



Festival, Faith and Identity: Understanding Mage Porob among the Ho Community

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Abstract

Fairs and festivals are integral part of the cultural life of the Ho tribe, These are mainly associated with the various stages of agricultural operation in different seasons starting from the sowing to the post-harvest activities. Cultivation is the primary occupation, where the life of Ho tribe is dependent upon crops and monsoons,

Kol, Kolha, Ho, Munda, are four tribes who reside in the Districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Balasore, Jajpur, Sundargarh (Bonai Area), Sambalpur, Dhenkanal district of Odisha State. These four tribes though named differently, are basically one and the same tribe. All these tribes are generally known as "Kolha" in Mayurbhanj and Balasore. In Keonjhar and Jajpur districts they are popularly known as "Munda" Tribe. But in their land records they are recorded as "Kolha". They are also called "Munda" because the rich, wealthy and respectful person in their society or the head of the village is known as "Munda". The other name "Ho" means Man. Their language is also called Ho. In this article the word "Ho" shall denote Kol, Ho, Kolha and Munda tribe.

The Ho are agricultural people. They depend on agriculture for food. Their main crop is paddy. All their seasonal festivals are connected to agricultural cycle. They observe festivals relating to sowing, eating of new crop, harvesting of paddy etc. The seed

sowing festival is known as "Herah Parab", the festival for first eating of new crop is known as "Jomnama Parab" and the harvesting festival is called "Mage Parab".

(1)The using of new sal leaves, eating of Mahua (Madkam) flowers, Mango fruit and worshipping the deities in sale or Desauli (sacred grove) by offering Sal flowers, Mohua flower or Mango and other flowers and fruits is known as "Baa Parab"(2) In the month of June-July "Herah Parab,(3) September-october, "Jamnama Parab", (4)January-February "Mage Parab" and February-March Baa Parab" etc are celebrated . In all these festivals, village deities (Desauli Bonga, saale bonga etc) are offered blood of animals (goats and chicken) in the sacred grove. The ancestors who reside in the sacred kitchen also are venerated. In these occasions the Ho people enjoy their lives by taking meat and rice, drinking rice beer (Diyeng) and dancing and singing.

Key words: Ho, Festivals, Parab, Desauli bonga, ancestors, Mageparab, Baa parab, Herah parab, Jamnama parab.



Introduction

Among the festivals celebrated by the Hos from the time immemorial, "Mage Parab" is the biggest and grandest. They observe this festival with much pomp and grandeur. The Mage festival is celebrated when the harvesting of paddy is over and all people have sufficient food materials in their granaries to prepare food and rice beer. They share the festivals with their neighbours and invite sisters, maternal aunts, maternal uncles and other relatives to participate in the Parab. They come in large number to enjoy the festivities with various gifts such as a pot of Diyeng (rice beer). In this festival the rice beer with eating of rice and meat are plenty consumed and all people irrespective of age, sex and status wear new clothes and gifted with new clothes to their servants. The Ho people of all villages do not observe this festival in a particular day. The auspicious day to celebrate the festival is decided by the village people before Mage Chanduh (Mage Month). Generally every year after 15th of January, the celebration of Mage Festival starts. The pleasant sound of musical instruments such as Dama (Nagera) Dumeng (Madal), Rutu (Flute) and Banam (Fiddle) is heard throughout the Ho village.

Why and how Mage Festival is celebrated or how it is initiated-?

There are several stories concerning the beginning of this festival. One of the stories is like this. Long long ago Ho people inhabited in a certain place. With passage of time their number multiplied. It caused hardship to them. They found it difficult to find places to stay and the cultivated land was fragmented, hence there was no sufficient food grain produced. Hence they moved out in search of land. When they found a fertile land for cultivation they decided to stay there. But whether this particular place is safe to stay?

To know this fact they tied two chickens, one red cock, and another hen with mixed colour of yellow and brown, which has not yet hatched eggs. In the selected place after promising to perform sacrifice of these creatures in the event of the place is fit for living, they went back keeping a pot of paddy there. In the next morning they came back to this place to verify whether any harm was inflicted on the chicken, whether the pot of paddy is still intact or the quantity of paddy has increased or decreased? In case nothing has happened to the chickens and the paddy is intact or increased, then the place is considered to be auspicious for living. They cleared the jungle and settled down there. In case the chickens are harmed and the pot of paddy is decreased, then they leave the place and search for another place.

Thus the place is selected, they settled down and after completion of one year they sacrificed these two chicken in honour of God (Bonga) who guards and protects or looks after the people of a village i.e. Hatugiram - Desauli. After settling down in the selected place for a year, when there was sufficient rain for cultivation, they had good harvest, they lived without any hardship, sacrificed these chickens and enjoyed the occasion by dancing and singing, taking of rice and meat and drinking diyeng (ricebeer) with great joy. The celebration was repeated next year also. Later a black hen was sacrificed for Bagiya Bonga, the jungle deity. This activity was repeated year after year and continuing in all Ho villages till now. In every Ho villages there is the seat of Goddess Desauli and also the village priest-Diuri

.WHY IS THIS FESTIVAL CALLED MAGE POROB?

In old days, when the sacrifice was to take place in the saale, the chickens were not eating the heaps of rice grain (punjitadchauli). The Diuri and his assistants Tingujuliko were worried why the Desauli Hatugiram is displeased? They prayed but chicken did not eat rice grain. If chickens do not eat it, it is not a good omen. So, other people present there started shouting in Mage Kaji i.e. obscene language. Thereafter the chickens ate the rice. The people thought that the Desauli god is happy only when Mage Kaji (obscene language) is spoken. Hence the practice of speaking of obscene language has started. As both male and female utter Mage Kaji during this festival probably because of that the festival is named as "Mage Parab".



With the beginning of Mage Chanduh (Mage month) after the harvesting of paddy is completed, people start discussion regarding celebrating Mage Parab. First activity is "Jantala"

. On this day, the celebration of Mage Parab is fixed. On the appointed date,(1) the first occasion is "oteili",

(2)The next day is "Gurih Parab", (3) the next day is "MarangParab", (4) the next day is "Jatara or mage parab" and (5) the next day is "Harmageya". On the "Har-mageya" day all worship relating to Mage Parab is completed.

What is Jantala Bonga

The Jantala Bonga is the sacrifice held on the occasion of purifying the Desauli (sacred grove) about two weeks prior to the Mage Festival (Parab). Usually a she goat and a cock is offered. The colour of goat is reddish brown and colour of cock is red. The two assistant priests -Jomsimkinj also sacrifice the cock.

The villagers collect money to purchase a goat and a cock. All householders contribute in cash and kind. Rice collected from all households is deposited at the house of Diuri. The rice is fermented to prepare rice beer. The wife of village priest prepares diyeng the rice beer out of adowachauli (rice husked without first boiled) remaining in fasting and after taking bath. On the day of Jantala, the Diuri along with his assistants Jomsimkinj and TinguJuliko go to Jayer or Saale (Desauli- sacred grove) with puja items i.e. goat, cock and adowachauli, holong, chatulundih, one new chelang etc. The Diuri does not eat ricme that means, on that day the diuri remain fasting and even some Diuris do not drink diyeng.

The main activities of jantala are (1) Purifying the Desauli and Hatugiram (2) Deciding the dates for Mage Festivals. Hence these activities are to purify village and village God for Mage festival.

OTE ILI:

Ote ili is a sacrificial action held two days before the Mage festival. Rice beer (diyeng) is poured into vessels so as to overflow into the earth (Ote). Some call it 'Tumutu'.

On this day the courtyard of houses are cleaned by spreading the cow dung with water by women folks. For the Diuri, it is a fasting day. People of the village assemble at the courtyard of Diuri with diyng. Diuri pours collected rice beer into vessel to overflow into the earth and utters the following words "Ape hamhoko dumhoko DesauliBonga Kajiyai penutumaibe tananj, Ape chetanhatu, latar hatu-kakako-Apuko-tatako-nanako-nenmusinj-nenmusinj-reh-Sebameya-salayaibe, dutamaibe-Karjiyaibe". "You ancestors inform (tell) Desauli God- your uncles, fathers, grandfathers, great grandfathers of upper and lower parts of village, on this day we will worship you, adore you, serve you, tell him further to invite his daughters, sisters, all relative to participate in the Mage Parab to take food and to drink rice beer which we will serve in plenty.

After ote-ili is poured and the prayer is made, next function is to pour the rasi. Rasi is the liquid from the fermentation on top of a rice beer brew. The rasi is poured into earth (ote), the pouring of ili or rasi is done so that coming year adequate amount of rain (dah-gama) will pour in to ensure good crops. At the time of pouring in of rasi the HatuDiuri (village priest) utters the following words "Tisinj do desauli, hatugiram, oteili, birilinjduletana, nenmusinjsebameya-Salameya, nehdonjdili-amtan, bokam-tan, hon-era, misi-era, geyhon-hatamhon, hagahon-Kutumhonko, dili-hjuh, Jom-me, bokanujuhJom-me, en musinj mage porobenj, seabamtana-salamtana, nehdonjemamtana, chedamtana, dili-yamtana, baka-aam-tananj."

"That means-To day Desauli, hatugiram (village god), I am pouring in ote(earth)-ili, birili, on this day will offer puja in your name, this extending invitation to you, please invite your daughters, sisters, your nieces, nephews, your near relatives to participate in the festival (puja) will be offering puja to you on the occasion of



Mage festival". He also names other minor gods and goddesses like Sira-hon. Siragokoe and request them to inform to the "Desauli". Then names of the other gods and goddesses -OteSorsotoko, Sirsatsotoko, Oteguni, Birguni, Hons, etc also are uttered by him to tell them the fixed date of Mage feast to "Desauli". After the pouring of ili or rasi to "Desauli" is over all people present, those who brought ili, rasi, those who have come there to witness, this function, his assistants like Jom-simko etc drink the diyeng and rasi. By this time the evening sets in, the drum beaters start. beating dumeng and dama and people start dancing on the place where diyeng and rasi are poured.

The invitation ceremony is ote ili. The gowari (beseches) are offered by diuri to Desauli for inviting him to participate in Mage festival. In one of the prayers he asks the ancestor spirits to inform the village God and on the other prayer, the invitation is directly extended to Desauli. He further prays other minor gods to give the message of Mage Feast to Desauli.

GURIH PARAB

This day is also called Gurih Parab of Mage feast. This day the floor or courtyard are cleaned with cow dung. This is the previous day of MarangParab. The women folk remain very busy in this day. After cleaning the floor or courtyard by noon they clean cloths and take bath. During daytime no puja is offered but in the evening, the night meal is cooked the same along with diyeng are offered to Hamhoko-Dum hokos (ancestors) by the head of the family in the Ading (kitchen). The specially fermented ili for puja is not shared with others. Only family members drink this. For others separate handia (rice-beer) is fermented. In the evening the DamaDumeng are beaten. Male and female dance and sing songs..

MARANG PARAB:

On MarangParab old and young wash their clothes in the morning and take bath. After doing that they go to take bath. Diuri, by mid-day, collects all puja articles. To help theDiuri, his assistants arrive at his house in the morning. They fence off a small area by small bushes in the courtyard. This fenced area is known as churui in Ho language.

Male folk in the morning trim their hair and shave their beards. The young men repair their flutes (Rutuko), fiddles (Banams) and the old men talk about the worship and repair the Dumang (Madal) and Dama (Drum). As the women remain busy in household chores they do not get time to prepare rice. By midday only they drink diyeng and some of them drink rasi in the morning hours.

By mid-day the assistants of Diuri-Jomsimkinj, Orang-sakowakinj and two Tingu Julikinj, assemble at his house to help him in arranging puja articles. For these people,marang porob is a fasting day. Of course they are permitted to drink rasi. They clean the churui by cow dung and prepare holong (flour).

By midday people with beating of Madal, Nagera come to Diuri's house. When people from hamlets arrive there, they proceed to the particular pond to take bath where every year the ceremonial bath is taken by the village priest. The lead is taken by Diuri, then Jomsimkinj, followed by Kolomlah and Tingujulikinj and at the last Orong Sakowakinj. Except the cloths on the waist, upper parts of the body remain naked. They do not use any soap, they do not rub their bodies while taking this ceremonial bath. They immerse in the water and come out. Women folk do not participate in this bath. The Diuri takes bath two times. When the Diuri is returning from bath his wife meets him halfway, along with Tingujudikinj and two helpers (Dengakinj). The wife of Diuri and her party cross the Diuri and his group on right side. One of the Orong Sakowa follows the wife of the Diuri upto the pond blowing the Sakowa. The wife of Diuri comes back to the house along with other women of the village. All others come back to the Diuri's house and then they do not go to their respective houses.



After taking the first bath, all arrange the puja articles; they prepare taben (flat rice), chauliata (fried husked rice grains), adowachauli (rice husked without being first boiled). They crack upon ramba (black gram) sasa sakam, lamah (the seed of rum creeper). After arranging the puja articles, they keep them in separate kokomba (leaf bag-funnel) and put them into gantah (four cornered basket). They again go to the pond for second bath. The beaters of Dama (Nagera) and Dumang (Madal) follow Diuri by beating these instruments. By the time the Diuri returns after taking second bath, his wife along with Tingujuliko with beating of Dama, Dumeng goes to take bath. On the mid-way when they meet each other one of the OrongSakowa (one who blows a conch) returns back to the pond with the wife of Diuri. The people of one hamlet accompany the Diuri and the people of another hamlet accompany his wife. After taking second bath they send Kolomlaw (a person assigned to go before the Diuri to the place where a sacrifice is to be performed) in order to level the place, clean it with cow dung where punji (heaps of rice grains) will be put and over which sacrifice will be performed. Mage sacrifice is done near the Desauli (sacred grove). After that he returns to the house of Djuri. On his arrival the Diuri comes out to go to the place to offer sacrifice.

Now the wife of Diuri takes the lead, she is followed by her two assistants (Tingujulikinj). In a short distance she is followed by the Diuri along with his assistants. The Diuri carries, the dalagantah (four concerned basket) with puja articles under his arm. After him there remain two assistants-Jomsimkinj, they carry the chickens tied on their legs, hanging on a stick one of the chicken is red cock (arahsandi) and the other is baramisri (mixture of yellow and brown) kaluti a hen which has not yet hatched eggs) i.e. yellow brown virgin hen, and one black chicken. This black chicken is small one. The two blowers of horn (Orong Sakowakinj) remain in the last. They blow the horn while following the Diuri's party. They follow by the beaters of Nagera (Dama) and Dumaeg (Madal). All assemble at the place of sacrifice.

MAGE BONGA REYAH PAITI - PANAITI (The works related to Mage festival)

On arrival at the place of sacrifice, the Diuri keeps the four concerned baskets down there. The Jomsimkinj also keep the Chickens down there. Orong Sakowakinj stands in a line with the Diuri along with the Tingujulikinj. The women folk remain standing in that line on the lengapa (left hand side). All others stand on the left hand side of the Diuri. JomSimkinj remains near the Diuri on standing. The Diuri puts moistened holong (flour) on his both ears, shoulders (taran), arms (supu) and anklets (andukata). He then prepares seven kokowas (compartments) by using dry holong for the punji (heaps of rice) at the place of sacrifice. In all seven okowas he keeps small amount of taben, chauliata, adowachauli, lamah, ramba. After that one Jomsim washing the legs and feather of the red cock and hand over it to the Diuri. The Diuri sacrifices the red cock. The chokah of lamahjang (the covering of lamah seed), tied down compactly are placed in the front. In case the covering of lamahjang are not tightly tied down, then that year the tigers, leopards, panthers get very angry and roar around. At the time of pronouncing the sacrificial formula over the red cock the Diuri does goworl (beseeches) like this "OchaDesauliTisinj do, Sebam-tananj, salamtananj), Hisi Randi Honko, Do'nsiPorjaHanko, lekakom-gandakom, chetan-Hatu, Latar-Hatu.Nel-urum, Atenurumkome; Adinj Nida TalaNidaSen Tan Tundang Tan-re, Buru Badchom, Saan-SakamtalitanBanjitanreMerakula, MeraBinja, Meradiri, Mera-Sampura, Hatudisum, Di-Dumburi. Tala Toro Mari-Rogo- Jugiyameram Bolo-Ichi, Meram-Son- lichiya, Hoyoko-Gamako, Hudinj Patukom, MarangPatukom, Gotiltanakir, DahgeDoromente,Denj Buru, Daponjorentege, Hudinj Hutumentege, Merang Hutumentage Damanam, Dumang-nam, Imung-ujuhkecher Uuheme". (This is like a Mantra in Ho Language which is the preist saying in front of Gram Debati as to safe to family member, villager and all the property with the cattle, goat etc.)

Its meaning is-"Hey! Desauli today am serving you, worshipping you, adoring you, count the twenty widows, thirty subjects of upper hamlets, lower hamlets, please recognize them, while they roam in the dark-midnight, when they go to jungle to collect leaves, firewood, cut sabai grass, etc may they suffer no harm from a tiger, a



snake, a stone may not suddenly come upon them, please do not allow entry of diseases -small pox, cholera etc into our village, please bring sufficient rain to our village from all available sources."

During the sacrifice the young and old male, female dances in joy in tune with the resounding sound of Dama and Dumeng. After the sacrifice is over, the Jomsimkinj carry the sacrificed chickens. Diuri takes the lead keeping the four-cornered basket under his arm. Orongsakowakinj (two persons who blow horns for the Mage sacrifice) follow the Diuri blowing the Sakowa (horn). The drumbeaters and dancers follow Diuri and his party while beating drums and dancing. All they come to Diuri's house. Then the dancers and drumbeaters after dancing for sometimes inside the churui, leave the place and go to their respective hamlets. They dance throughout the night in the Akala (dancing ground) till the sunrise in the next morning. After the offering of Imsalamko to Ha-am-Hoko Du-Um Hoko, the Diuri and Jomsnkimnj eat the baked meat and drink rice beer (diyeng). Rice beer prepared especially for sacrificial purpose known as matikandaili is strained using a strainer (chala) either by TinguJuliking or Orongsakowa and are served to Jomsim Kinj, Orongsakowakinj. Tingujudikinj (all assistants of Diuri). It is not given to others. After rice is cooked inside the churui, the Diuri offer these to the ancestor spirits. In the night they sleep there and guard the leftover food for the night. Jomsimkinj and Orongsakowakinj do not go to their houses and all sleep there till morning. In the evening all household offer rice, curry and rice beer to the ancestors in the adding (inner part of kitchen). After offering the food items to ancestors all people eat and drink.

BASI MUSING:

The day after the main day of festival, Basimusing, in the court of the Diuri and his assistants have some works to do. Leftover meat is cooked. Cooked food and ricebeer are offered to spirits inside the churui. After this the churui is dismantled by the Diuri and his assistants. By midday male, female of the village come to the house of Diuri dancing and singing and beating the Dama and Dumeng. Both male and female dance in the courtyard the Diuri's house while the churui is being dismantle. This dance is known as "Churui Susun" i.e. a term used for the custom of dancing upon the dismantled churui which has been setup in the courtyard of the house of the Diuri for Mage Parab, which is broken down the following day (Basi Musing) on which occasion the villagers come with drums and dance. After that these assembled people go back to their respective hamlets along with the drums. Sometimes they are served ricebeer by the members of family of the Diuri. The females also return to their hamlets dancing together along with the drumbeaters. After the dismantling of churui, the work of the Diuri is over. After this the Jomsim, Orongsakowa and Tingujulis can go back to their houses. Then the Diuri accompanied by Orongsakowa, go to different houses and they are served diyeng. They relish with immense joy. After the sunset all stay in their houses. The works of Jomsimkinj and Orongsakowakinj are over. On this day they enjoy the evening with their invited guests- the married sisters and their sons and daughters etc. In the evening the ancestors are venerated in the ading (inner room of house where cooking is done). On the Marang Parab Musing the non-vegetarian food is taken by the priest and his assistants. On Basi-Musing the non- vegetarian meal is cooked in all houses.

HAR MAGE

The second day after the main day (MarangParab) of the Mage Feast, the Mage spirits are driven out of the village. This day is also called Mage Moroeh. Mageya spirits are found in the jungle and often troublesome hunters. There are also many servant spirits. If these spirits who were invited to the village to get veneration by Diuri during Mage Festival remain in the village, it is believed they cause sickness to human beings and to domesticated animals. These are malicious spirits. As soon as the festival is over they are driven out of the village. At the dawn from every house a person comes out along with either one stick (dandah) or one broken tin container, or one torn winnowing baskets. Beating these they beat the houses shouting the words. "Haeh, haeh" (a noise made to drive away evil spirits). This way Badams are driven away. Badams are dwarf like



malign spirits (considered to be servant spirits to the Jugni spirits) (Juguni a bonga who inflects epidemics and serious illness). After driving out activities are completed, these dandah (stick), chachahhatah (broken winnowing basket) etc are kept in an oblique way (sanditah) in a place outside the village. Keeping these articles to gandlested (to block a road by putting across for the malign spirits) they go to village to search for a hendesim (black chicken). They find it out from any body's house. After collecting the black chicken they collect lamah (the fruit of the rum creeper), tirilminj), (sesamumindicum), rambah (black gram) and come to the place where they had kept the dandah in gandlested way (blocking the road way). They collect these articles and drive out the bagiya spirits (the spirits are believed to control the jungle) to the place where every year they are driven to. They keep the dandahko (sticks) there in a row in an oblique way. They do not go beyond that place. They do not step over. They remain in this side. They sprinkle the ashes upto the dandah and keep quiet. One of them offers puja. After they keep the brought articles, they fry rambah, tilminj and chauli (husked rice) in a kechoh (a piece of broken chatu and earthen pot). After the frying is over one who knows how to worship offer these items.

"You the hill spirits of people killed by tiger, you the servant of mountain jungle spirits more important spirit of the hunt, we have ceremoniously dismissed you, we are driving you away from our village, we are driving you away by winnowing, you go back to roam around mountain, hill, jungle, you return back to your places within limit of your dwellings. Our plough cattle, let them remain healthy, when they enter into jungle for grazing grass and for eating leaves, may you send no fog upon them or they not be over taken by mist or fog. (Meaning, they are not lost in the jungle)". After uttering the above words and offering the black chicken to Bagiye spirits, the worshipper throws the living black chicken to the front side. Others present throw stones on the black chicken. Then someone goes to the stoned chicken and collects it and then it is the persons standing there, utter obscene languages (Mage Kaji). Two persons carry the dead bird with the help of branch of Ichah tree. People come to the house of Diuri. The Diuri throws some seeds of tilminj and adowachauli on it. These people go to their hamlets and keep the bird in a place where every year the sacrificed black chicken is kept. This chicken is not cooked in any house. This bird is kept in a tree and after the rice is fried, the chicken is baked in a leaf pocket.

With the end of Harmageya activities, the Mage Porob comes to an end. Before the sun is set all invited guests are given farewell. The village looks empty.

Conclusion

The Ho tribe still preserve their own festivals to propitiate the deities but they celebrate them with total freedom of feasting, singing, dancing and drinking. They offer prayers to their deities with dance and songs and sacrifice of animals and birds to please the ancestors, Gods and Goddesses. The fairs and festivals are observed by the tribes throughout the year with the hope to obtain an intimate relationship with God, Goddesses, ancestral spirits and other supernatural forces that would bring them prosperity and immunity from fatal diseases. Animals and birds sacrifice, songs, dance and community feasts and drinking of liquor form an integral part of the celebrations.

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