



Rituals of Risa: Exploring the Cultural, Spiritual and Social Significance of the Sacred Shawl in the Jamatia Tribe of Tripura.

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Abstract.

This article presents the first comprehensive study on the rituals of Risa, a significant cultural and spiritual tradition of the Jamatia tribe of Tripura. Risa is traditionally worn by almost all 19 indigenous tribes of Tripura. However, each tribe features its own unique designs, symbols and patterns. Out of the 19 indigenous tribes, the rituals associated with Risa are quite similar among the seven tribes namely: Jamatia, Debbarma, Kolo, Murasing, Reang, Uchoi and Noatia. Risa, the sacred shawl, serves as an emblem of spirituality, tradition and identity, embedded with intricate designs and woven with deep cultural significance, Risa is much more than aesthetic appeal, it plays a vital role in social ceremonies and spiritual practices. By analysing its role in social hierarchy, gender identity and intergenerational cultural transmission, this article highlights Risa's lifelong importance in preserving Jamatia heritage. The findings reveal that Risa is not merely a lien of clothe but a dynamic cultural artifact embedded in ritualistic and spiritual practices. Additionally, this research contributes to the broader discourse on indigenous cultural traditions and the sociocultural implications of ceremonial attire. The ritual of Risa, as examined in this study, highlights the resilience of indigenous practices in the face of modernization, affirming the need for preservation and documentation.

Keywords: Ceremonial Attire, Cultural Heritage, Folklore and Mythology, Jamatia tribe, Risa, Rituals and Traditions, Spiritual Practices, Symbolism in Clothing, Tripura.

1. Introduction.

The Jamatia tribe, the third largest of the 19 indigenous tribes of Tripura with an approx population of one lakh (hundred thousand) has long preserved its cultural heritage through oral traditions and ritual ceremonies. Risa plays a pivotal role in these practices, symbolizing honor, protection and communal bonds and is used in various rituals, such as:

- *Risa Soromani.*
- *Yaar Khamani,*
- *Mare Khamani.*
- *Dharma Baba.*
- *Dharma Dada.*
- *Dharma Bai.*
- *And Dharma Tete.*

(A detailed analysis of these rituals is given in the discussion below.). Beyond its ceremonial functions, Risa carries spiritual connotations, as seen in its association with myths and deities in Jamatia folklore. And Risa is considered to be a symbol of good luck and peace.

The term 'Risa' is a combination of two Kokborok words, 'Ri' and 'Sa', meaning 'Cloth' and 'Body'. Risa is used as a colourful piece of shawl to adorn the body, especially draped around the bosom of a woman and used as a piece of traditional shawl. It is commonly woven with cotton, but sometimes rare silks are also used. The sacred shawl also connects the past and present of the Jamatia, fostering cultural heritage of the tribe's tradition. Whenever a guest from other country or state visits Tripura, they are adorned with Risa as a symbol of honor and respect. And every chief guest, guest of honor, or special guest at any function, event or program is gifted Risa to acknowledge its significance and to uphold the traditional values of the indigenous tribe of Tripura.

The tribe holds Risa in deep reverence, as it carries centuries of cultural significance that has been passed down through generations. Its elaborate designs convey tales of spirituality and heritage and every thread is infused with prayers, connecting the wearer to divine forces and their ancestors. Risa symbolizes protection and identity, adorning the wearer with the vibrant narrative of their cultural, spiritual beliefs and heritage. There is a popular belief among the 19 tribes of Tripura that disrespecting Risa, such as throwing it to the ground or keeping it soiled for a long time brings bad luck.

2. Literature Review.

The study of the ritual of Risa necessitates a review of existing literature on indigenous textile traditions, symbolic anthropology, and ritualistic practices in tribal communities. The following themes and sources provide a foundational understanding of Risa's cultural significance.

2. 1. Indigenous Textile Traditions:

- Previous research on indigenous textiles highlights their role as cultural artifacts embedded with historical and spiritual meanings (Barber, 1991).
- Works by scholars such as Turner (1967) emphasize the symbolic function of ritual garments in identity construction and community bonding.
- Studies on Southeast Asian and Northeast Indian textiles provide comparative insights into weaving techniques and the socio-religious functions of ceremonial garments (Buhler & Fisher, 1979).

2. 2. Symbolism and Ritual Practices:

- Anthropological theories of symbolism (Geertz, 1973) suggest that cultural artifacts such as Risa act as semiotic devices that encode social and spiritual meanings.
- Durkheim (1912) discusses the role of sacred objects in fostering collective consciousness and social cohesion within religious communities.
- Research on Northeast Indian tribal rituals (Ghosh, 2018) provides ethnographic accounts of ritual attire and their role in rites of passage and social structuring.

2. 3. Historical and Mythological Contexts:

- Oral traditions and indigenous historiographies offer crucial insights into the mythological significance of Risa.
- The tale of Queen Hirabati and the Fourteen Deities, as recounted in Rajmala (Tripura's royal chronicles), connects the sacred shawl to divine intervention and governance.
- Comparative mythology suggests parallels between Risa-related rituals and other indigenous traditions where garments serve as mediators between the divine and the earthly realm.

2. 4. Gender and Socio-Cultural Identity:

- Feminist anthropological perspectives (Ortner, 1974) explore how ceremonial attire like Risa marks transitions in female life stages, particularly in puberty rituals such as Risa Soromani.
- The role of garments in establishing social hierarchy and kinship relations is examined in works by Levi-Strauss (1969), reinforcing the structural importance of ceremonial garments.
- The symbolic representation of textiles in indigenous communities has been widely studied, with researchers highlighting their role in maintaining identity and cultural continuity. Sen (2017) examines how traditional weaving practices among Northeast Indian tribes contribute to preserving gender roles and social hierarchies.
- Similarly, Kailash (2022) discusses the integration of fabric-based rituals into everyday life, emphasizing their role in reinforcing religious values and communal bonds. These perspectives align with the significance of Risa in the Jamatia tribe, where it not only serves as an object of clothing but reinforcing societal norms and also as a medium of transmitting cultural knowledge.

2. 5. Continuity and Change in Indigenous Traditions:

- Studies on globalization and cultural change (Appadurai, 1996) explore how indigenous communities negotiate tradition and modernity.
- Ethnographic research on the Jamatia tribe highlights the persistence of Risa rituals despite external influences, demonstrating the adaptive resilience of cultural practices.

- Contemporary analyses of intangible cultural heritage (Smith, 2006) emphasize the need for documentation and preservation of ritual practices like those associated with Risa.

3. Methodology.

The methodology for this study on *'Rituals of Risa: Exploring the Cultural, Spiritual and Social Significance of the Sacred Shawl in the Jamatia Tribe of Tripura'* employs a qualitative research approach, integrating ethnographic fieldwork, historical analysis, and interpretative frameworks to explore the ritual's significance. The study is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ritual's origins, functions and impact within its socio-cultural context. A combination of primary and secondary data collection methods was employed to investigate the Ritual of Risa. The research was conducted in four phases:

- **Ethnographic Fieldwork:** This phase involved participant observation and semi-structured interviews with ritual practitioners and community members. Data was collected through direct engagement with the community to understand lived experiences and perceptions associated with the ritual. The researcher actively participated in the rituals, documenting intricate details such as chants, attire and symbolic elements to ensure an immersive understanding.
- **Historical Analysis:** Archival research was conducted to trace the historical evolution of the ritual of Risa. This included the examination of historical records, texts and folklore that document the ritual's development over time. Oral histories from community elders were also collected to bridge gaps in documented historical records.
- **Symbolic and Semiotic Analysis:** Sociological and anthropological theories were applied to analyse the social functions and symbolic meanings of the ritual. Functionalist and Structuralist perspectives were particularly useful in understanding how the ritual maintains social cohesion and reflects cultural values. The semiotic analysis focused on the colours and intricate patterns of Risa, decoding their religious and cultural significance.
- **Comparative Analysis:** The Ritual was compared with similar indigenous traditions to examine unique aspects and commonalities. This cross-cultural approach helped contextualize the ritual within broader indigenous and worldwide traditions of ceremonial attires and life transitions. Furthermore, the analysis revealed the significance of these attires in shaping collective and identities individual within the specific cultural context of the ritual.

4. Data Collection Methods.

- **Participant Observation:** Researchers attended ritual performances, taking detailed field notes to capture the essence, symbolism and communal interactions. Audio and Video recordings were used with consent to chants and ritualistic expressions for further analysis.
- **Interviews:** To gather diverse perspectives in-depth interviews were conducted with 27 participants, including elders, ritual specialists and younger members of the tribe. Focus group discussions were held to encourage collective reflection on the significance of the ritual.
- **Document Analysis:** Community records, historical texts and visual documentation (videos, photographs) were analysed to enhance findings from fieldwork. Sacred objects related to Risa ritual were also examined to understand their cultural significance.
- **Artifact Examination:** The physical attributes of various Risa, including s, weaving techniques, material and patterns were meticulously analysed to understand their evolution and cultural meanings.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Ethical approval was obtained from the tribe's Chieftain/Hoda Okra- Bipra Kumar Jamatia. Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring their secrecy and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Special care was taken to respect indigenous knowledge systems, ensuring that findings were accurately represented and that sensitive cultural aspects were handled with discretion. The research also incorporated a participatory approach, where community members were actively involved in the validation and interpretation of findings to ensure cultural authenticity.

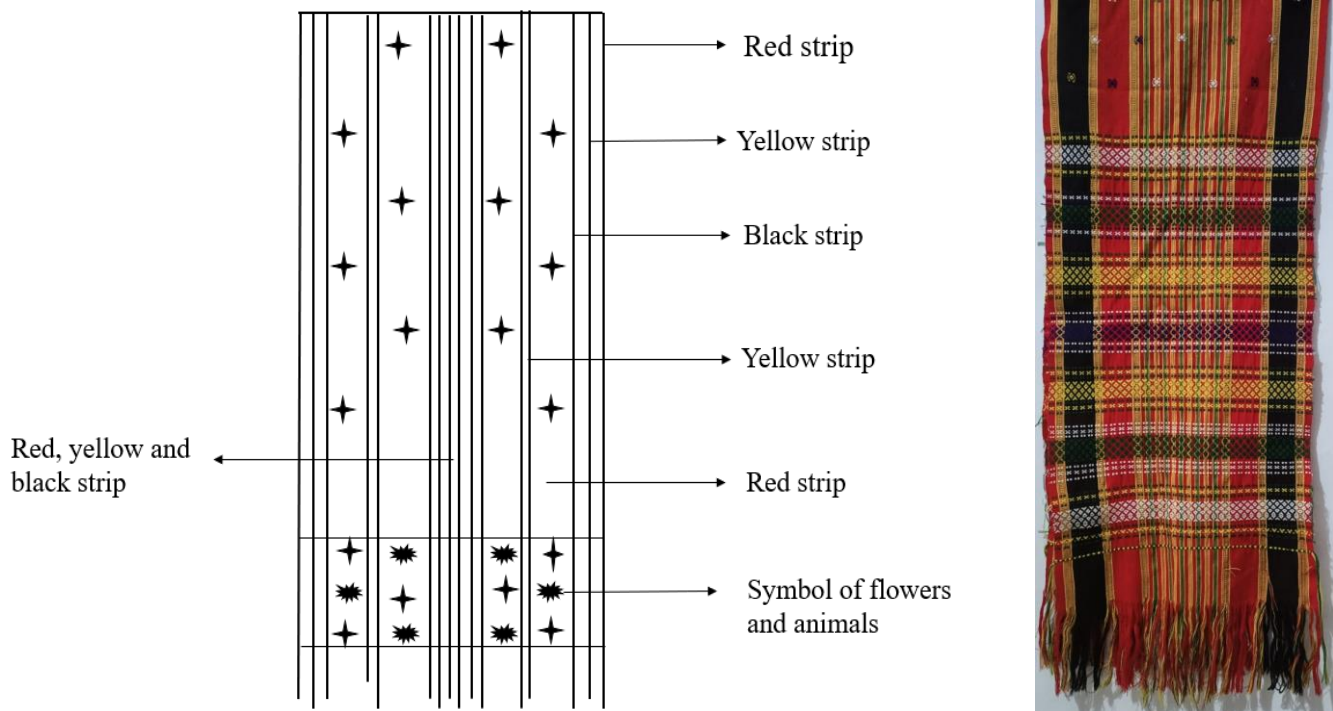
5. Data Analysis:

- **Thematic Analysis:**
Recurring patterns and themes in the collected data were identified. Transcriptions of interviews were coded to extract key themes related to societal role, ritual's purpose and transformation over time.
- **Discourse Analysis:**
Ritual narratives, prayers and myths associated with Risa were examined to understand their spiritual and cultural implications.
- **Comparative Analysis:**
Data was compared across different ritual participants and generational perspectives to highlight changes in the ritual's practice and its evolving meaning.
- **Visual Analysis:**
Photographs and videos were analysed to study body language, spatial arrangements, and ritual enactments.

6. Discussion.

In the Jamatia tribe, there are two types of Risa. One type is used for daily purposes and consists of a combination of forty percent red, forty percent black and twenty percent yellow. This particular Risa is adorned with patterns of various flowers, including Khumpui (white butterfly ginger lily), Khelang Bubar (Orchid), Hingra (Night Jasmine), coconut trees, peepal trees, and Joba (Hibiscus). The footprints of certain animals, such as elephants, ducks, doves, sparrows and pigeons are also used as symbols. The other type of Risa is called Risa Sorbongini¹, which is specifically used during wedding ceremonies. It is plain white with green stripes along the edge, resembling Risa depicted in the tale of 'Khelang Bubar'.

Figure 1: Model of Risa.



1. **Khumpui flower:** To the jamatia tribe, Khumpui flower found in the tale of 'Raima bai Saima' is a symbol of rebirth because it closes at night and reopens in the morning, representing a daily spiritual renewal.
2. **Khelang Bubar (Orchid).** The symbol of this flower is used because the tribe believes that the flower is sacred and belongs to the cursed Goddess Absa Kanya. This goddess is found in the tales of 'Khelang Bubar', 'Youngest Daughter' and 'White Elephant'.
3. **Hingra (Night Jasmine):** According to the tribe, the flower is considered to be the favourite of Mailuma (Goddess of paddy) and is used during Her worship. The tribe also believes that this flower fell from heaven, which is why it has the unique characteristic of bearing flowers at night and can be offered to the deities, even after they have fallen to the ground.
4. **Coconut Tree:** The Jamatia holds the belief that sighting a coconut tree or a coconut on the morning after every Amavasya is an auspicious omen, signifying good fortune. For the tribe, the coconut tree is symbolic of well-being and good health and is regarded with great reverence and religious importance. The fruits of the coconut tree are considered to be highly auspicious and are vital to various religious ceremonies and rituals of the tribe.
5. **Peepal tree:** The tribe believes that Haichuk Ma, the Goddess of the Jungle, rests under this tree and that the tree brings success and happiness.
6. **Jaba (Hibiscus):** According to the tribe, the flower represents beauty and is commonly presented to individuals to convey admiration for their beauty and good nature. In the Jamatia culture, a woman wearing a Jaba flower on her left ear indicates that she is married, while wearing it on the right ear signifies that she is unmarried and seeking for a suitable partner for marriage.
7. **Lotus flower:** The Jamatia tribe sees the lotus as a representation of innocence, virtue, elegance and honesty.
8. **Elephant:** For the tribe it is a symbol of strength and loyalty.
9. **Duck:** A symbol of wisdom and eternal love and is also associated with the tribe's ritual called 'Bwrwi rok', which is performed to ward off witches. In this ritual, only ducks can be sacrificed.
10. **Dove:** According to the tribe, doves symbolize peace and serve as messengers of love, representing equality.

11. **Sparrow:** In the Jamatia tribe, dreaming of sparrows is a good sign as it indicates birth or marriage ahead and is seen as a lucky and positive omen of fulfilment and strength. Sparrows are considered symbols of good fortune and are often welcomed into homes.

12. **Pigeons:** The Jamatia people have a tradition of raising pigeons because of their medicinal properties. The tribe believes that their meat is beneficial for the immune system of individuals over the age of fifty and that it helps to maintain youthfulness.

7. Folktales associated with Risa.

Risa is not only a simple cultural artifact, but it also has religious and mystical connotations. In the Jamatia community, it is believed that gifting a Risa to close and trusted individuals symbolizes the sealing of a lifelong bond of brotherhood. It is believed that those who perform the ritual aligned with Risa are willing to sacrifice their lives for this cause. Risa also demonstrates the concept of status, including the power associated with it in various forms.

➤ **Tale of the 'Fourteen Gods.'**

The tale of the 'Fourteen Gods' demonstrates its magical power to tame the wild.

King Daitya's son, Tripur, was a mighty warrior but cruel and arrogant. After becoming the 46th King of Tripura, his tyranny led the people to pray to Lord Shiva for protection. Disguised, Lord Shiva witnessed Tripur's ruthlessness, unjust executions, and arrogance, even declaring himself greater than the gods. Enraged, Lord Shiva struck him down with his trident, ending his reign. With the kingdom in ruins and its people suffering, Queen Hirabati and her ministers prayed for a saviour. Lord Shiva, upon seeing the lifeless condition of the people appeared and granted them a boon.

"I will grant you a great king. He will be my son and will govern the subjects. He will have the same appearance and nature as I. He will be known as belonging to the lunar dynasty (Candra-Bangsa) and he will rule over your lands. And I will send the Fourteen Deities to protect him and his people. Starting today, Queen Hirabati must make offerings to Madana, the God of Love, until she bears the child." (Rajmala VL. I-IV, P 22).

One day, Queen Hirabati, after offering prayers, heard cries from a banyan tree. The Fourteen Deities were trapped by a ferocious buffalo. Knowing that Risa, a sacred shawl, had calming powers, she placed it on the buffalo's forehead, instantly taming it. In gratitude, she sacrificed the buffalo to honor the deities and invited them to reside in the palace until their temple was built. Thus, Trilochana², also called Subrai Raja (The Saviour), grew up under divine protection and restored peace to the land.

One can see how Risa is depicted in this captivating tale where its significance transcends from mere shawl into something that possesses extraordinary power. In the story, Queen Hirabati's Risa becomes a symbol of control and salvation when confronted with a ferocious and wild buffalo. This mystical shawl is not just an ordinary piece of clothing; it carries a divine essence that tames the untamed and Queen Hirabati recognizes Risa's unique quality when she witnesses the plight of the Fourteen Deities sent by Lord Shiva. These deities find themselves trapped in the branches of a banyan tree, chased by a relentless wild buffalo. The queen, understanding Risa's extraordinary ability, takes it off and places it on the buffalo's forehead and unfolds a miraculous transformation. The once wild and ferocious buffalo becomes submissive and calm, as though it were suddenly tamed by an unseen force or power of the sacred Risa. Risa, therefore, emerges as a symbol of protection and salvation, showcasing its unparalleled power to bring calmness even to the wildest beings.

Since then, Risa has become the holy throne of the Fourteen Deities. Whenever any puja is performed, the first thing ochai does is place a piece of banana leaf, which symbolizes the sacred Risa. Without placing Risa as the seat for the deity before any puja, worship or rites, one cannot perform the rituals. The sacredness of Risa extends beyond its material form, becoming an essential element in the spiritual practices of the tribe. The act of placing a piece of banana leaf, symbolizing the sacred Risa, signifies a call to the divine and invokes the presence of the Fourteen Deities. Risa, thus, acts as a bridge between the human world and the realm of the Divine, serving as a physical representation of the respect held for the deities. The holy throne Risa plays a significant role in the complex tradition of Jamatia culture, serving as a testament to the cultural importance and sacredness associated with this mystical shawl.

➤ **Tale of 'Kwthwirogni Khum'³ (Flower of the Dead).**

Story of two lovers, a young girl and a boy, in which the tiger despite its hunger, refrains from attacking the girl when Risa was thrown at it.

➤ **'Khelang Bubar.'** (Flower of Goddess Absakanya- Orchid)

Famous folk tale of the indigenous tribes of Tripura where the girl tied Risa on the forehead of her lover as her eternal gift before they were both transformed into a howling monkey and a dragon lizard due to the curse for plucking Khelang bubar (orchid- flower of the goddess Absakanya) without the permission of goddess Absakanya.

One can find numerous folktales within the Jamatia tribe associated with Risa, these stories highlight the sacredness of the shawl and its deep-rooted significance in the tribe's history and mythology. Some of these tales describe divine interventions where the sacred shawl plays a crucial role in blessing or protecting individuals. Others narrate how the ancestral figures use Risa as a symbol of unity, power and spiritual strength.

8. Rituals surrounding Risa.

The Jamatia tribes have seven different types of rituals associated with Risa. Among these, only the procedure of the ritual '*Risa Soromani*' is different, while the other six rituals share similarities in both their mantras and the processes involved. The seven rituals of the tribe associated with Risa are:

1. **Risa Soromani.** Ritual of wrapping Risa around the bosom of a girl after her first puberty.
2. **Yaar Khamani:** Two non-related males become blood related brother by performing this ritual.
3. **Mare Khamani:** Two non-related females become blood related sister by performing this ritual.
4. **Dharma Baba:** Non-related elderly man become blood related father of a non-related person by performing this ritual.
5. **Dharma Dada:** Non-related man become blooded related elder brother of a non-related male or female by performing this ritual.
6. **Dharma Bai:** Non-related woman become blooded related elder sister of a non-related male or female by performing this ritual.
7. **Dharma Tete.** Non-related male or a female become blooded related younger sister or brother of a non-related male or female by performing this ritual.

1. 1. Risa Soromani.

In the Jamatia tribe, when the girl reaches Tanner Stage two (development of breast), the family of the girl, particularly the mother, without the knowledge of her daughter, requests the Kumajwk⁴ and Lumajwk⁵ to perform the ritual of Risa Soromani on her daughter by presenting them rice beer in a mud pot. After the request, Kumajwk and Lumajwk gather all the young unmarried girls, those who have already undergone Risa Soromani rite and make a plan to perform the ritual. The ritual is being conducted on an important day, especially on Hogaigiri⁶ at night time. The news, however, accidentally or intentionally reaches the girl and she tries to hide for the rest of the night. The young girls would search for her the entire Hogaigiri night and upon finding her, she is held on both hands and brought into a room while she twists and turns with all her might. There have been some instances where some of the young girls' teeth, performing the ritual got loose due to the vigorous struggle and accidental hitting on one of the girls holding her. This has happened on a number of occasions. Finally, the girl's shirt is taken off and Risa is fastened to her bosom. It has been noticed that as soon as Risa is tied to her bosom, the girl seems to awaken, she becomes still and calm remaining silent.

After the completion of the ritual, in the following morning ochai comes to the girl's house and performs the Lampra puja, (a ritual of cleansing). The girl, accompanied by her friends, then goes to Twima Kwthang (river that has never dried) and bathes in it. This is followed by a Risa Soromani meal for all those who participated in the ritual, including the village elders. From then on, the girl is allowed to take bath with her rignai fastened on her bosom and she is allowed to wear the shirt of a grown woman. Before the ritual, the girls of the tribe bathe with their shirts on, however cannot bathe with the rignai fastened on their bosom, nor are they allowed to wear a blouse until they complete the ceremony of Risa. And no one needs to remind them, for the girls themselves know the customs and respect them. The girls of the Jamatia tribe understand and respect these customs on their own, showcasing the deep connection they feel towards the tribe's cultural heritage. Risa ceremony not only signifies a girls' physical growth but also promotes responsibility and the maintenance of tradition. Through these rituals, the Jamatia tribe conveys a sense of identity as the keeper of tradition, ensuring that their culture and traditions remain distinct and vibrant. For some, this tradition can seem odd, however, these are the traditions that set the Jamatia tribe apart from the other indigenous tribes of Tripura.

An important aspect of this particular ritual is that the girl does not rage, twist or turn vigorously because she does not want to wear Risa. In interviews conducted with Budha Bala Jamatia, Indra Rani Jamatia, Manya Kanya Jamatia and Bir Patani Jamatia, they expressed their strong desire to wear Risa. However, when the time for them to partake in the ritual arrives, they become restless and simultaneously feel nervous and uncertain about what to do, leading them to run away and struggle when being caught and brought for the ceremony. However, after the ritual, they all remain calm and reflect on their new status as grown women. The ritual not only physically marks their transition but also instills a sense of reverence, leaving the girl to reflect on the significant journey of womanhood they are about to embark on. Such behaviour exhibited after the ceremony attributes to Risa being sacred and holy.

2. 2. Yaar Khamani:

Through this ritual, two non-related males become blood-related best friends. Yaar Khamani is an important tradition in the tribe. This tradition usually takes place when a boy meets and makes a new friend from another village or through family members when they feel that both boys are of similar age and share certain similarities in character. However, Yaar Khamani is more than just a friendship as it involves ochai, family, village elders and most importantly, a ritual that needs to be performed. After the ritual, both families become blood-related and both of their parents refer to each other as 'Chamai' and 'Chamaijwk' (terms used between in-laws after marriage). Both of them would refer to the parents of the other side as Baba (father) and Ama (mother), instead of calling them uncle and aunty.

In case they are married, both the Yaar will call their friend's wife as Mare and the wife will call their husband's Yaar as Kiching, whereas the wives will call each other as Mare. The ritual usually takes place on an important day, often during Hogaigiri.

The guardians from both sides decide the date and when the day arrives, ochai is called upon to perform the ritual. Ochai starts the ritual by performing Lampra puja and by calling upon the two male Lampra deities Sri Akhatha and Sri Bikhatha⁷. Two bucks, brought by each of the boys are then sacrificed and the boys are made to pay their respects to the two deities and are instructed to sit down. Both of them are given Risa, which has been offered to the two deities. Ochai then instructs the two Yaar to sit on each other's laps, taking turns, while exchanging their Risa. This signifies that they are now blood related. After the exchange of Risa and sitting on each other's laps, Ochai sprinkles three drops of water on each Yaar's forehead asking them to hand-feed each other the prasad offered to the deities. Following the hand-feeding of the prasad, Ochai declares that their lifelong bond has been sealed and that the ritual is complete. The two Yaar are then greeted and blessed by both their parents. The Yaar Khamani meal is quite similar to a wedding feast, as all villagers are invited to participate in the ritual and offer their blessings.

3. 3. Mare Khamani:

Through this ritual, two non-related females become blood-related best friend/sisters. The ritual of 'Mare Khamani' is also similar to 'Yaar Khamani', except for the calling of the deity during the chanting of the mantra ochai takes the name of the two goddesses Mailuma⁸ and Khuluma⁹. The sitting on the lap, exchanging of their Risa, hand-feeding of the prasad and serving of the Mare Khamani's meal are all similar to that of the Yarr Khamani. In case they are married, the calling of the mare's husband is similar to that of the Yaar Khamani, including calling of their parents. This ritual is also performed at any one of the mares' houses during the set date in the presence of their family members and village elders.

4. 4. Dharma Baba:

Through this ritual, a non-related elderly man becomes a blood-related father of a particular individual. In this ritual, unlike the Yaar Khamani ritual, only the person who is going to become the son or daughter sits on the lap of a man who will be their father. The hand-feeding of the prasad is only done by the to-be-father, whereas the exchange of Risa is done by both. First the to-be-son- gives Risa to his to-be-father followed by the to-be-father. During the ritual, ochai calls upon the Mwtai Kotor¹⁰ and Mwtai Kotor Ama¹¹. Through this ritual, only the person who becomes the son or daughter calls the man 'Baba' (father), while the rest of the siblings addresses him and his wife as 'Yong Chwla' and 'Yong Bwrwi'. The parents will refer to him as Chamai, similar to Yaar Khamani and the man will also refer to his new son or daughter's parents as Chamai. The rest of the ritual, such as the sacrificing of the buck and serving of the meal are similar to that of 'Yaar Khamani'.

5. 5. Dharma Dada:

Through this ritual, a non-related individual becomes a blood-related elder brother of a non-related male or female. This ritual usually occurs in the case of a single son or daughter. If a son or daughter, after years of knowing a person, wishes to make that person their elder brother, this ritual is performed in the presence of both parents and village elders, similar to the ritual of 'Dharma Baba.' In this ritual, only one who is to be the elder brother makes his to-be younger sister or brother sit on his lap. The hand-feeding of the prasad is only done by him, while his to-be younger brother or sister hands him the prasad on a banana leaf. While chanting the mantras, ochai calls upon Habuk Ma¹² and Sangrongma¹³. The way they address their parents is similar to that of Yaar Khamani. Each person will call their opposite parents as 'Ama' and 'Baba' (mother and father), while their parents will refer to each other as 'Chamani'. The exchange of Risa, the sacrifice of the buck and the serving of the meal are again similar to those of the Yaar Khamani.

6. 6. Dharma Bai:

Through this ritual, an unrelated woman becomes a blood-related elder sister of an unrelated man or a woman. This ritual is also almost similar to that of Dharma Dada. This ritual takes place if there are no elder sisters in the family. With the consent of the family members, similar to that of Dharma Dada, the ritual is performed after years of knowing the person and his family members. It takes place at one of their houses in the presence of their family members and the village elders. During this ritual, only the to-be-elder sister makes her to-be-younger brother or sister sit on her lap. She is the only one who hand feeds the prasad, while the to-be-younger brother

or sister present her the prasada on a banana leaf. The invocation of the deity, calling of the parents, sacrificing of the buck and serving of the ceremonial meal is also similar to that of the Dharma Dada ritual.

7. 7. Dharma Hanok.

Through this ritual, a non-related woman becomes a blood related younger sister of a non-related male or female. This ritual is also similar to Dharma Dada ritual, the difference is that, this ritual take place at the to-be-younger sister's house. During the ritual the prasada is being hand fed to to-be younger sister by her to-be elder sister or elder brother. Calling of the deity, exchange of Risa, sacrificing of the buck, calling of their parent and the serving of the ceremonial meal are also similar to those in the Dharma Dada ritual.

9. Mantra used during the ritual.

1st Stanza

Ang hingya doh	It is impossible for me to walk
Shri Akhatha, Shri Bikhatha	Shri Akhatha, Shri Bikhata
Ama Twibuk ¹⁴ , Ama Songram	Goddess Twibuk, Goddess Songram
Niroksi maphainai	Please appear
Uttor tongbw, Dokhin Tongbw	Be in the East and the West
Puu-be tongbw, Paschim tongbw	North or South
Rajsinghson rokha, Achok phaidi	A seat fit for a king has been arranged.
Aa takle achok phaibaijakhaha	Now that everyone is seated
Nirokno chaswmai rokha	The food has been served
Nung swmai rojakha	Drinks have been served
Yasujaknai twi rojakha,	Water has been served
Yasubaijasidi	Kindly wash your hands (Trans: Mine.)

The first stanza of the mantra symbolizes the invitation to the male and female deities, Shri Akhatha and Shri Bikhata, as well as Goddess Twibuk and Goddess Songram, to be present at the ceremony, regardless of their location in the East, West, North, or South. The village priest (Ochai), informs the deities that a special arrangement has been prepared and politely requests that they take their seats. Food and drinks are offered to the deities, along with water for washing their hands. Ochai pours water on the ground three times, symbolizing the deities washing their hands. This invocation of the deities serves as an introduction that marks the beginning of the ritual and establishes a connection with those being invoked. This sacred act of invocation signifies reverence and respect toward the deities, ensuring their presence and blessings throughout the ceremony. The precise rituals performed by Ochai reflect the community's belief and their deep-rooted traditions in maintaining harmony between the earthly and spiritual realms. By formally welcoming the deities, the ritual sets the stage for the subsequent offerings and prayers, reinforcing the sacred bond between the worshippers and the divine forces.

2nd Stanza

Aa takle yasubaijakhaha	Now that the hands are washed
(Nwsa Fona...(bwmwng)	(Name of those involved in the ritual)
kwrwija twtwi phanw	Though poor with nothing to offer
Bikhra khangra Japhanw	Worship and pays respect
Nirokno mairung kisa	Makes an offering of rice grain
Batasa kisa khwlaiwi jugalwi	And Batasa
Chasmai rojajawu	A humble refreshment with nothing else to offer
	Trans: Mine.

After the offering, Ochai draws attention to those involved in the ritual. Despite their poverty, they make a humble offering of a few grains of rice and a sweet called 'Batasa.' These offerings are presented with humility, acknowledging their limited resources. The stanza conveys a profound sense of humility and reverence towards the deities, even in times of hardship.

3rd Stanza

Tabokle chabaikha nungbaikha	Now that the meal is complete
Nini Sajla/Sajwk (Bwmwng)	Your sons/daughters (name of those involved)
Nini Rangchak Achokthai Risa ni bisingtwi	Through your golden throne of Risa
Ma, Fa	Father, Mother

Takhuk bai takhuk	Brother to bother
Bukhuk bai Bukhuk	Sister to sister
Donda kwrwi dosa kwrwi	Brother to sister
Aya kwrwi achi kwrwi	Let there be no pain or sorrow
Ayuk kolok thaluk kolok	Let them live a long life
Chabaiya nungbaiya	Grant them an abundance of food
Khe tongrojadi dok	Let them receive all these blessings

Trans: Mine.

In the third stanza the Ochai expresses gratitude while invoking prosperity, harmony and longevity for their newly added loved ones. It acknowledges the completion of the feast and calls upon the divine to bless the family, ensuring unity among siblings and freedom from pain or sorrow. The mention of the “golden throne of Risa” suggests a sacred presence, reinforcing the spiritual significance of the prayer. Ultimately, the mantra seeks a life of abundance, nourishment and well-being, reflecting profound cultural values of respect, gratitude and familial bonds.

The tribe’s various Risa rituals convey remarkable cultural significance, entwined with deep spiritual aspects and traditional values. Risa rituals serve as an outstanding example of how non-related bonds can be solidified and formed, reflecting an important social aspect of the tribe. These practices represent bonds of friendship, parenthood, brotherhood and sisterhood, beyond the traditional understanding of these relationships and suggesting a deep implication of love and unity. The rites not only signify various stages of life but also symbolize protection, care and love. For example, the ‘*Risa Soromani*’ ritual which marks a girl’s transition into womanhood, simultaneously promoting maintenance of tradition and responsibility. The exchange of Risa seals the bond for generations, while the hand feeding of the prasad symbolizes parental care. Moreover, all of these practices reveal the liveliness and cultural heritage of the tribe, which the tribe proudly passes on and preserves through generations.

The act of sitting on the lap in all the rituals of Risa carries a sacred significance. This act is symbolic of protection and care, reflecting the underlying values of familial bonds and love in the Jamatia tribe. In rituals like ‘*Dharma Bai*’, ‘*Dharma Baba*’ and ‘*Dharma Dada*’ and the act of to-be sister, brother or father making the chosen person sit on their lap, signifies a unique display of promise and love to care and protect the person who they are establishing a bond with. In the rituals of ‘*Mare Khamani*’ and ‘*Yaar Khamani*’, the individuals get to sit on each other’s lap, symbolizing interdependence, equality and mutual respect of their new relationship. Therefore, the act of sitting on the lap in Risa rituals further highlights the depth and holiness of the relationships being formed, symbolizing protection, care and love for one another. This ritualistic act signifies the emotional depth of the relationships, making them sacred.

10. Results and Findings.

The findings of this study reveal that Risa is more than just a traditional garment; it is a powerful symbol of identity, spirituality and cultural continuity among the Jamatia tribe. Through the extensive ethnographic research and historical analysis, the following key findings were identified:

1. Spiritual and Symbolic Significance:

- Risa is infused with prayers and spiritual connotations, connecting the wearer to divine forces and ancestors.
- The patterns on Risa, including animal symbols and floral motifs carry deep spiritual meanings. For example, elephant symbolizes strength and loyalty while Khumpui flower represents renewal.

2. Ritualistic and Social Functions:

- The study identified seven key rituals associated with Risa, such as ‘*Risa Soromani*’, a puberty ritual marking a girl’s transition into womanhood.
- Other rituals, such as ‘*Yaar Khamani*’ and ‘*Mare Khamani*’, create lifelong bonds between unrelated individuals, signifying the role of Risa in strengthening social ties.
- The practice of gifting a Risa signifies deep bonds of trust and brotherhood, reinforcing communal relationships.

3. Cultural Preservation and Intergenerational Transmission:

- Risa acts as a cultural bridge between generations, with older members passing down ritual practices and weaving techniques to younger generations.
- The younger generation continues to engage in these rituals, demonstrating a commitment to cultural preservation despite external influences.

4. Influence of Mythology and Oral Traditions:

- Historical narratives and myths, such as the story of Queen Hirabati and the Fourteen Deities, highlight Risa’s role in protection, governance and divine intervention.
- The tale of King Tripur illustrates the transformative power of Risa in pacifying wild forces, reinforcing its mystical properties.

5. Social Status and Hierarchical Representation:

- The use of Risa in ceremonies, particularly among leaders and elders, reinforces its association with status and honor.
- Different variations of Risa, such as Risa Sorbongini (used in weddings), reflect its ceremonial importance.

6. Taboos and Cultural Norms:

- Disrespecting Risa, such as letting it touch the ground or keeping it soiled, is considered inauspicious and may bring misfortune.
- There are strict customs regarding the wearing of Risa, particularly for young girls undergoing the '*Risa Soromani*' ritual.
- The girls are allowed to bath with their rignai tied to their bosom only after the ritual.

Overall, the study underscores that Risa is an integral part of the Jamatia tribe's cultural and spiritual identity. Beyond its physical form, it serves as a conduit for tradition, belief systems and social cohesion, making it a revered and indispensable element of their heritage.

11. Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research.

- Despite the extensive exploration of the ritual of Risa, this study has certain limitations. Firstly, the research is largely based on oral traditions, which, while valuable lack written documentation for verification. Since much of the Jamatia tribe's knowledge has been passed down verbally, inconsistencies or variations in narratives arise over time. Future studies should consider cross-referencing oral histories with archived records or other indigenous sources.
- Secondly, the research primarily focuses on the Jamatia tribe's perspective, with limited comparative analysis with similar practices among other indigenous communities in Northeast India or beyond. Expanding the study to include cross-cultural comparisons could provide a broader understanding of the socio-cultural significance of textile-based rituals.
- One of the most challenging aspects of this research was the translation of Kokborok terms and phrases into English. Many words and expressions carry cultural and spiritual meanings that do not have direct English equivalents, making precise translation difficult. Future research should consider linguistic studies that preserve the authenticity of Kokborok terminology while making the content accessible to a wider audience.
- Another limitation is the scope of fieldwork. The study was conducted within a specific geographical area of the Jamatia villages, meaning variations in the ritual of Risa among different Tripuri tribes or regions may not have been fully captured. Future research could involve extensive fieldwork across a wider demographic to account for regional variations in the practice of Risa rituals.
- Additionally, the role of modernization on Risa-related traditions was not extensively examined in this study. As cultural influences evolve, exploring how younger generations adapt or reinterpret these rituals in contemporary surroundings would provide valuable insights.
- Lastly, this study does not delve deeply into the economic aspects of Risa weaving and production. Future research could explore the impact of market dynamics, commercialization and economic sustainability in preserving traditional weaving practices.

By addressing these limitations, future studies can provide a more holistic and dynamic understanding of the Ritual of Risa, ensuring that this significant cultural heritage continues to be documented, preserved, and appreciated in changing socio-cultural contexts.

12. Conclusion.

Risa stands as a profound testament to the cultural, spiritual and social identity of the Jamatia tribe. As more than just a mere attire, Risa embodies divine connection, social cohesion and ancestral wisdom, ensuring the continuity of traditions across generations. Its use in rituals highlights its role in strengthening of kinship bonds. Additionally, the sacred mantras associated with these rituals deepen its spiritual essence, invoking sanctification, protection and blessings. Despite the pressures of modernization, the Jamatia tribe continue to uphold the sanctity of Risa, adapting its significance while preserving its core values. This study underscores the need for further research and documentation to ensure that the traditions surrounding Risa remain recognized and respected. By celebrating and preserving the ritual of Risa, the Jamatia tribe safeguards a crucial aspect of their heritage, reaffirming their identity in an ever-changing world.

This article seeks to bridge this gap by providing a comprehensive examination of Risa's role in Jamatia society. Through a combination of, historical analysis, comparative studies and ethnographic fieldwork, this research aims to highlight Risa's evolving role in contemporary Jamatia identity. This study is significant not only in its documentation but also in its contribution to the broader discourse on indigenous cultural traditions. By situating Risa within the contexts of sociology, anthropology and folklore studies, this article underscores the importance of preserving cultural heritage in the face of modern influences. The ritual of Risa remains a testament to the resilience and vibrancy of Jamatia traditions, making its documentation crucial for future generations. Risa, thus, remains not only a cultural artifact but a living representation of Jamatia resilience and unity.

Endnote

1. Chief of Risa.
2. 47th king of Tripura.
3. Wild mussanda.
4. Head mid-wife.
5. Co-head mid-wife.
6. Night of Stealing.
7. God of cleansing
8. Goddess of paddy.
9. Goddess of corn.
10. Supreme God.
11. Supreme Goddess.
12. Earth Goddess.
13. Goddess of Wish.
14. Water Goddess.

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