

Sarhul Festival



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The Sarhul festival marks cultural event for Adivasis in Jharkhand and the Chhotanagpur region. Celebrated in spring, it venerates the Sal tree, which is central to Adivasi tradition. This festival represents a deep connection to nature and the cycle of life. It marks the Adivasi community's agricultural practices and their spiritual beliefs.

Significance of the Sal Tree

The Sal tree, or *Shorea robusta*, holds a sacred place in Adivasi culture. It is believed to be the dwelling of Sarna Maa, the deity who protects villages. The tree is not only a source of livelihood but also a symbol of the unity between the Sun and the Earth, which is essential for life.

Structure of the Festival

Sarhul is a three-day festival. The first day involves preparations. The village priest, known as pahan, performs rituals and gathers Sal flowers. Homes and sacred groves, called Sarna Sthals, are cleaned and decorated with red and white flags. The second day features the main rituals, including the sacrifice of a rooster and the offering of Sal flowers to the deity. Traditional songs and dances, such as Jadur and Gena, enliven the celebrations.

Community Involvement

The festival encourages community participation. Young men partake in ceremonial fishing, gathering food for the feast. The final day culminates in a grand communal meal, where villagers share traditional dishes and rice beer, known as handia. The pahan blesses the community, reinforcing social bonds.

Historical Context

Historically, Sarhul evolved from a hunting tradition to one focused on agriculture. This shift reflects the changing lifestyles of the Adivasi population. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, as tribes faced displacement, Sarhul spread to various regions, including Assam and even abroad to Nepal and Bhutan.

Contemporary Celebrations

Today, Sarhul is celebrated by various tribes, including the Munda, Santal, and Oraon, each adding their unique customs. The festival continues to be a focal point for expressing Adivasi culture and unity, reflecting both traditional beliefs and contemporary social movements.