January 2021

Conservation of Indigenous Tribal Culture at Tripura, India: A Proposed Model in E-Environment

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Conservation of Indigenous Tribal Culture at Tripura, India: A Model

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Abstract:

The tribal communities (indigenous groups) of Tripura have their respective arts and cultures or folklores or folktales which are initially oral and passed down to the younger generations by the senior members from generation to generation. Due to the modernization and influx migrated people from the neighboring country to Tripura, created threats among the tribal communities for maintaining their unique identity and traditional cultures. Their enrich culture is getting mix-up and they are wondering to save their culture for the next generation. The present study discusses the issues and challenges faced by tribal communities to maintain their enrich arts and culture by keeping in view the present condition of Tripura. To provide a platform where the tribal communities can preserve their arts and cultures or folklores, one model is proposed namely "Indigenous Cultural Heritage of Tripura", which might preserve their unique traditional arts and cultures or folktales.

Keywords: Indigenous People, Cultural Heritage, folktale, Preservation, folksong, Tripura.

1. Introduction:

"Indigenous" means native, belonging naturally, that of the people regarded as the original inhabitants of an area. But, in India, none of the groups are recognized as "indigenous" officially because of large numbers influx migration of people from other neighboring countries from time to time. It is also impossible to determine the exact time of the migrant for any particular such groups. The Construction of India, thus provides the safeguards to the smaller communities by protecting their cultural diversity and equality by referring to "tribal group". Tripura, a small state of North-East India, has enriched cultural diversity from the ancient time. The total area of the territory is 10,491.69sq. km. with the size of population 36,71,032 numbers (Census, 2011). The region has been the home of more than 19 different communities of indigenous or tribal communities like Bhil, Bhutia, Chaimal, Chakma, Garo, Halam, Jamatia, Khashia, Kuki, Lepcha, Lushai, Mog, Munda, Noatia, Orang, Reang, Santal, Tripuri, Uchai and many more with different religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamism, Saktism, Christianity and many believers of other gods and goddess. Each of these groups has a separate identity for their socio-economic and cultural tradition. They have huge collections of folktales, folk songs, riddles, proverbs which are passed down from generation to generation from the senior members of the society to the younger generation mostly without having any written documentary form.

After the independence of India, indigenous people had started to demand for protection of their unique socio-economic and cultural traditions mainly during the 1950s and 1980s due to the large numbers of influx migration of the different cultural people from Bangladesh during the time. It also observed that there is a decline in the indigenous people population in terms of percentage within the state. According to the census report of India, in 1881 the population of tribal representation was 87.06% which is reduced to 30% of the total population in 2011 (Census report, 2011). The hegemony of other people mainly Bengali culture influenced the original culture and belief of them. The language, culture, society, and religion have started to mix-up with the other traditional people from time to time.

Thus this paper attempts to find out the old traditional culture of indigenous people and their unique practices. It is also tried to find out the effect of influx migration on their traditional culture. Therefore, this paper is designed with the objectives to understand the threats faced/ felt by indigenous or tribal communities in that region. This paper also discusses the various issues and challenges faced by them. Lastly, one model is proposed to conserve the unique traditional culture which might lead to resolving the conflicts.

2. Methodology

The present study is primarily based on the available literature related to the history, traditions, cultures, etc. of the tribal communities. The required data have been collected from the Reports of the Governments of Tripura accessible through the website (https://trci.tripura.gov.in) and also through available hard copies. Data related to the old traditional culture of indigenous people and the effect of influx migration, the secondary sources of information such as books, reports, journals and websites are also used to collect the required

information for this study. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, obtained data have been transferred to table and finally analyzed to get the results.

3. Review of Literature

Several studies regarding the issues and challenges of tribal communities have been conducted in different settings at different times. For this paper, some significant studies related to the objectives that focus on different aspects of history and culture of tribal communities have been thoroughly reviewed. To understand the threats faced by the indigenous or tribal communities at Tripura, we must overview the article first related to the ancient history of that place. Palit, (2004) have discussed in detail the different ruler of Tripura for several centuries. As per the record of Rajamala (a book written by the king), the chronicles of Tripura kings, 179 kings of Mongoloid origin ruled the region at different periods of time (Poddar and Karmakar 2016). There are only two main authentic sources, that can help to understand the ancient and medieval history of Tripura which are the manuscript of Sri Rajamala (written in the Bengali language) and Rajaratnakara (written in the Sanskrit language). However, the name of kings mentioned in the "Tripura Rajmala" is challenged by many historians as well as the scholars because of the lack historical evidences in support of the fact at the manuscripts. However, with the observation of "Tripura Rajmala" and other available literature, it is quite established that Tripura was ruled by Tribal King at a different time for more than one thousand years ago (Omesh, 1978 and Roy, 1995). There are also some shreds of evidence, which saw that the king (Mongoloid origin) have migrated from the eastern parts of the Tibet and Western part of China in 5000BC and settled down in the fertile land of Brahmaputra valley (presently at the Assam State of India) (Roy, 1995). But during the 7th and 8th Centuries AD, these tribes migrated to the hills of Tripura from the east, Northern-east and South-east of the Arakan Yoma Hill tracts bordering this Hill States (Ghaudary, 1983). It is not well known to anyone when and how this kingdom of the Mongolid race was named as Tripura. For the first time, the word "Tripura" was found mentioned on his coin carrying as the royal epithet (Palit, 2004).

Apart from Mongoloid Tribes, some other tribal communities such as Austro-Asiatic groups, Tibeto-Chinese groups, Cocase-Mongoloid origin, Kuki-Chin group also have migrated into this place mostly before 13th Centuries AD (Chakraborty, 2007). Each community has its respective history, culture, or folktales which is initially oral and passed down from generation to generation (Roy et al., 2011). The daily lives and everyday issues can be observed through arts and culture, folktales of tribal communities. These arts and culture or folktales are full of variety and one can find themes of moral, social guidance and restrictions, ancient legends, fertility, taboos, creation and fate, and destiny (Gray et al., 2013). The tutelage from the Royal court is another evidence of such which is made in the numerous copper plates, rock inscriptions, stamps, and coins of the period (Chaudhari, 1999).

The tribal communities start feeling of outer interference in the middle of the eighteenth century, when the industrial revolution started in India to make India a big market for goods. However, the tribal communities had started facing serious problems after the change of demography at Tripura during the partition of India and West-Pakistan (now Bangladesh). It has gone through a

substantial change in socio-economic and cultural of tribal communities due to the interference of outsiders in each and every aspect of their culture. Due to the huge number of migration of Bangladeshi refugees to Tripura created huge problems for the existing tribe communities (Saigal, 1978). The indigenous or tribal communities thus become the minority at their state and the other culture started dominating in all aspects. They start strong feelings for their identity crisis. In the 1980s there was considerable ethnic violence, tribal communities' starts to demand for independent tribal homeland. Thereafter, Government of India had taken several immediate steps to solve-out the issues (Tranester, 2011). Now though conflicts were resolved to some extent, but the identity of those enrich traditional culture is under the question mark. The language, culture, society, and religion have mixed-up with the other traditional people (Sahoo and Mohanty, 2015). Their ancient traditional cultures are in danger and waiting to get an appropriate identity.

4. Cultural Variety among Different Tribal communities at Tripura

To understand the cultural diversity among the different tribal groups, it is very essential to identify the origin of indigenous people. Several communities like Bhil, Bhutia, Chaimal, Chakma, Garo, Halam, Jamatia, Khashia, Kuki, Lepcha, Lushai, Mog, Munda, Noatia, Orang, Reang, Santal, Tripuri, Uchai are the main indigenous people of these place. The information related to the family of origin and arts related to the different unique patterns of dances among tribal communities lay down on the website of Tripura Tourism, Government of Tripura represented in tabular form below (Table:1).

Some other interesting facts related to the arts and cultures of tribal communities also reported on the website of Tripura Tourism, Government of Tripura, and Tripura Tribe Areas District Autonomous Council. It is found that the Tripuris community is invigorated with sweet melodies of folk songs and music of the flute, Sarinda, Champreng, and other string instruments. Reangs, Chakmas are two major tribes of Tripura having to their unique sweet melodies of folk songs and perform traditional dances with string instruments made with wood and bamboo. Jamatia was the major strength of Royal Army of Tripura kingdom. They are fond of their traditional folk culture. Ethnically Halam lives in typical "Tong Ghar" specially made of bamboos and Chan grass and unique festivals of their own. Chaimals have a separate form of dance, folk songs and music through performances are very occasional. Bhills are also fond of dance and music with the traditional tune of Flute and Drum. They enjoy the whole night by drinking and dancing. When new crop penetrates Garos community celebrate this wangala festival with colorful dance, songs and music. The long hand drum and other traditional musical instruments of Garos are really melodious that creates eternal feelings in mind. Kukis are fond of music and dance. They work hard in the jhum field and enjoy dance and music at the community level. They generally do not arrange any marriage alliances outside their community. Lepcha lives on rearing a large number of cattle and milch cows besides cultivation of Agricultural and Horticultural crops. The Bamboo Dance (Cheraw-dance) of Lusai is very much popular in and outside India. The folk tales and folk songs of Mog are very nice and touches the core of the heart. Mundas enjoy their life during working in the Tea garden with community participation, group hunting with bow and arrows of wild animals and birds, group dancing and singing and

also enjoying country liquor irrespective of age bar in any ceremony or festival. Holi is their main festival of Santals when they enjoy Haria and dance in-group with the melody of drum and sing-their traditional songs.

Table: 1 Different Tribes at Tripura with their Origin and Distinct Dance Form

Tribes of Tripura	Origin/ Family of origin	Dance
Tripuri	Tibeto-Burman family	Garia, Jhum, Maimita, Masak Sumani and Lebang Boomani dances
Bhil	Dravidian Family	Individual Dance form
Reang	Tibeto-Burman family	Hozagiri dance
Chakma	Tibeto-Chainese family	Bizu dance
Jamatia	Tibeto-Burman family	Garia dances
Halam	Cocase-Mongoloid family	Hai- Hak dance
Chaimal	Cocaso-Mongoloid family	Individual Dance form
Bhutia	Himalayan tribe	Bhutia folk dancer
Garo	Tibeto-Burman family	Wangla dance
Khashia	Mon-Kher family	Khasia Dancer
Kuki	Kuki-Chin family	Mozo Dance
Lepcha	Indo-Chinese family	Chu-Faat Lepcha Dance
Lushai	Kuki-Chin family	Cheraw and Welcome dances
Malsum	Cocaso-Mongoloid family	Hai- Hak dance
Mog	Tibeto-Chainese family	Sangraiaka, Chimithang, Padisha and abhangma dances
Munda	Austro-Asiatic family	Ho munda dance
Santal	Austro-Asiatic family	Haria Dance

(Sources: Tripura Tourism Website, Government of Tripura)

Thus, if we closely analyze the origin of tribal communities, most of them belong to Tibeto-Burman family, Dravidian Family, Tibeto-Chinese family, Cocaso-Mongoloid family, Himalayan tribe family, Mon-Kher family, Kuki-Chin family, Indo-Chinese family and Austro-Asiatic family. Each of them has their own individual culture and arts. These ethnic communities have unique traditional arts and cultures, the folktale of stories, riddles, myth, legends, proverbs, songs and dances. The traditional arts and cultures, folktale mostly survived in the oral form and it kept altering according to the changes take place in the society. The authors of the folktales are anonymous and cannot be traceable and it is as old as human society. The traditional arts and cultures, folktale generally serves the purpose of teaching the values and cultures of the

community to the younger generations. It contains the myth of creation, warnings for breaking taboos, festivals, and the belief system of that particular community. The folk literature is the most common form of narrating a story by the elderly of the community to the younger ones. The children are taught morals and values of life through parables, fables and allegorical tales. The traditional arts and cultures, folktale also served the same purpose and the traditions, knowledge about the surrounding environment, morals, warnings and taboos were percolated to the next generation. History, culture and tradition move side by side and every creative literary work of the age reflects its inner urges, its vitality and special characteristics.

5. Proposed Model

Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and Tripura Tribe Areas District Autonomous Council, Government of Tripura has taken lots of initiative to fill-out the problem faced by tribal communities. But, it is also true that due to globalization and in the age of Information Communication Technology, the arts, cultures, society and religions have mixed up with the traditional system of tribal communities. The influence of modernization cannot be denied. The government of India or the Government of Tripura has taken several techniques to preserve the cultural and socio-economic activities of the different groups of tribal populations, but the methods are not sufficient enough in practice to preserve the distinct culture of tribal populations. Since, traditional culture such as folktales, folk songs, different cultures related to society are passing generation to generation without any kind of written form, so a model has been proposed keeping in view the latest technologies available at the digital environment to conserve the cultural activities of the tribal community.

The process can be started by developing a proposed network of cultural heritage first; which would be known as the Model of "Indigenous Cultural Heritage of Tripura" (ICHT); The ICHT model is shown in Figure: 1. The ICHT will act as a repository, which would be linked by a proposed website of the Cultural Heritage of Tripura. The cultural activities will be recorded and stored in the ICHT and links will be provided to retrieve the cultural activities of different types of tribal communities related to their folktales, folk songs, different cultural information related to society, the economy, and life style. This cultural activity will be searched by the common people throughout the globe to get the required information. The main objectives of the "Indigenous Cultural Heritage of Tripura" would be:

➢ To identify the different pattern of cultural activities by different communities of tribal;
➢ To create a checklist to record different folktales, folk songs, social-cultural, economy and lifestyle;
➢ To collect/ assemble such different patterns of cultural activity in a place;
➢ To create a database with all different cultural activities;
➢ To create website further, through which link will be provided to access the information globally.
➢ To gather and create belief in tribal communities by preserving their arts and cultural activities.
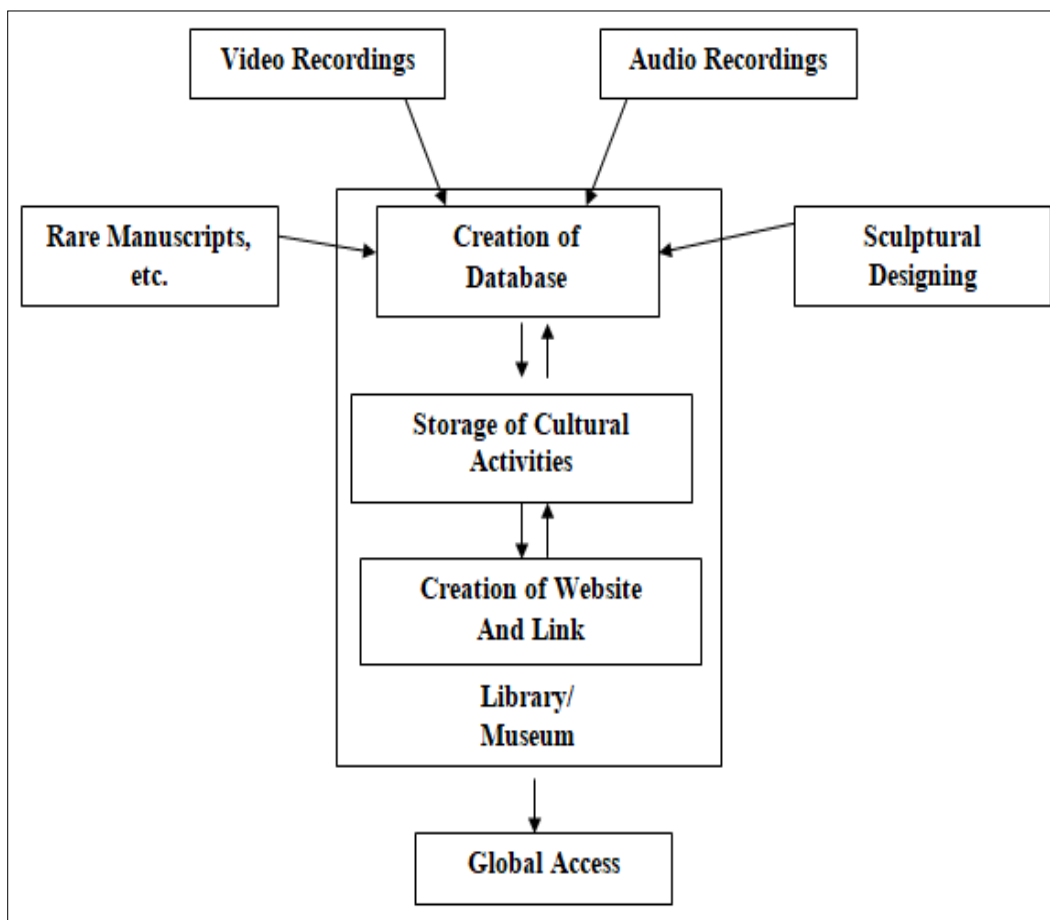
Figure: 1: Proposed Model of Indigenous Cultural Heritage of Tripura (ICHT)

Stage-I: Planning and Designing:

"Indigenous Cultural Heritage of Tripura" has been proposed with a plan to collect the different types of cultural activities of different tribal communities. There should be an adequate discussion with the tribal communities (basically with the leader of those particular communities) to make a blueprint for designing the structure of parameters for recording. Each and every aspect of folk talk, folk song, culture must be covered up before finalizing the blueprint.

At the first stage of the proposed model, the following functions need to be performed:

  ➢ Planning and Framing the Policy statement;
  ➢ Constituting with the Policy Makers/ Executive Bodies MOU, if required for their approval;
  ➢ Infrastructures development with necessary in terms of
  ➢ technological requirement
  ➢ finance;
  ➢ man-power;
  ➢ other related aspects;

Stage-II: Recording to Activities:

Now, there will be an urgent requirement of collection of different activities of such tribal communities by using different recording platforms. For recording various kinds of technologies could be used such as video recording, audio recording, designing of paintings, picture capture, sculptural designing, conservation of rare manuscripts, etc. Thus, we may go for the next steps; which would mainly deal with the following aspects:

- ➢ Planning for the technical issues related to the recording of activities with the high-resolution camera;
- ➢ Planning for Software/ hardware and sustainable preservation;
- ➢ Planning to recite professional(s), who should able to communicate with tribal communities with their respective language;
- ➢ After the collection of recorded documents, we have to make guidelines and flow diagrams for easy retrieval.

Stage-III: Database Creation and Designing of Website:

Here, the database would be created separately for each group of communities like Chaimal, Chakma, Garo, Halam, Jamatia, Khashia, Kuki, Lepcha, Lushai, Mog, Munda, Noatia, Orang, Reang, Santal, Tripuri, Uchai, Bhil, Bhutia,etc. There will be linked with each and every aspect of their cultural activities; considering dances, arts, lifestyles, festivals, socio-culture, etc. We may go for these steps; with the following aspects:

- ➢ Planning for the technical issues related to the creation of the database;
- ➢ Planning for Software/ hardware for server issues;
- ➢ Planning to build up a proper website for getting access;
- ➢ Linking the cultural activities at the appropriate webpage;
- ➢ Planning for proper Internet connectivity to connect the recorded oral traditional culture globally.

Stage-IV: Linking Website with Globe:

There would be a Central Body who will look for the whole activities of it. Any Government intuition such as Library or Museum may play the lead role. It would act as the Central Body and would work as an independent body/ agency. This body would control and manage the issues related to the preservation and conservation of activities, databases, websites, and new ICT infrastructure. We may go for these steps; with the following aspects:

- ➢ MOU with a Government body;
- ➢ Planning for man-power support;
- ➢ Planning to the maintenance of the website;
- ➢ Planning to adopt the required technology for sustainable supports.

7. Action plans for Implementation of the Model

The creation of the repository for preserving oral culture as stated in the Model of "Indigenous Cultural Heritage of Tripura" (ICHT) is not an easy task. The most important work of this model is collection of folktales, folksongs and other different forms of arts and cultures. Since, most of traditional cultures are well-known to the old generation people, so proper communication (preferably to their own language) and details analysis of such is very much essential here. For implementation of such model, it is also very much essential to have multiple dialogs with the tribal people and also to recorder the issues and crisis faced by them. Tripura state Government institution or State University can adopt the model for the creating the center which will look after the entire matter thereafter. Certain action plans, in this regard can also be formulated towards the implementation of the proposed model:

> ➢ Guidelines must be created for the database and best practices to be followed;
> ➢ Proper human resource, up-to-date web application designing technology should be made available to access;
> ➢ Mechanisms should be developed for sustainable preservation for the long term;
> ➢ Strategies should be developed to make ICHT as a permanent repository;
> ➢ The Government should come forward for the necessary funding to develop such an essential service in the digital era;
> ➢ There should be an independent body, which will provide advisory as well as technical services time to time keeping in view the objective of the study;

8. Conclusion

The study has revealed that with the changing scenario of ICT infrastructure and modernization of lifestyle, people started shifting towards the modern lifestyle. On the other hand, while adopting such a modernized lifestyle, indigenous people are struggling to co-up with the situation. The ancient indigenous groups or tribal communities are also slowly moving away from their old ways of life and the stories which existed mostly in the oral form are getting forgotten and laid back. It can also be observed that due to modernism and globalization the young generation hardly know or care about any of these folktales and the cultures are therefore more alienated to the new generation. To revive the interest in the past and its culture is only possible if we could generate the interests among the young minds once again to go back to these enrich filled folklores and folktales to dig out the history and roots of the glorious past of the traditional culture. Influx migration and modernization influenced the lifestyle of tribal communities of Tripura, so the preservation of arts and oral culture become essential for them. The existing system is not enough to fulfill/ satisfy the specific group of tribal communities. Moreover, the lives of the common people in Tripura did not have a written record of their past culture and belief but the folktales handed over from person to person survived among the people giving them enough knowledge about their ancestors and rich heritage. The proposed Model of Indigenous Cultural Heritage of Tripura (ICHT) may fulfill the main concern of the tribal communities by preserving the indigenous arts and culture. The proposed model can solve the

identity crisis of tribal communities of Tripura to most extend if implemented. They will get the platform globally for their enrich arts and culture, particularly for folktales, folk songs, folk dances, etc. Therefore, it is the need of the hour that we should think for the preservation of such cultural heritage of such indigenous people by using available technology.

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