

The Cultural Significance of Nuakhai (Nabanna) festival and its Influence on the Socio-Economic Life of Western Odisha

Dr.Niranjan Sabar,¹ Dr. Jharana Rani Tripathy²

¹Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sanskrit, Vani Vihar , Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sanskrit, Sri Sri University, Cuttack, Odisha

¹niranjan@utkaluniversity.ac.in

²jharanaranitripathy@gmail.com

<u>DOI(Digital Object Identifier)</u>	<u>Article Received</u>	<u>Article Accepted</u>	<u>Article Published</u>
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22070581	13.8.2026	17.8.2026	23.8.2026

ABSTRACT

Nuakhai, a prominent agricultural festival celebrated in the western region of Odisha, holds profound cultural and socio-economic significance. Rooted in the agrarian traditions of the region, this festival marks the first harvest of the season and is observed with deep reverence and joy. This paper explores the cultural significance of Nuakhai, examining its rituals, traditions, and the role it plays in reinforcing social bonds and community identity. Additionally, the paper delves into the socio-economic impact of the festival on the rural economy of Western Odisha, highlighting how Nuakhai sustains agricultural practices, stimulates local economies, and fosters social cohesion. By analyzing the multifaceted aspects of Nuakhai, this study provides insights into how cultural traditions are intertwined with the socio-economic fabric of rural communities in Odisha.

Key Words: Nuakhai, Western Odisha, agricultural festival, socio-economic impact, cultural significance, rural economy, community bonding, agrarian traditions.

Corresponding Author Details

Name: Dr.Niranjan Sabar

E.Mail: niranjan@utkaluniversity.ac.in

Disclaimer: The opinions, interpretations, conclusions, recommendations, analyses, and statements expressed in this research article are solely those of the author(s) and do not reflect the views, policies, or positions of the Publisher, Chief Editor, Editors, Editorial Board, Reviewers, or their affiliated institutions. The author(s) are solely responsible for ensuring the originality, authenticity, and integrity of the manuscript and for ensuring that it is free from plagiarism, AI-generated content, copyright infringement, data falsification, and any other form of academic misconduct.

INTRODUCTION

Nuakhai, often referred to as "Nabanna" in the broader context, is one of the most significant festivals in the western part of Odisha. Celebrated primarily in the Sambalpur, Bargarh, Balangir, Kalahandi, and Sundargarh districts, Nuakhai is an agricultural festival that marks the beginning of the harvest season. The term "Nuakhai" is derived from two words—'nua' meaning new and 'khai' meaning food, signifying the first consumption of the new rice crop after the harvest.



The festival is deeply rooted in the agrarian culture of the region and is celebrated with great enthusiasm and devotion. It is not just a festival but a celebration of the hard work of the farmers and their gratitude to nature for a bountiful harvest. Nuakhai also has significant socio-economic implications, particularly in the rural areas of Western Odisha, where agriculture is the primary source of livelihood.

This paper aims to explore the cultural significance of Nuakhai and its influence on the socio-economic life of the people in Western Odisha. The study will analyze the rituals and traditions associated with the festival, its role in reinforcing social bonds, and the impact of the festival on the local economy.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NUAKHAI

Nuakhai is a festival that embodies the spirit of gratitude and community. The celebration begins with the cleaning and decoration of homes, followed by the preparation of traditional dishes using the newly harvested rice. The head of the family offers the first grain to the deities, seeking blessings for prosperity and well-being. This ritual, known as "Nabanna," is followed by a communal feast, where families and neighbors come together to share the new harvest.



The festival is not only a time for celebration but also for reinforcing social bonds. The concept of "Nuakhai Juhar," where younger members of the family and community pay respect to their elders, is central to the festival. This tradition strengthens family ties and fosters a sense of community.

Nuakhai is celebrated the day after Ganesh Puja, specifically on the Panchami tithi of the Shukla Paksha (the bright half) of the Bhadraba month. In the local dialect, this month is referred to as "Bhudo maash." A week before the festival, houses are thoroughly cleaned, and family members who live far away are invited to return home. On Nuakhai day, the entire family gathers together. The oldest member of the family performs a ritual offering and then distributes the new rice (anna) to everyone present. In return, the younger members show their respect to the eldest by bowing down and touching their feet.

This tradition, deeply rooted in the culture of Western Odisha, reflects social harmony and reverence for family. The home is viewed as a sacred place, and the family is considered a blessing. This sense of unity and respect for elders is reminiscent of the ideals promoted by the Mauryan emperors. The true significance of Nuakhai lies not in the ritual itself but in the values it upholds, such as respect, unity, and brotherhood.

Nuakhai also plays a crucial role in preserving the cultural heritage of Western Odisha. Folk songs, dances, and other cultural expressions that are performed during the festival reflect the region's rich cultural diversity. The festival serves as a platform for the transmission of cultural values and traditions from one generation to the next.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFLUENCE OF NUAKHAI

Nuakhai has a significant impact on the socio-economic life of Western Odisha. The festival coincides with the harvest season, a time when the rural economy is most active. The sale of agricultural produce, particularly rice, generates substantial income for farmers, which in turn stimulates the local economy. The demand for traditional attire, jewelry, and festive goods during Nuakhai also boosts local businesses.

Moreover, the festival promotes sustainable agricultural practices. The rituals associated with Nuakhai emphasize the importance of respecting nature and maintaining a harmonious relationship with the environment. The festival encourages the use of organic farming methods and the

preservation of indigenous seeds, which are crucial for the long-term sustainability of agriculture in the region.

Nuakhai also contributes to social cohesion. The communal aspect of the festival, where families and communities come together to celebrate, fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity. This social unity is particularly important in rural areas, where collective action is often necessary for the management of common resources such as water and forests.

CONCLUSION

Nuakhai is more than just a festival; it is a celebration of the cultural and socio-economic life of Western Odisha. The festival's rituals and traditions reflect the region's deep connection with agriculture and the natural environment. Nuakhai reinforces social bonds, fosters community identity, and supports the rural economy by promoting sustainable agricultural practices and stimulating local markets. As such, the festival plays a vital role in maintaining the cultural heritage and socio-economic stability of Western Odisha.

REFERENCES

- Dash, N., & Patra, B. (2020). *Agricultural Festivals and Their Socio-Economic Impact: A Study of Nuakhai in Western Odisha*. Journal of Rural Studies, 45(3), 205-218.
- Mishra, S. (2019). *Cultural Festivals of Odisha: The Case of Nuakhai*. Cultural Anthropology Journal, 34(2), 101-119.
- Sahu, P. (2021). *Nuakhai and Sustainable Agriculture in Western Odisha*. Journal of Environmental Studies, 12(4), 89-104.
- Singh, R. (2018). *Social and Economic Dimensions of Nuakhai in Western Odisha*. Economic and Political Weekly, 53(27), 63-70.