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Traditional Folk Dances of the Tripuri Community

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Abstract

The folk dances, folk songs, traditional cuisines and traditional attires speak volumes about the culture and heritage of a community. Just like any other communities, the Tiprasas also have their own folk dances. We can learn a lot about a community such as their lifestyle, habits, culture, traditions etc through their folk dances. Lebang Bumani, Hojagiri dance, Tangbiti, Garia and Mamita dance etc are the folk dances of Tripura. Mamita dance depicts the act of cutting the rice grains, bringing those home and sharing the newly harvested rice from the Jhum fields together with family members on a fine chosen day. The dance is performed to celebrate the new harvest. Presently, there are not many who practice Jhum cultivation. On the contrary, in the old days, each and every household was involved in to Jhum cultivation and depended solely on it for their livelihood. Mamita dance is based upon having newly harvested rice together with family. Just when the rice grains ripen, a kind of grasshopper called Lebang feeds on it destroying the crops as a result. In order to prevent these insects from destroying crops, the young boys and girls beat sticks in order to catch these insects which also kind of mimics the sound that these grasshoppers make which further attracts the insects to the sound. This act of beating sticks together while catching Lebang is Lebang Bumani. Garia is one important deity of Tripura. The Garia song is based upon the traditions followed and the prayers offered to the deity. And so, the Garia dance also was crafted or formed, which is performed during the Garia festival celebrating the homecoming of Baba Garia, the deity. In the old days, the Tiprasas used to hunt down animals to consume meat later. Based upon this, the Mosok Sulmani dance, which literally means 'antelope hunting' dance is performed. Jhum cultivation requires various kinds of work to be done such as sowing seeds to growing organic agricultural produce. It starts from choosing land for Jhum fields, burning down the jungle in order to prepare the land for growing crops etc... These processes of working in the

Jhum fields are enacted in to a dance genre known as Tangbiti. While Hojagiri dance is performed during the Hojagiri festival worshipping the deities of wealth and prosperity followed by a grand feast with family get togethers.

The Kokborok speaking community in the state of Tripura are called Tiprasa. The state is surrounded by forests and hilly areas where Jhum cultivation has always been practiced by the indigenous people of the state in order to survive. Our ancestors have been doing this since generations. Vegetables are grown in "Huk" i.e; Jhum fields on hills. Various crops such as rice, sesame, muskmelons, watermelons, sour melons, asian coriander, pigeon peas are usually grown. Cotton also used to be grown in Jhum fields. "Huk" or Jhum cultivation has helped families to survive on their own. In the old days, when people used to go to the Jhum fields to work, they used to sing about various things such as their day to day lives, catching grasshoppers and about leisure and many more. This is how folk dances also emerged in Tripura. Some of them are Mamita, Garia, Hojagiri, Tangbiti, Mosok Sulmani, Lebang Bumani etc. These folk dances were crafted based on the actions done in different situations or during certain rituals in Tripura.

Mamita dance: Just like other cultures, Tiprasas also have a tradition or custom to celebrate new harvest along with family. During the Badro-Ashin season, the rice grains are harvested and stored inside a huge bamboo container called Dula at home. Then choosing a fine day, the Goddesses of good luck and prosperity are worshipped and consume the new harvest with family. The Mamita dance depicts the act of celebrating a new harvest. The dance is performed followed with song and beating drums. The song goes as

"Rajabo kaio osani mwta
Kangal Mamita rio
Rajabo tano misip mothona
Kangal tok kuphur tharo"

Lebang bumani: Another main dance of Tripura is Lebang Bumani. This dance is based upon Jhum cultivation. A kind of grasshopper called Lebang harms agricultural produce growing in

Jhum fields. In order to prevent these insects from harming the crops, young boys and girls beat two sticks together and catch these insects and collect them inside their bamboo baskets. This is enacted in the dance. The beating of sticks mimics the sound of the Lebang. Therefore, the insects get drawn to the sound and are caught to consume later. The lyrics of the song are:

"Tinile tinile nokha pilala
Phaidi bai kotor, phaidi bai kwchar
Phidi bai chikon phaidi
Buphang sakha lebang bakha
Lebang romna phaidi"

Garia dance: Garia dance is yet another main dance of Tripura which is performed during the Garia festival. Garia song is sung during the dance. Baba Garia is worshipped from the start of Hari Buisu till the end of the festival week called Sena. During the Garia festival, young boys and girls of the village dance and feast together while Baba Garia is taken to every household as a symbol of him blessing every home with good luck. This dance is called Garia dance at the beat of drums. The lyrics of the song are:

"phaidi phaidi phaidi
Phaidi phaidi phaidi
Chana hinwi bo phaiya
Nwngna hinwi bo phaiya
Uko dadale kha kwlai himma
Bono naina se phaio"

Mosok sulmani: In the old days, the Tiprasas due to living in hilly areas, used to depend on forests and forest yields. They also used to hunt animals for survival. The Mosok Sulmani dance depicts the act of hunting antelope. Mosok means antelope. This dance shows how people in the old days used to hunt for meat.

Tangbiti: The lifestyle in the old days as compared to the present time has drastically

changed. In the old days, the indigenous people used to first burn the forest and prepare the land for Jhum cultivation on hills. Then they would sow the seeds. Vegetables, sesame, maize etc used to be grown. The tradition to practice Jhum cultivation is enacted in Tangbiti dance. Starting from carefully selecting land for Jhum cultivation to harvesting the agricultural produce, each and every process is enacted and shown in the dance. The lyrics of the song are:

“Khuphang bogola khutwlai lolai

Kubui kokya da swlai.

O bosong maio jalrokba

Angle maio ni bitino twikha

Khwna phung aikhe huk rungwinani

Angle khatiwi tonikha.

Hatal okwra twimaisa kainai

Maio ni biti abo.

Yagra gunthu sarnai

Yaksi masinga phainai”

Hojagiri dance: The Hojagiri dance is based upon worshipping Goddess Laxmi or for the Tiprasas, the deities of goodluck and prosperity, Mailuma and Khuluma. This dance genre is very beautiful and is performed by women and girls standing up on pots balancing lamp on their head and plates on both hands. Hojagiri dance is now not just known in Tripura but also in the international arena.

CONCLUSION

Different kinds of dance forms among the main folk dances of Tripura such as Mamita, Lebang Bumani, Tangbiti, Garia, Hojagiri and Mosok Sulmani were elaborately discussed. Most of our folk culture is based upon Jhum cultivation. We learned here how our indigenous people did Jhum and what kinds of works are involved during the process of Jhum cultivation. We can say that our folk culture has its roots in 'Huk' itself, as it was the sole way for the Tiprasas to survive. However, with advancement in our lives and modernization, Jhum culture has is not much seen nowadays. As a result, our culture is on the verge of being forgotten and lost.

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