

Significance of Traditional Culture of Chakma Communities in North-Eastern Region of India: An Analysis

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Abstract

North-Eastern region in India consists of seven sisters along with one host brother and is one of the most beautiful regions in India. It is the easternmost region which represents both geographic and political administrative division of the country. It comprises eight states – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

The people of North – East region are well known for its distinct culture. Each and every people of these states have its own culture, languages, dress, custom, festivals, folk song, folk dance, food and crafts.

Chakmas are distributed throughout the Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and in Chittagong Hill tracts of Bangladesh. Chakma language is a language belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family. They are closely related to tribes in the foothills of the Himalayas. They are believed to be originally from Arakan Yoma North, which is presently China state.

The chakmas are people with their own culture, folklore, literature and traditions. Their traditional dress is Phinon and Haccdi. They wore variety of necklaces, bracelets, anklets, rings and other ornaments. They are skilled weavers and make their own cloth. Their staple food is rice, vegetables and mustard. They

drink alcoholic beverages freely and every household makes its own rice liquor which is consumed at all festivals and occasions.

They celebrate various Buddhist festivals and the most important is Buddha Purnima. They wore best clothes and visit temple. Houses are decorated with flowers and festive dishes are prepared for guests. Thus, several diverse ethno-linguistic groups have given rise to a composite culture.

Key Words: Diverse Culture, Traditions, Festivals, Occasions, Language.

1. Introduction

‘North-Eastern Region is the easternmost region in India comprising eight states i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The region is paradise on earth with natural beauty of flora and fauna. It has distinct culture and traditional life style. The region offers a mixed culture of Hindu, Christianity, Muslim and Buddhism. Lifestyles of these States varies from one-place to other, people are divided into tribes and sub-tribes including different other communities. Peoples of hilly region live a simple life-style. They are inhabiting in high mountains and their prime occupations are weaving, fishing, hunting, tea-farming and traditional handicrafts. Each and every communities, tribes and sub-tribes of this region are rich in their traditional culture, festivals, food, dance, music and handicrafts which are their integral part of life. Ultimately North Eastern region is full of adventure, diverse culture and lovable people.

2. Chakma Communities of North-East India

The Chakmas are numerically as significant tribe of North-East India. They are found in some areas of Assam, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh but they are mainly concentrated in Tripura. The Chakma people are also called Changma People. They are ethnic group who are related to the Daingnet people. Lewin in

1869 classes the Chakmas with the Khyoungtha or Jumia Magh. They are of Arakanese origin and they speak the ancient Arakan dialect.

According to Risley, Chakma has been derived from Tsamka Tsak Thek, a Lohitic tribe of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Dr. Leeffer said that the Sak in the border areas of Arakan and Chittagong descended the Chakma and linguistically spoke Sak dialect. Dr. Leeffer also said that Saks have adopted Bengali language and became Chakma.

Tripuri Chakmas are divided into 35 sects (gozas) which are sub-divided into gustis. These sects are – Milima, Tanja, Barua, Koda, Wuangra, Buma, Kurchya, Kadua etc.

2.1 Religion

Majority of the Chakma tribes are followers of Theravada Buddhism which they are practicing for centuries. Buddhism practiced by the Chakma people are mixed i.e., Southern School of Buddhism with tantrik Buddhism, Chakma temples are called Buddhist Vihar (Kiyong) which is present in almost every village.

There are four types of workers exist in every Buddha Vihars. They are Bhikkus, Raules, Ojhas and Gankulies. Bhikkus are chief priests or monks. Raules performs the customary rites. The Ojhas appease the evil spirits and the Gankulies sing sentimental narrative religious songs from village to village.

The Chakmas also worship Hindu deities for example Sri Mahalakshmi is worshipped as the Goddess of the harvest. They also practice animal sacrifice which is against the Buddhist beliefs.

2.2 Living Conditions

The Chakma people depend on jhum cultivation for their livelihood. Their main crops are usually rice, millet, teel, cotton, mustard seeds etc. Their mode of living is changed with the change of jhum cycle. Their lean period of economy comes between July and September. They turn pauper during these days and

become indebted to moneyed men for which major portion of their yield goes out of their hand. Their zestful period lasts for 1-2 months only i.e., after the harvest. They are very hospitable and would entertain guests even by borrowing. At present Chakmas are progressing. They are being educated day by day and also have joined service and trade. Their ceremonies are also like Bengalis usually of two types i.e., religious ceremonies and ceremonies based on social customs.

2.3 Food

The traditional food of Chakma people is Bamboo shoot which they call Bajchuri. They call these 'Sido'. Their staple food is rice and vegetables include yams, pumpkins, melons and cucumbers. Though they are Buddhists vegetarians they also eat fish, poultry and meat. They also eat foods wrapped in banana leaves and placed beside a fire and eggs that are aged until rotten.

2.4 Dress

The Chakmas wear dress similar with the dress of the Burmese and the Shan people. Generally, they use hand woven cloths. A piece of cloth is tied by them around their body covering the upper and lower part of the body which they weave in leisure them. In modern days women wear saree and blouse similarly like Bengali traditional women and use ornaments which somelaoue look like the Bengali women. Men wear mill-made Dhoti, gengi and shirt.

2.5 Marriage

There are two marriage systems prevalent in Chakma society (i) Religious system and social or customary system of marriage. The higher or advanced section of the society followed religious system of marriage. It is performed by Buddhist monks.

The customary marriage system is very popular in the villages. Young Boy attaining 20 to 22 years of age his parents look a suitable match. On finding a suitable girl a male relative of the groom is sent to the house of the girl and after

discussions a day is fixing for a meeting of the parents of both the parties and grooms parents carry a bottle of wine to the bride's house. Like this they give three visits and in the third visit groom's parents carry wine, rice cakes and lots of eatables. On this day they discuss about the marriage and fix the date of marriage. On the day preceding the marriage the grooms party take presents, cloths and jewellery with them and March to the strains of festive music. Then the bride is adorned with new clothes and jewellery. Next day after the morning meal the groom's party escort the bride to the bridegroom's house and the actual ceremony takes place in the evening. The bride and bridegroom are made to sit together and two of their relations with the consent of the parents bind the couple together with a white cloth. The bride then has to place cooked rice and a prepared pan in the mouth of the bridegroom and the groom repeat the same act to her. As soon as the cloth is loosened they are declared newly married.

2.6 Polygamy

The system of keeping more than one wife is also prevalent in the society. The marriage ceremony is known as chumulong. The groom is to pay the price for the bride which usually includes paddy, domestic animals in addition to cash amount.

2.7 Divorce

Divorce system is also found in the society and there is no barrier for widow re-marriage.

2.8 Art and Music

Chakmas are not much proficient in the field of art and music except for popular songs. Their old traditional musical instruments like Singha, Dhuluk, Khengarang have been replaced by Harmonium, Dhole and Tabla. Some of their old romantic songs known as ubageet are still popular among them. There is no visible mark of their traditional dance style. Dancing is not encouraged in the society except by small children. Presently they are in closer contact with the plain

people and have developed the basic rhythm of dance which has become very popular among them. They are fond of Doli/Drama.

2.9 Sports and Games

The popular games among the Chakmas are Ghila Khara, Nadeng Khara, Potti Khara etc. Ha-do-do is a game played, throughout the Chakma region. In this game two teams stand on either side of a central line. They take turns sending a player into opposite territory to touch as many people during the space of one breath saying “Ha-do-do”. If the player runs out of breath or caught by any opponents the player is out. On the other hand if the player successfully returns to his/ her territory, the players has tagged must leave the game.

Ghila Khara is a game that can be played between two teams or two individuals. A special type of seed called ghilay is used to play this game. This seed is grown in wild forests of hills and are similar like bean seeds. When the time comes, the large beans dry out and the seeds known as Ghila are ready to be collected for use in the game.

Nadeng Khara is played with spinning top. Potti Khara is a traditional game played by two teams but due to its sophisticated rules it is becoming less common.

In the present age, Chakma youths are less fond of these traditional games.

2.10 Festivals

Various important Festivals celebrated by the Chakma community are Bizu, Alphaloni, Buddha Purnima and Kothin Civar Dan.

2.10.1 Buddha Purnima

This is the anniversary of three important events in Buddha’s life – his birth, his attainment of enlightenment and his death. It is observed on the full moon day of the month of Vaisakha.

On this day they wear best clothes and visit the temple. They offer flowers to the image of Buddha, light candles and listen to sermon and priests. Alms are given to poor and feasts are held for the priests.

2.10.2 Bishu

This is the three-day festival which coincides with the Bengali New year's Day. Houses are decorated with flowers. Children win the blessings of elders and festive dishes are prepared for guests.

2.10.3 Bizu

It is the important socio-religious festivals of Chakma. This festival gave birth to Bizu dance. This festival began one day before the last day of the month of Chaitra and lasts for three days on this occasion, cloth and household items are cleaned and washed. The second day is Mul Bizu which starts with bathing in water. People wear new clothes and make rounds of the village. Women wear Phinon and Haadi while men wear Silum and Dhudi. They prepare many traditional sweets and vegetable curry known as pazon ton. The day ends with Bizu dance.

The last day is known as Gojje Pojje din involves the performances of different socio-religious activities. The festival is actually agricultural character in which jum sowing is taken up with the first rain. But now it has lost its character.

2.10.4 Alphaloni

During this festival everyone takes a break from farming because it is a harvest season. All farmers take rest and give rest to all animals, weapons. They eat new food, fruits from jum harvest offer and share with each other. It is a historical festival of Chakma people which is celebrated for 2500 years.

3. Conclusion

Thus, from the above study we have found that the community is enriched by myths and legends. Chakma are originally jumma peoples of Chittagong

Hill tracts and are very much influenced by the Bengalis of this region. The

Chakmas came in contact with the Bengalis and accepted the Hindu religion. The religion practiced by the Chakmas is Buddhism but from their constant contact with the Bengalis, they have now added to these over rites much of Hindu superstition. Their dialect is based on south-eastern Bengali but it had undergone so much transformation that it has almost become a separate languages.

In overall aspect, Chakmas are very much hospitality in nature. They greet each other with the traditional cry 'Hoya!' which is also used to express pleasure at victory in sports. They save themselves more culturally similar to the Hindu peoples of India. Presently Chakmas are growing up in every aspect of life regarding literacy, Jobs etc.

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