**Project : The Faith of Life**

**(Gajan Festival , West Bengal | India)**

**Gajan** is a Hindu festival celebrated mostly in the Rural part of West Bengal. Gajan spans around a week, starting at the last week of Chaitra continuing till the end of the Bengali year. It ends with Charak Puja Participants of this festival is known as Sannyasi or Devotee .Persons of any gender can be a participant. The complete history of the festival is not known. The central theme of this festival is deriving satisfaction through non-sexual pain, devotion and sacrifice.

The word Gajan is considered a combination of parts of two words - Ga is from the word gram meaning village and jan is from the word janasadharan meaning folk. In this sense Gajan is a festival of village folk .Some of the myth said Gajan means Gar+Jan = A Bengali Word which reveals the call of the sannyasi or Bhokta to their lord Shiva . Ofthen in this festival Sannyasi or Bhokta are murmuring with the name of Lord Shiva on daily basis 108 times & together they cry with pain : Debadi Dev Mahadev .. Hara Gauri .. Joy Shiv . They often believe its such a powerful chants that keep them cool and help to overcome all the pain related to their painfull process of devotion.

Hindus celebrate the festival mainly on the last two days of the month of Chaitra. This period is known as Chaitra Sankranti when Sun will enter Pisces sign. Chaitra Sankranti begins on 14th March of every year. People observe fast during this period devoting themselves to their God. Gajan is actually linked to persons who are related to agricultural community, directly or indirectly. They pray for the rains and better harvest. Lord Shiva is said to be closely related to this community. It may be worth noting here that Dharmathakur is actually considered to be the God of Fertility.

Charak & Gajan has 2 separate part of Festival according to the Rituals . Gajan used to happen on 2 days before the Month end of Chaitra , the Last Bengali Month ( Middle of March as per English Calendar) . In different part of West Bengal these Rituals are being celebrated with different dangerous Traditional Play like **Playing with Dead Bodies , Human Skull .**This year we went to a Remote village of Bardhaman to observe this dangerous Practice . According to villagers, this practice has been going on for more than a hundred years. Police and district administration do very little to stop the ugly and unhygienic practices .According to one of the Devotees*,* they collect the bodies from different burial grounds. Those who could not  burn the dead bodies due to financial reasons, bury those bodies in the graveyard. Sometimes the relatives of dead children do not burn the bodies and bury them instead.Some of the villages are using these skulls for 2 - 3 years and some of the village use to cut the skulls before 1 - 2 month of this Ritual from different graveyard. These skulls are used to hide in some secret places near by of the villages , people were co-operative enough to shoot us these dangerous photos but they stopped us to enter those secret places where they have hidden these skulls or dead bodies .

Observing this Dangerous Ritual may create Visual disturbance but this Ritual still live for 100 more years in rural part of Bengal , India.

**\*\* Attached Photos are in Serial wise as per Event.**