



Socio-Cultural Life of the Tripuri People: Tradition, Identity, and Change

Saheshna Debbarma

M.A in Kokborok, Aryavert International University, Mail:Saheshnadd@gmail.com

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20099657>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 22-04-2026

Published: 10-05-2026

Keywords:

Custom, Ritual, Heritage, Folklore, Indigenous practices, Ethnic identity, Cultural identity, Community values

ABSTRACT

The Tripuri people, one of the principal indigenous communities of Tripura in Northeast India, possess a rich and multifaceted socio-cultural heritage shaped by historical continuity, ecological adaptation, and community-centered living. This paper examines the social organization, language, religious beliefs, festivals, economic practices, and processes of cultural transformation among the Tripuri community. It explores how traditional institutions coexist with modern influences, resulting in both preservation and adaptation of cultural identity. The study highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge systems and emphasizes the need for cultural preservation amid rapid socio-economic change. By analyzing both continuity and transformation, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of Tripuri socio-cultural dynamics in contemporary contexts.

Introduction:

The northeastern region of India is known for its remarkable ethnic diversity, and among its many indigenous communities, the Tripuri people hold a significant place. Predominantly residing in Tripura, the Tripuris are considered one of the earliest inhabitants of the region. They belong to the broader Tibeto-Burman ethnic and linguistic group and have developed a distinctive socio-cultural identity over centuries.

The cultural fabric of the Tripuri community is deeply rooted in tradition, shaped by their interaction with nature, social institutions, and historical developments. Their language, Kokborok, serves as a vital medium for transmitting oral traditions, folklore, and cultural values across generations. Despite external



influences, the community has maintained a strong sense of identity, expressed through rituals, festivals, and social practices.

However, like many indigenous communities, the Tripuri people are experiencing rapid socio-cultural transformation due to modernization, globalization, education, and political changes. Institutions such as the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council have played a crucial role in promoting development and safeguarding tribal rights. At the same time, these changes have introduced challenges related to cultural preservation and identity.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural life of the Tripuri people, focusing on both traditional practices and contemporary transformations.

Concept Overview:

The socio-cultural life of the Tripuri people reflects a dynamic relationship between **tradition, identity, and change**. It shows how the community preserves its rich heritage while adapting to modern influences.

1. Tradition

Tradition forms the foundation of Tripuri society. It includes customs, beliefs, and practices passed down through generations.

- **Festivals and Rituals:** Garia Puja, Ker Puja, and other community rituals
- **Traditional Economy:** Jhum (shifting) cultivation and agriculture
- **Dress and Ornaments:** Rignai, Risa, and traditional attire
- **Folk Culture:** Songs, dances, musical instruments, and oral traditions
- Tradition helps maintain continuity and connects the present generation with their ancestors.

2. Identity

Identity refers to the distinct cultural characteristics that make the Tripuri people unique.

- **Language:** Kokborok as a marker of ethnic identity
- **Social Structure:** Clan system, kinship, and community life



- **Cultural Values:** Respect for elders, community cooperation, and harmony with nature
- **Ethnic Consciousness:** A sense of belonging and pride in their heritage
- Identity gives the community a sense of unity and distinguishes them from others.

3. Change

Change is an inevitable process influenced by modernization, education, and globalization.

- **Education and Urbanization:** Shift from traditional to modern occupations
- **Cultural Transformation:** Modification of rituals and lifestyle
- **Media and Technology:** Exposure to new ideas and cultures
- **Economic Development:** Reduced dependence on jhum cultivation
- Change ensures survival and development but may also challenge traditional values.

4. Interaction of Tradition, Identity, and Change

The Tripuri socio-cultural life is shaped by the balance between these three elements:

- Tradition preserves the past
- Identity defines the present
- Change shapes the future

Objective of Tripuri Traditional identity:

1. Preservation of Cultural Heritage

One main objective is to protect and preserve traditional customs, rituals, language (Kokborok), dress, and folklore. This helps keep the unique identity of the Tripuri community alive across generations.

2. Promotion of Language and Literature

Maintaining and developing the Kokborok language is central. It includes promoting oral traditions, folk tales, songs, and modern writings to strengthen cultural roots.

3. Protection of Traditional Lifestyle



Tripuri identity aims to preserve traditional ways of living such as **jhum cultivation**, food habits, and indigenous knowledge systems related to nature and environment.

4. Strengthening Social Unity

Traditional identity promotes unity within the community through festivals, rituals, and clan systems. It builds a sense of belonging and collective responsibility.

5. Continuation of Customs and Rituals

Practices like marriage customs, religious beliefs, and festivals (like Garia Puja, Ker Puja) are preserved to maintain continuity of tradition.

6. Cultural Expression through Art and Music

Dance, music, and handicrafts are important parts of identity. These expressions help in passing traditions to younger generations and showcasing culture to others.

7. Adaptation with Modern Society

Another objective is to balance tradition with modern life—keeping cultural roots while adapting to education, technology, and social change.

8. Assertion of Ethnic Identity

Tripuri traditional identity also aims to assert and protect their distinct ethnic identity within the broader Indian society, ensuring respect, recognition, and rights.

Objective of Tripuri traditional identity change:

1. Adaptation to Modern Society

One major objective is to adjust traditional practices to fit modern life—education, urbanization, and new occupations—while keeping core cultural values intact.

2. Preservation with Transformation

Instead of rigidly following old customs, the aim is to preserve important traditions while modifying outdated or impractical ones.

3. Development and Progress



Cultural change helps the community move forward socially and economically, improving living standards without abandoning identity.

4. Wider Cultural Interaction

Interaction with other cultures encourages exchange of ideas, leading to a more inclusive and dynamic identity.

5. Empowerment of Youth

The changing identity aims to make younger generations more aware, confident, and capable of balancing tradition with modern opportunities.

6. Protection from Cultural Loss

By consciously adapting, the community prevents total cultural erosion in the face of globalization and external influences.

7. Promotion of Cultural Identity in New Forms

Traditional identity is expressed in modern ways—through education, media, literature, and cultural programs—so it remains visible and relevant.

8. Social Equality and Reform

Some traditional practices may change to promote equality, education, and human rights within the community.

Historical Background and Ethnic Identity:

The Tripuri people have a long and complex history, often associated with the ancient kingdom of Tripura. Historical narratives suggest that the Tripuri rulers once governed vast territories extending beyond present-day boundaries. The royal lineage and traditional governance systems contributed to shaping the socio-political structure of the community.

Ethnically, the Tripuris are part of the Indo-Mongoloid group, characterized by distinct physical features and cultural practices. Their identity is closely tied to their language, customs, and shared historical experiences. Oral traditions and folklore play an essential role in preserving historical memory and reinforcing group identity.



Social Structure and Organization:

Tripuri society is traditionally organized into clans known as “*Hoda*”. Each clan has its own lineage and identity, and social interactions are governed by strict norms and customs. Clan exogamy is a key feature, meaning individuals are prohibited from marrying within their own clan.

The family structure is predominantly patriarchal, with the eldest male often serving as the head of the household. However, women hold an important position in domestic and cultural life. They are responsible for maintaining traditions, especially in areas such as weaving, food preparation, and ritual practices.

Community life is highly cooperative, with strong emphasis on mutual support and collective decision-making. Traditional village councils often work alongside formal governance institutions like the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council to manage local affairs.

Language and Cultural Expression:

Language plays a central role in the cultural identity of the Tripuri people. Kokborok is not only a means of communication but also a repository of cultural knowledge. It carries oral literature, including myths, legends, songs, and proverbs.

Efforts to preserve and promote Kokborok have gained momentum in recent years, with its inclusion in educational curricula and media. Literary works in Kokborok are increasing, contributing to the revival of cultural pride and identity.

Cultural expression among the Tripuris is also evident in their music, dance, and art. Traditional songs often reflect themes of love, nature, and social values, while dances are performed during festivals and communal gatherings.

Religion and Belief Systems:

The traditional religion of the Tripuri people is deeply rooted in animism and nature worship. They believe in a variety of deities and spirits associated with natural elements such as forests, rivers, and hills.

One of the most important deities is Garia, who is worshipped during the Garia Puja. This festival is associated with agricultural prosperity and is celebrated with elaborate rituals, dances, and offerings.



Over time, external influences have led to the adoption of Hinduism and Christianity among sections of the Tripuri population. This has resulted in a syncretic religious culture, where traditional beliefs coexist with organized religions.

Festivals and Ritual Practices:

Festivals occupy a central place in Tripuri socio-cultural life, reflecting their agricultural calendar and spiritual beliefs. Garia Puja is one of the most significant festivals, celebrated after the sowing season to seek blessings for a good harvest.

Another important festival is *Ker Puja*, which involves rituals for the protection and well-being of the community. These festivals are characterized by communal participation, music, dance, and feasting.

Traditional dances such as the Garia dance and Lebang Boomani dance are integral to these celebrations. They not only serve as forms of entertainment but also reinforce social bonds and cultural identity.

Economic Life and Livelihood:

The traditional economy of the Tripuri people is primarily based on agriculture, particularly *jhum cultivation* or shifting cultivation. This method involves clearing forest land for cultivation and moving to new areas after a few years.

In addition to agriculture, the community engages in fishing, hunting, and gathering forest resources. Handicrafts and weaving are also important economic activities, especially for women. Traditional garments like *Rignai* and *Risa* are woven using indigenous techniques and designs.

With modernization, there has been a gradual shift towards settled agriculture, government employment, and other forms of livelihood. However, traditional practices continue to hold cultural significance.

Dress, Food, and Daily Life:

Traditional attire is an important aspect of Tripuri identity. Women wear *Rignai* (a wrap-around skirt) and *Risa* (a breast cloth), often decorated with intricate patterns. Men traditionally wear garments such as *Rikutu*.

The Tripuri diet is simple and closely linked to their environment. Rice is the staple food, accompanied by fish, meat, and vegetables. Bamboo shoots and fermented foods are commonly used, reflecting indigenous culinary practices.



Daily life is organized around agricultural activities, household responsibilities, and community interactions. Despite modern influences, many traditional practices continue to be observed.

Cultural Change and Modernization:

The Tripuri community is undergoing significant socio-cultural transformation due to factors such as education, urbanization, and globalization. Institutions like the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council have played a key role in promoting development and protecting tribal rights.

Modern education has opened new opportunities for the younger generation, leading to changes in lifestyle and aspirations. At the same time, exposure to global culture has influenced traditional practices, sometimes leading to cultural erosion.

However, there is also a growing awareness about the importance of preserving indigenous culture. Cultural festivals, language promotion, and documentation efforts are helping to sustain Tripuri identity in a changing world.

Challenges and Preservation of Cultural Identity:

Despite efforts to preserve their heritage, the Tripuri people face several challenges, including language decline, loss of traditional knowledge, and socio-economic disparities. Migration and urbanization have further contributed to cultural changes.

Preservation of culture requires a balanced approach that integrates tradition with modernity. Community initiatives, government policies, and academic research play a crucial role in safeguarding cultural heritage.

Organizations such as the Anthropological Survey of India have contributed to documenting tribal cultures, including that of the Tripuris. Continued efforts in education, cultural promotion, and policy support are essential for sustaining their socio-cultural identity.

The socio-cultural life of Tripuri people is deeply rooted in tradition, community values, and a close relationship with nature. The importance of Tripuri socio-cultural practices can be understood in several key ways:

First, it helps preserve identity. The Tripuri people, one of the major indigenous groups of Tripura, maintain their unique identity through language (Kokborok), dress, food habits, and customs. These elements distinguish them from other communities and keep their heritage alive.



Second, it strengthens social unity. Festivals, rituals, and community activities bring people together. Celebrations like Garia Puja and Kharchi Puja promote cooperation, harmony, and collective participation among the people.

Third, it reflects their connection with nature. Traditional practices such as jhum (shifting) cultivation show how Tripuri people depend on and respect natural resources. Their songs, dances, and beliefs often revolve around forests, rivers, and seasons.

Fourth, it preserves traditional knowledge. Indigenous knowledge related to agriculture, medicine, crafts, and environment is passed from one generation to another. This knowledge is valuable not only for the community but also for sustainable development.

Fifth, it enriches cultural diversity. The socio-cultural life of Tripuri people adds to the rich cultural mosaic of India. Their folk dances like Hojagiri, traditional music, and handicrafts attract cultural interest and promote tourism.

Lastly, it provides moral and social values. Respect for elders, community cooperation, and simple living are important values taught through their traditions and customs.

In short, the socio-cultural importance of Tripuri people lies in preserving identity, promoting unity, maintaining harmony with nature, and enriching the broader cultural heritage of society.

Conclusion:

The socio-cultural life of the Tripuri people represents a dynamic interplay between tradition and change. Rooted in a rich historical and cultural heritage, the community has developed a unique identity characterized by strong social bonds, vibrant festivals, and deep connection with nature.

While modernization has introduced new opportunities and challenges, the resilience of Tripura culture lies in its ability to adapt without losing its core values. Language, rituals, and community practices continue to serve as pillars of identity.

Preserving this heritage requires collective efforts from the community, government, and scholars. By promoting cultural awareness and supporting indigenous practices, it is possible to ensure that the socio-cultural legacy of the Tripuri people continues to thrive in the future.



References

- Government of Tripura. (Various Reports on Tribal Welfare and Culture)
- Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. Official Publications
- Chaudhuri, J. B. (1985). *The Tripura Tribes: Socio-Economic and Cultural Life*
- Sen, Sipra. (2004). *Tribes of Tripura*
- Debbarma, S. (2019). *Culture and Heritage of Tripura Tribes*
- Anthropological Survey of India. Tribal Studies Reports
- Bhattacharya, P. (1991). *Tribal Culture of Northeast India*
- Dev Varma, Naresh Chandra edit. *Tripura Adibashi*. 2010. Tripura Darpan, Agartala
- Debbarma, Rabindra Kishore. *Kokborok Luku Hukumu*. 2007. Language Wing, Education Department, TTAADC, Khumulwng, Tripura.
- Debbarma, Radhamadhab. *Dalok Misolok*. 2014. Language Wing, Education Department, TTAADC, Khumulwng, Tripura.