and on, all alone, before a bunch of deeply sleeping listeners.” In most scholarly circles folklores are categorized as folk-tales, fairy-tales, myths, legends etc. In Kokborok such a division is absent. In Kokborok there is a single term for folklores, that is ‘Kerang Kothoma’. A Kerang is a land-tortoise and Kothoma means a tale. Folk-tales are, therefore, tales of the wild land tortoise, whether there be a tortoise in it or not. The reason for this nomenclature is not known but it continues from the remote past. Tortoise belongs to the turtle group, but is an exception. Instead of water, it lives on land. Its appearance is strange and defence mechanism stranger; it is said that even a tiger cannot make an easy prey of a tortoise. When under attack it draws itself up in the fortress of its shell. Even if it is present in a story, the tortoise, by itself, may not have any special significance. In the story of the yellow tortoise and the doe, the focus is on ‘natural power hierarchy’—why snakes never look up at kites.

The Bengali folk-tales are deeply linked with their original vast repertoire, without much change in the content or character; what is interesting, though, is that those prevalent in Tripura have sometimes assimilated the local background, local flora and fauna. Otherwise they are more or less uniform all over Bengali speaking communities. The Chakma tales, in that respect, have distinctive features. Their story of the ‘Beginning’ does not have any close parallel. Oral literature of Tripura is a field worth the attention of scholars.

The Tripuris and most other ancient ethnic groups of Tripura celebrate Garia Puja at the end of the last month of Bengali calendar (Chaitra). It continues through the first week of the first month of Bengali calendar (Baisakh). Tripura has been called a land of ‘composite culture’. Different cultural traditions co-exist so harmoniously without losing their respective identity, that, when looked from the surface, one looks identical to the other. The Garia festival often coincided with Bengali New-year celebrations and Ganesh Puja. To a discerning observer though, the differences become clear. There is no denying that because of its being a ‘Hindu Kingdom’, and because of long neighbourly association with Bengalis practising the Brahmanical rites, Tripuris and other communities might have taken some elements; but these remained only external. In spirit, Garia is a God of the soil, result of indigenous spiritual thought.

In the worship of Garia, a whole bamboo stands as the symbol. For all the clans the struggle for existence starts almost invariably with hunting. The early hunters on Tripura soil soon discovered bamboo to have the potential of being a very important weapon for hunting. In ancient worlds, whatever brought benefit was attributed to magical or divine powers. “To the savage the world in general is animate, and trees and plants no exception to this rule” (Frazier). Trees are credited with power in most ancient communities, and their beneficial powers raised them to the status of gods. Since the ‘soul’ in the bamboo was performing a good act for the community, they donated through ‘sacrifice’ blood and flesh of birds and animals for the satisfaction of that soul. This ritual of sacrifice continued and grew even stronger in the cultivation age. “The work of tilling, sowing and reaping is slow, arduous and uncertain. It required patience, foresight, faith. Accordingly, agricultural society is characterised by the extensive development of magic”(Thomson). In later agricultural society, bamboo found many more uses: It was essential for the

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construction of shelter, it provided containers for liquids, it could be used both as a faggot and as a cooking utensil. For Jum cultivation, bamboo groves had to be burnt. It further necessitated the propitiation of the bamboo spirit. Thus, the symbol of bamboo comes from its association since the beginning of clan-life. It is a purely indigenous concept.

Risa (Ria:home-woven breast-cloth) is hung from the bamboo symbol. In all agricultural societies increase in harvest is the dominating desire. The fertility cult originated from this desire. In agricultural activities the role of the female acquired importance. The belief equating female with soil was formed. This belief supported the basic dictum of ancient life: ‘Live and procreate.’ Garia worship, which became primarily a ritual for plentiful harvest, also assumed the significance of the reproduction cult. The Risa and the festive abandon subsequent to the actual ‘Puja’ of Garia suggest that. More harvest and more members in the community were the two important elements for clan security. Garia, from the guardian God of plentiful harvest, also became the benefactor and guardian of the clan in all respects. This aspect of Garia festival is marked by its festive character. Dance was added, and accompanying songs were composed. There are expressly erotic expressions in Garia songs. It is said that, being instructed in a dream, King Dhanyamanikya of Tripura reclaimed God Garia from Kuki Kingdom. The victorious army brought a number of beautiful Kuki women as captives. The erotic element in the songs was a result of that. Whatever be the reason, a suggestion of the reproduction cult cannot be denied. In the festival part, there is the custom of drinking galore. Wine was recognised as a potent aphrodisiac in ancient societies. A Santhal myth states that Maran Buru (the Creator) had created man and woman, but they knew no urge for procreation. So, Maran Buru taught them how to make wine. After drinking wine, they felt the urge for procreation. With regard to the role of dancing in the festival, Frazer says that community people thought singing and dancing had magical powers and could hence translate into more production. Even the movements in the dances closely resemble the world around, and gets inspiration from everyday activities. This leads to the idea that the Garia festival originated from the soil, mirroring the history of the formation of society. Traces of ancient animism, fertility cult and reproduction cults are not matters that could have been brought in from outside. ❆