

## **Bathudi Tribe of Northern Odisha: Cultural Ties with Atharadeula Temple**

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**Abstract:** *The Bathudi tribe, an indigenous community predominantly inhabiting the northern regions of Odisha, is a significant cultural group with a rich heritage. Their lifestyle, traditions, and spiritual practices reflect the harmonious relationship they have maintained with their natural and cultural surroundings for generations. Among the prominent symbols of this connection is the Atharadeula Temple, a historical and spiritual landmark that holds immense significance for the tribe.*

### **The Bathudi Tribe: An Overview**

The Bathudi people are primarily found in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Balasore in Odisha (SCSTRTI, 2015; Odisha State Tribal Museum, n.d.). Their ancestral roots can be traced to the Panchpaidh (Panchpir) plateau within the Simlipal forest range of Mayurbhanj district, from where they gradually migrated (Wikipedia, 2023; Odisha State Tribal Museum, n.d.). Known for their unique traditions and customs, they are primarily agrarian, relying on farming and forest resources for sustenance (SCSTRTI, 2015). Their cultural identity is deeply rooted in nature, as reflected in their rituals, festivals, and daily practices. According to their traditional beliefs, the Bathudis originated from the arms of Brahma (Wikipedia, 2023).

The Bathudi tribe has a rich oral tradition that preserves their history, folklore, and beliefs. Their language, a dialect influenced by Odia and Santali, serves as a

medium for transmitting their heritage across generations (Odisha State Tribal Museum, n.d.). Their lifestyle is deeply intertwined with nature, and their spiritual beliefs reflect a unique blend of animism and Hinduism (SCSTRTI, 2015). Atharadeula Temple, situated near the tribal heartland, is a prominent pilgrimage site in the region. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva and holds immense cultural and religious significance for the Bathudi community (Odisha Bathudi Blog, 2018).



Figure 1: Cenreal view of Bathudi tribe in Simlipal Region

### Lifestyle and Occupation

The Bathudi people are primarily agrarian, with farming and forest-based activities being their main sources of livelihood. They also engage in animal husbandry, hunting, and fishing to sustain their families. Many Bathudi communities practice shifting cultivation in hilly areas. These underscore the tribe's intimate relationship with the natural environment and its centrality to their economic and cultural life.

### Social Structure

The tribe follows a patriarchal social system, where elders play a significant role in decision-making. They have a clan-based structure, and marriages within the same clan are avoided.

### Religious Beliefs

The Bathudis worship several deities, both animistic and Hindu. Badam is their principal deity, and they believe in the presence of spirits in nature. They celebrate

several festivals, with Chaitra Parva being one of the most important. This festival marks the community's devotion to their gods and includes rituals, dances, and feasts.

**Badam Sala:** In Bathudi villages, the Badam Sala serves as a central worship place, often located under sacred trees. The primary deity worshipped here is "Badam," considered the main god of the Bathudi tribe. Each village may have its own specific goddess in addition to Badam. The village priest, known as the Dehuri, conducts rituals and festivals at the Badam Sala, especially on Saturdays. This Dehuri is believed to be chosen through divine will of Badam of course. While it may sometimes be a prophetic dream or at others by considering the number of *mansiks* of people, that have come true through their prayer. These occasions are marked by traditional dances like the Changu Nacha, performed by village youth during the Chaitra month of the Odia calendar.

**Thakurani Sala:** Another significant worship site is the Thakurani Sala, which, like the Badam Sala, is situated under sacred trees and serves as a place for village deities. The Dehuri also oversees rituals here, with the community actively participating in various ceremonies throughout the year.

These sacred sites are integral to the Bathudi tribe's religious and cultural identity, reflecting their deep connection to nature and traditional practices.

### **The Atharadeula Temple: A Sacred Site**

The Atharadeula Temple, located in northern Odisha, is a historic temple that serves as a vital spiritual center for the *Bathudi* tribe and other local communities. The temple, believed to be several centuries old, is dedicated to a deity who is revered as a guardian of the land and its people. On the architectural basis it appears to belonging from the early centuries, that is 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Architecturally, the temple is a fine example of Kalinga-style craftsmanship, featuring intricate carvings and a sanctum sanctorum that radiates serenity. Its location amidst nature further enhances its spiritual aura, making it a place of pilgrimage and cultural significance for the *Bathudi* tribe.

The Athara Deula, translating to "Eighteen Temples," is a significant cultural and religious site within Odisha's Similipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district. This complex comprises 18 temples made of stone and holds profound importance for the indigenous Bathudi tribe, serving as a central place of worship and cultural expression. The primary temple, known as Manab Deula, is situated in the core area



Figure 2: Image of Manav Temple

of the Bakua range within Similipal. It is so called because it is believed to be the only man-made temple of the 18 temples that fall under the Atharadeula temple complex. While the rest are believed to have come into existence through divine will.

Each year, during the Hindu month of Chaitra (March-April), the Bathudi community conducts a ten-day worship program at Athara Deula, underscoring its enduring cultural relevance. The primary temple, known as Manab Deula, is situated in the core area of the Bakua range within Similipal. Each year, during the Hindu month of Chaitra (March-April), the Bathudi community conducts a ten-day worship program at Athara Deula, underscoring its enduring cultural relevance. The Bathudi community venerates Lord Badam, their chief deity, at Athara Deula. They regard this site with profound reverence, considering a pilgrimage to Athara Deula essential in their lifetime. The temple's origins are shrouded in legend, with beliefs that it was divinely constructed rather than man-made.

### **Cultural Connection between the *Bathudi* Tribe and Atharadeula Temple**

The *Bathudi* tribe, an indigenous community from the northern part of Odisha, has long been associated with the rich cultural and religious traditions of the region. Its connection to the Atharadeula Temple is profound, extending beyond religious practices to encompass cultural and social dimensions. Key aspects of this connection include:

## Rituals and Festivals

The *Bathudi* people play a central role in the temple's rituals and festivals. Major events like the annual Rath Yatra and harvest festivals see the active participation of the tribe, who offer prayers, perform traditional dances, and make offerings from their agricultural produce.

## Custodians of Tradition

The tribe considers themselves custodians of the temple's traditions, with certain families entrusted with specific roles, such as maintaining the temple premises, preparing offerings, and conducting rituals.

## Sacred Ecology

The *Bathudi* belief system intertwines spiritual practices with ecological stewardship. They revere the temple as a sacred site and protect its surrounding environment, which they believe is vital for the deity's blessings.

## Folklore and Oral History

Stories and legends about the Atharadeula Temple are an integral part of *Bathudi* folklore. These narratives often emphasize the temple's protective role during times of crisis, reinforcing its significance in their collective memory.

## The 10-Day Rituals (Atharadeula Parba) Observed by the *Bathudi* Tribe Near Atharadeula Temple

The *Bathudi* tribe's connection to the Atharadeula Temple is both spiritual and historical. The rituals conducted at the temple serve not only as acts of worship but also as ways to preserve and celebrate their ancient traditions.

Athara Deula serves as a focal point for various traditional festivals and rituals. One of the most significant aspects of their cultural practices is the 10-day ritual observed annually near the Atharadeula Temple, a revered religious site. Notably, during the month of Chaitra (March-April), this significant ten-day worship event is held, initiated by Dehuri King Sj. Brundaban Mohapatra Maharaj of the Sanamulia Ashram in Khunta, it attracts devotees from numerous *Bathudi* villages, with some people even walking barefooted all the way. These gatherings reinforce community bonds and preserve cultural heritage.

This event not only highlights their deep connection to the temple but also symbolizes their respect for the divine and the spiritual bond between the *Bathudi* people and the sacred space.

### **The Significance of the 10-Day Rituals**

The 10-day rituals, held annually near Atharadeula Temple, are a time for intense spiritual activity. These rituals are observed with utmost devotion and are believed to bring blessings from the deity. The *Bathudi* tribe, with their profound reverence for nature and the divine, use this period to seek spiritual healing, prosperity, and protection for their community.

The rituals are carefully planned and involve a series of sacred practices that engage both the body and the spirit. They also emphasize the importance of community and family, with every member of the tribe, from the youngest to the eldest, participating in the observances.

Some Important Guidelines for participation in the Atharadeula Parba :-

1. At the auspicious time of the beginning of the Atharadeula Yatra, the people of the community are to first visit their respective village gods & goddesses at their Shri Thakurani & Badam sala, praying for the well-being of their families.
2. If some people of the community are travelling from Jashipur to take part in this ritual, then they are to first visit and devote themselves at various religious sites like Duarsuni, Andharisala, Mahu Bhandara, Mahabrukshasala, Mahabruksha Champa, Budhi Ghara & Pokhari Devi.
3. The natural spring near the Atharadeula temple is the starting point of the temple enclosure, and one must not enter the enclosure wearing shoes, colorful dresses, on a vehicle or being in a state of intoxication.
4. Use of plastic utensils are banned within the temple premises.
5. They are to offer offerings of food in a new bowl, a new plate, on a new mat.
6. They are refrained from performing the great musical instrument of their God, the Changu, in a disorderly manner, here and there.

### **Day 1-3: Preparations and Purification**

The first three days of the ritual period are dedicated to purification and preparation. After setting up camp by bulding temporary huts, the tribe gathers at the temple,



Figure 3: The Rule of the Athara Deula festival

where they perform cleansing ceremonies to purify their bodies and minds. This includes taking a bath at the nearby spring, drinking *Goumutra* (Cow’s urine), and for men shaving their facial hair and, in some cases, head as well is considered important. They then get into their appropriate attire.

These days are marked by offerings of fruits, flowers, and sacred herbs to Lord Shiva, seeking his blessings for the success of the upcoming rituals.

On the second day, there is a communal feast, where the *Bathudi* people share food and celebrate their bond with one another. It of course consists of purely vegetarian food. This meal is seen as a symbol of unity, reinforcing the idea that they are all part of one spiritual family. The third day is dedicated to honoring ancestors and seeking their guidance and protection.

### Day 4-6: Rituals of Offering and Devotion

The middle three days focus on intense offerings and prayers. Devotees offer milk, honey, and sacred water at the temple’s sanctum. These offerings symbolize purity and are believed to please the deities, ensuring their favor. During these days, the



Figure 4: Temporary dwellings of the *Bathudis*

*Bathudi* people engage in devotional singing and dance, known as ‘Bhajana’ and ‘Jagarana,’ to invoke the blessings of Lord Shiva.

These three days are also marked by the recitation of sacred texts and mantras, passed down through generations. The tribe believes that chanting these mantras strengthens their connection to the divine and helps them overcome any hardships they may face.

### **Day 7-9: Meditation and Spiritual Reflection**

The final three days of the ritual period are focused on introspection and spiritual reflection. The *Bathudi* tribe members engage in meditation, seeking peace and clarity in their lives. These days are characterized by silence and deep prayer, as the people gather in the temple precincts to connect with the divine on a more personal level.

The eighth day is particularly significant, as it is believed that the spirits of the ancestors visit the temple to bless the living. On this day, special prayers are offered for the well-being and protection of the entire tribe.

## Day 10: The Grand Finale and Celebrations

The 10th day marks the culmination of the rituals and is celebrated with great fervor. This day is known as the 'Jatra' (festival), where the *Bathudi* people come together for a grand procession. The temple is decorated with flowers, lights, and traditional ornaments. A special ritual is performed to thank Lord Shiva for his blessings, and the *Bathudi* tribe offers a final set of prayers and offerings.

On this day, the community also gathers to share a festive meal, often including traditional dishes that have been prepared over the course of the ritual period. goats and chicken are scarified, as a part of a religious offering to the deity and later consumed in the feast. The festivities include folk dances, music, and a sense of joyous celebration, as the *Bathudi* tribe reflects on the spiritual journey they have undergone during the past 10 days.



Figure 5: Animal Sacrifice

## Cultural and Spiritual Impact

The 10-day rituals observed by the *Bathudi* tribe near Atharadeula Temple are not only a display of their deep spiritual devotion but also a significant cultural event that reinforces their identity. These rituals serve to strengthen the social fabric of the *Bathudi* community, fostering unity, harmony, and respect for tradition. The connection to the Atharadeula Temple also highlights the tribe's relationship with the divine and the natural world, acknowledging their dependence on both for spiritual and material well-being.

And for a tribe that is very strict on marrying within its own caste, this Atharadeula parba serves as a great ground for considering matrimonial relations.

An integral part of the *Bathudi* culture is of course its indigenous musical instruments, like the Jhumki, ginni and the most important, *Changu*. Often referred to as the great musical instrument of their God Badam, the *Changu* is a circular instrument made using goat's skin, and has 33 spikes along its rims. These spikes, according to their sacred belief, represent the 33 crore gods & goddesses. To the beats of this *Changu*, dance 12 unmarried girls and 13 unmarried boys, the nights of this 10-day long festival, as a way of offering devotion to Badam and Badamani. And according to the *Bathudi's* popular belief, this practice is so spiritually evoking that by the end one can feel the presence of another spirit among the dancers, signifying their deity joining in.

The rituals reflect the *Bathudi* tribe's belief in the cyclical nature of life, death, and rebirth. Through their sacred practices, they seek to align themselves with cosmic forces, ensuring balance and prosperity for the generations to come.



Figure 6: Musical Instruments including the *Changu*

### **Ethos of Simplicity and Ecological Responsibility**

An integral aspect of the *Bathudi* tribe's cultural identity is reflected in their distinctive dress code and practices, particularly during religious observances and communal gatherings near sacred sites such as Atharadeula. These visual and behavioral codes are not merely traditional, but are deeply symbolic of the tribe's philosophical orientation toward simplicity, naturalism, and ecological harmony.

*Bathudi* women are customarily attired in red and white sarees, colors that carry deep spiritual and ritual connotations. Red symbolizes vitality, fertility, and sacred energy, while white evokes purity and spiritual clarity. Eschewing all forms of artificial adornment, the women do not wear jewellery or makeup during sacred occasions. This intentional absence of embellishment reflects a conscious

embrace of their natural form, asserting a cultural ideal where spiritual authenticity transcends aesthetic ornamentation. *Bathudi* men likewise adhere to a minimalist dress code, donning plain white dhotis as a symbol of humility and ritual cleanliness. Both men and women move barefoot through forest paths and temple grounds, a gesture that signifies their unmediated connection with the earth and reverence for the land as sacred. Their daily rituals also reflect an eco-centric ethos. Rather than modern toothbrushes, *Bathudi* individuals use *datum*, or chewing sticks made from medicinal tree branches, not only as an oral hygiene practice but also as a continuation of traditional ecological knowledge. Meals are often served on broad leaves, employed as biodegradable utensils, which reinforces their sustainable use of forest resources. These practices collectively represent an ethos of environmental sensitivity, minimalism, and spiritual discipline, forming a cohesive cultural framework where lifestyle itself becomes an act of devotion. By preserving these embodied traditions, the *Bathudi* community offers a compelling example of how indigenous lifeways can harmonize ecological wisdom with spiritual expression, thus contributing to a living heritage that is both resilient and deeply rooted in the rhythms of nature.



Figure 7: Women's Attire



Figure 8: Food served in leaves



Figure 9: Impromptu Dustbin

## Conclusion

The 10-day rituals observed by the *Bathudi* tribe near the Atharadeula Temple offer a vivid window into the tribe's spiritual and cultural life. These sacred practices

demonstrate their deep reverence for their traditions, the divine, and their community. As the *Bathudi* people continue to observe these rituals year after year, they ensure that their heritage is passed down, preserving not only their religious beliefs but also the spirit of unity that defines their tribe. Through these rites, the *Bathudi* tribe of northern Odisha continues to honor their ancestral connection to the Atharadeula Temple and maintain their rich cultural legacy.

Despite their strong cultural ties, the *Bathudi* tribe faces challenges such as socio-economic marginalization and the erosion of traditional practices due to modernization. Efforts are needed to preserve their heritage and safeguard their connection to the Atharadeula Temple.

Government initiatives, along with the support of historians, anthropologists, and local organizations, can help document the tribe's traditions and restore the temple to its former glory. Promoting sustainable tourism that respects the *Bathudi* culture and the sanctity of the temple can also contribute to their welfare.

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