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## An Analysis of Tribal Communities' Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Practices in Tripura

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**Abstract:** On October 15, 1949, the state of Tripura, which had previously been a princely state, became a "C" category state and became part of the Indian Territory. The beginning of the 1950s marked the beginning of this state's transition to having a majority population composed of tribal people. The migration of non-tribal people over the border from Bangladesh, which was once a part of East Pakistan, caused a shift in the demographic makeup of the state after the partition of India. There are 19 different tribes in Tripura, in addition to a non-tribal community. It has Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Lusai, Mog, Garo, Kuki, Chaimal, Uchai, Hala,,Khasia, Bhutia, Munda, Orang, Lepcha, Santal, Bhil and Noatia. As of the census taken in 2001, the population of scheduled tribes was 9,93,426, up from 8,53,345 (30.95 percent) in the census taken in 1991. The total number of scheduled tribe men and females was 5,04,320 and 4,89,106, respectively, according to the census taken in 2001. However, the primary emphasis of this research is placed on the indigenous knowledge and practises of the ethnic communities of Tripura, which the people of these communities have been incorporating into their day-to-day lives. In addition, the study will shed some light on the role that tribal women play in the performance of these practises.

**Keywords:** Tripuri, Tripura, Ethnic, Indigenous, Customary Laws, Tribal Women.

### I. Introduction

Knowledge is made up of a number of different components, including but not limited to awareness, familiarity, facts, and skills gained via experience or education. These capabilities may either be a theoretical or practical grasp of a subject. To reiterate, practises are methods of doing something that are common, customary, or widely acknowledged by the majority of people. As a consequence of this, practises and knowledge are intricately intertwined with one another.

The ethnic and linguistic origins of the Tripura population's ethnic affiliations were diverse. The majority of tribal societies in Tripura are patriarchal, with the exception of the Khasi and Garo people, who are matrilineal.

The indigenous peoples of Tripura are sometimes referred to as "children of nature." Their understanding and activities are well-acquainted with the whole of the eco-system. It is entirely made from organic materials and is one of a kind. Everything, from Jhuming to local customary rules, is acclimated to the natural laws that govern the world. Every indigenous community has its own set of laws and a unique body of knowledge. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the indigenous populations of Tripura are very reliant on the natural environment. Their teachers are the enormous sky, hills, woods, and rivers that surround them.

## II. Popular Knowledge and Practices among the Tribes of Tripura:

**Social practices:** Ethnic people in Tripura live inside their own society, much as members of other ethnic groups do elsewhere. In general, these organisations are established around rivers of any kind. A colony is formed when three hundred to one hundred households remain together. The community looks up to Chowdhury as its leader. Although the indigenous inhabitants of this state gradually moved away from the more distant highland regions and onto the plains, the cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions that they brought with them are still very much alive today.

Let us begin with the customs that are often followed in traditional tribal societies while giving birth to children. A celebration known as "phanra-tingma" that takes place between four and five months before to the birth of a child. After that, the birthing process takes place with the assistance of kumuijak in a chamber that is kept completely private (midwife). A celebration known as "aapulchona" takes place after 9 days for a male kid and after 7 days for a female child. This festival, which is really the naming ceremony of a freshly born child, takes place after 9 days for a male child.

Every civilization places a significant emphasis on the institution of marriage. The 'ghar jamai' (cha-mari) method is a tradition that is unique to the tribes of Tripura and contributed to the event's increased level of excitement. As part of this tradition, the groom is required to spend the night at the home of his future parents-in-law and assist the family with their various responsibilities. Even this practise may be broken down into a few other categories, such as:

- a) Cha-mari ampa: This is for a little period of time after the wedding day has been decided upon.
- b) Cha-mari kara: According to this tradition, once the marriage has been arranged, the groom is required to live with his new in-laws for a certain amount of time, which might be three or five years. He is not permitted to leave the house during this time. He is unable to terminate the agreement within this time period.

c) Cha-mari-amar: According to this tradition, as soon as the marriage is finalised, the groom is required to move in with his new in-laws and remain with them for the remainder of his life. However, he may have his own residence with his wife if he so desires, and this will not affect his property rights.

Nevertheless, there are also other kinds of weddings, such as marriage by negotiation, marriage by force, marriage by service, etc., amongst other possibilities.

Last but not least, after a person has passed away, their body is burned at a crematorium that is located next to a river or stream. Before being cremated, the dead should be given a wash and given fresh clothes to wear. Following this, a chicken is offered as a sacrifice, and rice and chicken curry are provided for the family of the deceased. Next the completion of the procedure, the following day is referred to as "thapla khibi." On this day, bones from the skulls of the deceased corpse are gathered and stored in a bamboo container.

The last step of these rituals is called "shraddha," and it consists of paying respect to the individual who has passed away.

### **III. Food gathering practices:**

If we take a thorough look at an indigenous community, we will see that the foundation of their society depends on agriculture. The indigenous populations engage in a farming method known as Jhum Cultivation, which primarily depends on forested and mountainous places. This is significant to them because it affects how easily they can get food. Even specific rituals are carried out during Jhum cultivation, such as burning of the forest, putting seeds in the ashes, and residing in that location during the whole process. Similarly, fishing is a significant social activity among Tripura's native people. As their whole food chain is based on nature, they sometimes catch fish without the need of equipment. They are skilled at using their bare hands to capture fish in shallow water, especially in the winter and summer. Sometimes it all revolves around a particular tournament when fish are given out as prizes. Other methods, such as nets like chaatki jal, doon jal, dharma jal, tana jal, bara ber jal, and gura ber jal, are used to capture fish, too. Different traps are also utilised, including anta chai, kakra chai, icha chai, song chai, and nal chai. Banana plant bases and leaf rafts are also utilised, with bamboo rods fastened underneath the raft and across its width. Fishing lines include andha barshi, jiol barshi, punthi barshi, tagga barshi, and tana barshi, among others. The many names for the fish lines include chipp, barshi, bari, barki, etc.

The culture of Tripura's tribes was further enhanced by their extensive understanding of hunting techniques. Even if the times have changed and there are new ways to get food, hunting techniques are still present in the tribal groups. With a bow and arrow, spear, dead fall, stakes, snares, pit, trap sling, bird lime, chopper, rifle, etc., this may be done either individually or collectively.

Once again, bamboo is a highly common component in the cultures of Tripura's indigenous populations. Tripura has a plentiful supply of bamboo trees because to nature. Because they live in the hills, the ethnic people of Tripura have mastered the use of bamboo in all of its forms in daily life. Even they consume it as

food since it is so delicious and healthful. Along with other delicacies including dry fish, oily fish, pig, chicken, and fish, bamboo sapling is a favourite dish of tribal groups in Tripura. What's most intriguing is that they prepare this curry using a bamboo cooking pot and bamboo pipe. Even they smoke from hookahs, which are likewise constructed of bamboo and are known to them as "Daba."

#### IV. Religious practices:

The cultivation process is connected to the indigenous cultures' religious traditions. Jhum cultivation starts in September or October when the location for the cultivation is chosen, and it concludes in March when the cultivation is started in the chosen burnt region. The tribal tribes' religious observances follow this cycle of jhum cultivation. Mamaita, Baaing Surma, Para Kerma, Bwusui Ter, Sena Ter, Lampra Wathap, Lamabumani, Devi Tripura Sundari Puja, and others are some of the significant religious rites.

#### V. Cultural practices:

The cultural practises of Tripura's tribes are extremely unique and highly regarded worldwide. Surprisingly, members of indigenous communities are able to play their bamboo or wood-made instruments without training or proper notation by mimicking any vocal melody. Songs and dances cannot be performed without the musical instruments. Kham (drum), Sumu (flute), Changpreng (stringed musical instrument), Sarinda (wooden stringed musical instrument), and Dangdu are some of the most common types of their musical instruments (mouth organ).

Traditional tribal dances of Tripura reach their pinnacle when accompanied by musical instruments. There are fundamentally two types of dance: ritual and recreational. Garia and Maimita dances belong to the category of ritualistic dance, which is a subgenre governed by taboos during performances. Lebangbumani and Mashak are unrestricted types of recreational dance.

However, each of these dance styles expresses its own unique themes. Example:

**Garia Dance:** This dance style is prevalent among the communities like Tripuris, Reangs and Jamatias. This form of dance is performed during Garia-worship, in which the god of wealth and prosperity is venerated. Garia puja is connected to agricultural rituals, as is the garia dance among jhum farmers.

**Maimita Dance:** This type of dance is performed during the customary ceremony for the consumption of newly harvested jhoom rice. Maimita is the name of this celebration of newly harvested rice.

**Lebangbumani:** This dance is derived from a device used to protect jhoom crops from the lebang insect. Tripuris also call this bug 'kuk'. Lebangbumani may also be described as 'jhoom dance' and done in the jhoom plot. The insects are captured using an instrument called a tak-tui-treng.

**Masahk Dance:** Mashak in kokborok language means deer. It's a trophy dance that deer hunters perform to express their elation after a successful hunt.

**Hojagiri:** This dance is the pride of Tripura and has gained international recognition for its prominence. This is a common practise among Tripura's Reang community. This traditional dance is performed at the Hojagiri festival and Laxmi puja. This dance is done together with male members participating in singing with kham and shumu. and ladies dance on the Bailing, a broad circular rice clearing object made of cane, a pitcher, bodo (bottle), kupi(lamp), mairang(a simple dish), and a handkerchief for each performer. This dance form requires extensive training in order to be perfected. Four to six members of the team must balance on the earthen pitcher while using only their lower bodies to manipulate other props.

This state's Kuki community is also very well-known for its bamboo dance.

Expertise in handicrafts and related techniques: Ethnic communities rely heavily on bamboo for the production of a variety of handicrafts. They are accustomed to utilising bamboo for a variety of purposes. From decorative goods to furnishings even decorations. And this is a fundamental economic activity by these tribes since most of them are gifted with this talent to manufacture anything from bamboo. Even now a days with various efforts by government these bamboo handicrafts are growing and becoming more famous internationally which is creating a wonderful economic stability to the people from the indigenous communities in Tripura.

Additionally, basketry is a prevalent socioeconomic practise among Tripura's ethnic groups. Examples of basketry include langa, chempay, khaturak, and dal, among others. All these baskets are manufactured from bamboos for transporting or storing stuff.

Moreover, the indigenous people's attire is also quite appealing. And this traditional clothing is fully created by the ladies of the various towns. This is a common economic practise, as this traditional attire of Tripuri women is in high demand across the country. Risa is the name for the upper portion of the garment, while Rignai is the name for the lower portion. A highly artistic design is woven into the Risa.

#### **VI. Health care knowledge and practices:**

Since the beginning the ethnic groups are living in the lap of nature and nature has given them all resources in plenty. Ethnic groups are lived in to the hills where the atmosphere is covered with the beautiful green forest with medicinal plants. So all the populations are informed about the therapeutic plants and practised it throughout various diseases. Even in contemporary days especially when sophisticated medicine system is governing the healthcare regime, ethno medical traditions are still widespread. The Reang community is renowned in this field. People who practise ethno medicine are referred to as "Baidya." They acquired this technique from their forebears. They absolutely know which herb is good for various conditions. Hitherto little effort been done to protect this ethno botanical method of healing. Plants like chouck, msautotra, yosrem, musafama, konglabi are utilised for cuts and sprains on bone joints. The fresh roots of these plants are chopped in to little pieces and crushed to paste with water to put it on the patient.

Again, khumthali, sataukura, boiec etc are utilised for healing gastrointestinal disorders. Khelang is capable of healing even shattered joints.



Unpopular ritual like 'jolpora' is another popular practise in to the tribe. In this technique, a person with a condition is given a little amount of holy water cleaned with appropriate hymns and placed in a pot. This is a vanishing custom among the many ethnic groups. In addition, the hymns are oral in nature. Consequently, with the passing of the Baidyas, this practise is also ending.

#### **VII. Customary practices:**

Since time immemorial, the ethnic groups of Tripura have rigorously adhered to a traditional administrative structure. Since the beginning of time, customary practises have played a crucial role in regulating social institutions. Interestingly, these norms are passed from generation to generation via observation and deference.

The tribal communities have a high level of social cohesion and identification. This is due to the structure of their customary customs. The top council of their social and traditional structure is called Naran.

The ethnic administrative structure of Tripura is composed of three levels. In the first level, each village or hamlet has its own village council. And the leader of the village council, who is also the judge, is referred to as RUJUWA. Regionally, the second tier of social justice courts is known as Pomang Court, and its top judge is also known as Pomang.

The community's highest court is the Naran or Supreme Court. This represents the third level of social justice. NARAN is the head judge of the highest court of social justice.

The family members who reside in urban areas are likewise governed by the Village Council of their respective permanent residence.

#### **VIII. Influence of indigenous women in tribal knowledge and practices:**

In the traditional culture of Tripura, the birth of a female child is not unwelcome. In a patriarchal culture, however, women must labour from night till morning. The tribal women of Tripura enhance every practise in tribal cultures. Women are an integral element of societal customs and dominate those linked to hunting, gathering, and handicrafts due to their superior understanding. Without women's involvement, cultural activities have no value.

Due to prevalent superstitions in the communities, tribal women cannot directly engage in religious ceremonies in patriarchal societies. Indigenous women have no rights in administrative procedures other than the ability to be an audience member. They are ineligible to become the leader of any customary procedure in their community.

Therefore, women's effect on tribal knowledge and practises is unavoidable, and they are forming the foundation of tribal groups in Tripura's customary knowledge and practises.

## IX. Conclusion:

Modern colleges for Agricultural studies and fisheries are designed to provide fundamental information on these techniques. The music college in Khumlung, located in the TTADC region of Tripura, provides instruction in the fundamentals of tribal instruments, dances, and songs. Crafting with bamboo is now also a vocabulary-learning approach. Ayurvedic medicine is also taught at institutions with the appropriate degree. All of these educational programmes, however, have been prevalent in native societies for aeons without formal training. Being taught by nature, they excelled in everything.

All of this information is now protected and safeguarded via the studies and research conducted by various institutes on indigenous traditions. Crafts are receiving contemporary designs, ethno-medical plants are being conserved, cultural practises are gaining larger perspectives, and our small green state is gaining a seat on the pan-Indian platform.

Thus, traditional knowledge and customs of Tripura's tribal tribes have been brought into the present with real protection of their original authenticity.

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