

## Changing Dimensions of Culture: A Case Study of Tripura Tribe in Longtarai Valley, Tripura

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### Abstract

The cultures are ever changing entities that are constantly altering in presence of mostly external influences. The Tripura tribe in Longtarai valley is also going through such processes under the influence of modernization and globalization. There are many aspects in the culture like folk arts, language, folk dances, religion and other traditional aspects that are discussed in the study. Further the changes have been observed based on the field observations and questionnaire survey in the area.

**Keywords:** culture, tradition, changing dimensions

### Introduction

Cultures are mostly conservative in nature, but it is an interesting phenomenon that they at the same time also constantly changing. The transition in culture has been profoundly experience with the impacts of industrialization, urbanization and its associate globalization on all societies. Tripura community is also experiencing a similar change based on above-mentioned reasons in its livelihood, language and resultantly, in its culture as whole.

### Statement of Problem

The traditional societies have been always conservative and very superstitious and Tripura community is not an exceptional one. The impact of modernization in education, Sanskritisation and accultural process like trans-acculturation and assimilation the society, culture of Tripura community has been on set of transformation. The change is inevitable; the imprint effect is observed in all sphere of life such livelihood support system change, social structure, cultural elements etc. thus identity become paramount tool and led contra-acculturation process to preserve identity attribute in the changing world. In present study the unique and significant cultural practices of Tripura tribe of Longtarai valley is given, and its changing dimensions is being discussed.

### Objectives of the Study

In the present study the cultural patterns of Tripura tribe in Longtarai valley is discussed. Also the changing patterns in culture whether it be in the field of religion, language, dietary habits or folk culture are also studied.

### Study Area

The study area selected for the present investigation is the Longtarai Valley Sub-Division of Dhalai district Tripura. Longtarai Valley Sub Division is established in the year 1992 by separating North Tripura District and joining korbok block of south Tripura district, with total geographical area of 840.74 Sq. km and a total population of 1, 30, 669 persons as per 2011 census records. The area extends from 23°38'53.59'' N to 24° 05'23.65'' N latitudes and from 91° 57'14.06'' E to 92° 2'25.64'' E longitudes (Fig 1).

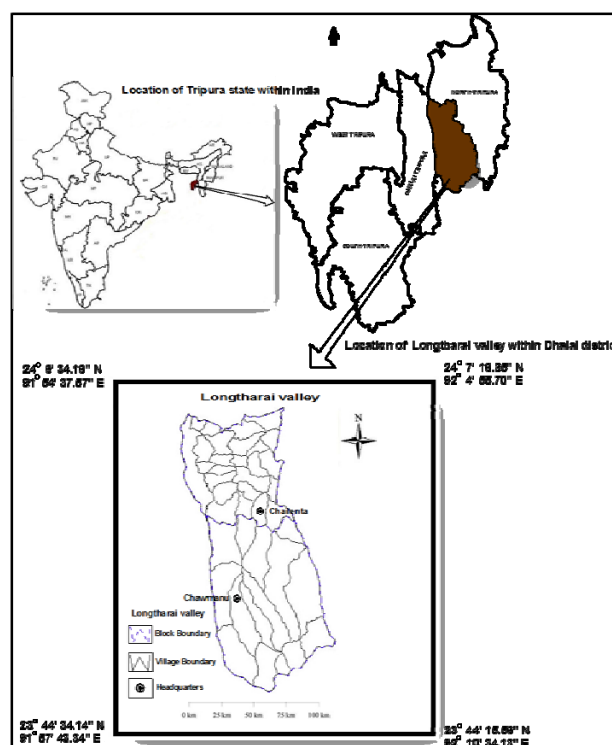


Fig 1: Location Map of Study Area

### Language identity

“Language is the only medium through which we ‘make sense’ of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged”. This means that, “We use signs and symbols – whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings”. The language evolves through dynamics of human thought, experience and expression with exchange and borrowing of evermore common in closely integrated world. They may have rigorously defined and preserved as essential elements of cultural identity or can be abandoned in the search of new acceptance into new society. Language can be further divided into two; standard and dialects language. A dialect can be the standard language through identity of prestige speech

commonly used by high-ranking community. When the two individuals talk with closely knit speech in variants is called dialect. The designation of few languages as an official language not always satisfy the ambitious of linguistically distinct groups for reorganization and autonomy. Language is an inseparable part of group identity and a defining characteristic of ethnic as well cultural distinction. The fact that established the cultural heritage is embedded in language and losing of language identity feels the worst and evidence of discrimination as well suppression (Gettis, A & Fellmann, J 1995).

Most of the scholars opined that the Tripura royal family belongs to the Tripura tribe. Language of Tripura is known as 'Kok-Borok' which comes under Tibeto-Burman language groups, its root can be traced to the Sino-Tibetan family speech. It strongly resembles of other sister dialect such as Bodo, Dimas, Garo and Kachari of Assam tribes (Singh, *et al* 1996).

### **Religion and Ethnic Practices**

Religion, in the sense of a standardized set of ideas and practices, was relatively unknown to the predominantly tribal-inhabited parts of the Northeast. The oral nature of tribal religions and traditions allows a certain degree of flexibility and openness. The ideas and practices would vary significantly from one area to another, even among the members of the same family of tribes. Many of them do not feel the necessity of codifying and standardizing their ideas and practices (DAS).

Religion and ethnic culture play an important role in the development of the social structure. Our society consists of several structural units based on structural pluralism. One more element that contributes to the creation of identity is ethnicity. All these folk art and culture forms an ethnic nature. Folk arts and folk songs play a vital role in their survival. They stand as background in every society. Hierarchy system is related to caste, gender and economic status. Folklore opposes the power structure and compromise with it. They preserve ethnic identity also. Religion has a very important role in the formation of identity of each society. It is the shell of cultural formation. The individuals in a society are born into them. It is through these customs and practices that social solidarity remains. Pre-existing cultural rules determine our ideas and behaviour through socialization. Societies are made up of structures of cultural rules, established beliefs and practices to which their members are expected to conform.

Among Tripura community, since time immemorial they have come following the nature and believe that all substance have life thus "Animism" faith. The Tripura tribe has worshipped various deities, which have great influence on their daily life affair. All of these deities some have taken as benevolent and some are as malevolent. The deities who are malevolent held to ruin mental as well physical. Thus, by sacrificing animals and birds this community make happy and satisfy the said deity. In Tripura community god and goddess has no concreted visual symbols of abstract concepts or idea for each only mental vision exist. Thus, the abstracts symbols of natural deities are made of bamboo pole having structure like Christian cross, bamboo leaves and cotton threads etc. the bamboo made structure of deities to some extent may be called an alter or pedestal of the deity. All the designs of the deities are made by traditional priest called 'ochai' who

follow specific design at the offering. The numbers of bamboo require in offering may vary according to deities and rituals. The worship of divine with the bamboo has long historical attrite in Tripura community. During offering only green and undamaged mature bamboo is in use. The dry bamboo and bend are deprived of all its sacred nature. In Tripura's community each god and goddess has qualifying terms of address as 'Ma' and 'Fa' which term as Mother and father respectively. They worship the earth, water, tree and stone in different name as dali-khamchi, chuak kathar and domestic animals like goats, chickens and pigs etc.

### **Folk and popular cultural practices**

Folk cultures have existed since time immemorial and they have grown with the joy and sorrow of community concerned. Hill people are strongly attached to their folk song and folk dance. These folk became part of culture heritage ushering generation to generation through immiting. These people live in truthful and closer to nature and it reflect the true emotion and feelings of human being. It reflects love for land described the journey of life, where it comprised the entire phenomenon. Despite socio-economic change and advent of modernisation folk song stands its position.

The change is observed in all cultural attribute in Tripura's community such construction of house. In early the traditional house are gaireng, charnok and bannok, which are uplifted from ground to couple of meters and materials like bamboo leave, elephant grass and bamboo cane. With the influence of modernisation, globalisation, people tend to construct cemented house with tin roof specially economical sound, while other section of population construct either bamboo with tin roof or mud wall with tin roof. All the mention houses were constructed along slope earlier, but the new house construction is observed at the plain valley as they have shifted their settlement. The traditional house has only one entrance, two compartments; kitchen and living room, in living room all family member sleep and in kitchen room the edible items and ration are kept. These traditional houses last for 30 to 40 years depending upon uses and quality of materials.

### **Food and drinking habit**

Food and drinking habits of Tripura tribes have both vegetarian and non-vegetarian items. Of course rice is staple food and every curry is made from dry fish as to make tastier. Like other tribe in north-east regions Tripura's also prepare their food in simple way with less oil uses. The common delicious food items are; Muipeng (any vegetable curry made from dry fish), Muiyabangsong (bamboo shoot fermented), chakhui (curry made from traditional soda) etc.

The forest product use as food by different tribal groups of Tripura state is diverse in nature and form unique dietary pattern. The most common vegetable used in preparing food items are various types of roots, leaves, flowers, fruits and stems. Tasty vegetables are collected from nearby forest, edible plants like Muiya (bamboo shoot), thorai, orai, muiching, gandroi, laiphang (banana tree), thakun (forest product have root, found under the surface) etc. During the rainy season bamboo shoot is avandantly available at market and widely use. Different kind of fish (aah), aah karan (dry fish) and muikhan (meat) is taken as food but milk product is rarely in use. Various kinds of wild edible fruits such as

thaicharem, amlai (amla), thaitoi, thaichuk (mango), borai (berry), dedolok, kok, thamachang, etc. Domestic edible fruit thaipong (jackfruit), kuwai (bettlenut), thaichumu, (melon) and darmai (cucumber). The chief spices used by tripuras are mosor (chilli), haching (ginger), suhdoi (turmeric), khumchani (dania) and milokbana (huk product) etc, are found in their food.

### **Traditional Drinking and Smoking**

Drinking habit occupied an important place in rituals from birth to death in different form in Tribal culture and Tripura community particular. Commencement with the rituals related with the birth of individuals and other rituals the cultural importance of alcohol is embedded in the individuals' life. In every rite of Tripura community involves the use of Traditional rice beer as symbol of cultural element without which all the rituals rite are considered in complete. Amongst Tripura community without rice beer it is impossible to conduct ceremonial rituals rite. The drinking habit and consumption in daily life and on rituals occasion vary considerably among different people or culture depending on religious practice of different groups. Rice beer is made from rice is also part of cultural trait, which is use in different purpose. It has three types of traditional rice beer; chuk, baramhi, chukma bwtwi uses in ritual rite as well as social purpose. They have customary practice of offering rice beer in any ritual ceremony. Also during buisuk festival (New Year occasion) rice beer is offer to elders of family and society's most respected person in honour, beside any guest on arrival. This traditional rice beer is prepared at home by women particular. But the society has considered as harmful and has bad impact on economy, thus band in modern day.

Smoking is also common amongst Tripura and tribals communities of Tripura state. Most of the tribes including Tripura use smoking in bamboo called '*daba*' (kind of water pipe made from bamboo). On arrival of guest rice beer (chuk), *daba* (water pipe), kowai (bettle nut & leaves) is offer. But it has significantly changed in those families who reside in urban area, replaced by tea and some snack.

### **Festival and Folk Dance**

The traditional festival is celebrated with folk songs, dance, music and folk games. The important festivals are hari buisuk, buisuk, bisi katal, and mainungma.

#### **Hari buisuk**

Like many occasion hari buisuk is eve of buisuk festival, on this occasion youth enjoy very much. A kind of rite is performs on this day where young girls are offer in honour new traditional cloth; Risa & Rinai. They are from then perceived or feel mature adult permit to get married the time is so wonderful to them. But the present scenario has change as development take place in every field. Besides, the mention rituals all the domestic animals and house are purified with some forest product use for any purification rite by priest and animals are taken to bath. It also time for seeking blessing from elders for coming year for younger boys and girls. The days are marks by visiting relatives' house preparing varieties of traditional cake and enjoyment.

Buisuk is the most important festival of Tripura's, celebrated by all the clans living any were else in the world. During this day people take bath or dip in water for purification of sins

that made. It is celebrated on the occasion of harvesting in mid-April of every year when all the people are free from work have stored all harvested crop. The time of festival usually fall on the autumn season. Buisuk normally last for two days; first day is called hari-buisuk and the last day main buisuk festival. During this day all people from children to older of family member wore new traditional attire both men and women. Practice the rituals of respect family elder and relative by offering gift; traditional rice beer and preparing traditional cake. In fact, the whole community enjoy with cheers and also time for social gathering.

### **Traditional Dance**

this is the unique dance only perform by men of groups in twenty members or less than carrying the supreme god 'Goria' which the buisuk festival is cerebrated for. A month prior to buisuk festival the youth and young of society members are gather with traditional attire and went for travelling whole habitat of Tripura community village. Mainly the dance is perform primarily in the house of 'Roaza' (village head) of every village then go on every house and while they arrive to every house owner of house has to provide rice and a chick on the honour of god Goria. These ways these dancers survive for months till the buisuk festival come. During the dance the men's sing with dirty jokes to tease girls but only for fun no intend. On the best dance performance they are awarded on buisuk day. Thus how dance play vital role integrating community. People are not allowed to come across the dance performer while going through any path of village. But at present the community has a social organisation called 'Tripura Chubalai Buthu' (TCB) that organises the Buisuk festival in state level and have financial assistant, solve other social problems.

### **Folk sport**

The sport which particular Tripura community plays are *songoi thwngmani*, *onjala taklaimani*, *fowasa sumani* (flow pipe competition), *solaimani* (wrestling), *hide and sike*, and *takla tanlaimani* (cock fighting) etc, *Onjala taklaimani* is similar to bamboo dance by Mizo tribe. It is said by the elders of community that once this dance was belong to Tripura community but during the kuki raid in twelve century to Tripura village, they have taken away some cultural traits from Tripura's. *Songoi* is a forest product look like temrinn fruit cover with hard substance from outer part, after broke the seed called *songoi* is use for playing as well medicine and ritual rite. It sometimes use for evil witchcraft practice to defend. *Takla tanlaimani* is fight between two chickens, where game is determined by defeating either of the one chicken.

### **Birth Ritual**

*Abur kisi sumani* is the rituals of purification of new baby born, when food pipe has been cut. The priest (ochai) would go to nearby stream and offer sacrifice of chicken and later the new baby born future would be determined by intestine of chicken. Where perceived the elongated left side of intestine is good and vice-versa is bad. Always conceived as left the god and right hand side to human being by ochai (priest), meanwhile the surrounding house area is encircle by bamboo sticks for symbolise.

*Abur karan sumani* is the ritual for purification of new born baby after the complete dryness of food pipe or complete

separation of food pipe and dry of naval from body. The same ritual is repeated by sacrificing of chicken and other curriculum.

*Abiak sumani* is the rituals rite where name is decided after seven days of baby born. In these ceremony all relatives, family members are bound to present. A plate is arranged with placed of seven threads by seven persons and lighted until it burn. The name is kept in the mind of conferring persons and last remaining thread is selected to choose name of the new born baby thus, the way birth ritual is accustom.

### **Death Ritual**

After the death immediately the corpse has been taken for cremation. The corpse is carried in chariot made from bamboo and place on the cremation place. When the death is confirm at night or day drum is played so that people come to known. The relative gather and helps to arrange the rituals, like Hindu rite elder son is permitted for set fire. From the day of death the family member is not allow to have any king of meat or non-vegetable item. Mourning period is observed either seven days or thirteen days base on the circumstance. In case of death of baby less than a year is just placed in cage made of bamboo and hung in the deep forest where no person goes. After the exact seven days or thirteen days, the boy or person is allow to save his hair and allow eating everything. During that day a kind of small hut is construct from bamboo to symbolized clan the person belong. Some clans have hut construction above the ground surface about a foot, while others have simple construction of hut in ground. Also animals are sacrificed to offer food to death person by every close relatives and family member preside by priest alongside. If any adult die from any cause he or she is perform separately. The unmarried adult corpse is carried secretly only by few persons and cremated in unknown place and unmarried adult corpse is place in cremation along with banana tree, symbolizing as married. People are not allowed especially young, keeping in mind that the same fortune would run on them. But at present the conservative or superstitious concept has changed and allowing everyone to attain in this kind of funeral. During the cremation all belonging of the death persons is burned down and offer all necessary things require in the life. Like cloth, food, shelter in the form of hut, and utensil etc. Normally white cloth is offer to death person and long bamboo pole is installed nearby cremation site with white piece of cloth is hang on it to symbolise the path to heaven.

### **External Influences and Cultural Change**

The traditional egalitarian relation however, underwent changed as tribal's group were exposed to diverse external influence emanating from central of power, such as administrator, economic classes, petty traders and money lenders etc. who slowly spilled over tribal domains particularly in mid-India. These external influences have helped transformation of tribal's relation and social-culture system losing their land and natural resource getting marginalize. The Indian society has been responding to the process of modernisation and social change with changing degree of intensity. However, the impacts of this process are not uniforms to all section of population. Urbanisation, industrialisation, education and political awakening embrace modernisation influence (kumar, 2004).

Culture is 'melting pot' of the world economy, traditional, culturally-defined landscapes are being customized under a multitude of international influences. In this perspective, it is often difficult to identify the landscape and design forms that are keys to maintaining local identity and a sense of place. Identifying these kinds is crucial in the planning process, as local planners and decision-makers try to integrate new, globally-influenced development patterns in local communities and at the same time generate spaces and places that will not destroy local values and associations. Landscape change is common. It is part of human settlements since the beginning of time, responding to cultural changes, outside influences and technology shifts. However, the pace is new things which landscapes are changing. Many scholars have described the resulting global loss of sense of place. In fact, it is questionable that the popularity of eco-tourism is, at least in part, the need to find places that remain "authentic" and untouched by the trend towards global homogenization of landscapes. The analysis of historical and cultural landscape has struggled with the issue of landscape change for the past two decades in an attempt to develop a theoretical construct for historical landscape analysis (Elizabeth, 2004).

Nature, culture and communities becomes not only targets but transformed when it is exposed to modernisation and globalisation. Promotional materials offer both information and change landscape if being marketed. The partial representation experiences traditional, histories and natural (Britton, 1979). According to Andrea Butcher; the external factors such as global economy, political governance, development paradigms and increasing global – interdependency guarantee that the change is difficult to avoid presently. Some of these changes are accepted whilst other considered being harmful to preserve the rich cultural heritage. The inevitable of change has to accept by and simultaneously the term 'modernisation; base on narrow definition as "progress" has to look upon indigenous context. Modernisation is an opportunity of learning, the one side of coin and it must be preserved. It is significant to preserve its cultural heritage and understand to practice sustainably. In this globalising world, fast mode of communication, skill full marketing and quick transportation system people become a medium of use.

According to Giddens (1990, p. 64), globalization is the "process which intensification worldwide social relations which connect distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa", thereby changing all aspects of our everyday life.

Since society is dynamic in nature and it's inevitable with no exception to Tripura community too. The impacts of globalization and modernisation also observed amongst Tripura community. Table 4.6 show how far change brought in the life style of Tripura's community, the maximum change has been observed in the house construction with 74 percent followed by practice of folklore with 62 percent of total households. Advancement of modernisation in social norms the change types are apprehend, 138 households has changed in their social custom with 32 percent following change in rituals of 70 households with 18 percent and culture dress with 3 percent following food habit change with 1 percent of total households.



**Table 1:** Changing lifestyle patterns in Village Longtharai valley, 2014

| Change type                             | Number of respondent |     |
|---|----------------------|-----|
|   | Yes                  | No  |
| Food/eating habit                       | 2                    | 389 |
| Cultural dress/ type of dress           | 10                   | 381 |
| Speak mother tongue                     |                      | 391 |
| Follow rituals/festival                 | 70                   | 321 |
| House change/type of housing & material | 290                  | 101 |
| Follow old custom/ tradition            | 138                  | 253 |
| Role of women and status in household   |                      | 391 |
| Practice of folk tale                   | 243                  | 148 |

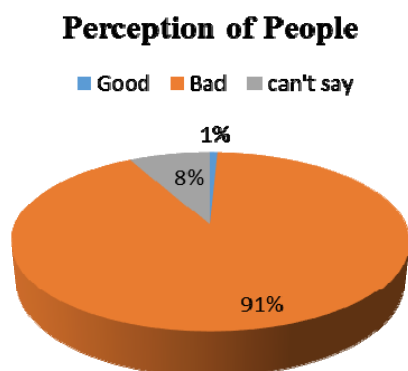
Source: Field survey, 2014

Though there is change in social and cultural attribute but the perception of peoples still holds different views on going cultural change. The change of views is observed in the study area where table 1 indicates that the maximum households holds views of bad ongoing cultural change with 91 percent followed by 8 percent households have no say to ongoing cultural change and very few of 3 households with 1 percent holds their view ongoing cultural change as good. During my field survey I have found that particularly the old aged persons have views of bad in ongoing cultural change. But among middle age group the perceptions of ongoing cultural change has mixed response, some feel good since change is inevitable while others holds views that it should go as it is.

Table 2: Perception about ongoing cultural change in Longtharai valley, 2014

| Cultural change            | Number of respondent |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Good                       | 3                    |
| Bad                        | 357                  |
| Does not matter /Can't say | 31                   |
| Total                      | 391                  |

Source: Field survey, 2014



**Fig 2:** Showing percentage wise views of people on ongoing cultural change in Longtharai valley

### Conclusion

The Tripura tribe has a unique culture of its own, with different tradition and folk art. The rich culture is going through a changing pattern, culture being a dynamic process. There is significant change in the house structures and following of old culture due to the process of modernization.

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