

Folk Literature of Bangladeshi Ethnic People: A Study on Manipuri, Chakma, and Tripura Tribes



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ABSTRACT: The ethnic groups referred to as the indigenous people live mostly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet Division, Rajshahi Division, and Meymensingh Division. They have their own style of living, culture, religion, literature, agricultural system, etc. These ethnic groups of people are introduced based on their different types of folk literature, which also helps them to rise to the apex of their literary status. In terms of ethnic culture, the indigenous people have their own matriarchal patterns, which prevail in most of the tribal groups. Most of the ethnic groups are disadvantaged. The most distinct feature of these people is that they have their own folk literature, cultural heritage, and legacy. This study aims to initiate both the folk literature and culture of major ethnic groups in Bangladesh, particularly Manipuri, Chakma, and Tripura. (Key Words: Folklore, Ethnic people, Dance, Tribal group, Language, Culture, Literature)

INTRODUCTION

Literature means any collection of written work, and it is used more narrowly for writings mainly considered to be art forms, especially prose, fiction, drama, and poetry.

Nevertheless, folk literature, or the lore (old knowledge and beliefs) of non literate civilizations, is passed down orally and includes the same genres as written literature: songs, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs, riddles, legends, etc. Furthermore, it is impossible to discuss any general advancements or changes in folk literature in detail. Every community, regardless of size, has interpreted their folk literature in a unique way. As traditions are passed down from person to person and are influenced by a variety of social and physical factors that might have an unconscious or conscious impact, as well as the ability or lack thereof of those who transmit them, Oral literature, a large portion of which has been transcribed, has been included in the term in recent centuries. It also includes works in various non-fiction genres, such as autobiographies, diaries, memoirs, letters, and essays. Ethnic people in Bangladesh have tremendous literary activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF POETRY

Modern Manipuri poetries are divided into two groups: a) the poetry of Dr. Kamal and his contemporaries, representing the early phase, and b) the poetry of more 'Modern' and younger poets, representing the 'Zeitgeist' of the contemporary world picture. The two groups are different in their outlook, style, and technique. While in the poetry of the elder group, a lyrical outburst and unstinted love of Manipuri after an eclipse of many years are the predominant strains, like the twittering of birds at an early dawn, the new poets become more critical and conscious of the declining faith and growing fear in harmony with the major trends in life and literature of this age.

Among many other themes, Kh. Chaoba's Thainagi Leirang includes poems that are mostly inspired by the magnificent city of Manipur. Anganghal Singh wrote Khamba Thoibi Sheirang.

Among the Chakma poets, Shivacharan is the one whose poems were discovered first. The title of a group of seven poems composed by him is 'Gojhen Lama', which is a hymn to 'Gojhen'. However, each of Shivacharan's poems is called 'Lama.' The 'Lama' can also be called a religious poem. He was a saint, along with a poet of the eighteenth century. Shivacharan was born in Mountain Narai, not far from Kaptai. After Shivacharan, a book of poems entitled *Alosi Kabita was published in 1930 by Prabodh Chandra Chakma*, alias 'Feeringchand' in 1930. The book gained popularity because of 'Alosi Milar Katha', the poem of the lazy girl included in the book. In the subsequent period, a magazine, the title of which was given 'Goirika' by the universal poet Rabindranath Tagore, had been irregularly published in these regions from 1936 to 1951 under the auspices of Queen Binita Ray (Chakma, 2016).

The literature and culture of the Tripuras are extremely rich. Some of their ancient poetry books are: a) The Ganga Taliyo Thanmani (moving towards a low-lying region), b) Gonshai Rajjaya Oa Thanmani (moving towards the province of Gonshai), c)

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Sree Sree Rajmala (composed in rows) are some of their ancient poetry books. Sree Sree Rajmala was composed to record the social culture, battles, and the biographies of the Tripura emperors. The events of this poetry book took place during the reign of the great Tripura king Dhanya Manikya (1490–1520). d) Kuchuk Ha Sikam Kamani (victory of the province of Kuki); e) Langoi Rajano Boomani (punishing the Mekhol king); f) Zijoank Punda Tanna; g) Champak Bijoy (the conquest of Champak); h) Krishnamala: This lengthy poem deals with the biography of the "Tripura great king."

Drama

Palgali, the first Manipuri play, was released in 1905. The evolution of Manipuri drama is linked to the name of seasoned actor, director, and author S. Lalit Singh. In addition, Ch. Mayurdhwa Singh and H. Irabot Singh made important contributions to the Manipuri plays Kege Lamja by Surchand Sarma and Sati Khongnang Thaba by O. Birmannal Singh. Imphal Thoibi, Miss Bottle, Matric Pass, Mani Mamou, Helcina Puba, Indiada Nambo Thaba, Looda Mi Changba, Sita Banabas of A. Minaketa Singh, and Ani Thokna Ching Kahire Thamo of G. C. Tongbra.

The Chakma community has a good source of drama, and through this drama, the total cultural and literary phenomenon of that society is presented. Hilar Production's Jadabol (2018) and Zinath Hakim's Gang Mayre (2019) Aung Rakhine is the director of the Bangladeshi film My Bicycle (Chakma: Mor Thengari). It is the first Chakmalanguage movie in the nation. The Chakmalanguage film industry is centered in Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. It was previously known as Chakma film and is now commonly referred to as Chakwood.

On July 19, 2005, Satarupa Sanyal's Chakma film Tanyabi Firti (Tanyabi's Lake) was released. (Lake Tanyabi, 2005) The first video film to be shown in a cinema for profit is

Tanyabi's Lake. The Chakma film industry grew as the creation of video films accelerated, and currently 3–10 films are produced annually.

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The Tripuras are very rich in their drama which is the reflection of their social and cultural life. Bengali Yatra (Jatra) performers introduced drama to the Kokborok-speaking populace. Drama was first presented and performed in Tripura by the rulers of Independent Tripura. Although yatra (jatra) presentations were initially restricted to the Royal Compound, over time they spread outside of it and more and more people started to participate and enjoy it. The Kokborok Sahitya Sabha premiered Nanda Kumar Debbarma's composition "Nobar Domsani Kothoma" in 1983. In 1988, they initiated the Kokborok Drama Festival, which introduced numerous ensembles and gifted performers to the public. In India, a few of the groups have received national awards. In 1989, Kokborok Sahitya Sabha also performed Nanda Kumar Debbarma's drama "Kwplai" in Tezpur, Assam. Another theater company, "Lampra," debuted with "Chamari Ompa," who was the most beautiful, in the 1990s. With the amazing production "Chethuang," which was based on a well-known Kokborok folktale (Kokborok Drama, by Nanda Kumar Debbarma, "Tui" Magazine, Tribal Research Institute, Agartala), Lampra took home the first place in the Yatra Utsav 1995.

The Bangladeshi Manipuri community is famous for its world-class dance. They have different types of dance that charm all classes of people. These are: Laiharaoba dance, Leima Jagoi, Leisham Jagoi, Rasa dance, Notapala Kirtans, Sansenba, Khubak Isei, and folk dances. Among these dances, the first one (the Laiharaoba Dance) is remarkable because Nongpokningthou alias siba one day went to the western hills of Manipur, where he saw Panthoibe alias Durga doing shifting cultivation with her parents and others. At first sight, they fell in love with each other. But Panthoibi was married to one Khaba, but he would not go near her as he saw her as very fearful and ugly. Being unable to bear the pang of separation, she eloped to Nongpokningthou, and they remained husband and wife. After their union, they staged a performance based mainly on the events that took place before their union, beginning with the creation of the world, etc., with all the gods and goddesses taking part, which is now called Laiharaoba. In past times, the upper-class Chakma people were somewhat conservative. For this reason, unlike other tribal people of Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Chakma women were not seen dancing. Thus, no dance of the present day was noticed among the Chakmas in the past. The Chakma dances of today started only three decades ago. One of the two mentionable dances is Jhum-Dance, and another is Biju-Dance. These two dances were created in the 1970s. In that period, a piece of music was composed combining the above-mentioned 'Hil mil abu a Jumat Jai De' written by Sugata Chakma and the song 'Hoi Hoi Hoi Hoi Jumat Jebang' by Ranjit Dewan, and this music was made into jhum-dance by adding poses taken from gestures used in the jhum. At that time, Jharna Chakma (currently Mrs. Jharna Ray) played a pioneering role in creating the Jhum-Dance. Formerly, at the time

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of the fair held during the Biju Festival, the Chakmas used to go around the Buddhist temple 'Mahamuni' at Kadalpur in Rangunia Upazila under the district of Chittagong with the cheer'reing' (e ho ho ho). In imitation of this and with the idea of Ranjit Dewan, Biju-Dance was created.

The musical dance and music are part and parcel of their life and livelihood, rituals and practices. These are considered to be the essential elements in their religious festivals, in Tantrik worship ceremonies and in their social customs. Hence, when a Tripura praises the creator, s/he does so with musical dance and measures. Again, when a Tripura arranges a worship festival in the Tantrik way, s/he does so with dancing, singing and maintaining a musical measure. If a Tripura wants to perform their marriage ceremony according to the custom, s/he has to do it with dancing, singing and in a musical measure. Even the message of welcome of a newly born baby is forecasted through the sound of a conch after its birth.

Music and Folksong

Folk music from the region includes the rhythmic Lai Paraiba eshei, which has lyrics hinting at erotic mysticism, the rural love songs khullang eshei, and pena eshei, which is accompanied by a pena, an instrument made from a bamboo rod and the shell of a gourd or coconut.

Manipuris view the pena, an ancient instrument, as a kind of national symbol.

Their famous singer is Mira Sinha who is a regular singer of Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar whose first solo album 'Prothom Prem Keno Bhola Jayna' released in 2008. It was the famous Chakma painter Chunilal Dewan who wrote a Chakma modern song first. The song was published in the magazine Goirika of Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1946. After that, Salil Ray wrote several Chakma modern songs in the 60s. These songs are available in his unpublished manuscript called Adhunik Chakma Geeti (Modern Chakma Songs). The Chakma song composed by him was first broadcasted in the voice of Mr. Surendra Lal Tripura (who later became the Director of the Institute of Tribal Culture in Rangamati) from the Radio Centre in Chittagong on 16 August 1965.

A significant component of Chakma tribal culture is folk music. It has Ubageet, a kind of romantic love songs. The stories of the G enkhuli songs are historical events. Epic poems like Dhanapati and Radhamon also exist. A drum, a circular piece of iron with a thread wrapped across it that vibrates to make sound, and a buffalo horn bugle are examples of traditional musical instruments.

Tripura is very rich in music. Tripura music has a significant place in Bangladesh culture from time immemorial. Tripura music is divided into five parts on the basis of its features: a) Folk Songs (songs of ordinary people) b) Baul Songs (music sung by a class of unorthodox religious devotees singing devotional songs in a special mode) c) Kabhya Songs (poetry based on deep personal feeling and intended to be sung) d) Kirton Songs (sort of Hindu religious song in glorification of Radha and Krishna) and e) Racier Ghagra (songs of shocks and separation). The Tripura folk songs are usually played in high volume. The principal means of subsistence of this type of songs are love, separation and marriage (Utser Shandhaney Tripura Jati by B.K. Rouja).

Socio-demographic and Cultural Features

This section presents the socio-demographic and cultural features of major three tribes. The word 'culture' refers to the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people. It is also an umbrella term which encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the awareness, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups. (Tylor, 1871).

Manipur's ancient name was Gandharbya Rajya or at times Parbatyarajya. Ancient documents refer to this place as 'tiughloi' or 'Mughlu'. The people of Burma/Myanmar call this land 'KachhiDesh'. Depending on political changes, it was variously known to the people of neighbouring lands as Moghlu to the Ahomias. Mekhali to Ahoms. Magli to the Kachharis, Kagey to the Shans, Kachhi/Kathev/Kashev/Kotev to the Burmese. It is mentioned in Mahabharata that once Manipur was known as 'MekliDesh' (Khokon & Sattar, 2012).

The politics of cultural difference, dictated almost exclusively by the state and its policy of stratifying people as belonging to different cultural 'groups', as well as contestations between rival nationalisms espoused by dominant groups (Adnan, 2008) have created Chakma identity as we know it today (Uddin, 2010). Sometimes, identity has been constructed in collaboration with an elite class within the central power structure, while at other times, identity has been constructed by how others (outsiders) intend to look upon them and describe them. Colonial administrators branded the CHT people as 'hill-men' or 'hill-tribes' (Pahari) while during the Pakistan period, the government referred to them as 'tribal people'. In post-independence Bangladesh, the state referred to them as upajatee (literally 'sub-nation' or 'tribe') – often used pejoratively by Bengalis to denote the Hill people as primitive and backward farmers (Chakma, 2016; Gutman & Pamela, 1976; Maitra, 2002; Talukdar, 1988)

Tripura is the third largest tribal group in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh after Chakmas and Marmas. Tripuris who are now in Bangladesh had their original residence in the Indian state of Tripura. Although many believe, they are in fact the descendents of Bodo group of people, considered as the forefathers of the people of Assam, Burma and Thailand. Tripuris are initially migrated from the Indian state of Tripura to Comilla, Sylhet and Chittagong areas as well as to some other regions like Noakhali, Dhaka, Faridpur and Barisal. In course of time, however, they concentrated largely in the CHT, especially in and around Ramgarh and Khagrachhari accounting for nearly 80% of all Tripuris now living in the CHT area (Maitra, 2002).

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Family Life and Inheritance

The Manipuris live as joint families consisting of husband and wife, parents, children, brothers and sisters and other elders. However, when the children grow up they are married and given due share of the family property to enable them to establish their own families. Since their society is patriarchal, father is the head of the family and in his absence the eldest male member takes his position. Mother's position in the family is also very important. All matters concerning the family are discussed threadbare in presence of all members before taking a decision. In matters of inheritance, the father's property goes to the male children only except when the father gives a portion of it to his daughters as gift. In case the father has no male children, the property goes to his daughters. In a childless family if the husband dies first, the wife becomes the owner of his property for her maintenance for the rest of her life but she cannot sell it except in an emergency (Majid, 2009).

The roughly 150 clans (gojas) that make up Chakmas are further subdivided into subclans

(guttis). Exogamy norms prohibit marriages between members of the same subclan, though this custom is not often followed to the letter. In Chākmā civilization, marriage between adults is customary. Though the desires of sons and daughters are taken into consideration, parents plan marriages. Negotiations result in the fixing of a bride-price.

Buddhist priests conduct the Chumulong, or marriage ritual. If young people elope, the marriage can be formalized on payment of the appropriate fines (Ghosh, 2010; Majid, 2019).

Tripuris do not have a uniform lineage system. In some groups, sons draw their lineage from the father's side, while in some others; daughters draw their lineage from the mother's side. The eldest son of a family can inherit his entire father's property but the other sons/daughters do not get any share at all. However, the right of the eldest son to inherit any property is forfeited if he separates himself from the parent's family when the father is still alive (Majid, 2015).

Marriage and Divorce System

The marital practices of the Manipuris are scrupulously confined to their society. Their sons and daughters run the risk of being declared social outcasts if they establish marital relationship outside the rigid boundaries of castes and clans. Violation of norms is punished severely at family or clan level or at panchayet level. The Manipuris have no written deeds of marriages; verbal agreements are enough. Although Hindu laws regulate the lives of the Manipuris, they also follow the social practice of taking more than one wife, going for a divorce or marrying a widow. This is also justifiable (Sattar, 2012).

Polygamous marriages are permissible among the Chakma, although they are less common today than in the past. Parents typically organize marriages, although prospective couples' ideas are taken into account. When a boy and girl decide they want to get married because they love each other, their parents typically agree as long as the marriage laws permit it. The exogamy laws of Chakma prohibit marriages between members of the same gutti (or gusthi).

A gutti is a patrilineage whose members have historically traced their ancestry back seven generations to a common ancestor (Dewan, 1969).

Tripuris follow a custom of arranged marriage, which is traditionally not allowed within one's own group. There is no bar in marrying outside the tribe. The father of the bridegroom is to pay the expenses for the bride's dress and ornaments. The dowry system practically does not exist in Tripura society but feasts claim a large amount of expenses. Before marriage, the bridegroom takes up abode in the bride's home for two years and becomes a member of his family (Majid, 2015).

Education and Employment

The Manipuris of Bangladesh may be said to be advancing in education. Their expectations are quite high in respect of obtaining higher educational degrees at home and abroad. The Manipuris today are found to be engaged in various jobs and enterprises. Many of them can be seen as high government officials, professors, judges, magistrates, advocates, doctors, engineers and teachers. Some of them have found employment in the armed forces, fire services, BGB, police and other services and professions. They are also benefiting from the reservation of quota in services for disadvantaged ethnic communities (Majid, 2009; Sattar, 2012).

As one might anticipate from a non-Muslim minority living in one of Bangladesh's most remote areas, Chākmās have low educational attainment scores.

Although specific numbers for the Chākmās are unavailable, the hill tribes as a whole have a 14.8% literacy rate.

The percentage falls to 7.2% for females. The states of India have much greater rates of literacy.

For example, Mizoram is the second most literate state in India after Kerala, but even here, the percentage of men and women who are Chākmā is just 45.3% and 36.6%, respectively (Majid, 2019).

The mother tongue of the Tripuris is Kok-borok. It had been the state language of Independent Tripura kingdom from 585 to 1949 AD. Kok-borok had lost its state language status as the kingdom of Tripura after 1949. The old status of Kok-borok was restored on 19 January 1979 by the Government of India. Kok-borok is written in Devanagori alphabets. The number of Kok-borok speaking people across India and Bangladesh now (2011) stand at nearly 1.9 million. The ethnic Tripuris living in Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Noakhali, Comilla and Sylhet regions of Bangladesh, speak Kok-borok (Majid, 2015).

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Religious Beliefs and Practices

The Manipuris practice Vaishnavism. In the distant past they used to practice some kind of nature worshiping. But they have been steadfast in their devotion to Lord Vishnu. They are very rigid in their worshipping practices, particularly pujas in the morning, at midday and in the evening. Every village has a temple with statues of deities like Krishna. Radha. Shiv, Vishnu (Chattyyapadhay, 2009).

The Chakmas are formally followers of the Southern, or Theravada, branch of Buddhism.

Sri Lanka is credited with bringing Theravada Buddhism to Southeast Asia; however there seems to have been some intermingling of northern Tantric Buddhism in Burma.

Chakma civilization was influenced by Hinduism during the 19th century due to exposure to it. Likewise, Buddhism in the region has absorbed rather than displaced existing pre-Buddhist beliefs (Majid, 2019).

Tripuris are mainly Hindus but their beliefs and religious practices are different from caste Hindus in many ways. They worship the god Shiva and the goddess Kali and 14 other gods and goddesses. They also believe in a number of evil spirits, incorporeal beings and demons, who have their abode in jungles and who do harm to people by inflicting diseases. Tripuras sacrifice animals and birds in the name of their gods and goddesses. They believe that rivers, lakes and canals were once human beings and but sacrificed their lives and turned into nature bodies to serve mankind (Majid, 2015).

Totems and Taboos

Sacred groves are small patches of land area which cover a certain area of forest or woodland preserving unique flora and fauna and having a very rich biodiversity. They are generally associated with strict socio-cultural and religious practices and social taboos. These inherited social taboos help in the conservation of biodiversity in the sacred grove of Manipur. In each and every sacred grove there must be some plants which are strictly associated with the natural beliefs of the deities resided and protected the grove. Each species has its own uniqueness including the resting place of the deity, an indicator of disaster, savior of the place etc (Sattar, 2012).

Majority portion of the Chakma people (67%) believe in superstitions. They mentioned at least six superstitions which they believe. In this point, to bring the Chakma children out from the beliefs of the superstitions, it is needed to add contents on the superstitions in national primary curriculum of Bangladesh (Majid, 2019). They believe in some other misconceptions specially in getting treatment for diseases (Maitra, 2002).

When a new baby takes birth in a Tripura family, the mother is to observe days of impurity and she is not allowed to cook. After some days of the birth, when the navel is dried, a ceremonial feast is organised to give a name to the new born. Tripuris burn the dead in burning grounds. When the fire is extinguished, the unburned bones are collected from ashes and thrown into the river or a pond (Majid, 2015). These tribal people have also some Socio-Demographic and Cultural Features which are discussed broadly in the main thesis paper.

Legends

One of the things that contributes to the structure of people and the culture they create are legends, which are a form of folk literature that carry over cultural traditions from the past to the present. It is one of the literary genres that develops by giving supernatural qualities to both actual and made-up people, places, and events. These works of literature shape people's social and personal lives by giving the impression that the stories are true and that the people telling them are distinct. They may be classified according to their subjects as:

- a. Legends about historical figures, locations, and occasions
- b. Stories about animals;
- c. Stories about supernatural creatures;
- d. Stories about religious topics.
- e. Stories about flora and trees;
- f. Stories about the environment and natural occurrences

Finds

Bangladeshi ethnic communities have a great source of potentiality in the various fields. Followings are found from this study:

- a. Their literatures are huge creative and effective which enlighten the next literary activities.
- b. Their poetries are based on their ancient history and culture.
- c. They have tremendous dramas and novels which are carrying the identity of their own still now.
- d. They have their own cultural heritage and legacy.
- e. The ethnic people have their matriarchal pattern which prevails in most of the tribal groups.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh is known as a homogeneous country. It is the home of people with distinct diversities of Ethnicity which is as the culture of people in a given geographic region. It includes their language, cultures, religion, beliefs, heritage, and customs. To be a member of an ethnic group is to conform to some or all of those practices. These ethnic communities have a rich fictional legacy, with the first available form of literature being over a thousand years old. Bengali literature developed considerably during the medieval period. The traditional music like classical, modern and folk of Ethnic communities is very popular in the Indian sub-continent. According to language diversification around 41 languages are spoken as counted by Ethnologue (languages of the world). All are living languages. Language is an important indicator and preserver of ethnicity. The Maintenance of Language (LM), therefore, is not just a transfer of literacy skills to the next generation. It is rather a matter of transferring and instilling a love and admiration of one's mother tongue. In the era of globalization, people are exposed to several languages and cultures causing many languages extinct and some of them are living for few centuries.

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