

Nuakhai Juhar

August 26, 2020

On the occasion of 'Nuakhai Juhar', the Prime Minister extended his good wishes to the farmers and wished for their prosperity and good health. Nuakhai Juhar, one of the most ancient festivals, is the **agricultural festival celebrated in Odisha, Chhattisgarh and areas of neighbouring states to welcome the new crop of the season.** It is also called Nuakhai Parab or Nuakahi Bhetghat.

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Nuakhai is a combination of two words that signifies eating of new rice as **'nua' means new and 'khai' means eat.** On this day, people worship food grain and prepare special meals. **Farmers offer the first produce from their lands to Goddess Samaleswari, the famous 'Mother Goddess' of Sambalpur district of Odisha.** Moreover, locals also organise several cultural programmes – folk songs and dances in their respective districts on this day to display the state's local culture and tradition. However, this year, people will celebrate the festival while staying indoors due to Covid-19 outbreak.

The festival is seen as a new ray of hope, held the day after the Ganesha Chaturthi festival. It has a big significance for farmers and the agricultural community. **The festival is celebrated at a particular time of day which is called lagan.** Arisaa pithaa is prepared to celebrate this festival. When the lagan comes, the people first remember their village god or goddess and then have their nua. The festival is observed throughout Odisha, but it is particularly important in the life and culture of Western Odisha.

According to local researchers Nuakhai is of fairly ancient origin. Some researchers found the fundamental idea of the celebration can be traced back at least to Vedic times when

the rishis (sages) had talked of **panchayajna, the five important activities in the annual calendar of an agrarian society**. These five activities have been specified as sitayajna (the tilling of the land), pravapana yajna (the sowing of seeds), **pralambana yajna (the initial cutting of crops)**, khala yajna (the harvesting of grains) and prayayana yajna (the preservation of the produce). In view of this, Nuakhai may be seen as having evolved out of the third activity, namely pralambana yajna, which involves cutting the first crop and reverently offering it to the mother goddess.