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The Study Of Folktales Of Tripura In Preserving Culture, Heritage, And Norms

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ABSTRACT

Folktales and folklore are one of the most important elements among the Tripuri community of Tripura that brings old and new generation together through the narration of folktales. This article will mainly focus on Kokborok folktales of Tripura and know about the culture heritage and norms reading through the selected folktales of Tripura. Folktales are an oral tradition which serves as preserving culture and heritage. It displays the society and societal norms and practices, simple lifestyle of Tripuri people who goes to jhum, houses like Gairing-nok (houses made of bamboo), their belief and connection with gods and deities, rituals and customs etc. There are different types of folktales and folklore one of each having moral lessons.

Keywords: Folktales, Culture and Heritage, Tripuri community, societal norms, cultural belief.

INTRODUCTION

When we speak about preserving culture, heritage, norms, and tradition folktales play significant role, which is very popular among the indigenous people of Northeast India. Northeast is rich in culture and tradition with diverse ethnic group across states like (Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur) having different customs, traditions, languages, different way of living life and its beautiful landscapes. They are also known for their Handicrafts and handlooms, unique dance forms and music, the unique cuisine, musical instruments and for the folklore like, folktales and folksong. However, this paper will mainly refer to the folktales of Tripura.

Basically, a folktales is a story that is passed down orally by our ancestors from generation to generation. Folktales are culturally deep rooted which teach us moral lesson, preserve cultural beliefs and historical knowledge, addresses societal norms, taboos. It explores the lifestyle of indigenous people and their daily basic activities.

There are different types of folktales like *fables* which uses animal character with human like features that teaches us moral lessons. *Supernatural beings* that features supernatural spirit, God and Goddesses, ghost which interact frequently with human, *nature and ecological tales* which feature human relationship with nature like rivers, animals, and plants. *Moral tales* are the tales that teaches us moral lessons about good and evil and human behaviour. There other tales like *trickster*, *legends*, *fairy-tales*, *myths*, *fables* etc.

Folktales are generally told from person to person orally which means it can also change slightly different as the time passes that has no specific author. It has simple plot structure, the settings are not certain, characters are recognizable with their character like trickster, clever, heroic, good and bad etc. supernatural elements, magic, spirit are included, connection of god and human, phrases are repeated. Eventually it reflects cultural values, belief, and view of the society.

OBJECTIVES

1. To know about the Kokborok folktales of Tripura.
2. To explore the culture, tradition and customs through the reading of folktale of Tripuri culture.
3. To know about the various societal norms.
4. To know how folktale is a way of preserving culture and heritage.

DISCUSSION

Tripura

Tripura is rich in culture and heritage with mixture of different communities, celebrates vibrant cultural festivals like Garia, Kharchi and Ker festivals and other traditional festivals and offers diverse traditional cuisine. It has natural scenic beauty, wildlife sanctuary, famous for its beautiful historical and archeological sites such as Unokoti and Pilak, Ujjayanta Palace, water Palaces like Neermahal which draw the attention of the tourists. The state is also known for its bamboo crafts and handlooms and also known for producing fruits like Queen Pineapple, jackfruits etc. It is also famous for its folk-dance like Garia mwsamung, Lebang bumani, Mamita, Hozagiri etc folk-songs like jadu kolija and folk-tales.

KOKBOROK FOLKTALES

Kokborok 'folktales' or 'Kerang Kothoma' are the traditional story-telling of Kokborok speaking people of Tripura which is usually narrated by our grandparents during the family gatherings or festivals. folktales which presents different characters of human being, showing the relation of human and nature, teaches moral lessons, features transformation of human to animal, sometimes nature, river forests, animals are seen talking to human. There are many kokborok folktales that impart knowledge of culture, religious-ritual customs which serve to preserve cultural identity and social values.

FOLKTALES OF TRIPURI COMMUNITY

Chethuang the myth and social taboo

The folktale *Chethuang* teaches us the consequences of going against the societal norms, where marriage between a brother and sister is an incest taboo. In the folktale *Chethuang* there is a family who live in a village goes to the jhum who have a son and a daughter. The problem began when the brother fell in love with his own sister which is unacceptable in the society. They also have a grandmother who suggested all the names of the girls from the village whom he can make choices for marriage but despite of all the suggestions and explanations from his parents he insisted to marry his own sister. After seeing the son's stubborn behaviour his parents went to Chowdhury/hoda okwra (chief of the community) for discussion on what solution can be done for his act and the thought process that has cultivated in his mind. Through this scene we can understand that 'hoda okwra' plays an important role in the society for any decisions, discussion, queries, solution suggestions to be made in the village. Therefore, hoda okwra existed long before in the Tripuri society for keeping up the societal norms and till now his presence is mandatory for any occasion and events.

The sister was unaware of the fact that her own brother wants to marry her. When she learned that the marriage was going to happen between her and the brother, she thought it is not at all acceptable, this is unsocial, unconsented. She could not think of anything at night she had a dream, a kind of a deity appears and said to find a sapling of Chethuang tree and to chant a few words while worshiping it. she would be free from all the worries when she plant and worship it. Next day she plant the sapling and started to worship and chanted “dada bai ano kainani hino!, log Chethuang log,” (Oh Chethuang! they wanted to get me married to my brother, please grow more taller and taller). When the tree grows taller, she climbs up the tree went up to the sky. The villagers were surprised since tree kept on growing higher and higher. The elder brother also pretend to accept his fault and request her to come down. The top of the tree where the girl was sitting continued to reach the height of the sky and bid them farewell.

This folktale shows that the act is beyond the boundaries of social norms. Therefore, we should follow acceptable social rules and preserve our culture and tradition. The relation between the nature and human has been seen in the folktale.

‘Kuchuk Kherengbar’ the tragic story of love and transformation and ecological wisdom

Kuchuk Kherengbar which is also known as heavenly sacred flower/forbidden kherengbar (orchid) a folktale that teaches us about the ecological knowledge, deeply rooted with values and history, which is also serve to preserve the rich Tripuri cultural heritage passing it orally through generations. This Tripuri folktale with its tragic tale of a newly married couple was transformed to a Hulok (a whooping monkey) and his wife transforming into Muphuk (monitor lizard) after plucking the sacred heavenly flower of divine.

In the folktale, the story is about a disputes between two families, one belonging to the elite class and the other from interior class. One family had a daughter and the other a son. Once upon a time both the families reside in the same village but due to some conflicts, the poor family left the village and started living an isolated place far away from the village. The girls father was the village Chowdhury (chief). The hero and heroine of the story meet for the first time in Jhum. They started seeing each other like this every day. On that time, they would have their conversations through songs and that's where their love began. But the girl's father is reluctant to accept their relationship. And then they decided to run away and get married.

While the couple was fleeing and crossing the forest they felt the smell of unknown flower, she enquired her husband about the unknown smell that she never smelt before. She requested her husband to pluck it for her as she wanted to decorate the scented flower on her hair. Her husband explained about the 'Kherengbar Bubar' is a scented flower which is very sacred and it is only for God. Therefore, it has some terms and conditions if human has to pluck it, not following the conditions may have to face the consequences. Afterwards seeing the upset wife, the husband climbs up to the tree to pluck the flower and throws towards the wife. Later the wife could not resist the smell and wore them on her hair but before her husband could come down. Eventually they faced the consequences of not obeying the rules and rituals, the husband transformed into Hulok (a whooping monkey) and the wife into Muphuk (monitor lizard). She cursed the Kherengbar flower because of which their love and life turned to different destiny, since, then their unique story is remembered forever and told and retold orally from generations to generations and it is a popular belief that the Kherengbar flower lost its fragrance from that day, due to her curse.

This folktale warns about the consequences of disrespecting the nature and divine belief by going beyond their set boundaries. Therefore, we should respect the spiritual belief that is embedded for the specific community culture and tradition. Also, the story here, teaches us not to disturb nature, it warns us of the disastrous consequences we will face if we do not follow the rules of nature.

The reflection of the typical society, family and relationship

The folktale *Nuai* highlights the typical Tripuri family, the relationship of between the siblings, parents and stepmother. There lived a Jhum cultivator whose family consist of his old parents, his wife and his two daughters. They together worked in the house and in the jhum fields offering a helping hand to their parents. The elder daughter of the cultivator is always being criticized by her elders and asked to change her manners, yet remained extremely careless in doing her works. She and her step-sister, one day, brought a pot filled with water, from which she unintentionally dropped water and also broke the pot while placing it down. But, her grandmother, her father and her step-mother, all scolded her for being so irresponsible despite being the elder one. She was always ill-treated by almost member in the family, especially by her step-mother. This made her sad and jealous towards her sister, as she thinks that everyone mistreated her because of her younger sister.

One day the two sisters went to the jhum to harvest some vegetables and fruits. After reaching to the jhum the elder sister saw a riped musk melon and kept on eating one after the other but the younger sister who was thoughtful than the elder sister was collecting vegetables in the Langa (traditional basket for carrying things). She also found a melon that was also asked by her elder sister. Later they headed to their grandmother's bathing spot/ pond so that they can eat and rest there. Eventually they reached the spot and eat and enjoyed the lean swing, after eating the elder sister pushed the younger sister into the water and she returned home alone. The younger sister was eaten by a big fish.

And for that she was forced to spend her days in the cage as a punishment for mistakes she has done. She was to endure to all bitter days of the heat of the sun rays during the hot sunny days, cold winter nights. She wanted each member of the society to help her in getting out of the cage but was treated like an animal as nobody, came forward to free her from the cage. She was denied to drink even to feel a drop of water during her thirst and have food during severe hunger. Her younger sister loves her very gravely and shed tears for her. One fine day, while her younger sister was cutting betel nuts, she asked her of the knife to chop off her nails. Hiding from her parents, younger sister dared to give the knife to her elder sister, on receiving the knife, she cut the cage and escaped by herself and then went to the field and looked towards the blue sky. She looked at the Nuai birds, flying in one corner of the sky and would think within herself if she could fly in the blue sky like those. And one day leaving behind her family flew away along with the Nuai birds high up in the sky.

It shows the consequences of unkind behavior, neglect and mistreatment in the family, teaching us the moral values and understanding. The story revolves around the two sisters and a stepmother where one sister is mistreated in the family by her stepmother which in the end leads to the consequences of transforming into a Nuai bird. This portrays the connection and belief of the human with animals and nature through the view of tripuri culture. This folktale also is an important to preserve the cultural identity showcasing its importance of social norms and values across the Tripuri people.

The folktale of myth and worshiping of Deity

Kamlapati or Borokwina is a myth that tells us about the origin and worshiping of Goddess 'Borokwina.' This folktale shows the belief in God or deity among the Tripuri culture which plays and important role in preserving heritage of moral values, cultural belief and identity. The story of 'Kamlapati' is usually told during the worshiping of the Goddess 'Borokwina.'

In the story princess Kamlapati was tortured by her step mother and she was asked to look after hundred goats. One day when she lost the goats she was beaten by her stepmother, later that night she was given no food out of sorrow she cried and slept hungry and thirsty. Then a beautiful deity appeared in her dream and told not to worry and she can ask help whenever she needs. Afterwards she worshiped the deity and 'Borokwina' appeared and said that she is the goddess who offer 'bor' (or boon) and now she can worship with whatever she had and whenever she needs. So Kamlapati worshipped full night and

prayed to get her back all the goats that she lost and to let her meet with her father. As the words said by the deity, her prayer was heard and in no sooner she found all her goats and met her father. Since then, the goddess was worshipped with pure and full devotion by the Tripuri people once in a month on every Sunday.

There are many more folktales of deities and its belief, portrays the culture, customs, identity, social values of the Kokborok speaking people of Tripura that reflects through folktales. The oral tradition teaches the younger generation to learn about the tradition and heritage, culture and belief of the Tripuri people.

FINDINGS

1. It has found that every folktale teaches us moral lessons and values. There are different types of folktales which is about myths and history of Tripuri community.
2. Traditional folktales, folksongs, folkdance and folklore are the deeply rooted to culture of Kokborok speaking people of Tripura which is the core of preserving heritage.
3. Looking into the selected folktales it has found that Tripuri culture is embedded with certain societal laws, norms and tradition, having their own traditional rituals.
4. The Tripuri community has their own belief and devotion in God and Goddesses like Garia, Ker, Borokwina etc., with their unique rituals.
5. It is seen that they respect and value nature, forest and birds and animals.
6. In the folktale human beings are always seen talking to forest, rivers birds. Humans transform into animals or birds is usually seen in the folktale.

CONCLUSION

As we know folktales in Tripuri community plays vital role in preserving our heritage and culture, as the elder generation pass down the tradition to new generation. Through the folktale we explored the basic social norms, how disrespecting nature and divine power could lead to downfall consequences. The complex relationship in the family and the society, love betrayal mistreatment, interconnection of deity and human being, transformation of human to animal.

Thus, folktale is the tool that holds the spirit of keeping up the tradition, language and cultural identity. Passed down in the oral narrative form which connects to roots of the culture even in the phase of modernization reminding the heritage and history of Tripuri community.

There are traditional folk songs of Kokborok speaking people like 'Jadu-kolija' which has special lyrics dedicating to love ones, expressing happy and sorrow moments and about life events etc., which has different tunes and rhythms. The traditional folk songs and folktales also preserve cultural heritage and language.

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