

Seasonal Festivals Ceremonies of the Tea Tribal Society of Assam - A Study

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Abstract: *There are many people who have come to Assam from different states of India and have their own culture and songs. The diverse cultural resources of the tea tribal community, one of the largest ethnic groups in Assam, have added to the diversity of Assamese culture. The tea people have been living in the tea plantations of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys for a long time and are an essential part of the Assamese society. The tea community has its own identity despite embracing the Assamese language and culture. They have made their mark in the society with their songs and words. The folk songs performed at various folk festivals in the cultural life of the tea community reflect the colorful, festive artistic aspect of their life. Among such folk festivals are those celebrated in different seasons. These basic ceremonies of the tea workers have the main elements of the Austro - Mongolian culture of Assam. These are the issues discussed in this paper ' Seasonal Festivals Ceremonies of the Tea Tribal Society of Assam - A Study '*

Keywords: Tea Tribes, Seasonal Festival

1. Introduction

Culture encompasses the intricate tapestry of the natural, economic, social, and cultural facets of human society, serving as a collective reservoir of ideas and beliefs that shape our social values and give expression to the kaleidoscope of human emotions. This ethereal concept finds its embodiment in the English word "Culture," encapsulating the essence of our shared human experience.

India, a land of boundless diversity, exists as a harmonious unity within its multifaceted tapestry. Assam, our beloved state, epitomizes the quintessence of unity in diversity. If one were to aptly christen the entire North East India, including Assam, it would be deemed the haven of ethnologists, and perhaps even more fittingly, the paradise of folklorists. Within our borders, a myriad of ethnic groups coexist, ranging from the hill - plains dwellers to the Aryan and Post - Aryan lineages, as well as the Mongoloid, Australoid, and Dravidian communities. The amalgamation of these diverse threads weaves a captivating narrative, evident not only in the organic elements but also in the rich tapestry of folklore that permeates our cultural fabric. At the local level, the demarcation between tribal and non - tribal societies in Assam remains fluid, blurring the lines and fostering a sense of unity amidst diversity. The nineteenth century was a transformative period for Assam, a time of profound change and historical significance. It is crucial to grasp the pivotal role that tea has played in shaping the history of our beloved land. In 1823, the intrepid explorer Robert Bruce, in collaboration with the visionary Maniram Dewan, stumbled upon the tea tree in the verdant landscapes of Assam, forever altering the course of our state's destiny. The discovery of tea in Assam not only revolutionized the economic landscape but also left an indelible mark on the cultural fabric of our society. It became a symbol of resilience, innovation, and progress, propelling Assam onto the global stage as a renowned tea - producing region. The tea industry became intertwined with the very identity of our state, shaping our traditions, customs, and way of life. As we delve into the annals of Assam's history, we must recognize the profound impact

that tea has had, not merely as a beverage but as a catalyst for transformation and a testament to the indomitable spirit of our people. The advent of tea in Assam by the British engendered a profound impact on the intricate labor dynamics of the region. Confronted with a dearth of workers, the British sahibs and sardars resorted to a stratagem to surmount this predicament. Consequently, they enticed individuals from diverse provinces of India, hailing from ethnic cohorts such as Tati, Orang Bauri, Munda, Bhumi, Karmakar, Baraik, Ganda, Majhi, Tasha, Ghatwar, and others, through the Girmitia system. These individuals, in their assimilation into the broader Assamese nation, amalgamated their distinctive attributes, encompassing language, folklore, festivals, social ceremonies, gastronomy, rituals, melodies, dances, and instrumentation. Over the passage of time, these tea communities have indelibly interwoven themselves within the fabric of Assamese society, rendering it a vibrant tapestry of multiculturalism. Their enduring presence and cultural exchange have fostered a sense of unity amidst diversity, endowing Assam with an inclusive and dynamic milieu.

2. Methodology

The study on ' Seasonal Festivals - Ceremonies Of The Tea Tribal Society Of Assam - A Study' employs both descriptive and analytical methodologies.

Seasonal Festivals of Tea Tribal Society of Assam

The main topic of our discussion is the seasonal festivals of the tea tribal community. There are 6 seasons - summer, rainy season, autumn, winter, winter and spring. The tea tribes are proud to celebrate 'Twelve Pujas in twelve months' and celebrate some kind of Puja festival every season. If we look closely, we see that their festivals are as follows:

Suryahi Puja:

Suryahi Puja, a revered festival cherished by the denizens of Bengal and Bihar, unfolds its splendor during the scorching summer months. This grand celebration, not an

annual affair, occurs either once every five years or once every twelve years, depending on the devotees' customs. Unlike domestic rituals, Suryahi Puja finds its sacred abode amidst the verdant embrace of the forest or on the serene banks of rivers. As the first rays of the sun grace the horizon, the worship rituals commence, culminating in completion by the noon hour.

On this hallowed day, both householders and devotees observe a rigorous fast, immersing themselves in the divine aura of Usha Puja, as some refer to it. The Puja adheres to strict rules of sacrifice, where offerings are not taken back to one's abode, for it is believed to invite ill fortune. Thus, all edibles and libations are consumed on the sacred premises, leaving no trace behind.

Upon returning home, the devotee, bearing a vessel of water, crosses the threshold, symbolizing the safeguarding of their dwelling from malevolent spirits and spectral entities. Those who partake in this Puja diligently cleanse their feet and face, reverently turning towards the sun deity, paying homage to its radiant magnificence. Suryahi Puja stands as a steadfast guardian, shielding devotees from the clutches of darkness and ushering in an aura of divine protection.

Durga Puja

Durga Puja, a grand festival celebrated with immense fervor and enthusiasm, holds a paramount place in the hearts of Indians. This vibrant extravaganza commemorates the victory of the goddess Durga over the buffalo demon Mahishasura, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil.

During this auspicious occasion, intricately crafted idols of the goddess Durga, accompanied by her divine entourage, are worshipped with utmost devotion and reverence. Elaborate pandals, adorned with artistic themes and decorations, grace the streets, captivating the senses of onlookers. The air resonates with the enchanting beats of dhak drums and the melodious strains of devotional songs, as devotees immerse themselves in the festivities.

Durga Puja serves as a unifying force, bringing people from diverse backgrounds together to celebrate the divine feminine power. It transcends religious boundaries and fosters a sense of communal harmony and togetherness. Families and friends reunite, donning traditional attire, indulging in delectable feasts, and exchanging heartfelt greetings. This festival holds immense cultural significance, showcasing the rich heritage and artistic prowess of India. It is a time when creativity flourishes, as artisans and craftsmen showcase their skill through the creation of stunning idols and intricate decorations. The streets come alive with vibrant processions, showcasing traditional dances, music, and theatrical performances.

Beyond its cultural and religious significance, Durga Puja also plays a vital role in the economy, particularly in regions like West Bengal. It attracts tourists from across the globe, boosting local businesses and providing a platform for artisans and craftsmen to showcase their talent.

In essence, Durga Puja is a celebration of faith, unity, and joy. It serves as a reminder of the eternal power of good over evil and instills a sense of hope and positivity in the hearts of millions. It is a time when the entire nation comes together to revel in the divine grace of the goddess Durga, fostering a sense of belonging and spiritual rejuvenation.

Manasa Puja:

The tea tribal community celebrates the worship of Goddess Manasa during the rainy season. This puja is held at two times. One is on the last day of the month of Bhad and the other is on the fifth day of the month of Shaon. There is no priest in this puja and the puja is performed by reading the books through the rituals. In Manasa Puja, the Manasa Gita is sung with musical instruments and the idol of Goddess Manasa is worshipped. The people of the worshiping household usually do not kill snakes and do not eat cucumbers and chickpea until the day of worship is over. Lotus flowers are essential in this puja along with other flowers. Among the Manasa songs, there are various stories of Beula - Lakhindar and Chand Sadagar besides Manasa.

Lakshmi Puja:

Lakshmi Puja is celebrated on Lakshmi Purnima in the month of Ahin - Kati. There are two types of pujas, domestic and public. There are no sacrificial rules in this puja. The puja is completed with offerings of beans, rice and coconuts according to the scriptural rules. Lakshmi Charit is recited during the puja. It is usually a female - dominated puja. Women take the lead in household worship. Thursday is called Lakshmi Bar. Many people do not eat meat or fish on that day.

Tuchu festival:

Tuchu festival is one of the national festivals of the tea tribal community. It is also called Paus Parab. This festival is celebrated on Makar Sankranti in the month of Magh. It is a women - dominated festival. Women take the lead in all aspects of this festival. There are some similarities between the national festival of Assamese society, Bhogali or Magh Bihu, and the Tuchu festival. According to folklore, Tuchu was a goddess of great chastity. The goddess burnt her life together after the death of her husband on this day of Makar Sankranti. Since that day, the Tuchu festival has been celebrated by expressing the virtues of Mahasati Tuchu through songs. These Tuchu songs are very beautiful.

Kshetra Puja:

This puja is usually celebrated by the people of the tea tribal community who have farms. Others do not. This puja is celebrated especially by the old tea tribe people living in slums. They are the only ones who have to do with agriculture in the village. It is a completely domestic worship. This puja is performed in the paddy fields before the harvest. There are sacrifices in this puja. This field is worshiped in the name of the field god to protect the crops of the fields. He is the one who harvests the paddy only after the end of the puja. This puja is celebrated collectively.

Charak Puja

Charak Puja is celebrated in the month of Chat. It is also called Chait Parab. In this puja, devotees insert wires into their tongues, backs, chests, etc. and tie them to the wires and spin them on poles like a wheel. But there is no pain and no bleeding. For this, devotees fast and do not eat food cooked by others for the days before the fast. This is a collective festival or festival held only in a few places in Assam.

Mage Porob:

The denizens of the tea community in Assam partake in the jubilant festivities of "Mage Porob," which is observed on a chosen day during the month of Magh. This festival serves as an expression of gratitude towards the benevolent goddess of the earth and fosters a spirit of communal celebration. The community members diligently gather rice and monetary contributions from each household, crafting their own libations. The village or regional Mukhial takes charge of capturing chickens, which are then offered as sacrificial offerings during the festival. Subsequently, the poultry is cooked and savored alongside the libations or mud, while the night is filled with joyous revelry, encompassing dance and song.

Christmas:

In the realm of Assam, the tea workers comprise a majority of Hindus, yet a significant Christian population also exists. These Christian tea workers partake in distinctive religious festivities, alongside embracing certain non-religious festivals. Notably, they joyously celebrate occasions such as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Day, and more, marking the rich tapestry of their cultural heritage.

3. Conclusion

It is seen that the people of the tea tribal community celebrate some kind of puja and festival in every season of the year. The field of tea tribal culture is full of Puja festivals. Therefore, in this society, the saying 'Twelve months thirteen Pujas' is heard. The tea community, comprised of individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds across different states of India, has found solace in the shared culture and unity of Assam. While each community within the tea tribes cherishes its unique language and traditions, they have collectively embraced Assamese as their mother tongue. As such, it becomes the responsibility of the educated members of the tea community to foster cultural, social, and political awareness, nurturing a thriving and resilient nation. Thus, it becomes essential to cultivate a culture of industriousness and productivity among the less literate members of the tea community, ensuring their holistic growth and empowerment.

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