

# A Review of the Religion, Culture and Creation of the People of Tripura State

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**Abstract:** Tripura is known for many culture and historical places. Tripura has 19 different tribal communities along with Bengali and Manipuri communities which contribute to the rich culture tradition of Tripura. The culture of Tripura is a mixture of culture and tradition that these communities have evolved over centuries. Tripura is known for its hilly terrain and tribal population. Tripura became an important centre of Buddhism from the first decade of 6<sup>th</sup> century Ad, and tantric Buddhism flourished from 8<sup>th</sup> century Ad onwards, especially, with the tribal folks of Moghs and Chakmas. The immigration of plain land people mark the rise of Brahminism. The state of Tripura is very rich in its culture and tradition. Each tribe of the state has its own cultural activities. They have their distinct dance and music which are mainly folk in nature. Folk songs and dance are performed on occasions like weddings, religious and other festivals. Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Janmastami, Nabaratri, Shiv - Chaturdasi, Kharchi Puja, Ker Puja, Gariya Puja etc. are the important festivals. Several festivals represent union of several tribal traditions.

**Keywords:** Tripura, Tribal communities, cultural heritage

During the reign of 184 kings in the state of Tripura, the kings were Hindus, they have established temples of different gods and goddesses at different times. This is mentioned in Rajmala. The names of the fourteen deities of the Tripura dynasty were Har, Uma, Hari, Lakshmi, Vani, Kumara, Ganesh, Brahma, Earth, Samudra (ocean), Ganga (river), Agni (fire), Kamdeb (sexual deity) and Himalaya (mountain). During the reign of Maharaj Trilochan, the worship of the fourteen deity began. The worship of the fourteen deity is known as 'Kharchi Puja' in the state of Tripura. Dhanyamanikya built the temple of Tripureswari in Udaipur (Gomati) and installed the goddess in it. Udaipur (Gomati) in Tripura is considered to be one of the fifty - one peethas in India. Dhanyamanikya also built the temple of Mahadev in Udaipur, Vijayamanikya built a temple and installed an idol in it. Maharaja Amarmanikya built Chandi temple and Laxminarayana temple. Maharaja Kalyanmanikya installed the Mahisasur Mardini Dashbhuj statue of Bhagwati. He built the Maa Kali Temple in the Kunjavan region of Kalyanpur. Gobindamanikya built Shiva temple and Jagannathdev temple. Ramdevmanikya built Gopinath Vishnu temples in Udaipur. Krishmanikya built the temple of Radhamadhava. Maharaj Durgamanikya built a temple in Varanasi and installed Dhiv - Linga in it. Maharaj Ramharimanikya established the Devi by building the Kali temple. Maharaj Ramgangamanikya built the Gopinath Temple. Maharaj Radhakishoremanikya built Sri Sri Jagannathdev temple in Agartala. Maharaj Virendrakishoremanikya built Durga and Laxminarayan temple in Agartala and installed the idols of various gods and goddesses to prove that the kings of manikya dynasty were the strong in Hinduism. In short, the kings and the peoples of Tripura are all apparently followers of sanatana - Dharma.

The worship of the gods and goddesses of the kings was rarely practiced among the peoples. The janajati (tribals) of the state were of the Kshatriya caste and followed their own culture, creation and religion. There is some discussion about their gods and goddesses. Tripuri people worship different gods and goddesses in their own way, Achai, is the priest of the puja. Most of the puja materials are egg, chicken, duck, pig, turtle, banana and batasa etc. and

mantras were recited in kaborok language. The deity or goddesses of worship is Mahadeva - Mahadevi. He is one of the gods of Tripuri tribals worship. There are lampra in the puja house for all kinds of welfare work in the village. The puja of Tiya - Khuluma or Ganga Devi is usually held in the Bengali month of Agrahayana (November - December). Raksha Kali is worshiped in Bengali Chaitra month (March - April) so that serious diseases like cholera, pox etc. cannot enter the village. Mahaluma, he is the god of paddy. They believe that paddy production is due to his grace.

Gariya festival is performed on very beginning of Bengali Chaitra Sankranti (March - April). At one time this puja was restricted to the janajatis but is now recognized as universal 'Buracha'. This puja is offered to get rid from diseases. "Thumnai Rock Merchant"—this puja is performed to get relief from calamity or illness. This deity is regarded as a goblin (apadevata) by the tribals. At one time 'seekal' i. e. Dhayani had influence especially in rural areas - Dhayani or witches were standared and killed. In case of illness in the family, gods and goddesses were diagnosed through meditation. In most cases the influence of a witch appears and she has to be worshiped. According to some people, it is a superstition of the society, but many people think that there is some evidence of truth in reality. The people of Tripura identify 'Buracha' 'thumnairak', 'Vanirak', 'seekal' as deities. They believe that goblin or evil can only harm people. The influence of the culture of the people of Tripura on these occasions is obvious. At present, under the influence of the light of education, the prejudices of the society of the tribes are gradually fading away.

Some reference is being made to the birth reform of the janajatis of Tripura. When the child is born, the message of its arrival is announced to the world through the uludhbani (Movement of tongue). It is customary to give uludhbani nine times when a boy is born and seven times when a girl is born. If a son is born, he defecates for nine days and if a girl is born, she defecates for seven days. On that day, the house is purified by 'lampra' worship in the courtyard of the house and there is a custom of seeing the sun by the child and touching the feet on the ground, this ceremony is called

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‘Abusumani’. On this occasion, all the relatives and friends are invited and a feast is held.

Some references are being made to the marriage customs of the tribes of Tripura the first phase of marriage is ‘Kaksurlaimani’ establishing a connection between the spouses, judging the good and bad etc. If the guardians of the bride and groom like it, then the second phase starts with the ‘Kaksinglaimani’ i. e. goodwill and welfare (marigalacāraṇa) ceremony. In welfare ceremony, according to the opinion of both the bride and groom, the date of marriage, custom and laws, demands etc. are discussed and the date and time of marriage is fixed only which both parties agree.

During the reign of king Radhakishore Manikya of Tripura, some Vaishnava religious people who came to Tripura from East Bengal started to live permanently in Tripura. At that time, strong Bengali Vaishnava Hindus started spreading Vaishnavism in various parts of the state and as a result, some of the people of the state were initiated into Vaishnava religion. In view of those times, Vaishnavism was propagated in Tripura again as two types of Gouriyo and Baul. Gouriyo vashnavites wore white clothes and Baul vashnavites wore colourful clothes. Vaishnavism, like other religions has certain restrictions especially in terms of food abstinence, i. e. vashnavite followers have to eat vegetarian food. Restrictions on this diet cause problems in preaching when it is said that everything except meat is allowed.

It is noted that during the reign of Birbikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, when Ratan - moni Reang rebelled against the feudal system, the king's armed forces arrested three thousand Reang subjects and brought them to Agartala. Later they were initiated to Vaishnavism. Later, however, they were released.

In the past there was no religious guru among the people of the state. Once upon a time a Hindu religious guru named ‘Karnaguru’ appeared in the state. He travelled around the tribal areas of the state to preach Hinduism and initiate Hinduism to the Tribals. As a result, some of the tribes accepted the discipleship of Karnaguru. After Karnaguru's death, his influence began to fade.

In Tripura since 1960 the dharma of anukul Chandra started to be preached and initiated. At present, it is known that a section of the state's population has seen a significant increase in initiation and initiation of favourable Anukul Chandra. At present, temples of Tagore have been built in various tribal areas of the state. For example, Ampura in Khowai sub - Division, Jampui Hill in undivided North Tripura, Bishramganj, Hejamara and various parts of South Tripura and Gomoti district. When asked what is the reason for Tagore's initiation, they replied that there is reality and science based logic in Tagore's religion. Tagore's numerous sayings include save, grow, healthy living, orderly ways to control oneself and the right way to build a better society and state etc.

A tribal from Tripura, religious reformer and social worker became undistinguished Sri Sri Shantikali Maharaj. He is being discussed briefly. Sri Sri Shantikali Maharaj was born

on 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1960 in Phulchari village of Manu Bazar area of Sabroom Sub - Division. His father's name is Dhananjay Tripura and mother's name is Khanjana Devi. His childhood name was Shanti Tripura, later he came to be known as Shantikali Maharaj. Shantikali Maharaj's opinion is that when the society starts to forget its traditions, culture, history rituals then the society begins to deteriorate. No country or state can be developed or strong without its own culture. God's work is not only worshipping and worshiping God. God's work is to work for the protection of religious and development of society in Kali - yuga. Accordingly, His holiness Shantikali Maharaj has established temples, ashrams, educational centres, hostels, etc. In the remote areas of Tripura for the awakening of Hindu religion and the protection of religion along with the worship of God. Along with the pursuit of God in all those services, education systems and hostels have been built for the students of the weaker sections of the society. At present there are 24 sevashrams in Tripura's rural areas in the name of Shantikali Maharaj. All sections of the society are benefited through sevashrams. They are Tuikuntabari Ashram, Dakshina Kalidebi Temple at Manughat, Tapradum Ashram, Barakanthal ashram, he established a tribal hostel in this ashram. There is an Ashram near chachu Bazar in Sidhai - Mohanpur, an Ashram near Karbook Bazar, an Ashram in Sarbong in Amparpur, there is a hostel for 250 people, there are ashrams and hostels for 150 people in Melagarh, Burakha, Khowai - Panmabil, Rabicharan Choudhurypara, and Kalyanpur in Champahaur, Pramodnagar etc. In 1995, Sri Sri Shantikali Maharaj established a Shiva Temple and Ashram at Hapung Raja Hill in Longtharai.

Shantikali Maharaj has built various residential hostels for the tribal students of remote areas of Tripura. There is a chance to stay, eat and study for free. Hostels are being constructed at Kowaifang, Toibandal, Jirania, Dhalai etc. under the inspiration of His Majesty. Currently, more than 1500 students are getting education in these hostels. He died on August 27, 2000, after being shot by militants. Sri Sri Shantikali Maharaj was defender of religion, culture, art and tradition and a social worker. Currently, the one who replaced him as Shantikali Maharaj is known as Chitta Maharaj and is a privileged disciple of Shantikali. Chitta Maharaj succeeded him as per the earlier instructions of Shantikali Maharaj. Chitta Maharaj is very intelligent and with the help of his intelligence and the blessings of Shantikali he is carrying forward his unfinished work at a fast pace and the influence of Shantikali among the tribes is growing steadily.

During the reign of Maharaja Birbikram Kishore Manikya, Christian missionaries Church was built in Maryamnagar and A. D. Nagar areas. It is believed that the influence of Christianity in Tripura started from 1940s. There is no evidence that there were Christians among the people of the king before that. The preachers of the Christian religion began to preach Christianity by visiting the remote tribal areas of the state. The weapons of their propaganda are the words of the Bible advice, instructions and ideals etc. They tried to explain these in very simple terms. The Christian preachers went to different areas of Tripura first to explain the basics of Christianity to educated and uneducated people and in this way they were able to attract the tribals to

Christianity. Along with preaching Christianity, he also did social service work. To serve the people of the village, he used to carry medicines for various diseases and also provided medical services.

Along with propagating the religion, he established private schools in various villages for education through English medium. He used to highlight the merits of English medium education system to the tribal. People and the schools were run in a very ordinary manner. They said in the discussion that the people of Tripura's neighbouring states like Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland have been able to become educated because of the English medium education system, even now Mizoram has been recognized as the second state in the nation with the literacy rate.

In today's internet, computer or technology era, education system through English medium is absolutely necessary to be successful in competition. As a result of which the present state government and the central government are emphasizing on the education system through English medium. Many tribal students of the state have studied in different English medium schools. And colleges and are educated in higher education and are working in high positions in various departments of the state administration.

If the tribals of the state accept Christianity, they get special privileges in schools, colleges and hospitals etc. run by Christian missionaries. Also, the social system of Christianity is very simple and easy and can be accomplished through mutual help, such as marriage, supernatural activities etc. They believe that the influence of orthodoxy in Christianity is comparatively less. All these things are the main reasons why the tribal people of Tripura are attached to Christianity.

A large section of tribals in the state resented the bigotry of Hinduism. According to Hindu religion, there is a provision to perform funeral ceremony (shraddha) on death of mother, father or relative. Funeral ceremony requires a lot of money. In order to raise money, land is sold or mortgaged, and the debt is finally paid off. It is said to be a reason for being attracted to Christianity.

The "Reang Rebellion" is a notable event during the reign of Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya. The hero of the rebellion was Ratan Mani Reang. This rebellion developed into a somewhat religious and social movement. Hindu tribes gather to take holy bath at 'Tirthamukh' in Amarpur during Paush Sangkranti. At that time, some of the tribes buried the bones of their death relatives in the Gomati river and prayed for their souls. On this occasion, some Bengali Brahmins living in the state of Tripura who came from East Bengal (not all) at that time taught mantras to the tribes and started earning a lot of money. Ratanmani noticed that the Bengali Brahmins were oppressing the tribes in the name of teaching mantras, then with the help of choudhury, Ratanmani chased away the Brahmins and started teaching mantras in Kakborak language.

At present the tribes of Tripura mainly follow three types of religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism. Most of the Chakmas and Mogs of Tripura are Buddhist. The

constitution of India recognizes the right of a citizen of a secular state to adopt any religion, so there is no place to oppose religion despite differences in religion. The cultural heritage of Tripura is very classy and it is a very important research topic for researcher. The main basis of this cultural richness of Tripura is the unity between the various tribal communities and the diversity of other communities. This study basically emphasizes the fact that these above mentioned traditions interact with each other to determine the social and cultural development of Tripura.

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