

## NUAKHAI JUHAR FESTIVAL

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister of India greeted farmers on the occasion of Nuakhai Juhar Festival.

### About Nuakhai Juhar Festival

Word 'Nuakhai' refers to consumption of new rice crop as 'Nua' means new and 'Khai' means food. Nuakhai Juhar Festival is an agricultural festival celebrated by tribal people in western Odisha and southern Chhattisgarh.

It is celebrated on fifth day immediately after Ganesh Chaturthi in the lunar fortnight of Bhadrapada or Bhadra (August-September). Initially, the time for celebrating this festival was not fixed. Customary, farmers used to celebrate Nuakhai on a day specified by the village head and priest. Later, this festival got patronage of the royal families and then, it turned into a mass socio-religious event in western Odisha region.

In this, farmers offer the first produce from their land to the famous 'Goddess Mother Samleshwari' of Sambalpur district in Odisha.

The origin of Nuakhai festival is traced from Panchayagya of the Vedic period. These panchayagya represent five agricultural activities, namely Sitayagya (ploughing), Pravapana Yagya (sowing seeds), Pralambana Yagya (early harvesting



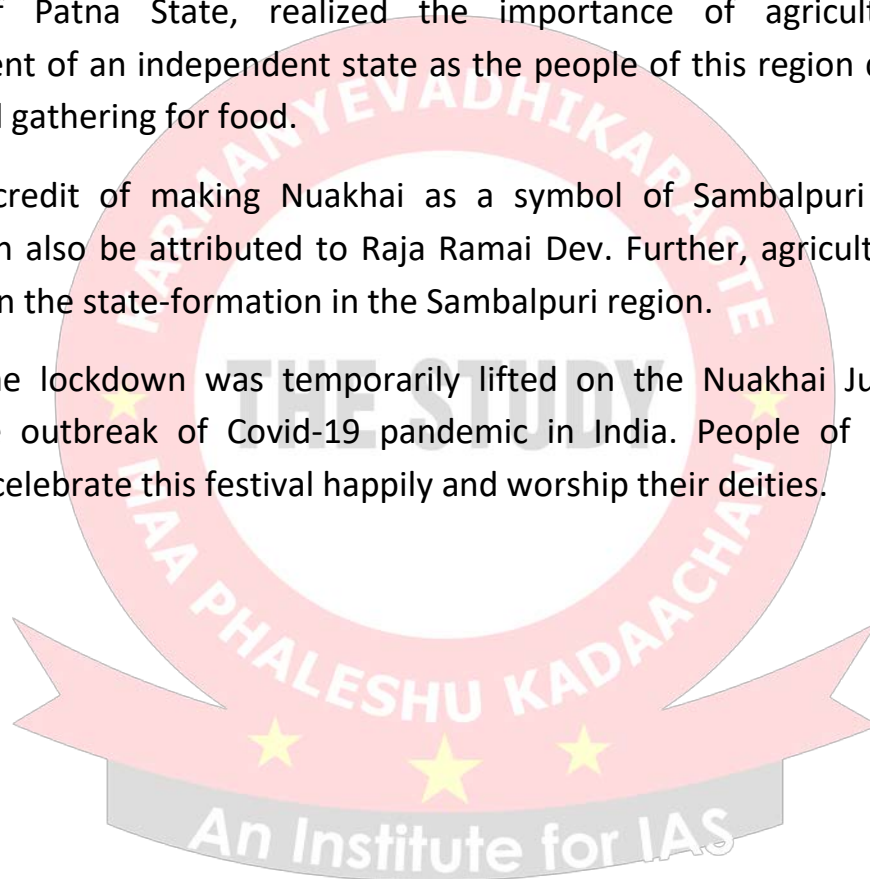
of crops), Khala Yagya (harvesting of grain) and Prayana Yagya (protection of crops).

Nine colours are used in Nuakhai. These nine colours represent various aspects, including sanitation, invitation, introduction of a new crop, gifts, etc. In this, nine rituals are conducted before the main ceremony.

According to the prevalent belief, in the 14th century AD, Raja Ramai Dev, the founder of Patna State, realized the importance of agriculture in the establishment of an independent state as the people of this region depended on hunting and gathering for food.

Thus, the credit of making Nuakhai as a symbol of Sambalpuri culture and heritage can also be attributed to Raja Ramai Dev. Further, agriculture played a major role in the state-formation in the Sambalpuri region.

In 2020, the lockdown was temporarily lifted on the Nuakhai Juhar Festival, despite the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in India. People of Odisha were allowed to celebrate this festival happily and worship their deities.



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