

**FOLK NARRATIVES, GAJANAN MATA MANDIR AND NEIGHBOURING
KUMHAR COMMUNITY OF JHARKHAND**

DR. RABINDRANATH SARMA (Associate Professor)

AMIT KUMAR (Research Scholar)

Department of Tribal Studies, Central University of Jharkhand, Ranchi, Pin-835205,
Jharkhand, India

Abstract

Folk Narratives relating particular religious place has its special importance in practical life. It is considered as integral part of cultural Heritage and valuable resources of Social Science particularly folk studies reflecting moral values and beliefs. Gajanan Mata Temple is another *Shaktipith* after Kamakhya Temple in Northern part of India which is worshipped formless mostly by the followers of Hinduism and it attracts thousands of devotees every year. This *Shaktipith* has been very much significant for Kumhar (Pottery) Community living nearby this temple as it impacts their socio-economic life. There are various myth and legend related to this temple. This paper has discussed the folk story adapted from Gajanan Mata Temple and its significance in Kumhar community.

Key words: Gajanan Mata Temple, Shaktipith, Kumhar, Myth, Legend.

Introduction

The Gajanan Mata Temple, situated at the border of Jharkhand and Bihar on the bank of *Karbar* River, concludes on the full moon day in *Chait Navratri*. It attracts a large crowd of devotees on the ninth day of *Navratri*. Once the people reach to the temple region, they can easily hear the sounds of various things from toys seller to the crying of small babies. It looks like one of wonderful site and the fairy atmosphere makes the devotees completely attachment to the nature. A small dam over *Karbar* river has large crowds of devotees for the bath. After having a natural bath from the river water stored in the dam, devotees use about half a kilo of flour, 125 grams of Jaggery and 125 grams of ghee in the earthen pan to cook *Karahi Prasad* (offerings made in earthen pan). After cooking this Prasad in earthen pan they now offer it to the Gajanan Mata inside the temple. This *Prasad* is made by the Brahmins

himself in front of the devotees inside the cooking hall of temple area. Most of the Brahmins Priest belongs to the remote village of Polidih region. In addition to running the frying pan in this Mata temple, devotees has to pay five rupees so that the Brahmins present there canmake a folk story and offer Chunri through coupons. The female devotees sometimes sing their local religious folk song related to Mata. A fair is organized twice every year in the temple. In this fair, devotees from Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, MP and Orissa have been coming for many years, whereas everyday over the year, there is an influx of devotees from outside at this temple. The temple is built around 50 years ago that has been spread over 8 acre of land. The height of the temple is approximately 69 feet. Only a platform is installed in the sanctum sanctorum of the Devi temple, where a monolithic flame always lit in the temple.

The temple is situated in Husainabad of Palamu district of Jharkhand on the bank of Kalarbar river. The temple is 15 km from Nabinagar in Aurangabad district of Bihar province. The distance of this temple is 12 km from the subdivision Husainabad headquarters (Jagat, 2018). The nearest air ports are Gaya and Patna which is 132 km and 185 km respectively from the temple.

The Gajanan Mata Dham religious trust is formed to be operated and to oversee the Gajanan Mata temple complex. From security point of view there is neither any type of police administration nor is a watchman appointed by Bihar or Jharkhand government.

Folk Narratives

As we know that most of the thing that we have learnt is from direct interaction with each other informally. With time and repetition, human expressions become pervasive and commonplace which is to be conceived as traditions and traditional later on identified as folklore. Folk narrative refers to stories without a precise author, passed on from one generation to another by word of mouth or via social media ranging from fictional genres such as fairy tales to jokes, legends or personal experience tales. The fundamentally oral and interactive human nature results into stories (Masoni, 2018). The consistent part of most of folk narratives is that it is repetitive and variant in nature that results in to people's belief without any authorized proof (NOKU, 1994).

Folk Narratives are defined by the culture and varies with respect to different cultures as it spans a wide range of genres like legend, saint's legend, fairy tale, urban legend, personal narrative, riddle, situation puzzle, joke or song. It is generally studied to understand

variability in transmission of narratives reflecting moral values and beliefs, and identities of groups and individuals over time (Dong Nguyen, 2012).

Folk story is interchangeable words for folktale that means the tale or legend originating among people which becomes the part of oral traditions. Myth and Legends are the part of any **folktale or folk story** (Dictionary, Folk Story, 2014).

Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience (G.A Richard, 2017). As per Merriam Webster dictionary it is a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon (Merriam-Webster).

Myths are symbolic tales of the distant past (often primordial times) that concern cosmogony and cosmology (the origin and nature of the universe), may be connected to belief systems or rituals, and may serve to direct social action and values (Magoulick, 2004). As per Wikipedia, Myth is a folklore genre consisting of narratives or stories that play a fundamental role in a society, such as foundational tales or origin myths (Contributors, 2020).

Legend is a non-historical or unverifiable story handed down by tradition from earlier times and popularly accepted as historical the body of stories of this kind, especially as they relate to a particular people, group, or clan (Dictionary, dictionary.com, 2012). A legend is a folklore genre that consists of a narrative featuring human actions perceived or believed both by teller and listeners to have taken place within human history (Owens, 1995). Brothers Grimm defined legend as folktale historically grounded (Krapf, 1998). Legends mostly contain supernatural elements occurred in recent past relating particular time and place which are considered as non-fictional by the narrator and the audience during the time of narration. The legends can be **Saint's Legends** and **Urban Legends**. Saint's Legends are narratives which tell story related to holy person or objects and Urban Legends are referred as contemporary legend, belief legends or FOAF (Friend of A Friend) tales in literature. (Dong Nguyen, 2012)

Folk Religion

Folk religions synthesize mainstream beliefs and practices, frequently animistic in nature that is created inside societies to deal with consistent issues. In numerous settings they coincide within high strict religious customs and sometimes even with mainstream secular humanism. In the context of tribal (where individuals comprehend themselves to live regarding a more distant family, a group, and a clan having distinct cultural heritage) folk religion frequently exists outside the overlap of a significant world religious custom (Rheenen).

The folk religion has greater impact over social behavior and the market place and it belongs to the security-creating segment and appears to be in the core culture layers, although there is still needed a proper research to confirm this hypothesis. Asian folk religion is based on ancient animistic beliefs and also draws upon certain aspects of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Yin-Yang and other religions. It has neither doctrines nor organization. Folk religions are deeply deep-rooted in Asian's everyday life and are inherited as a matter of custom amid people bound together by community. It has been mentioned that folk religion believes in ghosts and religious taboos. According to Asian folk religion, some ghosts, particularly those spirits of people who died from drowning during Japan tsunami, persist livid and target on the innocent living as a means of taking revenge, even grudging them of reincarnation and therefore it may thus strongly affect the perceptions of danger linked with visiting tsunami-affected endpoints (Jen-Hung Huang, 2008).

The term folk religion is considered as the deposit in culture of folk religiosity, the full range of folk attitudes to religion. This is an attempt to create a genre out of the folk elements in religion, but unfortunately it cannot do justice to the full range of folk-religious phenomena and attitude. Folk religion is considered as the interaction of belief, ritual, custom, and mythology in traditional societies. It is the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the firm religious and liturgical forms of the official religion (Yoder, 1974).

Origin Story

There is Saint's Legend as per Mahant Sri Sri 108 Shri Avadh Bihari Ji Maharaj of Mahant Sah Gajanan Mata Temple of Suryamandir, Patna, Olarapur, who said that in general an idol is worshiped at the remaining Devi temples but there are only two temples in India

where Shakti (Power) is worshiped. He said that the famous Kamakhya temple in India is worshipped formless where the idol of Mother is not installed and the same is for Gajanan Mata Temple which is worshipped formless. In both temples, only Shakti is worshiped. He also included that the Gajanan Mata temple is situated on the border of Bihar and Jharkhand, but some villagers of Poldih (Jharkhand) have given a big look to the periphery of the temple by giving land donation to further the Gajanan Mata temple. According to the old tradition in the said temple, even from the ancient times to today, the devotees of many states other than Bihar Jharkhand reach for worship of Shakti Swaroopini Maa Gajanan Mata temple and offer only *Prasad* made in earthen pot.

It is said that in ancient times this area was the abode of Adi humans. There are many old relics in the village of Poldih even today. This relic is called the citadel. The relic has several statues of ancient gods and goddesses among themselves. Kuldevi Chedimai of the weeds is worshiped here. Japala was the capital of the Kharwar kings about 800 years before the arrival of the Chero Dynasts. Ashutosh Bhattacharya has discussed Ghajna Maa in his work 'Bengali, Folk Literature and Culture'. The name changed from Ghazan to Ghazna. Gajan is said to be a festival that has been associated with the *Shaivism* followers popular in Bengal since ancient times. Gajan festival is celebrated in the month of Chaitra in Bengal region. It is also celebrated in the month of Vaishakh. History states that till the middle of the twelfth century the region was subordinate to the ruler of Bengal, Ram Pal Sen. After this, the rule of the region passed into the hands of the Gahadwal king. Presently the chief priest here, Jagannath Mishra, states that Gajna Mata is also called Van Devi. Satyanarayana Singh aka Sadhuji said that the temple was a ravine about 55 years ago. The clay idol of Elephants and horses were offered here. Earlier goats were sacrificed here. Later, at the behest of local villagers, Pt. Mukdev Das stopped the practice of sacrifice. Here, offerings of *Puri* and Jaggery made in Ghee are offered to the mother. It is known about Gajna Dham that it is a corruption and abridged form of Gajanan Mata Dham. According to a popular legend, in Dewasur Sangram, a goddess named Lalita had a crusade against the demon king Vicious. Goddess Mother was defeated in this battle, and then Bishnu suggested Goddess to give birth of Lord Ganesha by contacting God Shankar. At that time Lord Shiva was absorbed in penance at Gajanadham. From that time this place was known as Gajana Dham and mother was named as Mata Gajanan (Sanjay, 2015). At present the devotees go to the temple after their wish get fulfilled and offers the *Prasad* in Karahi which is used to cook with the help of the half a kilo of flour, 125 grams of Jaggery and 125 grams of ghee only.

About Kumhar Community

The word “Kumhar” literally means “potter” in Indian languages, pottery being the traditional occupation of the Kumhars which is derived from the Sanskrit language 'Kumbhakara' meaning Potters (the people who make pots with the help of soil). Pottery practice is an important event of prehistoric past and it has been marked as the beginning of Neolithic revolution in human society (Chaudhuri, 2015). They use to make idols, statues of famous people and folk deities and animals and they sell their wares made up of clay and water on most days in local market.

There are some famous folk narratives of the Kumhar's origins. As per the Maharashtra Kumhar community they claim that they emerged on earth with the blessing of the Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma gave them his art, Vishnu his wheel and Shiva his form. As per Hindu Mythology they are descendants of Lord Prajapati. Therefore, Kumhar or Kumbhar is also known as Prajapati, is a caste or community of India, mainly belonging to the Hindu religion

In the Vedic texts, Prajapati is a distinct Vedic deity, but whose significance slowly diminishes. In the texts of medieval era, they are referred as legendary agents of creation, working as gods or sages, who appear in every cycle of creation-maintenance-destruction (*manvantara*). The term also predicts many different gods, depending on the Hindu text, ranging from being the creator god to being same as one of the following: Viswakarma, Indra, Agni, Daksha, Brahma and others. As per George Williams, the inconsistent, varying and evolving Prajapati concept reflects the diverse Hindu cosmology. Prajapati has also been equated to the metaphysical concept called Brahman as Prajapati-Brahman (Svayambhu Brahman) in Classical and medieval era literature. (DALAL, 2010). They were called Prajapati to give respect to the potters' creative art of making pottery from traditional clay. After their emergence on the earth they firstly made a product *Kumbha* means water pot. Their main traditional occupation is to make earthen ware. Just as the Brahma *Pancha* elements create this mortal creation, similarly Kumara also creates many attractive sculptures from clay particles, toys, utensils, etc., so this caste creator was given the simile. It is also believed that crafts and engineering started in humans from this caste. The use of lime and khadi was detected only during the manufacture of various types of clay mortar. The lime chosen from the steep and the building construction is called Chejare. (Sharma, 2019).

The connectivity towards the Mother Nature can be seen through their true devotion in making of earthen pots, *Surahis*, lights, utensils, and figures. The fragrance of clay perceived during cooking in an earthen *handi* or drinking water from pot calms our natural senses. During Diwali and different celebrations blessings produced using clay and water can be made to look exceptionally basic yet masterful. With the spreading attention to the advantages of drinking water from earthen pots, earthenware has special play in our lives. As a craftsmanship likewise ceramics is a delightful and imaginative and satisfying hobby.

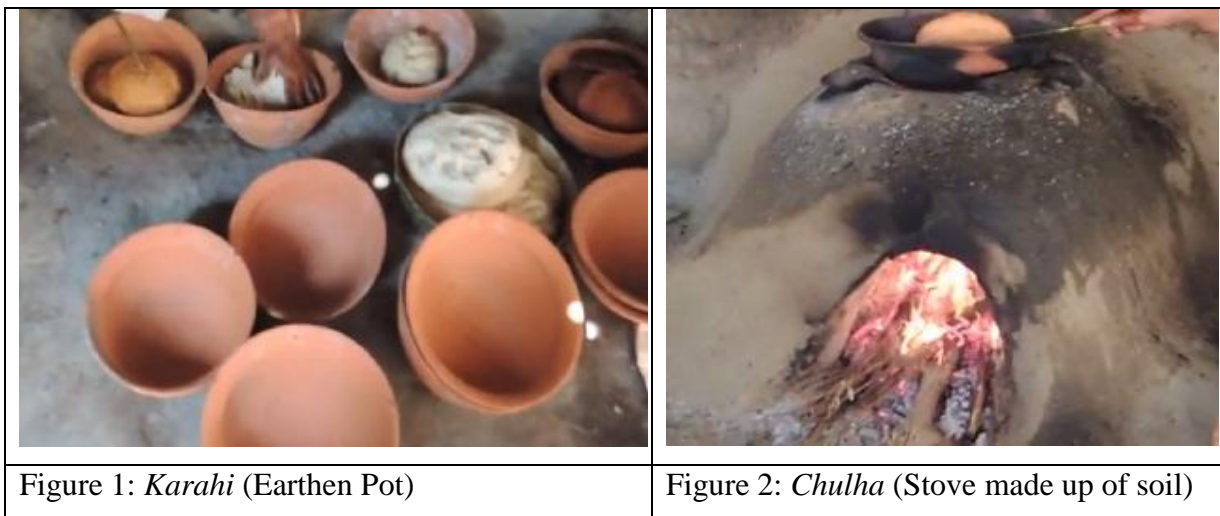
Relevance of Kumhar Community in Gajanan Mata Mandir

Pottery is one of the most significant creations of human progress which permitted preparing and storing food. Pottery has assumed a fundamental part in everyday life before, being likewise one of the first fine arts created by Homo sapiens. For practicing pottery there is need of specific soil or clay. Selection of suitable clay for pottery making is very much important for longevity and fine finishing so that it looks smooth and beautiful. The knowledge of selecting such clay or soil thus depends mainly on the age old experience of the potter through inheritance for its suitability just by observing its color and texture. Clay is generally dug from pond side or from fallow land depending upon the geographical space (Chaudhuri, 2015).

This temple has its own unique significance, as Gajanan Mata only accepts the *Prasad* made by local panda in Karahi (Pan) made up of clay and water. This cooking earthen ware has specific design and it helps in easy cooking. This community has provided this Karahi in the most acceptable and appropriate design looks like semicircular pan as shown in Figure 1 which is very much acceptable by the devotees. The offerings made to this temple are almost natural and it is less harmful to the devotees and environment. This semicircular pan made up of soil can be bought easily; the price varies between Rupees 20 to 50 per piece depending upon smoothness and design of ware which can be considered as low in accordance with the hard work of making such utensils. On the fast-rotating wheel, Kumhar community people begin to center the clay first and then by pressing firmly at its base and running hand to the top, shaping it into a cone while constantly moistening it. To uninitiated eyes, a potter at work is no less than an alchemist as the objects seem to emerge from the invisible recesses of the potter's hand. "It's all in the fingertips of them after shaping the perfect design of the object they cuts it off with a thread and holds it in their hand. "It is the pressure of the fingertips that differentiates a skillful potter from a mediocre one. Dipping the nail of his little

finger, almost imperceptibly, to shape the objects to be made of their choices is art. After suitable smoke with fire of these clay made objects, the traders then sell it in the market.

The Figure 2 shows the *Chulha* (stove made up of soil) is used to cook the *Prasad* with the help of mostly dried and combustible stick of mango tree. There devotees can buy dry and combustible stick as firewood at some price but most of the devotees use to take these from their home itself so that it cannot become barriers in the process of worshipping the Gajanan Mata.



The expertise in pottery making traditions depicts the traditional knowledge of Kumhar community and their caste identity as well. The Kumhar community living nearby this village has been dependent on Pots made by them as such pots are used in the temple. As per book, “*The scheduled Caste*” by KS Singh, around 25.48 % of total workers within this community is engaged in the traditional household industry of pottery. 41.89% are cultivators, 24.89 % are agricultural laborers and remaining’s are engaged in other services(Singh, 2010).This temple has been very much significant for Kumhar community as they are the only community who use to make such earthen pots.

Conclusion

Gajanan Mata Dhamas a *Shaktipithis* one of the symbolic temples after Kamakhya Temple situated on the border of Bihar and Jharkhand. This is the perfect examples of Hindu culture and traditions which shows love towards the symbol of Courage worshipping formless. The materials used during the worship are totally natural which is very much significant for the environment. It can play a vital role in the socio-economic improvement of

Kumhar Community. As per expertise this Community only makes the specific earthen Pot for the cooking Prasad (offerings) as per requirement of the Gajanan Mata without harming the environment. Gajanan Mata Dham should get the status of tourist destination as devotees throng to temple in *Chait Navami* and the temple area becomes like a fair. There is a need of development and promotion of this temple as a cultural tourist place. It will change the social and economic life of People residing nearby the temple including Kumhar community.

References:

- Chaudhuri, M. S. (2015). Pottery Making tradition among the Prajapati Community of Gujarat, India. *Eurasian Journal of Anthropology*, 6(1), 1-14.
- Contributors, W. (2020, July 04). *Wikipedia "Myth"*. Retrieved July 09, 2020, from wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myth>
- Dalal, R. (2010). *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide*. INDIA: Penguin Books India.
- Dictionary, C. E. (2012). *dictionary.com*. Retrieved July 02, 2020, from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/legend>
- Dictionary, C. E. (2014). *Folk Story*. Retrieved July 14, 2020, from <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Folk+story>
- Dong Nguyen, D. T. (2012). Automatic Classification of folk Narrative genres . *Proceedings of KONVENS 2012 (LThist 2012 workshop)*,, 378-382.
- G.A Richard, B. K. (2017). Myth. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
- Jagat, S. (2018). *गजनाधामहोपर्यटनस्थलकीसूचीमेंशामिल* . Bihar: samacharjagat.com.
- Jen-Hung Huang, S.-T. C.-R. (2008). FOLK RELIGION AND TOURIST INTENTION AVOIDING TSUNAMI-AFFECTED DESTINATIONS. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 1074-78.
- Krapf, N. (1998). Beneath the Cherry Sapling: Legends from Franconia. *Fordham University Press*, 312.

- Magoulick, M. (2004). *What is Myth?* Retrieved June 15, 2020, from <https://faculty.gcsu.edu/custom-website/mary-magoulick/defmyth.htm>
- Masoni, L. (2018). Folk Narrative and EFL:A Narrative Approach to Language Learning. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 640-658.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved July 09, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>
- NOKU, M. P. (1994). ARE FOLK NARRATIVES ESSENTIALLY REPETITIVE? A Brief Note on Repetition in Folk Narratives. *Neohe/ieon XXI/2 Akad~miai Kiadt, Budapest John Benjamins B. V., Amsterdam*, 303-310.
- Owens, R. G. (1995). *Folkloristics. USA: Indiana University Press*, 7.
- Rheenen, D. G. (n.d.). *Introduction to Folk Religion*. Retrieved July 10, 2020, from missiology.org: <http://missiology.org/folkreligion/introduction.htm>
- Sanjay, K. (2015). *Jharkhand Ke Mele*. Ranchi: Prabhat Prakashan.
- Sharma, S. (2019, July 14). Prajapati Samaj Kuldevi/Shriyade Mata/ Kumhar Caste History in Hindi. India.
- Singh, K. (2010). *The Scheduled Caste*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Yoder, D. (1974). Toward a Definition of Folk Religion. *Western States Folklore Society, collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to WesternFolklore.*, 2-15.