



RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF THE KANDHA OF KANDHAMAL, ODISHA: A CASE STUDY OF THEIR RITUALS AND MYTHS

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Abstract: The Kandha people of Kandhamal, Odisha, follow an animistic and polytheistic religion that is deeply rooted in their natural environment. Their religious worldview centres around an interconnected universe of nature, ancestors, deities, and spirits, with their rituals and myths essential for maintaining harmony and well-being within their community. Similar to the ancient Egyptians, known as the children of the Sun God, these indigenous people of Odisha are also regarded as the children of Dharni Penu. The renowned Meriah festival of the region brings the community together to celebrate Earth Goddess's glory and, in doing so, affirms the Kandha's unique cultural identity in the area. This grand ritual was originally aimed at blessing the mother for a bountiful harvest. However, over time, the tribal sentiment linked to Dharni Penu has evolved. Due to market rationality, the crop once offered as a gift from the goddess has become a commodity for sale. This change occurred as the tribal community increasingly integrated with mainstream society. Moreover, as caste Hindus migrated in large numbers to the plains of Kandhamal, the Kandha's religious practices experienced significant transformations due to this interaction. This paper highlights the rituals and myths of the Kandha community in the Baliguda and G. Udayagiri blocks of Kandhamal district, exploring specific aspects of their livelihood, socio-economic changes, and economy across different periods.

Keywords: Kandha, Rituals, Myths, Penu, Dravidian, Meriah, Kedu, Religion and tribals, etc.

Received : 11 May 2025

Revised : 09 June 2025

Accepted : 13 June 2025

Published : 25 June 2025

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Rajesh Kumar Bagarti (2025). Religious Practices of the Kandha of Kandhamal, Odisha: A Case Study of Their Rituals and Myths, *Journal of South Asian Research*, 3: 1, pp. 171-186.

Introduction

Kandhamal District is situated in the southern part of Odisha, India, where the indigenous tribes are commonly referred to as the Kandha. This region, along with neighbouring districts such as Kalahandi, Koraput, and Rayagada, forms a densely populated tribal area. Among the various tribal communities in Kandhamal, the Kandha community is the most prominent, including subgroups known as Kutia Kandha and others who inhabit the forested and hilly regions. The name '*kondh*' originates from the root '*ko*', which signifies the mountains. The Telugu word '*kondhu*' corresponds to the Sanskrit '*konda*', also meaning the mountains. Odia's aspirates the final '*h*', so the name is often spelt as '*kondh*' or '*Kandha*'. Some anthropologists refer to them as '*kond*'. The Kandha people believe that the first Kandha man and woman emerged from a hole in the *Siriki hill*, situated somewhere in the Belghar range. Kandhas are classified as a *Proto-Austroloid* race with Mongoloid elements. In contrast, the Kandha people identify as '*Kui Loku*,' '*Kui Enju*,' or '*Kuinga*,' as their primary languages- '*Kui*' and '*Kuvi*'-belong to the Dravidian linguistic family. The terms "*Kui*" and "*Kuvi*" represent two distinct regional dialects: *Kuvi*, predominantly spoken by Kandhas from the erstwhile districts of Koraput, Kalahandi, Gajapati and Balangir, retains its original structural form, while *Kui*, utilized by Kandhas in Kandhamal, has adapted over time. Based on socio-cultural attributes, the Kandhas can be categorized into several subgroups, including Desia Kandha, Dongria Kandha, Kutia Kandha, Sitha Kandha, Buda Kandha, Pengo Kandha, and Malua Kandha, among others. Notably, two subgroups, the Kutia Kandha and Dongria Kandha, are recognised as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups or Primitive Tribal Groups (PVTGs). The daily existence of the Kandha community is characterized by simplicity, and their primary mode of communication is the *Kui* language. This language serves as a vital medium for expressing emotions and facilitating interpersonal communication within society. The objective of this research is to document the daily lifestyle of the Kandha community, gaining insights into their social, political, economic, and religious dimensions. Furthermore, this work aims to reconstruct the religious practices, rituals, and myths of the Kandha community, while also examining the effects of climate change and modernity on their traditional way of life.

Study Area and Environmental Settings

The Kandhamal district extends between latitudinal coordinates of 19° 34' and 20° 34' north and longitudinal coordinates of 83° 30' and 84° 35' east,

covering an area of 7,649 square kilometers. It comprises two subdivisions, eighteen Zilla Parishads, twelve blocks, two Notified Area Councils (NACs), one municipality, three assembly constituencies, 171 Gram Panchayats, and a total of 2,515 villages. The dominant soil type in the district is red sandy soil from the red laterite group, which is particularly rich in organic matter. The climate is subtropical, featuring hot, dry summers and cool, dry winters. The hill ranges of Kandhamal gradually diminish in elevation and width moving northward, where they transition into Boudh district. Additionally, smaller mountain ranges of varying heights extend in multiple directions, with only a few exhibiting serrated or conical peaks. The demographic composition mainly consists of the Kandha community, making this region a key source of information about this tribal group. The focus of this study includes the nature, lifestyle, religious practices, and developmental stories of the Kandha tribes. This study was conducted in the villages of Padhanpada and Kasirikhole, located within the Talarimaha Gram Panchayat of the G.Udayagiri block in Kandhamal District (Figure 1).

Methodology Used

The research on rituals and myths among the Kandha tribe of Odisha employs a qualitative ethnographic approach to comprehensively understand the cultural, social, and religious aspects of these practices. To analyse the festivals and ritual sacrifices of the Kandha, data from both primary and secondary sources were utilised. The study employed descriptive research methods to gather responses from people through observation, interviews, and secondary data obtained from various platforms. The primary method involved extensive fieldwork conducted in the G. Udayagiri and Baliguda blocks of Kandhamal district. It investigates the Kandha community to observe and document festivals and ritual sacrifices directly. This includes actively participating in rituals, ceremonies, and community activities to gain insights into the tribe's cultural practices and social dynamics. Observation notes record details such as ceremonial procedures, roles of participants, symbolic meanings, and community interactions. The interviews explore topics such as religious beliefs, traditional practices, historical significance of festivals, and the roles of gender and intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Several focus group discussions were organised with different segments of the community, such as women, men, and elders. These discussions facilitated a broader

understanding of community perspectives and allowed for comparison of views across different demographic groups. For secondary data, historical documents, ethnographic literature, religious texts, government reports, and scholarly articles related to Kandha culture and rituals are analysed.

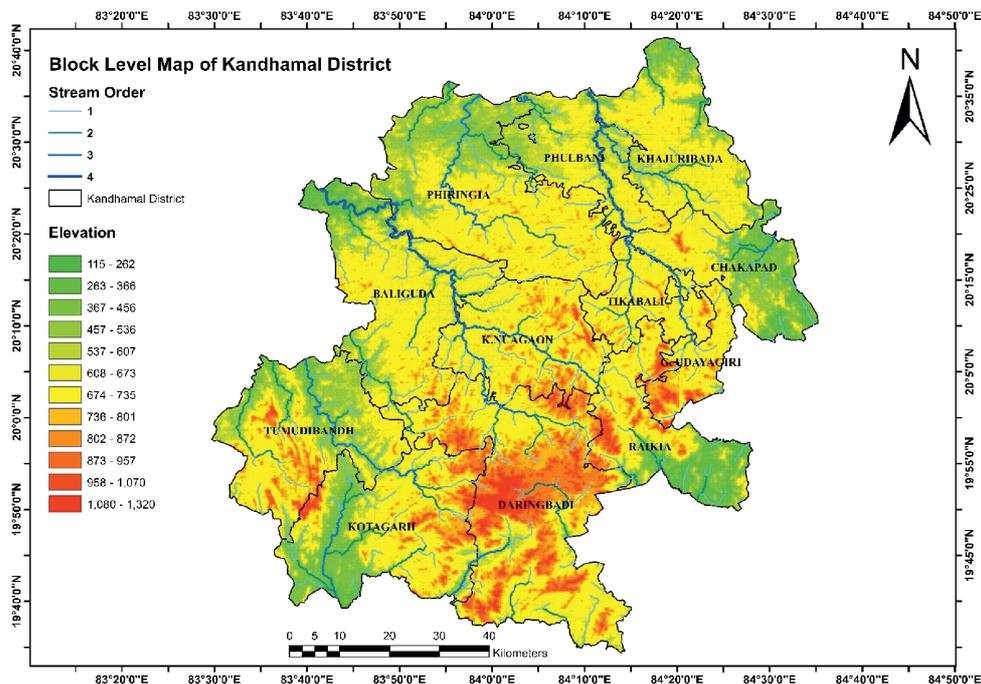


Fig. 1: Topographic Map of the Kandhamal district, Odisha

Religious Beliefs of the Kandha Communities

The Kandha people are characterised by their deep religious convictions, centred around animism and a profound reverence for nature. Their belief system encompasses the worship of multiple deities, spirits (referred to as *pideri*), and various elements of the natural environment. To honour these deities and spirits, the Kandha engage in a range of magico-religious practices, which often include the sacrifice of different animals. Like many indigenous groups, the Kandha emphasize maintaining a harmonious balance between the human realm and the surrounding ecosystem. Distinct elements such as hills, streams, trees, forests, rice fields, and village settlements each occupy their designated spaces, thereby forming an intricate mosaic of co-existence. This ecological equilibrium is inherently woven into the Kandha worldview.

Furthermore, their religious beliefs are not merely abstract concepts but are integral to their social organization. The intimate relationship between the Kandha's spiritual framework and their social structure suggests that a comprehensive understanding of one cannot occur without the other. This strong affiliation between the Kandha and their spiritual entities is prominently illustrated in their seasonal, occasional, and life cycle rites and festivals. The primary objectives of these rites and ceremonies are twofold: first, to eliminate pollution associated with individual households and the broader community, thereby safeguarding them from calamities caused by malevolent spirits; and second, to facilitate personal purification, shielding individuals from hostile entities while ensuring the protection offered by benevolent spirits.

The Kandha community possesses a profound belief in the efficacy of both black and white magic. The intertwining of Kandha magic and religion is an integral aspect of their cultural framework, actively pursued as a means to navigate the complexities of the supernatural realm. Consequently, the lives of the Kandhas are fundamentally shaped by their religious and magical convictions. Central to their rituals and ceremonies is the belief that both societal and individual well-being hinge upon maintaining a harmonious balance among human beings, nature, and the supernatural universe. The Kandhas identify as polytheists, revering nearly 84 distinct deities, each with unique domains, influences, and specific functions. These deities oversee various aspects of life, including villages, health, rainfall, agricultural productivity, livestock, and more (Vidyatri and Ray 1976:27). Within their settlements, symbolic structures such as wooden poles, stones adorned with vermilion (known as *baddi*), leaf plates, and bamboo baskets (referred to as *boga*) function as ritual objects. Each of these sites is believed to possess supernatural significance, serving as shelters for spirits and deities of considerable power.

The principal deity among the Kandha is the Earth Goddess, known as *Dharani Penu*. Other notable deities include *Saru Penu* (mountain god), *Suga Penu* (stream god), *Piju Penu* (rain god), *Naju Penu* (village deity), *Pideri Penu* (ancestor god), *Bela Penu* (sun god), *Pilanu Penu* (hunting god), *Jakeri Penu* (sister of the earth god), *Jori Penu* (river god), *Burpi Penu* (first fruit god), *Ruju Juga Penu* (calamity god), *Sande Penu* (border god), as well as various village deities, such as *Budi Maa Thakurani* and *Baraldevi*, who are honored during different ceremonies and festivals. It is important to note that the names of deities may vary across regions.

Each village is home to its own magico-religious specialists, including *Jani*, *Jhankar*, *Dehuri*, *Bahaka*, and *Mati Guru*, responsible for worshipping specific deities. The *Mati Guru* (*priest*) dedicates his worship exclusively to the Earth Goddess (*Dharani Penu*), with the *Jhankar* performing her worship in instances of the *Mati Guru*'s absence. Specific taboos within their magico-religious practices impose restrictions on women; they are prohibited from touching sacrificial food, and pregnant women are barred from its consumption. Sacred performances typically involve various sacrifices and observances, accompanied by dance, music, and communal drinking, all of which foster unity and reinforce community bonds. During such rituals, villagers gather to store sacred items, including wine (*kalu*), arua rice (*pranga*), eggs (*tola*), *jhuna* (*tadali*), turmeric (*singa*), and gourds (*loka*). The celebration of the Meria festival is emblematic of Kandha cultural identity.

In the region of Kandhamal, two segments of the Kandha population, representing distinct stages of socio-economic development, coexist. The Kutia Kandhas, residing in the Belghar hill area, exemplify the more primitive segment, whereas the Kandhas inhabiting the plains of Kandhamal district epitomize the more developed segment of the tribe. The religious dimensions of both segments warrant separate examination.

Ritual and Myths of the Kandha Communities

The Kandha community, residing in the valleys and plains of Kandhamal, represents an acculturated segment of the Kandha tribe, influenced by various neighbouring castes and tribes. Over time, they have assimilated certain aspects of the religions practised by these surrounding groups while maintaining the integrity of their indigenous, autonomous belief system. In the Kandha linguistic tradition, the term for God is "*Penu*," which is gender-neutral. Their deities are recognized as residing within the village, the sky, the earth, and the underworld. However, these beliefs are undergoing transformation due to the influence of Hinduism. The Kandhas engage in worship of several deities, including *Darani Penu*, *Tana Penu*, *Saru Penu*, *Suga Penu* (the deity associated with streams), *Turki Penu* (the God of fertilization), *Pijeri* (ancestors), and *Penka* (ghosts), as well as *Dalkhai* or *Laxmi* (Goddess of wealth) during various festivals and rituals. Cultural interactions with non-tribal communities have led to a degree of cultural assimilation, resulting in the Kandhas incorporating the worship of non-tribal deities such as Durga, Kali, Jagannath, Ganesh, Laxmi,

Saraswati, Shiva, and Lord Krishna during their respective celebrations. It is notable that deities such as Baraladevi, Patakhanda, Pitabali, Bhima Bhairavi, Suradevi, Byaghradevi, and Narayani are venerated by both tribal and non-tribal populations. The village deity, referred to as *Jatrakudi*, is typically installed at the periphery of the village. Additionally, the stream deity is identified as *Gangi Penu* and *Suga Penu*. *Bhima Penu* is honored as the master of the hills, while *Saru Penu* is regarded as the hill deity. *Lei Penu* is celebrated as the forest deity, *Sita Penu* represents wealth, and *Birna Penu* is worshipped as the Rain God. The ancestors, known as *Duma*, also receive reverence. The Kandhas acknowledge and honour a spectrum of spirits, both malevolent and benevolent (Rath 2010:35).

The *Lamba*, *Jani*, *Pujari*, *Dishari*, *Dehuri*, *Bahuka*, and *Kalishis* are various religious functionaries who preside over their respective spiritual domains. *Jani* is the village priest responsible for performing rituals for different gods, deities, and spirits at the village level. *Pujari* is a Hindu priest who worships various Hindu gods and goddesses. *Dishari* serves as a medicine man and astrologer. *Lamba Jani* is the *meriah* priest. The *Bejuni* and *Kalishis* are shamans. *Dehuri* is the priest of specific deities such as *Pitabali*, *Bhimadevi*, and *Baraladevi*, among others, while *Bahuka* assists *Dehuri* and carries out sacrificial duties. Materials and objects used to appease these forces include unboiled rice, incense powder, incense sticks, turmeric powder, and other items, along with sacrificial animals such as buffaloes, pigs, lambs, goats, and fowls. Eggs are offered to pacify ghosts and spirits. Liquor is a vital component in many rituals. In most rituals and sacrifices, musical instruments like drums and trumpets are played (Mohanty 2004: 218).

Dharani Penu

The Supreme Deity of the Kandha community is known as '*Dharani Penu*,' also referred to as *Tada Penu*, the Mother Goddess of Earth. She is regarded as the Supreme Being, representing the highest and most powerful of all deities (Figure 2). The Kandhas hold the belief that '*Dharani Penu*' is the creator of the entire universe. Historically, the practice of human sacrifice, known as *meriah*, was observed by the Kandhas, who made blood offerings to '*Tada Penu*' or '*Bura Penu*.' The primary purpose of these sacrifices was to provide a magical fertiliser for the soil, thereby ensuring a bountiful harvest. In contemporary times, the Kandha community has replaced human sacrifices

with buffalo sacrifices, referred to as '*Kedu*' (Figure 3). The community believes that the supreme mother goddess, '*Dharani Penu*,' oversees all gods and is worshipped in all ceremonial practices. She is symbolized by a stone block that is placed in a hut, and she is accompanied by twelve disciples, represented by various stone slabs. Prior to rituals dedicated to '*Dharani*,' pigs and fowls are sacrificed, alongside offerings such as first fruits, newly harvested rice, '*Kandul*,' *Amba/Maha Mrahndi* (mango), *Salap* (sago palm beer), and rice flour. Each *Kandha raha* (street) and *Odia raha* contains a shrine devoted to '*Dharani*.' The devotees, referred to as *Tlamba*, assume the role of priests.

Typically, '*Dharani*' is established according to *raha*, and individuals from the same '*Gasi*' (lineage) may establish a '*Dharani*' even when residing in different *rahas*. Occasionally, different *Gasi* groups may set up separate '*Dharanis*' within the same *raha*. The establishment of '*Dharani*' typically occurs during *Chaitra* (March-April), just preceding the '*Kedu*' festival. The *Gasi* community convenes to select a trustworthy individual to house '*Dharani*' in his verandah. On the designated day, the *Tlamba* arrives with a stone, attired in purified cloth and in a state of fasting to perform the *Puja*. He subsequently establishes '*Dharani Penu*' and offers her worship with rice and additional offerings to four goddesses: *Tada Penu*, *Dharani Penu*, *Bura Penu*, and *Srambuli-Dimbuli*. During this occasion, male *Gasi* members contribute rice and partake in the communal feast, while women are not permitted to consume the meat offered to '*Dharani*.' When establishing a new '*Dharani*,' the community also makes offerings of rice, pig, liquor, and eggs. The worship of '*Dharani*' is intended to provide protection from wild animals such as tigers and bears, in addition to the betterment of their livestock. The community also engages in worship during other significant occasions, including death rituals, *Kedu* festivals, '*Sadrangi*,' and '*Maranglaka*'.

Furthermore, the community performs rituals directed at '*Dharani*' when women are observed during their menstruation. While conducting worship, the *Tlamba* adorns himself in fine attire and maintains a fast until the completion of the *puja*. During sacrificial rites, he uses '*Siali*' leaves placed near '*Dharani*,' onto which he subsequently places the rice. He then performs the sacrifice of a pig or fowl, sprinkling the blood onto the rice while reciting verses in the *Kui* language for various intentions. It is evident that '*Dharani*' is central to the social life of the *Kandha* community, as she is venerated during

all festivals and social functions, including marriage, childbirth, and death, events in which all Gasi members participate collectively in feasting. 'Dharani Penu' or 'Tada Penu' is recognized as their chief deity, accompanied by six sisters: 'Bura Penu,' 'Badi Penu,' 'Dimbuli,' 'Srambuli,' 'Bekali,' and 'Kokali,' who are venerated for specific purposes. During festivals or rituals, these deities receive offerings of blood and meat from the upper portions of the sacrificed animals. Beyond this, 'Dharani' is honoured on multiple occasions, including 'Budeli,' 'Kedu,' and 'Marangi.' The Kandhas are meticulous in their worship of 'Dharani' during all significant events, demonstrating a greater level of devotion compared to other deities. It is well-documented that their ancient practice of human (*Meriah*) sacrifice has been supplanted by buffalo sacrifice due to the intervention of the British government, leading to a change in the festival's designation from *Meriah* to *Kedu* (buffalo). Furthermore, the non-tribal communities expressed disfavour toward buffalo sacrifices, resulting in their replacement with the sacrifice of goats or cocks during the *Jantal festival*, a communal celebration and gathering.



Fig. 2: Worship of Dharani Penu by the Kandhas Community of Kasirikhole Village



Fig. 3: Kedu (Buffalo) Sacrifice Performed by the Kandhas at Budrukia Village, Kandhamal.

Batamelani/Bolani (Rugmedigiba)

In the tribal-dominated Kandhamal district, the Kandha community engages in the annual worship of the path Batamelani (Rugmedigiba) from January to April (*Magha-Baisakha*). The principal officiants in this ceremonial procession include *Dehuri-Deheri*, *Jani*, and *Bahka/Bahuka* priests. The rituals involve the use of sacred items such as Chita Kana, various flowers (*Phula*), a bamboo basket (*Baunsha Boga*), a cock, and indigenous mahogany wine (*Kalu*). This worship reflects the community's belief system, which asserts that their deity will bestow blessings for a prosperous livelihood and safeguard the village against diseases (Figure 4). This cultural practice was recently brought to our attention.



Fig. 4: Worship of Batamelani/Bolani (Rugmedigiba) by the Kandha tribes.

Maara Worship (*Kui-Kund-Kairi*)

The Kandha community's tribal villages conduct a ceremonial observance known as the Maara Puja (*Kui Kundh Kairi*) annually in the village of *Jyestha* during the month of June. In this ceremony, the roles of Chief Priest are undertaken by individuals named *Jakeri* and *Jani*. The ritual employs various items, including an incense stick, flowers (referred to as *puju*), worshipped arua rice (termed *Pranga*), Sal Tree (known as *Jargi Dega*), one chicken (designated as *Kaju*), one pig (referred to as *Paji*), turmeric powder (called *Singa*), and wine (identified as *Kalu*). The puja is performed with the intention of enjoying a diverse selection of fresh vegetables, fruits, and mushrooms, as the community holds the belief that this ceremonial practice will yield beneficial outcomes for the village.

Batamelani Worship

The Kandha community annually commemorates the worship of Bata Melani during the month of Bhadrab (August). In this ceremony, *Jakeri* and *Jani* serve as the chief priests responsible for overseeing the rituals. The worship involves the use of various traditional offerings, including incense sticks, flowers (*Puju*), rice, turmeric powder (*Singa*), and indigenous mahogany wine (*Kalu*), among other ingredients. The puja is conducted with the objective of mitigating diseases and pests that may affect different types of agricultural cultivation, particularly paddy (*Kudinga*) cultivation.

Bani Worship (*Puja*)

In the month of Bhadrab (September), the practice of Bani Puja is carried out to ensure the fruitful cultivation of paddy rice (*Kudinga*). This ritual is rooted in the belief that the puja serves to prevent various diseases and to protect the farmland from lightning strikes. *Jakeri* and *Jani* serve as the chief priests during this ceremony, utilizing a variety of offerings including incense sticks, flowers, Arua Chaula (*worship rice*), turmeric powder (*Singa*), indigenous mahogany wine (*Kalu*), and other essential ingredients.

Nuakhai (*Sare Kudinga Kairi*)

In the Kandhamal district, which is inhabited by various tribal communities, the Kandha community observes the annual festival of Nuakhai (*Sare Kudinga Kairi*) in September (Bhadrab). The rituals associated with this celebration are

performed by the chief priest, *Jakeri*, and *Jani*, utilizing ceremonial items such as rice (*Pranga*), turmeric powder (*Singa*), and locally produced mahogany wine (*Kalu*). The purpose of the puja is to present an array of fresh vegetables and fruits, collectively referred to as 'Nuakhai.' Following the completion of the ceremony, participants partake in new crops, including maize, jhata (*beans*), and bhalia (*Bhilawa seeds*), among others.

Sruba Laka Worship (*Khala Puja*)

The community of Kandha conducts the Khala Puja (Srupalaka) annually in December (Margasira). During this traditional ceremony, the roles of chief priests are assumed by *Jakeri* and *Jani*. The worship involves various offerings, including chicken, goat (known as *Adda*), turmeric powder (*Singa*), and Mahogany wine (*Kalu*). It is traditionally believed that observing this ritual fosters a successful harvest of paddy (*Kudinga*) in the threshing floor.

Pitabali Worship (*Puja*)

In the predominantly tribal Kandhamal District, the Kandha community observes Pitabali Worship in the month of April-May (Baishakh) festival each year in the month of May. During this ritual, several essential sacred items are utilised, including Chitta Kana (*red puja cloth*), flowers (*puju*), bamboo baskets (*Boga*), turmeric powder (*Singa*), and Mahua wine (*Kalu*). This ceremonial worship is intended to safeguard the village and its residents, with the belief that it will promote the well-being of the community, mitigate the risk of various diseases, and ensure the overall health of all individuals involved (Figure 5).



Fig. 5: Worship of Maa Pitabali by the Kandha tribes.

Raku Worship/Puja (*Batanga Pihpa*)

Each year during the month of Asadha (July), a ritual is conducted in which devotees honour Raku (*Batanga Pipa*). The primary responsibilities for this ceremony are carried out by individuals known as *Jakari* and *Jani*. The offerings presented during this worship include incense sticks, flowers, specially prepared worship rice (referred to as *Pranga*), turmeric powder (known as *Singa*), twenty-one native chicken eggs (*termed Tola*), and mahogany wine (referred to as *Kalu*). It is widely believed that the performance of this ritual facilitates abundant rainfall.

Gatisila Worship/Puja (*Maa Lachhami Devi*)

The main deity of Padhanpada (Kanhar Sahi) village is Maa Ghatasila (*Lachhami Devi*), who is worshipped by the villagers every Thursday. An annual celebration takes place in the months of April and May (Baisakh), during which goats and cocks are offered to the goddess. The worship involves the use of special items such as rice (known as *Pranga*), China Rose (*Mandar puju*), bamboo baskets (called *Boga*), turmeric powder (referred to as *Singa*), and Mahua liquor (called *Kalu*). The rituals are performed by local priests known as *Deheri/Dehuri* and *Jani*. It is believed that worshipping the goddess brings good luck to all the villagers (Figure 6). This tradition has been observed since the time of our ancestors.



Fig. 6: Worship of Gatisila (*Maa Lachhami Devi*) at Padhanpada (Kanhar Sahi) Village.

Maa Badebira Worship (*Puja*)

In Kanabageri village, located in the G. Udayagiri block of Kandhamal district, villagers celebrate their supreme goddess, Badebira (*Dharanipenu*), twice a year, in June and December (*Asadi Masa/Pusa Masa*). During the worship, they wear traditional attire and carry decorative weapons. The goddess is honoured with offerings of raw or white rice, Mahua liquor (also known as *Kalu*), and brown eggs (Figure 7). Once every 12 years, a male goat, referred to as a “buck,” is sacrificed to the goddess. The villagers pray for good rainfall, prosperous agriculture, the health of their cows, and the well-being of the community. They have been performing this puja regularly for 102 years, honouring a tradition passed down from their ancestors.



Fig. 7: Worship of Maa Badebira at Kanabageri Village.

Forest God (*Luha Penu*)

This deity is honoured through a unique “*Tlamba*” ceremony every seven years. During this celebration, the ‘*Tlamba*’ carries an iron rod that represents the god while performing the puja to appease ‘*Lahapenu*’. This worship (*puja*) occurs in the month of Baisakha (March and April) and involves a goat sacrifice to safeguard against natural disasters. The entire village gathers for the event, joyfully dancing, singing songs, and playing drums. The puja is conducted at intervals whenever ‘*Lahapenu*’ harms anyone.

Rain God (*Sashi Penu*)

The Kandha people practice the worship of ‘*Sashi Penu*’ to ensure adequate rainfall. Every seven years, during a special event called *Tlamba*, they honour a

'Sal' tree as a representation of 'Sashi Penu.' This worship not only helps bring good rain but also contributes to successful crop yields.

Fountain God (Siru Penu)

The Kandhas pay tribute to the springs known as '*Nabajirichua*', '*Siselichua*', and '*Bagal bonda chua*', which symbolize *Sashi Penu* during the *Kedu* festival. They venerate the fountain deity by presenting an egg to secure clean water. Furthermore, they honour this god at wedding ceremonies and during specific death rituals, like *Aras Puja*, when a man falls victim to a tiger.

Field God (Gamberu Penu or Patkhanda Devata)

This festival takes place during the month of Chaitra. The *Darani-Tlamba* carries out this ritual as a puritan. Each year, the *Tlamba* performs worship using arua rice and an egg. Additionally, if someone is afflicted by the wrath of *Gamberu Penu*, a goat or a fowl is sacrificed. In the past, this deity was housed in a thatched cottage; however, such a dwelling no longer exists. It is said that many individuals find healing by appeasing this god.

Household Gods (Duma Dahani)

The Kandhas hold a firm belief that, similar to other deities, the household gods possess considerable power and require consistent offerings to appease them. The ancestral deity of the Kandhas is consistently associated with various spirits that serve as mediators and oversee the progress and well-being of each family's members. In times of illness, the head of the household promptly conducts the puja by presenting rice and wine.

Conclusion

Each of the Kandha deities holds significant social importance, which is why their religious festivals and rituals are observed with great reverence. The Kandhas firmly believe that the ancestral land where rice is cultivated, as well as the processes of ploughing, sowing, transplanting, and harvesting, and the storage baskets for paddy and the measuring tools for paddy, all require ritualistic attention. It is noteworthy that even after death, a Kandha individual maintains an interest in family matters, which in turn affects the prosperity and happiness of both the family and the broader community. The community engages in these rituals with profound devotion and strict adherence to

tradition. For generations, the spiritual practices of the Kandha tribe and the caste Hindus have facilitated a framework for the peaceful coexistence of tribal and non-tribal populations in Kandhamal. The tribes residing in Kandhamal perceive themselves as encompassed by a multitude of deities, supernatural beings, and spirits that inhabit the spaces around them. Consequently, the entire tribal village and its surrounding areas are considered sacred. The Kandhas attribute significance to both animate and inanimate elements of nature and recognize the existence of invisible supernatural forces and spirits. They exhibit notable bravery, coupled with a deep reverence for the divine. The Kandhas believe that their Gods, deities, spirits, and superpowers are characterized by omniformity, omnifariousness, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience.

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