



Preserving Culture and Tradition in Tribal Societies of Northeast India: Impact of Ramayana and Mahabharata

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ABSTRACT

Any holy book in any society is not only a book but it is also a part and parcel of the societal ideology to propel each and every moment. India is a country of multi diversity where various people live. Here, many tribes have very close relation with both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In our Northeastern states, many tribes live and many among them belong to the Hindu way of life, and they accept the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as an integral part of their life. To respect the culture and tradition of each and every tribal society, both the epics have long played a helpful role in every step. In Assam the various tribes like Karbi, Tiwa, Bodo community have shown impact of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In Arunachal Pradesh Idu Mishmi tribe, the Aka community, etc. reflect impact of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Among people in Manipur, the impact of both the epics is remarkable. In Tripura the Rama Legend is prominent in folklore songs and art of Tripura. In Mizoram, the predominantly Mizo people have folk stories influenced by the Rama Legend. They believe that Rama and his brother Lakshmana taught them how to cultivate paddy. It may be said that, many tribal people have learnt and gathered knowledge from both the epics and accordingly they have proceeded thus far. So, the epics have wide coverage in the indigenous cultures of Northeast India.

Keywords – *Indigenous; Folklore; Impact; Culture; Tradition: Tribal; Ramayana; Mahabharata; etc.*

Introduction

Ramayana and Mahabharata are two outstanding Holy book of many human beings. As long as mountains stand and the rivers flow on the earth Ramayana will survive upon the lips of men. The influence of Ramayana or the Story of Sri Rama has its deep impact on the human mind; especially it has cut deep roots in the Hindu society since the hoary past. The great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata have always been and will be subjects of interest for the storytellers and the masses too. We all are aware of the deep impressions of the story of Ramayana has carved on the mind of the Indian society. This became evident when the “Ramayana” television serial was first telecast in the early 1980s. The massive response it evoked was simply amazing; people of all age groups were found glued to their television sets and one would experience a self-declared curfew sort of as no one would project out during that one-hour slot. Even the timings of public functions and marriages were adjusted according to the serial timings on Sundays. Such was the influence of Ramayana at that time. Its influence is not only in particular community but also covered each and every society in our country. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are connected to Northeast India's tribal history through references in ancient literature, local lore, and the spread of the Sanskritization process.

Features of both the epic

The **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** are both foundational Hindu epics with a central theme of the struggle between good and evil, and a strong emphasis on **dharma**. Key features include the Ramayana's focus on the story of **Rama** and his mission to rescue **Sita**, highlighting virtues like duty, loyalty, and devotion, while the Mahabharata centers on the **Kurukshetra War** between the **Pandavas** and **Kauravas**, delving into complex political intrigue and moral dilemmas. Both epics feature divine figures and their interactions with humans, as well as powerful mythological elements, but differ in their narrative scope and specific focus. The Ramayana primarily the story of Rama an avatar of Vishnu and main character here Rama, Sita, Lakshman, Hanuman, and Ravenna. The main Theme of Ramayana are influenced as the importance of dharma, Justice and ideal behavior and here the main highlights is Ram is ideal man and king while Sita is the ideal devoted wife.

Again, Mahabharata focus the Kurukhetra war fought between the five Pandava brothers and their one hundred kaurava cousins. Here the divine figure was Krishna playing a pivotal role and highlights mainly of dharma. The Mahabharata is the longer epic containing 1.8 million words while Ramayana has over 24,000 verses. Mahabharata is religious text such as Bhagvat.

The Ramayana and Mahabharata and relation with North east

The Mahabharata contains references to the city and country of Pragjyotisha and its rulers named Naraka and Bhagadatta. Referred ‘Kiratas’ and other people as constituting the army of Bhagadatta, who very gallantly fought against the Pandavas in the Mahabharata War. Bhagadatta gave his daughter in marriage to Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas. He is called the mighty king of ‘Mlechchha’. North-Eastern people are referred to as

'Mlechchha'. In the 'Sabhaparva' reference to the battle between Arjuna, the third Pandava, and Bhagadatta in connection with the 'Digvijaya' journey and the 'Rajasuya' sacrifice of Yudhisthira. Again, after the Kurukhetra War, Yudhisthira had performed the 'Asvamedha' sacrifice, and this time Bajradatta, son of Bhagadatta, had fought valiantly for three days. Another reference to the North-East in the Mahabharat story of Chitaangada, the Manipuri princes, and Arjuna. Manipura was a kingdom during the Mahabharata period, and the contemporary king was Chitravahana. Arjuna's wandering period, he went to ancient Manipur and married her. They stayed around three years together and had a son, Babruvahana. The 'Aswamedha' sacrifice horse of Yudhisthira moved towards Manipur, and the fight started with Arjuna with young Babruvahana, and one arrow got him to fall unconscious. 'Ulupi', the other wife of Arjuna, came to the spot with 'Nagamani', a mythical gem capable of bringing a dead man to life. She was a Naga girl. After that, Arjuna took Ulupi, Chitaangada, and Babruvahana to Hastinapur

Objective of the study

1. To know the impact of Ramayana in the various tribes of North –eastern State.
2. To know the major differences between the two epic
3. To know the relationship between the two epic and cultivation.

North-East Tribal's and their connection to Ancient India

The various tribes in the North East which are constantly teased as being **Chinese** by the rest of India are actually indigenous to the land. Many of them not only believe themselves an integral part of Mahabharata and Ramayana but also continue to follow their traditions to date.

Out of the 54 tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, there is a tribe called **Idu Mishmi** which considers itself to be from the lineage of **Krishna's wife, Rukmini**. Their fables tell tales of Rukmini as the princess of current day Bishmanagar. The King, her father was Bhishmak and she had a brother named Rukmi. When Rukmini fell in love with Krishna, Rukmi strongly opposed the marriage and arranged for her to marry Shishupal to form an alliance. Rukmini, hearing of this agreement, secretly sent a message to Lord Krishna to come and rescue her. As they were eloping, Rukmi caught up to the two and in the duel that ensued, lost to Krishna. When Krishna was about to kill him, Rukmini begged to have her brother's life spared. Krishna agreed but as punishment, shaved Rukmi's head with his **Sudarshana Chakra** – a visible sign of defeat – and let him go free. The Idu Mishmi tribe has a characteristic style of chopping their hair due to which they are called **Chulikatas**. It is explained as an act of punishment inflicted by Krishna for the initial resistance offered to the marriage which later became the mark of honour. The Idu Rukmini is highly respected by them as Inyi Maselo or **Great Mother**.

The most important legendary account connected with the Arunachal tribe of Mishmis is that of the **Brahmakunda**. It is also popularly known as **Parasuram Kunda**; for, Parasuram, according to the Kalika Purana came to the Kunda to cleanse himself of the sin he had incurred by slaying his own mother Renuka on his

father's orders. This Kunda is in the heart of the Mishmi area. It is traditionally thought that the Parasuram Kunda as a holy place was originally a Mishmi institution and the Mishmis used to collect tax from the visiting pilgrims.

The **Khasi** tribes of Meghalaya are famous for their archery skills. However, this archery is peculiar because they use two fingers only in shooting and discharging the arrows in place of a finger and thumb as done by other archers. Most of the people in the Khasi tribe have never heard of **Eklavya** but legend has it that one of their ancestors gave up his thumb in **Guru Daskshina** and therefore the thumb should never be used during archery.

Dimapur is the largest city in Nagaland. Some people believe that this word is a corruption of Hidimbapur, depicting the city of **Hidimba** of Mahabharata, wife of **Bhima** and mother of Ghotokacha. He is believed to be the progenitor of Kacharis, a kingdom that was prosperous once in the region. Kachhar dynasty is the descendents of Kirat dynasty described in Mahabharata. There is a place in Dimapur where huge **chess pieces** still lie around in falling down state. Folklore marks this to be the place where Bhima and Ghotokacha played chess. Of the tribal people living in the hills, the **Karbis**, the **Dimasas** and the **Jaintias** are more or less well acquainted with the Ramayana lore.

Ukhrul in Manipur connects itself with Uloopi, the **Naga** wife of Arjuna who played a major role as a stepmother to Bhabhravahana and also in saving Arjuna's life. Iravan was the son of Arjuna and Uloopi. The **Thangkul** tribe is well known for its martial arts and they comprise of over 40% of members of National Socialist Council of Nagland that wants to establish their own sovereign state of Nagalim.

All in all, India's indigenous tribes belong to India. Sadly, they have been segregated, used and abused the **British Empire** who, while ruthlessly suppressing them, imposed their religion and ideology on the people. The **post-Independence** political parties of India who see these tribal as nothing more than a voting bank haven't helped much in improving their situation. Thanks to this indifference, foreign ideologies both from **Christian Missionaries** with their number game and the **Maoists** of China threaten to rip the North-East apart from rest of India. It is high time they were given their rightful place in the country.

Comparing Ramayana and Mahabharata

Ramayana and Mahabharata are perhaps India's most prominent ancient texts apart from Bhagwat Geeta. Rama, the Hero of Ramayana, and Krishna, the hero of Mahabharata are the most revered incarnations of Vishnu and the most illustrious characters of Hindu mythology.

The storytelling of these scriptures is by the ancient tradition of singing hymns with a musical instrument. It is said that if you want to know the dos for a successful life, read Ramayana. And if you want to know the don'ts for a successful life, read Mahabharata. These two dynamic texts provide two different views of life and its order of it. This article is about the differences and similarities between these two texts, and the legends associated with them.

In the process of comparing the texts, we will try to understand why these texts still hold significant influence on the values and ideals of Indian society, even after thousands of years.

Story of Brothers

Mahabharata, as we know, is the story of two warring groups of cousins – Kauravas and Pandavas. Both groups belong to the same lineage of the Kuru clan and are fighting for the throne of Hastinapur.

Ramayana is the story of Rama, a prince of the Raghuवंश, whose family ruled over the Kosala kingdom. Rama had three other brothers, but no one claimed his stake in the throne. Even Rama was unwilling to take up the kingdom and instead wanted his younger brother Bharat to be the king. When Rama is exiled to the forest by his father Dasharatha, Bharat refuses to take up the throne and instead rules Ayodhya as a representative of Rama while he's in exile for fourteen years.

There is a sharp contrast between both of these narratives. On one hand, Kauravas and Pandavas are contending for the throne of Hastinapur. While on another hand sons of Dasharatha are ready to sacrifice the throne for one another. Bharat, in absence of his elder brother, doesn't take up his throne and instead rules as a deputy, keeping the Khadau (wooden slippers) of Rama as a symbol of the authority of the monarch.

Sun and Moon

Ramayana is the story of Rama, which belongs to the illustrious Suryavansham, or the solar dynasty. These are scions of the Surya Dev or the Sun god. Powerful kings such as Ikshvaku, Bharat, Harishchandra, Dilip, Sagara, Bhagirath, Aja, Raghu and Dasharatha were born in this dynasty.

Mahabharata is the story of Kauravas and Pandavas, which belonged to the Kuru clan, which was in turn a part of the Chandravansham, or the lunar dynasty. These are the descendants of the Chandra Dev or the Moon God. Ila, Yayati, Puru, Yadu, Dushyant, Kuru, Shantanu, Vichitraveera, Chitrangad, Pandu, Dhritarashtra and Vidur were born in the lunar dynasty.

Geography

The story of Ramayana is based on the north Indian kingdom of Kosala and its capital city Ayodhya, which was situated on the banks of river Sarayu. The storyline of Ramayana goes from north to south. It descends to Kashi, Chitrakoot, Dandakaranya, and Kishkindha before reaching the Indian Ocean. This is where Rama worshipped lord Shiva before proceeding ahead to Lanka to fight Ravana.

On the other hand, the story of Mahabharata travels horizontally east-west. Krishna is the king of the coastal kingdom of Dwarka on the West coast of India. The Kuru clan rules over Hastinapur in present-day Haryana. Krishna's childhood was spent in Mathura and Vrindavan. Pandavas spent their last days of exile in Tripura in the far east corner of India. This unravels the whole trajectory of horizontal travel in the story of Pandavas.

Subordinate Vedic Gods

The stories of both Ramayana and Mahabharata feature Vedic deities such as Indra (King of Gods), Surya (Sun God), Vayu (Wind God) and Agni (Fire God). In Ramayana, Ram was born after a Yagya was performed by King Dasharatha. Sita, daughter of Janak was born after a Vedic ritual of ploughing the field. The leading Vanara characters of Hanuman, Sugriva and Vali are sons of Vayu, Surya and Indra respectively. In Mahabharata, by the power of mantras, Kunti bears Karna, Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna by invoking Surya, Yama, Vayu and Indra. Madri invokes the Ashwini twins to bear Nakul and Sahadeva.

Therefore, we can say that deities of the Vedic period occupied a supporting role in the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata and not had a vital say. The epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata were instrumental in the transition from the Vedic era to the Puranic era. These epics established Rama and Krishna as more popular heroes of the masses. In these stories, God himself descends to the mortal world, to live with people and demonstrate what an ideal life is like. These concepts were cherished by the people, hence, Puranic heroes like Rama, Krishna and Hanuman became the front cover of Indian culture, whereas the Vedic deities took a corner seat.

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