ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 10| October 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

INTERPRETING ANIMISTIC BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BOROK RITUALS

Dr. Rati Mohan Tripura[1], Prof. Somdev Banik[2]
[1]Asst. Professor, Dept. of English, Dhamama Dipa International Buddhist University, India
[2]Dept. of English, Tripura University, India

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra32019
DOI No: 10.36713/epra32019

ABSTRACT

Borok is one of the indigenous communities in Tripura, north east India. The community is rich culturally and traditionally. Like other indigenous communities, the community has also its own traditional belief system which is orally passed down for generations. The community worship Mother Nature. They perform rituals to venerate the forest, stream, river, stone, moon, sun and etc. But with the change of time, their age-old religious faiths are on the verge of extinction. Most of them are embracing organized religions like Christianity, and Shanatana Hindu. Apart from religious conversion, acculturation, commercialisation and modernnisation are also very important factors for waning Borok's traditional faiths.

KEY WORDS: *Animism, Borok, Ritual, Sacrifice, Ochai.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This proposed dissertation "Understanding Animistic Beliefs and Practices in the Context of the *Borok* Rituals" attempts to study the traditional beliefs and practices of the *Borok* people. And this proposed research paper is not to study religion but to understand the nature of the religious faiths of the community. Usually, *Borok* people profess animistic faiths. Nevertheless, they also follow Hindu gods and goddesses. Their aged old belief systems are interwoven with Hinduism. There are many Hindu god and goddesses worshipped at the time of the community deities are worshipped. Therefore, Indian tribal religion is not regarded completely animistic but also folk Hinduism. And this proposed work will be carried out through oral tradition. There are many cultural materials and religious faiths without scripts and written texts orally passing down through generations. Oral tradition always plays an important role in building a community. According to Joseph ki-Zerbo Oral Tradition may be defined as "being a testimony transmitted verbally from one generation to another. Its special characteristics are that it is verbal and the manner in which it transmitted". The Tripura oral tradition is rich in the field of myths, legends, tales, proverbs, mantras and songs and festivals. Oral literature is a valuable resource of Tripura.

India's northeast, widely known for its unexplored natural beauty, is also home to distinctive cultures, faith, tradition, history, myths, lifestyle and philosophy. Tripura is one of the eight states of northeast and home to nineteen indigenous communities: Tripuri, Jamatia, Reang, Uchoi, Noatia, Orang, Mog, Chakma, Lushai, Garo, Bhil, Santal, Lepcha, Halam, Bhutia, Kuki, Chaimal, Khasia and Munda. All these tribes may linguistically be divided into three groups: Tibetan- Burman group, Kuki-chin group and the Arakan- group. There are a total of nine tribes speaking Kokborok which is a Tibeto-Burman language. The kokborok speaking tribes are - (1) Tripura, (2) Reang (3) Jamatia, (4) Noatia, (5) Uchoi, (6) Kalai, (7) Rupini, (8) Debbarma and (9) Murasing. Each single kokborok speaking tribe has its own distinct culture, tradition, religious faiths, customary laws etc. All these nine tribes are addressed as "*borok*", "*Twiprasa*" and "*Tripuri*". The word *Twiprasa* means children of water ('Twi' means water and 'Phra 'means god 'sa' means children). Every indigenous tribe or community has its own terminology to define and describe its worldview, its beliefs in cosmology, spirituality or god. A native word can authentically and comprehensively conceptualise the belief system like no borrowed term can do. Therefore, it is useful to employ the native term "*motai*" to describe the Tripura traditional belief system.

The word *motai is* a kokborok native term found in Tripura society. The term *motai* means "deity". Tripuras understand of religion through this term *motai*. Tripura traditional religion is an unorganised religion or a folk belief which does not have any scriptures to bind together or to lead someone within the religious norms. Indigenous faith systems are quite distinct in terms of norms, practices, philosophy, propitiations and are transmitted orally through myths, folk songs, rituals, taboos, riddles, and folktales etc. The indigenous people believe in souls and worship the mountains, hills, rivers, the sun, the moon, in order to propitiate the soul within all these natural objects. Edward Burnett Tylor calls this form of folk practice as animism, derived from the Latin word anima or animus which generally means a 'Breath' or 'soul' or 'spirit'. The term animism was first coined by anthropologist Tylor in 1871 in his book "Primitive Culture". Basically animism refers to a belief in numerous personified supernatural beings endowed with reasons, and or violation, that both objects and living beings govern their existence. According to Tylor, "animism generally prefers a doctrine of the soul and spirit or philosophy of souls and spirits". Animism is mostly associated with sacrifice of physical objects and living beings. Sacrifice is an essential and significant custom in every indigenous walk of life which clarifies their identity and socio-cultural religious life and modes of lifestyle. And in this regard Tripura traditional religion is no exception to others. Without animal sacrifice a deity is hardly propitiated in the rituals. Sacrifice in Tripura

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 10| October 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

society is known as '*dali'* meaning "to behead". Dali has always been an integral part of Tripura traditional religion since ancient times. The term has different meanings and significance based on rituals. Dali in Tripura traditional religion is a rite in which an object or an animal is offered to a divinity in order to establish, maintain, or restore a right relationship of a human being to the sacred order. The equipment of sacrifice differs according to the deity worshipped. It is believed that through the ritual of sacrifice, the consecrated life of an offering is liberated as a sacred potency that establishes a bond between the householder and the sacred power.

The important Tripura festivals are *Garia, Pohra, Gugrani khorok* while some of the significant rituals are *khurok sumani, Lampra, kharanglamani, ayokkwtalni cholk*. The tribal deities are usually made of bamboso and iron. The propitiatory rites require mandatory sacrifice of livestock such as chicken, pigs, male goats, ducks, and pigeons. Though in some lesser significant rituals, livestock sacrifice can be replaced by eggs, mud, bananas etc. These animals are sacrificed for the welfare of all family members, for hailing, and for the protection of crops from evil spirits and black magic. The sacrificed blood is then sprinkled over the *malai* or the heads of the deity. The sacrifice is conducted by sacred specialist priests known as *ochai, chantai, tansrai*, and it is believed that there is a portent to be decoded in every sacrificial ritual. The shaman distinguishes the good omen from bad omen by interpreting different aspects of the consecrated blood, body and organism. Interpretation of the omens is essential for establishing a successful connection between the visible and the spirit worlds. Omen in Kokborok is known as '*thui'* or '*samai'*.
The community also worships specific folk tales as living soul. They believe in such folktale have soul and can harm humans if the taboos of the tales are not followed properly. There are many folk tales found in Tripura community need to be narrated in certain hailing rituals by the priest. These folk tales play a pivotal role in their traditional belief systems or religion. For instance, the "*nokkuruimaa*" is one of the famous folktales of Tripuras is narrated through in the form of song. And while it is narrated few words need to be escaped in order to protect the listeners from the soul of the characters of the tale.
This is the brief introduction of the proposed work as mentioned out to get the basic concept of the community and its religious faiths prevailing still in their daily life. But with the change of time, the community is found giving up their age-old religious faiths. Most of them are embracing organized religions like Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. On the other hand, acculturation, commercialisation and modernnisation are also one of the important factors behind the changes of their socio-religious life.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Since, The Tripura community does not have sufficient literary sources on the traditional religion some similar books, articles and journals are studied in order to make an extensive survey on area of the proposed work. With this objective in mind, a preliminary study was carried out during the course of the journey towards the proposed works of Understanding Animistic beliefs and Practices in the Context of Tripura Traditional Religion: A Study of Oral Tradition. There is no such detailed document found on Tripura animistic faiths and practices except for the oral stories. Tripuras document their religious faiths, narrative, rites and rituals, customs, and habits legend, myths, culture and history verbally. Verbal documentation assures the existence of Tripura animistic faiths. I studied some books, articles and journals which are relevant to my proposed research. Some of which as I found they are:
In an International journal, On Indigenous Religions of Nagaland before Coming of Christianity, 2018 by Ilianeub Haihing and Manu Sharma mentioned that "Animism is the right term of indigenous religion by practices of the different Naga tribes, their belief in the existence of spirits in all the aspects of life and their surroundings like trees, rock, river etc. remained unchallenged till the arrival of Christianity in the Naga Hills". As I mentioned in introduction that the Tripuras profess animistic faiths believe in mountains, river, stream, stone, trees etc., but now-a-days most of the people of the Tripura community are embracing organized religion.

In the book of Tribal Religion of Tripura (2003) by Dr. Dhijendra LaL Bhowmik, it is mentioned that "tribal religion is one of the many aboriginal forms of religion. Tribes mean any aggregate of people united by ties of descent from a common ancestor, community of customs and traditions, adherence to the same leaders or a local division of an aboriginal people". There is no doubt that the tribal religion is aboriginal since the tribal people are practising their ole-aged religions since antiquity. Tribals are homogenous in many aspects share common religious faiths but differ community to community. They have local religious leader like ochai who unite the people through rituals.

In the book of Treatise of Traditional Social Institute of Tripuri Community by Debapriya DebBarma is mentioned that "tribal religion is based on Hinduism". There is no doubt that Tripuras profess animistic faiths nevertheless, there are many deities of which roots are Hinduism. Though the tribal communities have their own belief systems worship their traditional deities but their religious faith in many aspects is indirectly interwoven with folk Hinduism. Many traditional deities of the Tripura community are Hinduism. Therefore, in many rituals tribal deities and Hindu deities are worshipped side by side at the same time.

In the book of Tribal life in India (1971) N.K Bose, an anthropologist has mentioned that "tribal people have their own gods and goddesses and priests and religious ceremonies but with the change of time many tribal peoples came under the influence of Hinduism". Religion crisis among the tribal communities has become a major problem. With the change of time and coming in contact with Hinduism heavily many tribal communities are under Hinduism.

Besides above mentioned literary sources since I have studied so far, I am studying some books like Hinduism and Tribal Religions by Dr. Pankaj Jain, Rita Sherma and Madhu Khanna published in 27th July 2021, Folklore of Bengal by A sutosh Bhattacharya published in 2006, Animism and the Question of life by Istvan Praet published in 2015.

III. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the proposed research program may be as follows;

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 10| October 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

i. To reconstruct the oral literature of the community by documenting the oral tradition.
ii. And most importantly to reconstruct the lost primitive ways of the community.
iii. To understand their concept of supernatural beings and their connection with cosmos, the human being that forms their religious identity.

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE PROPOSED WORK

In studying a definite subject matter and in gaining knowledge regarding the topic, a research methodology is necessary. A methodology is a scientific approach designed to carry out research work keeping in view the nature of the subject under study. Every method has fixed outlay and follows certain schedule steps. There are two types of data collection sources i.e. primary sources and secondary sources .the present work entitles "***Interpreting Animistic Beliefs and Practices in the Context of the Borok Rituals***" deals with the day to day socio-religious life and practices of the Tripura community. The proposed work is required both of primary and secondary sources. Since the area of the proposed work is on the traditional religion like folk religion, the primary sources of the study will include folklore of the community both verbal and non-verbal genres of expression like myths, legends ,songs, tales, beliefs, proverbs, riddles, ritual performances ,materials, material culture associated with the gods and goddesses along with cultural life of the community.

Secondary sources comprise historical and literary works. The literary sources consist of works so far done or studied connected like books, articles, dissertations, journals, news papers articles etc. William Bascom's Myth-Ritual theory can be applied as secondary sources to study the Tripura traditional religion.

Qualitative and quantitative methods will be used and survey, participant and non-participant observation, interview, unstructured questionnaire and transcription will be used to study the proposed work.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

So far as researches are done on Twiprasa community, they have focused mainly on their own religious faiths. Though many scholars have conducted research on Twiprasa tribal traditional religion but the prime focus of their research was on their own community religious faiths. This proposed work will be the first research on the traditional religion of the Tripura community. The folk religious life of the Tripura community is not studied yet. The study is very much important and need to be studied since the official religion of the community is Hinduism and practicing in their everyday life along with their traditional beliefs which makes their religious status complex and dynamic. Most of the indigenous people believe in some sort of great spirits, which are worshipped through rituals. Indigenous religions have strong feelings in ecology as they try to live in harmony with Mother Nature. Though human cultures are no longer far away from the providence of science and modernity, such practices are still prevailing among indigenous peoples. Through animistic beliefs and practices ecological awareness has been increasing in contemporary religions and politics.

Since the tribe lives in hilly areas, their livelihood and religious faiths lie in the Mother Nature. Animistic beliefs and practices are significant since it not only represents the primitive cultures but it also gives in- depth insights into the chronic development of structured religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islamic. These structured religions are believed to be driven from the aged-old belief system and that can be understood through indigenous cultures. One the other hand, their traditional beliefs have changed for the decades. The change has become a global phenomenon in every indigenous culture across the world. Besides constant contacts with the influences of globalization, commercialization and with other cultures, religion conversion is also one of the major causes behind the changes and waning their traditional religion. Since, the community does not have any scripts transmits verbally through generations to generations. It is very much essential to study the religious aspects and activities of the Tripura community in everyday life that are reflected in their expressive behaviours like worshiping of folk deities ,various communal ,personal religious rituals and the attachment of the folk beliefs to it. The significance of the study lies in identifying the actual religious status of the Tripura community leaving out the official religion on one hand and to understand the socio-religious life of the Tripura community through narratives on the other. Therefore, it requires conservation and documentation in order to make it known to the world.

VI. DISCUSSION

The cultural diversity of the *Borok* people is vast and cannot be fully represented either in written form or through oral narratives alone. Certain cultural practices can be adequately understood only through direct observation and visualisation. Among these practices, animal sacrifice and the collection of sacrificial blood in a sacred container made of bamboo leaves constitute an important aspect of traditional Borok religious life. This practice has been transmitted through generations and continues to hold considerable ritual significance.

The beheading of the sacrificial animal and the collection of its blood are particularly significant because the blood is interpreted as an omen concerning the devotee's health, fortune, and possible afflictions. The *ochai*, or traditional shaman, plays a central role in interpreting these signs. Depending on the nature of the problem or the reason for performing the ritual, the *ochai* predicts the devotee's fortune and prescribes particular rituals, remedies, or forms of worship. Thus, sacrificial rituals are not merely acts of religious devotion; they also function within a traditional system of healing, social discipline, and moral correction.

In Borok belief, the colour, appearance, and other features of the collected blood may be interpreted as auspicious or inauspicious signs. Such interpretations are believed to reveal the condition or circumstances of the devotee. When a deity is invoked through a particular ritual manifestation, the sacrificial blood may likewise be regarded as an omen through which the divine will is interpreted. In this sense, the ritual connects the human world with the spiritual realm and provides the community with a traditional framework for understanding illness, misfortune, and other unexplained difficulties. The rituals also contribute to social cohesion. Members of the

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 10| October 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

community participate in worship, ritual performances, and associated practices, thereby strengthening collective bonds and a sense of communal harmony. Traditional medicines, ritual prescriptions, and codes of conduct associated with these practices further contribute to what may be understood as a disciplined way of life within the community.

The *Borok* people are exceptionally rich in their diverse cultures, traditions, belief systems, and religious practices. Despite living in a relatively small geographical region, different communities in Tripura have historically coexisted with considerable cultural interaction and social harmony. The traditional Borok worldview is deeply connected with Mother Nature**,** and the natural environment occupies an important place in their religious and cultural imagination.

Although a significant section of the Borok population has converted to Christianity and other religious traditions, many elements of their indigenous religious beliefs, ritual practices, deities, and cultural traditions continue to exist within society. This coexistence demonstrates the resilience and continuity of indigenous cultural knowledge. The persistence of these practices also indicates that religious conversion does not necessarily result in the complete disappearance of earlier cultural traditions; rather, elements of indigenous belief and practice may continue to survive, adapt, and coexist within changing social and religious contexts.

VII. END NOTES

1. *Sri Maa King: In Tripua society, female deities are also addressed as king instead of queen*
2. *Tansrai : Assitant priest*
3. *Kasumung : prevention*
4. *Ochai : priest*
5. *Pokiya: it is a traditional bamboo craft used for carrying things and the deities*

VIII. REFERENCES

1. *Tyler, Burnett, Edward, Primitive Cultures.Inc.Mineola,New York, Dover, 1871.*
2. *Praet,Iatvan, Animism and the Question of Life .Routledge, New York,2014.*
3. *Manoshi,Jayanta,et al.Rebati Tripura.Tripura Tribe.Directorate of Tribal Research and Cultural Institute ,Government of Tripura,Agarla,2011.*
4. *Deb Berma, Debapriya,Treatise on Traditional Social Institution of the Tripuri Community. Directorate of Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Govt.of Tripura, Agartala, 1983*
5. *Bhowmik, D. L;Tribal Religion of Tripura. Directorate of Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Govt.of Tripura, Agartala, 2003.*
6. *Battacharjee, Priyabrata.Tribal Poojas and Festival inTripura.Dictorate of Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Govt.of Tripura, Agartala, 1994.*
7. *Debbarma, Suren. A Short Account of Tripuri Society, Jnan bichitra prakashani, Agartala, 2006.*
8. *Debbarma, R.K. T, Debbrama. Kereng kothoma , Tribal research & cultural Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, 2002.*

Personal Interviews

9. *Tripura, Hari. Personal interview.1st Dec.2025.*
10. *Tripura, Rassan. Personal interview. 4th March. 2026.*
11. *Tripura, Harendra. Personal interview. 1s Jun 2026.*
12. *Tripura, Surendra. Personal interview. 22th Jun 2026.*