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The Socio-Economic Life of Jamatia Tribe- A Case Study

Madhu Chandra Jamatia

M.A. in History 2016, Gold Medalist, Tripura University (A Central University), SLET qualified, India

ABSTRACT : The paper describes in detail about the socio-economic life of the Jamatia tribe. As we know that the Jamatia tribe is one of the main tribe of Tripura, having distinct feature of mongoloid origin. They speak kokborok language like the Tripuris which is a language of Tibeto-Burman family. Jamatias is well-known for their contribution in the royal army of princely Tripura for which they were exempted from paying taxes to the kings of Tripura. The Jamatia tribe concentrated in different places of Tripura such as Udaipur, Amarpur, Teliamura etc.

In this context Omesh Saigal holds the view that Jamat in Urdu means an assemblage of persons. The former rulers of Tripura used to recruit his army from a class of triba who are not only warriors but also had proved their loyalty to him. A fair proportion of his armed forces were drawn from amongst the jamatias who formed a group in his army, and it was from this fact that they derived their clan name¹.

The Jamatia believed that the word Jamatia is derived from the word Jama-(an Arabic word which means tax) and twia-(a kokborok words means not to bear the burden of). So the word Jamatia means persons who do not bear the burden of taxes. They hold the opinion that the jamatias enjoyed these privileges for their military duties².

In fact, this research paper will represent the indigenous Jamatias social and economic life. As per Cambridge Dictionary, the social life is the realm of organized social life and network of institutions by which citizens represents themselves. Jamatia community is patriarchal in nature where the father is deemed to be the head of the family and he held the full responsibility to looked after the family. The Jamatia tribe is living in a particular region and the main deity of Jamatia tribe is Gauria. . Therefore, dress and ornament, family, Hoda, kinship, marriage etc. are the social life of Jamatia tribe. On the other hand, economic life of the Jamatia tribe is mainly depend on agriculture since the long past and it is the main source of livelihood for them. Prior to the plough cultivation, the Jamatia tribe society was characterized by the primitive subsistence farming – called a slash and burn agriculture.

This paper makes a critical analysis on the socio-economic life of the Jamatias in day- to -today life.

KEYWORDS: Family and Kinship, Dress, Ornament, Hoda, Shifting cultivation, Plough cultivation.

Tripura is a hilly, small state in the northeast India where 19 tribes and non-tribal communities are residing simultaneously. Jamatia tribe is another important tribal group of Tripura and their socio-economic life constituted the unique characteristics to a greater extent. Therefore, social and economic life of the Jamatia tribe are discuss in below-

Social Life of the Jamatia tribe

The social structure includes family, religion, law, economy and class etc. Jamatias living in a particular region in Tripura. In fact the Jamatias are patriarchal in nature where father is the head of the family. Therefore, the family, kinship, marriage, dress and ornament which comprises the social structure of the Jamatia tribe are discuss below-

1. Family – The family is the basic social unit and it known as Nukhung among the Jamatia tribe. The Jamatia family usually comprises of a man and his wife with their sons and daughter. The Jamatias tribe preferred a nuclear type of family but sometimes it is prove that a man having two wives. A person having two wives is considered to be illegal. Traditionally, the father or eldest male member is holding important position in the family. He is the full responsible for taking decision in all domestic, social religious and political members. It is mandatory to all the family members to



abide the directions of the head of the family. Each and every family member of the Jamatias must be loyal to the Jamatia Hoda. They must be performed Lampra puja at least one time in a year in each family.

2 .Kinship - the Jamatia kinship refers to the connection by blood, marriage or adoption. The Jamatia society is bifurcated into two- consanguineous kins-individually who are believe to be biological related by blood and affinal kins-individual who are becoming relations by tying the knot.

Following the pioneering work done century ago among the Iroquois of New York state by American ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan the kinship terms of Jamatia tribe may be divided into two system : Classifactory and descriptive. In a descriptive terminology system, the Jamatia primarily refer to only direct biological relationship such as Baba (Father), Ama(Mother) Bwsla (Son), Bwsajok (Daughter). In a classifactory terminology system, the Jamatia refer to a class of relatives, lineal as well as collateral such as Kaka (Fathers brother), Totoi (mother's sister) kwmwi (Sister husband) and Bachwi (brother's wife)3.

3. Avoidance – The role of avoidance is found in Jamatia society like the other society. In Jamatia society, the wife of a person is called a 'bwhwi' (wife) traditionally is addressed as a mother of so and so, e.g. 'Chandrama'. And husband is addressed traditionally as a father of so and so. The parents-in-law also hardly call their bahanjwk (daughter-in-law) and Chamwrwi(son-in-law) by name, rather they are addressed as 'Hansa' (daughter-in-law) and 'Chamwruisa'(son-in-law). Such teknomymies, of late,however, due to impact of sankritisation and westernization, are not strictly followed4.

4. Marriage-The marriage is one of the three important events which includes birth, marriage and death of a men which are discuss below-

Firstly, the born of child is the important part of life. It is believe that the saint priest (Ochai) performed a puja for the saking of the baby before its birth. After the baby birth kumajok used to cut the navel string of the new born baby and handed over to Lumajok for hygiene and cleanliness. And later on, secretly the name of new born baby was decided by the kumajok. After the accomplishment of the lampra puja the name of the baby was announced before people publicly. Both kumajok and Lumajok are the Helpers who wearing the new clothes to the new born baby and bring the baby outside the house after the accomplishment of their task. Following the norms, arrow is also thrown in every direction so that they can oust the evil spirit. Finally, all the invitees of the village and relatives were giving blessing to the new born baby for healthy and long life just after showing both sun and moon to the baby. It is worth to mention here that the most important initiative of the jamatias was to lead the childless parents to adopt the child who were orphan.

Secondly, the marriage ceremony is the significant event in the Jamatia tribe. There are three types of marriage which are observed - Hamjwk phaimani(fetching to groom family) Chamwrwi thangmani(fetcning bride family) and Twikharlaimani (Eloping) . In fact nuclear family is the ideal rule of marriage in Jamatia tribe. Dowry system is strongly condemned and strictly prohibited. The marriage is performed by the ochoi as per the norms of the Jamatia tribe. To accomplish the task of marriage the following stages are performed such as erection of Haya(alter), worship of Mailuma and khuluma inside the Benki(a place inside the house where newly married couple have to stay until they went to the Horshini),Worshipped of 14 gods who is usually called the Chaudda Devta, bath with holy water by both bride and groom which is collected by Aioi from the running water, Bride and groom leads by Ochai in the haya, and round of Haya by both bride and groom at least twice or thrice. Following the norms, Ochai ties the clothes of both bride and groom. After that all the parents and relatives of both sprinkles the holy water with Tulsi leaves on the heads of the bride and groom inside the Haya. After the completion of sprinkles of holy water on the heads of bride and groom, the marriage is considered to be completed. Generally, divorce is also a part of life. It is permitted in Jamatia society when both parties are agreed. After all, they can start a new life. But in present days, we found many cases of divorce due to some reasons such as child marriage, dowry system, domestic violence, extra marital affairs etc. It is very interesting to mention here that Jamatia community used to wash the foot of the people with the holy water while welcoming the guests in all social occasions.

Thirdly, naturally, death is common to all the people. No one is immortal everyone has to die sooner or later everything living behind. Here, death is categorized into two-natural death and unnatural death. At the time of death, all the villagers and relatives are informed as soon as possible. And after the arrival of the villagers used to take bath the



deceased with warm water. Soon after that the deceased was dressed with new cloth and placed it on the bier. Later on, maikhalai(fresh food) was given by all the sons and daughter in the honor of the death body. Following the rites, the bier was lift up by the relatives on their shoulders and round the courtyard about seven times from left to right. At last all the sons and daughter of the deceased have to lying on the ground just before the death body was taken to the cremation ground (simalwng). But it is interested to mention here that if the husband died, then wife is not allowed to go to the cremation ground. It is mandatory for all the villagers that they have to keep the some baal (funeral pyre) at the crematorium. Later on, after reaching the funeral pyre the dead body head was keep on tha north side and burned by the sons. All the death body is burned with naked systematically which is passed from generation to generation because it believed that the people comes to the earth with naked and had to go with naked. It is the traditional custom of Jamatia tribe. After the burn, a small hut was installed for the rest of departed soul and white flag was placed on it. Thereafter, all the villagers who were went to the simalung tying the grass while returning. Before returned to the house of the bereaved family, they took bath and applied iron with their teeth and also water were sprinkles on their head by Ochai. On regular basis, praying and agharbati at the simalwng is performed by the childrens at least once in a day till Sradha from the date of death. They collected asthi (residual bones) and put it on bamboo pipes by covering the clothes as well as daily they offer prayer for it till asthi was taking to the tirthamukh. Until or unless the completion of funeral ceremony deceased sons were not allowed to have anything except all kinds of fruits. In those days, some of the elders of the village including male and female sing a song and played instruments at night of the deceased home. And even all the relatives of the deceased observing the Nerasi (having only vegetables but without putting dry fish) for man only 13 days and for women 3 days. At the funeral ceremony, they split Nerasi with bitter vegetables and dried fish. During this occasion, some kinds of gift offered to the ochai who is performing all the rites including poor families of the village in the honor of the deceased.

5. Dress and ornament: Jamatias have their own traditional dress and ornaments like other tribe of Tripura. The systematic and design of dress for each tribes dress is very different. The dresses which is worn by women for their lower half of the body is called Rignai and for upper half of the body is called Risa and Rikutuk in the jamatias . All these were woven with primitive technology. In fact, the threads were bought from the market where it was sale. People love their traditional costume and are proud to wear traditional attire in different occasions. It is very unfortunate to say that the use traditional attire is declining due to the modernization.

The traditional dress of the Jamatias Men is called Kamchului borok and khorog risa made of coarse home woven fabric. They also used Ritrakborok which is made of coarse home woven fabric. It is very good in quality and protects the body from coldness.

Jamatias have their own traditional culture. These can be express through ornaments. The ornaments used by the women are wakhum, khaisama, Parbamala etc. They also wear Nakfu(Nose ring) and Bali including Yastam (finger ring).Yet, people are not paying heed towards traditional dress and ornaments due to their modernization. This will hamper the traditional dress and identity in future.

‘Mrs.Kabita Jamatia was of the view that despite its unique beauty, the traditional dresses of Jamatia are on the verse of extinction. Hence she requested all the educated person to use the traditional items in their day to day life. This is mainly because she believed that the educated people are more likely to be an idol of other people of the society. She had also requested all the men to help the women in weaving5.

6.Language: Language is the important part of life. kokborok is the main native language of Jamatia like the Tripuris. Tripura is the small states of India and sharing the largest boundary with Bangladesh. Generally, the roots of Kokborok come from Kok meaning verbal and borok meaning people which means people language. The erstwhile of the kokborok is tripuri and tipra kok. But with the passage of time the tripuri or tipra came to be known as kokborok. Kokborok is the official language of Tripura which got its recognition in 1979. The kokborok is the mother tongue of Tripura after Bengali. It is spoken by Tripura, Reang, Noathia, Jamatia, Rupini, Kalai, Uchai, Murasing. Kokborok is one of the Tibeto-burman language widely spoken in northeastern part of Indian state, Tripura and the neighboring state



of Bangladesh. Every year on 19 January a kokborok day is observed. This day is the important day for the state of Tripura. Therefore, Jamatia community who speaks the kokborok came to be known as Tripuris. But it is unfortunate that the script of kokborok is not finalized due to some debates. There are some groups of people who tried their level best for the development of kokborok language via music, song, folktale etc. Yet, many steps have been taken to improve and promoting the Kokborok language in the national level and also to include in the Eight schedule of the Indian constitution.

5. Religion: Religion is considered as social festival in the jamatias. It is played a significant role for the upliftment of the society. Jamatia are Hindus and have embrace Sakti-cult and Vaishnavism. Jamatia worshipped the different type of Gods such as Laxmi puja, ker puja, Garia puja, Durga puja and Bishwakarma. Among these, the principal deity of Jamatia is Garia Puja, which is celebrated with full enthusiasm. The other tribe of Tripura also celebrated the Garia puja on the seven day of month of April by both men and women to perpetrate the deity for blessing. Garia is the natural benevolent spirit of the house hold who looks after the increase of production. Garia is called "Garia raja" who always prefers welfare of his inmates by giving the wealth, peace and children. On the whole, Garia represents the character of our benign nature and he always does good to us. The rites and rituals of the Garia puja seem to have peculiar blending of naturism, animism, fertility cult and animatism. In the anthropological point of view, the tribal religion consists of beliefs and rituals, the beliefs are static while the rituals are dynamic.

Baba Garia is the male deities of Tripuris. In Jamatia community, Garia puja is performed into two different ways- Biagwnang (with hand) and Biakwrwi (without hand). Generally it is regulated by Jamatia hoda. During the Garia puja, maintainance of sanctity is mandatory among the people by taking a bath. It is believed that a number of Bagalas (saint) are nominated to aid the distress people. The puja shall performed by the pujari appointed by Jamatia Hoda. Biagwnang and Biakwrwi are two brothers. Biagwnang is moving from one village to another village but Biakwrwi is confined to one village from starting date to till end. All the officials of the puja are Ochai is the one who offer pujas, Kherfang held the responsible to preserve the image of Baba Garia and its belongingness, Mwtai Balnai is the bearer of Garia idol at the time of puja, Daria is the drum beater of Baba Garia, Bhandari is the storekeeper of puja. Besides, Bagala is also playing the pivotal role during the puja. They are appointed by Mahanta who is appointed by Hoda during annual conference in order to monitor and controlled the pujas. It is believe that the bagala having a super natural power as given by a mohanta. During the time of puja, Bagala takes the women dress and wearing the colorful ornaments. The Bagalas held the responsibility to guide and blessed the pilgrims during the puja. As per rules and regulations, Garia starts circumambulation from the houses of kherphang and chakdari and then to the houses of villager. During the circumbulation, almighty Garia is warmly and heartly welcomed by all the villagers and offers flowers and bows to Baba Garia. But it is unfortunate to say that girl who is going through their menstrual period have to stay away from the Garia while visiting the houses of the village. At last, after circumambulation for six days in different villages, Garia shall be taken back to the house of kherphang and last puja was given in the house of kherphang. In this way puja came to an end.

Hoda- Jamatia community had three-tier social structure – Hoda headed by Okra (Chieftainship) as a whole. Moyal comprises of five to thirty three villages where two Pachais are selected in each moyal by the regions, Luku- village level whose head is Chokdiri. All these bodies looked after the rights and safeguard of the culture of Jamatia community. Its headquarters is located in Atharbla, Udaipur Gomati Tripura and a branch office at khejurbagan, Agartala. It has opened 11 schools in different places of Tripura in the name of Garia- Garia Academy (Model). In Jamatia clan, there are two Hoda okras who has appointed by them. Due to relentless efforts of jamatia Hoda, jamatia community gained the Customary Laws Act in 2017. The Jamatia Customary Law Act may be amended by the District Council. Jamatia Customary Law became so important for Jamatia tribe since 2017. As per the laws, yet Jamatia Hoda can issue marriage certificate, scheduled tribe certificate, birth certificate etc. similar to the District level. Hoda is used to settle the disputes that pertaining to some factors such as property disputes, dowry system and so on.



Economic Life of Jamatia tribe

Jamatias is an agriculturist tribe. It is the main source of livelihood for Jamatias. The economic life of the Jamatias tribe is completely different that of the non tribal people of Tripura. For Jamatia society, family is the basic unit of production and they followed the system of division of labor according to age and sex.

As a matter of the fact that early tribal society is characterize by primitive subsistence farming-slash and burn agriculture. This system of farming cleared patch of land with digging stick and the hoe. Primitive subsistence farming is widely practice in the Jamatia community since the long past. All Family members are engaged in this activity according to their capability of work. No doubt the rural economy of the Jamatia is a combination of plough cultivation and Jhuming cultivation. Jhuming is the principal source of income for Jamatias. The economic life of the Jamatia tribe can be divided into two categories-

Jhuming – It is commonly practiced in the 19th tribe of Tripura as Jhuming cultivation. Among these tribes, Jamatia tribe is also another tribal group which practised jhum cultivation. Locally shifting cultivation is term as Hok chaliama. It is an integral part of the economic life Jamatias. The first and foremost step of the jhuming is finding the plot location. Generally they find the location which is untouched/left for the long past. And after that they cleared a patch of land with the help of tools and implements such as dao, digging stick and other equipments. In this process,they cleared and left it un-burn, waiting for the monsoon rains. They used burn it when the rain is about to happen. It is believe that the rainfall helps the Jhoom cultivation to gain the manures of the land. Earlier,it is believe that jhoom cultivation was done in the selected location which is finalized by Ochai. In case if he rejected Jhoom cultivation could not be take place. Yet, such kind of practice was not done. All the family members are participated in the Jhoom cultivation. Shifting cultivation is done substantially to collect higher productivity from their Jhoom. Different kinds of seeds are showing in the field such as paddy, maize, chilies, pumpkin, ladies finger, and many other vegetables. All the crops which are grown in their Jhoom are fully natural and there is no use of fertilizers, chemicals and pesticides. In other words it is also called organic farming. It is very much helpful to our health which leads the healthy and longevity of life.

Festivities and worshipping:- The shifting cultivation is the part and parcel of the Jamatia tribe. They performed many activities around the Jhomming cultivation such as singing and dance. Besides they revered to the fertility soil by sacrificing the animals which they domesticated in their home such as Goats, pigs and chicken. It is evident that the activities of romances have been found frequently. It is worth to mention here that the Jamatias were fond of amusement and also loved the cultural activity rather than a means of food production.After the beginning of harvesting in the month of Ashwin , jamatia tribe is performing their two traditional puja- Mailuma is called the goddess of Paddy and Khuluma is called the goddess of cotton.

‘Observing by their religious beliefs, the Tipras have to be said the worshipper of natural forces as the God and Goddesses like the other tribal communities of the North East India. The earth is the mother Goddess throughout the primitive world. She is the giver of blessing for increasing the productivity of paddy and crops. The Goddesses Milooma commonly is known as the Goddess of Paddy but anthropologically she is the mother Goddess “Earth” no doubt. The deity Kholooma is the mother Goddess mixed with the earth who is worshipped for abundant supply of cotton crops. These two deities are extremely relatedwith the fertility cult. In most of the cases the deity Mailooma and Kholooma are paid reverence jointly7.

And in the month of Agrahayan, the winter paddy was collected and in the honor of new paddy (Maikwtal) a festival is celebrated to a greater extent. During celebration, Maikwtal (New rice) is eaten and also offered to the deities in the hope of more productivity in the coming year. ‘Jamatia community is one of the ancient tribes of Tripura. They are third largest tribal group of Tripura. Jamatias are hard working agriculturists and are conscious about cultural values. A staunch Hindu tribe Jamatia’s practice their conversional rites and rituals. They are the most organized among all the tribes of Tripura and the highest body of the community is called “HODA” Though “Garia” is a common festival for the Kokborok linguistic groups, also celebrated by the Jamatias. For the worship of Garia, Subscription are collected from the villagers. As the Jhum cultivation has been the main crop of sustenance rituals of Gauria worship depicts and



presence through various stages wherein with colourful traditional attires women perform dance and songs on the festival. With collective efforts this group of tribe celebrate Garia festival at the end of year and based on which they perform Garia dance. They use “ khaum(A kind of musical instrument) and “Sumo”(flute) during Garia dance for rhythm8

Food Habits:-The food habit of Jamatia tribe is similar to other tribe. Chok (Rice Beer) is prepared by fermenting rice in water which was drunk in several occasions. Some of the food habits of the Jamatia tribe are enumerated below-

Rice is a staple food of Jamatia tribe

Miya (Bamboo shoots) awandro made of Berma and Rice flour.

Miya chakhwi made of Berma , rice flour and soda . Besides,Lemon leaves are also given to produce a pleasant smell and make the mouth watering.

Wokha, dish is made of pork.

Mosodeng , made of Berma and chillies .

Berma bwtwi (boiled) of Kosoi, Thalwi Mwikhomo, Mwikhun dwichok, Therai, Sasita, Khokleng, Sikabuk, Orai bwlai, Sejna bwtha and many others.

Having different kind of tubes such as Tha, Thama, Batema etc.

Different kinds of fruit such as Goyam,Thaichok, Jabok, Amlai, Attaphol, Khwichang ,Deruk, jackfruit etc. have been eaten.

Plough Cultivation: Plough cultivation is known as settled agriculture. Prior to the plough cultivation, Jamatia tribe is mainly depends on primitive subsistence farming (Labor Intensive Farming). Originally, jhooming cultivation of the jamatia began to disintegrate from the latter part of the 19th century.The main reasons are -Transfer of capital from Udaipur to Agartala and Jamatia Revolt which led them to settled plough cultivation. Indeed, Jamatia is a fighting warrior but they began to leave their job and decided to start plough cultivation. Besides, immigrant muslim are also began to settle agriculture in Tripura. Now-a-days it seems that some of the people engaged in different economic activities to enhance their economy. Fish breeding, Rubber plantation, Horticulture, poultry farm etc, are some of the examples economic activities. This type of economic activity gained popularity among the Jamatias. Therefore, the activity of Jhooming is also continued along with the plough cultivation by the Jamatia tribe to a lesser extent.

Problem findings:-

1. There is lacking preferences of indigenous food habits. Yet, most of the people eating fast food and oily things which increases the chances of severe diseases.
2. Following the western way of life by replacing the traditional customs.
3. Jamatia customary law act is not strictly followed so far.
4. Jamatias rarely practice the shifting cultivation. Now it is practiced to supplement their economic conditions.

Conclusion-From the above facts it can be justify that Jamatia tribe is the most important tribal group of Tripura. Initially, Jamatia tribe depends on shifting cultivation but now they shifted to settled agriculture to a greater extent. Besides, there are some people who tried to building their economic activities by engaging with different agricultural activities such as poultry farming, fish breeding, rubber plantation and many others. However, there are few people who benefitted in these activities. Indeed, there are many people who lagging behind to be benefitted from other economic activities rather than settle agriculture. So this wide gap can be eradicate if the government is taking necessary steps to enhance their economic activities then people have the better opportunities to improve their economic to some extent. And also, negligence of the social practices of the Jamatia can be promoted by giving



attention to their social activities. We should protect and preserve our culture and identity because this gave us a recognition and true culture of the community with flying colors.

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