Pousha Punei - An Agricultural Festival of Western Orissa

Susil Kumar Panigrahi

Pousha Purnima, an annual festival based on agriculture is observed on fullmoon day of the month of Pousha. The festival is celebrated throughout Western Orissa, both by the rural and tribal folk.

In some areas, it is also called Pousha Parva or Pausha Punei. But the most popular name, specially in rural areas as "Chher-chhera". The term chher-chhera has probably evolved by corruption of the word 'char-char' meaning a drum. Drum is an integrated part of the Pausha festival, as drum beating and dancing to the tune of beat is a must.

Pousha Punei is different from other agriculture festivals of this area. It is largely a communal jubilation related to the new harvest and celebrated through feasting and merrymaking.

The festival is characterised by two important events for the farming community - the annual contract of land labouers comes to an end and payments by landowners and agreements on fresh contracts are finalised for the ensuing year.

Interesting and enjoyable scenes are enacted in the streets of villages. Jubilant boys

and girls raise funds for 'chher-chhera' feasts from the families in the village, regaling them with their dance and music. In some villages, mock quarrels between angry old grand mothers and naughty children are organised. These events are entertaining and create a great deal of amusement and laughter among the audience.

Among the tribals too, it is a festival of merry-making. After harvest men and women enjoy the day by community dancing to the rhythm of drummers.

In some parts Pausha Parva has a special religious significance with some tribes offering animal sacrifice to their goddess.

The Pausha Festival is concurrent with other harvest festivals like Pongal in other parts of the country at the same time of the year.

Dhanuyatra - the largest open air theatre in the world come to the end on the Pousha Purnima. It adds colour to the festival in Bargarh area of Western Orissa.

Susil Kumar Panigrahi lives at Dalaipara, Sambalpur - 768001.