



A STUDY ON THE TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL AND SPIRITUAL BELIEFS OF TRIPURA TRIBAL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO- KALAI AND NOATIA

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Abstract : The Noatia and Kalai tribes of Tripura possess a rich heritage of festivals and spiritual practices rooted in reverence for nature and community life. The festivals and spiritual beliefs of Tripura tribals remain an important yet under- documented part of India's cultural heritage. Very little systematic research has been done on these practices and most information exists only in oral form. This study therefore aims to explore and document their rituals, deities, and festivals, showing how they preserve identity and social cohesion even amid modernisation. By filling this gap, the research hopes to contribute new knowledge and support the preservation of these traditions.

IndexTerms - Tribes of Tripura, Kalai, Noatia, Traditional Festivals, Spiritual beliefs..

I. INTRODUCTION

Tripura is a landlocked state, Surrounded by Bangladesh on its north, south, and west with Assam and Mizoram to its east. Tripura is a hill state with fertile valleys and forests. The state is rich in natural beauty with rivers, lakes, and dense greenery. Tripura is one of the most racially and linguistically diverse state in India. Tripura is a state in northeastern India. The third smallest state in the country, it covers 11,571 km² (4,051 sq. mi.). Tripura is divided into 8 districts and 25 sub-divisions, where Agartala is the capital and the largest city in the state. Tripura has 19 different tribals community. The 19 tribes in Tripura are namely, Tripuri (Debbarma and Tripura), Reang, Jamatia, Kalai, Noatia, uchoi, Halam, Kukis, Garo, Mog, Chakma, Bhil, Munda, Orang, Santal, Lepcha, Khachis, Bhutias, and Chaimal. Out of the 19 tribals communities in Tripura, 9 tribal communities primarily speak the Kokborok language. Kalai and Noatia are treated as a prominent tribal community in Tripura. These tribals communities having their individual ethnic features including colourful traditions and own spiritual beliefs, where created a multi-spiritual ethnic cultural assimilation in this state.

Review of Literature:

A very sparing work has been done till now regarding the traditional festivals and spiritual beliefs of the Kalai and Noatia tribes of Tripura in a descriptive way and among this I had used a few sources which had help me to gather a broad idea about their festivals and beliefs.

The tribes of Tripura – Tribal Research and cultural Institute (TRCI) of Tripura – this is a key source which has been very useful in knowing about the festivals of Tripura. It gives detail information about their culture, tradition, practice and spiritual beliefs. It helps me to complete my project.

Objectives:

1. To examine the traditional festivals celebrated by Kalai and Noatia communities.
2. To study the spiritual beliefs of the Kalai and Noatia tribes of Tripura.
3. To analyse the impact of modernization on their spiritual and festive practices.

Methodology:

The study uses a both primary and secondary data while making this project primary data were collected through interviews with elders, direct observation of festivals. Secondary sources of data were collected from research article, Government reports and Tripura Tribal research and cultural institute publication understand the history; symbolism and social significance of tribal festivals and their spiritual beliefs.

Religion and Festival

Religion: Kalai and Noatia people were the authentic animistic believes in the past, both the Kalai and the Noatia tribes of Tripura followed animistic religions practices and Hinduism. Their faith was rooted in nature and ancestor worship, where forests, rivers, hills and household spirits were believed to hold divine power. They perform rituals to please these spirits, offering rice, eggs, foawl, and rice beer (Chuwak) especially during sowing, harvesting on times of illness and misfortune. There were no temples or idols and worship usually took place in sacred groves, village courtyards or inside the home. The rituals were led by village elders on priest Ochai chosen from within the community.

Some of the name of gods believes by the Kalai and Noatia people were -

1. Mwtaikotor – The supreme on head of all gods.
2. Lamprawathop – God of path.
3. Twimamwtai – God of river on water.
4. Mailuma– God of wealth.
5. Haichukma – God who hides people.

Festival: The Kalai and Noatia are two momentous tribal communities of Tripura and like other tribes; their festivals are closely connected with agriculture, nature, and spiritual beliefs.

Festivals of the Noatia tribes:

Lamprawathop:

The Lamprawathop festival is one of the most important culture and religions occasions of the Tripuri people, especially among the Noatia community of Tripura. Lamprawathop is the biggest festivals among the Noatia community. This festival is celebrated on a grand state once a year. Lamprawathop is considered the supreme deity, the protector and creator, who is worshipped during major life events such as birth rituals, weddings, and funeral as well as in village ceremonies. The festival is held to honor and seek blessings from this deity for the well-being of individuals. Families and the entire community.

In modern times, the Lamprawothop festival has also grown into a larger cultural celebration, often observed over several days with not only religions rites but also music, dance and community feasts, people dress in traditional attire, perform folk songs, and showcase their rich heritage through dances and ritual that strengthen unity among the tribe. Beyond the religious importance, the festival has become a way of preserving and expressing Tripuri identity, bringing together the younger and older generations to share traditions, values, and collective sense of belonging.

Twima Puja:

Twima puja is one of the important traditional rituals performed by the Noatia tribes of Tripura. The word Twima means Ganga, the river goddess, who is considered the source of life and purity. The Noatia people perform this puja to honour and appease mother Ganga, praying for fertility of the land, good harvest, good health and protection from natural calamities and diseases.

The Twima puja is arranged by the side of a river, on that day the symbolic representation of the deity is made with the aid of green bamboo, platform raises up on the water level, on the middle of the platform a bamboo(wathop) is prepared and chanting the mantras the Ochai. The start during the puja, offerings such as rice, eggs, wine, Goat, and duck are dedicated to the goddess and the community priest, known as Ochai, leads the ceremony with prayers. Twima puja not only reflects the Noatiatribes' spiritual connection with nature but also strengthens their cultural identity and community bonds.

Garia festival:

Garia puja is a significant weeklong religion and cultural festival celebrated in Tripura. Garia puja stands out as a meaningful celebration, primarily observed by the Tripura tribes. It is celebrated to honour Garia, the deity of wealth, fertility, and prosperity. This festival usually occurs in April or May. Unite with the agriculture season, particularly before the soing of new crops. The Noatia construct a special alter, often decorated with bamboo, banana leaves and flowers. Devotees offer rice, vegetables, and sometimes sacrificial animals (like hen, duck, or goat) to Garia. Traditional priesGoat (Known as Ochai) perform ritual and chant prayers to invoke the deity. Garia puja festival is highly community oriented with families coming together to celebrate, share food and perform rituals collectively. At the end of the ritual the bamboo made symbol of the deity is emerged in the water of river or stream. Garia puja is not only a religion event but also a cultural festival that preserves tribal identity, promotes social cohesion, and passes traditional knowledge to younger generation.

In essence, Garia puja among the Noatia is a vibrant combination of religion, culture, and agriculture, reflecting the tribe's close relationship with nature.

Ker Puja:

Ker puja is one of the most important traditional rituals performed by several tribal communities of Tripura, including the Noatia. The sacred and important Ker puja is celebrated during the month of Phalgun. The puja is dedicated to Ker, the guardian deity of VastuDevata, who is believed to protect the community. The word "ker" means a boundary on a sacred enclosure. The Noatia believe that this puja creates a divine, boundary around their village, keeping away evil spirits, diseases, and misfortune fate.

During the ceremony, the community sets up a restricted area marked as sacred. No outsiders are allowed to enter, and even the villagers themselves must follow strict rules of silence fasting and discipline. Traditional offerings like animals, fruits and rice beer are made to the guardian deities. The puja is conducted by the village priest (Ochai) with the help of elders. The deities of the Ker puja are worshipped on symbolic representation which is constructed by the green bamboopoles. During the Ker puja no outsider are allowed to enter as well as no man is to be allowed to leave the village as long as the ritual continues.

Other pujas:

The Noatia tribe of Tripura observes many traditional pujas which are closely connected with their religious beliefs agriculture and community life. The Noatia believe in a good number of deities. The names of the deities of the Noatia as follows: Nakchumatai, Mailooma, Burasa, khuluma Mataikatar, Haichukma, Logtaraimutri, Dohari- pohari, Akhatra-Bakhatra, sirijumdu.

Nature deities and spiritual beliefs:

- a. The spirit of the fertility and wealth: Garia.
- b. The tutelary spirit of the family: Nakchumatai.
- c. The spirit of the forest: Haichukma.
- d. The spirit of the disease: Burasa
- e. The spirit of death: Thumnairok
- f. The spirit of the barrenness of woman: Sirijudi
- g. God of Parth: Lamprawathop

Like other tribes in the region Noatias hold animistic beliefs. The Noatia tribes have deep rooted belief in the power of nature deities, spirits, and ancestors. They believe that unseen spiritual powers influence every aspect of life, including health, harvest, family welfare and community protection. They believe that if spiritual and rules are broken on the deities are displeased, it can bring harm to the community in the form of illness, crop failure, natural calamities, on attacks of evil spirits, such misfortunes are seen as the result of neglecting rituals, disrespecting ancestors on violating taboos, during sacred periods. To solve these problems, the Noatia perform special pujas like Ker puja to protect the village from evil influences, Twibukma puja for saving crops, and khuluma puja for children's Death Burasa puja for disease. Through these rituals, the community believes harmony with spiritual powers is regained and peace returns to their lives.

The impact of modernization on the society of the Noatia tribes of Tripura:

Modernisation has deeply influenced the Cultural and spiritual life of the Noatia tribes while their festivals and beliefs remain central to their identity, many changes have taken place under the impact of education, technology, urbanization and exposure to mainstream society.

Traditional festivals like Garia puja, Ker puja, Twima Puja and Lamprawathop are still celebrated, but the scale and participation are reducing among the younger generations.

The Noatia traditionally believed in nature gods, ancestral spirits and healing rituals performed by priests (Ochai), modern healthcare and education have reduced reliance on spiritual healers.

Young generations are moving towards modern religions and scientific thinking, leading to a decline in faith in traditional deities and sacrifices.

Still, elders in villages continue to hold on to ancestral worship and nature – based spirituality.

Festivals of the Kalai tribes:

Rai balma panda:

The biggest festival of the Kalai community is Rai balma panda. This festival is celebrated in the month of Agrahayan at the house of the Kalai community's head (The "Rai") and also celebrated by the Kalai community of Tripura as a grand Social and cultural gathering where the new "Samajpati" or community head is formally settled. The celebration usually lasts for few days and is hosted at different places in the state. People from the community, along with dignitaries and officials, come together to witness and participate in the ceremony. At the heart of the event is the ritual of crowning the new leader, which symbolises the transfer of responsibility and authority. Around this central act there is a resonant programme of traditional songs, dances, and folk performances, along with newer elements such as youth pageants and other cultural Showcases. The entire event is prepared and managed collectively by elders, lenders and government, representatives, turning it into a festival of unity, pride, and continuity of the Kalai peoples heritage.

Sangrong Mwtai:

Sangrongmwtai refers to the worship of Mother Earth, a benevolent deity in the Tripuri pantheon. The worship of Sangrong occurs within a broader framework of festivals and deities.

Mwtai Kotor Puja:

Mwtaikotor, also known as Garia puja, is a major festival of the Kalai tribes like a other tribes. "Mwtai" is the supreme village deity and during this puja the Kalai people pray for good harvest, health, and protection of the whole community. The village priest performs the rituals at the sacred place or in the community (The "Rai") house with offerings like rice, eggs, cotton, and rice beer. The sacred symbol of Mwtai is taken from house to house so that every family can offer Prayers. The puja ends with songs, dances and a communal feast which shows the unity of the Kalai people.

Risa – Sormani Festival:

Among the Kalai Tribes, Risa – Sormani are not only garments but also part of a coming-of-age ritual when a girl reaches puberty, the family organises a small ceremony known as the Risa-Sormani festival. In this ritual the elders formally present the girl with her first Risa (Upper cloth) and Sormani (lower wrap) woven by women of the clan. This act symbolises that she has entered womanhood and is now recognised as an adult member of the community. Relatives and neighbours are invited the priest blesses her, traditional songs and dances are performed and communal feast is held.

The Risa-sormani festival is both a social and religious function which marks the transition of a young girl in the Kalai tribe into adulthood and shows the tribe's respect for their weaving tradition and cultural identity.

Spiritual beliefs:

In their older belief system every part of nature has a spirit; rivers, forests, and the earth itself are sacred. Deities are called "Mwtai." Their festivals such as Rai Balma panda are not only social events but also reaffirm the sacred order of the community. In short, the Kalai view the spiritual world as an interconnected web of one supreme deity, many nature spirits and ancestors, and their rituals are ways of keeping that web balanced so that people, crops and the community can flourish.

The impact of modernization on the society of the Kalai tribes of Tripura:

Traditionally the Kalai tribes lived in compact hills on villages and their spiritual life revolved around local deities (The Mwtai), village rituals and the authority of the community head. Over the last few decades schools, mobile phones, state development programmes and mass migration have brought the Kalai much closer to mainstream society, this has had a mixed impact on their beliefs.

Many young Kalai are now go to town for education or work. They are exposed to urban lifestyles and mainstream Hinduism and Christianity. This often weakens regular participation in village rituals, because people physically absent and because some come to see sacrifices or spirit worship as "old fashioned." At the same time, modernization has not completely erased Kalai spirituality. Improved communications have allowed large, state level festivals like "Rai Balma panda" to flourish, with government support and media coverage. Cultural organisations document folk song, dance, and rituals. Modernization has reduced and isolation that kept Kalai ritual life intact, but it has also created new opportunities for them to display and preserve their traditions in public, often reframed as "cultural heritage" rather than purely religious obligation.

Conclusion:

The festivals and spiritual beliefs of the Noatia and Kalai tribes show, how deeply their social life is tied to nature community and tradition. The festivals of Tripura Tribal people had a social dimension which prescribed man's life and preface in the society. It also had a unique and interesting mythological form and the celebration of festivals and puja had special connectivity among the people of society as during the festival season people visit each other house, gathered in one place and celebrate. Even after adopting others modern influences, both groups continue to honour their own deities and hold seasonal pujas and festivals as symbols of unity and identity. These practices keep, their cultural heritage alive while, adapting to the changes brought by modern life.

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