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Rhythms of Tripura Hills: The Vibrant Folk Dances of the Tiprasa (Tripuri) People

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Abstract: This essay writes about the various Tripuri folk dances. The rhythm of the jhum cycle is reflected through the various folk dances of different tribes in Tiprasa or Tripura. *Mosok Sulmani* is a tribal dance for hunting. In sum, the essay is about folk art representing the life of the *Tiprasa* people, which demands a conscious preservation in the face of rapid urbanization.

Keywords: *huk, borok, Tiprasa*

Introduction

Under the starry hills of Hathai Kotor, Hačwk Berem, Longtorai, and Jampui, where Tiprasa people's rhythm sway to the gentle flow of the Saidra and Gomti rivers, lies the vibrant world of Tripura's folk dances, a tale of ancient joy and cultural heritage waiting to be explored. Tripura, a northeastern Indian state, boasts a rich cultural heritage shaped by its complex history and geography. The princely state of Tripura was ruled by the Manikya dynasty for centuries, with 183 Tiprasa kings shaping its history. Strategically located near the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and surrounded by the Indian states of Assam and Mizoram, Tripura's unique position has influenced its history and cultural development. The state's history dates to the ancient period, with mentions in the Mahabharata and Ashokan inscriptions. The indigenous Tiprasa peoples who reside in the lush hills of Tripura, refer to it as "Rangchakni ha" in Kokborok which translates as 'land of gold.' The Tiprasa community has preserved its rich cultural heritage for centuries. It is believed that the state of Tripura and the Tiprasa existed

during and earlier to the time of the Mahabharata. This ancient history has shaped the community's culture, traditions, and way of life.

The Tiprasa people

The Tiprasa people speak Kokborok, a Tibeto-Burman language. The language is an essential part of the community's cultural identity and plays a vital role in preserving their traditions and customs. Kokborok is one of the official languages of Tripura. Its meaning is 'language of the borok race'. Tiprasa people are subdivided into nine sub-communities, which include *Debbarma, Reang, Jamatia, Tripura Noatia, Rupini, Kaloi, Murasingh, and Uchai*. The Tiprasa community traditionally inhabits the hilly regions of Tripura. Their lives are deeply connected to the land, forests, and natural resources. The community's dependence on the natural environment has shaped their culture, traditions, and way of life.

Jhum cultivation, or *Huk*, as they call it in Kokborok, is a traditional practice among the Tripuri community. It involves clearing land by burning vegetation and then cultivating crops. This practice has been an integral part of the community's life and culture for centuries. The rhythm of the jhum cycle is reflected in their folk dances, which celebrate the sowing of new crops, the harvesting season, and the community's gratitude for the land's bounty. This folk dance, is not just a form of entertainment but a way of life that showcases the community's creativity, ingenuity, and cultural richness. Different tribal groups residing in the state have their own folk dances. Most of the themes of the dances revolve around the harvesting and cropping seasons as well as themes related to day-to-day activities of the Tiprasa people.

Goria Dance: A Celebration of Fertility and Abundance

The *Goria* dance, performed during the *Goria* festival, is one such dance that bursts with vibrant energy. It is a dazzling display of color and movement, its intricate footwork and rhythmic movements a reflection of the community's deep connection with nature. As the dancers move in perfect harmony, their footsteps echoing through the hills, the air is filled with the sweet scent of blooming flowers and the sound of laughter and music.

Lebang Bumani Dance: A Reflection of Community Life

The *Lebang Bumani* dance, another significant dance form performed by both man and woman is performed after the *Goria* festival. Marking the end of harvest and beginning of monsoon, it originated from the community's practice of catching insects (*Lebang*), a kind of grasshopper

that destroy crops in Jhum fields. This is a harvest dance where the women folk mimic the act of catching lebangs and putting them in *langa* (bamboo basket), while the man folks make a rhythmic sound with the help of bamboo clappers. This dance showcases the community's resourcefulness and ingenuity, as well as their connection with the natural environment. The dance involves traditional musical instruments like kham, flute, sarinda and pung.

Hojagiri Dance: A Showcase of Balance and Strength

The *Hojagiri* dance, performed by the *Reang* clan of the Tripuri community, is a unique and captivating dance form. Characterized by intricate footwork and balance, the dance involves dancers standing on earthen pitchers and bottles, showcasing their skill and agility. Hojagiri is exclusively performed by young women having incredible agility and balance. The dance is a testament to the community's creativity and cultural richness.

Mamita Dance: A Celebration of Harvest

The *Mamita* dance, performed during the Mamita festival, is a joyous celebration of the harvesting season. It is a celebration of the community's connection dependence on agriculture.

Tangbiti Dance: A Depiction of Daily Life

The *Tangbiti* dance is a lively and dynamic dance form that depicts the day-to-day lives of the tribal people in the Jhum fields. Performed by both men and women, the dance involves intricate footwork and movements that imitate the activities of clearing the forests and cultivating crops. The use of props such as *Langa* (a big basket) and *Da* (a large Tripuri knife) adds to the authenticity and cultural significance of the dance.

Mosok Sulmani

In the heart of Tripura, the Tripuri community comes alive with the *Mosok Sulmani* dance, a dynamic hunting ritual that echoes through the empty jhum lands, in December. With every step and gesture, the dancers reenact the age-old tradition of stalking the prized deer, its hunt a significant part of the community's heritage. As the dancers weave their way through the landscape, they embody the stealth and skill of traditional hunters, bringing to life the stories and techniques passed down through generations.

Back in those days, these dances were not meant to be performed for an audience but were rather performed among themselves to mark any special event or occasion and to enjoy among themselves. However, in contemporary times, these dance forms are also performed for

a larger audience as a means of entertainment and also to spread awareness and information about tribal life and culture. This evolution has not only helped in preserving the traditional dance forms but also in promoting the rich cultural heritage of the Tiprasa community. Despite the significance of these folk dances, the Tiprasa community faces significant challenges in preserving their cultural heritage. The influence of modernization, urbanization, and cultural homogenization threatens the community's traditional way of life and cultural practices. To preserve and promote the folk dances of the Tiprasa community, it is essential to document and showcase these dance forms through various mediums, such as cultural festivals, workshops, and performances. Additionally, incorporating these dance forms into educational curricula and promoting them through digital media can help reach a wider audience. By preserving and promoting these dance forms, we can ensure the continuation of the community's cultural identity and pass it down to future generations.



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