

AND AS FOR E.G. AKBARPUR, DAPTHU, DEO, DEO-BARUNARK, DEOGHAR, DEO-MARKANDEYA, GAYA, NALANDA, ONGARI, PAWAPURI, PUNARAK, RAJGIR, SHAHPUR, TELKUPI, UMGA AMONG OTHERS. CHHATH FESTIVAL – IDENTITY OF BIHAR

..‘A LOOK INTO THE DEEP ROOTS OF CHHATH PUJA’ BY PRABUDDHA BISWAS

## INTRODUCTION

THE MODERN DAY CHHATH FESTIVAL HAS EMERGED AS THE MOST REVERRED AND POPULAR COMMUNITY FESTIVAL OF BIHAR, IN WHICH ALL STRATA OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATE WITH EQUAL ZEAL AND SINCERITY THOUGH WITH MANY NEW MANIFESTATIONS AND AMENDMENTS. BUT THE WORSHIP OF SUN GOD, WHICH CONSTITUTES THE ESSENCE OF BIHAR’S MOST REVERRED CHHATH FESTIVAL, HAS BEEN PREVALENT IN THE MAGADH REGION AND IN OTHER PARTS BIHAR FOR MILLENNIA.

## THE EARLIEST SYMBOLIC MANIFESTATION

INITIALLY, SUN AND WATER WERE DEPICTED THROUGH SYMBOLS AND THEN CAME THE FIGURATIVE MANIFESTATION. IN INDIAN ART, THE DEPICTION OF SUN STARTED WITH WHEEL AND CHAKRA.

## THE EARLIEST FIGURATIVE MANIFESTATION OF ‘THE SUN GOD’ IN THE MAGADH REGION

THE FIGURATIVE MANIFESTATION OF THE SUN GOD IN BIHAR REGION WAS REVEALED DURING THE SAKA-KUSHANA PERIOD IN TWO PLACES (I) IN TERRACOTTA PLAQUE, EXPOSED IN THE NEOLITHIC SITE OF CHIRAND AND (II) IN MAHABODHI TEMPLE STONE-PILLARS OF BODHGAYA, ACCORDING TO HISTORIAN DR. ARVIND MAHAJAN OF THE DIRECTORATE OF MUSEUMS. WHEREAS, THE CHIRAND-PLAQUE IS SLIGHTLY EARLIER; BUT THE MAHABODHI SUN FIGURE IS OF THE LATER TIMES.

“THE SUN GOD WAS SEEN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A ONE-WHEELED CHARIOT DRAWN BY FOUR HORSES. ARUN AS SUN GOD’S CHARIOTEER (SARATHI) IS HANDICAPPED AND IS SITTING BETWEEN THE LEGS OF THE SUN GOD. THE SUN GOD IS SEEN IN FULL ACTION, THROWING ARROWS WITH HIS BOW AND ACCOMPANIED BY BOTH HIS WIVES, USHA AND PRATYUSHA. THE ‘BOW AND ARROW’ OF THE SUN GOD SYMBOLISE THE WIPING OUT OF DARKNESS AND THE FOUR HORSES RESEMBLE FOUR DIRECTIONS; I.E. EAST, WEST, NORTH AND SOUTH RESPECTIVELY,” ACCORDING TO SOCIAL SCIENTIST PRAFULLA KUMAR SINGH MAUN, AS REVEALED TO ME MANY YEARS AGO.

IN THE LATER PERIOD ONE COULD OBSERVE INCREASE IN NUMBER OF ASSISTANTS OF THE SUN GOD WHICH INCLUDE SEVEN HORSES, SEVEN COLOURS (COLOURS OF RAINBOW), TWO ATTENDANTS DANDI AND PINGAL AMONG OTHERS.

THE EARLIEST USE OF 'FIRE' BY THE PRIMITIVE MAN AND ITS LINKAGE WITH THE 'SUN – THE ETERNAL SOURCE OF FIRE'

THE FIRE AND ITS USE IN THE 'HUMAN SOCIETY' HAVE GOT A DIRECT LINKAGE. THE PRIMITIVE MAN, WHILE USING THE FIRE, IN ITS DAY TO DAY ACTIVITY; VISUALISED THE SUN GOD IN THE SKY AS THE ETERNAL SOURCE OF FIRE.

THE EARLIEST EVIDENCE OF THE 'USE OF FIRE', IN THE WORLD ARENA, WAS INITIATED BY STONE AGE PEOPLE ABOUT 3,50,000 YEARS AGO WITH THE UTILISATION OF FLINT TOOLS, WHICH WERE USED FOR SCRAPING AND CUTTING MEAT.

LATER, THE ROLE OF FIRE HAD EXPANDED IN THE NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENTS AND EARLY VILLAGE COMMUNITIES, THROUGHOUT THE WORLD; WHO WANTED TO INCREASE THE SETTLEMENT AREAS AND AGRICULTURAL FIELDS BY BURNING FORESTS.

SIGNIFICANCE AND THE ROLE OF 'FIRE (AGNI)' IN THE RIG-VEDIC ENVIRONMENT

THE MOST IMPORTANT MALE DIVINITIES OF RIG VEDIC ARYANS WERE INDRA, AGNI (FIRE), VARUNA AND SURYA RESPECTIVELY. WHEN SEMI-NOMADIC AND SEMI-PASTORAL ARYANS ENTERED INDIA FROM THE NORTH INDIA FROM THE NORTH-WEST DURING 1500 BC, THE UPPER PORTION OF SINDHU REGION WAS COVERED UNDER FOREST COVER WHOSE DENSITY FURTHER INCREASED AS ONE MOVED FURTHER EAST IN THE GANGETIC ARYAVARTA DUE TO 'MORE RAIN-FED ZONE'. INITIALLY, FORESTS WERE BURNT DOWN TO BUILD NEW SETTLEMENTS.

HENCE, THE ROLE OF AGNI HAD A GREAT IMPORTANCE IN THE EYES OF RIG-VEDIC PEOPLE AND AGNI (FIRE) EMERGED AS THE VERY IMPORTANT DIVINITY DURING 1500 – 1000 BC. AGNI ACTED AS A KIND OF INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN THE GODS ON THE ONE HAND AND PEOPLE ON THE OTHER. THE 'OBLATIONS' OFFERED TO 'AGNI' WERE SUPPOSED TO BE CARRIED IN THE FORM OF SMOKE TO THE SKY AND THUS TRANSMITTED TO GODS AMONG WHOM, SUN (ETERNAL FIRE) WAS THE FOREMOST DIVINITY.

EMERGENCE AND INTEGRATION OF 'SUN GOD' IN RIG VEDIC PANTHEON

RIG VEDA MENTIONS TWO PRINCIPAL THOUGHTS; - (I) THE LIVING BEINGS GET 'LIFE OR ENERGY' FROM THE SUN AND (II) 'SUSTENANCE' FROM WATER. HENCE THE SUN GOD HAD 'ARYAN ANTIQUITY', WHO EMERGED AND INTEGRATED IN THE RIG VEDIC PANTHEON DURING 1500 – 1000 BC.

USE OF FIRE IN CLEARING THE FORESTS IN GANGETIC ARYAVARTA DURING 1000 BC – 600 BC

UNLIKE THE SAPTA-SINDHU REGION OF RIG VEDIC SOCIETY, THE GANGETIC PLAIN OF ARYAVARTA (NORTH INDIA) HAD BEEN UNDER 'MORE DENSE AND DEEP FOREST COVER'. IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASES (1000 BC – 600 BC), THE SEMI-NOMADIC RIG-VEDIC PEOPLE STARTED COMING FROM THE NORTH-WEST AND GOT SETTLED IN THE GANGETIC ARYAVARTA AS DISPERSED VILLAGE COMMUNITIES. SLOWLY AND GRADUALLY, THEY GOT TRANSFORMED INTO VILLAGE PEASANTRY AND CONTINUOUS NEW SETTLEMENTS EMERGED OUT, ONE AFTER THE OTHER, FROM WEST TOWARDS EAST, BY BURNING AND CLEARING FORESTS.

WITH MOST OF THE FORESTS ALREADY BURNED, AGNI AND SUN HAD LOST THEIR IMPORTANCE AND WERE REPLACED BY THE EMERGENCE AND POPULARIZATION OF NEW DIVINITIES LIKE BRAHMA, VISHNU AND MAHESHWAR.

EXTENSION OF THE 'USE OF FIRE' IN CLEARING FORESTS IN THE BIHAR REGION, 600 BC ONWARDS

THOUGH THE ROLE OF FIRE GOT MINIMIZED IN ARYAVARTA (PRESENT DAY UTTAR PRADESH) AFTER THE LATER VEDIC PHASE (1000 - 600 BC); BUT ITS USE INCREASED, FURTHER EAST, IN THE BIHAR REGION; 600 BC ONWARDS AS NEW SETTLEMENTS EMERGED OUT IN THE MAGADH AND OTHER PARTS OF BIHAR.

THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF THE 'FIRE CULT' AND THE 'SUN GOD' IN THE BIHAR REGION, 600 BC ONWARDS

THOUGH THE INTER-LINKAGE OF FIRE AND THE SUN (AS THE 'ETERNAL FIRE') HAD LOST ITS SIGNIFICANCE AFTER 600 BC AMONG BRAHMANICAL PANTHEON IN GENERAL AND IN THE ARYAVARTA REGION IN PARTICULAR; BUT BOTH THE 'FIRE CULT' AND THE 'WORSHIP OF SUN GOD' HAD REMAINED RELEVANT IN CENTRAL GANGETIC PLAINS OF BIHAR IN GENERAL AND MAGADH REGION IN PARTICULAR.

PRE-HISTORIC ROCK SETTLEMENTS OF SOUTH BIHAR AND NORTHERN JHARKHAND

THE PRE-HISTORIC SETTLEMENTS OF THE HILLY AND THE JUNGLE TERRAIN OF SOUTH BIHAR REGIONS AND NORTHERN JHARKHAND WERE THE SOURCE OF THE SUSTENANCE FOR NATURE WORSHIPPERS, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWERS OF THE SUN/FIRE CULT. IN RECENT TIMES, MORE THAN 42 ROCK SHELTERS/CAVE SETTLEMENTS BELONGING TO THE PRE-HISTORIC AS WELL AS EARLY HISTORIC PERIOD HAVE BEEN DECIPHERED IN THE DISTRICTS OF NAWADA, JAMUI, GIRIDIH AND JAMUI DISTRICTS RESPECTIVELY.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TARADIH EXCAVATION

IN THE TARADIH EXCAVATIONS OF BODHGAYA, THE SETTLEMENT HAS BEEN UNEARTHED, REVEALING ARTEFACTS SINCE THE NEOLITHIC PERIOD. INTERESTINGLY, SEVERAL FIRE PITS HAVE BEEN FOUND WHICH ALSO JUSTIFY THE WORSHIP OF FIRE/SUN GOD AS CONTINUITY SINCE PRE-HISTORIC TIMES.

THE STORY OF THREE KASSAPA BROTHERS IN BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES

THE BUDDHIST LITERATURE DESCRIBES THE SACRED COMPLEX OF HINDU GAYA WERE THE REGIONS OF FOLLOWERS OF THREE ASCETICS; WHO WERE NADI, GAYA AND URUVELA RESPECTIVELY.

SIGNIFICANTLY, NADI KASSAPA, GAYA KASSAPA AND URUVELA KASSAPA WERE THREE BROTHERS WHO WERE 'FIRE WORSHIPPERS' AND THEY INTERACTED WITH BUDDHA AFTER HIS ARRIVAL FROM SARNATH. LATER ALL THE THREE BROTHERS BECAME FOLLOWERS OF GAUTAM BUDDHA ALONG WITH THEIR THOUSANDS OF FOLLOWERS.

THE ARYANISATION OF THE MAGADH REGION

THE 'ARYANISATION OF THE MAGADH REGION, SINCE 600 BC, SIMPLY SUPERIMPOSED THE RIG VEDIC (1500 – 1000 BC) CONCEPT OVER THE LOCAL TRADITION OF THE SUN/FIRE CULT IN THE AREA.

THE FIRST MANIFESTATION OF THE SUN GOD IN THE MAHABODHI PILLARS OF BODHGAYA IN THE ART FORM DURING SAKA-KUSHAN PERIOD IS THUS NATURAL. AS SUCH, WE ALSO FIND 'SUN GOD' APPEARING ON KUSHAN COINS DURING 200-300 AD.

THE SUBSEQUENT RAPID URBANISATION OF THE MAGADH REGION

THE RAPID MARCH OF MAGADH EMPIRE DURING 600 BC AND THE SUBSEQUENT RAPID URBANIZATION OF THE MAGADH REGION; FURTHER REGENERATED AND POPULARIZED THE LOCAL PREHISTORIC SUN/FIRE CULT AMONG THE URBAN GENTRY AND THE RULING ELITE OF MAGADH REGION.

THE LINKAGE BETWEEN WORSHIP OF SUN GOD AND THE MOTHER GODDESS

THIS IS TO BE NOTED THAT THE WORSHIP OF THE MOTHER GODDESS IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE 'FERTILITY CULT', WHICH HAD ITS ORIGIN IN PRIMITIVE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES OF THE WORLD. DISCOVERY OF IDOLS OF MOTHER GODDESS IN VARIOUS MATURED FORMS AT THE SITES OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION PROVE BEYOND DOUBT THAT THE WORSHIP OF MOTHER GODDESS HAS BEEN VERY POPULAR IN INDIA FROM PRE-HISTORIC TIMES.

THE MAHABODHI PILLARS OF SAKA KUSHAN TIMES HAVE REVEALED TWO DISTINCT IMAGES CARVED OUT OF STONE; -

(I) THE SUN GOD AND

(II) THE PRIMORDIAL MOTHER GODDESS.

WHEREAS THE IMAGE OF THE SUN GOD WAS CONCEIVED DURING THE RIG VEDIC PHASE BUT THE PRIMORDIAL MOTHER GODDESS WAS STILL IN THE PRISTINE FORM, AS THE RIVER GODDESS AND WAS CONCEIVED FROM THE FOLK TRADITIONS OF ARYAVARTA.

WITH THE EVOLUTION AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE AGRARIAN ECONOMY IN ARYAVARTA, THE WORSHIP OF MOTHER GODDESS EMERGED AS THE MOST POPULAR FORM OF WORSHIP IN THE FOLK TRADITION.

THE RIVER GODDESS WAS SLOWLY EVOLVED IN THE MINDSET OF THE VILLAGE COMMUNITIES OF ARYAVARTA DURING LATE VEDIC PHASE (1000 – 600 BC). THE CONCEPT OF THE RIVER GODDESS OF ARYAVARTA TRAVELLED FAR AND WIDE DURING 600 BC TO 300 AD FROM THE NORTH WEST INDIA TO THE EASTERN INDIA IN THE INDO-GANGETIC BELT AND WAS VERY POPULAR AMONG THE PEOPLE OF THE TIME IN GENERAL AND THE VILLAGE COMMUNITIES IN PARTICULAR.

THE IMAGE OF RIVER GODDESS IN MAHABODHI PILLAR

HERE, THE RIVER GODDESS IS SITTING ON GHATA (VASE OR KALASH) AND BLACK-CLOUDS REPRESENTING TWO ELEPHANTS ARE POURING WATER ON HER HEAD BY THEIR TRUNKS, SIGNIFYING HEAVY DOWNPOUR DURING RAINY SEASON. LATER, THE RIVER GODDESS HAD BEEN IDENTIFIED AS THE GAJA LAKSHMI FORM OF GODDESS LAKSHMI IN THE BRAHMANICAL PANTHEON BUT IT ALSO SURVIVED IN ITS PRISTINE FORM, IN THE FOLK TRADITION OF MAGADH (IN PARTICULAR) AND BIHAR (IN GENERAL) IN THE FORM OF CHHATH PUJA.

INTERESTINGLY, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT UTENSILS USED ON THE OCCASION OF CHHATH PUJA ARE A HOLY POT (KALASH) AND THE CHATURMUKH DWIP. THE HOLY POT SIGNIFIES THE MOTHER EARTH OR MOTHER GODDESS, WHICH PROVES BEYOND DOUBT, THE INTER LINKAGE BETWEEN THE SUN GOD (MALE DIVINITY) AND THE MOTHER GODDESS (FEMALE DIVINITY).

THE CHHATH PUJA IS DIRECTLY ROOTED TO THE WELL BEING OF THE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

THE CHHATH PUJA IS DIRECTLY ROOTED TO THE WELL BEING OF THE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY AS THE WORSHIP OF SUN GOD IS DIRECTLY RELATED WITH THE HARVESTING SEASON OF TWO MAJOR CROPS OF BIHAR; (I) KHARIF AND (II) RABI CROPS. THE HARVESTING TIME KHARIF CROPS ARE THE MONTH OF KARTIK (OCTOBER-NOVEMBER); AND THE HARVESTING TIME OF RABI CROPS ARE THE MONTH OF CHAITRA (MARCH-APRIL).

SIGNIFICANTLY, THE WORSHIP OF SUN GOD IN THE FORM OF CHHATH PUJA IS PERFORMED IN THE MONTH OF KARTIK AND CHAITRA MONTHS IN WHICH SEASONAL FRUITS AND VEGETABLES ARE NEEDED SIGNIFYING THE DIRECT INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL PEOPLE AND VILLAGE COMMUNITIES OF RURAL BIHAR.

WHY IS THE 'DALA CHHATH' OF 'KARTIK MONTH', MORE POPULAR IN MAGADH?

SIGNIFICANTLY, THE NORTH BIHAR PERFORMS BOTH CHHATH FESTIVALS IN SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS BUT THE PEOPLE OF MAGADH AND SOUTH BIHAR PREFER TO CELEBRATE CHHATH DURING KARTIK MONTH, AS IT IS MORE POPULAR THERE.

THE REASON BEHIND ITS POPULARITY IS RELATED WITH THE LANDSCAPE OF THE REGION.

(I) THE MAGADH REGION IS DISTRIBUTED WITH THE RUGGED AND ROCKY TOPOGRAPHY OF CHOTANAGPUR PLATEAU AND KAIMUR HILLS IN THE SOUTH, WHICH DRIES UP MOST OF THE REGIONS AND MAKES THE SUMMER MONTHS, VERY UNBEARABLE. AS A RESULT, THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY CANNOT ENJOY THE CHAITRA CHHATH AS COMMUNITY FESTIVAL.

(II) THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE MAGADH REGION IS VERY MUCH PRONE TO FLASH FLOODS AND THE SEASONAL DISCHARGE OF WATER FROM PENINSULAR RIVERS WHICH HELP ARTIFICIAL TANKS AND WATER BODIES TO FULLY FEED THE KHARIF CROPS.

(III) MORE OVER, THE MONTH OF KARTIK SEASON FOLLOWED BY UPCOMING WINTER SEASONS MAKES THE TOPOGRAPHY OF MAGADH AND SOUTH BIHAR, VERY CONDUCIVE FOR THE COMMUNITY FESTIVAL LIKE CHHATH DURING KARTIK MONTHS.

#### THE UNIQUE FEATURE OF THE CHHATH FESTIVAL

(I) UNLIKE ANY OTHER RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL OF THE BRAHMANICAL PANTHEON, CHHATH PUJA COULD NOT BE HIJACKED BY THE PRIESTLY CLASS, WHICH HAS MADE IT A UNIQUE FESTIVAL. THERE IS THE DIRECT COMMUNICATION OF THE 'DEVOTEE WITH ALMIGHTY'.

(II) YET, THE PRISTINE PURITY OF THE MOTHER GODDESS IS STILL BEEN REFLECTED AS WE CAN STILL FEEL THE EARTHEN TOUCH OF THE FOLK TRADITION OF THE 'RIVER GODDESS' WHICH WAS CONCEIVED DURING THE LATE VEDIC PHASE AND WAS CARVED IN ROCK IN THE HUMAN FORM DURING SAKA-KUSHAN TIMES IN THE MAHABODHI PILLARS OF BODHGAYA.

(III) FURTHERMORE, THE CHHATH PUJA FESTIVAL HAS BEEN SHOW-CASED PERMANENTLY WITH THE FOLK TRADITION AS IT HAS BEEN TAGGED WITH THE HARVESTING SEASON OF KHARIF AND RAVI CROPS OF BIHAR REGION.

(IV) ULTIMATELY, THE DRIVING FORCE OF THE CHHATH PUJA FESTIVAL IS NOT THE PRIESTLY CLASS OF THE INDIAN CLASSICAL TRADITION; BUT THE 'MILLIONS OF VILLAGE GENTRY AND PEASANTRY OF THE FOLK TRADITION OF BIHAR'; WHO ARE THE REAL SUSTAINER OF THE RURAL ECONOMY OF BIHAR.

(V) THE VILLAGE GENTRY AND PEASANTRY OF THE FOLK TRADITION; CARRYING FORWARD 'THE CHHATH PUJA TRADITION' WITH UTMOST FAITH AND REVERENCE TO THE MOTHER EARTH AND THE SUN GOD.

#### THE PRESENT FORM OF CHHATH PUJA WAS CONCEIVED DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF CHHATH PUJA GOT CRYSTALLIZED WITH THE STABILIZATION OF THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD AS WE CAN SEE THE DEVOTEES URGE THE SUN GOD TO PROVIDE THEM GOOD HEALTH, MALE PROGENY AND WEALTH (GOOD HARVEST AND MONETARY GAIN), A GENERAL URGE FOR ALL CLASSES OF THE AGRARIAN FEUDAL SOCIETY OF THE CENTRAL GANGETIC PLAIN OF BIHAR.

#### SUN TEMPLES IN BIHAR

(1) THE OLDEST SUN TEMPLE IN INDIA HAS BEEN TRACED IN THREE PLACES, WHICH INCLUDE MATANG MANDIR (KASHMIR), KONARK TEMPLE (ODISHA) AND DEO MANDIR (AURANGABAD, BIHAR) AND ALL THE THREE WERE INSTALLED AND BUILT IN THE POST GUPTA PERIOD.

(2) THERE ARE SEVERAL MEDIEVAL SUN TEMPLES IN SOUTH BIHAR AND NORTHERN JHARKH

(3) THOUGH THERE IS ONLY ONE SUN TEMPLE IN THE NORTH BIHAR (KANDAHA SUN TEMPLE, SAHARSA), SEVERAL IDOLS OF SUN GOD HAVE BEEN FOUND AND THEY INCLUDE GANDIV ISHWAR (MADHUBANI), BENIPATTI, ASHGAON – DHARAMPUR (DARBHANGA), PARSA (MADHUBANI), BARUNI (BEGUSARAI), MAHISI (SAHARSA), BADI JAAN (KATIHAR) AMONG OTHERS.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COCONUT, PAAN AND BANANAS

WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN THAT SEASONAL FRUITS AND VEGETABLES (OF THE BIHAR ECO-SYSTEM) ARE NEEDED FOR THE CHHATH PUJA; BUT THE ONLY EXCEPTION IS COCONUT WHICH IS KNOWN AS KANCHAN PHAL.

IT SIGNIFIES THAT COCONUT IS VERY RESISTANT TO ROTTING FOR MONTHS DUE TO ITS SCLERENCHYMATOUS OUTER COVER AND CAN BE SAFELY TRANSPORTED FROM ONE PART OF THE COUNTRY TO ANOTHER. IN THE ANCIENT AND THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD COCONUT (BUT NOT THE GREEN COCONUT) WAS VERY MUCH PART OF BIHAR'S DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS.

SIGNIFICANTLY, BETEL LEAF (PAAN) AND BANANAS HAD BEEN BROUGHT FROM THE SOUTH-EAST ASIAN ECO-SYSTEM, IN THE ANCIENT PERIOD, PROBABLY BY BRAHMAN AND BUDDHIST MONKS BUT BOTH HAD BEEN INTERNALIZED IN THE CULTURAL TRADITIONS OF INDIA. BOTH PAAN AND BANANAS PREDATE THE MEDIEVAL CHHATH PUJA TRADITIONS AND ARE ESSENTIAL PART OF CHHATH PUJA.

## MODERN AMENDMENTS

OFF LATE, PINEAPPLE AND ORANGE HAS BECOME PART OF THE 'CHHATH PUJA ARGHA' TO SUN GOD.

INCIDENTALLY, ORANGE IS A HYBRID, BETWEEN POMELO (CITRUS MAXIMA) AND MANDARIN (CITRUS RETICULATA). THE ORANGE IS UNKNOWN IN THE WILD STATE; IT IS ASSUMED TO HAVE ORIGINATED IN SOUTHERN CHINA, NORTH-EASTERN INDIA, AND PERHAPS SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA FROM ANCIENT TIMES BUT NOW, IT IS AVAILABLE IN THE MARKET DUE TO THE AVAILABILITY OF RAPID COMMUNICATION. SIMILARLY, PINEAPPLE, A FRUIT OF THE ECO-SYSTEM OF N.E. STATES ARE NOW READILY AVAILABLE IN BIHAR DURING DALA CHHATH OF KARTIK.

THE USE OF SOME OF TODAY'S COMMON FRUITS, VEGETABLES AND PULSES ARE NOT SEEN IN USE BY CHHATH DEVOTEES DUE TO THEIR ORIGIN FROM OTHER ECO-SYSTEMS LIKE POTATOES (LATIN AMERICA), ONION (CENTRAL ASIA), APPLE (CENTRAL ASIA), LENTIL (CENTRAL ASIA), CAULI FLOWER (SYRIA AND EUROPE), CABBAGE (MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES) AMONG OTHERS. INSTEAD, THE LOCAL EDIBLES ARE IN USE AS FOR E.G. SWEET POTATO, SINGHARA, POMELO, BENGAL GRAM (CHANA DAL), TURMERIC SAPLINGS AMONG OTHERS.

THE JAGGERY (GUR) FROM SUGER-CANE IS THE TRADITIONAL SWEETENER OF INDIAN CULTURAL TRADITION, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL PART OF CHHATH PUJA FESTIVAL AND ITS CUISINES BUT NOW SOME DEVOTEES ALSO UTILIZE THE SUGAR CRYSTALS, POPULARISED BY ENGLISH COLONIAL MASTERS BY OPENING SUGAR MILLS IN THE NORTH BIHAR AND ELSEWHERE DURING THE EARLY DECADES OF TWENTIETH CENTURY.

WITH THE POPULATION EXPLOSION AND INTRODUCTION OF MODERN LIFE STYLE, THE CHHATH FESTIVAL HAS FOUND OUT ITS WAY TO CITY'S ROOF TOPS IN THE MAKE-SHIFT ARTIFICIAL POOLS ALSO. WITH THE POPULATION MIGRATION, CHHATH FESTIVAL HAS TRANSCENDED THE GEOGRAPHICAL REGION OF BIHAR IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND ABROAD.

## INFERENCE

BUT THE SPIRIT OF CHHATH STILL REMAINS IN ITS PRISTINE PURITY, DOWN TO THE EARTH AND TRULY A COMMUNITY FESTIVAL OF ONE AND ALL, REVERRED BY MILLIONS; WHERE 'DEVOTEE, DIRECTLY COMMUNICATES WITH ALMIGHTY' WITHOUT THE INVOLVEMENT AND INTERFERENCE OF THE PRIESTLY CLASS.

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