

A Study of Religious Beliefs and the Festivals of the Tribal's of Tripura with Special Reference to – *Tripuris*

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Abstract:- It is believed that, “Religion is commonly understood on a belief that mankind has in visible controlling power with a related emotion and sense of morality. The common features and nature of religion belief of the Tribal Religion are some as in the case of any so called higher. It is true that in the field of the simplest beliefs and practices of Tribal communities, the non-Tribal virtuous people are not different from them. But yet, there are differences on pragmatic grounds ‘Which are not logically valid’. At present it must suffice to say that “in any treatment of Tribal beliefs and practices, it would be useful to shed personal prejudices, or at least keep judgment in suspense’s.

The most important universal features of Tribal faith in Tripura is that it ranges from the vaguest animism and supernatural worship to the deepest anthropomorphism it is a fact that the rites and rituals of the Tribal people vary from those of the stately temples of Agartala to those of the Tripura. The reangs, noatias, Jomatias, uchais, Khasis, and Rupines, who worship their indigenous pre-hindu fourteen Gods and goddess with conventional Tribal rites and beliefs and practices. But it should be remembered that the form of worship spring from true love, therefore, we find no differences in the field of Tribal religious from the Brahmanical faith.

However, beside pujas to the Brahmanical Gods and Goddesses in their day to day life there are countless Gods and Goddesses belonged to animism along with rituals of all kinds in which scared natural objects representing them are adored. The most of the Tribal peoples of Tripura Hinduized or Buddaized or Christianized but many of them seem to be knitted together by Tribal beliefs and practices and they are preserving vestiges of Tribal faith on religion even today. Through centuries many of Tribal people along with the rulers of Tripura hale stream of Hindu way life along with their patheon of Gods and Goddesses. The sacred scriptures, the epics the puraness and the socio-religious system of Bengali speaking Hindu were highly accepted by the Tribal of Tripura. But one may not forest that many tribal people have also been forces by history to seek retreat in to the relatively moor inaccessible religious of forest, hills and hill-slop where they are still maintaining their indigenous religions behaviour patterns. The religion Tribal community to

Hinduism is not a like to Christianity on religious point ground.

Many of the tribes of Tripura come moor and moor under influence of Hindu way of life, and their tribal cults were roughly assimilated to Hinduism by Brahmins who are said to brought by Royal house of Tripura. But animism, the primitive from of religion, is still traceable in tribal's thinking and out-looks among the Hindu & Buddhist tribes. Now a new trend has been found among them in which respect for their own indigenous culture and their identity are the dominant facts. Buddhism has undoubtedly brought the message of peace of love to the converts. The Moghs and Chakma are Buddhists, but they bear a distinct Muslim influence in their social norms, conventions, language and in the system of nomenclatures. On the other hand in their rites concerning the deities they bear market traces of Hinduism.

Keywords:- Tribal, Aboriginal Tribe, Tripurians, Tribal Festivals.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Tripuri (also Tipra or Tipperah) people are the original inhabitants of the Kingdom of Tripura in North-East India and Bangladesh. The Tripuri people through the Royal family of the Debbarmas ruled the Kingdom of Tripura for more than 2,000 years until the kingdom joined the Indian Union in 1949.

The people from Tripura are considered part of the Tibeto-Burman ethnic group. Originally they migrated from near the upper courses of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers in present-day Western China. They had left China long before the Sui dynasty came to power. At the time of migration they were animists. So it may be reasonably assumed that they migrated before 65 AD, the year Buddhism was introduced in China. The common reference to these people as "Kirates" and "Cinas" in the early Sanskrit texts of India unmistakably indicates that they came down to the Assam valley long before the dawn of Christian era. Tripuris entered their present country through its north-eastern corner, settled there and gradually expanded their settlement and suzerainty over the whole of Tripura. They were able to expand their influence as far south as Chittagong, as far west as Comilla and Noakhali (known during the British period as 'plains Tipperah') and

as far north as Sylhet (all in present Bangladesh) ¹. The ruling dynasty passed through several vicissitudes of history and ruled Tripura for several centuries till 18th

century, after which it became a colony of Britain. On 14 October 1949, Tripura was merged into the newly independent India ².

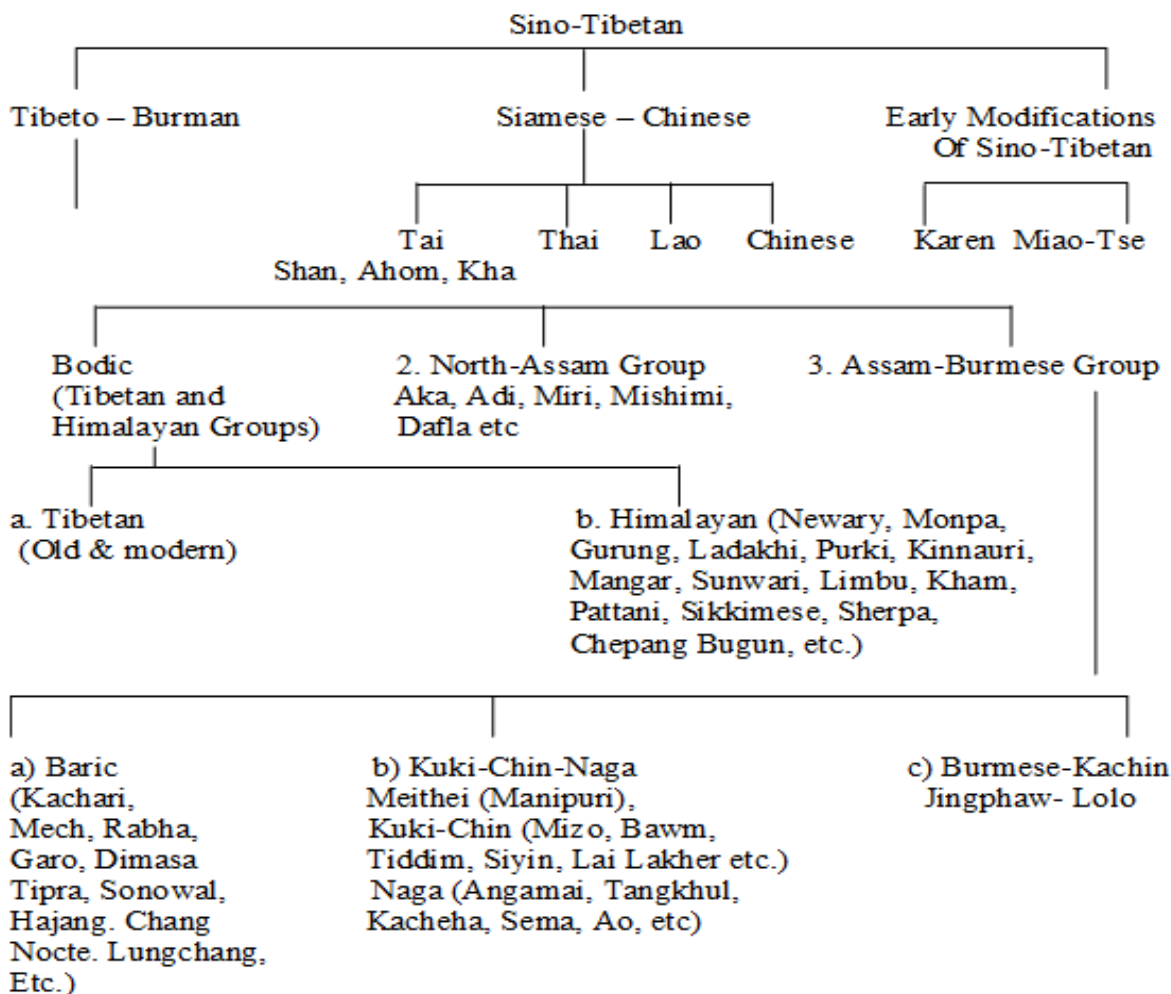


Fig 1:- The above Genealogical Table is based in Ajita Tripura (Prepared for M.phil Degree.)
 Tripura, Ajita; Tripurar Adibasi, Tripura Darpan, Agartala, 2009
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II. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY, LAND AND PEOPLE OF TRIPURA

Tripura, the land of “Chaturdasa-devata” (fourteen Gods and Goddesses) in the north eastern India with its capitals at Agartala is located between 20°56 and 24°32 north latitude and 91°10 and 91°21 east longitude. Bordered by Bangladesh on three sides. Tripura is connected to the main land through the eastern frontier which is adjacent to the Cachar district of Assam and Chittagoan Hill. Tracts in Bangladesh share a common boundary with Tripura on the north, west, south and south-east direction respectively.

The state aberrances an area of 10,49,169 square kms. According to the state department of land records and settlement. Geologically, the territory is not very old. It’s seems to have risen from the sea-bed in the late tertiary age about forty million years ago. It is a part of Assam – Arakan geological province. Originally this province was a basin. Topographically, the wile territory can be divided in

to the following divisions of physical features – Hill, Hillock, river valley, lunga, Tilla, flat lands and lakes. The climate of Tripura is generally dry and humid with plenty of rains. The state lies within the south – west monsoon belt and rainfall is quite moderate. The annual temperature ranges from 10°4c to 35°2c.

Total population of the state is 36, 71,032 (Census 2011) 0.3% of the country’s population. Indigenous communities are known in India as scheduled tribes about 30% of the Tripura’s populations.

➤ Tribes of Tripura

A Tribe social group which possesses certain qualities and characteristic that make it a unique cultural, social and political entity. A single tribe has languages, customs, rituals, social organization and religious beliefs. There often composed of generally autonomous and independent bands and villages.

Tripura is large extent, a melting pot of ethnic diversity; a great number of tribal people are living in Tripura from early times. According to the order of the resident in India in 1956 on the scheduled casts and scheduled tribes in Tripura. There are 19 scheduled tribes in Tripura. The Bengalis from the plains belonging mostly to different Brahminical sects started refuse in the hilly region of Tripura. This movement of people become more and more intense aftense after the partition of India in 1947 the tribes of Tripura could be divided into two groups as (i) Ab-origin and (ii) Immigrants. All the Ab-origin tribes have been migrated in this territory from a place between Tibbet, up hills of Barma like Arakan hills tracts, shan state and adjacent to China. Ab-origin tribes are Tripuris, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Lusai, Uchai, Chaimal, Halam, Kukis, Garos, Mog and Chakmas. Other tribes like Bhill, Munda, orang, saotal, Lepcha, Khasis and Bhutia is are the immigrant tribes came and settled here for economic reasons. Most of them are central India tribes and come from Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orrissa and west Bengal. Some of these tribes are however, northern frontier tribes come from Bhutan, Meghalayas, Sikkim, and north Bengal. Chakma's and Mog's are Arakan tribes enter Tripura through Chittagong Hills tracts³.

III. PUJA AND FESTIVALS OF TRIPURI COMMUNITY

Among in numeral deities of the Tripura community few principle names are mentioned here. The deities can be grouped ads per the mode and purpose of the worship. These are as follows:-

A. Matai katar and Matai katarama :-

Matai katar is the supreme deity and Matai katarma is his consort. These deities are worshiped for the enhancement of prosperity and security. They are worshiped household wise or community wise. For these deities a goose is required to be offered; sometimes a he-goat is also offered in case of a promise. Along with this offering, banana, undried rice, vermilion, betel leaf and nut etc, are required. This puja takes place outside the house.

B. Akhatra and Bikhitra :-

They are the sons of the Matai katar and Matai katarma. The two deities are jointly named as 'Lampra'. These two deities are worshipped in Tripura community in the beginning of all social and religious ceremonies.

C. Toomima :-

Goddess of water. This deity is worshipped as household goddess as well as village Goddess as a precautionary measure against the attack of pox , Cholera etc. They worship the Toomima deity on the river. As the water helps to spread the disease so they worship the Goddess of the river not to contain the disease. To worship the deity one he-goat or one buffalo is needed as offering.

D. Sangram :-

Husband of Toomima Sangram is the God of wealth and prosperity. If any member of a family suffers very frequently from diseases and illness then the worship of the Sangram deity takes place to overcome the sufferings. It is a household deity. At the courtyard of the house the Sangram deity is worshipped. For deity two fowls are required as offerings. In want of fowls, this puja can be performed with two eggs also.

E. Khoolooma :-

Goddess of cotton. Mailoma and khooloma are worshipped jointly for wealth and prosperity. These two deities are household deities. Two fowls are scarified for these two deities as offering during this puja. Inside the house the deities are worshipped.

F. Nakehumatai :-

The Gardian of homestead. A female deity. Nakehumatai is to be worshipped at homestead to recover from illness. To worship this deity a fowl or a pig of any size is needed. After the worship. The cooked meat is offered to the deity. Thereafter, the meat is eaten by the 'Ochai' and his helper 'barun' along with the family members of the household.

G. Suklakmatai :-

God of health. In the last part of 'magh' or in 'falgun' this deity is worshipped Saklakmatai is a household deity and it is worshipped in the countryard with different types of cakes prepared with oil and with other offerings. In the evening a he-got is sanctified the house to the deity.

The following diets are named ads malevolent in the Tripuri society. All these deities are worshipped as household deities related with the persons concerned.

A. Thoomnairok and Banirok :-

As these two deities are called the messengers of death news, they are worshipped to keep them in good humor. A he or she goat along with two chickens or two eggs is required as offerings in the courtyard. For banirok two fowls or two gees are need to offer. The Banirok deity is worshipped in the jungle.

B. Chhakal Jook :-

The guardian deity of witches. To be cured from the illness caused by the witches the Chhakal jook deity is worshipped. Cooked meat of the tortoise and pork are offered to this deity as offering. The Chhakal jook is worshipped outside the village.

C. Burasa :-

A male deity stand for diseases. When a household member. Especially the children cry incessantly from severe pain of fever it is believed that the 'Burasa' matai has caused this diseases. In order to cure the patient they worship this Matai (deity) with two black fowls along with two eggs. The worship of these deity takes place outside the village.

D. Haichukma :-

A female deity. She is the wife of “burasa”. She rules over animals and forests. The Tripuris believe that when any domesticated animal is lost they pray to this deity to get back the animal and promise worship to the deity.

E. Priesthood :-

The priest is known as ochi. The ochai is selected by the villager and the profession is not hereditary. The women are not permitted to become a priest. In some religious occasions the priest needs a helper. The helper of the priest is called barua in some occasions the Ochai and Barua. In some occasions another man helps the Ochai and Barua whom they call ‘Khandal’⁴.

IV. CONCEPT OF SOUL

The concept of soul among the Tripuris is similar to a certain extent like other primitive people. The soul according to the Tripuris is incombustible, invisible, untouchable, undestroyable and can have any form, colour etc. the Tripuris call the soul of humans body ‘Fala’. They believe that when a man falls asleep the soul goes out from the body temporarily. In most of the cases of unnatural deaths by accident, snake bites, suicide etc. the Tripuris, specially the older generation believe that the soul may convert into an evil spirit. The custom of offering food and drinks to the soul of the dead is another indication about their conception of soul.

➤ Garia Puja Festival :-

Garia is the natural benevolent spirits of the household who looks after the increase of production. Garia is called “Garia raja” that always prefers welfare of his inmates by giving the wealth, peace and children. On the whole, Garia represents the character of our benign nature and he always does well to us.

➤ Kharchi Puja Festival :-

So far as Tripura is concerned, the Kharchi puja is one of the most popular festivals of the Tripura as well as the dwellers in Tripura, although it is said to have been influenced by the Brahmanical Hindus. As a matter of fact, this festival is associated with the indigenous tribal deities. This festival is held sometimes in June July on the suklastami day which lasts for seven days and is essentially a festival of Tripurabasi. The kharchi puja is held at old Agartala, 8km from the state capital Agartala. old Agartala was the capital of the “Manikya Dynasty” and there was a temple of chaturdashdevata where the Kharchi puja would take place before entering into detailed account of the Kharchi puja, we shall now devote a few lines to a description of the deities of the Kharchi puja, the fourteen head-images are worshipped at the time of Kharchi puja.

V. DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS SECTS OF TRIPURA

The religious history of Tripura is infected, the religious history at the Prachya dasa or the eastern India. Of course, regional variances are there, still its overall history and development prior to the 12th century A.D is inextricable mixed up with the religious history of ancient sylhet samatata, Noakhali and chittagong.

Paucity of archaeological evidence from Tripura makes it difficult to ascertain the introduction to the Brahmanical religious pattern in Tripura. It is also not known exactly when the Aryans penetrated to the domain of religion in Tripura. The fact that Buddhism flourished in different part of Tripura from the early times has been attested by the discovery of various archaeological material. A copper plate inscription from Gunaighar proves and Buddhism flourished here sometimes before 507-508 A.D. similarly different forms of Brahmanical religion. Viz, Vaisnavism, saivism and saktism were prevalent as early as 7th century A.D. A good number of surya images, some of which measure about 11 feet high, have been recovered from the pilak, Jolaibari are of south Tripura and these objects belonged to a considerably early period. Such colossal figure of surya from eastern Indian has not come to our notice yet. Ganesa was also a popular deity among the people of southern.

Perhaps north Tripura was the seat of saivism and orthodox Brahmanical preachers selected Unakoti hills of the region which was largely populated by the tribal people. Different tribes of shiva images are found scattered over the Unakoti hills.

VI. THE IMPACT OF THE PUJAS AND FESTIVALS ON THE SOCIETY OF TRIPURI COMMUNITY**➤ Culture**

The Tripuri culture has evolved through ages in its own soil a contact with the neighbouring Bangladesh an assimilation of the two coincide the extent took place. The acculturation is occurring is with the urbanized Tripuris in comparison with the Tripurians residing in the interior places.

Somehow the Tripuris of the remote area are to this day in a position to sustain traditional culture. Their dress, food habit, performance or dance, folk songs and observed of festival little’s till date their own. But it needs to be mentioned here that a little bit impact of the neighbour’s culture is also penetrating in it. As for the traditional ladies garment it deserves mentioning here that the female folk wear ‘pachra’ and ‘Richa’ all the time. In this case a change is noted to certain extent among the young girls, especially at the time of visiting certain a village market or a town area many of them wear shari and blous. The young boys have also been accustomed to wear trousers whenever they come to any urban area. Even at the time of weaving their garments some of them are observed on now a days to use woollen thread with modern design. The Tripuri folk songs are rich

in compassion and expression. These are me in tune and bear the great significance young generation shows great interest in Bengali and Hindi song. Sometimes they composed their songs imitating the tune of Bengali and Hindi song⁵.

The musical instruments 'Tuitreng' 'Lebangti' etc are played some of dances like Gorria, Mamita & Lebang bumani etc in this dance. Now a day in the month of Jaistha (Bengali Month) they usually perform this dance. Lebang bumani dance is also one of the most colorful dances of Tripuri community. The male and the female take part in this dance collectively. The Gorria dance take place at the time of Gorria puja in the month of Baisakha(Bengali Month). Like the Tripuri community this dance is also popular in other communities such as Jamatia, Nuatia, Reang etc. to have a happy and prosperous life and for bumper crop in *Jum* cultivation they propitiate the God *Goria* and dance on the occasion the new year both man and woman take part in this dance. The drum and flute etc are played in this dance.

In the months October-November *Momita* dance is performed. *Momita* dance is one of the most favorite dances of *Tripuri* community. After the observance of worship of the God and Goddess of "Duapathar" this dance take place with a community feast by inviting persons from neighbouring village to make merriment. The invitees perform the dance with the host villagers. The musical instrument likes 'Wathop' 'Chompreng' 'Sarinda' 'Tuitreng' etc are played in this dance.

VII. CONCLUSION

➤ *Special Characteristics of the Tribal Religious and Festivals of Tripura. :*

It has been brought to light at the present stage of our knowledge that religions, no doubt, have a social dimension which prescribed of man's life and rule in the society. The Tribes of Tripura give preference to the nature deity's spirits and ancestors to carry on struggle for existence. The Tribal religion of Tripura is essentially polytheistic and is expressed in pujas and festival's both at the family and the communal lives. But Christians should not be included under this theory.

The Tribal is related to religion. It is their music, dance, sculptures, crafts and literature which found expression in religious rites and rituals. So here in Tripura the culture identity and religious identity of the Tribal people go together.

Pujas and Festivals constitute the major part of the Tribal religious life. Pujas are regulated ways of devotion show towards Gods and Goddess, Spirits and ancestors to satisfy their anger or two achieve material gain. The water of holy pipe, chanting of mantras in the indigenous

languages. Sacrificial animal, wine, and *Ochai* are the essential components of puja. The *Ochai* performs the traditional puja according to his ancestral procedure. The aim behind majority of the puja is to avert and impending danger or calamity which might fall upon them or for food production or crops and also to achieve *punya*. Besides, some pujas are arranged to drive out the evil spirits from a body of diseased person the *Ochai* conduct puja as a shaman to cure a patient from illness.

The Tribal festivals of Tripura are celebrated in different seasons and characteristically these festivals are mostly agriculture, religious and marry making. The festival of river bathing in performs for prosperity of crops god health of mankind and domestic animals. A good number of festivals are accompanied with puja's, prayer's, music and dance at the time of celebration. The festivals of *Garia* puja are remarkable for its folk songs and rhythmic dance. The *Biju* festival is also accompanied with song and dance of the *chakma* and *Mog* communities⁶.

The government of Tripura has taking a policy of promotion of traditional culture, faith and practices because it has been found that the socio-religious cultural festivals accompanied with folk song and dance increase moral of the people, value of indigenous culture self respect for preservation of self identity by improving and developing folk songs and dance. On the occasion of the republic day, the marry making festival is arranged throughout the Tripura when the cultural activities of the Tribal people are displayed. At the time light of these activities Tribal people resolved to improve the celebration with incentive programmed.

The modernity should .be accepted to bring social and economic changes, to preserve the beauty of the state, and to conserve the value of Tribal life. The present school of modern religion culture and culture is developing the traditional culture keeping affinity with old traditions of the people. Majority of the Tribal people are not drawn in the stream of western culture. Here is Tripura, Brahmanical and Buddhist rites and rituals will survive along with the old traditions because it appears that the present generation will preserved the ancestor's culture along with their modern tendency.

In spite of imitating modern and western music dance, Bombay movies, video tapes, etc. the Tribal people of Tripura will not be compelled to give up old traditions because they younger generation are looking forward for better future accepting the moral values of their for forefathers along with modernity.

The Tribal cultures of Tripura most find a new hope by criticizing social reality showing the social backwardness and developing a form of culture, art, music and literature.

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