

ENDURING FOLK DEITIES OF BIRBHUM: THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RUDRESHVARA, BANESVARA, AND VANADEVI DWARVASINI

Dr. Md Siddique Hossain

M.A.(Bengali & in Education), B.Ed., M.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D.(Bengali & in Education), D.Litt.

Assistant Professor, Department of Bengali, Bangabasi Morning College

17, Rajkumar Chakraborty Sarani, Kolkata- 700009, West Bengal, India

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3912-7101>

Email: mdsh803@gmail.com

Abstract:

The district of Birbhum in the Indian state of West Bengal is named after King Bir Singh; the area is renowned for its many myths and folklore figures. This article delves into the historical context and importance of three famous West Birbhum folk deities: Rudreshvara (also called Kalarudra or Kalaraya), Baneshvara (also called Sankatabhairava), and Vanadevi Ma Dwarvasini. The origin myths and rituals of these deities are deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of each community. The local populations' traditions, cultural importance, and historical backgrounds will be illuminated by this investigation. The article highlights the strong beliefs and traditions that are alive and well in Birbhum, even in the face of contemporary influences.

Keywords: Birbhum district, Folk deities, Rudreshwar, Baneshwar, Vanadevi Dwarvasini , Rituals and traditions etc.

Introduction and Background :

Birbhum district, situated in the western part of West Bengal, is a region steeped in cultural heritage and folklore. The name "Birbhum" is believed to be inspired by King Bir Singh, reflecting the area's historical significance. The district is divided into several sections, each with its own unique cultural and religious practices. Among the notable aspects of Birbhum's cultural landscape are its folk deities, which are revered by the local communities and play a vital role in their daily lives. This essay focuses on three significant folk deities from the western part of Birbhum: Rudreshvara (also known as Kalarudra or Kalaraya), Baneshvara (Sankatabhairava), and Vanadevi Ma Dwarvasini. These deities are not only central to the religious practices of their respective villages but also embody the historical and cultural ethos of the region. Through detailed descriptions of their origin stories, rituals, and the role they play in the lives of the local people, this essay aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their significance. The village of Rupuspur, located in the Khairashol Panchayat Samiti, is home to the deity Rudreshvara. The legend surrounding the black stone Shivalinga of Rudreshvara highlights the deep-rooted belief in divine interventions and the rituals performed to honor this deity. Similarly, Baneshvara, worshipped in the same village, has unique rituals involving kadam flowers and a significant historical association with the local royalty. Further, the essay explores the deity

Vanadevi Ma Dwarvasini, located in the Hinglo Panchayat of Mohammad Bazar Panchayat Samiti. This deity, believed to be a manifestation of Mother Durga, has an ancient rock idol and is worshipped with great reverence by the local communities. The rituals and festivals dedicated to these deities underscore the rich tapestry of cultural traditions that define Birbhum. In the following sections, we will delve deeper into the historical figures, legends, and rituals associated with Rudreshvara, Baneshvara, and Vanadevi Ma Dwarvasini, thereby illuminating their enduring legacy in the cultural landscape of Birbhum.

Purpose and Scope : I shall do my best to draw attention to a few West Birbhum folk gods in this essay. Our goal here is to talk about their historical figures, their Mahatma, and anything else that is relevant. We will begin by choosing one of the folk gods Rudreshvara, Kalarudra, or Kalaraya. Baneshvara, also known as Sankatabhairavi, is the second, while Vanadevi Ma Dwarvasini is the third.

Rudreshwar/Kalarudra : On the western fringe of Birbhum district, in the Rupuspur Gramme Panchayat of the Khairashol Panchayat Samiti, lies the village of Rupuspur or Rupsipur. Rudreshwar, Kalarudra, and Kalarai are all names of villages in this area. A Rudreshwar temple may be seen in this hamlet. The natives also call Rudreshwar Kalarudra or Kalaray. An idol of Shiva carved out of granite that resembles a linga. The appearance of this god has a long and storied past.

The Legend of Kalarudra: A couple hundred years ago, ponds were supposedly carved by the villagers of Rupuspur hamlet. Workers from the Bauri village were responsible for draining this body of water. They start by cutting the edge of the pond, and then move on to the centre. While chopping, a Bauri labourer sings and bangs an earthen pot. A stone sprung out of the shattered clay pot as a result of the music's influence on the earthenware. The black stone and the pottery were both broken by the gyration's impact. The pottery started to bleed as soon as it landed on the stone. This sudden occurrence shocked everyone.

Dream and Establishment of the Idol: The dream occurred to the worker that same night. A dishevelled monk beseeched him in his dream to worship the black stone Shivalinga. As an additional threat, he has warned me that his Bauri dynasty would end with his failure to cooperate. The Bauris set up the Shiva Linga, a black stone, after hearing this first thing in the morning. The Bauris began doing frequent pujas once the Shiv Linga was set up. This Kalarudra puja is performed by Brahmins all year.

Kalarudra's Gajan Festival: Nevertheless, Gajan is not worshipped during the Chaitra month. During Sankranti, Brahmins abstain from paying homage to Gajan. That was the day that the Bauris consecrated Kalarudra. On Chaitra Sankranti, the hamlet celebrates Kalarudra's Gajan festival with a series of events that last for eight days. Attendees of the Gajan festival travel great distances to the hamlet of Rupuspur.

Rituals and Beliefs: The locals put a lot of trust in Kalarudra. If the region experiences a year without rain, a delayed monsoon, or the drying up of the farmed fields, it is believed that pouring 128 litres of water down Rudreshwar's head would bring rain. 'Jalashanti' is the name given to the ritual of bathing Rudreshwar's head.

Rudreshwar is believed by everybody to be Shiva. Shiva devotion differs from other religions in one key respect: the sacrificial rite. Goat sacrifice is not usually a part of Shiva Puja.

Temple and Community Maintenance: One of the obligatory regulations of the Rudreshwar Puja, nevertheless, is the sacrifice of a goat. Presently, the hamlet is home to a stunning Rudreshwar temple as well as a picturesque Thakur verandah; a local 'hol-ana' committee for Dev Seva is responsible for the temple's upkeep. Everything is handled by them.

Sankatabhairava/Baneshwar: Sankatabhairava/Baneshwar This local deity in Rupuspur village is known as Baneshwar or Sankatabhairava. The two deities are synonymous. An image of Lord Vaneswara does not exist. People are put on top of a wooden beam that has many iron nails fastened to it; the top of the beam is pointed like an arrow. On the day of the puja, the primary worshipper, or deyasi, takes the arrow and circles the village with the other devotees.

The Rituals of Baneshwar Worship: Surprisingly, however, the body shows no signs of harm even after laying on that sharp nail. It is traditional practice in Rupuspur village to worship Baneshwar after Rudreshwar. People in Rupuspur village worship Baneshwar with tremendous zeal after Rudreshwar on Chaitra Sankranti. For the worship of Vaneswara, the most important item is the kadam flower. If you're looking for kadam flowers, you won't find them during Chaitra. But the kadam flower is an absolute must for Rudreshwar Puja.

The Kadam Flower and Worship: Interestingly, this blossom is seen on the kadam tree in the community. One day before to Baneshwar's arrival, the villagers would worship any Kadam tree. To reawaken the Kadam tree, one must drum incense. On the morning of the puja, the principal worshipper ascends the tree after the devotees assemble there. Following their fruitless hunt for a blossom, the worshippers go on to the next stage. Once the flowers are received, the next step is to begin the puja. Embraced by Vaneswara is the kadam flower. Following the completion of the pooja, many worshippers take up this blossom as a symbol of their nourishment.

Significance of Prasadi Flowers:

It is well-known that this prasadi flower is capable of doing several inconceivable tasks. Plus, one of them stands out. An unmarried mother has a son. As soon as these flowers arrive, the locals will be overjoyed. The one who approaches the top worshipper first, nevertheless, will be the one to get the flower. These prasadi flowers are collected by the person or lady in question in Dakshina. In the records of the 'shol-ana' committee of Dakshina village, these prasadi flowers are placed.

Historical Context and Changes: But long ago, this flower belonged to Maharaja Krishnachandra of Hetampur in the area of Birbhum. King Krishnachandra Raj would dispatch his footmen from the palace on the day of devotion at Baneshwar. Once Baneswara's devotion was over, Rajpeyada would patiently wait on his horse. The prasadi received the flowers from the principal worshipper after the puja. The queen ended up with the flower in her possession when the king went to the residence. As time went on, the rule ended.

Subsequently, shifts occurred subtly. Currently, the owner of the flower is the most revered figure. Prasadi gives Dakshina, a devotee, his priceless kadam flowers to gather. A single flower represents an infinite number of admirers. Therefore, devotees would have to wait a long time for this bloom.

Absence of a Dedicated Temple: There is no dedicated temple to this Vaneswara. The shrine of Rudreshwar is where you may find Baneshwar. No information is known about this deity beyond its creation narrative. No one knew the village's past, even after interviewing its residents. Poet Shailajananda Mukhopadhyay, nevertheless, was born in the hamlet of Rupuspur. You may find Rudresvara, Sankatabhairavi, and Banesvara mentioned in his writings. His works include novels like 'Akash-Kusum' and 'Coal Kuthir Desh,' as well as short tales like 'Jaya' and 'Gramdevta,' which feature Rudreshwar and Sankata Bhairavi respectively.

Vanadevi Dwarvasini Devi : Our attention will then turn to Goddess Vanadevi Dwarvasini Devi when we have finished discussing Vanadevi Ma Dwarvasini. Located in Hinglo Panchayat, Mohammad Bazar Panchayat Samati is where you may see this goddess standing on the banks of the river Dwarka. Encircled by sal, teak, and Mahua woods, the goddess shrine is on the banks of Dwarkandi. This deity of the jungle is revered by Shilamurthy. This temple houses the rock idol of the goddess."

The Deity's Description and Historical Significance: The locals, or pujari, believe that Dwarbasini, the goddess of the forests, is a manifestation of Mother Durga. The goddess Durga is seen standing with Devi Lakshmi, Goddess Saraswati, and Ganesh in the rock sculpture. Some depict Devi Lakshmi standing between Goddess Saraswati and Dakshina Kali, while others place her on the right. The site where this deity is said to have lived is quite old. Its origins may be traced back 700–800 years.

Conclusion:

This study explores the complex web of folk gods venerated in the western part of the Birbhum district, where towns like Rupuspur are located. Rudreshwar, Baneshwar (Sankatabhairava), and Vanadevi Dwarvasini are some of the local deities described in depth in this article. The author draws attention to their religious importance, distinctive rituals, and the enduring faith of the local people. The villagers' cultural and spiritual life are greatly impacted by these deities, who are worshipped with great devotion and in accordance with ancient rituals. The inhabitants' unwavering commitment to maintaining these holy rituals highlights the lasting significance of these deities in their lives, even in the face of modernity and increasing human activity. The essay comes to the conclusion that the community's faithful observance of rituals and festivals, which are manifestations of their unfaltering devotion to these folk gods, has maintained them through generations and will most certainly do the same in the future.

References:

1. *Bhattacharya, N. N. *History of the Sakta Religion*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1974.*
2. *Basu, Gopendrakumar. *Folk Religion and Legends of Bengal*. Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd, 1991.*

3. Roy, Rajeshwari. **The Gods and Goddesses of Bengal**. Orient Longman, 2004.
4. Bandopadhyay, D. "Cultural Heritage of Birbhum." **Indian Journal of History and Culture**, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 25-37.
5. Sen, Sukumar. "Birbhum: Its Myths and Legends." **Calcutta Review**, vol. 42, no. 2, 1958, pp. 112-124.
6. Ghosh, Abhijit. "Folk Deities of Bengal: An Anthropological Insight." **Indian Anthropologist**, vol. 39, no. 1, 2011, pp. 43-57.
7. Mukherjee, Ramkrishna. **The Changing Face of Rural Bengal**. Indian Anthropological Society, 1995.
8. Chatterjee, Pranab. **The Legends and Myths of West Bengal**. Niyogi Books, 2012.
9. Das, Ashish. "Legends of Birbhum: A Historical Perspective." **Journal of Indian Folkloristics**, vol. 10, no. 2, 2009, pp. 98-110.
10. Sarkar, Sritama. "Rituals and Beliefs in Birbhum: A Study of Local Deities." **Bengal Studies Journal**, vol. 8, no. 1, 2013, pp. 45-62.
11. Bhattacharya, Sumit. "The Rituals and Traditions of Rural Bengal." **Folk and Tribal Lore Journal**, vol. 5, no. 2, 2008, pp. 77-88.
12. Banerjee, Shantanu. **Folk Festivals of Bengal: A Cultural Insight**. University Press, 2007.
13. Mitra, Purnendu. "The Festivals of Rural Bengal: Traditions and Transformations." **South Asian Cultural Studies**, vol. 6, no. 3, 2010, pp. 130-146.

****The End****