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Folk Music and Dances of Tripura: With Special Reference to Tripuri Tribe

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Abstract

India is a culturally very rich land. There is a diversity of cultures present here which are all interrelated and at the same time very different from each other. Culture is even varied in the people following the same religion according to various factors like social order and religion. However, a comparative study of different cultures is necessary to come to an understanding of collectiveness and commonality of it. As human beings cannot survive alone there has to be an exchange of thoughts and this is reflected in different cultures. Such a thought process is necessary in the human race as people are interdependent on each other. It is not applicable in the lower beings though, as they are directly under the laws of nature. Tribal culture is presently at a crossroads. The new generation is not much familiar with our culture and in this age of globalization the ocean of Tripuri culture stands depleted as the new generation fails to grasp the relevance of the art forms of the not so distant past. As the new generation does not realize the importance of our traditions the tribal culture of Tripura is being threatened by forces of commercialization. This is why we need to explore and expose our rich heritage which is lying dormant.

Keywords- Tripuri community, Religion-folk song, Garia deity, Dances

Introduction

Tripura is a tiny tribal dominated state located in the North-East part of India. Entire Geotopographical areas of Tripura are covered with high tillas and slopes. Green valleys, abundant forest cover, large scale of wild animals inside the forest cover, wild fields, uncountable streams, rivers, fertile land, plenty of edible plants, which have attracted numbers of indigenous tribal communities to enter Tripura in different waves and to settle

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here adopting jhum based economy to sustain their lives. These tribal communities having their separate ethnic feature with colourful traditions have created a multi-ethnic cultural assimilation in this state. Culturally conscious, the people of Tripura love to celebrate their own festivals and enjoy the festivity of others too. Each festival comes with an energetic fervour and lots of entertainment. These ethnic components are so colourful that people outside the tribal communities, including research scholars will have immense interest to know about the tribal culture of Tripura. There are 19 tribes in Tripura namely, (1) Tripuri, (2) Reang, (3) Jamatia, (4) Chakma, (5) Lusai, (6) Mog, (7) Garo, (8) Kuki, (9) Chaimal, (10) Uchai, (11) Halam, (12) Khasia, (13) Bhutia, (14) Munda, (15) Orang, (16) Lepcha, (17) Santal, (18) Bhil, (19) Noatia. Tripuri are treated as one of the major tribes of Tripura.

Tripuri community

The Tripuris are the largest tribal community in Tripura. They are also found in significant numbers in neighbouring Bangladesh, having similar Culture and language. The Tripuris, who are spread all over the civil subdivisions of Tripura, lived mainly on the slopes of hills in a group of five to fifty families. They lived in a specially built bamboo house raised two to five feet from the ground. The height of the house was considered to be a protection against the depredations by wild animals. This house known is known as “Gairing” where they now rarely live.

Religion:

The most important features of the religious history of Tripura is the synthesis, Aryan and non- Aryan known as Bengali Hindu And Tripuri Hindus. By origin the Tripuri society had no system of idolatry. The deities males or females worshipped by them have no image or patima but of symbolic image made out of green bamboo. But due to culture-contact with the Bengali Hindus they turned to be idol-worshiper. Leaving aside the plain dwellers, the Tripuris of interior hill areas also worship the image of some Hindu deities.

Indigenous folk songs of Tripura

Folk songs of indigenous of Tripura are mainly tuned in Kokborok, a language of eight major tribes. Folk songs of Tribal in Tripura are very old, and are popular among eight tribal communities. Folk songs of Tribal community of Tripura is rich for its old traditions and generally songs during shifting cultivation, festivals seasons, and to express their belief and superstition. There are old folk songs which are still sung by them in original form though now a day with some variation in tune. The theme of these songs signifies as sparking glimpses of the past.

Different kind of Folk Songs

- (1) Jaduni or Sarbang: Song based on love and pleasure.
- (2) Reser khakra: Song based on plaintive mood.
- (3) ChamariTunmani: Sung by the bride’s party on arrival of bridegroom.
- (4) Hamjwk Rohormani: Sung at the time of bride’s departure from the house of her in-laws.

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- (5) Hachuk Kamani: Sung while passing through hill tracks to fight fatigue.
- (6) Kuchuk Ha Sikam; Sung to urge people to join the royal force.
- (7) Waying khilimani; Its is a song of Lullaby.
- (8) Mamita Rwmani: Its is sung during the harvest of the new crop.
- (9) Goria Rwmani: Its is sung during the Garia Festival.
- (10) Longoi Chokmani: Its is sung at the time of swinging.

Dance:

Tripuri people are a beauty-loving and having good sense of humour and artistry. It is evident from their vogue of dance and music through which their thoughts and emotions are charmingly depicted. They have mainly four types of dances which may be classified into two, ceremonial or ritualistic and recreational. These are *Garia, Mamita, Lebangbumani* and *Mashak Surmani*.

Garia deity

To the Tripuris Garia is a god of wealth and prosperity and accordingly the Garia had long since been worshiped by them. The worshippers offer their oblation with intense longing for the aim of wealth and prosperity. The worship of Garia deity can also be termed as the cult of jhum cultivation as they hold that having of good crop is essentially interwoven with the blessing of Garia deity whose boon can be acquired only by way of offering puja before they start jhoom cultivation by cutting and burning of forest. Garia Puja is associated with the concept of agro-based rituals followed by dance recital known as Garia dance. Therefore the jhoom cultivators celebrate Garia puja in an enthusiastic manner commencing from the last day of Chaitra and up to the end of 1st week of Baisakhi. This week-long celebration of Garia puja bears a profound significance of the socio-cultural as well as socio-religious life of Tripuris. On the other hand Garia dance can be attributed to twofold concepts, socialistic and ritualistic. It is ritualistic as it is performed round the alter of Garia deity when the puja goes on. While it is socialistic as it helps attract large social gathering.

Garia Dance

Garia dance recital is performed by a group of dancers to the rhythmic and beat of the flute and drum . Both the male and female join in the dancing troupe. The dance begins with slow stepping, and the stepping grows faster and swifter as the drum beating is made faster and faster. Sometimes the dancers go round and round. Arms waving and swinging high and low. While dancing, the dancers sing in a chorus sometimes making loud cry expressing joyous mood. When the dance troupe accompanied by the priest set out from one village to another village they proclaim the news of travelling of Garia deity to villages with the slogans “We the votaries of god Garia are here. The king Garia desires to travel. All the householders keep awakening. The Garia king has appeared before you to bless”.

Garia dance is not a magic dance. There is no mystic concept about it. It is a dance to express the feeling of joy and satisfaction at the close of the year as well as in the beginning

of happy new year. The striking feature of Garia dance is its different kinds of mudras or movements imitated from the nature as well as from the movements of animals and birds. This imitated mudras made the Garia dance more enjoyable without any dullness monotony.

Some of Mudra or Steps of Garia dance:

1. Luku kobokmani: Invitation.
2. Khulumani: Indian Salutation movement.
3. Nokfarmani: Sweeping of house.
4. Khum kholmai: Plucking of flowers.
5. Chokha bai khul lubmani: Making of thread by spinning wheel.
6. Tapang Muiya faihmani: Breaking of Bamboo shoot.
7. Mai sarmani: Spreading of Paddy seeds.
8. Maikaimani: Sowing of paddy seen in Jhum.
9. Tukumani: Bathing movement.
10. Yakung bai Mainakmani: Separation of paddy by foot.
11. Rwsambo mai sukmani: Husking of paddy.
12. Hor sohmani: Fire making.
13. Yafabumani: Clapping of hands movement.
14. Mwxhra rwkmani: Chasing the monkey.
15. Tok tanlai mani: Cook fighting.
16. Toksa ada tukmani: Birds feeding movement.
17. Tok Mai sukmani: Hen eating of corn.
18. Topsi bahrmani: Jumping like parakeet
19. Tok birmani: Birds flying.
20. Abisani Khichumu suhmani: Washing of Baby's nappy.
21. Tok khitung Jangirimani: Shaking of hen's tail.
22. Harung maikisilmani: Wavy view of paddy field.
23. Tokma yaching malmani: Shaking of hen's leg.
24. Mayung hadul nakmani: elephant dusting.
25. Sikambuk kholmani: Collection of snail movement.

Lebang bumani Dance

Lebang is a kind of insect highly destructive to jhoom crops. Tripuris call it 'kuk'. These insects at times flock to the jhoom field when the paddy plants shoot up to flower-spike. The 'kuk' may be compared to the locust, a terror to Bengals agriculturists. Lebang is a green coloured insect. To protect the jhoom crops from destructive attack of the swarms of insect 'Lebang', the jhoom cultivators both men and women adopt a kind of device to drive out the Lebang. From this device is originated the dance. Lebangbumani dance can also be called jhoom dance and it is performed in the jhoom plot. It is a group dance participated by both men and women. The dancers stand in along row with two bamboo sticks in hands and

produce a peculiar rhythmic sound that attracts the insect 'Lebang' to come out from their hideout. When the Lebangs come out in a body, the dancers tumble down to catch or to kill the insects. The different movements required for driving the Labang in high and low slopes of the jhoom field are imitated in the Lebang dance. To conclude it may be recapitulated that due to changing socio-cultural circumstances, the life-style of the Tripuris are also being caught in the vortex of metamorphosis. Consequently the dance is no longer performed by the jhoom cultivators. It has now assumed the form of recreational dance form.

Mashak Surmani

Mashak is a Tripuri word which means deer. The origin of this dance can be attributed to the fullest expression of joy of the deer hunters following their hunting gain. In a word, the Mashak surmani dance can aptly be called as the dance of trophy. It is performed during return journey of the hunters with game. On their way home two or four strong persons carry the game on their shoulders and the accompanying ones walking side by side frequently, out of great joy, make loud cry and make different gestures while walking sometimes a bit slower to keep pace with the carriers of the game. In the Mashak surmani dance, two forms of dances are performed by the hunters. The hunters who carry the game can hardly move limbs fast due to pressure of the load. So they can make only slow and steady movement while advancing ahead. The persons who are free can make various movement expressing their joy to every beat of walking step. Now-a-days this dance is totally absent from the real scene as deer hunting is totally banned by the government. However this dance can be developed into a nice form of dance to perform in any cultural function. It has got great potentials to develop into a popular folk dance of the state.

Mamita Dance

The Tripuris have customary practice to eat new harvested jhoom rice ceremonially. The festival of eating rice is called Mamita. It is a Tripuri word (kok Borok) meaning rice-eating. Hence the dance performed during this ceremony is called Mamita dance. The jhoom crops are harvested by the end of the Sep-October month. Then the phase of storing comes in. they build up temporary godown in the jhoom field to store up the unthrsed crops. The Mamita festival is not held immediate after harvest. After few days the crops are thrashed and shifted to home and then finding out an auspicious day the Mamita festival is celebrated with the great festive mood. On the eve of Mamita festival there is customary practice to sacrifice fowls at the altar of 'Randak'. 'Randak' is a rice-container of large size made of earth. It is symbol of Laxmi, the goddess of fortune. After worship the family members together with invited close relatives sit together and start eating new rice. To make the ceremony more joyous and vivacious a group of dancers both men and women perform dance recital which is known as Mamita dance.

Musical Instruments

Studies on tribal dances are incomplete, without understanding music. Tripuris are endowed with innate love for music and dance. They have several kinds of musical instruments of their own. Musical instruments are a must for vocal as well as dance recital. Without accompaniment of musical instruments, dance and song cannot be performed. The common varieties of their musical instruments are Drum, flute, Changpreng, Sairinda and Dangdu. All these instruments are melodiously played by experts instrumentalists.

Drum

It is called 'Kham' by them. It is made of wood of which both ends are covered with cowhide. The kham is played on the occasions of music and dance recital. This is also beaten on funeral and other ceremonial occasions.

Flute

Tripuris call it Sumu. It is very popular musical instruments of Tripuris. Tripuri young men have innate love to play the note of romantic love-song by flute. It is also played on to the accompaniment of different dance recitals like Garia and other kind of dances.

Sarinda

It is stringed musical instrument of common kind. This is also found to be used among the tribes of hilly region of north India and Bihar. Its body is so deeply pinched that it looks as though it is of two parts. The lower portion is a small pear-shaped one with a hide covering. The upper part is much bigger which is kept open. Over this, run four strings of twisted cotton, gut or metal. It is played on as the fitting accompaniment of romantic love song sung by the lady-love and the beloved. It is surprising that the Sarinda player without having any sort of training for musical notation can set to music to the string.

Changpreng

It is a stringed musical instrument made of wood. Changpreng is manufactured by the artist themselves. It is purely indigenous musical instrument of Tripuris. It is also played to the accompaniment of dance recital.

Dangdu

It is a kind of mouth organ made of bamboo, the frame having an annular base which does not complete the circle. The ends of the incomplete ring project into two prongs. A thin tongue is fixed in between the two prongs which are kept free at the terminal end. This is called *moorsing* or *moorchang* found in Rajasthan and Uttarpradesh. This *Dangdu* is called jaw's harp in English. This is set in between the upper and lower lips of the player. The player is to hold the base of it in one hand and is to beat by the index finger of other hand on the hook-shaped end of it. While beating finger on the hook the player has to make sound by oral breathing thereby resonating gentle sound.

Conclusion

Now-a-days all this dances has assumed secular character in terms of its widespread rendering in and outside state at different occasions at different places of metropolitan cities

like Kolkata and New Delhi. Though a few analytical discussions are available on the dance forms of a particular community of the North-Eastern region, but no significant contribution is found in the case of the tribal dances of Tripura. Hence 'Folk Music and Dances of Tripura: With special preference to Tripuri Tribe' is my humble effort to meet the dearth of a research-oriented work on the variety of folk music and dances of Tripuri Community living in Tripura. Discussion has been done with a critical outlook and observation has been based on field survey for which I had to visit the tribal dominated areas to observe their life-style, social customs, festivals and ceremonies and rites and rituals which have pretty reflection on their dances. I hope that the compilation will help the young students and readers for the better understanding of the tribal culture and tradition of Tripuri community.

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