handful of paddies on the ashes as a symbol of prosperity.

**Kath Jatra ;**- The Kath Jatra ceremony, which is held in January or February, like many other festivals. This ceremony was not celebrated on any definite calendar day of the year. A day was fixed by the village for holding rituals. The

Dehuri installed two pieces of Sal logs, one dry and the other green, at the Darbar. Unless this ceremony was performed, the Bhuyan did not eat fried mohua flowers, which were eaten beforehand only by boiling.

**Tusu Parab** :- Living in society, humans are interested in the harmony of communal life. To get the divine experience of this harmony, they celebrate festivals traditionally. These festivals are mainly celebrated based on the traditions and beliefs and religious concepts of communal life. One such tradition-based festival is the Tusu festival, which is the main festival of the Kudumi community living in Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and other parts of Odisha. The Kudumi community of Keonjhar celebrates this festival with great enthusiasm for a long month. Magh Sankranti or Makar Sankranti is the day of celebration of this festival. A month before this, the young girls of the Kudumi community make an idol of Tusu Thakurani. The idol is installed in a house in the village (some in the clubhouse, some in Bhagavat Tungi, and some in their own house) and is traditionally worshipped. Every day in the evening, while worshipping, young girls of the village sing the Tusu song. The song sung during the lighting of the lamp in the evening is –

“Salita Dilan Dilan Sarger Batilo

Dilan Sarger Batilo.

Sandha diat bahir na ghare kula batilo

Ghare kula batilo

Bahir na ghare kula batilo”

Similarly, at different times of the month, many other songs are sung by females of the Kudumi community while going to dispose of the Tusu -

“Bali Bali Aail Gaadi

Aail Tusur Lal Sari

Kan Sariita Lib Tusu

Yan Sariita Bas Bhari

Haliya Halta Bikre Dada

Ar Tusuke De Shankha”

But there is a historical fact about Tusu. Various historians have given their opinion and accepted Tusu as a historical character. Tusu is considered to be the beautiful and graceful royal daughter of Chittor. These historians believe that after the fall of the Chittor fort, the Sultan fell in love with the Hindu royal daughter 'Tusmani'. The Sultan ordered the commander to bring her and present her to the Sultan. To save herself, 'Tusmani' saved her virginity by jumping into the river. The day she jumped into the river was the Magh Sankranti. Therefore, the unmarried girls of the Kudumi community celebrate it as a festival in memory of Tusumani and celebrate it as Tusmani Parba. This month-long festival ends on Makar Sankranti after the immersion of Tusu. It is believed that the word Tusu has been come from Tusmani and tusmani to tusumani, later transformed into Tusu. In fact, young girls who are not familiar with this unique self-renunciation have adopted it as the *Kumari Brata*.

**Karama** :- This festival was observed preferably in the months of August- September in Keonjhar and in the month of November-December in the western Odisha. Only a few Bhuyans observed this festival in Keonjhar. The aim of the karama puja is to be blessed with a child and lead a happy and prosperous family life. Four or five days earlier, the Bunyan's made necessary arrangements for the ritual. On the appointed day, the Dehuri and the girls of the village fasted for the whole day. The Dehuri planted the karma branch on the ground and worshipped it by offering rice-grains, molasses, milk and sweets to the branch. The girls provided fried Ganjei to the Dehuri for offering it to karma Devata. The next morning, the Dehuri worshipped the sacred plant and sacrificed a chicken contributed by the girls. In every seventh year of the worship a girl was obliged to contribute a chicken for sacrifice in honour to Karama Devata. After the plant was worshipped, the Dehuri uprooted it.

**CONCLUSION:** - The fair and festivals of the people of Keonjhar are more than just celebrations; they are a deep reflection of their identity, values, and strong bond with nature. Each festival, like Makar Sankranti and the Bandana festival, carries rich traditions rooted in agriculture and spirituality. These events bring families and neighbours together, strengthening bonds and creating a sense of belonging. Through music, dance, and storytelling, the Keonjhar people pass down their cultural heritage to younger generations, ensuring these traditions live on. As we move forward, it's important to recognize how these festivals promote ecological awareness and sustainable practices. The Keonjhar community shows how cultural traditions can align with nature, offering valuable lessons on resilience and sustainability. In today's rapidly changing world, where local customs are often at risk, it's crucial to preserve these celebrations. By supporting efforts to keep these traditions alive, we honour the Keonjhar people's heritage and enrich our shared cultural history, celebrating the beauty of diversity and our connection to the world around us.

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