



Gājan : An Interpretation of Social Intricacies in Fringe Bengal

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Abstract

Rituals and festivals serve an essential function in shaping a community's identity and, side by side, reflect the region's social patterns, where people rejoice and proceed towards community building. Most interestingly, the masses carry these social ailments within themselves, which are reflected in festive rituals like Gājan. Celebrated during the Bengali month of Chaitra, the central practitioners of the festival are the antaja sampradaya, i.e., lower castes (Nicholas 2013, Sircar 2016), although by discipline the festival encompasses all social boundaries. By performing rites of social immolation, villagers worship Shiva and Dhamma, with the deity Surya holding equal significance (Nicholas 2013). The deities are envisioned with rural interpretations and dynamism while also encompassing the more popular Brahmanical interpretations of North India. This refers to the processes of universalisation and parochialisation (Marriott 1955), with elements of Sanskritisation also at play. Thus, this paper attempts to critically examine social intricacies in rural Bengal, i.e., fringe Bengal, using the folk festival Gājan as a tool for assessment. Although the scope of the paper is geographically limited to Rarh Bengal (Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia, Paschim Medinipur, etc.) and Southern Bengal (Howrah, Hooghly, South 24 Parganas, etc.), it engages in a comparative study of a few primary case studies to avoid inconsistencies in narratives through a historical approach. The paper is divided into three subsections: the first deals with the general introduction to the Gājan festival, followed by the background under which such a social hierarchical system was established in village Bengal, which is reflected in Gājan, and concludes the discussion with an attempt to interpret social intricacies by observing the rituals of Gājan.

Keywords: Gājan, Vanga, Sanskritisation, Ethnocentrism, Universalization, Parochialization.



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Introduction

Michel Foucault, one of the most renowned French historians of the 20th century, throughout his career has sought to propound a theory focused on power, knowledge, and discourse. He believed that “power was what was seen, what was shown and what was manifested,” and, interestingly, he found the overbearing principle of its force in the way it deployed it. Thus, on whom power was exercised remain in the state of depravity; while they received light/solace only from that portion of power which was conceded to them by those who remain in control of it, or from the reflection of power that for a moment they seem to manifest (Foucault 1979).

When these ideas are applied to our understanding of caste in India, it seems quite logical to think that caste was not always about ritual purity. Rather, it was a social power struggle in which the political and economic factors at times could influence social stance and, as a result, had very little to do with the ideals of ritual purity. Louis Dumont, in his book *Homo Hierarchicus — Caste System and Its Implications*, seems to refute this idea, as his observations were based on the view that the political and economic domains of social life in India are encompassed by religion. As Brahmins symbolise ritual purity, while kings symbolise political authority. Disagreeing with Dumont, however, there are some texts that consider the king to be above the Brahmin, for example, in the royal consecration ceremony. While in several other instances the Brahmin appears superior to the king, for example, in the Manu Dharmasastra. Moreover, Dumont also suggested that caste is primarily religious, based on the domains of purity and pollution. But an ethno-historical study in South India conducted by Nicholas B. Dirks contradicts Dumont’s claim; according to him, the Kallars of Pudukkottai did not belong to higher castes like kshatriyas, but still were legitimate rulers who even heavily patronized Brahmins according to the royal gifting activity.

If the interpretation of power politics in caste were applied to social caste or class positions in village Bengal, we would see that the villages were organised within a feudal society in which agricultural labour served as the chief mode of production. In this regard, power concentration seemed directly proportional to maintaining control over the mode of production. Thus, in such a social organisational scenario folk festivals like Gājan, which is a communal festival celebrated during the hot and dry months in Rarh and Southern Bengal, dealing with the basic necessity of asking for a boon from the mythical deity in order to regenerate back fertility in the fields, which is done by employing non-brahmins as chief worshippers of the deity although only after they are purified through the sacred thread, followed by the acts of self-immolation makes one think is Gājan a symbolic representation of the social fabric within which the repressed are sucked under? An adequate attempt of interpretation has been undertaken in this regard.

About Gājan

Gājan is a spring festival that takes place in the Bengali months of Chaitra (March-April) and Baisakh (April-May), the last and first months of the Bengali year, in different parts of West Bengal (particularly in the Rarh region and southern Bengal). In localities where a second Gājan (called Abar Gājan) is organised, it generally concludes on the first day of Jyaishta (May-June). The festival is centred around the worship of Hindu deities Shiva, Dharma, and Surya through rituals of self-mortification and traditional deity worship. In the Rarh region, Gajan focuses on

the worship of Dharmadev and is called Dharma Gajan, while in other regions of Bengal, Shiva is the more popular deity in Gājan and thus it is called Shiber Gajan. Although the two forms of Gajan are closely connected, it is widely believed that Gājan of Shiva is a later rendition, a result of the Sanskritisation of the local pantheon, as demonstrated by M.N. Srinivas in his book *“Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India”*.

Jawhar Sircar (2005) argues that the distinctive social fabric and religious culture of a local village community in Bengal are essential factors in setting up a composite culture dominated by Brahmanical Hindu ideas. According to Sircar, while important local deities such as Manasa were absorbed into Brahmanical practice, the Brahmins most often avoided Dharma Thakur and substituted Siva for Dharma. As a result, Shiva Gajan became widely popularised, while Dharma Gajan remains in the background. Moreover, Haraprasad Shastri, in his brief report in the proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, considers a Buddhist origin of the Gājan with regard to Dharma worship (Law 1933). Thus, it may have led to the deity's insignificance with the decaying Buddhism. However, Shashi Bhushan Dasgupta, in his book *“Obscure Religious Cult”* (1995), relies on a synthesis of primitive practices to understand the origin of deity, agreeing with Ashutosh Bhattacharya's claim that the Dharma of Gājan could be traced to the pre-Aryan sun god (Bhattacharya 1975).

Few or no references to Gājan could be found in the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas. While Ramai Pandit's *Sunya Purana* indirectly refers to the hook swinging festival (Pandit 1908), it is the Dharma Mangal Kavya of Ghanaram, Rupram Chakravarty, and Anadi Mangal of Ramdas Adak (Chakrabarti 1912, Adak 1939) which serves as the chief treatise of worship of deities during Gājan, although it solely relies on myths to build a premise of the deity worship. Before the festival begins, the bhaktas/sannyasis (ascetics) are selected from various social groups and are relieved from all caste distinctions for the remainder of the festival. During this period, they undergo a stage of purification and righteousness by eating simple, uncontaminated food and by wearing a sacred thread to make themselves worthy of deity worship. Alongside such acts, after the beginning of Gājan, the ascetics go through several gruesome methods of self-immolation. These include *hindola* or sacred swing, fire walking, the *pit-phorne* or piercing the back, *charake-ora* or swing in mid air, the '*jib-phorne*' or piercing the tongue, *rajani-phorne* dance, etc (B.Chaudhuri 1987). Symbolically, Gājan stands for creation and regeneration, i.e., the union of the human fertility cult and the agrarian fertility cult; the process to achieve this union is through self-immolation.

Moreover, Gājan also reflects social order and power dynamics, influenced by social and cultural outlooks. While the festival brings various caste and social groups together, evidence of social constraints is also visible. Unlike in mainstream Brahmanical rituals, in Gājan, the ritual priests belong to the lower caste order; even though they are Brahmins, they must be low-born Brahmins. Also, the role of Brahmin priests is minimal, while the lower castes, Sadgope, Napit, Kumar, Bagdi, and Dom actively participate only after going through ritual purification, and their festival ends when they have endured self-immolation for the sake of satisfying the mythical figure.

Gājan -The substructure behind its social stance

Bengal, a low-lying flood plane shaped like a great horseshoe, has long been a victim of Indo-Aryan cultural disparity, even before and after its inclusion in Brahmanical writings. According to

H.C.Raychowdhury, “The historic land included within the area now known as Bengal finds no mention in Vedic hymns.” However, it is not mere negligence but the deliberate subjugation of the later period that draws particular attention to the study of this matter. For instance, in the Śatapatha Brahmana of the later Vedic period, one sees the eastward movement of an Indo-Aryan king and Agni, the god of fire. In this legend, Agni refuses to cross the Gandak river and enter Bengal as it is unfit for Vedic sacrifices. Agreeing with this, the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa and the Yajñavalkya Smṛiti suggest several remedies for purifying the Indo-Āryans who have travelled to these ritually polluted regions. Also, expressions like Vaṅgāvagadhāh/Vaṅga-Magadhāh, i.e., people of Vaṅga and Magadha, have been found in Aitareya Āraṇyaka, who are charged with the guilt of transgression. The theologians of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa classed these people as ‘dasyus’.

One might regard these utterances as constricted observations made by novice Indo-Āryans lacking comprehension of Bengal’s social landscape during the Vedic (1500-1000 BCE) and later Vedic (1000-500 BCE) periods, which were corrected thereafter, explaining the fickle change in the Indo-Āryan narrative. While this interpretation cannot be logically ruled out, as in the post-later Vedic literature, like in the epic of Rāmāyana, probably composed between 500 BCE-300 CE, the Vangas (an early Bengal tribe of central and eastern Bengal) are no longer shunned as impure barbarians; moreover, political relations are maintained with them by high-born aristocrats of Ayodhyā. Further encouragement is provided to visit the land of Pundras (North Bengal) and Mandara (Western Bengal). However, this cannot be the only elucidation behind such a barbarous demonstration.

The idea of cultural supremacy over another has been a recurring theme for scholars to decode. The term ‘ethnocentrism’ coined by William Sumner in 1906, focused on the belief that an alien culture is evaluated based on the standards and values of one’s own culture. Thus, aspects of one’s own culture are considered far superior in comparison to other socio-cultural groups. The migrating Indo-Āryans were not deprived of such sentiments. Thus, in accordance with ethnocentrism, an alternative take of Indo-Āryan resentment of Bengal could be summarised.

The Indo-Āryans, who probably entered from the north and west, brought with them a vast corpus of Sanskrit sacred literature. These, along with the appearance of new pottery styles, showcase a gradual eastward shift of Indo-Aryan culture. According to Michael Witzel, in the twelfth century BCE, Indo-Aryan cultural production flourished in the East Punjab and Haryana (Kuru) area, and by the seventh to sixth century BCE, the influence had expanded to eastern U.P. and the northern Bihar (Videha) region. Literature produced towards the end of this migratory process indicates the construction of a hierarchical, ordered society headed by Brahmanas, with ideas of ritual purity and pollution conferring superior status on the Indo-Āryans, while non-aryans were portrayed as barbarians (mlecchas). This led to the construction of a cultural frontier, a purity barrier separating them from the rest of the non-Aryans. This conceptual perimeter, based on Brahmanical ritualistic pollution, culminated in practical geopolitical frontiers.

For instance, in the Bodhāyana Dharmasūtra, the subcontinent is divided into three ethnic belts. The holiest lies between the Himalayas and the western Vindhya and was termed as Āryāvarta (land of the Aryans). The zone that stood next embraced Malwa, Deccan, and South Bihar. While the outermost belt included Pundras of North Bengal, Vangas of central and eastern Bengal, etc. Regions outside the Āryāvarta zone were regarded as outside the Vedic

cultural domain. Also, these zones were not watertight territories; as in the Rig Veda, the eastern frontier of Āryavārta was the Yamuna River; in the Paippalāda Samhita, it was Kasi; in the Saunakīya Samhita, it was Anga (Eastern Bihar); while in the Aitareya Samhita, it was Pundra (Northern Bengal). This constant eastward shift confirms that, despite such taboos, the Indo-Aryan groups settled in the lower Ganges region and merged with the paddy-cultivating non-Aryans, even though, according to them, it was once ritually unclean. Therefore, it raises the obvious question: why such contradictions? If indeed pollution and ritual purity served as key factors of demarcation from non-Aryans, one might ask why mingle with them later on? How did the land (Bengal), which was once impure for Vedic sacrifices, suddenly become virtuous and part of Āryavārta?

If the theory of automatic sanctification of land inhabited by Indo-Āryans could be put aside, it may be considered that subjugation was a tool in the hands of the migrating Indo-Āryans. To establish an Indo-Aryan sway by terming the indigenous folk as irrelevant, their actions barbaric, and their land polluted. Thus, generating the need for a more civilised group to take over. A product of imperial tenacity, as one might see in recent history, one of the latest examples being when Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem “The White Man’s Burden”.

However, while it may have been established that signs of pollution were essential to the success of Indo-Aryan territorial expansion in the east, and had little to do with the religious indecency of the then inhabitants of Bengal. It is bound to be asked: Why and how did the actions of the first wave of migrating Brahman idealists in areas (now Bengal) have any relevance when studying primitive folk festivals like Gājan? While there is no simplified answer, something which is for certain and not mind-baffling is the installation of a rigid hierarchical-based social system in regions of Bengal only after the Indo-Aryan ascendancy in the East. If this stands true, taking cue from it, Dharma Gajan, i.e., worship of Dharma thakur, in the Rarh region of Bengal, its worship is often traced to the primitive sun-cult of pre-Aryan times (Ashutosh Bhattacharjee). Sukumar Sen also points out that the ‘antiquity of Dharmaraj predated the Vedas’. Thus, if the worship of ‘Dharma thakur’ indeed preceded the Indo-Aryan migration in Bengal, then why do caste roles play such an essential part in modern Dharma Gājan celebrations? For example, the Basahari ascetics (house dwellers) of Gājan are mostly from the Napit (Barber) caste, and the dhakis (drum players) belong to the Dom caste. As caste intricacies could not have been established when Dharma worship first began. While this shall be addressed later, the point to be made here is that, even though Gājan is a “home-grown” ritual of Bengal, it addresses the arduous needs of ordinary people, unlike the Brahmanical Hindu rites with post-vedantic ritual authority. The eventual syncretism and amalgamation of migratory and indigenous cultures in Bengal have brought Gājan within the realm of Brahmanical Hindu rites and, by doing so, have installed caste hierarchy and social prejudices within the folk festival, which the Indo-Āryans have cherished for so long in the context of community building.

Interpretation of Gājan

Gājan or Gambhīrā (called in North West Bengal), celebrated in the Bengali month of Chaitra (March-April), is a spring ritual focusing on the worship of Dharma or Shiva and at times Surya (Sun god), which, according to Ralph W. Nicholas, “seeks resurrection in the desiccating heat of unrelenting sun”. As the festival falls at the conjecture of spring (basanta) and hot (grimsa) season, Bengal, mostly being a low-lying delta, falls victim to the excess heat. The soil dries up

while the water bodies are depleted of the elixir of life. As any village community sustaining itself on agriculture would rely on these essential resources of life, the occasion of Gājan, in essence, is not merely a celebration during this period but rather a cry for social rejuvenation in the form of mythical rain to address practical issues.

Further agreeing to this outlook, J.M. Dasa traced the term Gājan to the Sanskrit word 'Gārjana', meaning 'crying' or 'rumbling'. On the other hand, Ralph W. Nicholas points out that 'Gà' may refer to 'Grama' (village), and 'jana' refers to people. Although these explanations lack linguistic credibility, the varied interpretations of the nomenclature do indicate that the rituals of Gājan focus on drawing attention to communal miseries, as previously discussed. Additionally, evidence for such an interpretation can be drawn from the case studies and surveys of Gājan conducted by Ákös Östör in the villages of Bishnupur (Bankura, West Bengal) and by Ralph W. Nicholas in the Kelomal group of villages (Tamluk, East Medinipur). Both of these authors have witnessed Gājan (Shiva Gājan) in two distinct regions of Bengal, at two fairly different time frames and local patterns, yet have still based their premises about Shiva Gājan on a singular, uniform line. Ákös Östör focused on the relationship between the Bhakta/sannyasi (ascetic) and his bhakti (religious belief). In Gājan, they denote a 'special kind of devotion' in which their sole purpose is to gain the favour of the deity through various ascetic practices and self-immolation. This exposition lines well with Ralph W. Nicholas's interpretation of Gājan in Kelomal. According to him, the deity has turned his face from the world and is sitting atop the mountain. As a result, the world is heating up, and all the fertilizing power is withheld. Thus, people who want to arouse and gain fruits must go through acts of austerities and self-immolation to acquire protection from the deity's anger. Acts of self-immolation can be traced in literary accounts such as *Dharma Mangal* (1662) by Rupram Chakraborty, which is one of the oldest treatises on Dharma worship and the first to mention the term 'Gājan' in the modern era.

As the story progresses, the hero Lausen and his mother Rañjāvati both impose upon themselves great acts of self-immolation, such as Rañjāvati throwing herself on a plank studded with sharp spikes or Lausen offering his body, divided into nine pieces. In both scenarios, the deity, impressed by their sacrifices, revives them and grants their wish. While Rañjāvati held a more personal wish to bear a child, Lausen's wish encompassed communal desires, thus symbolising the dual purpose of Gājan ascetics. The central theme of the story thus revolves around the idea that self-harm would help gain the deity's favour. Based on this, in both *Dharma Gājan* and *Shiva Gājan*, the ascetics symbolically imitate a similar theme, i.e., the deity's ability to bring the dead back to life through the return of rain, the growth of crops, etc. The concept of the dead being brought back to life has been a recurring theme in Bengali folklore found in *Manasa Mangal* (faithful wife restoring life of husband) as well as *Śitalā Mangal* (dead children brought back to life) but these are considerably contrasting to the narrative of *Dharma Mangal* as here the followers had to voluntarily proclaim self harm on themselves to worship the deity. Therefore, in Gājan, the deity is not portrayed as a selfless, compassionate figure; his pity is only witnessed after his followers voluntarily endure sufficient pain. Consequently, it makes one eager to speculate that the mythical descriptions in *Dharmamangal* may be a symbolic indication of a relationship between an overlord (deity) and his subjects (Gājan ascetics), i.e., an indication of a feudal hierarchical society.

Evidence of serfdom could be found from the Fifth-Seventh century C.E. copper plate grants found in Bengal. For example, the Ashrafpur grants (7th century C.E.) from East Bengal

record the information of individuals who held rights over a plot of land and also named the cultivators who tilled it. The grant also records that the plot was later granted to a Buddhist monastery headed by Samghmitra, while the cultivators remained undisturbed, as if they were tied to the soil. In this scenario, if there is a period of crop failure, the subjects of the village beg for mercy from their overlords or take loans from moneylenders, and the peasants must endure considerable trouble to repay them. Similarly, in preparations to Gājan, when the weather fails an agrarian based village society, the villagers fall in great jeopardy and with no choice, undergo significant physical harm leading to their Garjana (crying/rumbling) to the deity, which not only acts as a reminder but also a form of payment to the mythical overlord in return for more pleasant weather conditions.

Thus, from the very stem of interpreting Gājan, one sees the impression of a hierarchical social system complemented with the displeasure of the deity, the reason of which is vague, but one might hypothesize if it has anything to do with the being called out and worshipped by non-Brahmanas as well as by non-dvijas (Shudras and outcastes).

Additionally, another important aspect of Gājan, which highlights that social inconsistencies were in order, was the process of renunciation of Bhaktas (ascetics) to perform Gājan. Renunciation holds a high regard in the history of Indian religious cultures. In the Dharmasastra and Mahabharata, it is described as the last stage of man's life. Louis Dumont proclaimed that the concept of renunciation was critical to understand Indian society, as it focuses on collective identity rather than individual action. But in Gājan, renunciation is seen as a temporary time-out for participants (ascetics) from worldly life to engage in the worship of the deity, as it is followed not by Moksha but by a return to samsāra. This temporary reprieve of ascetics from worldly matters is unique to the performance of Gājan and, as a result, must be examined to interpret the social norms it imbibes.

While many Hindu domestic rituals are performed by non-Brahmana householders, Hindu communal rites are exclusively presided over by Brahmana priests as prescribed by the Varna system as well as by the Sanskrit puranas, which associate Brahmanas 'as intermediaries to deities on behalf of others'. However, in the case of a communal festival like Gājan in which Hindu deities such as Shiva, Dharma, and Surya are worshipped, the rites are chiefly performed by ordinary non-Brahmana householders who go through severe austerities in order to qualify themselves for the occasion. Evidence of which could be found from the accounts and surveys conducted by Amalendu Mitra, who surveyed the organization of Gajan in over 85 villages in 1972, Rebati Mohan Sarkar's (1986) ethnographic research of Gājan in Southwest Birbhum and Northwest Bardhaman, Frank J. Korom's (1992) description of Dharma Gajan in Goalpara village, Shantiniketan, and many more. So, it may be asked that even though Gājan marks the worship of deities in the Hindu pantheon, why then is it chiefly participated in and worshipped by non-Brahman groups? Won't it go against the norms of the varna system? The observations with regard to this are manifold.

Firstly, Brahmanas do not completely sideline themselves from Gājan rites, as there are certain ceremonies in which the role of a Brahmana is considered indispensable. Thus, while the Kayasthas and higher-ranking Brahmans stand largely outside the execution of Gajan, quite interestingly, the socially lower placed Brahmanas cordially participate in the festival. As witnessed by Ralph W. Nicholas in Gājan of Kelomal village, the Brahmanas engaged in Gājan

practices belong to the Vyāsokta order, which were domestic priests of Mahisyas and are lowly placed within the brahmanical hierarchical order.

In fact, bhaktas (ascetics) from various social groups, including lower-order Brahmanas, undergo austerities to become ascetics. Again, from the accounts of Ralph W. Nicholas, it is suggested that from the households of Banamalikalua, ascetics for the sake of village Gājan were called upon who belonged to high-caste groups such as Brahmanas and Kayasthas, as well as included Mahisyas, Garland-makers, and Barbers who are often socially downtrodden. Therefore, based on such observations, Gajan does not seem to be contained only within the non-brahmana groups, and the participation of Brahmanas indicates Gājan's compliance with the norms of the varna system. Moreover, it seems that the occasion of Gajan facilitates social cooperation, placing high-caste and low-caste ascetics on the same footing. While it seems legitimate, the presence of lower-order Brahmanas and the absence of the higher order of the same indicate that societal factionalism was certainly influential in Gājan rites.

According to Ákös Östor, "Almost all high caste and low caste participate in the Gajan Bhaktas (ascetics) do puja regardless of caste, and there is no separation in eating". However, Ákös Östor was quick to remind us that "people do not use Gājan to carry castelessness in everyday life"; rather, Gajan does not aim to eradicate social contradictions through rituals; rather, it falls within them. This can well be understood by emphasising the procedure to be an ascetic, making the interpretation rather complex.

The foremost participants in Gājan are known as sannyāsī or bhakta. A sannyāsī is a person who has renounced worldly life temporarily during the period of Gājan through ascetic practice. There are two types of ascetics in Gājan: those appointed by a community called 'Deśer Sannyāsī' and those who make a personal vow to become ascetics called 'Mānasik Sannyāsī'. Throughout the course of Gājan, the ascetics survive on a havisya vegetarian diet, food cooked in clarified butter, suitable for offering in a fire sacrifice. The food itself seems to be based on conditions of being ritually pure or impure, comparable to the Hindu custom of impurity (āsaucha) during one's funeral rites. Also, an amalgamation of myths and practical rituals showcases that during the period of Gājan, the deity seems to have been invited to leave the ascetic life and take up worldly life; therefore, the deity is greeted with both uncooked and cooked food. However, cooked foods like rice can easily become contaminated, so precautions must be taken to preserve their purity. Evidences of such a condition are condensed in accounts of Amalendu Mitra's study of Gajan in 85 villages, as well as in Ralph W. Nicholas's case study of Gājan in Kelomal. During the entire year, the Sūdra householders of the village are not qualified to make such food offerings to the deity because they are not dvija (twice born). Nevertheless, for the duration of Gajan, the Sudras, along with other non-Brahmanas, are transferred to 'Shiva's clan', as the male ascetics wear sacrificial threads like the dvija men of higher castes. This is further confirmed by Ákös Östor, the sacred thread "symbolizes a new birth, birth into the gotra of the gods, not birth into the Brahman caste. Bhaktas emphasize that they are not like Brahmins but like deities. The sacred thread is used to purify objects in the puja; in the Gajan, it signifies the ability of the bhaktas to serve, touch, and worship the deities without any restrictions."

Moreover, each male ascetic receives a sacrificial thread and kusa grass ring from a Brahman before undertaking the service of the gods. The thread worn by a Brahman man, called paita (from upavita), is usually suspended from the left shoulder and under the right arm.

However, gajan ascetics wear sacred threads called *uttari* (from *uttariya*) around the neck, not across the left shoulder as in the Brahmanic fashion. Nevertheless, the objective of the sacred thread seems to be to grant legitimacy to non-Brahmanas to worship the deity and not to mix with Brahmanas, who are considered higher in the social order. Also, the legitimacy is granted by a Brahmana concurring to their authority over the entire gajan and their unquestionable purity in ritual proceedings. Therefore, it might be said that Gajan is substantially participated in by the non-Brahmanas and low jatis, but Brahmanas chiefly coordinate the festival in accordance with the norms of the Hindu religious system. This outlook is agreed by Ákös Östor - while all high and low castes participate in Gājan, the “festival is not dominated by low castes”.

Conclusion

Gājan, with its varied ritual practices, is essential for understanding the conditions of rural Bengal. While the treatment of the ascetic's body during Gājan showcases the richness of the local rites, it also holds a long tradition of worshipping agriculture and fertility. The Rarh region of Bengal is filled with folk tales, songs, and rural performances surrounding Gājan, which showcase the impact this festival has on their lives.

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