

# Indigenous Culture and Heritage of Tripura

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## Abstract

The study focuses on Tripura's indigenous culture and heritage, aiming to uncover its significance, challenges, and prospects. Through descriptive and exploratory approaches, it delves into various aspects of the region's cultural landscape, drawing data from official reports, speeches, and a range of secondary sources such as books, journals, and websites. The study emphasizes the importance of cultural preservation efforts, calling for collaborative initiatives to ensure that Tripura's indigenous traditions continue to thrive amidst modernization. The study particularly examines the impact of modernization, urbanization, and external influences on traditional practices, highlighting how these dynamics have reshaped the indigenous community's way of life. By analyzing these complex interactions, the study provides valuable insights into both the opportunities and challenges that arise from such transformations. The findings are carefully structured and rigorously analyzed, offering significant conclusions regarding the preservation and revitalization of Tripura's unique customs. The study suggests concrete solutions to help safeguard the rich cultural legacy of Tripura's indigenous communities, ensuring its survival in the face of ongoing societal changes and external pressures.

**Keywords:** Culture, Heritage, Indigenous; Modernization, Tribes, Tripura, Urbanization.

## 1. Introduction

The Northeast region of India is a hub for diverse cultures, religions, and civilizations due to its abundant vegetation, diverse communities, and unique geography. Its unique flora and wildlife, steep hills, and powerful rivers make it a captivating destination. The region comprises eight states and international borders with Myanmar, China, Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The region's enchanting aesthetics and diverse flora and wildlife make it a unique and captivating destination [1]. The local environment and biodiversity have significant effects on human life, and human cultures vary greatly in how they engage with nature. Indigenous refers to something indigenous to a place or its original population. However, due to the constant and massive stream of migrants from neighboring countries, none of the communities in India can claim official "indigenous" status. Human cultural practices and the symbolic systems that bestow meaning and value on them are what is meant by the term "culture" [2].

The small, hilly state of Tripura can be found in the extreme southern region of northeast India. Its land borders include both the international border with Bangladesh and the national borders with Assam and Mizoram, making it a landlocked state [3]. Tripura, India's third-smallest state, is home to 36,71,032 people in a 10,491.69 square kilometers area. Over 19 indigenous or tribal groups, including Bhutia, Bhil, Chakma, Chaimal, Halam, Garo, Khashia, Jamatia, Lepcha, Kuki, Mog, Lushai, Noatia, Munda, Reang, Orang, Tripuri, Santal, Uchai, practice a variety of religions and economic practices, giving them distinctive identities. The state's culture is vibrant because of the wide range of tribal groups who live there. Traditions and customs are passed down from generation to generation within each society. The

Tripura indigenous have been called “children of nature” on occasion. All aspects of the ecosystem are factored into their knowledge and actions. It's one of a kind because it's constructed entirely of natural materials [4].

The paper would explicitly state why readers would want to read it to get a deeper respect for the rich tapestry of human history and legacy, as well as an awareness of the issues faced by Indigenous populations worldwide. The purpose of the study is to educate people about their indigenous traditional culture, which is being lost as a result of the impact of other religions and cultures brought about by industrialization. The fundamental reason for investigating the problem is that if culture and heritage are not reflected, the next generation will forget its culture and traditions. The paper seeks to learn about indigenous peoples' traditional cultures and traditions. It also attempted to determine the impact of the influx of migration on their traditional culture. As a result, this study also covers the many concerns and obstacles they encounter.

The next section examines the literature review, which will analyze the prior study to identify any gaps. Subsequently, the research will establish targets based on the identified gap. In the next section, the study will present the methodology, which will outline the specific procedures used to create the results and discussion. The study will conclude by presenting the outcomes, together with any limitations and implications.

## 2. Review of Literature

Based on the aforementioned succinct introduction, the review of literature section follows the steps for building a deeper understanding based on the nature of the study activity:

- Searched review of the literature
- Selection of selected review of literature

The two steps outlined above are used in the review of literature based on the topic:

Tripura's tribal communities showcase unique artistic expressions, cultural practices, and folklore, primarily oral, passed down through elder guidance, according to study. The study explores the challenges and obstacles indigenous tribes face in preserving their culturally significant arts and traditions, focusing on the Tripura region. Tripura et. al., (2024) highlighted Indigenous communities have utilized tourism to address socio-economic disparities and challenge misconceptions about Indigenous cultures, despite the state government's diverse strategies [5]. Rathour et al. (2023) examined the advantages of repositories concerning the preservation, promotion, and advancement of tribal communities. The researcher also proposed strategies to enhance the accessibility of information about tribal culture and heritage using these repositories [6].

The study conducted by Tripura (2012) [7] examined the educational experiences of indigenous populations, focusing on their ethnic composition, representation of knowledge and culture, and economic constraints. Roy et al., (2011) primarily concentrated on the region of Tripura, while also incorporating select examples from the north-eastern region of India [8]. Tribal communities' unique historical, cultural, and folkloric heritage, transmitted through oral tradition, serves as a reflection of their daily lives and challenges. According to Hetherington et al., (2013) [9], these works of art and culture encompass various themes such as morality, societal guidance and boundaries, ancient legends, fertility, taboos, creation, and fate, as well as destiny.

This study examines indigenous communities' challenges and obstacles in Tripura, focusing on their history and culture, and aiming to understand the perils they face. Palit (2004) went to great lengths on the

many Tripuran rulers over several centuries. Kailash Chandra Singha's "The Rajamala" provides the histories of Tripura kings, who ruled under 184 Mongoloid emperors [10]. The manuscripts Sri Rajamala and Rajaratnakara are the only authentic sources, but historians contest the monarchs' names due to a lack of evidence.

On the other hand, Roy (2016) [11] documented that Tripura was under tribal rule over 5,000 years ago, according to "Tripura Rajmala" and other literature. Nobody is quite sure how or when this Mongoloid kingdom came to be known as Tripura. "Tripura" was referenced for the first time in his currency, which bore the royal epithet according to Palit, (2004) [10]. In addition to the Mongoloid tribes, additional tribal groups have also moved here, mostly before the 13th century AD. The groups include the Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Chinese, Cocase, and Kuki-Chin tribes, as stated by Chakraborty, et. al. (2012) [12]. Roy et al., (2011) found that Folktales, oral stories passed down through generations, offer insights into everyday situations and lifestyles in tribal societies and other forms of art and culture [8]. Themes of morality, societal direction and constraints, fertility, taboos, creation and fate, and destiny may all be found in these many forms of art and culture, or folktales, as also added by Gray & Hetherington (2016) [13].

The Industrial Revolution in the 18th century influenced the tribal people in India, but demographic shifts in Tripura during the India-West Pakistan division led to significant challenges. Saigal, (1978) found that due to outsiders meddling in every part of their society, tribal societies have seen significant socioeconomic and cultural transformation [14]. Bangladeshi migrants displaced tribal populations in Tripura, making them a minority and causing identity dilemmas. In the 1980s, tribal communities demanded an autonomous homeland amid significant conflict. After that, the Indian government moved quickly to address the problems, according to Shubhang, (2012) [15]. Other traditional people have mixed feelings towards them in terms of language, culture, society, and religion Mohanty et al. (2015) [16]. Their long-standing customs are endangered and in need of suitable rebranding.

The literature on Indigenous culture and heritage in Tripura has not extensively explored gender dynamics in cultural activities. This study aims to address this gap by examining the intersection of gender roles, identities, and experiences with Indigenous cultures. It focuses on the contributions of women, the evolution of gender roles, and the influence of external factors on gender dynamics. The study also examines the impact of cultural narratives on gender portrayals, aiming to enhance cultural preservation techniques that cater to the unique needs of various community members.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study primarily focuses on the culture, legacy, and traditions of the indigenous population residing in Tripura. The study employs descriptive methodology to analyze the culture and heritage. The analysis collected data from several sources, such as Statista government publications, as well as public statements made by ambassadors and government officials. In addition to primary sources, secondary sources such as books, reports, journals, and websites were utilized to gather the necessary information for this study. Diverse data has been acquired from a range of sources including government reports, newspapers, journals, and other relevant publications. To the study's aims, the collected data has been organized descriptively and subsequently subjected to analysis and discussion to acquire the findings.

Based on these consequences, there are the following research objectives:

- To investigate the role of Indigenous culture and heritage in Tripura.
- To explore ways to promote and revive indigenous cultural practices and traditions within the communities of Tripura.

- To explore how the processes of modernization, urbanization, and external influences have shaped and reshaped the culture and heritage of indigenous communities in Tripura.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

After a careful review of the information obtained from several sources, this study conducts an in-depth investigation and discussion based on the predetermined objectives.

##### *The role of Indigenous culture and heritage in Tripura*

Northern India's Tripura state is renowned for its rich indigenous history and culture. The state is home to nineteen distinct tribal communities, each having its distinct music, dance, arts, customs, food, and traditions, such as the Tripuris, Mundas, and Kokborok. The cultural richness and variety of Tripura are greatly enhanced by the many indigenous tribes, including the Mundas, Tripuris, Kokborok, and others [6].

According to Barma and Mitra (2015) [17], Tripura's unique cultural history is enriched by its hilly landscape and natural beauty, and its diverse ethnolinguistic groups make it a fascinating destination. The state is known for its vibrant handicrafts, including pottery, bamboo and cane crafts, and handloom weaving. Handloom weaving is also popular, and the state produces a variety of textiles like cotton, silk, and wool [18]. Tripura's rich cultural legacy is shaped by its diverse religious and tribal traditions, influenced by nearby states like Assam, Manipur, and Mizoram [7].

Tripura is also renowned for its vibrant festivals and festivities, which are a reflection of the state's rich cultural past. Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Diwali, Saraswati Puja, and Holi are a few of the important holidays observed in Tripura. Several tribal festivals are also observed in the state, including Wangala, Ker, and Garia Puja [19]. Vibrant processions, traditional music, and dance performances portray these festivities. An essential component of Tripura's cultural legacy is music and dance. Folk music and dance are deeply ingrained in the state's culture, and they are a reflection of the diverse tribal groups who inhabit the area [20].

Hojagiri, Goria, Lebang Boomani, and Bizu are a few of the well-known Tripuran traditional dances [21]. Tripura's fame stems from its dance performances, beautiful handicrafts, and hand-woven textiles like shawls and saris. The state's cuisine combines flavors and ingredients, with non-vegetarian staples like bamboo shoots, seafood, and meat. Famous Tripuran delicacies include Chokwi, Mui Borok, Wahan Mosdeng, and Chakui Pitha [22]. The Bengali community, Tripura's largest non-indigenous minority, significantly influences the state's culture and architecture. The state boasts numerous temples, palaces, and structures, including the Ujjayanta Palace, built by Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya in the early 20th century [5]. The Tripura government is promoting the state's cultural heritage through museums, cultural institutions, and festivals, while also promoting its cultural and ecological assets through the Tripura Tourism Department's aggressive push as a travel destination.

##### *The ways to promote and revive Indigenous cultural practices and traditions within communities of Tripura*

To revitalize Tripura's indigenous cultural practices and traditions, various initiatives should be implemented, including celebrating festivals like Garia Puja, practicing ancient dances like Jhum, and preserving indigenous musical instruments like Sumui, Sarinda, and Chongpreng [23]. In addition, maintaining an ecologically conscious and clean environment along with recording and disseminating myths, tales, songs, and folklore shaped by the state's culture can help bring back and support indigenous cultural practices in Tripura's communities. These initiatives are crucial to safeguarding Tripura's distinct

cultural legacy and making sure that the customs of its native populations are carried down to the next generations [24].

- **Food Gathering and Religious Practices**

The agricultural practice used by the indigenous communities is called Jhum Cultivation, and it is mostly dependent on hilly and wooded areas. Their ability to obtain food is impacted, therefore this is important to them. Even special rituals are performed during Jhum cultivation, such as burning the forest, planting seeds in the ashes, and staying there the entire time. Similar to this, fishing is a big social pastime for the indigenous people of Tripura. Since their entire food chain depends on nature, they occasionally manage to capture fish without the aid of gear [20]. In the winter and summer months, they are particularly adept at catching fish in shallow water with just their hands.

Fish are also caught using other techniques, such as nets called chaatki jal, doon jal, dharma jal, tana jal, bara ber jal, and gura ber jal. A variety of traps are also employed, such as the anta, kakra, icha, song, and nal teas. Bamboo rods are affixed beneath and throughout the breadth of the banana plant bases and leaf rafts, which are also employed. A variety of fishing lines are available, such as andha, jiol, punthi, tagga, and tana barshi. The fish lines go by a variety of names, such as barki, barshi, chipp, and bari [4]. The indigenous states' religious practices are linked to the agriculture process. Once the place is selected, jhum cultivation begins in September or October, and it ends in March when the specified charred zone is planted with crops. This cycle of jhum cultivation is practiced religiously by the tribal groups. Some important religious ceremonies include "Mamaita, Baaing Surma, Para Kerma, Bwusui Ter, Sena Ter, Lampra Wathap, Lamabumani, Devi Tripura Sundari Puja, and others" [25]. The Reang community, known as "Baidya," practice ethnomedical medicine using plants like Chouck, msautotra, yosrem, musafama, and konglabi to treat bone joint wounds and sprains [26].

- **Customary Practices**

The tribal groups of Tripura have scrupulously followed a customary governmental system since the beginning of time. Interestingly, reverence and observation are how these rules are passed down from generation to generation. There is a strong sense of social cohesiveness and identity among the tribal communities. This is because of the way their traditional practices are structured. The highest council in their social and customary structure is known as the Naran.

There are three tiers to Tripura's tribal administration hierarchy. Every village or hamlet has its village council at the first level. Additionally, RUJUWA is the name of the village council's head, who also serves as the judge. In the region, Pomang Court is the second tier of social justice courts, and Pomang is also the name of the court's chief justice. The Naran, or Supreme Court, is the highest court in society. This stands for social justice's third tier. The chief justice of the highest court of social justice is NARAN. According to Hetherington et al. (2013) [9], family members who live in cities are also subject to the Village Council of the region in which they permanently reside.

*The processes of modernization, urbanization, and external influences have shaped and reshaped the culture and heritage of indigenous communities in Tripura*

The culture and tradition of the indigenous groups of Tripura have been influenced and transformed by the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and foreign influences. For example, when people adjust to new cultural norms and habits, urbanization can hasten the assimilation process. The state of Tripura is known for its music, dancing, arts, traditions, and cuisine. The state's culture has, nevertheless, mostly been shaped by outside factors, such as the Bengali language and culture. The indigenous populations of Tripura have been touched by the process of modernization, which includes elements like Christianity, a



modern economy, advanced agricultural technology, and modern education [27].

The native tribes of Tripura have been able to maintain their cultural history and customs despite these outside influences. Every tribe has its distinct collection of rituals, practices, and creative manifestations that are a reflection of its social structure and rich past. To ensure that the customs of Tripura's indigenous communities are carried down to future generations and to preserve the region's distinctive cultural heritage, efforts must be made to celebrate and promote indigenous festivals, conserve indigenous musical instruments, and perform traditional dances [28].

Tripura's diverse ethnolinguistic groups and active cohabitation create a rich cultural diversity. However, external influences from power centers have led to a shift in tribal relationships and social-cultural structure, resulting in territory loss and marginalization of natural resources, despite the state's commitment to environmental preservation [29]. The modernization and social development processes have been met with varying degrees of severity by Indian society. All demographic segments are not equally affected by this process, though. According to Kumar et al. (2004) [30], modernization is embraced by urbanization, industrialization, education, and political awakening.

Identifying essential landscape and design elements for preserving local character is crucial in planning processes, as local planners aim to create spaces that preserve local associations while integrating international development patterns [31]. The environment adapts to human settlements, and cultural and technological changes, leading to global loss of place. Academics debate whether the desire for authentic, unaffected locations is linked to the growing popularity of eco-tourism [32].

While some of these changes are thought to be beneficial for maintaining the rich cultural legacy, others are not. Change is unavoidable and must be accepted at the same time as the word “modernization”; a limited definition of “progress” requires consideration of the indigenous context. Modernization provides a chance for learning; this is one side of the coin that has to be protected. Preserving its cultural legacy and learning how to practice sustainably is important. People are becoming a means of utilization in this era of globalization because of speedy transit, skillful marketing, and fast modes of communication.

## **5. Conclusion**

Tripura's native culture and history showcase the diverse tapestry of 19 tribal groups, including the Mundas, Kokborok, and Tripuris. The region's diverse traditions, customs, music, dance, arts, and cuisine are influenced by the undulating hills cape and pristine natural beauty. The importance of indigenous culture and heritage in Tripura has been uncovered, highlighting the preservation of distinctive cultural identities despite external influences and industrialization and urbanization processes. Numerous projects have been proposed to meet the necessity of fostering and revitalizing indigenous cultural traditions. The rich cultural legacy is mostly protected via the celebration and preservation of festivals like Garia Puja, Kharchi Puja, Ker Puja, Hangrai, and Hari-Buisu. Furthermore essential to maintaining these cultural traditions is the maintenance of native musical instruments and traditional dances. Tripura's cultural environment has been shaped by modernity, urbanization, and external influences. Despite Bengali culture, indigenous groups have shown resilience in preserving the customs. Institutions like the Tripura State Tribal Museum are promoting preservation by showcasing traditional items and preserving the rich cultural heritage of various ethnolinguistic groups.

It is imperative that attempts to preserve and promote indigenous culture continue and pick up steam in the face of obstacles presented by modernity and outside influences. To guarantee that traditions are passed down to future generations, this involves community participation programs, documentation efforts, and

educational programs. By doing this, Tripura will be able to maintain its own cultural identity while also acting as an example of how to revive and preserve cultural traditions in a world which are changing quickly. In the end, Tripura's indigenous culture and legacy serve as a source of inspiration, resiliency, and pride for future generations.

Although the study explores Tripura's rich indigenous culture and legacy, it is crucial to recognize some limits. Because the research mostly draws on previously published works, it could not fully reflect the most current advancements or subtleties in the region's ever-changing cultural milieu. Furthermore, the study may not adequately address possible difficulties or disputes inside and across indigenous groups since it places too much emphasis on the advantages of cultural preservation initiatives. Additionally, the research's conclusions emphasize the necessity for ongoing efforts to protect and advance indigenous traditions, but they skip over discussing the potential policy ramifications or conflicts that can arise from modernity and traditional behaviors coexisting.

It is crucial to carry out more in-depth fieldwork in the future, interact with the local community, and take into account the many viewpoints both inside and outside of indigenous groups. To guarantee the inclusion and durability of these initiatives, policymakers should take these results into account when developing comprehensive plans that strike a balance between modernity and cultural preservation. Preserving Tripura's distinctive legacy can also be accomplished more holistically and culturally sensitively by supporting cooperative projects including indigenous people, cultural groups, and state agencies.

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