

Rituals, Beliefs, and Practices of Indigenous Communities in Bangladesh Related to Land and Water

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Indigenous Connection to Land and Water

“O our beautiful Mother forest land and water,
You are the great divine power
We are devoted to you
You are in our heart, please do not leave us.
Protect us and keep us on your blessings.
Give us strengths so that we can protect us.”

-Elder Kosomo Prue Khyang shared this prayer during an individual interview to explain Khyang Indigenous Community's perception of land and water rituals (Datta, 70).

Indigenous Connection to Land and Water

- ❑ Indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts have a deep-rooted spiritual and cultural connection to nature, viewing forests, rivers, and land as sacred. Their beliefs guide sustainable practices, with rituals embedded in their daily lives that govern responsible use of resources. These traditions, passed down through generations, ensure harmony with nature and foster environmental stewardship. Their practices emphasize respect for the environment and highlight the importance of integrating traditional knowledge into conservation efforts for effective, culturally respectful environmental management.
- For example: The name "Tripura" itself, which comes from words meaning "river" and "confluence," signifying the importance of water in their existence and cultural expressions.



Beliefs

- ❑ Indigenous beliefs in Bangladesh regard land and water as sacred and central to life.
 - ❑ Land embodies ancestral spirits, cultural identity, and heritage, while water symbolizes purity, renewal, and spiritual connection.
 - ❑ Both are deeply respected, reflecting a harmonious relationship where nature is seen as a vital part of their existence and traditions.
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- For example:
 - Chakma and Tripura community believe in forest guardians called 'Jhar o Bhut/Burasa Mwtai.' Sacred lands ('Duj Jaga') are avoided unless purified.
 - The Tripura community believes that the well-being of the village is connected to large trees, stones, or old caves in the area, so they protect these elements.

Mwtai Pukhiri- The Goddess Pond



This is a naturally formed pond on a hilltop in Khagrachhari Hill District, Bangladesh, considered very sacred by the Tripura community. Every year, on the day of Hari Bwisu, thousands of people gather at this place to purify themselves in the holy waters of Mwtai Pukhiri and to fulfil their wishes.



Rituals

- ❑ Many indigenous rituals in Bangladesh are tied to the land and water.
 - ❑ During 'Jum/Rotational firming' cultivation, offerings and prayers are made to honor the land's spirit and ensure a good harvest and after harvesting the crops from the Jum fields, the first portion is offered in worship to the Jhum deity.
 - ❑ Water is vital for rituals involving cleansing and offerings, symbolizing purification and life. Ceremonial practices often take place at riverbanks or lakesides, emphasizing their spiritual importance.
- For example:
 - Animal sacrifices to gods (Lokhei, Bogle, Mina) for protection. (Khyang community)
 - Ritual 'Bhat jora' involves offerings to seek Ma Ganga's forgiveness when illness is linked to river spirit. (Chakma Community)
 - When a major crisis occurs in the family, all family members come together to perform *Khuruk Sunai* worship by the river to seek relief from the hardship. (Tripura Community)

Mailwngma Puja (Tripura)



Practices

Machang Ghor- Traditional House Design

Indigenous people, particularly those in hilly regions, avoid cutting into the soil when constructing their homes as an expression of respect for Mother Earth.



Practices

Alpaloni Festival

The indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts celebrate the *Alpaloni* festival once a year. On this day, they give the land complete rest. Villagers refrain from any activities that involve digging or cutting the soil. The festival begins in the morning with a community ritual, where everyone comes together to perform a ceremony to honor the land.



Practices

❑ Bwisu/Biju Festival

The biggest festival of the Indigenous People in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is Bwisu/Biju. This three-day festival begins with offering flowers in the river, paying respect to Mother Ganga, and some traditional ceremonies. The Tripura IPs call this “Hari Bwisu,” and the Chakma IPs call it “Ful Biju.”



Our Responsibilities...

Due to lack of regular practice and preservation, many indigenous land-related rituals, beliefs, and practices are currently at risk. To protect these, we need to-

- We must raise awareness among the new generation about the importance of these rituals, beliefs, and practices.
- Take initiatives for preservation at governmental, non-governmental, community, and individual levels.
- Include these topics in textbooks.
- Ensure constitutional rights for indigenous Peoples.



- https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11_xXho3FKITDzm4wYwaiTZHPwTni1gn9

HAMBAI

THANK YOU

References

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- [<https://lastplaces.com/en/travel-is-knowledge/tripura-people-bangladesh/>](#)