



The Wah Festival of Tripura: A Socio-Cultural Study of the Mog Community

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ABSTRACT

The Wah Festival (Wah Poi) is one of the most significant socio-cultural festivals of the Mog community of Tripura. Deeply rooted in Buddhist religious traditions, the festival is celebrated in connection with the completion of the three-month Vassa (rainy season retreat) observed by Buddhist monks. Beyond its religious importance, the festival serves as a platform for preserving the cultural identity, customs, language, and traditional heritage of the Mog community. People from different parts of Tripura gather to participate in religious ceremonies, cultural performances, traditional dances, and exhibitions of indigenous artefacts. The festival also provides an opportunity for the younger generation to learn about their ancestral traditions and strengthen their cultural identity. This paper examines the historical background, religious significance, rituals, and socio-cultural importance of the Wah Festival based on both primary field data and secondary sources.

Introduction

Tripura is a multicultural state where several indigenous communities have preserved their unique traditions and cultural heritage. Among these communities, the Mog community occupies a distinctive place because of its Buddhist faith, traditional customs, and historical links with the Arakan region of present-day Myanmar. Although the population of the Mog community in Tripura is comparatively small, it has successfully preserved many of its religious and cultural traditions.

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Among the various festivals celebrated by the Mog community, the Wah Festival (Wah Poi) is one of the most important. The festival is closely associated with the Buddhist observance of Vassa, locally known as Barsabas, during which Buddhist monks undertake a three-month period of residence, meditation, and religious discipline. While the festival has a strong religious foundation, it also functions as a major cultural gathering where members of the Mog community come together to celebrate their shared identity and heritage.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to:

1. Examine the historical background and origin of the Wah Festival (Wah Poi) of the Mog community in Tripura.
2. Understand the relationship between the Wah Festival and the Buddhist practice of **Barsabas (Vassa)**.
3. Analyse the religious rituals, customs, and cultural practices associated with the celebration of the Wah Festival.
4. Explore the socio-cultural significance of the Wah Festival in preserving the identity, traditions, and heritage of the Mog community.
5. Examine the role of the Wah Festival in promoting community unity and transmitting indigenous knowledge and cultural values to the younger generation.
6. Identify the contemporary challenges in preserving the Wah Festival and suggest measures for its conservation and promotion.

Review of Literature

The available literature on the Wah Festival (Wah Poi) of the Mog community in Tripura is limited. Ranglong (2025) discusses the cultural identity and traditional institutions of the Mog community but does not provide a detailed analysis of the Wah Festival. The Department of Tourism, Government of Tripura, briefly mentions the festival as an important cultural event of the Mog community. Similarly, Tripura University study materials and History of Tripura: As Reflected in the Manuscripts (2016) provide background information on the Mog community but lack a detailed socio-cultural study of the festival. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this research gap.



Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and qualitative research design and is based on both primary and secondary sources.

Primary data were collected through personal interviews with Ven. Usara Bhikkhu (29 years, Juggachola, Manickchari, Khagrachari, Bangladesh), Mracha Mog (67 years, Salong Mog Para, Silachari, Tripura), Duaiggo Mog (46 years, Salong Mog Para, Silachari, Tripura), Ruisao Mog (41 years, Salong Mog Para, Silachari, Tripura), and Ramrachai Mog (Salong Mog Para, Silachari, Tripura). The interviews focused on the origin, religious significance, rituals, and socio-cultural importance of the Wah Festival.

Secondary data were collected from books, research articles, journals, government publications, and reliable online sources related to the Mog community, Buddhism, and the cultural heritage of Tripura.

Historical Background of the Mog Community

The Mog community is one of the recognised tribal communities of Tripura. Historically, their ancestors migrated from the Arakan region and gradually settled in different parts of present-day Tripura, particularly in the southern districts. They follow Theravāda Buddhism, and Buddhist monasteries (Kyang) play a central role in their religious and social life.

The Mog community is mainly concentrated in the districts of South Tripura, where Buddhist monasteries continue to play an important role in preserving their religious and cultural traditions.

Over the centuries, the Mog community has maintained its own language, customs, religious practices, music, dance, and festivals despite social and cultural changes. Their festivals continue to reflect the close relationship between religion, community life, and indigenous traditions.

Wah Festival and the Barsabas (Vassa) Tradition

The Wah Festival is celebrated in connection with the Buddhist practice of Barsabas (Vassa). Barsabas begins on the full moon day of the Bengali month of Ashar (Āṣāḍha Purnima), when Buddhist monks (Bante or Sangphora) formally undertake the three-month rainy season retreat.

During this period, the monks remain attached to the monastery (Kyang Ma) where they have undertaken their retreat. Although they may leave the monastery during the daytime for necessary religious duties, they return to the same monastery every night. Throughout the three months, the monks devote themselves to meditation, religious discipline, and the preaching of Dhamma to Upasakas and Upasikas.



Barsabas concludes on the full moon day of the Bengali month of Ashwin, known as Prabarana Purnima. The completion of this sacred retreat forms the religious basis of the Wah Festival (Wah Poi). Thus, the festival symbolises spiritual devotion, cultural continuity, and community unity.

Rituals and Celebration

The Wah Festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm by the Mog community throughout Tripura. On the occasion of the festival, devotees visit their respective Buddhist monasteries (Kyang) wearing traditional Mog attire. They carry offerings such as cooked rice (Chhoweng), fruits (Ashie), flowers (Peng), candles, incense, and other items to pay homage to Lord Buddha and seek blessings. The monks conduct religious prayers, chant Buddhist scriptures, and deliver Dhamma sermons for the spiritual well-being of the devotees.

Apart from the religious ceremonies, the festival is marked by a variety of cultural programmes. Traditional folk songs, music, and dances are performed by people of different age groups. Among the most popular performances are the Wah Dance and the Candle Dance, which reflect the artistic heritage and cultural identity of the Mog community. These performances not only entertain the audience but also preserve traditional knowledge and artistic expressions.

In earlier times, one of the unique features of the Wah Festival was the exhibition of traditional household articles, agricultural implements, musical instruments, and other objects used by the Mog people in their daily lives. Such exhibitions enabled the younger generation to understand the lifestyle, occupation, and material culture of their ancestors. Although some of these practices have declined over time, they remain an important part of the collective memory of the community.

Socio-Cultural Significance

The Wah Festival is much more than a religious celebration. It serves as an important institution for preserving the cultural heritage of the Mog community. Every year, people from different parts of Tripura gather at the festival, making it a grand social reunion that strengthens relationships among families, relatives, and friends.

The festival also plays a significant role in transmitting indigenous knowledge from one generation to another. Through traditional songs, dances, language, rituals, and cultural exhibitions, young members of the community become familiar with their ancestral heritage. It encourages them to value their traditions while adapting to the changing social environment.



Another important aspect of the Wah Festival is its contribution to communal harmony. Although it is primarily organised by the Mog community, people from other tribal and non-tribal communities also attend the celebrations. Their participation promotes mutual respect, cultural exchange, and peaceful coexistence among different communities in Tripura.

Challenges and Preservation

Like many indigenous festivals, the Wah Festival faces several contemporary challenges. Modernisation, urbanisation, migration, and changing lifestyles have reduced the participation of some young people in traditional cultural practices. The increasing influence of modern entertainment has also affected the continuity of certain indigenous performances and customs.

To preserve the festival, active participation of the younger generation is essential. Community organisations, Buddhist monasteries, educational institutions, and the Government of Tripura can contribute by documenting oral traditions, organising cultural workshops, encouraging research, and promoting the festival as part of the state's rich cultural heritage. Such initiatives will help safeguard the traditions of the Mog community for future generations.

Conclusion

The Wah Festival (Wah Poi) is one of the most important socio-cultural and religious festivals of the Mog community in Tripura. Rooted in the Buddhist tradition of Vassa, it symbolises spiritual discipline, cultural continuity, and community solidarity. The festival preserves the rich traditions of the Mog people through religious observances, traditional dances, music, cultural exhibitions, and social gatherings. It also serves as an effective medium for passing indigenous knowledge and cultural values to the younger generation.

In the present era of rapid social change, preserving festivals like Wah is essential for protecting the unique cultural identity of the Mog community. With continued community participation, documentation, and institutional support, the Wah Festival will continue to remain a living symbol of the cultural diversity and pluralistic heritage of Tripura.

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