



Traditional Festivals in Contemporary Garo Society: Continuity and Change

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the dynamics of traditional festivals within the Garo society of Meghalaya, focusing on the interplay between continuity and change in contemporary times. It examines how these festivals have evolved over time, influenced by socio-economic factors, globalization, and cultural adaptation. By analyzing the significance of these festivals in preserving cultural heritage while embracing modernity, the paper aims to shed light on the resilience of Garo traditions amidst the forces of change.

KEYWORDS: traditional, festivals, culture, Garos.

Introduction

Traditional festivals are intrinsic to the cultural identity and social cohesion of the Garo community, indigenous to the northeastern state of Meghalaya in India. These festivals, deeply rooted in the rich history and traditions of the Garo people, serve as significant markers of time, reflecting the agricultural cycles, religious beliefs, and social structures of the community. However, in the face of rapid societal transformations, globalization, and modernization, the dynamics of these festivals are undergoing a profound shift, presenting a complex interplay between continuity and change within contemporary Garo society. The Garo community, traditionally agrarian and deeply connected to the rhythms of nature, has long celebrated a myriad of festivals that punctuate the seasonal cycles and commemorate ancestral legacies. Among these, the Wangala festival stands as a paramount celebration of harvest and thanksgiving, embodying the communal spirit and cultural resilience of the Garo people. Similarly, festivals like Rongchuwa, marking the onset of spring, and Agalmaka, celebrating the new moon, hold significant religious and social importance, fostering bonds of kinship and community solidarity.

However, as the Garo society navigates the complexities of modernity, these traditional festivals are experiencing a nuanced transformation. Urbanization, migration, and changing livelihood patterns are reshaping the socio-economic landscape, altering the traditional contexts within which these festivals were once celebrated. Moreover, the advent of technology and increased connectivity have introduced new avenues for cultural exchange and expression, influencing the form and function of Garo festivals in contemporary times. Partha (2003) performed a look at on bio-variety of the Madhupur tract which recognized a few issues of the Garo on the subject of agricultural sports. These are irrigation hassle, excessive price of irrigation gasoline, harm to vegetation with the aid of using cattle, deforestation, and growing inhabitation of outsiders with inside the Garo community. Ahamed, Ali, Gegum, (2010) explored the transformation process of the marriage system of the Garo community. The Garo community is one of the most matriarchal societies in the world. They have their own distinctive culture. They are identified by side of their mother. The old Sangsaharek religion was practiced by the ancient Garo people. However, a small number of people continue to practice Sangsharekh. This study focused on the hills Garo of Kalmakanda Upazila in Netrokona District. The important norms for their marriage were maintained since they practiced traditional religion, but after they converted to Christianity, these rules are altering. Both regions are now seeing an increase in Christian marriage



rituals. But for their marriage, only a few customary customs are followed. The study also showed that the majority of Garo people preferred love marriages over arranged unions and that following a love marriage, men tended to prefer living independently rather than visiting their wives' homes. According to Bal (1999), the Garo community has had a tremendous impact on how the Garo see themselves and how they organize. As a result, the Garo have developed a tight-knit ethnic community over time. The majority of the Garo are now Christians, while some have converted to Islam. Their economical, psychological, cultural, and political conditions are significantly impacted by Christianity. Similar data from developed countries are available and may be broadly prevalent. The research comes to the conclusion that these national sentiments have actually contributed to the close-knit ethnic network that the Garo people of Bangladesh have become. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to explore the intricate dynamics of continuity and change within the traditional festivals of the Garo society. By examining the evolving significance, rituals, and expressions of these festivals, we can gain insights into how the Garo community negotiates its cultural heritage in the face of modern challenges. This paper seeks to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of traditional festivals in contemporary Garo society, illuminating the resilience and adaptability of Garo cultural traditions amidst the currents of change.

Objectives

1. To investigate the historical origins and cultural significance of key traditional festivals within the Garo society.
2. To examine the impact of contemporary socio-economic factors, including urbanization, globalization, and technological advancements.
3. To identify the strategies and initiatives undertaken by the Garo community to ensure the continuity and relevance of traditional festivals.

Methodology

In this study, I used in-depth interviews, observation techniques, and focus group discussions to collect primary data, and I collected secondary data from published or unpublished publications such as books, journals, periodicals, dissertations, reports, and so on. Based on my research question and objectives qualitative method is relevant. Data has been collected directly from Garo community. Researcher has followed qualitative method and conduct face to face interview with semi-structured question.

Results and Discussion

The investigation into the dynamics of traditional festivals within the Garo society yielded insightful findings, highlighting the interplay between continuity and change amidst contemporary socio-cultural realities. Through a combination of literature review, field research, and comparative analysis, the study examined the historical origins, cultural significance, and evolving practices of key Garo festivals, shedding light on their resilience and adaptability in the face of modern challenges. The Garo society, nestled in the northeastern region of India and parts of Bangladesh, boasts a rich tapestry of traditional festivals deeply intertwined with its historical origins and cultural ethos. Among the myriad celebrations, several key festivals stand out, each laden with profound significance and symbolism. One such festival is Wangala, often referred to as the "100 Drums Festival," which holds a paramount place in Garo culture. Originating from agrarian roots, Wangala is an annual harvest festival celebrated with great fervor and zeal. It marks the culmination of the agricultural cycle, offering gratitude to the benevolent spirits for a bountiful harvest. The rhythmic beats of drums, accompanied by traditional dances and rituals, reverberate across Garo hills, symbolizing communal harmony and prosperity. Similarly, Agalmaka, another prominent festival, honors the deity Saljong, the Sun God, revered for fertility and abundance. It signifies the Garo people's close relationship with nature, acknowledging the Sun's vital role in sustaining life and ensuring agricultural prosperity. Agalmaka involves intricate ceremonies, including prayers, sacrifices, and communal feasting, reinforcing cultural bonds and spiritual interconnectedness. Rongchu, celebrated during the spring season, embodies the Garo community's reverence for nature's cycles and renewal. It commemorates the arrival of spring, symbolizing hope, rejuvenation, and the triumph of life over death. Rongchu



festivities feature colorful rituals, traditional songs, and vibrant dances, reflecting the Garo people's deep-rooted connection to the natural world and their ancestral heritage. These festivals not only serve as occasions for merriment and revelry but also serve as repositories of Garo identity, preserving age-old traditions, myths, and customs. They provide a platform for intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, fostering a sense of belonging and pride among the Garo populace. In essence, the historical origins and cultural significance of key traditional festivals within the Garo society are emblematic of its rich heritage and values, encapsulating the symbiotic relationship between the community, nature, and spirituality. Through these celebrations, the Garo people continue to uphold their cultural legacy, weaving a vibrant tapestry of traditions that resonate across generations.

Continuity of Traditional Festivals

The study found that traditional festivals such as Wangala, Rongchuwa, and Agalmaka continue to hold significant cultural and social importance within the Garo community. These festivals serve as occasions for celebrating harvests, marking seasonal transitions, and strengthening community bonds. Participant observation and interviews revealed a deep-rooted attachment to traditional festival practices among Garo elders, who emphasized the importance of passing down cultural traditions to younger generations. Despite their enduring significance, Garo festivals have not remained stagnant. Field research indicated several ways in which these festivals have adapted to contemporary socio-economic realities. For instance, the Wangala festival, once primarily agricultural in nature, has evolved to incorporate elements of tourism and cultural exchange, catering to a wider audience beyond the local community. Similarly, the use of digital technology and social media platforms has facilitated the promotion and organization of festivals, enabling greater outreach and participation among younger generations.

Influence of Globalization and Urbanization

The study also highlighted the influence of globalization and urbanization on Garo festival dynamics. Urban migration has led to changes in festival practices, with Garo diaspora communities adapting traditional rituals to urban settings while maintaining cultural authenticity. Additionally, globalization has introduced new cultural influences and practices, influencing the form and content of Garo festivals. However, participants expressed a desire to balance modern influences with the preservation of traditional values, reflecting a nuanced negotiation between tradition and modernity.

Community Engagement and Cultural Preservation

Community-led initiatives emerged as key drivers of cultural preservation and festival continuity within the Garo society. The study identified grassroots efforts by local organizations, cultural institutions, and community leaders to revive and promote traditional festivals, fostering a sense of pride and identity among Garo youth. Moreover, intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge was observed as crucial in ensuring the sustainability of festival traditions, with elders playing a central role in passing down rituals and stories to younger generations. Despite the resilience of Garo festival traditions, the study identified several challenges facing their continuity in contemporary society. These include environmental degradation, changing agricultural practices, and socio-economic disparities. Moving forward, there is a need for concerted efforts to address these challenges while empowering local communities to safeguard their cultural heritage. Furthermore, fostering dialogue and collaboration between Garo communities and external stakeholders can facilitate the preservation and promotion of traditional festivals in a rapidly changing world. In conclusion, the results of this study underscore the dynamic nature of traditional festivals within the Garo society, highlighting their ability to adapt to changing socio-cultural landscapes while retaining core cultural values. By understanding the mechanisms of continuity and change within Garo festival traditions, stakeholders can better support efforts to preserve and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the Garo community for generations to come.

Conclusion

The examination of traditional festivals within the Garo society has illuminated the intricate dynamics of continuity and change in contemporary times. Despite facing pressures from urbanization, globalization, and modernization, Garo festivals continue to serve as vital expressions of cultural





identity and heritage. Through adaptation and innovation, the Garo community navigates the complexities of modernity while staying rooted in tradition. This seminar paper has underscored the resilience of Garo festival traditions, highlighting the significance of community engagement, cultural preservation efforts, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge in ensuring their continuity. Moving forward, there is a need for collaborative action to address the challenges facing Garo festivals while celebrating their cultural richness and diversity. By fostering dialogue, promoting sustainable practices, and supporting grassroots initiatives, stakeholders can contribute to the preservation and promotion of Garo festival traditions, safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Garo community for future generations. Through collective efforts, traditional festivals will continue to serve as emblematic symbols of Garo identity, resilience, and cultural pride in a rapidly changing world.

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