



ISSN 2455-7544
www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Daath Voyage : An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English

A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access
Vol.10/No.2 June 2025

Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee



www.daathvoyagejournal.com

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

Vol.10/No.2, June, 2025

Religious Rituals and Culinary Customs: Documenting Indigenous Culture of Tripuri Tribe of North-East India

Abhijit Deb,

Research Scholar,
Faculty of Liberal Arts,
ICFAI University Tripura

&

Dr. Aditya Ghosh,

Assistant Professor,
Faculty of Liberal Arts,
ICFAI University Tripura

Email: abhijitdeb439@gmail.com

Received- 20/05/2025, Revised-06/06/2025, Accepted-11/06/2025, Published-30/06/2025.

Abstract: The native Tripuri community in Northeast India has a vibrant cultural legacy closely connected to nature, spiritual values and historical customs. Their cultural legacy is most clearly manifested through diverse religious celebrations, ceremonies and related food traditions that act as pathways for cultural preservation and community unity. Festivals occupy a crucial role in tribal culture serving religious rituals and social events that strengthen community ties. Grounded in farming rhythms, seasonal variations and reverence for ancestors, these celebrations embody their balanced connection with the environment. The collective enjoyment of food and drink promotes togetherness and strengthens the communal bond within these groups. Memorial banquets in funeral services and wedding celebrations further emphasize the significance of food in fostering community connections. Dance and music, integral to festivals, narrate mythological tales and enhance cultural expression. By documenting the interplay between religious rituals and associated culinary customs, this research highlights the resilience and adaptability of indigenous Tripuri community of North-East India.

Keyword: Rituals, Tribal festivals, Tradition and Culture, Indigenous cuisine, Tripuri tribe, North-East India.

Introduction

Tripura, a small tribal-dominated state, is characterized by high tillas, green valleys, abundant forests, diverse wildlife, fertile land and numerous rivers and streams (159). The tribal communities here preserve their identity through a rich tapestry of festivals, rituals and culinary traditions that reflect a profound bond with nature and ancestral beliefs. These celebrations, linked to agrarian cycles, seasonal changes and ancestral

worship, function as both religious observances and social gatherings. Rituals involve invocations, prayers and offerings to deities believed to govern nature and fortune. As Dr. Tribhuwan (2003) observes, “tribal society tries to secure favor and active help of supernatural powers by propitiation, sacrifices of animals” (1). Communal worships predominate, as “personal worship is not well developed among any section of the tribes” (Singh). Culinary heritage is integral, serving as a cultural marker and medium of bonding. Festival foods – rice, bamboo shoots, fish, pork and indigenous herbs are, as Singh notes, “intimately connected to socio-cultural, spiritual life and health.” (79).

Various scholars have studied different aspects of Indian Tribal community, emphasizing their role in maintaining indigenous identities and sustaining socio-cultural continuity. Christopher Von Furer-Haimedrof’s (1982) provides an in-depth ethnographic study of India’s tribal communities focusing on their socio-economic challenges and cultural transformations. G.S. Ghurye’s (1959) offers a comprehensive examination of India’s indigenous communities, focusing on their historical context, social structures and the challenges they face within the broader Indian society. Virginius Xaxa (1999) challenges traditional sociological and anthropological perspectives that often predict the assimilation of tribes into caste hierarchies or their transformation into present classes. Monimugdha Bhuyan (2015) delves into the rich indigenous knowledge systems of various tribal communities in Northeast India, focusing on their use of medicinal plants for healthcare. Madhushree Das and Suman Das (2014) conducted a study on the income levels, migration pattern, and social integration of the Tripuri community in Tripura. A thorough review of the literature reveals a glaring absence of attention to the culture of the Tripuri tribe’s culture, especially in relation to their festivals, rituals associated with them, traditions and cuisine. This absence necessitates a specific study to examine religious festivals, the importance of rituals and their essential role in preserving the indigenous cultural heritage of the Tripuri tribe.

Hangrai Festival:

Hangrai marks the fruitful and spiritually uplifting period of the year to celebrate communal harmony and growth. In the Gregorian calendar, Pousha month spans December to January, and the final day of Pousha marks the *Hangrai* celebration. Festivals are marked with many ceremonies, one being the immersion of the ancestral remains in sacred rivers which offers liberation spiritually, through transmutation and grants the

lineage's perpetuation. In family settings, preparations for *Hangrai* start several days before and the focus during that time is to centre on the purification and renewal themes. Households engage in purification rituals starting with the scrubbing of their homes, washing of utensils and clothes and beautifying the abode.

An important part of the festival is the *Hangrai Nok* where boys age seven to nineteen build temporary huts from thatch and bamboo by ponds and rivers. The thatched huts serve as a place of gathering where the boys engage in cooking, cultural activities and other festivities. On Hangrai's evening, they partake in communal offerings where they serve several dishes including, meat, fish, rice and eggs. The huts are set on fire during the dawn which symbolizes the transient nature of life, death and the cycle of birth. The boys then perform a ceremonial dive in the water which symbolizes purification. Elders partake in designated ceremonial activities as well. After a ritual bath, they don their freshly laundered clothes and apply natural scents, which symbolizes physical and spiritual refreshing.

Mythological Foundation of the Festival:

According to oral traditions, the first world was an empty and uninhabited grassland landscape devoid of any form of life. As a response to this vacuum, *Sibrai* (Lord Shiva), the supreme god, produced an egg that, with its dramatic hatching similar to a big bang, created the first man, Hangrai. Entering this new and silent world, Hangrai sought refuge in the fragments of his eggshells, filled with loneliness and fear. Seeing this existential imbalance, Sibrai produced a second egg that, after a ten month of incubation, hatched with an even greater explosion, resulting in a spectacular cosmic show. Subrai, a powerful and valiant figure, hatched from this egg, proclaiming him the ancient and supreme ruler of the world. On encountering Hangrai, Subrai declared his precedence over him, a claim that existed for thousands of years.

With the passing of time, death drew closer. Subrai, devoted and loyal, was looking after the elderly and unwell Hangrai. Sibrai coming forth and revealing the secret that Hangrai was the older sibling shattered Subrai's long-held conviction and led to a considerable act of repentance and forgiveness. Stricken with guilt, Subrai sought Hangrai's forgiveness which was extended to him graciously, despite knowing that Hangrai would soon succumb to his terminal illness. The core essence of this mythological story, recounted for ages, portrays the essence of family, humility, remorse, the dignity of ancestors and serves as the backbone for the rituals associated with the festival.

Culinary Traditions and Ritual Foods:

The *Hangrai* festival focuses on food as a form of ritual symbolizing spiritual connection, along with nourishment and abundance. Tripuri food culture offers a variety of dishes made from rice, as well as from fermented drinks and protein rich food. Rice cakes made with jiggery, coconut and sesame are the key food item, made using traditional methods; meat dishes, particularly those with pork, fish and eggs, representing wealth and shared nourishment; and fermented beverages, such as *Bwtwk* and *Chuwarak*, crafted using age-old fermentation practices.

The festival contains the traditional rite of sampling warm cake, symbolizing contentment and the prosperity of the people. The elder people of the village perform a rite of toasting while offering the first sip of the rice wine to the spirits of the ancestors. Sharing a meal associated with the act of celebrating, which goes beyond the need to eat and connects people with their culture and roots. As an integral part of Tripuri culture, Hangrai is a resilient cultural symbol, reaffirming the spiritual and communal values of the Tripuri people in a transforming socio-cultural environment. The feast is not only about flavorful meals but also singing and dancing until twilight, next to the *Hangrai Nok*, which is usually constructed near a pond or a lake (Jamatia).

Garia Puja:

Garia Puja is one of the most significant tribal festivals in Tripura. Lord Garia, revered as the deity of wealth and prosperity, has been worshipped by the Tripuri people since ancient times. The veneration of Garia is intrinsically linked to Jhum cultivation, as agriculture prosperity is believed to be contingent upon the deity's blessings. It is believed that "Garia is called 'Garia raja' that always prefers welfare of his inmates by giving the wealth, peace and children" (710). The word Garia is used to denote a benevolent spirit as the powerful nature deity who gives life, wealth, fertility and strength of war to the Jamatias (Bhattacharjee).

Mythological Account of Garia Puja:

According to historical and mythological narratives, the deity Garia, presently in the custody of the Jamatia clan, was originally obtained from the *Sikam* (Kuki) tribe during the Battle of *Thanangsi* in the reign of King Dhanya Manikya. A widely accepted belief posits that Lord Garia is a manifestation of Lord Shiva, embodying the diverse attribute of strength, prosperity and spiritual energy. The worship of Lord Garia commences on the first day of the Tripuri New Year and extends for seven days. Devotees seek divine

blessings for vitality, prosperity, agricultural abundance, marital harmony, offspring, protection from adversaries, eradication of disease and overall well-being. Lord Garia is reverentially addressed as Baba Garia and the festival is celebrated during the month of Chaitra (March - April).

The contemporary representation of Lord Garia's idol comprises a bamboo pole adorned with a golden head; a form rooted in historical legend. It is believed that during the Battle of *Tanangsi*, the idol of Lord Garia was fragmented into two parts – the head remained with the Jamatia clan, while the body was retained by the *Sikam* (Kuki) tribe. Consequently, in the present-day festival, the bamboo pole symbolizes the deity's body, which is elaborately decorated with garlands and a traditional Tripuri *risha* (handwoven scarf).

Ritualistic Observances and Traditional Customs:

The ritualistic proceedings of Garia Puja are conducted by a designated priest (*Ochai*). A pre-festival ritual involves a ceremonial procession, during which members of the tribe, along with the priest, carry the bamboo-pole image of Garia across various villages. This journey, which can extend across multiple districts, is regarded as a spiritual pilgrimage. Participants observe a strict fast and walk barefoot until they reach the designated venue for the festival. For the construction of the symbolical representation of Garia a group of people consisting of six persons, usually go to the hilly area to collect three green bamboos. At the time of cutting bamboo, they perform a special rite which is called *Patkarna*. Afterwards, the prominent bamboo is given the offerings and it is taken by a single stroke of the *takkal* controlling breath devotionally by one of the cutters. (Bhattacharjee). In villages, a green bamboo-pole which is the representation of Lord Garia is offered prayer. Villagers gather at the house of the headman to seek blessings, offering eggs and sweets as tokens of devotion. Following the completion of the rituals, the festival turn into celebratory performances, featuring the traditional dance form known as Garia *Mwsamung*.

Culinary Traditions of Garia Puja:

Some of the most notable delicacies associated with Garia Puja include:

- *Awang* – A sweet delicacy made from sticky rice, often offered to the deity alongside eggs and poultry.
- *Gudok* – A traditional fermented fish dish, often prepared with vegetables, spices and rice.
- *Muya Bai Wahan* – A signature bamboo shoot curry, typically cooked with pork or other meats.
- *Wahan Mosdeng* – A spicy pork dish, seasoned with chili, onions and local herbs.

- *Chakhwi* – A mixed vegetable stew prepared with lentils, potatoes and bamboo shoots.
- *Chuwarak* – A traditional rice beer that is ritually offered to Lord Garia and later consumed by community members.

During the festival, sacrificial offerings of poultry (hens and cocks) are made to the deity, after which the meat is prepared into various dishes and shared among villagers as *Prasad* (sacred food).

Kharchi Puja:

Kharchi Puja is dedicated to the Fourteen Deities- *Chaturdasha Devta*- the dynastic gods of the Tripuri rulers. Among the fourteen head-images, the thirteen are made of brass while one is made of silver (Bhattacharjee). The festival is observed annually on the eighth day of the new moon in the month of *Shravan* or *Shuklashthami*. The primary objective of Kharchi Puja is the purification of sins and seeking divine blessings for the prosperity and well-being of the people and the kingdom.

Ritualistic Observances and Traditional Customs:

The festival lasts for seven days and the rituals are exclusively performed by priests, specifically the *Chantai* and his attendants. Kharchi Puja is performed fifteen days after the conclusion of *Ama Peechi* (*Ambu Vachi*). According to the oral mythological legend, this period is considered auspicious occasion thereby regarded as a state of ritual impurity. It is a seven-day festival and its first day is marked by a significant ritual. The most important rituals include:

- **Sacred Bathing Ceremony:** On the first day, the idols of the Fourteen Gods, which consist of only their heads, are carried by the *Chantai* priests to the nearby river (*Sidra*) for a realistic bath.
- **Return to the Temple:** After bathing, the deities are adorned with flowers, decorated with vermillion (*sindoor*) on their foreheads and garlanded. They are then brought back to the temple for worship.
- **Animal Sacrifice and Offerings:** Devotees offer goats, buffaloes, sweets and other items as part of the ritualistic offerings. The traditional religious beliefs and customs of which the most interesting seems to have been the sacrifice of animal and egg to the beloved deities (Bhattacharjee).
- **Folk Performances and Cultural Programs:** Over time, the festival has incorporated various cultural performances, including traditional dances, music and community feasts.

Mythological Origin of Kharchi Puja:

According to the *Rajmala* (the royal chronicle of Tripura), the worship of the Fourteen Gods dates back to King Tripur, a powerful ruler who ascended the throne after his father, Daitya, passed away. King Tripur was known for his unparalleled military conquest, defeating neighboring kingdoms and expanding his dominion. However, his pride and arrogance led him to forbid his subjects from worshipping any gods other than himself as “Tripur was extremely inimical and crude” (Bhattacharjee). As his tyranny grew unbearable, the people of Tripura prayed to Lord Shiva for relief. In response, Lord Shiva intervened and killed King Tripur, liberating the people from his oppression. However, after the king’s death, the kingdom fell into chaos and lawlessness due to the absence of a ruler. The people once again turned to Lord Shiva, seeking guidance. Shiva then instructed King Tripur’s widow Hirabati to re-establish the temple of the Fourteen Gods, worship them daily and conduct Kharchi Puja every year on the eighth lunar day of the Shravan month. He also blessed her with a son, Trilochana, who later become a legendary ruler of Tripura, known as Sibrai or Subrai Raja. It was Trilochana, successor of Tripur who brought the fourteen deities from an island accompanied by the Chantai and Dearai and the worship of the fourteen deities was performed by Trilochana (Bhattacharjee).

The deities worshipped during the Kharchi Puja are unique in that they are represented only by their heads rather than full-bodied idols. The pantheon according to Sri Rajmala includes *Hara, Uma, Hari, Ma, Bani, Kumara, Ganapa, Biddhu, Ka, Abdhi, Ganga, Sekhi, Kama, Himadri (Shiva, Durga, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartikeya, Ganesha, Chandra, Bramha, Samudra, Ganga, Agni, Kaamdeva, Himaavat)*. However, only *Har* (Shiva), *Uma* (Durga) and *Hari* (Vishnu) are venerated daily, while the other fourteen deities receive worship only on this auspicious occasion.

Traditional Cuisine of Kharchi Puja:

Kharchi Puja has a great variety of traditional Tripuri food items, including both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Some of the notable food items cooked during the festival are “*Awang Bangwi*” (Sweet Sticky Rice), which are sweets made of traditional sticky rice, jaggery and coconut, offered as part of rituals; “*Gudok*,” a strong dish made of pork; “*Mui Borok*,” a boiled vegetable dish made with bamboo shoots, herbs and sun-dried fish; “*Wahan Mosdeng*,” a Tripuri-style pork salad made of with green chilies, onions and

indigenous spices and “*Chuak*,” a traditional fermented rice beer being offered during rituals and being enjoyed during festivals.

Conclusion:

The Tripuri enjoy a rich cultural heritage directly correlated with their environment, spiritual beliefs and history. Their food, rituals and festivals are more than celebrations; they are resilient expressions of identity that confirm beliefs, ecological consciousness and respect for ancestral practices. Celebrating gods and observing rituals, such as sacrifices and prayers, demonstrate a profound spiritual relationship with nature, confirming devotion to living with nature and respecting its bounty. Festivals are resilient means of unifying people and preserving culture, offering vibrant spaces for music, dance and communal feasting, which confirm intergenerational relationships and safeguarding oral traditions. The festive foods served on such occasions are also remarkable. In consonance with being sustainable, traditional foods such as rice, bamboo shoots, fish, pork and wild herbs are prepared using traditional means, which symbolize prosperity, fertility and thanksgiving to the gods. Rice-based fermented drinks are significant in religious and social lives, enhancing the cultural significance of food. Preserving these traditions focuses more on conveying enduring lessons about sustainable living, resilience and the interconnectedness of humans and nature than on preserving uniqueness. The Tripuri heritage contributes to the cultural diversity of India while passing on age-old lessons on living together and ecological coexistence.

Work Cited

- Baral, K. C. “Globalization and Tribes of North-East India.” *Indian Folk life*, 2006.
- Bhargava, G., editor. *Encyclopedia of Art and Culture in India: Tripura*. Isha Books, 2008.
- Bhattacharjee, P. *Tribal Pujas and Festivals in Tripura*. Directorate of Tripura State Tribal Research Institute and Museum, 1994.
- Bhuyan, M. “Comparative Study of Ethnomedicine among the Tribes of North East India.” *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, vol. 5, no. 9, 2015, pp. 1–5.
<https://www.isca.me/IJSS/Archive/v4/i2/7.ISCA-IRJSS-2014-284.pdf>.

- Chandrakantha, K. M. "Tribal Marriage System in India: A Sociological Analysis." *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2014, pp. 90–91.
<https://www.ijrar.org/papers/IJRAR19D1295.pdf>.
- Chaudhuri, J. G. *A Political History of Tripura*. Inter-India Publication, 1955.
- Das, S., and M. Das. "Income, Migration and Social Adjustment of the Tribal People in Tripura: A Case Study of the 'Tripuri' Tribe." *Space and Culture, India*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2014, pp. 5–13.
https://spaceandculture.in/index.php/spaceandculture/article/view/60/pdf_14.
- Dasgupta, P. *Tripura: A Land of Ethnicity*. BFC Publications, 2021.
- Debbarma, K. *Tribal Folk Medicine of Tripura*. Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, 1974.
https://trci.tripura.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-09/Tribal_Folk_Medicine_of_Tripura.pdf.
- Debbarma, R. "Tipra Luku Bosongo Hangrai Ter Palaija kmano Rwgwi Kok Kisa." *Adivasi Lives Matter*, 19 Jan. 2022, <https://www.adivasilivesmatter.com/post/hangrai-festival-of-tripura-is-a-time-for-celebrating-the-winter-harvest>.
- Debbarma, S. "Ethnic Diversity and Multicultural Festivals in Tripura: Transcending Socio-Religious Boundaries." *Adivasi Lives Matter*, 7 Mar. 2022, <https://www.adivasilivesmatter.com/post/ethnic-diversity-and-multicultural-festivals-in-tripura-transcending-socio-religious-boundaries>.
- Debbarma, S. "Folk Music and Dances of Tripura: With Special Reference to Tripuri Tribe." *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2017, pp. 159–165.
<https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/7038/703876863031.pdf>.
- Dev Varman, S. B. K. *The Tribes of Tripura: A Dissertation*. Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, 1971.
https://trci.tripura.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-09/TheTribes_of_Tripura_A_Dissertation.pdf.
- Ghosh, N. M. P. "An Outline to the Festivals of the Indigenous 'Tripuri Community' of Tripura." *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science Communication and Technology*, 2024, pp. 710–714. <https://doi.org/10.48175/ijarset-18792>.
- Ghurye, G. S. *The Scheduled Tribes of India*. Popular Prakashan, 1959.

- Haimendorf, Christoph von Fürer. *Tribes of India: The Struggle for Survival*. Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Jamatia, K. “How and Why a Handful of Rice from Each Household Is Essential to Celebrate Tripura’s Garia Puja.” *Adivasi Lives Matter*, 27 Apr. 2022, <https://www.adivasilivesmatter.com/post/how-and-why-a-handful-of-rice-from-each-household-is-essential-to-celebrate-tripura-s-garia-puja>.
- Jamatia, N. “A Festival Where Young People Construct Bamboo Huts Only to Burn Them the Next Day.” *Adivasi Lives Matter*, 14 Jan. 2022, <https://www.adivasilivesmatter.com/post/hangrai-festival-is-celebrated-by-tripuri-people-to-commemorate-harvest-season>.
- Palit, P. K. *History of Religion in Tripura*. Kaveri Books, 2004.
- Saha, S. B. *Tribes of Tripura: A Historical Survey*, 1980.
- Sen, S. *Tribes of Tripura: Description, Ethnology, and Bibliography*. Gyan Books, 1993.
- Sharma, U. *Festival in Indian Society*. Vol. 2, Mittal Publications, 2008.
- Singh, A. K. *Tribal Festivals of Bihar: A Functional Analysis*. Concept Publishing Company, 1982.
- Singh, A., R. K. Singh, and A. K. Sureja. “Cultural Significance and Diversities of Ethnic Foods of Northeast India.” *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2007, pp. 79–94.
- Tribhuwan, R. D., and P. R. Tribhuwan. “An Introduction to Tribal Fairs and Festivals: Theoretical Considerations.” *Tribal Dances of India*, edited by R. D. Tribhuwan and P. R. Tribhuwan, Discovery Publishing House, 2003, pp. 1–20.
- Uchoi, D., et al. “Diversified Traditional Cured Food Products of Certain Indigenous Tribes of Tripura, India.” *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2015, pp. 440–446. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282794773_Diversified_traditional_cured_food_products_of_certain_indigenous_tribes_of_Tripura_India.
- Xaxa, Virginius. “Transformation of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 34, no. 24, 1999, pp. 1457–1465.