

# MITHUN KUMAR URAO

Community: Oraon

LCIPP Bioregional Gathering Participants From Bangladesh

## KARAM Worship



P.C: Manik Soren

*Purohit (priest) telling the story of KARAM Worship during the festival*

## Garlagi!

Many songs, dances and other cultural elements of the Bengali lifestyle are rooted in indigenous culture. Nevertheless, the cultural, spiritual and religious traditions and customs of the indigenous peoples of the plain land are nowadays conducted sporadically. The disruption of this process has negatively impacted the indigenous people's knowledge system of plants, animals and natural phenomena. Karam, one of the major festivals of the Oraon, indigenous communities from plain lands, is an example of one such traditional cultural expression that also has a close link to nature.

The Karam deity (the god of power, youth and youthfulness) is worshipped during this festival. Oraon indigenous peoples worship the Karam tree (symbol of the Karam deity) during this festival as they are a source of livelihood, and they pray to Mother Nature to keep their farmlands green and ensure a rich harvest. It is believed that the worship for good germination increases the fertility of grain crops and that the Karam deity will bring blessings and wealth, along with a good harvest. But due to deforestation and illegal logging, the Karam tree is now becoming extinct.

The Karam festival is held in the Bangla month of Bhadra (July to August), on the eleventh day of the full moon (*purnima*) cycle. The preparations begin around two weeks before the festival. The devotees keep a day long fast and worship the branches of the Karam tree. Girls celebrate the festival for welfare, friendship and sisterhood by exchanging hibiscus (*jawa*) flowers. During the festival, the young people approach the forests, singing songs and dancing along to drum beats while collecting branches of the trees. The branches are usually carried by young, unmarried girls who sing and praise the deity. Afterwards, the branches are planted at the Centre of the festival ground by the priest and adorned with flowers. Then, the *purohit* (priest) as well as we conduct the worship of the Karam tree together. They believe that the Karam tree is equal to the protector. We also believe that in the past, when we were driven away by the Aryans, the Karam deity gave us refuge in the form of the Karam tree. From then on, out of gratitude, we celebrate this Karam festival.

However, Our Karam festival (an intangible cultural heritage of IPs in north-western Bangladesh) is now at risk due to the threats of modern civilization, the motivations of people in certain communities and practices that have made the country's intangible heritage extinct or at risk in many communities. Dispossession of traditional land and natural resources has also led to political, socioeconomic and cultural deprivation of IPs

living in this region. Additionally, a lack of acknowledgement of our customary laws in the statutory laws of the country have marginalized our indigenous knowledge on the management of natural resources.



*Members of the Orao community in colourful hues, dance at the festival.*