



A Glimpse into Tripura's Cultural Heritage through Language and Oral Tradition: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Tripura, one of the eight sisters located in Northeast India, is a habitat of the indigenous communities whose diverse languages, folklore, storytelling practices, and oral traditions form the backbone of the cultural heritage of this lovely hilly state, Tripura. Each indigenous community differs from another in terms of language, food, dress, music, dance style, and taste for livelihood. Languages such as Tripura/Tipra language, Bengali, and other indigenous languages, along with dances like Hozagiri, Lebang Boomani, Bizu, and Garia, and musical instruments like Sarinda, Chongpreng, Madol and Sumui have significantly contributed to the protection of the cultural heritage of this beautiful state, accompanied by hundreds of folktales from the Tipra soil. But the approach of modern science and technology, along with the influences of Western languages, dances, food habits, and culture, has impaired the cultural divergences of the state. Now, these thousand-year-old traditions and cultures are under threat. This study offers an overview of how oral traditions contribute to the preservation and expansion of its heritage, emphasising the urgent need for collective efforts to protect these indefinable cultural assets.

Key words: *Oral traditions, Indigenous people, Cultural diversity, Western culture*

Introduction

Tripura is a small and beautiful state with its areas 10,491 sq. kms, in the North East of India. Still, its rich cultural and oral traditions have placed the state as one of the most powerful states in the country, particularly in the preservation of cultural heritage through its language and oral traditions. The state is rich in the indigenous cultural values, dating back thousands of years before the arrival of the Bengali migrants from the neighbouring state of Bangladesh. There was a time when modern amenities and technology were not available as they are today. Those people assumed and presumed the social laws, restrictions, permissions, etc., everything based on their unconditional love and respect for Mother Earth. If anyone

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committed a crime, these naive people would rush to the supernatural power of Mother Nature. In a word, their existence directly or indirectly depended on Nature or nature-related matter. (Gupta, 2022)

There were no written scripts for the Tripura/Tipra language, one of the major spoken languages in the state, used by the indigenous inhabiting these small, beautiful, and hilly areas. People used to pass on valuable life lessons and knowledge through oral communication from one generation to the next. These traditions convey the overall life advice through their maxims, stories, songs, and moral lessons. It is evident even today that the cultural tradition is protected and preserved through the oral tradition, which has been sustained for an extended period. These oral stories not only convey the social systems, beliefs, food habits, and family traditions of the Tripuras/Tipras in Tripura, but also transcend geographical boundaries, highlighting the ravages of time. (Devy & Debbarma, 2016)

When different indigenous peoples of Tripura, such as the Bhils, migrated to the soil of Tripura from various parts of the country, including Rajasthan, Gujarat, Malwa, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar. (Deb, 2018) The Chakmas, who have migrated to Arakan Hills at first in Burma and then through Chittagong Hill Tracts to Tripura, similarly, the Garos originated from Meghalaya's Garo Hills, Kamrup District, Goalpara in Assam, and Mymensingh in Bangladesh (Dev Varman, 2012) The Mogs are Arakan tribes. They migrated to Tripura through the Chittagong Hill Tracts. (TRI, n.d)

The Reangs are said to have migrated from the Shan State of upper Burma (now Myanmar) in different waves to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and then to the southern part of Tripura. (Reang & Hrangkhawl, 2024) And the majority population of the Bengalis came from the neighbouring Country, Bangladesh.

When these indigenous peoples enter into the soil of the natural hillock state of Tripura, they did not come alone, or empty-handed; in a word, they carried a high cultural and traditional treasure with them and their beautiful oral traditions that are related to the mythical stories, fairy tales, fables, proverbs, etc., of that form the cultural diversity and heritage of Tripura. These indigenous peoples, along with their fables and folk tales, which are thousands of years old and have been passed down orally from generation to generation, now constitute the treasures of Tripura's cultural heritage. Had these indigenous not been descendants of the soil of Tripura, the artistic beauty of the state would not be so varied, so divergent, so beautiful and worthy.



Objectives of the Study

The researchers have formulated the following objectives to make the study fruitful.

These are

- a) To specify how language and oral traditions contribute to the cultural heritage in Tripura.
- b) To state the significance of the cultural preservation of the state and its people.
- c) To point out how joint efforts of pupils and teachers can support to revive the cultural heritage of Tripura.

Hypotheses of the study

The following hypothetical statements have been formulated.

These are

- a) Fables and Folk Tales of Tripura convey and carry the cultural traditions of Tripura alive.
- b) Folk Tales and Fables of Tripura have moral, ethical and religious significance.
- c) The Government of the State and other organisations are working to preserve Cultural diversity.

Research Methodology

The following methods have been adopted while studying the role of Fables and Folk Tales of Tripura in preserving the Cultural Heritage of the State. Both primary and secondary data have been collected through the following ways.

- a) storytelling method,
- b) interviews with elders,
- c) documentation of oral narratives, and
- d) ethnographic fieldwork



Analysis and Interpretations of the Fables and Folk Tales: The folk tales and oral traditions bear the treasures of the cultural heritage of Tripura, and these are the priceless and time beyond survivor, and the state can be proud of its heritage. These

The Tale of a Talking Turtle: A Folk Fable of Tripura

Long ago, there was a sage named Rudra Baidya who came to pray to God near a mound that resembled the shape of a turtle shell beside the River Gomati. As the sage began his meditation, he heard a soft voice in the air that told him about the arrival of the goddess *Mata Tripura Sundari* and a righteous king who would dream about that goddess and bring her here from a distant land. Since then, the Temple has been known as the Tripura Sundari Temple, and people have started worshipping the goddess, which we know as Tripura Sundari Matarbadi. The logic and validity of the turtle's tale are not fake, and the real Tripura Sundari temple was built on the turtle-shaped hilly mound beside a lake, where the lake is full of turtles. Hence, it can be expressed that the fables and folk tales of Tripura have become a treasure and a preserver of the cultural identity of its people. (Gan-Choudhuri, 2015). Recently, 524 years old Mata Tripura Sundari Temple was redeveloped as part of the pilgrimage Rejuvenation and spiritual heritage Augmentation drive (PRASHAD) scheme.

Chaturdasha Devata Temple: The Tale of the Fourteen Gods

What a nice combination of gods and goddesses worshipped in Tripura! *Chaturdasha Devata* fourteen deities worshipped by the Tripura kings, we know that there are indigenous live in Tripura. Each clan is different from the others in various aspects, whether it is a question of food habits, dressing sense, or beliefs. Those kings might not have received a university degree from a renowned institution, but their religious empathy for all is beyond question. Today, highly qualified leaders are pushing forward their subjects to wage wars in the name of faith and religion. King Birchandra Manikya, one of the great rulers of the Manikya Dynasty, in a vision, asks to worship fourteen gods and goddesses together to maintain harmony in the kingdom. The folk tales reveal the truth of the beautiful amalgamation of Hindu and indigenous animistic beliefs, making the temple a symbol of Tripura's pluralism. (Sharma & Sharma, 2005)

Unakoti: The Tale of Shiva's Forgotten Retinue

Unakoti means less than a crore, and there is a folk tale associated with the Temple of Unakoti that recounts how Lord Shiva once travelled to this site with his fellow devotees. After dinner, he ordered the other gods and goddesses to wake up early the next morning and leave the site. However, the next morning, he woke



up alone in bed, and, driven by anger, he cursed the rest of the gods and goddesses before leaving the place. And since then, all the unakoti Devatas and Devis became stone. Now, this place has become one of the major tourist sites in Tripura. The fables and folk tales of Tripura are not the product of the people's imagination, which lacks cultural or socio-economic significance. (Kakkar, 2024)

The Tiger Bride of Jumpui Hills

Long ago, there was an indigenous chieftain in a village who promised to hand over his daughter's hand to anyone who could bring back the reflection of moonlight from the nearby lake. This promise was overheard by a hidden tiger that went to the lake and caught a silver fish that resembled the reflection of the moon. The promise was fulfilled, and the girl married the Tiger of the Jumpui Hill, and they started living peacefully. This small folk tale holds deep significance in the natural bonding between humans and nature. Tiger is no longer viewed as a ferocious animal that destroys humans and other animals; instead, it is presented here as one of the intelligent animals in the tales that has the heart to understand the value of human lives. In a word, the Folk tales and Fables of Tripura reveal that in earlier times in Tripura, humans and animals lived in harmony and peace, with no clash or enmity between them. (Anonymous, n.d.)

Language as a medium of Cultural Significance

Kokborok is the second most widely spoken language after Bangla and is also the state language of Tripura. It is used and understood by most of the tribes in the state, and it has an immense cultural significance across the state. Most folk tales and fables are part of oral traditions, and these are spoken in the Kokborok language. Language is a means of communication, serving as a powerful tool for expressing emotions, thoughts, ideas, and cultures of one community, and it is a living force that has been passed on to the next generation from time immemorial. The Kokborok language is formed with the surroundings of Nature. In ancient times, people not only lived in harmony with Mother Nature, but her influence also shaped the language spoken by those who lived in her heart and soul.

Table 1: Shows the Percentage of the indigenous Peoples in Tripura

Sl.No	Community	Percentage	Sl.No	Community	Percentage
1	Tripura/Tipra	54%	11	Munda	0.70%
2	Reang	16%	12	Lushai	0.50%
3	Jamatia	7%	13	Oraon	0.40%
4	Chakma	6%	14	Santal	0.40%
5	Halam	4%	15	Uchai	0.30%
6	Noatia	2%	16	Khasi	0.20%
7	Mog	2%	17	Bhil	0.20%
8	Kuki	1.50%	18	Lepcha	0.10%
9	Darlong	1%	19	Chaimal	0.10%
10	Garos	0.80%			

Source: https://www.examboard.in/2019/07/tribes-of-tripura.html#google_vignette

The nineteen different sub-categories of Indigenous peoples themselves constitute a melting pot of cultural variety and bonding among all the people of the state, with its rich oral stories. The nineteen different indigenous follow the languages given below:

Table No.2: Shows the percentage of languages in Tripura

Sl. No.	Language	Percentage	Sl. No.	Language	Percentage
1	Tripura/Tipra language	16%	11	Hrangkhawl	<1%
2	Reang Bru Dialect (Tripura language Viriant)	4-5%	12	Bawm Language	<1%
3	Jamatia Tripura language/ Kokborok Variant	3-4%	13	Chaimar Dialect	<1%
4	Chakma	2.29%	14	Khil Dialect	<1%
5	Halam Dialect	2-3%	15	Korbar Dialect	<1%
6	Mogh (Burmese Origin)	0.97%	16	Murasing Tripura language / Kokborok Variet	<1%
7	Lushai (Mizo)	<1%	17	Noatia Tripura language / Kokborok Variet	<1%
8	Uchai Dialect	<1%	18	Ranglong Dialect	<1%
9	Orang	<1%	19	Saimar(nearly extinct)	0%
10	Kuki-Chin Language	<1%			

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripura>

The primary language of the Tripura/Tipra is Tripura/Tipra language, spoken by 16% of the total population of the indigenous in Tripura. Additionally, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, and Murasing also have roots in Tripura/Tipra language and its variants. No language can survive if it is not practised and used for



communication for a long time. Thus, due to a smaller population and a rare use, some of the dialects, viz, Chaimar dialect, Korbar, and Khil dialects, are only used by < 1 % of people in the state. And the Saimar, a dialect used by the Saimar community (extinct), according to the 2012 census, has only four speakers in Tripura. We must not forget that a language bears the tradition, culture, and heritage of a separate and distinct clan, which is a witness to the thousands of years of history, evolution, and modification on its journey to the modern world. It is a moral duty to nurture a torn, broken, and extinct language, saving one's culture and tradition through joint efforts to maintain our pride and legacy. This research on the oral tradition and culture of the indigenous will assist in realising the frightening condition of some of the dilapidated languages and dialects still used and spoken by the people of the state, which demands everyone's care and attention to survive and thrive.

Findings of the Study

From the above analytical study, it is evident that, concerning the preservation of Tripura's Heritage and culture, language and oral traditions play an essential role in interpretations. All the folk tales regarding the origin of sacred places in Tripura bear a rich cultural implication. Every spot in the state is associated with the local interpretation of the people who had no formal education or institutional degree, but had the symmetry of the fusion of different clans with their other food habits, language, and cultural variety. They shared an empathetic bond and a deep faith in Nature and God. However, over time, due to the influence of globalisation and the need for social and financial advancement, people are increasingly shifting towards the town in search of jobs, industries, and professional careers. They have hardly inculcated the traditional values and oral traditions that are thousands of years old; instead, they are more inclined towards modern science and technology. The reckless felling of trees, the destruction of jungles, and jhum cultivation, along with the adoption of contemporary harvesting equipment from Western countries, has drawn the men of modern times. Thus, they become more determined to reject their own language, traditions, and culture, embracing instead the Western language, such as English, and sometimes even converting to another religion for financial and educational benefits. Thus, the first generation of learner's mocks at the oral traditions, culture, and rituals that have been practised for thousands of years by their parents and guardians. Their native language is replaced with another modern European tongue, and their food habits are changed to Western food items, such as pizza and burgers. The thousand-year-old traditional dances, such as the Garia dance, Hozagiri, Lebang Boomani, and Mamita dances, which were once celebrated during the harvesting seasons, have now been replaced with modern European dance styles.



Recommendations

Hence, based on the above-stated observations, the researchers recommend that protecting and preserving the cultural heritage of the lovely state of Tripura is not merely the responsibility of the Government of the state. Although the state has come forward with a lot of initiatives, like the Tripura Tribal Folk Arts & Cultural Scheme, 2022, the Tribal Research and Cultural Institute (TR & CI), and the Tripura State Academy of Tribal Culture (TSATC), etc, still, no government can revive and recover the lost glory of any declined and lost cultural traditions of a state, until its people come forward to practice it by heart and soul. Hence, the following recommendations can be considered to revive the cultural beauty of the state of Tripura. (i) Teaching and learning through one's native language besides English at the primary or ground level. (ii) to assist the rural poor and elderly people in continuing to weave the traditional bamboo-made handloom or handicrafts that are eco-friendly (iii) to reduce the use of plastic and motivate the people to use instead the handmade bags, mats, baskets, hand fans, and other accessories, (iv) only sweet words, and big dreams cannot help to revive the cultural beauty of the tribes in the state, instead people and government should come with a package of financial aid and train the local artisans to make the lovely products to compete in the international markets(v) last but not the least, the traditional folk tales should be translated into English so that people of the home and abroad can come to know about them, and recognise the rich cultural beauty of our lovely state Tripura.

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