



ECHOES FROM THE PAST: EXPLORING TRIPURI IDENTITY THROUGH KOKBOROK FOLK NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This research article delves into the rich tapestry of *Tripuri* identity by examining *Kokborok* folk narratives. *Kokborok*, the indigenous language of the *Tripuri* people of Tripura, India, serves as a repository of cultural heritage, preserving tales that reflect the ethos, beliefs, and collective memory of the community. Through a qualitative analysis of *Kokborok* folk narratives, this study aims to uncover the intricate layers of *Tripuri* identity, exploring themes of tradition, folklore, and socio-cultural dynamics embedded within these stories. By engaging with *Kokborok* folklore, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of *Tripuri* identity formation and preservation in the contemporary context.

KEYWORDS : *Tripuri* Identity, *Kokborok*, Folk Narratives, Folklore, Tripura, Cultural Heritage.

INTRODUCTION:

Nestled within the verdant hills of Northeast India lies Tripura, a state steeped in cultural richness. The indigenous *Tripuri* people, the state's original inhabitants, possess a vibrant heritage interwoven with their language, *Kokborok*. This language serves as the lifeblood of a unique tradition of folk narratives, passed down through generations. These narratives often referred to as "folk tales" or "folk narratives," transcend mere entertainment. They act as powerful echoes from the past, resonating with the very essence of *Tripuri* identity. This research article delves into the captivating world of *Kokborok* folk narratives, exploring how they illuminate the cultural identity, social fabric, and historical experiences of the *Tripuri* people.

1. Kokborok: The Language of Identity

Rooted in the Sino-Tibetan language family, *Kokborok*'s origins trace back to the *Bodo-Garo* branch. The term "Borok" itself is likely derived from "Bodo" or "Boro," reflecting their linguistic lineage. This lineage within the Sino-Tibetan family gave rise to languages like *Bodo-Naga* and *Kokborok*. In Tripura, eight distinct tribes speak *Kokborok*. These tribes include the *Puran Tripuri (Debbarma)*, *Reang*, *Jamatia*, *Noatia*, *Murasing*, *Kalai*, *Rupini*, and *Uchoi*. Interestingly, each tribe has developed its own unique body of literature in the contemporary world.

However, the influence of English as a global language cannot be ignored. Its widespread popularity and necessity for education have propelled it to a dominant position in the modern era. Despite this, *Kokborok* continues to have its own vibrant literary tradition.

2. Historical Context:

The history of the *Tripuri* people is deeply intertwined with their land, culture, and language. With roots tracing back to ancient times, the *Tripuri* community has evolved through various socio-political changes, including interactions with neighboring kingdoms, colonial rule, and post-independence transformations. *Kokborok*, as the language of the *Tripuri* people, has served as a medium for preserving cultural heritage and transmitting collective wisdom across generations. Understanding the historical context provides a foundation for unraveling the complexities of *Tripuri* identity embedded within *Kokborok* folk narratives.

3. METHODOLOGY:

This research employs a qualitative approach to analyze

Kokborok folk narratives. Drawing upon ethnographic methods, including interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis, the study seeks to identify recurrent themes, motifs, and cultural symbols present in *Kokborok* folklore. By engaging directly with members of the *Tripuri* community, the research aims to capture indigenous perspectives on the significance and interpretation of these narratives, enriching the analysis with local insights and lived experiences.

4. Themes in Kokborok Folk Narratives:

Through the analysis of *Kokborok* folk narratives, several recurring themes emerge, reflecting key aspects of *Tripuri* identity. These include:

a. Mythological Origins:

Kokborok folklore often narrates myths and legends surrounding the creation of the *Tripuri* people, their relationship with the land, and encounters with supernatural beings.

The tales of *Thaichukrangchak*, *Chethuwang*, *Phote bai Rangiya*, and many others delve into themes of nature, morality, and heroism, each offering valuable lessons to their audience.

Phote and *Rangiya* exemplify the valor of a younger brother in fulfilling his elder brother's promise to rescue a lost princess. *Rangiya*'s bravery is put to the test as he faces various challenges, including battling beasts and ultimately confronting a malevolent white elephant holding the princess captive. His courageous deeds lead to the princess's rescue and eventual marriage to *Rangiya*, cementing his reputation as a heroic figure. These folk tales serve as vessels for imparting timeless wisdom about the importance of nurturing our relationship with nature, upholding moral principles within society, and embodying bravery in the face of adversity. Through their narratives, they inspire audiences to cherish nature, respect familial bonds, and embrace courage in all aspects of life.

b. Cultural Traditions:

Folk narratives serve as invaluable repositories of cultural traditions, encompassing practices, rituals, and customs that offer profound insights into traditional social structures, kinship systems, and religious beliefs. Within *Kokborok* folk tales, stories like *Khelangbubar*, *Raima-Saima*, and *Kerangsa* serve as vibrant expressions of cultural values and societal norms, conveyed through various mediums such as imagery, sound, dialogue, music, colors, and symbols.

In the tale of *Khelangkubbar*, the narrative revolves around a childless couple who face societal scorn and humiliation due to their inability to conceive. The husband, overwhelmed by shame, contemplates suicide until he encounters a supernatural entity instructing him to feed a fig to his wife to enable her to conceive. Following this guidance, the wife bears a son, but their journey is fraught with challenges, including the disapproval of a wealthy landlord for the son's marriage proposal. Fleeing into the forest, they encounter the mystical *Khelangkubbar* flower, which leads to a tragic transformation when the husband inadvertently triggers a curse by failing to follow instructions. This tale not only reflects the cultural significance attached to fertility but also explores themes of sacrifice, love, and the consequences of defying supernatural warnings.

Similarly, in the story of *Raima-Saima*, recurring motifs of supernatural intervention and transformation are evident. The two sisters, *Raima* and *Saima*, are aided by a supernatural being in building a resting house. However, their perceptions differ, with the elder sister viewing the entity as a man and the younger sister perceiving him as a snake due to a curse. This narrative intricately weaves themes of perception, loyalty, and the blurred lines between reality and the supernatural realm. Through their encounters, the sisters navigate challenges, ultimately revealing the true nature of the being who aids them.

These folk tales not only entertain but also serve as cultural touchstones, preserving traditional beliefs, customs, and moral lessons for future generations. Through the rich tapestry of imagery, symbolism, and narrative, they offer profound insights into the complexities of human experience and the enduring power of cultural heritage.

c. Ethical Values:

Moral tales within Kokborok folklore impart lessons on ethics, morality, and social conduct, reinforcing communal norms and behavioral codes.

Chethuwang:

This story explores the importance of morality within society. It recounts the taboo love between siblings and the consequences of defying social norms. Despite familial objections, a brother persists in his love for his younger sister, leading to his illness. In a dramatic turn, the sister escapes the forced marriage by seeking refuge in a chethuwang tree, highlighting the innate moral boundaries that should not be crossed, especially within familial relationships.

d. Historical Events:

Historical events leave an undeniable mark on a people's culture. This intertwined relationship shapes societal practices, beliefs, and even education systems. Folk tales serve as powerful testaments to this influence. Stories like "*Chethuwang*" act as social commentaries, teaching moral lessons and shaping societal norms. This particular tale discourages marriage within close family relations, promoting responsible behavior within the community. Similarly, "*Yamoroksa*" highlights the consequences of foolishness, serving as a cautionary tale against impulsive actions that can disrupt family and community harmony. These narratives continue to be referenced within the culture, reinforcing the importance of wisdom and responsible conduct.

e. Contemporary Reflections:

While firmly rooted in tradition, *Kokborok* folk narratives have also adapted to contemporary realities, grappling with issues such as modernization, globalization, and the preservation of cultural heritage. As society transitions from a primitive to a more modern environment, the role of folk tales has

undergone significant changes, struggling to find relevance in today's context. Despite these shifts, older generations still hold onto the ancient stories, preserving them amidst the influx of modern ideologies.

Certain cultural practices remain deeply ingrained, transcending socio-economic differences. For instance, the full moon symbolizes auspiciousness, while the new moon signifies adversity, beliefs held universally regardless of social status. Traditional customs continue to influence daily life, such as post-harvest celebrations marked by wine-drinking and feasting, illustrating the enduring influence of age-old practices.

Even in rural areas, primitive customs and ancient wisdom persist, resisting the tide of modernization. Rituals like dropping the first flower onto the soil before plucking the rest are upheld, showcasing the resilience of traditional beliefs in the face of changing times.

Despite the challenges posed by modernization and globalization, *Kokborok* folk narratives endure as repositories of cultural identity, adapting to contemporary realities while preserving the essence of indigenous wisdom and heritage.

5. Implications for Tripuri Identity:

The analysis of *Kokborok* folk narratives offers profound insights into the construction and negotiation of *Tripuri* identity. By exploring themes of myth, tradition, and cultural continuity, these narratives reaffirm the resilience and adaptive capacity of the *Tripuri* people in the face of socio-cultural changes. Moreover, *Kokborok* folklore serves as a source of pride and belonging for the community, fostering a sense of collective identity and heritage amidst the complexities of modernity.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, *Kokborok* folk narratives provide a unique lens through which to explore and understand *Tripuri* identity. By delving into the rich tapestry of *Kokborok* folklore, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on indigenous knowledge systems, cultural preservation, and identity politics. As the *Tripuri* community navigates the challenges of the 21st century, *Kokborok* folk narratives remain a testament to the enduring spirit and cultural richness of this vibrant indigenous culture.

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