

## *Roghara Parve:* A Festival or a Custom Related to Health and Pollution among Mundas

Waseem Fatima

*Department of Anthropology, University of Allahabad, Allahabad 211 002,  
Uttar Pradesh, India  
Phone: 9415216162; E-mail: waseemfatima2008@gmail.com*

**KEYWORDS** Evil Spirits. *Akhra. Pahan. Disease. Sarna*

**ABSTRACT** Like every tribe Mundas also celebrated a large number of festivals, but for the first time, a festival named *Roghara* was noticed by the researcher among Mundas during her fieldwork among Munda tribe in 2006. There is a large number of ethnographic works on Munda tribe but any reference of this festival or custom in ethnographic works on Munda tribes is unavailable. This festival is based on the concept of pollution caused by evil spirits, which cause health problems on the villages affected by it. The chief point noted during observation is, that, this festival is celebrated by both *Sarna* (those Mundas who worship Nature) and Christian populations (converted to Christianity) together, which show that *Roghara* is more a custom in their culture than a religious festival. This research paper clearly shows, with the description of *Roghara Parve* that, how each and every festival has a certain objective behind it and they are essential for smooth functioning of our social life.

### INTRODUCTION

A festival is an event, usually and ordinarily staged by a local community, which centers on some unique aspect of that community<sup>1</sup>. Or, festivals are a means of bringing ideas, experiences, and customs to a broad public in a concentrated package over a brief period of time<sup>2</sup>.

Among many religions, a feast or festival is a set of celebrations in honor of God or gods. A feast and a festival are historically interchangeable. However, the term "feast" has also entered common secular parlance as a synonym for any large or elaborate meal. When used as in the meaning of a festival, most often refers to a religious festival rather than a film or art festival.

Festivals, are of many types, and serve to meet specific needs, as well as to provide entertainment. These times of celebration offer a sense of belonging for religious, social, or geographical groups. Modern festivals that focus on cultural or ethnic topics seek to inform members of that community about their traditions. In the past, festivals were times when the elderly shared stories and transferred certain knowledge to the next generation. There are numerous types of festivals in the world. Though many have religious origins, others involve seasonal change or have some cultural significance.

Among Indian tribes, a large number of festivals are noted, each one having different reason- some festivals are celebrated to adore their

ancestors, some are to appraise spirits for better crops and well-being, while some are celebrated to remove evil spirits etc.

The Munda, one of the Scheduled Tribes of Jharkhand, occupy third position in the numerically strongest Kolarian tribes, are the inhabitants of Chotanagpur region in Jharkhand. Racially, they are proto-australoid and speak Mundari dialect of Austro-Asiatic family (Roy 1970). The Munda tribe also celebrates several festivals like *Mage, Phagu, Karama, Sarhul, Jaini Shikar* and *Sohrai* etc. (Srivastava 2007). Wherever festivals celebrated by Mundas are discussed, the above festivals are mainly discussed. But when we closely examine the culture and lifestyle of the Mundas, some other minor festivals were also observed like *Diuali, Batauli, Harpune, Haram Huduk, Ba Parve, Honba parve, Roapune, Dumru Mela, Roghara* etc. (Jaiswal 2006) The above festivals are minor, but each one has cultural significance and has reasons to perform and they are celebrated to fulfill certain objectives, which are related to their daily activities. *Roghara* is also such type of festival, which has a great cultural importance.

### FIELD AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The following research paper is based on the fieldwork done on the Munda tribe of Jharkhand. The field area selected was a Munda village

named Sukri Sarang, located in Khunti block of Khunti subdivision of Ranchi district. Khunti subdivision is one of the few areas in Jharkhand where least immigration has taken place. The fieldwork was done during April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006 – May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006. Data on which the following paper is based was collected using more than one technique. All the proceedings of *Roghara Parve* were noted with the help of participant observation and interview method was used for more details about this *Parve*. The village studied consists of mixed population of *Sarna Munda* (those Mundas who worship Nature) and *Christian Mundas* (converted to Christianity).

### ROGHARA PARVE

*Roghara Parve* is one of the several minor festivals celebrated by Mundas. Virtually *Roghara* formed by *Rog+Hara*, *rog* means disease and *hara* means eradication. So the *Roghara Parve* combinedly means a festival which eradicates disease. According to people of the studied village *Roghara Parve* means “*Rogon ko harné wala parve*”. The objective or the reason behind the celebration of this festival is very much clear from its name and meaning of it. The studied village is Khunkatti village, which is one of the few areas in Jharkhand where least immigration has taken place, so the Mundas of the studied region till now associate the causes of the incurable diseases, which were not cured by traditional herbs and medicines, with evil spirits and witches (*Bongas*). So the chief objective of this festival or it is the belief of the Mundas that by celebrating this festival they can drive away evil souls causing diseases and the diseases out of their houses and at last out of their village. So, the basic concept behind this *Parve* is to ward off pollutants that is, evil spirits, from their village, which cause a great deal of health problems to the villagers.

This festival is mainly performed before or during the rainy season, that is, from the month of May to the month of July. The exact month and day of celebration of this festival was not fixed, it was mainly due to the fact that that above duration was mainly breeding season of parasites which cause diseases and when the frequency of the occurrence of diseases increase, the villagers tries to ward off evil spirits by performing *Roghara*.

In this festival only women can participate. *Sarna* and *Christian Munda* women both par-

ticipate in this festival, which point out that this festival is more a custom than a festival performed by Mundas. All the rituals during the festival are performed by lady *Pahan* (that is, *pahan's* wife) or lady *Munda* (that is, political head's wife) of *sarnas*. All the rituals were performed by *sarnas*, because belief in the spirits is the base of *sarna* religion, not of the Christian religion. The converted Mundas do not totally drop their traditional religion, that is, *Sarnaism*. They are showing awareness of affinity with their tribal beliefs and customs more than their new religion, that is, Christianity. All women who participate in the festival fast till all the rituals are performed.

On the day of *Roghara*, before going to participate in the festival, women firstly mop their houses with cow dung. On a fixed time all women from their houses assemble at *Akhra* with pitcher having ashes from their hearths, *oddi* leaves, a piece of cloth, cow dung, soap and some water in it. With this they also come with a stick and an old broomstick. They decorate their pots with vermilion and put vermilion on each other's forehead and cheeks. During these performances women have their hair untied. When all women assemble at *Akhra*, they throw *arwa* rice at *Akhra* and then lady *munda/ lady pahan* clear a small portion of land with an old broom and mop that portion with a piece of cloth dipped in the mixture of water, ashes and *oddi* leaf. On that mopped portion all women put some *arva* rice. After that lady *munda/ lady pahan* light a fire on the side of mopped portion and start chanting mantras and give rice to a chicken, which is taken with her as a sacrifice for evil spirits. After that all women mop a small portion on *Akhra*. *Pahan's* wife with the chicken and all the other women with their pots and sticks, move forward, producing a special type of voice for removing evil spirits. Then ladies go outside the boundary of the village passing through the fields and forests. In their way, they stop at many places and place their pitchers on the ground, dig the land with their sticks and after digging they clear that portion with their brooms, mop it and after mopping they put pitchers on their head, and proceed forward. When they reach outside the boundary of the village, lady *munda* performs the same rituals which she performs on the *Akhra* earlier. Other ladies also repeat the same mopping process, after that lady *munda* frees that chicken in the jungle and they started breaking their pots

with their sticks and after doing their job they starts running because they believe that, the evil spirits which they take away with them from their village may stick with them. They run back to the village by some other path, because it is believed that if they return by the same path they have come with pitcher, having all the diseases and ghost-like things in it, the same might be hovering there and may catch them. While returning to their village by different path, they take bath in a pond on the way, so that they can completely get rid of all the diseases and supernatural influences. Then after returning to the village they all gather at *Akhra* and break their fast with *meethi handiya* (less fermented), which is made up of folded leaves, which makes them feel cool. After that all the women sit together at *Akhra*, and eat *Chiwda* (roasted rice) and *Mudi* (puffed rice).

### CONCLUSION

From the above findings and discussion, it can be said that despite the drastic changes due to urbanization and industrialization, and the fast pace of modernization, the Munda tribe is still maintaining its religion, values and culture.

We all know that it is human nature that for satisfying our curiosity we want to know the cause behind every effect. So the villagers of the studied group explore the cause of their ill health in their religion and evil spirits, because scientific explanation is absent here. So we can explain the situation of the studied population that, magic and religion are tools to help man out of difficult situations and relieve his tensions. With the theory of Functionalism, one tries to understand and interpret cultural components in terms of its function, which that cultural component performs. Malinowski and his associates were of the opinion that a cultural trait, which is functionless, would not survive and hence no cultural survival. So in the light of the theory of Functionalism, in the studied

population, according to the belief of people of village, *Roghara* festival has a function to play, which is, to drive away ill spirits causing pollution and diseases, and relieve their tension. In the studied group a second (scientific) explanation was not available, so their traditional system is still functioning, but whenever a second and better option will be available, then their traditional system by itself will become extinct or will become a vestigial custom.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the present paper, it will be recommended that while studying the culture or the custom of a particular community, every researcher has to enquire the reasons which control them. And also make it sure that those causes are applicable in the present scenario.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I would like to thanks the villagers of Sukri Sarang, especially the women of the village, with whom we formed a very good rapport due to which I was able to do participant observation of *Roghara* Festival. I would also like to acknowledge Mrs. Parvati Hans and Mrs. Nimmi for their cooperation without whom it would be impossible to do participant observation and give a detailed account of *Roghara*.

### REFERENCES

- Canadian Heritage. From <[www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/ccc/pubs/2010/gloss2010-eng.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/ccc/pubs/2010/gloss2010-eng.cfm)> (Retrieved February 15, 2009).
- Festival. From <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/festival>> (Retrieved January 10, 2009).
- Jaiswal Ekta 2006. *Sacred Complex of Munda Tribe: A Brief Study*. Unpublished.
- Roy SC 1970. *Munda and Their Country*. London: Asia Publications House.
- Srivastava Malini 2007. The sacred complex of Munda tribe. *Anthropologist*, 9(4): 327-330.

## APPENDIX

<i>Local Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Roghara</i> -	Festival related to the eradication of disease.
<i>Sarna</i> -	Munda word for 'Sacred Grove'
<i>Mage</i> -	Festival celebrated in the month of February, in which ancestor worship is done.
<i>Phagu</i> -	Festival celebrated in the month of March, concerned with the phagun festival of Hindus.
<i>Karama</i> -	Festival celebrated in the month of October for better plantation.
<i>Sarhul</i> -	Festival celebrated in the month of April, by Mundas to adore their ancestors.
<i>Jaini Shikar</i> -	Festival celebrated every 12 <sup>th</sup> year in which females go for hunting.
<i>Sohrai</i> -	Festival related to the ox.
<i>Diwali</i> -	Festival celebrated for showing regards to their cattle.
<i>Batauli</i> -	Festival related to the worship of land.
<i>Harpune</i> -	Celebrated in the month of May for better farming.
<i>Ba Parve</i> -	Also known as flower festival celebrated in the month of April.
<i>Honba parve</i> -	Celebrated before sarhul, in the happiness of sowing paddy.
<i>Roapune</i> -	Festival celebrated to rescue the paddy seeds from the danger of evil spirit.
<i>Dumru Mela</i> -	Fare held every year on the martyr day of God Birsa Munda.
<i>Bongas</i> -	Malevolent spirit or power which influences the destiny of man.
<i>Pahan</i> -	Religious head of the Munda Village.
<i>Akhra</i> -	Meeting place of the village where a tamarind tree is found.
<i>Oddi Leaves</i> -	A kind of large tree.
<i>Arwa rice</i> -	Parboiled rice.
<i>Meethi Handiya</i> -	Sweet rice beer.
<i>Chiwda</i> -	Roasted rice.
<i>Mudi</i> -	Puffed rice.