International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Socio-Religious Rituals and Ethno-Cultural Identity of the Tripuri Community in Tripura.

Mr. Majendra Tripura

Guest Faculty, Ramthakur college, Agartala, Badharghat.

ABSTRACT

The indigenous people of Tripura include the Tripuris who are the most populous tribal community. Culture, tradition, festivals and rituals are also part of their cultural heritage. Among indigenous people rites play an important role in social cohesion and ethno cultural identity and generational continuity. The main rituals of the Tripuris, such as initiation ceremonies, agrarian rituals, religious rituals, marriage ceremonies, nasality and funeral rituals, and Traditional Festivals like Garia Puja, Ker Puja, Kharchi Puja and Mamita, symbolize the eco-spirit, agrarian-culture, ancestral worship and cosmology of the Tripuri people and their dependence upon nature and environment. The role of traditional institutions, authorities (ochai), village elders and the whole community, in the preservation and continuity of the ceremonies and the rites of passage has also been highlighted although modern factors such as modernization, urbanization, formal education, out-migration and socio-economic changes have affected the continuance of these traditional rites. However, the ritual performances also mark the community's identity and continuity. This paper argues that four components are important for the protection of the Tripuri community's intangible cultural heritage as it goes through socio-cultural changes. These are systematic documentation, community participation in governance and process, heritage education, and organizational intervention.

Keywords: Tripuri Community, Tripura, Socio-Religious Rituals, Indigenous Culture, Garia Puja, Ker Puja, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Ethno-Cultural Identity.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The indigenous people in Tripura have a background of a rich history, a vibrant culture, strong bonds with nature and a strong sense of community. Their culture is mostly based on rituals which are carried out according to their religious beliefs and the traditions practiced by their forefathers. The rituals also hold information about the beliefs of the people and how their society is structured and what defines their identity. The Tripuris are known as one of the large groups of traditional people in Tripura. Their culture was formed from the events in the past, the relationship between people and nature, as well as the relationships that people had among themselves. For the Tripuris, the traditions are an important element of life, as well as belief in nature, respect for people, elders and ancestors. The traditional rituals that are conducted are performed on all social ceremonies and religious festivals which includes farming, birth of a child, marriages, death and common social events that take place in the community. The majority of these ceremonies occur with the support of family, elders, community members, etc. Many also involve traditional knowledge that has been passed down from one generation to the next. In addition, traditional

practices provide social bonding, an awareness of connection, and an understanding of shared community. However, the introduction of modernization, formal education, urbanization, the changes in life circumstances, and the interaction with other cultures have altered ways of performing some traditional ceremonies. Some rituals are still being done similarly as the first time; whereas some remain to exist in transformed state; and whilst some have ceased to be performed as often during the course of time. Therefore, studying the rituals of the Tripuri people will enhance one's understanding of how traditional culture continues to evolve today in contemporary Tripura.

Culture plays a key role in the collective identity. The language, dress, music and festivals, religious beliefs and traditional institutions and practices of indigenous peoples are also expressions of culture. The Tripuri community of Tripura has its unique cultural characteristics, and their social life and religious practices are intimately intertwined. Beliefs, values, social relationships and cultural knowledge are transmitted from generation to generation through traditional rituals.

In the history of the Tripuri community the agriculture and nature and social organisation in the villages are very close. The social and natural setting in which traditional religion occurred. The literature has various types of pupular rituals for birth, marriage, death, house worship, organisation of villages and religious practices in social institutions in Tripuri.

Garia Puja and other traditional festivals are important religious and cultural practices of the Tripuri community. Garia Puja is a special celebration for the agricultural life and is done by prayers, songs and dances. The linkage of the worship of the Garia with the cultivation of Jhum as mentioned by the Government of Tripura is basically that prayers are being offered for a good harvest while sowing of seeds. Thus, the traditional rituals are not just about religious practices. They also serve a social purpose to bring people together from the community, improve social relationships and share cultural information. Religious studies in the context of the Tripura also demonstrate that rites, rituals, beliefs, and religious festivals are also deeply embedded in the socio-economic life and views of the tribes of Tripura. At the same time, the cultural scene of the Tripuri community is changing. Changes in religious beliefs are coupled with changes in traditional customs due to urbanisation, formal education, economic exchanges with other groups and lifestyles. Also, some of the modifications in rituals, and the influence of neighbouring cultural practices, were reported in earlier studies of the social institutions of the Tripuris.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The main aim of this study is to analyze and understand the role of socio-religious ritual in the maintenance, expression, and transformation of the ethno-cultural identity of Tripuris in Tripura.

Specific Objectives are the following:

a. **To Identify Socio-Cultural Significance:** To document and analyze the social and cultural importance of some life cycle events of Tripeople, like birth, marriage, and death ceremony, and agricultural festivals like Garia puja, Kharchi, and Mamita.
b. **To assess cultural continuity:** To evaluate the role traditional knowledge systems, ritual practices, and institutional authority of the village priest (Ochai) play in maintaining social cohesion and in passing on values from one generation to the next.
c. **To Analyze Patterns of Transformation:** To explore the effect of modernization, urbanization, formal education, and economy on traditional rituals as they perform, adapt, or disappear.
d. **To Understand Identity Negotiation:** To understand the process of negotiation and redetermination of the collective ethno-cultural identity of Tripuri community in the present socio-political context of

the Tripura.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS/HYPOTHESES:

The following questions are explored in the study:

a. Name the important socio-religious festivals celebrated by Tripuris.
b. What do these rituals do within the social and cultural context?
c. What is the role traditional rituals play in the Tripuri Ethno-Cultural Identity?
d. What is the means of passing down traditional rituals from generation to generation?
e. What is going on that is causing the traditional rituals to change?

4. METHODOLOGY:

4.1 Research Design

The study uses qualitative and descriptive approach. It is about learning about the cultural and social importance of traditional practices, not statistics.

4.2 Sources of Data

The paper is mainly from the secondary sources. Important publications are the publications of the Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura, which include studies about traditional social institutions, tribal religion, tribal pujas and festivals, and indigenous music and culture.

4.3 Data Analysis

The materials collected are analyzed thematically. Special emphasis is placed on rituals, religious belief, farming practices, social structures, socialization and identity building.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The available literature serves as a good starting point for understanding the society and its traditional practices of Tripura. The Treatise on Traditional Social Institutions of the Tripuri Community, by Debapriya Deb Barman documents the social institutions and customary practices of the Tripuri community such as marriage, birth, death, household, deities and social organisation on the village level, in detail. Tribal Pujas & Festivals in Tripura by Priyabrata Bhattacharjee her book 'The study of the traditional religious practices and festivals among the tribes in Tripura.' The work emphasizes the significance of rites, rituals, beliefs and festivals as one of the indigenous cultural heritages. Tribal Religion of Tripura, A Socio-Religious Analysis, by Dwijendra Lal Bhowmik explores the religion, rites, customs and ceremonial practices in the socio-economic and cultural background of the tribal communities of Tripura. The book also shows the importance of music and cultural performance in the traditional life of tribes of Tripura. The description of the Tripuri festivals and ceremonies suggests a connection between religious events, culture and community. Some of the recent research has also covered particular rituals and festivals of the Tripuris. In Rakesh Sen's article on Para Mwtai festival, he talks about mythology, ritual, worship and dance as a manifestation of the belief system and life of the Tripuri community. Existing literature thus demonstrates that the Tripuri rituals, apart from being religious, are also social and cultural institutions. But further research is required to examine the interactions between these practices and the current social change and identity formation.

6. SOCIO–RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE TRIPURI COMMUNITY:

In Tripuri cultural life, religion and society have always been interlinked. Traditional religious beliefs incl-

ude deities, supernatural beings, ancestors, nature, and ritual specialists. Collective participation and customary rules are often associated with religious ceremonies. Rituals are also part of the traditional social system. The performance and transmission of customary practices are shaped by community institutions, family relations, and the organization of the village. Traditional knowledge is frequently passed from person to person by informal, oral means and through participation and not through formal written instruction. In addition, agriculture has also contributed significantly to the cultural life of the Tripuri people. This linkage between agriculture and ritual is more apparent in Garia worship. According to the Government of Tripura. The life and culture of the Tripuri are closely related to jhum cultivation, and their worship of Garia is related to the expectation of getting a good crop. So, religion, agriculture, social organisation, and cultural identity are not independent but interdependent aspects of traditional Tripuri society.

7. MAJOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RITUALS:

7.1 Garia Puja:

Garia Puja is one of the important traditional festivals of the Tripuri community. It is strongly associated with agriculture and its cycle commencement. The Government of Tripura finds prayers to Garia are related to the sowing of seeds and anticipation for a good harvest. This celebration involves singing and dancing and lasts for a few days.

“So, the ritual becomes a shared experience that’s both spiritual and social.” It communicates wishes for wealth and agricultural health and provides the opportunity for community involvement. The Tribal Research and Cultural Institute has in its separate records recorded the Garia Puja in the major tribal communities of Tripura, including the Tripuri community. The agricultural practice shown in Garia Puja is an important symbol of cultural identity. Generations share their culture through ritual, music, dance, and community.

7.2 Ker Puja:

Another important traditional ritual system of the indigenous culture of Tripura is ker puja. Historical records explain that Ker worship is related to protection from diseases, epidemics, disasters, and other forms of harm. Traditional practice also has particular restrictions and ritual boundaries.

It is a ritual that demonstrates the connection between religion and the collective social organization. Ritual restrictions set temporary codes of conduct within the community and help to ensure that there is a sense of discipline and solidarity within the community.

7.3 Life-Cycle Rituals:

Rituals also have to do with significant life events of the individual and the family, such as birth, marriage, and death. The traditional social-institution studies of the Tripuri community have recorded the customary practices that surround these life-cycle events.

These rituals are ritual actions that make individual experiences events recognized by the society. They enhance family ties and allow for customary knowledge to be passed on to younger family members.

7.4 Household and Deity Worship:

Another aspect of the culture of the Tripuras is their household religious practice. Conventional documentation of domestic deities and/or beliefs concerning prosperity, well-being, and protection. Some of these practices also show cultural interaction of Tripuris with surrounding communities. Such practices demonstrate how cultural identity can be distinct and, at the same time, adapt to other cultural traditions.

8. RITUALS AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION:

Socio-religious rituals play different roles in the organization of community life. First, they provide opportunities for groups to participate. Secondly, they strengthen ties and relationships with family members and within the community. Third, they create roles for the elders, ritual specialists, and others. For instance, there have been particular limitations and group observances that have historically been associated with the ceremony of KER Puja. These practices reveal how sacred traditions can gently guide a group and deepen their sense of belonging. Likewise, festivals with songs, dances, and communal assemblies provide opportunities to perform and reproduce cultural knowledge. Traditional music and dance are hence not just entertaining but also a means of cultural communication. This study on the folk songs and cultural performances in the context of indigenous music in Tripura underscores the significance of these songs in the field of understanding the traditional life of the people.

9. RITUALS AND ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY:

Ethno-cultural identity is the feeling of belonging that a community has because of the culture, traditions, history, language, customs and shared experiences common to its members; traditional rituals are important signs of this kind of identity among the Tripuri people. Rituals offer visible manifestations of cultural distinctiveness, while taking part in traditional festivals, using customary songs and dances, observing religious practices, and passing on traditional knowledge all help to strengthen a feeling of shared belonging. The example of Garia Puja shows this kind of relationship very clearly since its association with agriculture, religious belief, music, dance, and collective participation gives it a significance that goes beyond being just one religious rite; it becomes a cultural expression by means of which members of the community come to recognize and pass on their common heritage. The same is true of studies of Tripuri festivals and rituals, since the mythological narratives and ritual performances show what the community's worldview and mode of life is. Traditional rituals may therefore be regarded as important mechanisms in the process of forming identity and ensuring cultural continuity.

10. CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND INTERGENERATIONAL CONTINUITY:

The Values and group identity from one generation to the next since older members of the community pass this knowledge on to others by taking part in them and by observing them. Children and young people are able to learn cultural practices by taking part in festivals and by watching the older people. Songs, dances, stories, ritual objects, and customary practices form a cultural environment in which knowledge is passed. Intergenerational transmission does not take place automatically. Factors such as urbanization, formal education, migration, changes in employment patterns, and new ways of living can lead to younger people taking part less in traditional practices. Previous research has already shown the differences between the practices in inland/rural areas and those in towns and in the nearby urban areas.

11. The Changing Character of Traditional Rituals:

Traditional Tripuri rituals are not fixed; instead, they have changed as a result of social, economic, and cultural transformation. The process of urbanization has given rise to new ways of living and new patterns of social interaction. As a result of education, access to a wider range of cultural influences has increased. Meanwhile, economic change has had an impact on traditional agricultural methods and on the way communities are organized. The exchange with adjacent communities has led to cultural exchange. Historical records show that there are similarities between certain Tripuri and Bengali religious beliefs

and practices, as well as the continued retention of distinct Tripuri customs. It doesn't have to be seen merely as a sign of cultural decline. Since culture is dynamic, communities often adjust their traditions to meet new social conditions. The key issue then becomes whether the fundamental cultural meanings and community knowledge connected with the rituals can still be passed on.

12. FINDING FROM THE STUDY:

The following findings emerge from the study:

1. Social and religious rituals have an important place in the traditional cultural life of Tripuri communities.
2. Rituals link religion and social organization, agricultural practices and social relations.
3. Garia Puja is an important expression of culture related to agriculture and prosperity.
4. Ker Puja reveals the link between religious beliefs, protection, and community regulation.
5. Life cycle and domestic rituals help in transmitting cultural traditions. Songs, dances, and rituals help in enhancing cultural communication.
6. Rituals serve as important symbols of Tripuri ethnocultural.
7. Modernization and urbanization are leading to changes in the traditional practices.
8. Cultural change does not always mean a loss of identity; traditional practices can be adapted to modern times.
9. Documentation and transmission are important to preserve the intangible cultural heritage.

14. DISCUSSION:

The results have proved that Tripuri ritual practices can be regarded as multidimensional cultural institutions and that the importance of these practices goes beyond religious worship. These rituals serve for the dissemination of social participation, the preservation of cultural memory, the establishment of community bonding, and the demonstration of a shared worldview. The relation between agriculture and ritual is an important one. Garia Puja is an example of how ecological and economical life may be expressed in religious symbolism. The importance of agriculture for Tripuri people is reflected in such a connection.

The role of rituals should also be acknowledged in preserving cultural traditions. Young people light candles, sing songs, and perform dances; witness traditions; and communicate with older community members, thus perpetuating knowledge. At the same time, however, the changing social context means that the preservation of the rituals is impossible as well as that it is necessary to keep cultural meanings, knowledge, and community significance intact.

15. CONCLUSION:

The socio-religious rituals form an integral part of the ethno-cultural identity of the Tripuri tribe in Tripura. The traditional practices like Garia Puja, Ker Puja, household rituals, and life cycle rituals integrate the religion with the social relations, agriculture, customary system, and culture. The rituals act as an agency for the transmission of culture through value transmission, belief transmission, knowledge transmission, and collective memory transmission from one generation to another. Dance, songs, festivals, and ritual performances also increase the process of collective participation and cultural affiliation.

But the present-day Tripuri society is going through a phase of social and cultural transformation. Urbanization, education, economic changes, migration, and interaction with the other societies have

affected the traditional practices. The present studies reveal that there exist some distinctions between the ritual practices in rural/interior areas and the urban areas.

The preservation of the cultural heritage of the Tripuri society would require documentation, community participation, and cultural education across generations. On the other hand, the cultural preservation should take into account the rights of the Tripuri community to modify their traditions according to their present-day social reality.

REFERENCE

1. Bhowmik, D. L. (2003). Tribal Religion of Tripura: A Socio-Religious Analysis. Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura.
2. Bhattacharjee, P. (1994). Tribal Pujas & Festivals in Tripura. Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura.
3. Deb Barman, D. (1984). Treatise on Traditional Social Institutions of the Tripuri Community. Directorate of Research, Department of Welfare for Scheduled Tribes & Scheduled Castes, Government of Tripura.
4. Dev Varman, S. B. K. (1971). The Tribes of Tripura: A Dissertation. Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura.
5. Damodaran, M. (1976/1999). Garia Puja. Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura.
6. Gan-Choudhury, J. (2017). A Cultural History of Tripura. Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura.
7. Sen, R. (2020). The myth of Para Mwtai and the rituals of Para Mwtai festival: A study of cultures of the Tripuri tribe community of Tripura. European Journal of Humanities and Educational Advancements, 1(4).
8. Sutradhar, J. L. (2014). Indigenous Music and Culture of Tripura. Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura.
9. Government of Tripura. (2026). Culture: District South Tripura. Government of Tripura.