

Raja Festival in Odisha: A Festival of Worshipping the Mother Earth and Having Leisure & Recreation

B.K. SWAIN AND KANAKLATA SAMAL

**SOCIOLOGY NAGPUR UNIVERSITY AND K E T'S VAZE COLLEGE, MULUND,
MUMBAI**

INDIA

Email Address: kanaksamal@gmail.com

Abstract: The festivals celebrated across the societies have had the imprints of the myths. Raja festival in Odisha is one such festival. Stretched over three days of celebrations, this festival of eastern India falls around mid - June, and has immense social, economic, religious, ethnic and cultural significance. The meaning of Raja has been derived from woman's first experience of procreative ability or her maturity for bearing progeny. Thus symbolically, Raja means to become procreative, that is, to get ready and become prepared for bearing progeny. After the long scorching heat of summer when the first shower of rain comes, the mother earth gets ready for cultivation and for bearing fruits. People plan a week before and get themselves off all their routine activities for celebrating the three days long festival. Varieties of traditional cakes and spiced cuisine for consumption are prepared in advance. The logic and belief behind this like humans during the festival period, is to give rest to the implements used in kitchens and to tools used in agriculture. The first shower of rain fills the heart of the people especially the marriageable girls with eternal happiness. The girls sing songs to the tune of their traditional and ethnic culture, dance and play on swings made of bamboos with wooden plates, strings and ropes. The boys and men play different games, visit relatives and eat varieties of food, homemade cakes and sweets prepared by the women. Women wear different traditional and ethnic attire, bathe and worship the mother earth along with the tools used for cultivation. They seek blessings for larger produce as the male members start digging the land and engage in cultivation from the next day. The festival brings people together to enjoy the leisure and have fun. It develops among the people a sense of fellow-feeling, fraternity and solidarity. The present study is characterized partly as descriptive and partly analytical, focusing mainly on the purpose of knowing descriptively the significance of the age old "Raja festival" in modern day Odisha.