

THE CELEBRATION OF GARIA PUJA IN JAMATIA TRIBE: A HISTORICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: This paper gives a vivid description about the religious ceremony of Garia puja in the Jamatias. Garia puja is one of the major festivals of Tripura. Jamatia tribe is one who celebrated the auspicious puja with a great enthusiasm. During puja all the delegates of Jamatia hoda are involved in it. They celebrated Garia puja in the last day of chaitra and celebrated puja for seven days. They performed their all duties responsibilities and also following all norms for executing the ongoing puja. They spoke kokborok language meaning thereby Kok meaning language and Borok meaning people which meant the language of the people. It is mandatory to mention here that the Jamatias is known for their major contribution in the Royal army of Tripura that's why they were exempted of paying taxes to the kings of Tripura.

Key words: Collection of Bamboo, Procession, Duties of the officials, Movement of Garia, Immersion etc.

There are controversies regarding the origin of the term Jamatia. It is mentioned in the Tribes of Tripura that from the etymology Jamat which in Bengali/urdu means assemblage, the tribe name Jamatia is supposed to have been derived or some believe that Jamatias recruited in the army which was called Jamat and subsequently came to be known as Jamatia. There are so many opinions among the authors and the historians regarding the origin of this tribe. According to the Rajmala by kaliprasana sen, the Jamatias were the most important fighting tribe of Tripura during the reigns of early kings. The army constituted by them was called Jamat and from this word Jamat they later on came to be known as Jamatias. As per Tripura District Gazetteer records the term Jamatia has originated from the word Jamayet which means gathering or mobilization. To some appellation Jamatia might have originated because of their dwelling in a congretd way in a particular geographical area. But according to Jamatia community, the word Jamatias derived from two kokborok word jama and twia. Here Jama (have to pay a portion of their produce to king) means tax and twia means does not bear such taxes. Thus, the word Jamatia means a person who does not bear the burden of taxes. Jamatia enjoy these privileges for their military duties.1

Yet another group of elder persons among the Jamatias are of opinion that when **pubnarayan** (a legendary hero of the Jamatias) brought the image of Baba Garia (one of the popular deities of the Jamatias) from the kukis of **Thanangehi** showing great valour and presented it to the king, the king ordered him to worship the deity in a Jamayet or an assemblage of people. And since then the persons who worship in a gathering (jamayet) came to be known as Jamatias. Tracing the origin of the Jamatia tribe, Mr. Gait, in his census report of 1901 for Bengal, states that the Jamatias originally came from Acholong in the Chittagong Hill tracts.2

The Jamatias population is found in various parts of Tripura such as Udaipur, Amarpur, Teliamura, Karamcherra, Jampuijala etc. Currently, Jamatias is the fourth largest community among 19 tribes in Tripura. Therefore, Jamatias had their own judicial system which is called the Customary Law of Jamatia tribe. Following the customary Law, Jamatias divided their society into three main organs such as **Luku** at village level, **Panchais** at regional level and Hoda, **Apex body** of the Jamatia community as a whole.

Socially, Jamatias are Hindus and performed various types of puja such as Saraswati puja, Durga puja, Laxmi puja, Garia puja, Lampra puja, Mailuma, Khuluma and many more. But the utmost importance and major puja of the Jamatias is **Garia Puja**. Every year Garia puja is celebrated on unprecedented scale and the puja is started on the last day of chaitra till Hari buisu. However, Garia puja is celebrated into two ways – One with hand is called **Biyak Gwnang** as younger brother and another is without hand/handless is called **Bia Kwrwi** as elder brother. Therefore, both puja were performed by the Jamatia community with a great zeal. Although, almighty God Baba Garia is made up of bamboo and along with that several ingredients are being used such as cotton, thread, risa, flower etc. which is flourished to the idol of Baba Garia.

Garia puja is one of the major festivals of Tripura. This puja is also called the community puja among Jamatia tribe. Almighty God Baba Garia is called the benevolent and Kindness by the people. This puja is popular in the state of Tripura. At the time of puja people seeking blessing for their good harvest, healthy and longevity of life.

There are some sacred things which are being followed in the times of making of almighty Baba Garia images. To prepare the images of Baba Garia about Six people have to visit the forest and they have to find the spotless bamboo which is called **Wathwi phang Raja** in local language. It is very interested to mention here that the selected bamboo have been cut by the people by holding the breath. Later on, it was brought to the place where puja is celebrated and adorned the whole images of Almighty God Baba Garia. At last, after the completion of the images the idol was put to the courtyard.

“There is more than one legend current in the Jamatias about the Biyagwnang Garia which point out the antiquity of the arrival of this type of Garia in Tripura. The legends are follows: According to sri Tapan Dutta, the worship of Biya gwnang Garia began from 111 Tripurabda. Mr. Dutta provides information about the folk story of purbanara. It is said that the Biyagwnang Garia was adorned by kukis of Mizoram, but Garia was unhappy. One night, purbanara, the commander-in-chief of the army of Tripura received an order from the Biyagwnang Garia to rescue him from the hands of kukis. The regiment of purbanara consisted of the Tipra soldiers, Riang-soldiers, Achlong-soldiers and Jamatia soldiers. Purbanara mobilized armed forces for the conquests of Mizoram. The mizoes are defeated by the army of purbanara, commander- in-chief who is said to have brought the **Biyagwnang Garia** from the Mizoram accompanied by the regiments of Tripura. It has been believe that the tribal communities, who had taken part in the expedition of Mizoram, equally shared the symbolic representation of the deity as follows:

Names of community	Symbol
Riangs	A spear
Tipras	A green bamboo pole
Achlongs	A falchion
Jamatias	A visage

According to another version of the legend of the **Biyagwnang Garia** it appears that the Biyagwnang Garia was brought by hero from NAGALIKE(Naga land). The original deity who is called **Bi kwruwy Garia** possesses only one hand. He becomes less popular in the Jamatia society when **Biyagwnang Garia** takes the prominent place as a younger brother of Garia”.³

There is no permanent place for the temple of almighty Baba Garia. The temple of Baba Garia was constantly changing at the interval of every after three or five years. The venue of Baba Garia was decided by the executive members during annual conference of Jamatia Hoda. The venue Garia puja can't be change without approval or consent of the Jamatia Hoda. Thereafter, the selected village shall take full responsibility to carry out the puja for almighty Baba Garia.

“The pandal of the puja is constructed in the courtyard. It is made of bamboo and decorated with with their hand-woven risa, dhuti etc. A trident is embedded in the ground at a distance of one cubit away from the image of Goriya. Beside this trident twenty others weighing each about of 10 kg are also fixed. These tridents are eight to nine cubits long. A boundary line leading from these tridents to the fencing is marked by two white threads. Admission within the precincts of this boundary at the time of puja is prohibited. Only the officials of the puja have admission in this area. Before the commencement of the puja the ochay, mwytaybalny and doriya sprinkled water sacrificed by mantra in this area”.⁴

However, the head of Garia is preserved by Kherphang who held the responsibility of keeping the head of almighty god Baba Garia. Hence, after the completion of Garia idol by the priests, the Garia was set on the courtyard. After this, the puja was started by Ochai/priest by sacrificing.

On the day of Hari buisu, every year a big fair was held near to the venue of almighty god Baba Garia. This was the day while many distinguished guests are invited and flourishing the importance of the day. Generally, the fair was held which is closely adjacent to the venue of Garia puja. Besides these, a cultural program was organized with

dances and music so as to create the warm and good environment of Garia puja. This was the place where large number of devotees are come from far and wide to offer blessing from Baba Garia puja. Several items are being sold in the fair which is necessities to the devotees.

On the day of buisu, all devotees have to take bath for their purity and worshipping Lord Baba Garia. At that time, all devotees were offering flower, fruits etc. to the almighty God Baba Garia. Amongst the devotees, some are sacrificing goat and buffalo in the name of god and fulfilled their hopes. But the heads of buffaloes and goats had been left to the venue for the beneficiaries of the workers who were carrying out all the activities of the puja.

“For the worship of Garia, subscriptions are collected from the villager. As the Jhum cultivation has been the main crop of sustenance rituals of Garia 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 rhythm”.⁵

“This seems to be imitation of the Hindu –Ratha-Yatra, where Lord Jagannatha but Matsyendra natha is carried on the ratha. The name Garia probably derives from Gaure or Gaudiya and the two Garia brothers may be Gaur-Nitat of Naba-dwip. The Jamatias adopted vaishnsvism in a large scale.”⁶

Therefore, to execute the works of Garia puja some functionaries have been given certain duties. All duties have been assigned separately during the annual conference of the Hoda which are enumerated below-

1. **Kherphang**-He is the person who looked after the images .He held the fully responsible to offer puja each and every day except on the day of Buisu. There are two Kherphang for each almighty God Baba Garia. Therefore,the post of Kherphang is not fixed.
2. **Ochai**- He is the priest and without him no pujas can be performed.
3. **Mwtai balnai**- He carries the idol of Almighty God Baba Garia while moving from place to place.
4. **Daria**-He is the Drum beater of the Gariya at the time of procession.
5. **Bhandari**-He acted as storekeeper of the Garia puja and he held the full responsible to keep all the belongings of the puja.
6. **Bogala**- He acted as guide to the pilgrims who were came to seek blessing from almighty god baba Garia.

These are the main officials required to perform the Garia puja and make it a grand success. No doubt, Gariya puja is celebrated among the kokborok speaking people but the celebration of Garia puja is most popular among the Jamatias.

The circumbulations of Baba Garia starts from the house of kherphang to the houses of villagers. During circumbulation, the entire villager used to welcome to all the workers of Baba Garia. One day before the day of puja a large number of devotees came to the village of Garia puja specially those who are came from far-flung areas and all of them were stays as a guest in those villages. At that time specially Baba Garia (without hand) moving for seven days to every houses of the village only at night and his movement is confined to one village. At the time of moving, many devotees gave company to those people who stays horsini (people who moves along with baba Garia till the day of immersion to complete their promised) of god baba Garia. After the consecration, all the devotees of the family fresh cotton and rice to Baba Garia. There is a lot of difference between elder and younger brother of Baba Garia. Baba Garia (Younger brother) moves from village to village till sena or immersion without taking rest whole day and night. Like his brother he is moving with a group of devotees while visiting the houses of the village. But almighty god Baba Garia is restricted to move to the scheduled villages in cases of anybody died in a particular village. Because Jamatias community is strictly observe the practice of austere, sanctity and truth in those seven days of Garia puja. Generally all the officials of the puja such as ochai, kherfang, mwtai balnai, daria are nominated by Hoda during annual conference. Among the officials, the role of Bagalas is unique because they were not only taking the dresses of women but also maintain the peace and order in those seven days of Garia puja celebration. Besides, they are also extend their hands to help to the distress people and blessed to all the devotees. Similarly, the devotees offer cotton and rice to the Baglas. There are some conditions regarding moving of Baba Garia that the

workers of Baba Garia have move together and wait for other pilgrims if anybody left out to enter into another villages. At the time of entering the village, all the workers used to execute their duties efficiently. Therefore, officials like ochai have to carry the sword, mwtaibalnai have to carry the image of Baba Garia and Daria have to beating the drum constantly. During that time the image of baba Garia is placing the bangchai at chakdri where Garia deity was worshipped by the villagers.

“At the end of the seven day of the puja, the image of Garia is again taken to the kherfangs house. There, the image of Garia is placed in front of the Banchay and puja is performed. Then offerings are given by individual members of the community and also by the members of their community as a whole. At that time only pigeons and the goats are sacrificed and hemp is offered to the Garia. After completion of the puja, the Mwtatayalnays take their bath and go to the house of the kherfang. Then anyone of the distinguished officials of the Garia asks them about the safest results of the puja. After this, the Mwtaibalnays ask all to immerse the image of Garia. At the time of the immersion they remove all the clothes of the image. Anyone can take off these clothes. Then any one of the mwtaibalnays immerses the image of Garia”.⁷

At the end, all the workers of almighty god Baba Garia collect some mud from the courtyard and playing it for succeeding norms. Later, they took bath from the nearest lake to the venue of Garia puja. Just after that, they were provided some home-made rice beer by Mohantas to be amused amongst themselves. Lastly, they acquired all the belongingness of almighty god baba Garia and put it into the house of Kherfang and all the belongingness of Baba Garia was kept in such a way that such sacred things could not be touched and stole by anyone.

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