

BARGARH & DHANUYATRA

Sri Ratan K. Pani

Bargarh lies in the Western zone of Orissa aptly known as the "rice bowl of the state" despite having a drought prone Sub-Division of Padampur. To its credits, the world center of acclaimed Sambalpuri Bastralaya is situated in the heart of this town whose founder is Late Padmashree Kruthartha Acharya. The Sambalpuri tie & dry textiles has all the way won the impression of all and sundry especially for its colour and ethnic pattern. Master weaver of this unique art Sri Kunja Bihari Meher of Barpali has been honoured by his Excellency, President of India with Padmashree Award and silpi guru Samman by Govt. of India.

Barpali, 18 Kilometers from Bargarh is the birth place of Nature Poet Gangadhar Meher. The early 20th century poet is instrumental in given a new direction to the poetry of the state. His subtle interpretation of the nature earned him the sobriquet "Wordsworth of Orissa" While that is a tribute, it is often misleading. For Meher merged in his poetry the sensuous with the natural. With a diction that belonged to the roots of Oriya ethos, the poet handle with felicity the subject of nature.

Kumbhari another village under Barpali block has its Brajeswari Temple Where only the Peacock Tail, which adorns Lord Krishana, gets worshipped. Besides, Kumbhari's "Sabda Nrutay" is also of precious culture wealth. It is said that " Sabda Nrutay" is the crude and primitive dance of Odissi form. And still more interesting is the fact that this dance form has been identified only in Kumbhari & no other Northern of Central part of India, a fact confirmed by Orissa Sangeet Natak Academy and Odissi Dance Acedemy.

Many place of this district also treasures the war sites of veer Surendra Sai, the peerless fighter during first war of independence of 1857. Ghes is the birth place of Veer Hate Singh, the only Oriya fighter Who suffered incarceration in the Andaman Cellular Jail. During Quit India movement 32 Young freedom fighters of Panimora village enblock courted arrest.

Bhatli, located 16 kilometers from this town, houses the Temple of Shyam Bihari, reckoned as Indian's second Khatu Rajastan. Bhatli's Car Festival of Lord Dadhi Baban is also of much significance as available records related in to the famous Car festival of Puri.

Nrusinghanath, the largest seat of Nurshima worship lies in the foot-hills of famed Gandhamardhan, popularly known as " Ayurvedists Paradise" is located at 120 kilometers from Bargarh. This pilgrimage carries with its episodes from Puranic Age to Buddhist age. Even Huen Tsang has made reference of this place as Po-Lo-Mo-Li-Ki-Li (referred to as Parimalgiri in Orissan history). Papaharini Springing out of the womb of Gandhamardhan besides containing medicinal value is said to wash away all sign and is called as "Chattisgarh ki Ganga" by the people of neighbouring Chattishgarh state and M.P. It is the only pilgrimage where all the ceremonies from birth to death is performed. The clam and serenity of the place inspired Late Ms. Parvati Giri, one of the awakened hand maidens of Gandhiji to establish orphanage here.

Prof. Prahallad Pradhan, the illustrious Indologist is a true son of the soil. Born in village Antapali of this district, he rose to become the first Oriya scholar in Pali and Chinese language whose Devnagari editions of "Abhi Dharma Sammuvhhaya" and "Abhi Dharma Kosa Bhasya" brought him international fame.

Bargarh in fact is a place of awakening of many an event social, economic, political and cultural etc. Pandit Jawaharlal Neheru, Dr.Ram Mohanar Lohia, Achrya Vinovba Bhave, Sundar Lal Bahuguna and the like have paid they are visit on this place. Life is never in unicoloured. It is rather a mosaic. And if there was ever a strange mosaic, it is Bargarh.

PLAYING MYTH IN REAL LIFE

It is a destination where from the commoner to the highest elite do get together. Dhanu yatra, the eleven day long annual extravaganza, thus recognizes Bargarh in the cultural map of India. It is at par with the standard of Orissan heritage and culture. It's an open air theatre stretching more than five square kilometers and comprising a village and a town in between. The cast too is lengthy; virtually every villager has a role to play. And from the entire eleven days, the people of Bargarh oblige what king Kansa and not the district administration orders.

The mythical demon king, who was killed by his young nephew Krishana, rules Bargarh town with iron hand to stop. In this eleven day festival, the entire past is re-enacted blow by blow. Considered to be one of the largest open air drama enacted anywhere in modern time, the central theme of this festival is borrowed from the "Krishana Leela" and "Mathura Vijay".

The geographical setting of Bargarh municipality area is virtually conforms to "Mathura" where king Kansa holes sway. The river "Jeera" is, well, the Yamuna river across which is situated Ambapali village, the "Gopapura", where Balak Krishna is growing.

What a prize is such a festival is! No doubt, it symbolises the victory of good over the evil. The death of Kansa at the very sight of teenager Krishna reminds us of great leela which took place more than five thousand years ago. This festival appears to be synthesis of stage, theatre and cinema is held within a period of eleven days preceding the 'Pous Purnima'. Unlike stage play or cinema, the acts are played at different places as laid in puranic description and visitors have to move from place to place to see the play live.

The eleven days enactment stars with the marriage of Devaki, the only sister of demon King Kansa with Basudev and ends with the killing of Kansa. In this large open air theater, the sense shifts from place to place as Kansa send demon warriors to Gopapura to kill Krishna. Finally, on Kansa's invitation, Krishna travels to Mathura. As he emerges from across the river 'Yamuna' in a beautiful decorate chariot, the final act of the epic is enacted. Lord Krishna turns the table on his maternal uncle killing him in the much to relief of the people of Mathura(Bargarh).

Kansa's royal strolling around the Bargarh town atop a caparisoned elephant along with his 'Mahamantri' and soldiers is the only one of its kind. Who can escape his wrath? In the 70's, once Anwar Hussain, the brother of Padmashree Nagris, (matinee idol of yester years) also was out witted. The National highway then running through Bargarh town is yet treasuring that much discussed Hussain's perplexion he was bound to pay a certain amount of money to Late Yudhistir Satapathy, the irrepressible Kansa of yester years. There are so incident and remembrances associated with Dhanu Yatra. Late Dukhishyam Swain, the legendary villain of Oriya film industry had expressed his desire to enact the role of Kansa, but his desire went with him. What makes the entire drama lively is Kansa is given the magisterial power and any one can be healed up from MLAs to officers to doctors- and punished for any negligence. and all comply with his dictates. Former Chief Minister of Orissa Late Biju Pattnaik who was incidentally visiting western Orissa during Dhanu Yatra in the year 1994, was 'summoned' to the durbar of Kansa. Biju obliged.

Dhanu Yatra transcends caste, creed and colour & pulls lakhs of people from far and wide. The gloom and monotony of the entire year thus gets refreshed with new life and zest. The enthusiasts who had given a move to this festival on independency of India really deserve homage and rich tribute.

Although it is not known how and when the festival began, elders say it was around independence. However, enactment of "Krishna Leela" traces its history to as early as end of 19th Century in Bargarh. Over the year, the fete has undergone change style and pomp but the theme-truth triumphs over tyranny-remains. The cast has changed, so is the shimiana from 'Jamuna' leaves that were used to shade the stage.

APPROCH

Bargarh lies along National Highway 6 connecting Kolkotta to Mumbai. It is well connected with all weather motorable road from the state capital of Bhubaneswar and Raipur. These two are incidentally the two nearest located airports with Boeing flights to major cities. Bargarh has direct train links with Kolkotta, New Delhi, Chennai and Allepy. Sambalpur is the nearest town and is 52 Kms from Bargarh with bus services in every 10 minutes.