

## **THE BARGARH DHANUYATRA SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC RELEVANCE**

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Dramatic festivals of Indian as a mass entraining means of Socio-cultural communication have enjoyed the reverence and popularity all over the world since 15<sup>th</sup> century. Most popular among such cultural media are the religious festive dramas based on tales from Hindu mythology; on which most of the Indian Children brought up. These were the main instruments by which the highest traditions of religion and culture were preserved and transmitted chiefly by oral means in living dramatic performances; giving glimpse of life as not ending only happily. Conflict of Interest between good and the evil disturbs the social system. The Almighty manifest himself in every age to establish right order to save the right people by destroying the ungracious anti-socials.

“Paritranay Sadhunam, Binasayacha Duskrutam,  
Dharma Sansthapanarthaya, Sambahavami Yuge Yuge”

To deliver the above message of God-head to the Society, the Bargarh Dhanu Yatra is an organized programme of discreet dramatic performance for popular mass entertainment based on the story of “Kansa Badha”- the demon king Kansa with all his evil forces killed by Krishna, the Almighty, to restore desired social order.

Like many traditional festivals of India, following ceremonial Calendar geared to the important events of the agricultural cycle, the Dhanu Yatra was started after harvesting season of the year 1947-48 just after independence of India as reflection of joyous atmosphere in the society for the end of British misrule. Since then it is performed every year at the end of the harvesting of paddy, the major crop of the locality. It starts from the 5<sup>th</sup> day of “Pausa Sukla” to end on “Pausa Purnima”. During the 11 days the entire area of Bargarh town and adjacent sub-urban parts of Bargarh Block like Cement Nagar, Padhanpali, Jamurda, Tora etc. render in to the Kingdom of Kansa- “The Mathura Nagari”. The river Jeera flowing by the side of Bargarh transcribed as river Jamuna and “Ambapali” at the other side of the river becomes “Gopapura” as per the mythological nomenclature. All around these places. The whole festival is distributed as follows-

- Day-1** Inaugural procession of king Ugrasen from Samaleswari Temple to Raj Darbar- the main erected stage, wedding of Kansa's sister Debaki with Basudev at Radhakrishna Temple, Kansa dethrones his father Ugrasen and takes over kingship. Hears heavenly message that the cause of his death will be born of Devaki and imprisons the couple in the "Karagar" erected at Ramji Temple.
- Day-2** Immediately after the birth of Krishna in Karagar he is taken away by Basudev to Gopapura following his instruction, gets exchanged with Yasoda's daughter "Bijuli Kanya" at birth. Kansa starts "Digbijiya" at Mathura encouraging evil forces to rule over others.
- Day-3** Hearing the birth of 8<sup>th</sup> issue of Devaki, Kansa tries to kill Bijulikanya at karagar, she evaporates into heaven warning Kansa of the incarnation of Krishna at Gopapura "Nandotsava" festivities starts at Gopapura on arrival of Krishna and Balaram.
- Day-4** Kansa sends demons like Putana, Baka, Dhenu, Truna, Sandha, Sakata etc. to kill Krishna from Mathura, at Gopapura Krishna kills all of them.
- Day-5** Kansa, getting frightened at the death of demons, ends Kaliya Naga and conspires with royal officials to arrange Ranga Sabha inviting all friendly demon kings. Krishna kills "Kaliya Naga" in Fakira Pond at Gopapura, Krishna-Balaram plays "Rasakrida"-Sports of love with Gopis.
- Day-6** Kansa concurs with demon kings at Ranga Sabha to arrange Dhanujatra. Government officials and non-officials leaders charge sheeted and adjudicated by king Kansa. Everyone accepts subjection of the king for success of Dhaujatra. Krishna-Balaram steals dresses of bathing Gopis at Jamuna river.

- Day-7** Kansa intensifies tortures against non-demons, treacherously sends "Akura" to invite Krishna-Balaram for the Dhanujatra aiming to kill them by collective demon forces. Krishna-Balram plays water sports "Nabakeli" with Gopis at Manabandha.
- Day-8** Akrura proceeds to Gopapura in colorful procession on chariot. Kansa starts forcible collections to feed invited demons, Akrura meets Krishna-Balaram at Jamuna river Prays for ways to convince Nandaraja & Yasoda to part with them.
- Day-9** Kansa plans to warfare to kill Krishna on arrival, Farewell procession of Krishna-Balaram from Gopapur to arrive at Adimata Matha at Mathura.
- Day-10** Kansa reported with the arrival of Akrura with Krishna-Balaram, Krishna exonerates Rajaka at George High School, Kubuja at Kali temple, Sudama garderner etc. out of their sin. Kansa becomes tense and weak hearing all these supernatural activities.
- Day-11** Krishna-Balaram kill Kubalaya elephant, Astamallla, Krishna breaks Siva Dhanu and finally fight to Kill Kansa, King Ugrasen recrowned, Effigy of Kansa burnt to announced the end of the Dhanujatra.

Thus various episodes being organized at various places from sacred centers like temples to public places like ponds, rivers, cultural and commercial centers, transforms the entire locality into an open air secular stage for the live show. All the people including lakhs of outsiders paying visit to the festival become actors of the drama either assuming or pretending to be the subjects of "King Kansa" at Mathura and as friends or devotees of Krishna at Gopapura. The death of social attachment of the people with the Dhanujatra can be adjudged from the obedience of order of King Kansa not only at the erected stage of Raj Darbar but every where the royal procession of King Kansa moves at conqueror. Everyone obliges to pay monetary fine or accepts mild physical punishment as a token of obedience. Even government officials, elected representatives including Ministers, Political Leaders, renowned artists academicians, every body irrespective of the social and official

status accepts subservience before the king. On the other hand Krishna and Balaram including their charioteer Akrura, whether at Gopapura or at Mathura after their arrival are worshiped by the people in general as idols of God. Love of virtue springs up while thronging to welcome the chariot of Krishna-Balram as if the God Himself incarnated temporarily in the body of the actors. In modern society most old myths are losing power. But the social obligation recognized & felt by all is considered to be an extension of the devotional religion of the traditional cult to a democratic mass culture. The citizenry make themselves active and engaged for the success of the Dhanujatra because they are aware of its socio-cultural and economic importance for the locality.

The Raj Darbar is used as a stage for all possible cultural performances from classical music and dance to varieties of folk dances, puppet show, dummy horse dance, devotional dances and music, including innovative performances. The drama being played without a written script, neither the actors nor the cultural performances are bound by any strict rules and principles. They are responsive to the atmosphere characterized by features likely to appeal to popular taste. Through out the night, the age old "Sanchar Samprada" in which divine music, song and dance are simultaneously performed by groups of 3 to 4 persons, either all males or all females or mixed, attract common folk, novices and cultural performers from far and near. It works as a means of devotional transport carrying traditional ideal in entertaining form. Thus the Yatra attracting lakhs of people everyday provides excellent opportunities for all the amateur and professional performers to manifest their talent. Their performances reach the world through mass media. It helps others in recruiting people with the right competencies. So the performers are less interested for monetary gain but the gain of status and popularity to barter them commercially elsewhere. This stage has brought up many political leaders and politicians are desperately eager to use this stage to reach to the masses for political gain. Thus the Dhanujatra has become the main promoter of socio-cultural development of the entire locality. It also brings together different casts, sects, various linguistic and religious communities to develop their togetherness for a better secular social system.

The Economic important of Dhanujatra for the locality is also not less pervasive. Just after harvesting season, the entire population like the farmers, agricultural labourers, traders, industrialist and so on are armed with purchasing power. So Lakhs of people gather for the Yatra not only for entertainment but also to purchase their needs at this commercial center and thousands to sale their products to the readily available consumers. The Industrialist, traders, Government and Semi-government agencies and local artisans exhibit their products both for sale and advertisement. We find some businessmen and artisans earning during these 11 days more than what they earn in the rest of the whole year. The Mega-sale of Samablपुरi Sarees and dress materials, the world famous local handloom product of tie and dye weaving, helps the weaving community to earn their livelihood without switching over from their traditional art and skill. The traders of Meena Bazar packed with articles of mass use mainly brought form Calcutta and Raipur earn huge profit even after selling at a very competitive price due to the availability of lakhs of mobile consumers. The consumers in turn also get the opportunity of bargain due to large numbers of traders competing at one place, It attract tourist form around the country and even from foreign lands. They not only visit the Dhanujatra but also go for sight seeing Hiraikud Dam, Narasingha Nath and other nearby places of tourist interest. It helps the nation to earn form tourism. All these economic beneficiaries of the Yatra pay a small part of the benefit to meet the expenditure of the Dhanujatra. The major part of the expense is to pay for hundred of artists, cultural performances, publicity media, artisans, cooks, stage erectors, decorators, electricians, printers, elephants, horses, dress materials, dress designers, workers and so on. Though the payments are not commensurate with their earning for the same job elsewhere, they are happy with his limited monetary gain because of unlimited gain in status and popularity boosting their capability to earn more elsewhere.

Thus the Bargarh Dhanujatra is one of the most popular religious folk drama performed in a secular manner on the largest possible open air stage with obligatory social involvement of people as actors of the drama transmitting socio-cultural wealth from one generation to the other at a very low cost providing immense socio-culture and economic benefit for the locality as whole.