
Historical Perspective of the Cultural Life of Chakmas' In Modern Era.

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ABSTRACT: This paper makes an attempt to study in detail about one of the prominent tribal Chakma communities of North-East India, which has a rich cultural heritage as well as the most significant indigenous life styles. Though the Chakma follows Buddhist religion, oral traditions, folk dances, folk literature and folk cultural performances as a whole. But due to lots of impact of modernization, the socio-cultural, economic opportunities, traditional values, and life-styles of the Chakmas have been transformed from indigenous society of the mainstream of the modernized society.

This paper makes a comparative study of the lives and cultural conditions of the Chakmas from other religious communities. Mostly the Chakmas reside in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar and at the present scenario they have become the Global citizen with all around development in their living standards, educational, facilities, cultural matters, secular outlook and digital awareness. They even enjoy the modern musical songs and rhythms along with their indigenous cultural performances, they attire modern dresses along with their traditional dresses, they have broadened their mental status due to the impact of modernization.

This paper evaluates the impact of modernization on the lives and cultural traditions of the Chakmas as per historical and literary evidences and comes to the conclusions that it is due to the prevalence of the modernization that the Chakmas lead a life of peace, progress and prosperity. In spite of turbulence around the global level, the Chakmas have retained their peaceful co-existence, harmonious atmosphere and brotherhood along with religions communities.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Life, Modernization, Impact, Indigenous, Tradition.

INTRODUCTION

The Chakmas are one of the largest indigenous ethnic communities in South Asia, especially the North-eastern states of India such as: - Tripura, Mizoram, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. Even they are one of the prominent communities of Bangladesh, where they mostly reside in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). As a matter of fact, the transition of their traditional way of life made a significant change in the modern era under the influence of modernization, technological advancement and globalization.

The Chakmas are Tibeto-Burman and are closely related to the tribes in the foothills of the Himalayas. The Chakmas are believed to be originally from Arakan, who later on moved to Bangladesh and in the Indian states of Tripura, Mizoram, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

On the basis of historical facts, this can be said with surety that the Chakmas have lived for centuries in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in comparative isolation. Their way of living was protected by the British, who by an enactment of 1900 prevented non-tribals from acquiring lands in the Hill Tracts. After partition of India in 1947 AD, the Government of East Pakistan sought to settle outsiders in the Chakma homeland.

During the Bangladesh liberation movement and were therefore spared by the Pakistani armed forces. After the emergence of Bangladesh there were renewed attempts to send outsiders to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is estimated that by 1974 AD, about 9600 Muslim refugees from Myanmar (Burma) were rehabilitated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. To counteract the encroachments the Chakmas Formed an armed resistance group which they called 'Shanti Bahini' (Peace Force). It was made up of young militants trained in 'Guerilla Warfare'.

The vast majority of the Chakma are the followers of Theravada Buddhism, a religion that they have been practicing for centuries. As far as their religious practices are concerned, they are very much positive to obey all religion code and principles. Generally, the Buddha temple is established in every Chakma village.

The Chakmas speak in their own language, which is known as 'Chakma' language, which belongs to Indo-Aryan family and possesses its own script known as the 'Chakma Script' or 'Ojhapath'. History is the evidence of this fact that the Chakma language was transmitted orally through folk songs, proverbs, legends and folk tales.

The main livelihood of the Chakmas was farming on settled areas as well as 'Jhuming'. The Chakmas who fully lived on Jhum

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cultivation were leading a migratory life in search of cultivable Jhum land year by year. But, due to the impact of modernization and globalization, the life of the Chakmas. Have transited to a great extent. At present, they have shifted from 'Jhum' cultivation to settled farming and due to modernization, they have adopted modern way of life and the impact of modern education has totally changed their traditional life style.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- 1) The Chakmas of Tripura: - This is a trustworthy source to know the social life of the Chakmas as the author has aptly described all the traditional faiths and beliefs of the Chakma People. Sri Pannalal Majumdar has rightly examined all the facts of the life-history of the Chakmas, but he has not mentioned in detailed about the impact of modernization on the life of the Chakmas.
- 2) Genesis of Chakma Movement in Chittagong Hill Tracts: - This is a book, written by Chandrika Basu Majumder and provides ample knowledge on the reasons of the Chakma movement in Chittagong Hill Tracts and due to their problems, they were forced to migrate to other parts of neighboring areas. But this book is silent on the issues of the historical perspective of modernization of the Chakmas.
- 3) Contemporary Buddhism in Bengal and Tripura: - This is one of the best secondary sources to know the religious condition of the Chakmas. This book throngs ample light on this fact that all Chakma people follow Bhuddhism and in every village they construct the Buddha Temple. Dr. Heinz Bechert has expressed the expansion of Buddhism in Bengal and Tripura by the followers of Buddhist ideology.
- 4) The Chakmas of Tripura: Past and Present: - This research article illustrates all the information related to the historical perspective of the Chakmas from ancient period to the present age. Dr. Pradeep Kumar Deepak has aptly discussed his views about the Chakmas by observing their traditional beliefs and religions life. This research paper does not highlight the impact of modernization on their traditional life.
- 5) Language Revitalization and Indigenous Identity: - This research article has been written by B. Chakma, who has narrated the identity crisis of the Chakmas and the problems of acceptance of their language to common masses. He has described about language revitalization and indigenous identity but does not talk much about the social and economic life of the Chakmas and the impact of modernization on their cultural traditions.

METHODOLOGY

The study undertakes an evaluation of the cultural life of the Chakmas in a broader sense. The main problem of the research paper rotates round the impact of modernization and globalization of modern era on the traditional life and culture of the Chakmas. First of all, the primary source such as – the observation of the Chakmas life in contemporary study was analyzed by oral history of the common people and by visiting the Buddhist temple of the Chakmas.

The literature review related secondary source such as books and research papers written on the life and culture of the Chakmas and their religious, social and economic condition was assessed and the impact of modernization was also studied. Basically, the methodology adopted in the research paper is qualitative.

DISCUSSION

The condition of Chakmas during the Mughal period:

If we study their past history, we are shocked to know that in 1666 AD, Shaista khan, who was then Mughal Governor of Bengal, defeated the Arakanese, conquered Chittagong and renamed it Islamabad. However, in the early days, the Mughal supremacy was confined only in the plain areas of Chittagong and the Chakmas remained practically unaffected. After a few years, when a dispute developed between the Mughal and the Chakmas, the Mughals demanded tribute from the Chakmas for Chittagong.

In 1713 AD, peace was established and soon stable relation developed between the Chakmas and the Mughals; the latter never demanded complete subjugation from the former. The Mughal area still known as “ Sukbilash”. There are still ruins of the royal place and other establishment. Subsequently, the capital was shifted to Rajnagar.

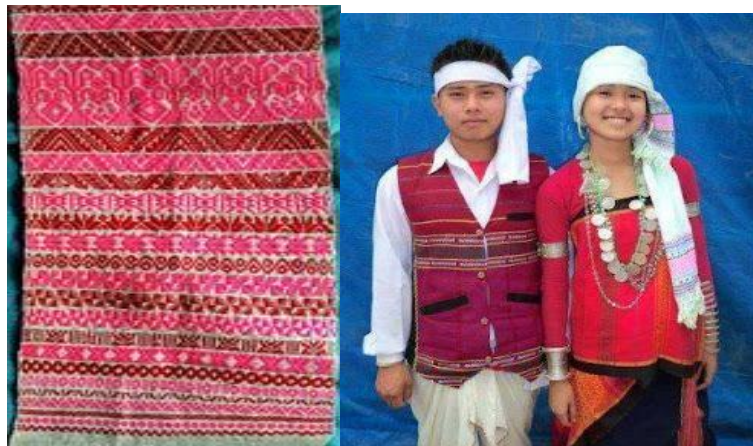
THE CHAKMAS' LIFESTYLE:

- i) **Housing Style:** - The Chakmas' traditional house is called 'Mawnogawr' which is usually 6 feet above from the ground. They use ladder to climb on their house. A mownogawr is constructed with Bamboo and the upper part of the roof is made with thatch. Or as a support used wooden logs. They built their houses near river or on hills. But due to the climatic change, the house could stand for many years. However, many Chakmas' have left those mownogawr house and started living in mud house or in modern buildings.



Mownogawr (House of Chakmas)

ii) **Dress and Ornaments:** - "Traditional attire is a significant part of almost every culture. The Chakma traditional dress for women is called Pion-Haadi, and for men it is called Dhuti and Punjabi(shilum)". Women wear the lower part an ankle-length cloth, which is pinon and hadi while being covered above the waist with a wrapped. The pinon and Haadi are colourfully handwoven using of various colours, first a design begins with an embroider design on a piece of cloth known as Alam. An Alam holds different types of patterns, each design and flord motif(phul) given a specific name and a Symbolic significance, often inspired by nature.



Alam Dress and Ornaments

iii) **Food and Drinks:** -

The Chakmas primarily eat rice as their staple food. Bamboo Shoots are a traditional dish for the Chakma people and they call it Bhaz-churi, shrimp paste, fish paste and dried fish are traditional ingredients of the Chakmas which are used in their daily cooking. The Chakma people mostly eat boiled vegetables and raw vegetables mixed with chili paste. Permanent dried fish and cidol are commonly added to almost all vegetables dishes.

Permanent dried fish and cidol (Indigenous Food)

They employ various traditional methods of cooking include GORAM (cooked slowly in a bamboo internodal tube embers) HEBANG (cooked in banana leaves over red embers) HEBANG is traditionally cooked by wrapping it in banana leaves and placing it over red-hot embers. Which give a distinct smoky flavour.



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BAMBOO GORAM (Indigenous Food)

The Chakmas prepare their traditional rice beer known as HANJI & JOGORAH. These are occasionally subjected to further distillation, sometimes twice (the double – distilled version is called DWO-CHUNI) using traditional equipment and techniques to crease its purity. The consumption of this liquor forms an integral part of social and festive gatherings. The beverage is commonly served during Biju and other special occasions.

HANJI & JOGORAH



1) Modernization on the life and culture of the Chakmas:-

The Chakmas are one of the major tribal communities living mainly in Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh, and also in parts of India specially in Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura.

Traditionally, they lived in simple rural life of based on agriculture, particularly Jhum cultivation, communication, urbanization and modern technology, modernization has brought significant changes in their life culture. Specially, now modernization has brought many changes in the Chakma community, like education system, cultural programs, wedding and modernization has influenced the dress patters, as traditional garments like pinon and Hadi are now often replaced by modern clothes, especially among the younger's generation. The education system and employment opportunities have also brought changes in family structure like joint families are slowly giving way to nuclear ones. Urban migration has led the exposure to new life style.

Overall modernization and development have improved literacy, health and economic status among the Chakmas. However, it is also observed that many traditional aspects of Chakma culture and gradually disappearing. With the growing influenced and modern education, technology and globalization, the younger generation is becoming less connected to their acentral customs and practices.

Changes in Economic Life of the Chakmas:-

Shift from jhum to settled cultivation:

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Earlier, mainly Chakmas depended on jhum cultivation. But now modernization have shifted to wet rice cultivation or cash crops such as ginger, turmeric, vegetables and several others. In past Agriculture formed the economic backbone of the Chakma community with jhum cultivation. Being their primary occupation for generations, in this system a selected hillside forest area is cleared, dried and brunt before cultivating crops such as rice, rice, millet, vegetables, chilly (jummo murish) and sticky rice. Both men and women participate in various stage of cultivation, from land clearing to harvesting. Jhum cultivation represents more them in agriculture practices, it constitutes an integral component of the indigenous identity and cultural heritage of communities such as the Chakma. This practice reflects their close connection to nature and self- sustaining rhythm of their traditional agrarian lifestyle.

Changes in family and social structure of the Chakmas:-

Traditionally, the Chakmas' society was a joint family based, with strong community ties. But somehow modernization impacted the urban migration have led to nuclear families. And inter community marriages are slowly increasing due to urban exposure.

Impact on religion and beliefs: -

The Chakmas' are traditionally Theravada Buddhists, but modernization has influenced religious practices Some young people are becoming less religious or secular, focusing more on education and modern lifestyle. Religious festival like Biju (Chakma new year) are still celebrated but in often more commercial or modernized way.

Dress and lifestyle: -

Traditional Chakma attire, such as Pinon and Haadi mostly worn during festivals or ceremonies. But due to modernization western style clothes have become common specially among youth. Food habits is also changed due to urbanization and availability of new foods. Modernization has brought both positive and negative impacts on the life and culture of Chakmas'. It has improved education, economy and social awareness, but also weakened traditional values and practices.

The Chakma community is one of the major indigenous groups of northeast India. Though it has a rich cultural heritage, there are still many areas where positive changes can be made for development and progress.

Marriage: -

Marriage among the Chakmas represents both a social and religious bond, deeply influenced by Buddhist values of compassion. Traditional marriage ceremony is known as chumulong. It is usually monogamous though polygyny is accepted but rare, the Chakmas followed a distinctive custom of inviting guests to weddings. Representatives of the family could personally visit each household, extending invitations according to a pre-prepared list. However, with the advent of modernization, these traditional practices have gradually disappeared, and invitations are now use of printed wedding invitation cards.

Use of modern tools: -

With the advent of modernization, agriculture practices among the Chakmas have undergone a significant transformation. The introduction of modern technologies such as tractors, chemical fertilizers, and advanced cultivation methods has made agricultural work comparatively easier and more efficient. But it also reduced traditional farming knowledge and indigenous farming techniques that were once central to Chakma culture and ecological balance.

Changes in family and social structure: -

Traditionally, the Chakmas society is a joint family based, with strong community ties. But somehow modernization and urban migration have led to nuclear families, and inter community marriages are slowly increasing due to urban exposure. Women role have also changed; many Chakma women now work outside and the home and participate in social activities.

Impact of Modernization on the Chakmas' dress, food, and lifestyle: -

Traditional Chakma attire, such as pinon and Hadi, is now mostly worn during festivals or ceremonies. But now western- style clothes have become common, especially among youth. Diet patterns have also changed due to urbanization and availability of new foods. Modernization has brought both positive and negative impacts on the life and the culture of the Chakmas. It has improved education, economy and social awareness, but also weakened traditional values and practices.

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Cultural Heritage: Folk Dance and Music of the Chakmas':-

The Chakma community possesses a distinct and vibrant cultural heritage that reflects their history and relationship with nature. Among the most expressive forms of this heritage are folk dance and music, which hold deep social and spiritual significance. The Chakma folk music is known for its soft, melodious rhythms and meaningful lyrics that describes human emotions, the beauty of nature, love, harmony and devotion to Buddha. Traditional musical instruments such as the khenggar (bamboo flute) dhuduk (drum), baaj (cymbal) and thong are used to create the soothing tunes typical of Chakma songs. Popular folk song forms include Bana Geet, and gengkhuli geet. Which are often performed during festivals, wedding and seasonal celebrations. There songs serve as oral records of the community's history and beliefs, helping preserve their language and traditions through generations.

The Chakma folk dance is equally significant and forms an integral part of their festival, especially during Biju, the Chakma new

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year celebration. The dance movement are graceful and rhythmic, symbolizing happiness, fertility and social unity. Both men and women participate dressed in colorful traditions attire such as pinon Hadi, accompanied by rhythmic drumming and melodious songs. The Biju dance holds special importance as it expresses gratitude towards nature and makes the beginning of the agriculture year, and performed the Biju festival at the end of Bengali new year. The Biju festival represents a vibrant manifestation of communal joy and cultural continuity.

The Chakma community, traditionally known for its rich cultural heritage, has undergone noticeable changes due to modernization and socio-economic development. Earlier, the Chakma life was deeply connected with nature, agriculture, and traditional practices such as jhum, folk music and customary laws. So, however with the spread of education, technology and communication, many aspects of their traditional lifestyle have transformed.

Modernization has influenced the dress patterns, as traditional garments like pinon and Hadi are now often replaced by modern clothes, especially among the younger generation. Traditional folk songs and dances. The education system and employment opportunities have also brought changes in family structure – like joint families are slowly giving way to nuclear ones. Urban migration has led to exposure of new life style. Due to modernization, the development can be accessed in the field of literacy, health and economic status among the Chakmas. However, it is also observed that many traditional aspects of Chakma culture are gradually disappearing. With the growing influence of modern education, technology, and globalization, the younger generation is becoming less connected to their customs and practices.

Education and literacy:

Education has increased awareness of rights, gender equality and political participation. In this modern era, it is often seen that the Chakmas are getting better education. However, it has also caused a decline in the use of traditional scripts and oral traditions and recently the Tripura state government has announced that 7th August will be observed as Chakma script and language day every year. However, the Chakma language is being included in the google translation platform to increase digital awareness in preserving the language.

So, we can say that after the arrival of modernization there has been a great improvement in education. Now many Chakmas are employed in various professions and today in this modern generation it is seen that most of the parents are educated and doing jobs. Modernization has brought both positive and negative impacts on the life style of the Chakmas.

CONCLUSION

Thus, on the basis of above facts, we can say it surely that the Chakmas had a very long and most significant historical perspective. The Impact of modernization on the Chakma community is a complex, yet inspiring journey of transformation. Over the years the modernization has brought new pathways of growth - better education, improved infrastructure, diversified occupations and greater access to healthcare and technology. Somehow, due to modernization it impacted Chakmas' cultural life, dress pattern, food habits, marriage and religious condition etc. Even now, their language, script and tradition have not been recognized in colleges or universities. Therefore, it is the urgent need of the hour to give full recognition of their identity. The gradual shift from Jhum cultivation to settled farming reflects both adaption and resilience. However, modernization has also brought challenges, the risk of losing traditional knowledge, the fading of old customs among youth. Yet, it is heartening to see many Chakmas' actively working to preserve their heritage through cultural programs, language initiatives, and community awareness efforts. This shows that modernization cannot erase tradition, instead it can coexist with cultural preservation when a community remains conscious and proud of its roots. Ultimately, their journey reminds us that true development is not just about change, but also about meaningful continuity. As the Chakma community steps into the future, carrying their traditions, values, and identity with them, they stand in a rapidly modernizing world.

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