

Surya Arghya festival:A Socio-religious Study of Sun Worship

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Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.

- M.K. Gandhi

Abstract -

Human, in its simplest form, is derived from nature and existentially dependent on it. Therefore nature worship has been an ancient and integral part of culture, within the deep spiritual connection. Over time, human skip the nature from development processes, have raised questions about the survival of civilization. Due to its own evil tendencies, humanity is facing serious existential challenges both in the realm of natural and cultural structures. The concept of sustainable development has emerged as a focal point of global discourse, seen as the key to resolving the growing environmental crisis and social inequalities in the development. Chhath Puja, a grand folk faith festival celebrated in North India since vedic age, dedicated to the worship of nature, based on the idea of sustainable development, which offer constructive path to the global community grappling with a widespread environmental crisis.

Objective -

The present paper analyse the various serious global environmental crisis in the context of the inherent characteristics of the Surya Arghya festivaand also highlights the importance of nature and the central role of women.

Methodology and data sources –

The study is based on secondary data and personal observations obtained and field work gathered through an intensive field visit and descriptive method used for analysis and presentation.

Introduction -

The perfect characteristic of unity in diversity and diversity in unity has been make Indian society an unique identity in the world. Several cultural aspects has been influencing the element of unity over diversity. Celebrated twice a year, Chhath Puja, a festival of sun worship and dedicating of arghya, is marked by a rainbow of

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unity with the diverse local colors. Almost all civilizations have worshipped the 'God Sun', but in Chhath Puja is the only occasion where the setting sun is worshipped along with the rising sun (Bihar Tourism, 2026). Chhath Puja, a popular festival of nature's faith, is an important part of Indian culture, conveying the message of environmental conservation, women's empowerment and social harmony.

Literature reviews -

Guha (1990) in his book "The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalayas" has criticized the blind devotion to development thinking and policies prevalent at national and international level and has highlighted its dangers. He discussed the factors of development, considers development as the sole goal and is willing to pursue it at any cost, even at the cost of harm to the environment and society. Yadav and Chandra (2024) based on their fieldwork in various districts of Bihar, show that the Chhath Puja offers different entry points for those who believe in the connection with the Sun God and the continuity of divine male-female relationships. They highlights the significance of feminine power, concept of "Maai," and the complementary relationship between male and female principles. They are also depicted that this worship works as a healer and protector of children, symbol of the Sun's feminine energy. Ritu (2024) in her research, highlights the common people's connection with Chhath Puja as a part of Bihar's culture and faith, and its contribution to boost the state's economy. Worship of the Sun God and Chhath Maiya, this festival honors the power of nature, the energy of life, purity of culture and honour for better new. Singh (2022) in his book "Chhath Puja: A Study in Cultural Ecology and Sustainability," states that the Chhath Mahaparva should be viewed not merely as a religious ritual, but as an excellent example of environmental protection and ecological balance. This festival is not based on the worship of any temple or idol, but rather worships nature itself (sun and water).

Surya Arghya Puja and Sustainability of development -

There is a deep connection between the central idea of sustainable development and the characteristics of Chhath Puja. Chhath Puja celebrates respect for nature and the energy of nature and life, which is one of the fundamental elements of sustainable development. The Sun has been worshipped since ancient times as a source of energy for the growth and flourishing of life on Earth (The Hindu, 2025). Traditional features of Chhath Puja, such as offerings to the Sun's first and last rays as the source of planetary life and energy, performing pujas on the banks of rivers, ponds, and reservoirs and offering grains and fruits grown according to the seasonal

cycle, appear to align with the characteristics of modern concepts such as sustainable development. Furthermore, Chhath Puja is performed by a family member for many years and is continued by married women of the next generation—the Vratīs—as part of intergenerational continuity. This characteristic also resonates with the intergenerational integration of sustainable development.

Conservation of Resources: Chhath Puja also places such sentiments at the core and, through the worship of the Sun God and nature, establishes coherence with the fundamental tenet of sustainable development. The objective of sustainable development is to make environment friendly economic development by ensuring balanced and judicious use of natural resources and long-term availability of resources by conserving biodiversity. Thus, harmony is maintained between humanity and nature. Purity of water, soil and air is also important in Chhath Puja, which is essential for sustainable development.

Worship of Nature and Purity of Conscience: A pure man instils respect and love the nature. A pure conscience person does not over-exploit resources and use with themanner, essential for sustainable development. Sustainable development is a lifestyle to meets the needs of the present while saving resources for future generations. When the craving within a human being decreases and compassion increases, he adopts an environment-friendly lifestyle. People with an environment-friendly lifestyle focus on “need” rather than “consumption”. The inner purity of the human mind and self-restraint also have an important place in Chhath Puja.

Community Involvement: Community participation is an integral part of both this folk festival and idea of sustainable development. Chhath Puja is celebrated not as an individual festival but as a collective ritual where the entire community comes together to worship the Sun God and Chhathi Maiya. Community participation ensures that these development works are in line with local needs, are sustainable and are owned by the local people. Conservation of biodiversity and natural resources are possible with the help of our indigenous knowledge.

Tradition and Culture: Through Chhath Puja, family members preserve their traditions and culture in their wear and habits which is also effective for sustainable development. Chhath Puja is not just a religious ritual, but a unique confluence of tradition, culture and the preservation of nature.

Honoring the Energy of Nature: The Chhath festival is not only religious in nature but also deeply rooted in nature. This festival worship Lord Surya and Chhathi Maiya, who are, in fact, one of the most important elements of nature. Lord Surya is the

source of life and energy and worshipping him through this festival infuses radiance, innovation and energy into livings. During this puja, devotees stand at a river, pond or other water bodies to prayer the Sun God. This synergy between water and the Sun also conveys the message of water and life cycle. Means understanding and respecting the energy of nature. The concept of sustainable development also believes in developing in harmony with nature, not in opposing nature.

Nature of Worship: During Chhath Puja, grains, water, dawn, and the sun are worshipped. Thus, Chhath Puja is not limited to religious beliefs alone but is also directly connected to nature and the environment. The Chhath festival begins with “Nahay-Khaay.” This tradition aims to maintain purity and sanctity in life. On the first day, devotees bathe in a sacred river or pond and consume pure food. Afterward, they fast for 36 hours and worship the Sun God. At the time of evening arghya to the setting Sun, devotees stand in water and worship the Sun God. This process combines pure water and the sun’s rays, symbolizing the purity of life and nature. This fast awakens self-control, patience and determination. Second day of festival, devotees worship the rising Sun and *Usha and Bhor*. Through this worship, devotees attain new energy, vigor and hope in life. Worshipping Usha, the goddess of the morning, symbolizes that every new day is a fresh start, inspiring positivity and progress in life. Married women pray for the prosperity of their families and society. They seek blessings from Chhathi Maiya for the prosperity of their parents’ and in-laws’ homes.

Chhath Puja and Nature Conservation: A Unique Synergy –

Chhath Puja, also known as Surya Shashthi, is one of India’s most ancient and sacred festival. This grand festival is a unique way to express gratitude and respect for nature, water, air and the Sun. Thus, this four-day ritual teaches us the importance of living in harmony with nature and conserving it. Ancient Indian texts deeply belief that the Earth must be kept sacred because she is our mother (Singh and Pathak, 2022). Nature conservation in several ways:

1. Cleanliness and conservation of water sources: This festival is a tested indigenous model nature conservation. This ritual emphasizes the importance of water conservation used solely for worship.

2. Self and environment cleanliness: While devotees keep themselves clean and pure throughout Chhath Puja and before the starting of this grand festival devotees and local communities together undertake extensive cleaning of then surrounding, river ghats, ponds, pools and water bodies. This process removes garbage, silt and

unwanted materials from water sources that are naturally purifying them and increasing their water-holding capacity.

3. *Scientific aspects:* Surya worship is also believed to bring health and wellness benefits. It teaches us to connect with the cycles of nature and its positive effects. This unique festival is a complete package for not only physical health but also mental and spiritual strength. The health benefits of the sun's rays include the absorption of Vitamin D and a complete detoxification of the body through a 36-hour waterless fast. This destroys the body's contaminated cells and gives rise to new cells, improving the digestive system and internally detoxifying the body. This festival falls in the month of Kartik, when the sun's ultraviolet rays help reduce skin diseases and boost the immune system. The light falling on the body during Surya Puja and Arghya destroys harmful germs and protects against seasonal diseases.

4. *Organic Puja Materials:* The materials used in Chhath Puja are almost entirely natural and biodegradable, preventing harm to the environment. Fruits, vegetables, tubers and homemade *Thekua* are used in the puja. These items are placed in a bamboo basket (*daura or soup*). Plastic or other artificial materials are not used in this festival, which helps curb plastic pollution and promote use natural and sustainable products in our daily lives as well.

4. *Social Harmony and Chhath Puja:* Chhath Puja is a festival that breaks down barriers of caste, gender and class, bringing everyone together to express respect for nature. Cleaning of rivers and ghats is done at the community level, fostering a sense of collective participation and responsibility for environmental protection. All devotees, regardless of caste or economic class, perform puja at the ghats in a similar manner. There is no need of a priest or any special person for guiding.

6. *Amalgamation of tradition and modernity:* This festival teaches us that the harmony and integration of modernity and tradition is essential for the development of any human society. It strengthens environmental consciousness through our cultural roots. In addition to its religious significance, this festival promotes health, ecological awareness and supports local economies, making it a celebration of both tradition and progress (Singh, Sushmita, 2024).

7. *Strengthening the local economy:* Chhath Puja plays a vital role in boosting the local economy. It increases demand for traditional items such as bamboo baskets, clay lamps, fruits, and traditional clothing, boosting the income of small vendors and artisans. Local artisans also benefit significantly as families purchase handmade

items, supporting cottage industries and preserving traditional crafts. This cyclical demand promotes employment generation and strengthen the local ruraleconomy.

8. Deification of women power: The most important part of Chhath Puja is the ‘Parvaitin’ (the fasting woman). She is the pivotal figure of this four-day ritual. She becomes the most sacred and powerful person in the family. The Parvaitin makes all important decisions related to the ritual. During this period, her orders are paramount for all members of the household, even the men in the family. This establishes her as an undisputed leader. Chhath Puja integrates modern concepts of women’s empowerment (such as self-confidence, decision-making, and social participation) with ancient cultural values. This festival is a comprehensive document of women’s physical, mental, spiritual and social empowerment. In this festival, women are not merely ritual performers, but also leaders, administrators, and embodiments of austerity.

Major Findings and Suggestions -

1. Study shows that Chhath Puja, rather than idol worship, is a direct worship of the five essential of life elements (especially, the sun and water), which teaches humans to be grateful to nature.
 2. The materials used in this festival are locally sourced and natural (bamboo spoons, clay stoves, banana leaves) and are completely biodegradable, which is an excellent example of waste management and zero waste generation.
 3. The mandatory use of only local and seasonal fruits (such as Dabh lemon, Suthani, ginger, sugarcane) in the puja revives from local agriculture and biodiversity.
 4. The process from ‘Nahay-Khaay’ to ‘Arghya’ mandates the collective cleaning of rivers and ponds. Community revival of water sources is an excellent folk model of water conservation that needs to be adopted on a large scale.
 5. The disappearance of caste and class distinctions at the ghats, along with a remarkable manifestation of women’s empowerment, promotes social stability and harmony, which is fundamental to sustainable development.
 6. Developing a ‘sustainable water management model’ between local bodies and communities is the need of the hour to maintain the purity of water bodies not only during the festival but throughout the year.
 7. Chhath Festival and Environment management should be included in the curriculum of primary to higher level of education. so that the new generation
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can understand the scientific basis of their cultural roots and develop a supportive attitude and lifestyle for sustainable development.

8. Given the scientific and environmental significance of the Chhath festival, it needs to be promoted and promoted globally as an eco-friendly festival.
9. World community is facing the calamity of climate change and environmental crisis. This puja festival will naturally foster an orientation towards sustainable development.

Conclusion

Chhath Puja is a remarkable festival of Indian culture that embodies both religious ritual and the spirit of a voluntary and collective environmental conservation campaigns. Worship of five elements, sun, water, air, and earth, this festival imparts the eternal message of gratitude, respect and harmony with nature. It teaches us that our lives depend on nature, and therefore, its purity and conservation are our moral responsibility. This grand festival inspires modern society to seek solutions to different types of pollutions and, presents a living example of ‘cultural ecology’.

Chhath Puja is not just a regional identity of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh; it can become a global model that teaches the world to ‘coexist with nature’. Through Chhath Puja, we carry forward a legacy to celebrate the interconnectedness of nature, spirituality and society. Chhath Puja serves as a living example of how ancient traditions can incorporate modern principles of sustainability and ecological balance.

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