

Kharchi Puja In Tripura: A Study With Reference To Festival Of Tripuri Janajati In Northeast India – Its Mythology And Significance

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Abstract: Tripura is popularly “The land of Fourteen Gods and Goddess” i.e., Chaturdasha Devata. The festival is also termed as ‘Kharchi Puja’. It is an indigenous festival of Royal family and is celebrated every year in the month of ‘Shukla Ashtami Tithi of Ashada.’

‘Kharchi’ is typical festival of Royal family of Tripura. Formerly, this was the festival of only Tripuri tribes of royal family but presently it is celebrated irrespective of caste or creed of Tripura’s inhabitants. There are many talking myths behind the origin of the festival and worshipping of fourteen Gods but no historical basis for these stories.

The term Kharchi is derived from the word ‘Khya’ means earth and this festival is celebrated basically to worship the earth. The festival is performed for seven consecutive days in which fourteen Gods and Goddess are worshiped. They are bathed in holy water and flowers and vermillion are offered. Animals and birds like goats and pigeons are sacrificed. Both tribal and non-tribal people join together to celebrate the festival.

Keywords: Kharchi Puja, celebration, Royal family, Sacrifice, Festival, Fourteen Gods & Goddess.

I. INTRODUCTION

‘Kharchi Puja’ is the yearly festival of mainly Tripuri tribes of the Royal family of Tripura. It is celebrated every year in the Eighth Lunar Day of the month of Ashada. The festival continues for seven long days. The festival is celebrated in the ‘Matabari’ temple premises situated at ‘Puran Agartala’ or ‘Old Agartala’ i.e., Khayerpur. The temple was built in 1761 by Manikya Dynasty king – King Krishna Manikya Debbarma. The temple looks very beautiful almost like Buddhist temples. The roofs of the temple looks dome patterned roofs of village huts in Bengal. The dome is surmounted by a stupa-like structure. There is a lake beside the temple and it is not open in afternoon. The visitors can get darshan of the Gods after 8 Am to 12 Noon.

Originally these Fourteen (14) deities were worshipped at the temple of Udaipur. Udaipur was the capital of Tripura Kingdom for a long time. The capital was shifted to Puran Haveli or Old Agartala by the Maharaja Krishna Manikya due

to harassment of Shamsar Gazi. Though capital was again shifted to present Agartala but the fourteen Gods remained in this temple itself. During this auspicious occasion thousands of tribal and non-tribal people gathered to celebrate the festival.

II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

History evidenced that humanity once lived a very primitive state of life. Its interactions were based on instincts as happens. As the word ‘Khya’ reveals earth, the festival is also associated with worshipping ‘mother earth’ and fourteen heads of Gods and Goddess. The earth that supports humanity with every one of her assets. This Puja is also performed to wash out the post menstrual phase of mother earth’s menstruation and also to clean the sins of the human beings.

The fourteen Gods and Goddess are considered as the ‘Kula Devta’ or Clan God of the Tripuri tribes who belongs to

the Royal family. It is believed that these fourteen Gods and Goddess showers prosperity, peace and victory over the enemies to the tribal people. During the celebration many people's belongs to different communities assemble in the courtyard of the temple to celebrate in a festive mood. Songs of union were sung. Thus, the festival also implies that the people of Tripura are united in the bond of fraternity.

III. MYTHOLOGICAL STORIES BEHIND THE FESTIVAL

There are many mythological stories hides behind the origin of the fourteen Gods and Goddess. According to Rajmala, these fourteen Gods were being worshipped by the kings of Tripura since time immemorial. 'King Tripur' was the son of 'King Daitya'. After King Daitya's death 'King Tripur' ascended the throne of Tripura. He was considered the mightiest King among all the Kings of Tripura. But suddenly King Tripur became very much arrogant. He presumed himself the God and asked all his subjects to worship him rather than any other God. All his subjects must worship his duty only. He became cruel, egoistic and overconfident. He started torturing the people of Tripura. The people became intolerant and begged to Lord Shiva, for protection.

The Lord Shiva appeared and killed the King Tripur with his Trishul. But after the death of Tripur a chaos can be observed in whole Tripura. The Kingdom was lawlessness and there were no civil administration. The people of Tripura again begged to Lord Shiva for reprieve from this anarchy. The Lord Shiva appeared before the people of Tripura and told the widow Queen of 'Tripur', Hiravati to establish a temple of Chaturdasha Devata i.e., fourteen Gods and to worship everyday. He also asked the people of Tripura to celebrate Kharchi festival on the Shukla Ashtami of Ashada (i.e., 8th Lunar day of Ashada).

The celebration must continue for seven days from the very day. The Queen built the temple and started worshipping. After that only she was blessed with a son who became the best King of Tripura. The King name was "Trilochana" means three eyes similar to that of Lord Shiva as he was born by the blessing of Lord Shiva. He was also called Subria Raja.

'Trilochana' had two sons, Dripaktiwas and Dakshin. The father-in-law of King Trilochana adopted his elder son Dripaktiwas. He was the King of 'Cachhar'. As he did not have any son to ruled Cachhar after him. The children grew up. After the death of King of Cachhar Dripakti was made the monarch. In Tripura, Trilochana, declared his younger son Dakshin as the heir apparent. After Trilochana's death, Dakshin ascended the throne. When Dripakti learnt about his father's death, he claim the throne saying as the eldest son he was the rightful heir of the throne. He declared war where he defeated Dakshin and took over the Kingdom of Tripura. But Dakshin escaped with the heads of fourteen Gods and set up his kingdom at central Cachhar. Over time descendants of Dakshin started worshipping fourteen Gods and Goddess.

It is said that after the death of Dripakti, his descendants too started worshipping the fourteen deities and soon it became a practice. According to another mythology, after the death of King Tripur, the Queen became very sad and was

praying to Lord Siva for blessings. One day while going to the river for bath she heard a cry from the branches of a banyan tree. She found fourteen deities were crying for help as one buffalo was chasing them. The Queen chased away the buffalo with her 'Risa' as explained by the deities. The Queen was blessed by the deities. The Queen was asked by the God to worship them as her Kula Devta and since then these Fourteen Gods had been worshipped by the Tripuri tribal people of Tripura. Thus, since then the people of Tripura believed that the fourteen deities or Chaturdasha Devata will help them in any difficulties and blessed them with prosperity and well being.

Among these 14 (fourteen) Gods the three of them had been worshipped whole year and the rest were locked in coffer (Sinduk). These Gods and Goddesses were only heads and during the auspicious festival all the heads were taken out and all were worshipped distinctly.

According to the first Lahar 'Shri Rajmala' the names of the fourteen Gods and Goddesses were depicted in shlokas as below:

"Haroma Hari Ma Bani Kumro Ganapa Bidhi
Khabdir Ganga Shikhi Kamo Himadrischa Chaturdasha."
(Rajmalika)

In Kokborok the original names of the 14 Gods were Katar, Katar-ma, Burachha, Mailoma, Khuloma, Subrai Raja, Lampra, Toi Bubagra, Sangrama, Harung Bubagra, Nangkhtai Bubagra, Bachhua Bubagra, Thunirok and Banirok.

Today the Fourteen deities are called Prithvi (Earth), Uma (Parvati), Har (Siva), Hari (Vishnu), Kumar (Kartikeya), Ma (Lakshmi), Bani (Saraswati), Ganesh, Brahma (Creator), Kamadeva (God of Love), Samudra (Ocean God), Ganga, Agni (Fire) and Himalaya (God of Mountains).

All these heads were made of 8 (eight) metals and only Mahadev's head was made of bronze. The worshipping was also made by the royal priest called 'Chantai'. Under him are Naran, Barifang Yakchu and a number of Galims. The duties of all the priests are fixed.

There is half-moon behind every heads. This half-moon is used in the coins, in the throne, in the royal seat, in temples and in old paintings by the Kings of Tripura. The Tripuri people considered them as the clan of Moon and also feel proud by using the symbol of half-moon.

The Kokborok names of the Fourteen Gods have been sanskritised. As the Royal family of Tripura accepted the Brahminic Hindu religion, the inhabitants of Tripura have been giving a holy dip to the Fourteen Gods for the last five hundred years.

IV. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF FOURTEEN GODS AND GODDESS

In the Puranas or other Vedic books, the origin of all the Gods and Goddess are contradictory and conflicting. Neither idol worshipping is found during Vedic Age. It is believed that worshipping of idols was first started among Tripuri's of Tripura. The idols of Chaturdasha Devata are only more than 2000 years old since the time of Subrai Raja. In Vedic Age no image of Vedic God had been discovered till now. Rather

Vedic Aryan did not worshiped the idols. During reign of Kushan Dynasty only first idols worshipping was found. He was Mongoloid in origin. The deity of Tripureshwari Mata is considered oldest in North-East India, 309 years older than Kalighat temple of Kolkata, 356 years older than Dakshineswar temple of Kolkata and 65 years older than Kamakhya temple of Guwahati. Even the idol of Kosba temple of Tripura is older than Kolkata's temples. Thus, worshipping of idol is an older practice among tribes of Tripura. The image below showing the idols of Chaturdasha Devata.



Figure 1: CHATURDASHA DEVATA (FOURTEEN GODS)

LORD 'SHIVA' OR 'HARA'

In the Vedas there is no such word called 'Shiva' as the 'Shiva' has its root in the Kirata or Borok race. Shiva is formed from true words –

Siman means Gyan or knowledge and Kaiba means five, i.e., Si + Ba = Siba > Siva > Sibarai > Sibrai. That means a God who has knowledge of five elements of life, that is earth, fire, water, air and sky. The Shiva is also considered as the creator of life in the world. It is this 'Sibrai' which is converted to Shivai in Sanskrit. 'Shiva' or 'Mahadev' is the supreme God of Tripuri people and first among the fourteen gods. The name of Shiva in Tripuri language is Mutai Kotor. The Tripuri people considered 'Shiva' or Subrai' i.e., 'Mutai' Kotor as the creator of universe and life in the earth in their mythology. Indian mythology also considered Shiva above Vishnu and Brahma.

'Shiva' has many names like Har-Har Mahadev, Bom-Bom, Kirateshwar, Bholenath etc. Similarly, 'Tripureshwar' is another name of 'Shiva' which means "God of Tripura". According to Rajmala the king of Tripura was killed by Shiva whose name was 'Tripur'. So Shiva is also termed as Tripurari.

GODDESS PARVATI OR UMA

The name 'Parvati' had been directly translated from Borok word 'Haichwkma' or the goddess of hills.

According to Tripuri mythology, Parvati lives in the hill and owner of the hills. She worshipped for Shiva in the jungle only. Even today also she is worshipped by the people of jungle. But Hindu Aryans preferred to live in the main land whereas Kirata's or Borok people who are of Mongoloid origin loves to live in jungle and their God and Goddess are

jungle dweller like Parvati and Shiva. Our temple 'Tripurasundari' which is located in Udaipur and also considered as one of 51 Shaktipeethas is also situated in the hill tops. Thus, above all facts Parvati was originally the Goddess of Kirata and later absorbed by main Hindus.

LORD VISHNU OR HARI

Vishnu is an important Hindu God. His number is second in Trinity i.e., Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. He is considered as 'Preserver' and is worshipped in the form of 'Avatars'. Tripuri's believed in 'Trinity' and so, they worship 'Vishnu' who is one among the fourteen (14) deities of Chaturdasha Devata.

GODDESS LAKSHMI OR MA OR KAMALA

In Tripuri Mythology we will find Mailuma Goddess is considered as Goddess of rice and wealth. It had derived from Noksuma, here letter N is replaced with L which is common in Aryan language. So Noksuma > Loksoma > Lokhma > Loksmi.

GODDESS SARASWATI OR BANI

'Saraswati' the only Goddess which is found in the Vedas. In Vedas, Saraswati was mentioned in two meaning one as river and another as Goddess. In Vedas, Saraswati was Goddess of wealth, fruits and well being and not Goddess of learning and intelligence. In present day Saraswati is dressed in white color which is made of cotton. This cotton is derived from Khuluma of 'Tripuri' people 'Khuluma' is Goddess of cotton and learning as she teaches to weave and design the clothes.

Thus, Goddess 'Saraswati' is regarded as 'Khuluma' of Tripuri tribes and is worshipped by them.

GOD KARTIK OR KUMARA

Kartik is the son of Shiv and Durga and the younger brother of Ganesh. We will not find the name of Kartik in Vedas. According to mythology, God Garia has younger brother. His name is God Kalia. He is God of well being. In the olden times this Kalia had been transformed into Kartik which is quite possible.

LORD GANESH OR GOD OF WEALTH

As Ganesha is the son of Shiva and Parvati and both are mongoloid God so he is also considered as mongoloid God. It most likely represents the God Garia of Tripuri people. Ganesha has got another name called Binayak. The Ochai community of Tripura worshipped God Gorai as Binairok. This implies that Garia and Ganesha is similar in the past. The Tripuri people tie a knot at the end of Risa for holding paddy, cotton, flower etc which was misinterpreted as trunk of elephant i.e., Ganesha. These way binairok became binayak and Gorai became Ganesha. Ganesha is considered as God of wealth prosperity and production – Similarly, Garia is also considered in the same meaning.

LORD BRAHMA OR CREATOR

The origins of Brahma is uncertain. The distinct deity of Brahma is evidenced in late Vedas. In Hinduism Brahma is considered as creator God and also the creator of four Vedas each from his mouth. But Brahma is a part of the trimurti i.e., Brahma – Vishnu – Shiva. The image below showing the trinity God – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.



Figure 2: Trinity-Brahma, Vishnu & Mahesh (Shiva)

In present age Brahma is not enjoying popular worship and has lesser importance.

Tripuri tribes are Mongoloid in origins and firm believer of Hindu Gods. As Hindu thinks Brahma as the creator and one among the trinity, so Brahma must be worshipped along with Vishnu and Mahesh. So they kept three of them in a same throne and worship whole year and rest of them are packed. Only during Kharchi festival all the Gods and Goddess are taken out for worshipping.

We all Hindus believed in God who created this world. Each and every components of the world are created by the God. These components of earth are also worshipped by us. The main reason behind this is that we are dependent on nature for our needs.

GODDESS PRITHVI OR EARTH

Tripuris believed that life exists in each and every components of this earth. They started believing in supernatural powers in natural objects which can do both good and evil. They are tree, flowers, leaf, forests, river, mountains, rock, sky, fire, sun, moon, planets etc. That is each and every components of earth are powerful and for the betterment of life the Tripuris started worshipping each and every components of earth.

Goddess Prithvi is the Hindu Goddess of Earth. The Tripura people worship Prithvi or Earth for protection from danger, to compensate sin there by bringing in happiness. After death person are asked to go to the lap of mother earth. She is often requested to cover the dead tenderly. Thus, Goddess Earth is worshipped with great respect.

GODDESS GANGA OR WATER

'Goddess Ganga or River Ganga' is the most sacred river in the Hindu Muthology. She is also called 'Ganga Maiya'. It is believed that only by the touches of Ganga water sins are washed away and salvation is granted to the devotee.

Among Tripuri people three religious cults i.e., Saiva, Sakta and Tantric were very popular. As they belongs to the Kirata people who are Mongoloid in origin the worshipping of female energy and trees, spirits of hills, forests, rivers, streams etc are all parts of the kirata civilization, which spread from Bengal to Arakan. So worshipping water or 'Tui' in Kokborok are all parts of their customs. For them 'tui' or water is a very holy and sacred objects of nature as water is life. Similarly they have included 'Ganga river' or 'Ganga Maiya' among 14 (fourteen) Gods.

GOD SAMUDRA OR OCEAN

The Gods and Goddess of Tripura people are same as that of so called main stream Hinduism. So, worshipping 'Samudra' (Ocean) are all the same and one as worshipping river or water.

GOD AGNI OR FIRE

Tripuri tribes from the very beginning is an agro-based i.e., jhum cultivation. For this Agni or fire is required. Under this system a piece of forest land is cleared by cutting the trees, shrubs, bushes. During the midyear the entire field is set on fire allowing shrubs and bushes to burn. Then they wait for the first shower for ploughing. Thus, both fire and water are required without which they could notes fulfill their demands.

As Agni is originated from the forehead of Brahma and with the creation of Agni came light and with that were created day and night. Thus, Agni is worshipped not only by the Tripuris but also by each people of the Earth.

GOD KAMADEVA OR GOD OF LOVE OR MADAN

'Kamadeva' also known as 'Madan' is a male Hindu deity. He is called 'God of Love'. He was created by 'Lord Shiva' and Goddess Shakti. In South India he is considered as protector of burial grounds. 'Madan' has got most importance in South India by Tamilians. As Tripuri's are of Kirata origin and firm believer of Hindu Gods Kamadeva i.e., God of Love is also worshipped by them.

HIMALAYA (GOD OF MOUNTAINS)

'Himalaya' is considered by Hindus as the sacred mountain range as it is the abode of several God and Goddess. The mountains influence weather and are the sources of rivers. They also effect the economic welfare of agriculturists. Due to their dominating positions, they unite the earth and are perceived as the guardians of the land and animals within their domains. This is the case of entire country. Many Buddhist monastries are built at the peak of Mountains. In Sikkim, Kanchanjunga is worshipped as protector deity.

The chief God of Tripuri tribes are 'Har' and 'Uma' who lives in high hills. Parvati's home is none other than peak of Himalayas. These facts clearly prove that as Tripuri's are of Kirata origin who themselves love to live in the hills and also worshipped hills for protection. So, Tripuri's also love mountain ranges. They lives in the hilly areas of mountain range and worship it for their protection. Thus, Himalaya is

one of the 'Chaturdasha Devata' and are worshipped by the Tripuri people.

V. RITUALS OF KHARCHI PUJA

The rituals of 'Kharchi Puja' started early in the morning at 'Chaturdasha Devata' temple premises. The fourteen 'Gods' and 'Goddess' are worshipped by the royal priest 'Chantai'. Chantai's are Tripuri by birth. They are practicing this rituals for more than 3000 years ago and is continuing till date. Under 'Chantai' there are 'Naran', 'Barifang', 'Yakchu', and a number of 'Galims'. The main duty of the 'Galims' is to immolate the beasts.

On the day of the puja, the fourteen Gods and Goddess are taken out from the temple to the holy river Saidra and given bath with the holy river water. They are then carried back to the temple and placed. The deities are decorated with various flowers and vermilion is put on their foreheads. People offer different types of prasad like fruits, sweets and fowls of goats and buffaloes. Many animals and birds like, Goats and Pigeons are sacrificed during the Puja. Only 'Chantai' and the peoples of the Royal family are allowed to present during the puja ceremony.

The complete rituals are kept as Religious secret. A large fair is also organized on the occasion. People seeks welfare for the society and state in general.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF 'KHARCHI PUJA'

The word 'Kharchi' is derived from the two word 'Khar' and 'Chi'. 'Khar' means sin and 'chi' means clean. Thus, the whole term reveals 'cleaning the Sin'. This festival is celebrated after the 15 days of Ambubachi i.e., worshipping of 'Kamakhya Devi Mata' of Assam. Kamroop Kamakhya Devi in Guwahati is one of the 51 Shakti Peethas of Devi Durga. During Ambubachi festival, it is believed that Mata Kamakhya is having her menstrual phase. At this time digging and ploughing of soil is not allowed. It is noticeable Ambubachi is celebrated by almost all the Hindus of India. After 15 days of Ambubachi the Kharchi Puja Festival is performed. Among Tripuris woman are considered unholy during menstruation. So, Kharchi festival is an auspicious religious function to wash out the post menstrual uncleanliness of earth mothers menstruation.

Hence, it signifies cleansing our earth or to cleansing our sins. If any priests wife is also having menstruation, then also they prohibit the priest from performing any rituals.

VII. CONCLUSION

Thus, 'Kharchi Puja' is one of the most famous festivals of Tripura. The festival is also known as the 'Festival of 14 Gods'. It is a good omen for the benevolent forces; a manifestation of mass eternal desire for happiness and prosperity. There are numerous festivals celebrated in Tripura but the one that possesses the pride of place is the love of fourteen (14) Gods celebrated in July at Agartala.

This is a week-long festival which is held in the sanctuary premises. Although the fourteen Gods are basically Gods of the tribals; their worship has acquired universality. This festival has become a unique instance of the mixed culture of Tripura. A large fair with cultural programmes performed by different communities (both tribes and non-tribes) are organized during this time. For the past several decades successive Tripura Governments have been bearing the expenses of this festival living up to the agreement with the erstwhile royal family of Tripura. To make mela a grand success and attractive various stalls with attractive items are set up. On an average, 10-15 lakh people from different communities gathered from all over the country and neighbouring Bangladesh to celebrate the festival in a festive mood.

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